

Chapter 49

ROLE OF THE OFFICE PROGRAM MANAGER–SAUDI ARABIAN NATIONAL GUARD MEDICAL EDUCATION AND BRIGADE TRAINING ADVISOR FOR HEALTH AFFAIRS

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Introduction

The Office of the Program Manager, Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG) was created in 1973 by a memorandum of understanding between the United States and the Saudi Arabian government in response to a request from then King Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz to modernize the Ministry of the National Guard (MNG).¹ Office personnel carry out their mission through direct advising, contracted training support, and foreign military sales (FMS) case management, producing a capable and professional medical force capable of sustaining health on the battlefield.² The physician assistant (PA) assigned to OPM-SANG is the principal military medical and training advisor for the strategic military modernization program between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The PA coordinates with soldiers and civilians from the MNG and National Guard Health Affairs on programs of instructions, faculty development, instructor training, medical unit sustainment training, and the management of the various departments within the Allied Health Sciences Military School (AHSMS) system and the MNG brigades.

Unit Structure

An FMS organization, OPM-SANG is subordinate to the US Army Security Assistance Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and its next higher headquarters is the Army Materiel Command. The program manager is currently a colonel. The Health Affairs section consists of an assistant program manager (APM), also a colonel; a deputy (lieutenant colonel); officers; and noncommissioned officers serving in various advisory roles within the MNG. Currently, OPM-SANG has over 100 active duty advisors (all sergeants first class or majors and above) and approximately 150 civilian employees.

Roles and Duties

The PA assigned to OPM-SANG integrates health service and medical training modernization in field and fixed medical units within the MNG by ensuring the addition of individual and collective medical training to training schedules, and by developing and providing medical leadership. In addition, the PA oversees military medical training programs for the AHSMS, which produces professional development courses to ensure that high-quality, current, and relevant military medical protocols and procedures are incorporated into programs of instruction. Specifically, the advisor directly oversees all aspects of the Allied Health Sciences Education Branch, which establishes curriculum, faculty, and medical doctrine development for all programs of instruction within the AHSMS. The advisor also provides direct supervision of the AHSMS Combat Medical Training Center. Furthermore, the PA collaborates with the APM and deputy of health affairs on command health issues, including planning, monitoring, and implementing medical preparedness plans. The PA provides direct primary care and monitors the medical readiness of all personnel assigned to OPM-SANG, while maintaining professional, physical, and technical readiness. In the absence of the APM, the PA serves as the command surgeon for OPM.

Desired Skills and Attributes

- Extensive experience as a PA.
- Combat deployment experience.
- Tactical Combat Casualty Care instructor.

- Minimum rank of major.
- Credentialed medical provider.
- Intermediate Level Education and Command and General Staff College graduate.
- Medical simulation training center experience.
- Expert writing and communication skills.

Training

The training required prior to arrival at OPM-SANG is the Security Assistant Team Training Orientation Course (SATTOC) offered at Fort Bragg. The PA must have access to the Medical Operating Data System (MODS) to update electronic profiles and address other medical readiness concerns within OPM-SANG. Additionally, taking a contracting course is helpful to ensure understanding of new purchase requests related to an FMS. Other required or recommended courses are as follows:

- **Must be completed before SATTOC:** Defense Institute of Security Cooperation Studies Security Cooperation Management Familiarization Course (101) online (<https://www.discs.dscu.mil/>)
- **Must be completed during or prior to SATTOC:** Defense Institute of Security Cooperation Studies Security Cooperation Online Orientation Course (201)
- **Highly recommended for a better understanding of acquisitions and the FMS system:** the following Defense Acquisitions University (<https://www.dau.edu>) classes:
 - CLM 003, Overview of Acquisition Ethics
 - CLC 106, Contracting Officer's Representative With a Mission Focus
 - COR 222, Contracting Officer's Representative Course Book 1
 - CLC 222, Contracting Officer's Representative Course

Key Factors

This position is typically a 1-year tour with and optional 1-year extension. It is coded for a male PA in the rank of major (O-4), with no additional skill identifier. This position is primarily nonclinical; however, there is a clinic on the installation that allows the PA to see OPM personnel and

provide health care. All medical providers' credentials are maintained at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. The PA can maintain continued medical education proficiency by taking courses through the Postgraduate Training Center located at the King Abdulaziz Medical City, which offers courses such as Basic Life Support, Advanced Life Saver, Pediatric Advanced Life Support, and Advanced Trauma Life Support. Funds are also available for travel to additional locations to maintain licensure through the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants during the assignment.

Lessons Learned

The following are lessons learned for the PA assigned in the OPM-SANG position:

- Understanding the MNG command structure will require patience. Establishing relationships will be instrumental.
- MNG doctrine is very similar to US doctrine. The PA must continually emphasize the need to use established doctrine in current operations.
- The PA must seek to understand MNG operational needs and provide appropriate coaching and mentoring.
- The MNG does not have all the appropriate medical positions, areas of concentration, or military occupational specialties required.
- The MNG does not have a mature medical logistical system for field medicine.
- The MNG values Role 4 over Roles 1, 2, and 3; the PA should emphasize the importance of all roles in coordination with leaders and civilians from the MNG and National Guard Health Affairs.
- The head of their fixed facility (non-military) makes decisions for acquiring any field medical equipment/supplies.
- The MNG does not have the leadership or a department equivalent to the Office of the Surgeon General.
- The MNG relies heavily on committees to gain consensus on information, which may delay decisions.
- The MNG does have acting commanders and may delay decisions until the commander is present; this requires the advisor to remain flexible.

- MNG leadership may need coaching and mentoring on improving communication to ensure information is shared across the entire formation.

Tips for Success

The following tips for success will help the PA assigned in the OPM-SANG position:

- The PA must maintain a positive relationship with MNG counterparts.
- The MNG is NOT the US Army; the PA's job is to advise and assist, not to be the middle person.
- The PA must leave a road map so their replacement can continue to follow up on the work they have started; US personnel should speak with "one voice."
- The PA must never commit to something they cannot get done.
- The PA must discuss issues with the MNG leadership and agree on goals that are achievable; they should avoid promising resources.
- The PA must learn as much as they can about the FMS process before arriving.

Conclusion

The OPM-SANG was started to help modernize the MNG through providing direct advice and FMS case management. Since the early years, it has transitioned away from advising fixed facilities and toward advising military field medicine. The OPM-SANG PA has a very challenging position that will rely on their military and field medical experience to assist with programs of instruction, faculty development, instructor training, medical unit sustainment training, and management of various departments within the AHSMS system and MNG brigades. Although challenging, this is also a broadening assignment, providing the PA opportunities to engage with host nation leaders and assist them in making decisions that will affect their entire military.

References

1. Nahil al Harbi B. *Saudi Arabia National Guard (SANG)*. Study project. US Army War College; 1991. Accessed September 9, 2020. <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a236930.pdf>
2. Martin C. *Fiscal Year 2019 Historical Report*. US Army Security Assistance Command; 2019: 1.