Chief, Physician Assistant Message

COL Bill Tozier, PA Section Chief

While you are all engaged in taking care of Soldiers during combat and the many deployments, a new opportunity is presenting itself to provide better care back in garrison. The Surgeon General has been monitoring "quality, compassionate health care" as part of the AMEDD Balanced Score Card. Young Soldiers, 18-24 years old, have consistently reported less satisfaction than any other category of beneficiary. Now TSG wants to develop an initiative to improve their health care experiences. This tasking has landed in my lap as PAs provide the most patient care to Soldiers.

Their complaints are familiar – being rushed through sick call, not seeing the same provider, feeling like second class citizens because their family members are seen at the hospital, Soldiers misusing profiles, having to come back frequently for the same complaint, and more. There has been a large amount of data collected over the years by TSG, the IG, CHPPM, and other researchers. What now remains is to develop a long-range plan for change.

I look on this as a great opportunity to refocus the AMEDD on Soldier health. Soldier health care is a difficult issue and not all of the problem falls within the control of the AMEDD. Commanders and first sergeants, FORSCOM, TRADOC, installation managers and others are all involved with their care. Health care for Soldiers is a mix of occupational medicine, family practice, adolescent medicine, and sports medicine. In contrast, the medical problems of spouses, children, and retired members have less complex relationships. Also, all these other groups have the advantage of some political advocate if they have complaints. The Soldier has had very little voice about the quality of their health care services. Now there is an opportunity for change.

I will be convening a steering group the first week in January to develop a plan for action. The group will be briefed by several researchers and presented with information about their complaints as reported on survey research. Additionally, each of the steering group members will be medical professionals, enlisted, physicians, PAs, PTs, and NPs, who are central to Soldier health care. They will bring their own experiences to the meeting. After we have heard background on their complaints, we will hear from places that have instituted change, successful and unsuccessful, in Soldier health care. With this information the steering group can go forward and develop tangible ideas for change, a plan, assign responsibilities, and develop a timeline. This will be briefed to TSG. His intent is that an initiative be developed for the long term that will extend beyond this tenure as TSG.

The PA motto is health care "From the line, For the line". We have all witnessed the separate standard of health care for Soldiers. Now we have an opportunity to improve Soldier health care, to improve how we practice health care, and build a stronger, more ready Army. I invite all of you to send me any ideas you have. This will take a lot of

work, a long time, and involved many people from many organizations. I will keep you updated on the progress of this initiative.
In line with my practice of adding stories of interest on unique PA jobs, the following was submitted by CPT Mike Pagel:

I am an Army Physician Assistant, assigned to the US Southern Command, as the Joint Interagency Task Force - South (JIATF-S) Surgeon. I work as a Command Surgeon staff member in the office of the Command Surgeon.

I am writing about some new Colombian Combat Lifesaver training that I worked on this year. I think it gives greater evidence as to how PA's, with their diverse level of "Operational" and "Medical" experience, can impact medical training at a national level.

In August 2003, I completed a national level Combat Lifesaver (CLS) Training program with the Colombian Ministry of Defense. The Colombian CLS program was named "Enfermero de Combate." The "Enfermero de Combate" program will eventually be indoctrinated into all branches of the Colombian military, and conducted throughout their country, as in the US military.

The program was a large success, and eagerly accepted by the Colombians. It was designed to equip the Colombian military leadership with the information, training materials, knowledge base, and minimum number of instructors required to initiate their own National level CLS training program. The complete US CLS training program was translated from English to Spanish (600+ pages), including 10 power point presentations, and presented to the Colombians.

Training in Colombia can be difficult. Due to funding, translation efforts, force protection issues, and other unique difficulties in Colombia, the program development span over 6 months.

The program required 3 phases of training and logistical coordination with the Colombian leadership. The final phase culminated in a 2 week
Train-the-trainer Mobile Training Team (MTT) event, conducted
at the Colombian equivalent of Ft. Benning under high visibility of, and participation from high-level Colombian Military leadership.

The MTT training was conducted by myself, 3 (91W/ E-7) Army, and 1 USAF
(E-5) CLS Instructors. The two weeks of training produced 50 fully qualified Colombian CLS (Enfermero de Combate) Instructors, and 12 CLS (Enfermero de Combate) Instructor Trainers.

Combat Lifesaver tasks, and similar courses have been conducted in Colombia, at the unit level, for many years. This was the first time CLS has been presented at the National level, with the goal of producing a self-sustaining CLS (Enfermero de Combate) program under complete control of the host nation.

Colombia has been under armed conflict for over 40 yrs. The proliferation and continuation of this program will undoubtedly save many lives. The Colombian CLS training will begin at select military installations and eventually proliferate throughout all services, and will eventually be conducted at the unit level, as in the US.

I have the entire program on electrons, as well as CD. I would be more than glad to share any of this information and lessons learned with any Military unit or prospective medical trainer. For any questions or comments please contact me at:

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To all PAs, Active, Reserve, and National Guard, both stateside and overseas I wish you best for the upcoming Holiday Season. Thank you again for all the fine health care you are providing and the hardships you and your families are enduring.

Take care,

COL Bill Tozier