The Current Status of US Army Dermatology

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Recently, COL Kathleen David-Bajar, who served as the Dermatology Consultant to the Surgeon General of the Army since 1999, retired from that position. She was a stellar immuno-dermatologist at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio, Texas, and her outstanding efforts as consultant will be sorely missed by us all. Meanwhile, COL Leonard Sperling continues to serve as the Chairman of the Dermatology Department at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) in Bethesda, Maryland. In 2002, we welcomed new leaders for the Army's 2 flagship medical centers: COL Scott Norton, a pioneer in bioterrorism readiness, was appointed as the Chief of Dermatology at Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) in Washington, DC, and LTC(P) Paula Vogel, a talented Mohs surgeon, was named Chief at BAMC.

Our graduate medical education programs retain their reputations as the standard for excellence worldwide. WRAMC and Bethesda Naval Hospital jointly form the National Capital Consortium (NCC), headed by COL George Turiansky; while BAMC and Wilford Hall Air Force Hospital comprise the San Antonio Uniformed Services Health Education Consortium (SAUSHEC), led by Air Force Col Jeffrey Meffert. LTC Stephen Krivda is the Assistant Chief at WRAMC, and COL Paul Benson continues to inspire residents in the NCC. In San Antonio, MAJ Hon Pak is making dramatic progress in the visionary Army Teledermatology implementation and recently transferred the SAUSHEC Assistant Program directorship to the energetic MAJ Darryl Hodson. The new military abbreviations and acronyms not withstanding, the interservice training experience for Army dermatologists has proven invaluable.

A paradigm shift in the selection of future Army dermatologists is underway, and the majority of our starting residents are now predesignated out of medical school, similar to the civilian match. The applicant pool consists of students from USUHS and those enrolled in the Health Professions Scholarship Program at civilian medical schools. We ask dermatologists around the country to notify us when they come upon talented medical students sponsored by the Army who may be interested in our specialty.

After training, Army dermatologists have the opportunity for varied assignment experiences at facilities of all sizes throughout the country and abroad. They continue their penchant for clinical excellence even when deployed to austere environments around the world, such as the Persian Gulf. In addition to advanced fellowship and research prospects, a career with the Army also affords the potential for a wide variety of eclectic career paths. For example, COL Nadja West is the new commander of the medical facility at Fort Eustis, Virginia, COL James Baunchalk soon assumes that same position at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, LTC Norvell (Van) Coots is a clinical operations officer on the staff of the Army's Surgeon General, and LTC Daniel Schissel is both a diving medical officer and a flight surgeon while assigned as a dermatologist in Germany.

I am forever grateful for the service of a dedicated group of Army Reserve dermatologists who carry on our nation's honorable tradition of 'citizen-soldiers' and feel privileged to work with them at any opportunity.

Regardless of where and how long one serves in Army dermatology, a unique thread of camaraderie binds Army dermatologists in a timeless fashion. From perhaps our specialty's strongest leader in the 20th century, the late Clarence Livingood, to former career officers eminent today such as Richard Odom, Stuart Salasche, William James, and Dirk Elston, to those currently serving around the globe, and finally to our residents, interns, and medical students, the proud legacy of the "Long Green Line" of Army Dermatology marches on!