

# BCOAG



25th Anniversary Newsletter

October 2015

## Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG)

### Mission

BCOAG provides assistance and consultation to the Office of the Surgeon General on issues related to the representation and participation of African-Americans in the USPHS as officers.

### Officers

#### Chair

CDR Hamet Touré

#### Chair Elect

LCDR Nadra Tyus

#### Executive Secretary

LCDR Valerie Marshall

#### Correspondence Secretary

LCDR Bryna Forson

#### COF Liaison

CDR Aisha Mix

#### MOLC Representative

CDR Kofi Ansah

CDR Adrienne Goodrich-Doctor

#### BCOAG Newsletter

CDR Jemekia Thornton

CDR Meshay Francis

LCDR Zewditu Demissie

LCDR Malaika Washington

LT Alberta Mirambeau

LT Malcolm Nasirah

## Message from the Chairs

This year marks BCOAG's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and we are grateful for the opportunity to pay tribute to our founders and reflect on the accomplishments of this great U.S. Public Health Service Advisory Group. During the 2015 Columbus Day week-end, the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group commemorated this truly historical occasion of the Advisory Group's history.

The events of Columbus Day week-end included a retirement seminar, training for officers, community service, a Gala attended by hundred twenty, worship services, and two social events. The week-end brought together retired officers and active duty officers of various agencies, geographical areas, ranks, and time of service.

The enduring success of BCOAG over the years has been made possible because of the involvement of flag, senior, and junior officers. Every officer has a role to play in the advancement of BCOAG. Similarly, BCOAG has embraced the participation of its retired officers on its committees and retired officers have continued to provide a vital role through guidance and mentoring of active duty officers.

During our Silver Anniversary year, our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee and Historian Committee have done an excellent job preparing for the celebratory Columbus Day weekend and honoring the legacy of black officers throughout history. Bravo Zulu!

**CDR Hamet Touré and LCDR Nadra Tyus**  
**2015 BCOAG Chair and Chair-Elect**

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# BCOAG History

BCOAG was chartered on February 7, 1990. Originally known as the Black Commissioned Officers Steering Committee, the group was formed out of a delegation of officers who attended the 1987 meeting of the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust. Under the leadership of RADM Audrey F. Manley (USPHS, Ret.), the group, consisting of officers from several agencies, was formally organized and developed a report of recommendations and initiatives for consideration by RADM C. Everett Koop, the Surgeon General at the time. Recommendations included the establishment of an advisory committee to the Surgeon General's office whose purpose would be to increase the representation and participation of blacks and other minorities in the Commissioned Corps. It was recommended that the advisory committee function to encourage maximum participation of blacks and other minorities in the activities of the Public Health Service, and (1) develop effective communication channels between the minority officers and the minority community, (2) assist in the recruitment of black officers into the Commissioned Corps, (3) assist in the career development and advancement of minority officers through counseling and other measures, (4) provide a network for dissemination of job-related information, (5) identify important community health issues and concerns and work towards their satisfactory resolution, (6) maintain relationships with the health professions and the schools located at predominately black colleges, and (7) maintain an archive of the achievements, accomplishments, and memorabilia of the Black Commissioned Officers.

Over the years, the structure of BCOAG has evolved, but BCOAG has stayed true to its functions and Charter. Today, the Career and Professional Development Committee and Awards Committee contribute to the recruitment, retention, growth, and recognition of black officers. The Charter and Bylaws Committee and the Membership Committee ensure the operation of BCOAG is conducted in accordance with its charter and ensure that new leadership is prepared to conduct the business of BCOAG. The Community Outreach and Health Disparities Committees work hand-in-hand with the community to promote healthy living and educate all officers regarding issues related to health disparities. The Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) Liaisons ensure BCOAG plays a vital role on the MOLC and works collaboratively with other minority advisory groups. The Communications and Public Relations Committee promotes the initiatives of the Surgeon General. Finally, the Social Committee works on morale improvement and provides officers an opportunity to network within BCOAG and with other advisory groups.

## Retiree Reflections

"I spent twenty rewarding years in the US Public Health Service. It is an honor to be a part of the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG). I am deeply grateful to my mentors, Former US Department of Health and Human Services Secretary, Dr. Louis Sullivan, Former Congressman Louis Stokes (D-OH), Dr. Robert Veiga, and my husband, William Adams. They shared invaluable knowledge honed over their lifetimes, helped to open doors of opportunity, and provided me with words of encouragement that motivated me to achieve success. As a result, I was able to write my own destiny. This circle of trust, respect, and dedication to the cause will stay with me forever."

- Diane L. Adams, MD, MPH, CHS-III

Congratulations BCOAG on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. When we began this journey as a Steering Committee of Black Officers to further the discussion and direction that the OSG of the USPHS should undertake to further the recruitment, retention and promotion of our own, we had little doubt that it would happen; however, the fruits of our labor were then unimaginable.

While BCOAG can boast of many singular accomplishments, we were the vessel that inspired other minority officers to develop similar Advisory Groups. Also, we gave visibility to our fellow officers of the past who had gone unrecognized for too long. Even today, we remind our Corps to remain vigilant of and vital to the needs of our community.

It was a proud moment to read how many of our officers deployed to Liberia to fight the Ebola crisis. I am sure CAPTs Poindexter and Eason were there in spirit; as it was in Africa that they served admirably since segregation prevailed during their time of PHS service.

So enjoy the celebration, and continue the charge of assuring the vision and goals of BCOAG. After all, the vine has many fruit yet to bear.

- CAPT Robert Veiga, (Ret.), MD, MPH  
Past Chair BCOAG, OSG, USPHS



# Retiree Reflections

Wow! Has it really been 25 years! I remember moving from Texas to Maryland as a LCDR and serving as a Staffing Officer in the Division of Commissioned Personnel (DCP) in 1989. Immediately, I was out of my element - I was filled with that Southern hospitality in an environment of high costs, cold weather, and unfriendly people that made me very foreign to others and them to me. BUT I met fantastic officers like Webb Young, Ken Howard, Howard Kelley, Betty DeBerry Sumner, Lola Staples, and Nathan Stinson who took me under their wings and made me feel welcome (or maybe I just forced myself under their wings). Either way, they remain in my heart as guardian angels when I was in a really tough place.

I do not recall how I was invited to participate with forming BCOAG - an advisory group to the Surgeon General. More than likely, I just invited myself as I hadn't been in Maryland very long. I recall sitting in one meeting or two in which we were trying to identify and agree upon a name for our group. I must admit that the name BCOAG still really represents our diverse group very well.

Even after I left Maryland, I still remained active with BCOAG. I have fond memories of all of the officers, civil service employees, and especially HRSA/BPHC, who helped me as the BCOAG Stroke Lead to produce the Stroke video with Surgeon General David Satcher, as well as all of the officers who showed this video at their faith-based organizations, social and/or service organizations, and community centers. We really did a phenomenal job in getting the word out to underserved populations, particularly to Black Americans, on stroke awareness, prevention, and treatment.

My continued association with BCOAG helped me with other leadership roles, such as with the CMS (HCFA) Horizons Project (partnering HBCUs with their state quality improvement organization) which was tasked to improve influenza immunizations among African American Medicare beneficiaries and also with our Mammography present.

I am delighted that BCOAG's mission still remains the same (even if the words have changed); its members, both past and present, remain committed to its mission, and its endeavors and accomplishments are still making outstanding and impactful contributions to others.

Keep up this fantastic work for another 25 years! Please do not hesitate to call upon me.

Thanks for the opportunity to share my fond BCOAG memories,  
- CAPT Shawneequa M. Harris, (Ret.), DDS, MPH, USPHS

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The 25th anniversary of the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG) is a reminder of my service in the Corps and the wonderful relationships I had with so many fabulous professionals, who were my brothers and sisters committed to the same mission. I remain committed in my current role with the Veterans Health Administration. It is also a time to applaud and encourage the new generation of Black officers who continue the work of us old timers. I look forward to celebrating the legacy, and to renewing our pride in the accomplishments of BCOAG and the Commissioned Corps. Once an officer, always an officer. Than you fellow travelers and public servant leaders!

- CAPT Regan Crump USPHS (Ret.)

**“Whatever your life’s work is, do it well. A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better.”**

**- Martin Luther King, Jr.**

# **Committee Reflections**

## **Awards—CDR Samantha Fontenelle**

A 25th (Silver) anniversary is a significant milestone and achievement for BCOAG. It is a recognition that BCOAG has done well, persevered and thrived since its inception in 1990. BCOAG has not wavered under the weight of its tremendous responsibility to the officers it serves and represents. While it has remained true to its intended mission of providing advice and consultation to the Surgeon General, it has expanded on the vision of the founding members by increasing the visibility of the of the Corps in the many community service activities it undertakes each year. The Awards Committee is honored to have the awesome responsibility of bestowing recognition to BCOAG officers who represent the best of the Commissioned Corps in their service to country, Agency, and community.

## **Communication and Public Relations—LCDR Makeva Rhoden**

On behalf of the BCOAG Communications and Public Relations Committee (CPRC), I would like to congratulate BCOAG on 25 years of service to African American and other minority officers serving in the Commissioned Corps. Your dedication to advancing the mission of the Corp by serving populations most in need has afforded many minority officers the opportunity to contribute to the Corps in meaningful ways. This includes educating the community on various health disparities to lending support to organizations caring for vulnerable populations. Additionally, we have seen firsthand how BCOAG has invested in education through its scholarships to graduating high school seniors.

Over the years, the CPRC has been instrumental in promoting BCOAG through the creation of various tools and resources needed to reach active and retired officers, and future health professionals. These materials include the creation of the BCOAG website—central hub for all things BCOAG related, the Facebook page, and informational brochure. This Committee was also involved in the development of the BCOAG Weekly Newsletter, a tool used to promote activities from across the BCOAG committees. For 2015, we led the celebration for Black History Month by not only promoting activities across the Corps, but also facilitating the BCOAG Black History Month Program—Life, Legacy, and Leadership of Black Commissioned Corp Officers. The program presented a historical perspective on the contributions of Black officers and featured a panel discussion from distinguished officers on the future of BCOAG. The CPRC has also raised awareness on the National Prevention Strategy (NPS) through the NPS Spotlight, a bi-monthly article on a health topic or activity that promotes the NPS strategies. Our culminating activity for 2015 is the BCOAG 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Newsletter, which we hope is envision will provide an in-depth view of all of the wonderful activities and events that the BCOAG Committees have participated in for 2015 as well as reflections from current and past officers on the BCOAG.

We are indeed grateful for the current and past leadership of BCOAG and stand ready to support 25 more years of success!

## **Community Outreach—LCDR Jennifer Smith**

BCOAG's 25 years are full of rich and rewarding outreach experiences, all reminders of our Officers' continued leadership and contributions towards improving the health of Black communities over the years. As the 25th Anniversary of BCOAG approaches, the Community Outreach Committee aims to continue in BCOAG's dedication to service in our communities. There is satisfaction in knowing that our outreach efforts contribute to the protection and promotion of the health of our communities, and we are honored to be counted among those BCOAG Officers who have stayed committed for so long.

## **Health Disparities—CDR Latonia Ford**

The BCOAG Anniversary means HISTORY, LONGIVITY and DEDICATION. We take pride in carrying the torch in educating the community and our fellow officers about public health and health disparities. We only see it fit to volunteer our time and share our knowledge. We are most grateful for those who have created and developed an organization such as BCOAG to represent our culture and abilities. We look forward to continuing the legacy and representing BCOAG moving forward to continue make HISTORY.



# **Committee Reflections (continued)**

## **Membership — LCDR LaMar Henderson**

The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary brings forth a lot of emotions that in one breath make me bow my head in humble reverence to the men and woman of color who have endured so much for me to wear this uniform, while simultaneously raising my head high in triumph as to say we are here unapologetically and we will remain to flourish at all cost. As the struggle for social, intellectual, and economic parity continues for people who look like me; I earnestly perform my role as an officer who understands his foundation is built on the backs of people who unwaveringly forged ahead despite a series of doubts and obstacles. Therefore, as I continue to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of this great nation; this anniversary means I am charged with bringing forth a true representation of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for those who were continuously denied. As a Man-As an Officer—I stand ready to serve!

## **Social—CDR Gwendolynn Johnson**

“The BCOAG 25th anniversary is the perfect time to network and build relationships outside of the work environment, which is the primary goal of the BCOAG Social Committee. Please take this opportunity to meet someone new and learn more about BCOAG’s rich history. In addition to enjoying the wonderful social events of the 25th anniversary, BCOAG officers should use this time to rejoice in our accomplishments, and examine what still needs to be done to enhance our operational goals. Over the past 25 years, we have achieved a lot! Let’s make the next generation proud by continuing to put our best efforts forward and upholding our beloved BCOAG to unparalleled levels.”

## **Readiness—LCDR Timothy Cunningham**

The BCOAG Anniversary represents a legacy of SERVICE, LEADERSHP, and COMMUNITY. BCOAG is an extremely diverse group in terms of technical expertise and the duty stations occupied by officers. We are most grateful for those who initiated BCOAG to provide a voice for African-American USPHS officers. We will strive to uphold this legacy.

## **Charter and Bylaws—LCDR Mutiu Okanlawon**

I attended University of Illinois at Chicago College of pharmacy. I remember being happy as one of the 15 black students in a class of 162. I learned later that the school used to have 2 or fewer black students in the 1990s. I was immediately thankful to the black students before me that fought, inspired and ultimately setting the way for my fellow black colleagues and I. BCOAG 25th Anniversary means 25 years of hard work and dedication to recruit and retain excellent black officers who may not otherwise get the chance. BCOAG Charter and Bylaws committee is at the core of BCOAG success. No organization can function effectively without having rules and regulations as well as detailed guidance for its members. I have similar views of the black officers that created BCOAG in the year 1990 and all other officers who have made BCOAG better over the years. I am extremely thankful to all these officers and pray for another 25 years of amazing work.

## **Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF)—CDR Aisha Mix**

As BCOAG celebrates our 25th anniversary, I stand proud to be a member of this dedicated group of officers. BCOAG represents not only a voice for Black officers in the USPHS Commissioned Corps, but also a place for support, encouragement, and learning. As a LT entering the Corps, I leaned on many BCOAG officers for guidance as I navigated the ins and outs of my new career. Fast forward to today and I am invigorated by my obligation to do the same for others who have come after me. For these reasons and many more, I salute BCOAG on 25 years and look forward to the continued contributions to the USPHS.



# Committee Reflections (continued)

## Minority Office Liaison Council (MOLC)—CDR Adrienne Goodrich-Doctor

25 years ago, I was in high school while very brave officers were serving on active duty and laying a foundation, a home for me in the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. BCOAG is home that home, a place where things are familiar, nurturing, and a place where you can retreat from the storm. As the BCOAG Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) Representative, I have the unique opportunity to assist with holding up the umbrella (that is MOLC) which was also chartered 25 years ago to protect and promote the interests of minority officers in the Corps. As MOLC Representatives, CDR Kofi Ansah and I led the planning and execution of the MOLC 25th Anniversary Awards Celebration which was a grand affair with over 100 officers and guests in attendance. I was humbled to be a part of planning this MOLC celebration and remain humble and excited as we celebrate the 25th Anniversary of BCOAG. It is time to show our BCOAG founding members how thankful we are for their perseverance and foresight. They built a home and we built additions, reinforced the structure, added decorations, and have cared for the home that they built. Now, it is time to invite them for a walkthrough, I know they will be proud! Thank you! We salute you!

## Minority Office Liaison Council (MOLC)—CDR Kofi Ansah

To me the 25th Anniversary of BCOAG means 25 years of cultivated leadership and collaboration with the other CMAGs, through MOLC, to advocate on issues that impact our officers; providing our officers with relevant information that helps advance their career and professional development. Nothing brings this home to me more than the leadership opportunities BCOAG makes available to our officers through volunteerism and public health advocacy in our communities thereby helping groom our officers for leadership roles within and outside the corps.

The chance to serve as BCOAG's MOLC representative these last couple of years has been humbling to say the least. Twenty-five years ago, I wasn't even thinking about coming to the United States, let alone being a part of something as big as BCOAG and helping carry on the great work of our founders. As we celebrate this profound milestone in BCOAG's existence, and take stock of what has been achieved over the last 25 years, I am even more cognizant of how others have labored to pave the way and encouraged by the knowledge that we of today also strive to continue in their footsteps; adding to their gains so that those who come after us could also pick up the mantle and pass it on. May the story of BCOAG forever be worthy of singing.

## BCOAG 25th Anniversary Planning Committee—LCDR Avena Russell

BCOAG's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was very special to me because it represents a cultural of unity. For 25 years African American Commissioned Officers have been excelling in leadership and volunteerism within their communities as well as within the US Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. As the Chair of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee I was given the opportunity to serve all the Officers who have so diligently served others and I was more than happy and honored to have done so. But most importantly when I think of BCOAG and its 25 years of service, I marvel at what God has done and at the blessing he has placed upon us as Officers to fulfill the greater mission of the Kingdom. I am excited and so proud to be a part of the history, legacy and better yet the next 25 years of BCOAG's accomplishments.

## BCOAG 25th Anniversary Planning Committee—CDR Jennifer Moon

This 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary marks a very important milestone for my beloved BCOAG. When I entered on duty almost ten years ago, BCOAG welcomed me with open arms. The work that we do through BCOAG and the MOLC is extremely critical to the mission of the USPHS Commissioned Corps. It has been an honor and my pleasure to serve as the Co-Chair for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Planning Committee. I am looking for even greater achievements over the next 25!



# **2015 BCOAG AWARD RECIPIENTS**

**Hildrus A. Poindexter**

CDR John Oguntomilade

**George I. Lythcott**

LCDR Kainne Dokubo

**Retired PHS Officer Recognition Award**

CAPT Mary I. Lambert (Retired)

# **2015 BCOAG 25th ANNIVERSARY AWARD RECIPIENTS**

**Junior Officer Award**

LCDR Zewditu Demissie

**Senior Officer Award**

CAPT Beverly Dandridge

**Retired Officer Award**

CAPT Leslie Cooper (Retired)



## RADM CLARA HENDERSON COBB (RET.)

# A LIVING LEGACY: ONE WHO HAS IMPACTED LIVES, PUBLIC HEALTH AND DISCIPLINES ACROSS THE NATION

LCDR Zanethia Eubanks, LCDR Jennifer Smith, LCDR Pilgrim Spikes, and CDR Jemekia Thornton

Former Assistant Surgeon General, RADM Clara H. Cobb, RN, MSN, FNP, FAAN was honored for exemplary leadership and outstanding contributions during her retirement ceremony on September 17, 2015. The ceremony, held at the Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center, was attended by nearly 300 guests, including U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers, retired officers, family, and friends. RADM Cobb's many years of dedicated, selfless service were commended by Deputy Surgeon General, RADM Sylvia Trent-Adams; RADM Deborah Parham-Hopson (Senior Advisor for HIV/AIDS Policy, HRSA); and RADM Epi Elizondo (Chief Health Services Officer and Regional Health Administrator, Region VI), among others.



The traditional USPHS retirement ceremony – complete with Sideboys, Bell Officer, Boatswain's Mate, USPHS Honor Cadre, USPHS Choral Ensemble – Atlanta/Butner Group, and USPHS Sword to cut the cake – combined with honored maritime traditions and poignant personal stories were the highlights of the event. RADM Cobb's 36-year career was highlighted as one of distinction; one that included serving as the Regional Health Administrator (RHA) for the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, overseeing the largest HHS region (Region IV); serving as principal federal public health leader, representing the Assistant Secretary for Health, and providing executive level leadership in policy development, planning, implementation and evaluation of public health programs; and directing five regionally based programs – Office on Women's Health, Office of Minority Health, Office of Population Affairs, HIV/AIDS Regional Resource Network Program and Medical Reserve Corps, all designed to protect and promote the health of all communities within the eight southeastern states.



RADM's Parham-Hopson, Cobb, & Trent-Adams

It was noted during the ceremony, in the greater than 200-year history of the U.S Public Health Service, there have only been four (the fearsome foursome) African American nurse officers, who have achieved the rank of Rear Admiral; one retired and the other two were in attendance at RADM Cobb's retirement ceremony. That was a very sobering, yet inspiring moment.

RADM Parham-Hopson began her journey in the USPHS, at or about the same time as RADM Cobb. She gave her account of RADM Cobb's dedication and commitment to the USPHS through the years, particularly, in the Nurse Category, as a mentor and trailblazer. Many of RADM Cobb's mentees were present and served in various capacities as volunteers and participants.

RADM Elizondo voiced his appreciation for the dedicated service RADM Cobb provided to HHS and his opportunity to serve alongside her as a fellow RHA. He commended her for her commitment to serving Region IV and providing guidance to so many officers along the way.

Deputy Surgeon General Trent-Adams also expressed her gratitude for RADM's Cobb's mentorship, continued support and encouragement. She remembered specific occasions where RADM Cobb acknowledged that she would have a bright future. When deciding whether to pursue her dream job, she was advised to "Think about what this would mean to people other than yourself; other little girls that look like you."



CAPT Doris Ravenell-Brown moderated the presentation of awards, tokens of appreciation, and mementos to RADM Cobb from HHS Officials, fellow PHS Officers, the Atlanta and North Carolina COAs, as well as other colleagues and friends.



RADM Parham-Hopson

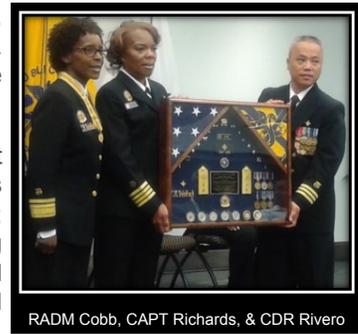


RADM Elizondo



RADM Trent-Adams

A lovely shadow box was presented to RADM Cobb, displaying her many awards, ribbons, medals and most coveted, the American flag that was flown over the U.S. Capitol, Washington, DC, August 4, 2015 in her honor, signifying her retirement from the USPHS.



RADM Cobb, CAPT Richards, & CDR Rivero

While RADM Cobb has received numerous awards during her career, her most significant ones included: the 2007 Nurse Responder of the Year Award; the 2010 Georgia Regents University's Distinguished Nurse Alumnus award; the Outstanding Service Medal in 2012; the Surgeon General's Exemplary Service Medal in 2013; and being selected as a "Living Legend" by the California Alumni Chapter of Oakwood University. Additionally RADM Cobb was inducted as a Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing in 2012, and selected as a 2013 Unsung Heroine by the National Coalition of 100 Black Women. However, during the ceremony, she was honored to receive the Surgeon General's Medallion.



RADM Cobb & ACOA Members

RADM Cobb made a very special presentation to the Atlanta COA (ACOA) during her ceremony. In 2014 she commissioned Mr. Preston S. Hesselgesser to make a bell to be used for her Retirement Ceremony. However, she stated "It's really not for me, I'm simply using it today. It belongs to the Atlanta Commissioned Officers' Association. Yes, ACOA, I am donating this bell to you to be used perpetually for ceremonies for years to come." The inscription was unveiled during the ceremony and read ***'Presented to the Atlanta Commissioned Officers Association; designed and crafted by Mr. Preston S. Hesselgesser; a perpetual contribution, by Rear Admiral; Clara H. Cobb; October 1, 2015.'***



RADM Cobb & RADM Trent-Adams

Very moving portions of the retirement ceremony included the readings of the "Retirement Orders" by RADM Parham-Hopson, presiding officer, and a beautifully-executed rendition of the "Old Glory" ceremony, narrated by CAPT Wanza Bacon, to include the LTJG through Rear Admiral, representing RADM Cobb's career progression. RADM Sylvia Trent-Adams, Deputy Surgeon General and one of RADM Cobb's many mentees, was the last officer to present the American flag to RADM Cobb during the "Old Glory" rite.

RADM Cobb's husband, Milton, daughter Chelsea, and her mother, Mrs. Emma Henderson were also honored during the ceremony. RADM Parham-Hopson read a letter to Mr. Cobb and Chelsea from VADM Vivek Murthy, 19<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General, citing their unwavering support and sacrifice during RADM Cobb's tenure with the USPHS.

The unexpected highlight was, "That's my baby!" exclaimed Mrs. Henderson, just before the family posed with RADM Cobb for pictures to commemorate the occasion.



Mrs. Henderson, RADM Cobb, Mr. Milton Cobb, & Chelsea Cobb



CAPT Belardo

At the end of the ceremony, CAPT Jose Belardo performed a memorable reading of the "The Watch." Saying to RADM Cobb, "...you stand relieved of duty. We have the watch." The ceremony then closed with RADM Parham-Hopson tearfully granting RADM Cobb permission to "go ashore." RADM Cobb and Mr. Cobb processed through the Sideboys to conclude a magnificent ceremony.

Guests were treated to a lovely reception after the ceremony during which many expressed well-wishes to RADM Cobb. Many great memories were created and celebrated that day!



One of RADM Cobb's memorable quotes of the day that resonated through the crowd (and one that each of us needs to be reminded of occasionally) is to ***'Remember, God chooses ordinary people. All of you are chosen; answer your calling and be used to help others.'***

# REFLECTIONS FROM THE HS PAC CHAIR

## CDR Stacey Evans

Since its establishment in 1990, The Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG) has served as a vital support network for African American Officers in the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). I first became acquainted with BCOAG shortly after my commissioning in early 2000. I remember stellar officers such as RADM (ret) Blackwell, CAPT (ret) Wendell Wainwrights, CAPT (ret) Hilda Douglas, CAPT (ret), Bob Taylor, CAPT Jose Belardo and CAPT Postelle Birch-Smith introducing me to the group many years ago. During those days the meetings were held on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor of the Parklawn Building in the Surgeon General's conference room. Over the last 15 years, I have seen an evolution in the services and programs that BCOAG implements for



Back Row: LCDR Filita Moore, CAPT Trellis Adams, LCDR Kami Cooper, LCDR Tanya Grandison, CDR Mivoyel Jean Paul, CDR Jyl Woolfolk  
Front Row: Mrs. Janice Eason, CDR Stacey Evans holding CAPT John Eason's Photo

not just African American Officers but for all Officers within the USPHS. I have had the pleasure of working alongside very dedicated officers in the BCOAG the list of whom is too numerous to name, but serving on review panels for awards, serving as a Science Fair judges, assisting with retirement and promotion ceremonies, serving the community through landscaping schools in Prince Georges County in the rain no less, participating in blood drives and so many other opportunities to increase health awareness in underserved communities and give back while representing the USPHS as America's Healthcare Professional cadre and Ready Responders as truly been an inspiration and rewarding experience.

While deployed in Liberia last year, I was fortunate enough to be alongside stellar BCOAG officers. Under the leadership of CAPT James L. Dickens (BCOAG Member), the Monrovia Medical Unit was named after CAPT John C. Eason. This was an especially proud moment to be a member of BCOAG because CAPT Eason was the first African American commissioned by the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). He was also one of the first USPHS Officer's assigned to the office of International Health where he supervised and supported health care missions to various countries. Upon our return to the United States, I had the privilege to accompany LCDR Cooper who led the initiative along with LCDR Tanya Grandison, LCDR Filita Moore, CDR Jyl Woolfolk, CDR Mivoyel Jean Paul, and CAPT Trellis Adams to the home of CAPT Eason's widow (Mrs. Janice Eason). We stood proud as we represented BCOAG and presented Ms. Eason with a replica of the camp sign that was named in her husband's honor. Mrs. Eason told us that "John would be so proud to see so many officers of color serving in the PHS that he helped pave the way for and so many wearing rank and following in his footsteps". Mrs. Eason's statement was truly humbling (See photo attached).

I salute every member of BCOAG past and present that has worked to ensure that all officers regardless of color, religion, or sexual orientation are respected, protected, and equipped with the tools needed to navigate the system to become stellar officers and community advocates.

Congratulations BCOAG Leadership on 25 years of Success and Accomplishments! I look forward to the continued great work that you do on behalf of the officers and our nation.



# BCOAG Officers Support Eliminating Health Disparities in Washington, DC

LT Jinean Riley & LT Israel Cross



Pictured: Back Row (L to R): LT Jibril Abdus-Samad, CDR Hamet Touré, LT Ellen Dieujuste, LT Israel Cross. Middle Row (L to R): CDR Stanley Shepperson, CDR Sean Bradley, LCDR Nadra Tyus, CAPT Monique Howard, CDR Anitra Johnson, CDR Shannon Hill, LT Gwendolyn Hudson. Front Row (L to R): CDR Latonia Ford, LT Jinean Riley, LCDR Kimberley Hawkins, LCDR Zanethia Eubanks, LT Janel Parham

Exercise – get moving, know your numbers, and visit your doctor annually. It's the simple, yet potentially life-saving message of the National African American Male Wellness Walk (AAMWW) Initiative. LT Jinean Riley organized 17 PHS officers in the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG) to participate in the AAMWW Initiative on August 1, 2015 at the National Mall in Washington, DC. Their participation emphasized BCOAG's commitment to increasing access to prevention services and empowering communities to become more active in their medical care. The event also allowed officers to share the PHS' mission to move the nation towards a focus on prevention and wellness.

Now in its 11<sup>th</sup> year, the AAMWW Initiative continues to expand in size in their efforts to raise awareness about ways to prevent death and disease among African American men. The Initiative was founded by Mr. John Gregory of the National Center for Urban Solutions in 2004. While the AAMWW Initiative began as an effort to bring awareness to health disparities affecting African American men in Ohio, it has expanded into a national program that reaches more than 10,000 men, women, and children in several states in the Midwest and on the East Coast.

One may ask why the focus on African American men in particular. Public health research has shown that African Americans males are at a higher risk of dying early from preventable diseases and conditions such as heart disease and stroke. In fact, African American males die from preventable diseases at nearly 10 times the rate of other men. Such health disparities are shaped by several social determinants and economic forces including generational poverty, a lack of trust in the medical system, and poor access to health care. However, the community can promote efforts, such as the AAMWW Initiative, that work to combat these disparities. Encouraging health-promoting behaviors, such as exercise and health screenings, is an important component in creating a healthy community.

BCOAG officers arrived early in the morning to help promote the event by walking around and encouraging African American men from the community to participate in the 5K walk/run and to get free screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, prostate cancer, and HIV. The male PHS officers in attendance set the example by getting screened. After the screenings and a pre-race warm-up, co-led by LT Israel Cross and a health professional from the AAMWW initiative, the officers gathered at the front of the line to kick off the walk/run. In its debut trip to Washington, DC, the AAMWW Initiative completed more than 100 screenings with the support of the local Howard Cancer Center. The Howard Cancer Center said it was the most prostate screenings they had completed at any similar event.



Pictured (L to R): CDR Stanley Shepperson, CDR Sean Bradley, LT Israel Cross, LT Jibril Abdus-Samad, LCDR LaMar Henderson, CDR Hamet Touré

Reference: <http://aawalk.org/>



# Opening Doors for the next Generation of BCOAG Officers: Public Health Career Mentoring at Spelman College

LCDR Candis M. Hunter, LCDR Jennifer Smith, and LCDR Asha Ivey-Stephenson

"You are setting an expectation...you are then opening the doors for other people. And if you don't, you can easily, just as easily, close that door"

-RADM Audrey Forbes- Manley ,USPHS, Ret.

[http://www.nlm.nih.gov/changingthefaceofmedicine/physicians/biography\\_211.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/changingthefaceofmedicine/physicians/biography_211.html)

As the first African American woman to be appointed as an Assistant Surgeon General in the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and founder of BCOAG, RADM Audrey F. Manley (Ret.) embodies setting expectations and opening doors for others. In addition to her distinguished federal service, RADM Manley was the first alumna to be selected as President of Spelman College, where she expanded training opportunities for students in science and medical fields. One example of this legacy to improve opportunities for the next generation of minority students is the Sister-2-Sister Alumnae-Student Professional Mentoring Program.

The Sister-2-Sister Mentoring Program was initiated by the Spelman College Office of Alumnae Affairs in 2011. Spelman alumnae are matched with students in the following areas:

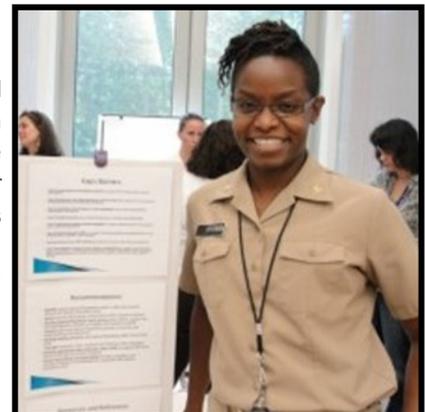
- Business/Entrepreneurship/Financial Services/Marketing
- Communications/Media/Public Relations
- Education
- Engineering/Dual Degree
- Law
- Medicine/Nursing/Public Health

Throughout the academic year, mentors and students participate in personal and professional development programs (Figure 1). Several USPHS officers stationed at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) mentor students at their alma mater through the Sister-2-Sister Program. They described their experiences below.



LCDR Jennifer Smith is an epidemiologist in the CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. LCDR Smith states that mentoring Spelman students gives her joy and helps keep her connected with her alma mater. She recalls, "My mentee from last year wasn't quite set on what she wanted to do, so it was kind of exciting looking back and remembering how I was at that age. I've been helping her to focus her energies."

LCDR Asha Ivey-Stephenson is a behavioral scientist in CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Although mentors may guide their mentees in establishing their careers or navigating the graduate school admissions process, they also learn life lessons from their mentees. LCDR Ivey-Stephenson states, "We are not just giving of ourselves as mentors, but there is always something that they inadvertently give to us. Sometimes this may come in the form of learning more about the technological world through them or perhaps even just learning more about the ways in which Spelman has prepared them differently from us."

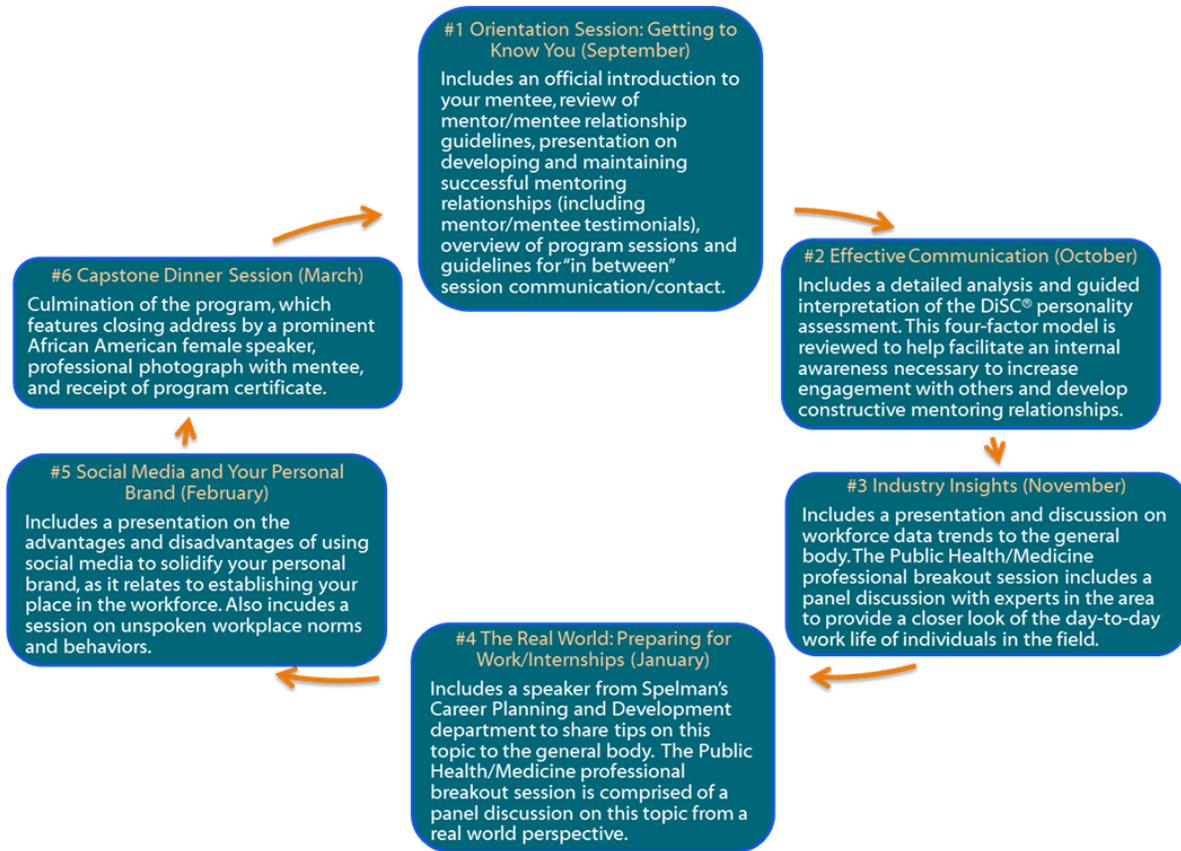




LCDR Candis M. Hunter is an environmental health officer in ATSDR. When her current mentee began the program, she had a strong interest in HIV behavioral health research. “One of the most rewarding parts of the experience has been the opportunity to share different public health career paths with my mentee. I have been able to expose her to some of the exciting opportunities in environmental health and epidemiology. I’m excited that in addition to HIV behavioral health research, she now also shares my passion for addressing environmental health disparities/environmental justice issues in underserved communities,” said LCDR Hunter.

Many current African American college students are unaware of PHS and other opportunities to serve in public health roles. The Sister-2-Sister Mentoring Program can serve as a model for PHS officer recruitment from Historically Black Colleges and Universities and can ultimately increase the diversity of the public health work force. HBCUs have served as an educational and developmental career marker in the lives of many BCOAG officers. Furthermore, activities such as these support BCOAG’s long history and support of mentorship and community outreach.

Figure 1: Sister-2-Sister mentoring program primary components and processes.



# Cultural Competency – The Journey Continues

CDR Helen Hunter Cox

On the heels of the Commissioned Corps' historic Ebola Response in West Africa, we also mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hurricane Katrina during this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group. Historically BCOAG officers were imperative in advocating for the importance of cultural competency in the context of disaster response. The challenges in the national response to Hurricane Katrina made the needs and importance for cultural competence during disaster response very evident.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, there was a heightened awareness of the challenges faced among racial and ethnic minority communities during disaster response efforts. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health had already published the first *National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)* in 2000 during the tenure of RADM Nathan Stinson as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Minority Health. At the time, the United States Public Health Service Office of Force Readiness and Deployment included a *Cultural Awareness* module as part of online readiness trainings. However, during and after Hurricane Katrina, many officers witnessed how critical it was to effectively meet the needs of diverse communities when existing health disparities were exacerbated by a natural disaster.

Following Hurricane Katrina, The Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) established a Cultural Competency Workgroup. RADM Helena Mishoe was one of the MOLC advisors at the time, and CAPT Sheila Merriweather was serving as the BCOAG chair. With their support and me as lead, our team developed a white paper. The MOLC workgroup then presented the white paper to the Office of the Surgeon General in September 2006. It highlighted facts on the importance of cultural competency and provided a framework of options that the OSG could consider implementing for better outcomes. Then in 2007, at The USPHS Symposium in Cincinnati, Ohio it was included in a breakout session, "Cultural Competency – More Than Awareness". The goal was to further promote the need for cultural competency training to a plethora of USPHS officers in the context of emergency preparedness. Proudly since that time, we have seen the following advances towards cultural competency training:

- *Cultural Competency Curriculum for Disaster Preparedness and Crisis Response* - a free, online educational program developed with funding from the HHS Office of Minority Health. This training is accredited for social workers, disaster mental health workers, first responders and emergency managers.  
<https://cccdpcr.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/>.
- The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response has a comprehensive listing of relevant resources available on their website, entitled *Cultural and Linguistic Competency for Disaster Preparedness Planning and Crisis Response*: <http://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/planning/abc/Pages/linguistic.aspx>.
- In 2013, the Office of Minority Health published enhanced CLAS standards, to further advance health equity through a stronger framework.
- An article in the May 2015 issue of the *RedDOG Newsletter* noted collaboration between the Readiness and Deployment Operations Group (RedDOG), the Office of Minority Health, and the Hispanic Officers Advisory Committee, towards finalizing an MOU to support all Corps officers in receiving training on the CLAS standards.

As BCOAG continues to journey forward, may we always continue to provide a voice in matters that impact our communities, continue to effect positive change and always be an advocate for progress towards cultural competency.



# Black History Moments over the Past 25 Years

LCDR Zewditu Demissie

Throughout history, African Americans have made significant contributions to the United States and the world. Such achievements have been made in several areas of society: science and medicine, politics, sports, business, and others. When we think of black history, most of us think of moments in the distant past. Examples include great moments such as John Baxter Taylor becoming the first African American Olympic Gold Medalist (1908) or Ralph Bunche becoming the first African American to win a Nobel Prize (1950). This article highlights some notable moments over the past 25 years that we can celebrate.

## 1990s

- 1990: Sharon Pratt Kelly is elected mayor of Washington, DC. This makes her the first African American woman elected to lead a major U.S. city.
- 1990: Carole Ann-Marie Gist becomes the first African American to win the Miss USA pageant.
- 1991: Walter Massey becomes the first African American director of the National Science Foundation.
- 1992: Mae Carol Jemison becomes the first African American woman in space.
- 1993: Toni Morrison becomes the first African American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. She was honored for her novel, *Beloved*.
- 1995: Lonnie Bristow becomes the first African American president of the American Medical Association.
- 1997: Tiger Woods is the first African American winner of the Masters Tournament (golfing).
- 1997: President Bill Clinton issues an apology for the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.
- 1999: Maurice Ashley becomes the world's first African American chess grandmaster.
- 2000: Lillian Elaine Fishbourne becomes the first African American admiral in the Navy.

## 2000s

- 2001: Colin Powell is the first African American appointed as U.S. Secretary of State.
- 2002: Halle Berry and Denzel Washington win Oscars for Best Actress and Best Actor, respectively; the first time that African Americans have won these awards.
- 2005: Condoleezza Rice becomes the first African American woman to be appointed as U.S. Secretary of State.
- 2005: Hurricane Katrina made landfall in the United States. Among the most affected includes African American communities in New Orleans.
- 2007: BCOAG hosts the yearly NOLA Mission to help strengthen these affected communities.
- 2008: Barack Obama is elected as the first African American U.S. President.

## 2010s

- 2011: The Martin Luther King Memorial in Washington, DC opened to the public. USPHS officers supported the dedication.
- 2015: Serena Williams becomes the oldest woman to win Wimbledon (tennis).
- 2015: Viola Davis becomes the first African American to win the Emmy for Best Actress in a Drama Series, for her role on *How to Get Away with Murder*.
- 2015: The base that housed the Monrovia Medical Unit (MMU) in Liberia during the Ebola response was dedicated Camp Eason. The base was named after CAPT John C. Eason, Jr., the first African American to be commissioned by the United States Public Health Service.

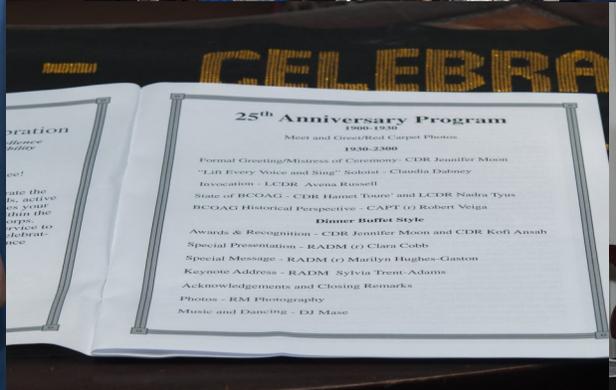
Reference: <http://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history-timeline-home-page>











# **BCOAG 25th Anniversary Planning Committee** **Acknowledgements**

RADM Sylvia Trent –Adams

RADM Clara Cobb

BCOAG Executive Committee

BCOAG Communications & Publications Committee

BCOAG Community Service Committee

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BCOAG Historical Committee

Tommie Thornton (T-Shirt designer)

Event Staff at the Bolling Club

FDA Audio/Visual Support Team

Flowers High School ROTC Cadets

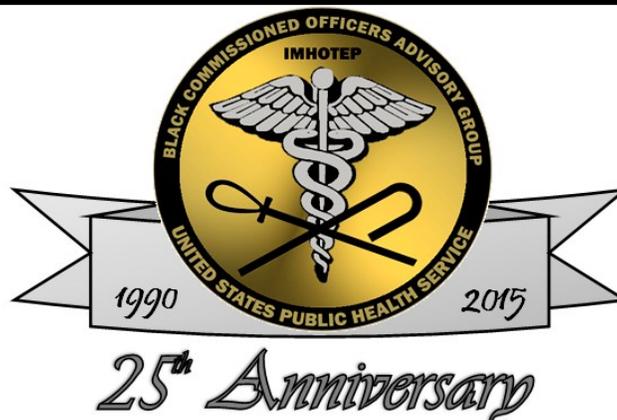
RM Photography

Cakes by Kim

Soloist – Claudia Dabney

**Without your support, the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events would not have been successful. We cannot thank you enough!**

"One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest."  
- Maya Angelou



"If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters. Excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude." - Colin Powell