

Acting Surgeon General Message to All-Hands,
Commissioned Corps of the US Public Health Service

September 25, 2009

As we anticipate the Senate confirmation of Surgeon General nominee Regina Benjamin, and I move forward in my professional journey, I want to share with you the sense of honor and privilege I feel having served with you and as your leader.

In my twenty three years in the Corps, I have seen our ranks grow in both size and strength. Today, we are more than 6500 officers strong and our readiness level is 93%, a percentage higher than any of the other uniformed services. During my tenure as Acting Surgeon General I have seen every day why our ranks are the nation's best asset in fighting public health crises. During the record hurricane season of 2008, thousands of officers deployed to bring critical health and human services to the families devastated by the storms. This past July I visited the USNS Comfort during the Continuing Promise 2009 humanitarian mission to recognize officers who are sharing our public health knowledge and resources with other nations to promote global health diplomacy. And each day our officers battle disease and poor health everywhere by doing research, implementing programs, and shaping health policy.

I reflect on my term with a sense of accomplishment but certainty that there is still much work to do. Twenty five years ago my medical training took me to Southeast Asia. This experience laid the foundation for my aspirations to prevent disease before it starts. While we as a nation have made progress, each day too many Americans suffer and die prematurely from preventable chronic diseases. One in every 3 adults and nearly 1 in every 5 young people are obese. Through my Healthy Youth for a Healthy Future initiative, I brought national attention to the complex issue of childhood obesity prevention, highlighted innovative community actions, and forged lasting partnerships to win the battle. I have published Surgeon General's Calls to Action on Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism and the Promotion of Healthy Homes, advocated for state-wide policies to prevent underage drinking, and helped rejuvenate the national dialogue on preventing pre-term births. Prevention has been my top priority as a health professional, an officer, and as Acting Surgeon General.

I have also focused on making sure tools are in place to support our current and future growth. New management systems are increasing efficiencies and career development and a revitalized Officer Basic Course equips new recruits with the traditions and knowledge necessary to serve. Recently, the Office of Force Readiness and Deployment convened a large scale training program to improve our readiness. Nearly 1500 officers left behind work projects and family to spend weeks honing their leadership and response skills to be the best responders during disasters. With H1N1 looming this fall and

unknown challenges in the future, these improvements will help ensure our ranks stand ready to help America through any public health crisis.

These are historic – and defining – times for advancing prevention across the nation. We have an unparalleled opportunity to move prevention into the mainstream of our medical system. As public health professionals I encourage you to draw upon the optimism and promise of current events and help the nation evolve to a more prevention-focused public health system.

In the coming years, the Corps will expand its numbers, increase its diversity, improve its response capabilities and strengthen its reach and impact. The road ahead will not be easy, but the stakes - America's health and wellbeing - could not be higher. Your ability to learn and adapt as we combat ever-changing crises and transform to meet future public health threats has and will be critical to our success. In closing, I would like to thank you for your courage and selfless service and ask for your continued perseverance in protecting and promoting the health of all Americans.

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