

No Man Is an Island in the Public Health Service

Jeffrey W. Sherman of the Transportation Security Administration discusses his inspiration to join the Public Health Service and giving back to junior officers.

Below is an edited and condensed version of the Federal Practitioner interview with Jeffrey W. Sherman, DO, chief medical officer of the Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration. Dr. Sherman recently received the Outstanding Service Medal from PHS. To hear the complete interview, visit: <http://www.fedprac.com/multimedia/multimedia-library.html>.

The Transportation Security Administration

Jeffrey W. Sherman, DO. I'm primarily responsible for providing expert opinion to the senior leadership of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) as it relates to occupational health, preventive medicine, and other medical topics. The position of chief medical officer at the TSA has been on the books for quite a while. However, it hasn't been filled on a permanent basis until the time that I came over from the Office of Health Affairs.... For the most part, the marching orders that I was given from the senior leadership was to take a fairly neutral look at the agency's ability to manage the health and wellness of its workforce and find both positive areas and areas for improvement where the TSA could impact the welfare of the TSA population.

Programs that we were able to identify that were already in existence and working really well for the TSA were in abundance. However, there were a number of programs that I found would probably enhance the TSA's ability to manage its workforce better and to provide a more comfortable, safe workplace. The main one was an ability to measure the transportation security officers' medical capability and aptitude over a period of time, so more or less to manage them periodically and allow us to review the requirements and assessments for that particular workforce from an occupational health standpoint.

Having a Career in the PHS

Dr. Sherman. My previous work with the PHS included being a director for a number of different medical programs in other government agencies, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), where I was acting director of the Division of Immigration Health Services for a period of time. I moved on to be the senior medical advisor to the principal legal advisor at ICE; and again, working with the attorneys on various medical issues allowed me to build greater confidence in my ability to manage the interface between what's appropriate legally from the medical

standpoint and what's appropriate from the clinical practice of medicine in occupational health. So that was very vital and important.

Just prior to coming to the TSA, I was the medical director for a number of programs for the U.S. Marshals Services. Working alongside law enforcement in their unique roles and managing programs that are variously clinical and nonclinical gives good insight as to how to come into a large organization such as the TSA, with more than 48,000 transportation security officers, and put in place programs in a preexisting organization. To retrofit programs into an organization of that size requires some tact and ability. So all that time previously spent has allowed me to gain those skills.

Joining the PHS

Dr. Sherman. We are a group of dedicated professionals; we have a very close connection and a close network of collegial interactions. I was the Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) chair for the Physicians PAC for a year and vice chair before that. Meeting all the individuals and working with them on various cross-agency public health and professional projects has absolutely brought a lot of their wealth into what I do here at the TSA specifically. No man is an

island; and certainly, in the PHS, you never feel that way...

I was in private practice in rural upstate New York in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita came ashore, and I was part of the National Health Service Corps at that time. Part of my response as a National Health Service Corps Scholar was to join colleagues—some of whom were PHS officers—down in the recovery area in Louisiana; that is where I met my first uniformed Commissioned Corps officer, 2 of them, in fact. I worked with them for several weeks and was so incredibly impressed with the work of the PHS that while I was there, I applied for my commission. So I was hit pretty hard and pretty heavy, and I haven't looked back...

It's, of course, very satisfying to hear your uniformed service spoken highly of in a public forum and especially by elected officials such as the president. I mean it's difficult not to smile when you hear that. I will say, as one of the 7 uniformed services of the U.S., we do take a lot of knuckling under from our sister services that are more well known. But frankly, at the end of the day, we work beside them regardless of the notoriety or note that we get from them or from anyone else.

I've served alongside the Navy on the USNS *Mercy*, and I've been out with Air Force and Coast Guard on their vessels as well. So I'm very comfortable, and I think most of the PHS officers are comfortable working with our sister uniformed services. It is nice to hear the recognition.

The PHS Outstanding Service Medal

Dr. Sherman. It's a real honor and a privilege to have received that medal.... There are things you do in your professional career that you do

Jeffrey W. Sherman, DO, DABFM, AAHIVS, currently is serving as the Department of Homeland Security Office of Health Affairs' medical liaison advisor to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). In this position, he offers occupational health, operational medicine, and public health expertise to the TSA. As the chief medical officer, Dr. Sherman is the TSA's top authority for medical- and health-related operational issues that impact the TSA personnel, including work life and wellness programs, worker's compensation, and drug and alcohol free workplace initiatives.

Previously, Dr. Sherman served in the U.S. Marshals Service as medical director, overseeing medical and safety programs within the Justice Prisoner & Alien Transportation System, Witness Security Division, Office of Courtroom Security Operations, and Prisoner Operations Division. He has also served as the senior medical advisor to the principal legal advisor for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, where he worked extensively as medical subject matter expert for attorneys in the fields of commercial and administrative law, employment and labor law, and enforcement and removal operations law.



not do for notoriety; you do it because it's the right thing to do, and you know it's in the greater service to your profession.

In this case, our profession is also a uniformed service. And so for the uniformed service itself to take note and to give recognition for what I would do anyway and the manner in which I do it, it's again, very satisfying; and it's very humbling.

Mentoring Junior Officers

Dr. Sherman. The PHS has a very robust program of mentoring junior officers; and I think one of the things that has been most satisfying in my time in uniform, outside of the obvious professional things, has really been mentoring junior officers on their way up through the ranks and as they find their path-

way forward in a career as a Commissioned Corps officer. And if I can say one thing to any new officer coming into the organization, it's make sure that you reach out to your senior officers, and make sure you learn from both their successes and their errors so that by the time you finish your career, you can look back and say you've done everything you've wanted to.

I still maintain relationships with [my] mentors. I don't think you're ever too old or ever too experienced to have a mentor. There's always something you can learn from another individual. So you know, you never stop learning, and you never stop appreciating the people who you're working beside who come before you and who are coming behind you. And please don't ask me to state names, because there are too many. ●



Jeffrey W. Sherman, DO, on Mentoring in the Public Health Service



Visit www.fedprac.com for the complete interview.