

## Chapter 55

# ROLE OF THE BASIC OFFICER LEADERS COURSE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT INSTRUCTOR/WRITER

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### Introduction

The physician assistant (PA) instructor/writer (I/W) at the Medical Center of Excellence (MEDCoE) Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC) is responsible for planning, resourcing, developing, documenting, and implementing common core curriculum based on established standards of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). The BOLC instruction teaches students the basic knowledge required for a new Army medical officer, providing initial military training for over 1,500 Army medical officers annually. The BOLC PA I/W plays a key role in educating and mentoring new medical officers of various company and field grades so they become familiarized with discipline, teamwork, basic soldier skills, tactical and operational medical doctrine, and the principles necessary for becoming a resilient, agile leader.<sup>1</sup>

### Course Description

The MEDCoE BOLC is a two-phase program. Phase 1 consists 7 weeks of common core training, and phase 2 area of concentration (AOC) track phase. The length of the track phase is specific to each AOC, and ranging from 1 to 5 weeks. BOLC is designed to provide orientation, training, and initial leader development for newly commissioned officers (Figure 55-1). Students are taught the technical and tactical application of leadership through a performance-based



**Figure 55-1.** Basic Officer Leaders Course students during a Role 1 mass casualty exercise, preparing patients for casevac (casualty evacuation), at Joint Base San Antonio–Camp Bullis, Texas, February 27, 2018.

curriculum in the areas of health service support, Army warrior tasks, collective training, force structures, and the military decision-making process. Phase 1 (common core) training culminates with a MEDCoE-specific field training exercise. Instructor-to-student ratios ideally range from 4:30 to 4:40. AMEDD BOLC students are evaluated on their written and oral communication skills throughout BOLC.

All Army medical officers are required to complete BOLC at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA), Texas. Active duty AMEDD officers and Reserve 70-series Medical Service Corps officers attend the 7-week core curriculum on temporary duty status during one of five classes per year. The summer BOLC class is a condensed 6-week class designed for Army Health Professions Scholarship Program officers, who are typically medical students and veterinarians between their 3rd and 4th year of schooling. Reserve component officers, with the exception of 70-series AOCs, attend a 3-week BOLC course, which has six sessions per year and runs concurrently with the active duty BOLC classes.<sup>2</sup>

## **Instructor/Writer Roles and Responsibilities**

BOLC PA I/Ws are responsible for the development, documentation, and implementation of initial entry military training for all AMEDD officers annually. The I/W operates under the Army Learning Concept for Training and Education 2020-2040, a “leadership-directed concept” that outlines the requirements needed to build the future of Army learning across the spectrum of training, published by TRADOC.<sup>2</sup> I/Ws mentor the AMEDD officers assigned to their platoon on common core didactic training. In addition to didactic training, the I/W, as the senior representative for all Specialist Corps officers and specifically PAs in the MEDCoE BOLC, is expected to provide specific guidance and career advice for PAs in the course. The BOLC PA I/W is also responsible for providing mentorship opportunities for PA branch and program managers, as well as coordinating social events for the PAs (Figure 55-2). I/Ws are responsible for creating a positive learning environment in which students work as a team to improve themselves and each other. In addition, the I/W may complete strategic projects for the PA branch, TRADOC, MEDCoE, or the Office of the Surgeon General.

### **Area of Concentration Track Phase**

The PA I/W also develops curriculum and instructs the AOC track phase for PAs (AOC 65D) (Figure 55-3). The I/W arranges the program of instruction by teaching classes and arranging for guest speakers to present information on Army PA roles and responsibilities, operational functions, and medical readiness systems and processes. The final week of training includes a session with the Tactical Combat Medical Care course, which provides training in practical medicine on the battlefield and in urban warfare.

### **Desired Skills and Attributes**

- Candidates must be a BOLC graduate.
- Rank of captain or major and Captains Career Course graduate are preferred.
- Must have operational, tactical, and strategic planning experience as a PA with knowledge and experience working with hospital leadership. Leadership positions as a battalion or brigade PA or in company or



**Figure 55-2.** Basic Officer Leaders Course student leaders discussing the plan of action for the activities scheduled for the day. The student command sergeant major, Army physician assistant First Lieutenant Antonio Narvaes (right), was responsible for the daily dissemination of information while mentoring and developing his subordinate leaders during the field training exercise at Joint Base San Antonio–Camp Bullis, Texas, February 14, 2018.

clinic command are preferred.

- Must have strong knowledge and application of leader attributes and competencies per Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership*.<sup>3</sup>
- Must be an excellent role model with a strong desire to mentor others.
- Must have expert knowledge of AMEDD business practices and processes.
- Must be able to serve as a BOLC PA I/W for at least 2 years (3 years preferred).
- Must possess strong spoken and written communication skills, have a people-oriented personality, and exhibit superior field technical and tactical knowledge.



**Figure 55-3.** Major Lakeshia T. Logan (left) and Major Bonnie Wickham (right) at Joint Base San Antonio–Camp Bullis, Texas, August 14, 2018. Major Wickham is an aeromedical physician assistant who travels with the medevac team to teach the students how to load and unload patients.

## **Training**

Army Medical Department (AMEDD) officers who receive direct commission into the Army are required to attend the Direct Commission Course (DCC) at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, prior to attending BOLC at JBSA. The DCC portion of training can be waived if the officer has completed any of the following courses: Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Officer Candidate School, Army Sergeants Major Academy, National Guard Bureau Officer Candidate School, or Warrant Officer Candidate School.<sup>4</sup> The 4-week DCC trains officers in fundamental skills, foundations of leadership, physical readiness, and tactical and technical proficiency. BOLC PA I/Ws must complete faculty development training (parts 1 and 2) after arriving, which results in a 5K additional skill identifier.

## **Lessons Learned**

The following are lessons learned in being a MEDCoE BOLC PA I/W:

- The initial 6 months in the position should be a time set aside to gain an understanding of the overall mission of BOLC and how to balance practicing medicine and being an active I/W.
- The I/W position is a unique opportunity to influence new AMEDD officers, whether they are direct accessions or prior service.
- The I/W must be prepared to learn Army doctrine outside of the practice of medicine, and possibly outside their comfort zone.
- The I/W should establish guidelines to create healthy boundaries when performing multiple responsibilities.

## **Tips for Success**

Along with lessons learned, the following tips for success will enable future I/Ws to succeed beyond expectations:

- The I/W should not hesitate to do more than other instructors. PAs can easily hold two positions as the 65D track phase coordinator and field training exercise PA.

- If a platoon advisor position is offered, it should be accepted; it will make the I/W a standout among their peers and prepare them for future Army professional military education schools.

## **Conclusion**

The PA I/W works in a nonclinical capacity as the PA representative in the MEDCoE BOLC. This position allows the PA an opportunity to make a lasting impression on initial entry medical officers. The PA I/W can offer relevant guidance on the roles and responsibilities of all AMEDD officers and how they interact with other AOCs in the Army. The PA I/W provides both clinical and operational viewpoints during the course and acts as the subject matter expert on clinical operations for all other instructors.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## **References**

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2. US Department of the Army. *The US Army Learning Concept for Training and Education 2020-2040*. HQDA; April 2017. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2.
3. Department of the Army. *Army Leadership*. HQDA; July 31, 2019. Army Doctrine Publication 6-22.
4. Department of the Army. *Army Training and Leader Development*. HQDA; December 10, 2017. Army Regulation 350-1.

