

**PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE OPTOMETRY OFFICER PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY GROUP 1  
(OPAG)**

**Teleconference Report – 11:10am to 12:50pm, Wednesday June 29, 2005**

**1. Attendees:**

**1.1. OPAG Members**

- 1.1.1. CAPT Greg Ketcher (Chair)
- 1.1.2. CDR Carmen Palma (Vice-Chair)
- 1.1.3. CDR Mike Candrea (Absent)
- 1.1.4. CDR Nancy Nichols (HSO PAC member and ex officio OPAG member)
- 1.1.5. LCDR Kim Lewandowski-Walker (OPAG secretary/treasurer)
- 1.1.6. LCDR Barbara Massey
- 1.1.7. Dr. Michael Duenas (CDC Representative – Absent)

**1.2. Guests**

- 1.2.1. CAPT Richard Hatch (I.H.S. Eye Care Coordination Committee Chair)

**2. Meeting called to order at 11:10am**

- 2.1.1. Approval of minutes from May 04, 2005 OPAG meeting performed via e-mail to OPAG members

**3. Old Business/ Standing Agenda Items**

**3.1. Retention pay (ORSP)/Loan Repayment**

3.1.1. CAPT Hatch spoke to CAPT Paul McSherry about assistance in drafting a memo to RADM Church at I.H.S. Headquarters to deliver to OCCO regarding the ORSP/LRP issue. There is some discrepancy between the regulations in the Commissioned Corps personnel manual, which state that loan repayment is in addition to pays and allowances. This is in conflict with the rules for ORSP, which state one cannot receive loan repayment and ORSP concurrently. As of now, there is no change in the current status.

3.1.2. CAPT Ketcher stated that renewal forms for ORSP agreements should be arriving this summer from OCCO. Even if one signed a three-year agreement, a renewal form must be submitted on a yearly basis. The renewal form is signed by the officer's supervisor regarding satisfactory performance. Those not in clinical billets will need to submit proof of clinical hours with the renewal. Alecia Welsh at Compensation Branch is the contact person.

**3.2. Medical Benefits** - nothing new to report.

**3.3. Transformation** – nothing new to report.

**3.4. Uniform Policies** – nothing new to report.

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**3.5. Retirement**

- 3.5.1. TSP Open Seasons have been eliminated. Changes to TSP accounts can be made at any time
- 3.5.2. CAPT Frank Behan at PSC retired June 01, 2005
- 3.5.3. CAPT Rhonda Balham at FDA has announced her retirement for September 01, 2005.

**3.6. OPAG Position Papers – currently on hold.**

**3.7. Selection of JOAG and COA Liaisons for OPAG**

- 3.7.1. CDR Dawn Clary was selected as the HSO representative to the COA Board of Directors. This is an elected position within COA. CDR Clary has agreed to report to OPAG on relevant COA activities.
- 3.7.2. Selection of the JOAG Liaison is currently on hold until the JOAG voting members are announced.

**3.8. Title 38 – Civil Service Reclassification**

- 3.8.1. Nothing new to report. The issue appears to be languishing at Headquarters.
- 3.8.2. Dr. Tracy Crane is working on developing a template of a letter for Clinical Directors, Service Unit Chiefs, and others to use to explain the need for Title 38 pay to I.H.S. Headquarters.

**4. New Business**

**4.1 OPAG Bylaws Update**

4.1.1. The following issues in the OPAG Bylaws were amended by OPAG

4.1.1.1. Attendance Requirements – members must attend at least 2/3 of the meetings or may be replaced.

4.1.1.2 Bylaws amended to show that OPAG will represent all PHS optometrists, including civil service, tribal, and contract O.D.s.

4.1.2. Changes were approved by HSO PAC

**4.2 OPAG Funds**

4.2.1 CAPT Hatch very generously donated \$200 to OPAG. OPAG secretary LCDR Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker agreed to hold the money in a checking account and report on the status of the balance and expenditures during each OPAG meeting.

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- 4.2.2 OPAG members agreed that if the balance of OPAG funds exceeds \$500, a separate account for OPAG will be opened.

**4.3 Academy Fellowship**

- 4.3.1 Required for Non-Physician Board Certification for optometry
- 4.3.2 CDR Nichols will be compiling a list of those PHS candidates for Fellowship.

**5. Career Development/Promotions/Awards**

**5.1 Promotions**

- 5.1.1 Comments from the 2005 HSO promotion board indicated that several optometry officers appeared to be working in positions or had more responsibilities than the billet indicated.
- 5.1.2 Readiness level may be considered for promotion boards in the future.
- 5.1.2.1 CAPT Ketcher stated that this is concerning because specific deployment roles are often a requirement for the advanced ORFD courses and space is usually very limited. CAPT Ketcher reported that optometrists may be eligible for the Medical Effects of Ionizing Radiation course.
- 5.1.2.2 CAPT Ketcher stated that in order to register for the Liaison Officer course, one must select “Liaison Officer” as their primary deployment role.
- 5.1.3 There was discussion regarding strengths and weaknesses for promotion.
- 5.1.3.1 **Readiness is mandatory.** December 31 was the cut-off for receiving 5 points for readiness for the 2005 cycle. Five points can easily make the difference between promotion and non-promotion. Officers not meeting readiness by December 31 do themselves a huge disservice. Officers not meeting readiness by May 01 were eliminated from the promotion list.
- 5.1.3.2 Junior officers should get involved as early as possible in their careers in PHS support activities for promotion success.
- 5.1.3.3 OPAG member LCDR Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker suggested that officers do not limit themselves to optometry activities. Promotion boards look for well-rounded officers who are involved in public health activities and “officership”. This is especially important since optometrists are in the HSO category,

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which has approximately 40 disciplines. Examples of activities officers in which officers can involve themselves:

- 5.1.3.3.1** Furthering public health knowledge and experience.  
The following free online courses are now available from the Illinois Public Health Preparedness Center. All courses run in a continuously available, completely online, instructor-led, self-paced format at no cost to registrants. You can visit <http://www.uic.edu/sph/prepare/> and follow instructions on the left to register.
  - 5.1.3.3.1.1** The Public Health 101 curriculum (PH 411-414) covers the basics of what public health is and how it works and is intended for front line public health workers who have had no previous formal education or training in public health.
  - 5.1.3.3.1.2** The Bioterrorism Preparedness 101 curriculum (PH 461 and PH 462) addresses public health roles in emergency preparedness and response activities, with an emphasis on bioterrorism preparedness and response. This curriculum also targets front line public health workers.
- 5.1.3.3.2** Become involved in your local area/hospital awards committee, resource allocation committee, or other local committees outside your direct clinical responsibilities.
- 5.1.3.3.3** If your clinic or hospital offers mini-courses in phlebotomy, public health, etc., consider participating.
- 5.1.3.3.4** Volunteer for HSO subcommittees (awards, policy, recruitment, communications, etc). Information on each subcommittee is available on the HSO website at <http://usphs-hso.org/ProfAdvise/PAC.shtml>
- 5.1.3.3.5** Become involved in JOAG and COA.
- 5.1.3.3.6** Earn Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry.
- 5.1.3.3.7** Review the promotion benchmarks and make every effort to meet as many as you can, especially if you are weak in a particular area, such as billet.

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**5.1.3.3.8** Work on obtaining a Master's degree in Public Health, Health Care Administration, Human Services, Clinical Research, etc. Comments from promotion board score sheets for the 2005 cycle indicate that seeking additional degrees is viewed very favorably by promotion boards. Some resources for accredited on-line degrees are as follows and many others are available (OPAG does not specifically endorse any particular school or degree program – check accreditation status of any school before committing to a program):

**5.1.3.3.8.1** Nova Southeastern University's, College of Optometry, all on-line Master of Science in Clinical Vision Research program at:  
<http://www.nova.edu/cvr>.

**5.1.3.3.8.2** Capella University offers accredited on-line Master's degrees in Human Services. (OPAG member CDR Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker earned a Master's in Human Services with Specialization in Health Care Administration from Capella University while working full-time at I.H.S.)  
[www.capella.edu](http://www.capella.edu)

**5.1.3.3.8.3** Walden University offers accredited on-line Master's of Public Health.  
<http://www.waldenu.edu>

**5.1.3.3.8.4** Become a protégé in the HSO mentoring program and use the experiences of senior officers to help plan your career path.

**5.1.3 Congratulations to all officers promoted during the 2005 promotion cycle.**

**5.2 Billets**

**5.2.1** CAPT Hatch stated that he spoke with CAPT Paul McSherry regarding the revised optometry billets. CAPT McSherry stated that the new optometry billets submitted to him are "good to go" and he is just waiting for other disciplines to get their billets updated so there can be a package of billets presented for approval.

**5.2.2** CAPT Hatch stated that until the new billets are approved and implemented, optometrists need to make better use of the billets already in place by taking the initiative to be sure they are in the highest billet possible. For example, any optometrist should be able to be in at least the

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05 service unit deputy chief billet. The only real bottle neck is the 06 billet. If there is need for more than one 06 billet at a facility and there is no person qualifying for the residency director, area chief or agency chief 06 optometry billets, non-optometry administrative billets can be considered. Too often it is a lack of initiative on the part of the individual officer.

**5.2.3** There was discussion among the OPAG members that a Request for Personnel Action PHS-1662 still needs to be approved before an officer can move to a higher billet. Our current personnel system does not have a provision for automatically moving officers to higher billets without managerial approval.

**5.3 Awards**

**5.2.1** CDR Palma proposed developing awards for OPAG Commissioned Officer Optometrists of the Year and OPAG Civil Service/Direct Hire Optometrist of the Year. Official award names to be determined.

**5.2.1.1** All OPAG members were in favor

**5.2.1.2** CDR Palma has begun work on developing the awards. OPAG members were in favor of naming the award after pioneers in PHS optometry.

**5.2.4** OPAG wishes to encourage commissioned officers to nominate fellow officers and their subordinates for PHS Commissioned Officer Awards. Please recognize the accomplishments of your fellow officers.

**5.2.5** Contact CDR Palma for assistance in nominating your fellow officers for PHS Awards.

**5.2.6** OPAG encourages all optometrists to become involved in the local or Area awards committees.

**5.3 Readiness Statistics**

**5.3.4** Any officers not meeting readiness who require assistance should contact CDR Zobel.

**5.3.5** CDR Zobel provided the following update via e-mail  
Optometry Officers Readiness Status as of 06/02/05

| Rank  | Agency |     |       | Meet            | Percent         |
|-------|--------|-----|-------|-----------------|-----------------|
|       | IHS    | FDA | Total | Basic Readiness | Basic Readiness |
| CAPT  | 28     | 3   | 31    | 25              | 80.65%          |
| CDR   | 24     |     | 24    | 20              | 83.33%          |
| LCDR  | 15     | 1   | 16    | 14              | 87.50%          |
| LT    | 11     |     | 11    | 7               | 63.64%          |
| Total | 78     | 4   | 82    | 66              | 80.49%          |

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**5.4 Assimilation** – nothing new to report

**5.4 Positions**

**5.4.1** CAPT John Fugate is scheduled to transfer in July from Shiprock, NM to an I.H.S. Headquarters position as the Senior Liaison for Navajo Region.

**5.4.2** LT Ann Bennett is resigning from her position at Ft. Defiance

**5.4.3** Dr. Anthony Stout (2004-2005 resident at GIMC) accepted a position at Albuquerque Indian Hospital.

**5.4.4** The most recent Recruitment Announcement was updated on June 14, 2005. The Recruitment Announcement can be found on the IHS Optometry Website at [www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/Optometry/Optjobs.cfm](http://www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/Optometry/Optjobs.cfm).

**6.3 Communications**

**6.3.1** The Optometry Web Board has been developed. The address is <http://www.forum.ihs.gov/~optometry>. This Web Board will be used to post announcements regarding I.H.S./P.H.S. optometry.

**6.3.2** CAPT Ketcher reported that the OPAG has a web page on the HSO PAC website. Contact CAPT Ketcher if you wish to put information on the OPAG web page, such as awards, meeting minutes, etc.

**7 Meetings, Recruitment Activities, and Liaison Reports**

**7.1** COA – CDR Palma gave the following report from the COA Conference held June 06 –10, 2005.

**7.1.A** 2005 Promotion Rates: 0-6 = 25%; 0-5 = 40%; 0-4 = 80%; 0-3 = 100%

**7.1.B** HSO Category Day PowerPoint presentation is available

**7.1.C** JOAG was a prominent presence

**7.1.D** LCDR Massey reported that the exhibit hall at COA was very good.

**7.1.E** Next COA - May 01- 04, 2006 – Adams Mark Hotel, Denver, Colorado, 303-893-3333. Travelers should bring a copy of their travel order to receive possible tax exemption on the room rate. CDR Palma requested that all OPAG members consider attending.

**7.2 AOA Convention** – June 22 –25, 2005. CDR Cespon will be invited to the August OPAG meeting to give a report

**7.2.A** Next AOA – June 21-25, 2006 – Las Vegas, Nevada. Information is available at [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org)

**7.3 AMSUS** – October 30 – November 04, 2005 – Nashville, TN. CAPT Clifford Brown is planning to attend. There may not be any optometry CE offered at

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AMSUS in 2005, although no firm decision has been made. CAPT Brown will be invited to the December OPAG meeting to give a report.

- 7.4 AAO Annual Meeting** – December 08 – 11, 2005 – San Diego, CA. Information can be found at [www.aaopt.org](http://www.aaopt.org)
- 7.5 IHS Eye Care Biennial 2006 Meeting** – The next meeting is scheduled May 8-12, 2006 at the Southern California College of Optometry Fullerton campus. CAPT John Garber will again organize and conduct the continuing education program. The meeting is open to all I.H.S and PHS optometrists. Contact Ms. Sue Atkinson at SCCO for registration information or CAPT Hatch if you need the registration form.
- 7.6 FSO** – PHS may be requested to sponsor the FSO meeting in 2009. CDR Candrea will be attending the FSO meeting in November 7-10, 2005. The meeting hotel is the Doubletree. Room rate is \$95.00/night. Call 1-800-222-8733 to reserve a room. <http://afos2020.org/Meetings/Fso/fso.htm>
- 7.7 SECO/AFOS** - February 24-26, 2006; Georgia World Congress Center and Omni HotelAtlanta, Georgia. Information can be found at [www.secointernational.com](http://www.secointernational.com)  
CAPT Ketcher is planning to attend.
- 7.8 JOAG**– JOAG Liaison to be determined. Liaison reports tentatively scheduled for October and April. JOAG website - <http://www.joag.org>.
- 7.9 Staffing and Recruitment** –CDR Bellware to give a report, tentatively scheduled for November and February

**8 Action Items**

- 8.1** CDR Cespon will be invited to the next OPAG meeting to give a report on the recruitment activities at the I.H.S. booth at the AOA meeting.
- 8.2** CDR Palma and OPAG will work on developing USPHS optometry awards.
- 8.3** CDR Nichols will inform OPAG of PHS candidates for Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry.

**9 OPAG Meetings**

**9.1 Next meeting scheduled for August 31, 2005 at 11:00 CST.**

**9.1.1** CAPT Richard Hatch, CAPT Terry Schleisman, CDR Cespon, and Dr. Tracy Crane will be invited as guests at the next meeting.

**9.1.2** OPAG members should use the same conference call number and password

**9.1.3** Meeting adjourned at 12:20 pm

Minutes prepared by CDR Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker, FDA Representative to the OPAG  
Distribution: HSO CPO, HSO PAC, PHS Optometrists