

# THE RAPID PULSE

March 2007

## Faces & Places

### WELCOME:

#### El Paso, TX:

LTJG Jose Ortiz

#### Eloy, AZ:

LCDR Michael Hopkins  
Ms. Lynne Best  
Ms. Nicola Lawrence  
Ms. Rita Alvarez  
Ms. Vivian E. Olivas

#### Florence, AZ:

LT Dawn Kordas  
Mr. Ramon Gomez

#### Houston, TX:

Ms. Aydee Marty

#### Pinal, AZ:

Ms. Arlene Putnam  
Ms. Caroline Toledo  
Ms. Lisa Efaw

#### San Pedro, CA:

LCDR Michael Forbes

#### Willacy, TX:

Ms. Janice Bowland

### FAREWELL:

#### El Paso, TX:

LT Ray Ford

#### Miami, FL:

CDR Luis Garabis

#### Washington, DC:

Mr. David Warner

## THE DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

By Mr. Neil Sampson, Interim Director

Welcome to another installment of *The Rapid Pulse*. I first want to start by saying what a pleasure it was for me, to have the opportunity to speak with DIHS staff during last month's all-hands conference call.

You may recall that during the last all-hands conference call, I made reference to the employee survey that was conducted last year. CFI Group, which is a consulting firm specializing in "maximizing value by optimizing customer and employee satisfaction," has been engaged by HRSA to conduct and analyze employee satisfaction within the agency including DIHS. The results of the survey, which almost half of our employees participated in voluntarily, will be released at the program manager's meeting on 2 April and to the entire division at the monthly all hands on 3 April.

We are working to streamline the administrative processes by centralizing some of the inprocessing requirements (passports, initial credentialing, etc.) so that sites can concentrate on local orientation.

We are also pleased to announce the launching of the "DIHS Sponsorship Program." All new federal employees will be assigned a sponsor. The sponsors are providing information on location, community activities, housing, etc. to assist new recruits in adjusting to the new duty station.

Good news from the travel department: In response to President Bush's Management Agenda calling for a more efficient and effective government, HHS adopted an integrated financial management solution, the Unified Financial Management System

(UFMS) to better align the department's business and technology to support decision making and cost effective business operations.

Although there have been some delays in the implementation of UFMS which have caused ripples through the division, we now are fortunate to experience one of the benefits: Travelers can now select a disbursement in GovTrip for expenses such as lodging, rental car and airfare. This allows these charges to be reimbursed directly and will decrease the financial burden to the individual traveler.

In the area of recruiting, we are working to re-focus the recruitment effort, to more rapidly respond to the needs of our field sites, particularly in the area of nursing.

Finally, I want to thank you all for your ongoing dedication and steadfastness to the mission of this Division.

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## ***THE “J” TEAM DELPLOYS IN SUPPORT OF OPERATION WAGON TRAIN***

By LT William Cooper

In December 2006, eight Public Health Service officers from the Division of Immigration Health Services (DIHS) deployed as a tactical special operations team to support the Department of Homeland Security’s ‘Operation Wagon Train.’

Preparation for this operation began in mid 2006 when a multi-agency team tracked a large population of illegal immigrants who had used stolen identities to secure employment in several US states. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) organized a response by forming ‘Operation Wagon Train.’

The operation would require several months of groundwork and a high level of flexibility and dedication from involved parties. ICE requested support from DIHS to provide “fit-for-flight” screening, and to follow on to the Stewart Detention Center to provide intake screening and physical exams for recently apprehended detainees. The DIHS special operations mission was under the direction of CAPT Jacinto Garrido and drew medical staff members from eight DIHS facilities.

In tribute to its leader, the team quickly adopted the name, the “J” team. Team leaders were LCDR Shawna Hutchins, RN and LT Jessica Diaz, RN. The remaining six members included CDR Alex Garza, NP; CDR Elizabeth Escalera, NP; LCDR Gina Chacon, RN; LT Mike Chuley, PA-C; LT Christine Chang, PA-C and LT William Cooper, PA-C.

Members had a solid foundation for this assignment from previous experience on global missions with the Department of Homeland Security’s Detention and Removal Operations. The “J” team remained on standby for three months. Operation Wagon Train was implemented in December across six states: Utah, Colorado, Texas, Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska.

Synchronized mobilization of the team occurred within 48 hours of deployment orders. Team members packed both standard and specialized equipment needed to provide a wide range of medical care. Transport of extensive pharmaceutical and medical supplies required a coordinated effort with the Transportation Security Administration.



**Left to Right Seated:** LT Christine Chang, CDR Elizabeth Escalera, LCDR Gina Chacon, LCDR Shawna Hutchins, LT Michael Chuley **Left to Right Standing:** CDR Alex Garza, LT Jessica Diaz, LT William Cooper

PHS officers arrived two days prior to the planned day of operation activity. Lodging arrangements had been made at Camp Dodge barracks, the same base where ICE had set up and the detainees would be received. The team utilized base barracks to maintain close proximity, decrease dependency on transportation and maintain on-site report capabilities. All activities were kept confidential across agencies and personnel.

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The “medical base” was quickly fitted with a pharmaceuticals dispensing system and sharps control system. The supplies with which team members had traveled were combined to outfit a complete clinic. An up-to-date dynamic drug and supply inventory system was tailored to track the activity of four medical processing stations. A minor illness treatment center was organized and supplied. Medical records were prepared for use and organized by a variety of unique identifiers ranging from arrest numbers to alien number. Strategies were developed to process a projected flow between 200 and 1,100 detainees. Screening procedures were drafted and revised several times to allow smooth processing of detainees. CAPT Jacinto Garrido and Dr. Timothy Shack coordinated healthcare resource management in coordination with DIHS Headquarters.

LCDR Hutchins had completed an international escort a few days before departure. She barely had time to unpack from that trip to pack for this one. LT Christine Chang sacrificed a much-needed two days off in order to participate in conference calls and collect her share of preparatory equipment. CDR Garza and LT Chang were preparing to depart to opposite ends of the globe on international assignments soon after completion of this deployment. LT Cooper was in the midst of a permanent change of station to Hawaii with NOAA and CDR Escalera’s TDY to Florence, AZ was cut short to allow for this deployment.

On day three detainees poured in to the base. The identifying and assigning of alien numbers was among the first tasks of processing. Within a few minutes of fingerprinting, the investigators knew of any violations on record. There were a few tense moments as perpetrators of aggravated crimes were identified.

The Mexican consulate from Omaha was briefed and arrived on site to gather information and provide updates to their respective countries.

Numerous detainees were Guatemalans whose pri-

mary language was one of several Indian dialects. The team turned to CDR Garza, LCDR Chacon or LCDR Hutchins, who have worked closely with these cultures for years. They were able to transform a confused, saddened Guatemalan into a laughing, smiling human being again. Exceptional cases were identified, and ICE worked with detainees on humanitarian issues.

Health officers and ICE worked together in processing candidates designated for release with court dates. The hope was that the majority of detainees would be in their native countries by Christmas. Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation System (JPATS) aircraft and buses joined the operation, facilitating removal to countries of origin.

The location of the temporary detention facility was confidential in these situations to avoid any compromises in security. A public information officer interacted with the press as needed. It was rewarding to see streamlined coordination between agencies as each remained dedicated to a common goal. Crucial to this success was the ability to respond with flexibility as events unfolded.

On day four, as Operation Wagon Train was winding down, part of the team re-located to a newly opened ICE detention facility in Stewart, Georgia to assist in processing detainees from this and other operations. CDR Alex Garza and LT Christine Chang volunteered to stay behind in Des Moines to provide care for migrants still waiting for flights.

The remaining team crammed into their beloved ICE paddy wagon and traveled to the local airport for a flight to Stewart. Checking into hotels after midnight, the exhausted team immediately went to bed, some remaining in uniform in readiness for reporting to the

*Wagon Train- From Page 3*

JPATS arrival just hours away. On days five and six, the team staged at the Stewart Detention Center, working with the site medical staff, to support the JPATS arrivals, working extremely long hours and with very little food, they provided 306 intake screenings and 306 physical exams for Operation Wagon Train detainees and 117 intake screenings and 139 physical exams on additional detainees.

Upon mission completion the team had provided a total of 1,319 patient encounters. The atmosphere of such a special and delicate operation lent itself for instant bonding between team members. During trips in the paddy wagon and flights between states, members heard stories of LT Chuley's college baseball days at Ithaca College, LT Diaz's Army career, LT Cooper's Bureau of Prisons experiences, LCDR Hutchins' abundant military and administrative anecdotes and most of all, CDR Elizabeth Escalera's tales providing deep insight into the life of the people we encountered. Operation Wagon Train was an enormous effort that required long hours and flexibility. All who participated, although exhausted, enjoyed the satisfaction of a job well done.

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## *Happy Nurses Week 2007*

By CDR Linda Jo Belsito, RN, MSN

This has been a year of growth, challenges, and opportunity for all of us. As we celebrate our profession of nursing each of you needs to know how much your efforts are appreciated. With the activations of 8 new sites, TDYs, special missions, escorts and supporting the Presidents Secure Border Initiative, we all have been working very hard to support those of you in the field. You must know that all of you are in my thoughts every day and we are working to alleviate the staffing issues before us today.

As your Chief Nurse Consultant I have been actively participating in the Nursing Appointment Review Boards and have recommended and identified candi-

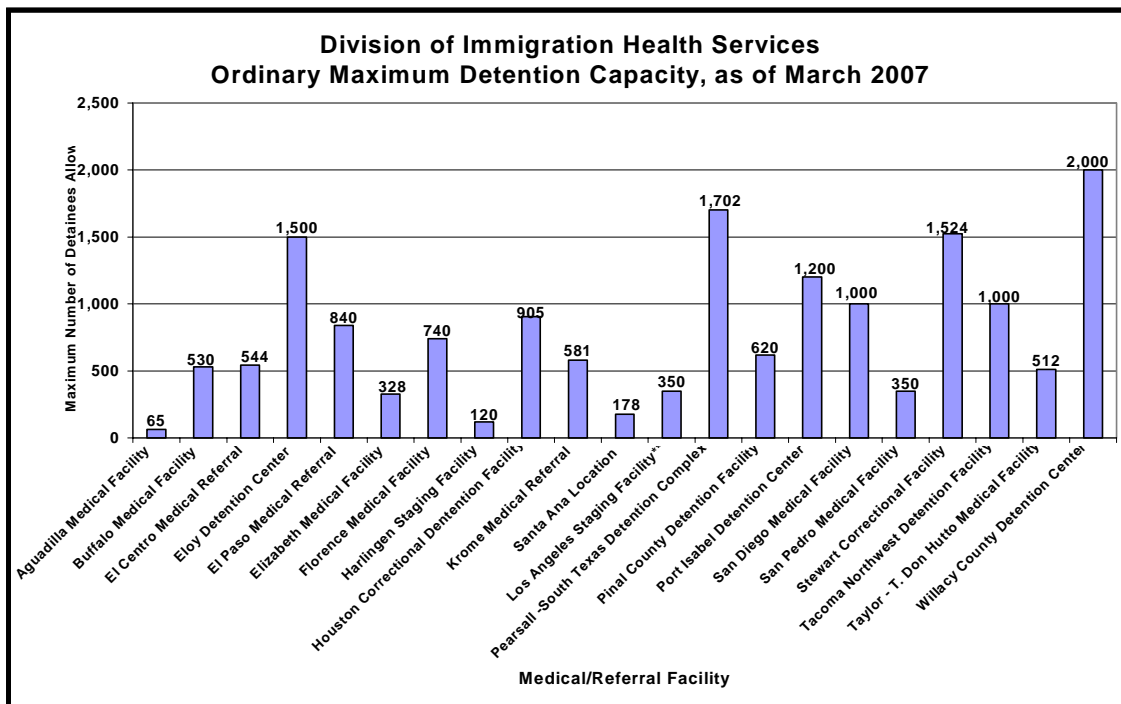
dates that I feel are the best fit for our mission and agency. We have been successful at a 22 % increase in nursing staff this year, and I plan to continue my pursuit of recruiting and building the best Nursing Team for this agency. As part of the Federal Chief Nurse Group, I have had the opportunity to represent our agency, discuss our daily challenges and work on addressing the issue of the nursing shortage across the nation. As reported by RADM Romano there are 900 vacancies in HHS. These are not all Commissioned Officers by nursing positions. There has been an outreach to nursing schools and the Chief Nurse is attempting to reach out to those schools and make them aware of the programs we have to offer so we can bring in younger nurses who may want to make a career with the Corps.

The transformation of the Corps is moving forward and changes are being made to redesign the recruitment effort to the Corps to attract nurses to "March in the Army of the Surgeon General." Each one of you must realize that you are a recruiter for the Corps and the Agency and you should encourage those who may be interested to apply to our division. Each day you go to work, do a public speaking engagement, or participate in one of the DIHS job fairs in your local areas you should feel proud to represent this agency, and the great work you do everyday providing health care to this detained population.

As you celebrate this National Nurse Week 2007, be proud of what you do everyday and know that you are appreciated for all that you do. You all have risen to the challenges presented this past year and continue to provide the best health care to those in our facilities every day. I truly believe that as Nurses we have chosen this profession because we have a higher calling. In this division we get to prove that every day. I want you all to know that I am proud to represent you and will continue to work towards a better future for our Team in the field.

### Denominators of Medical/Referral Sites at the Division of Immigration Health Services (DIHS)

By Dr. John T. Wulu



\*Pearsall was reduced from 1,904 to 1,702 due to recent Chicken Pox outbreak.

\*\* Los Angeles Staging shows a max capacity estimate and it is expected to re-open in June/

There are a total of **21** medical/referral sites (including three staging facilities—Harlingen, Santa Ana, and Los Angeles) in which DIHS provides health care and public health services to detainees in support of immigration law enforcement.

Generally, the ordinary maximum capacity of the total detainee population at DIHS medical/referral sites stands at **16,589**. The ordinary max capacity represents the non-emergency capacity of detainee population at any given site. In the event of an urgent situation, the emergency capacity at a site may exceed its ordinary maximum capacity.

The ordinary max capacity ranges from **65** to **2,000** depending on the sites; The Aguadilla Medical Facility maintains an ordinary max capacity of **65** detainees, while Willacy County Detention Center holds up to **2,000** detainees normally.

By partitioning DIHS sites into regions, **Central** with 7 sites (El Paso, Harlingen, Houston, Pearsall, Port Isabel, Taylor, and Willacy) has an ordinary maximum detention capacity of **7,279** (43.9%); **Eastern** with 5 sites (Aguadilla, Buffalo, Elizabeth, Krome, and Stewart) has **3,028** (18.2%); and **Western** with 9 sites (El Centro, Eloy, Florence, Santa Ana, Los Angeles, Pinal, San Diego, San Pedro, and Tacoma) has **6,282** (37.9%).