

Commissioned Officers Association of the United States Public Health Service FACT SHEET

OVERVIEW

The US Public Health Service, commanded by the U.S. Surgeon General, is a 6,500 strong cadre of uniformed health professionals who serve as the Nation's first line of defense in providing public health security. Commissioned Corps officers are not members of the U.S. Armed Forces, but are considered active duty officers. We wear uniforms similar to those worn by United States Navy officers with special corps insignia and hold ranks equivalent to those of naval officers. Corps uniforms reflect and recall the maritime origins of the PHS Commissioned Corps.

The mission of the USPHS Commissioned Corps is to protect, promote and advance the health and safety of our Nation.

- The Corps provides rapid and effective response to public health needs, such as deploying to assist vulnerable populations in the areas most affected by a national or international emergency.
- Corps officers provide leadership and excellence in public health practices through the work of highly trained public health professionals.

Officers represent professions such as medicine, nursing, engineering, epidemiology and psychology. Throughout our history, Commissioned Corps officers have been involved in disease control and prevention, biomedical research, regulation of food and drugs, mental health and drug abuse, health care delivery, and international health. To find out more information regarding the United States Public Health Service, please log on to <http://www.usphs.gov/>.

Recently the Secretary of Health activated the Commissioned Corps to provide medical and public health support to victims of the earthquake in Haiti.

WHAT WE DO

The USPHS Commissioned Corps officers fill essential public health leadership and service roles within the Nation's Federal Government agencies and programs.

The PHS Commissioned Corps is overseen by the Surgeon General, who is considered America's chief health educator, responsible for giving Americans the best scientific information available on how to improve their health and reduce the risk of illness and injury.

USPHS Commissioned Corps Officers care for American Indians on reservations, research for cures at the National Institutes of Health, identify epidemics at the Centers for Disease Control, and oversee food and drug regulation at the Food and Drug Administration. This unique group of officers work not only at these and other Health and Human Services Agencies, but go wherever medical emergencies call them.

DISEASE CONTROL

Over the past 200 years, the PHS has served the nation to control and eliminate dozens of diseases, including typhus, malaria, yellow fever, pellagra, and hookworm.

Most recently, with the H1N1 outbreak, Commissioned Corps officers are among the staff at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who are involved in the planning and research to prevent and react to the next pandemic.

Historically, the USPHS Commissioned Corps has been our Nation's frontline against the spread of disease from sailors returning from foreign ports, to immigrants entering the country, to communities affected by natural and manmade disasters. Now our mission extends to all areas of public health including attention to physical fitness, obesity, chronic disease and injury prevention. Today, service clinicians and research scientists are at the forefront of the battles against AIDS, cancer, drug abuse, product tampering, injury, obesity and homelessness.

We believe in the advancement of public health science through research and development of medications and vaccines needed by the Nation's public.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

When there is a medical emergency, USPHS Officers are there: physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, engineers, therapists, dietitians, epidemiologists, veterinarians and other medical experts. As part of our mission, the USPHS Commissioned Corps officers meet readiness requirements for deployment in the event of a public health emergency. Commissioned Corps officers are assigned to a variety of response teams to provide support as needed. For example, the PHS has five Rapid Deployment Force teams each with >100 officers on call and ready to respond within 12 hours of activation.

Over the last few years, the Commissioned Corps Officers have provided disaster response leadership and humanitarian health services during several natural disasters, such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, and in 2008, Hurricanes Ike and Gustav.

- Officers provided medical treatment in New York to first responders and 9/11 workers.
- More than 2,400 officers served in Texas and Louisiana in multiple capacities, such as caring for hurricane victims, setting up clinics, working with local officials to establish safe water supply, even providing medical care for stranded animals.

MILITARY SUPPORT

Commissioned Corps officers have deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan partnering with the Ministries of Public Health to create national programs and services for both countries. Furthermore, the USPHS has collaborated with the United States Navy- PHS officers have had the opportunity to serve aboard Navy ships, providing clinical and public health services to Latin America, Caribbean, Pacific Rim, and Pacific Island residents.