

Chapter 56

ROLE OF THE CAPTAINS CAREER COURSE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SMALL GROUP LEADER

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Introduction

The physician assistant (PA) filling the role as the small group leader (SGL) at the Medical Center of Excellence (MEDCoE) Captains Career Course (CCC) is responsible for planning, developing, and presenting graduate-level professional military education (PME) to active duty, reserve, and international students. This education builds on a PA's leadership attributes. The curriculum provides CCC students with the skills and knowledge to lead company-size units and serve on battalion and brigade staffs operating in joint environments throughout the full range of military operations. Students also gain advanced training in combat health service support operations, as well as Army Medical Department (AMEDD) specific skills and knowledge required to succeed at clinic and hospital assignments. The MEDCoE CCC PA SGL plays a key role in educating and mentoring AMEDD company- and field-grade officers to succeed in battalion to brigade level assignments.¹

Captains Career Course Background

The mission of the MEDCoE CCC is to train AMEDD officers to lead company or equivalent-sized organizations and to serve successfully in US Army staff positions. Graduates will possess the tactical and technical knowledge necessary to execute Army health systems in support of unified land operations.

Active component officers attend the 9-week course on a temporary duty status during one of four sessions per year. Reserve component

officers attend the 2-week session that meets annually during the summer. Active component officers are encouraged to attend as soon as practical, once promotable to captain (O-3), or between their 4th and 7th year of federal commissioned service.¹ Officers incur a 1-year service obligation for course attendance.¹ All officers should plan their long-term individual, organizational, and institutional education goals by utilizing the Army Career Tracker at <https://actnow.army.mil>.

The MEDCoE, at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA), Texas, hosts the course. Both AMEDD officers and international military students attend the 9-week resident course. The SGL-to-student ratio ideally ranges from 1:12 to 1:16.⁴ SGLs are responsible for facilitating learning through counseling, coaching, and team building (Figure 56-1). Students hone their critical thinking skills and challenge each other to succeed, through shared knowledge and lessons learned. Measures of effectiveness include graded written and oral communication skills evaluations, demonstrated knowledge of the military planning process, demonstrated knowledge of medical business processes,⁵ and improved leadership skills as demonstrated by peer evaluations.⁵



Figure 56-1. The small group leader (right) provides instruction to students during the leader reaction course in January 2020 at Joint Base San Antonio-Camp Bullis, TX.

Small Group Leader Roles and Responsibilities

The SGL operates under the Army Learning Concept, published by the Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC).³ Each SGL is responsible for creating a positive learning environment in which students work as a team to improve themselves and each other (Figures 56-2 and 56-3). The SGLs must possess strong spoken and written communication skills, a people-oriented personality, knowledge of AMEDD business processes, and superior field technical and tactical knowledge.

All SGLs mentor AMEDD CCC officers assigned to their class regarding course performance, professional development, and their individual careers. The PASGL, as the senior representative for PAs in the MEDCoE CCC, provides specific guidance and career advice for all PAs in the course. The PA SGL is also responsible for providing mentorship opportunities for PA branch and program managers, as well as coordinating social events for the PAs.



Figure 56-2. The Captains Career Course students discuss their medical concept of support plan with small group leaders (middle) during the military decision making process exercise in January 2020 at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, TX.

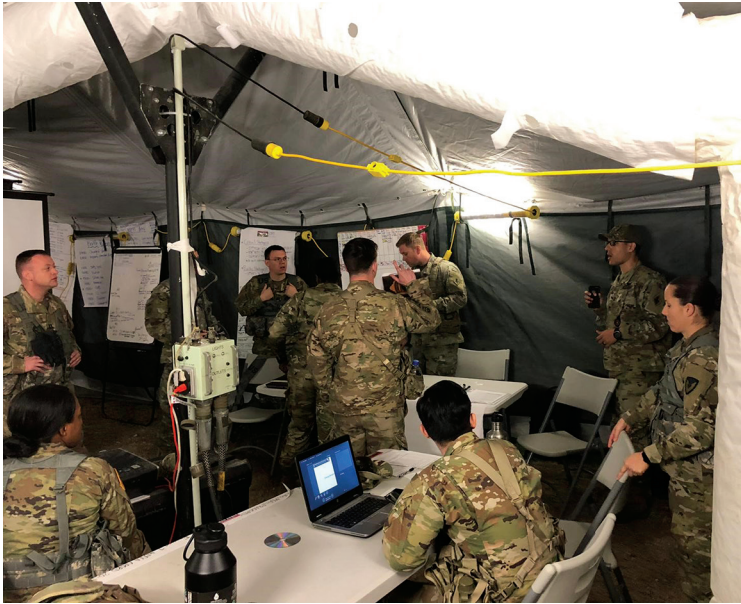


Figure 56-3. The small group leader (right) observes students during their defense support to civil authorities staff exercise in January 2020 at Joint Base San Antonio-Camp Bullis, TX.

Teaching, guiding, and mentoring are not the only activities PAs conduct while assigned to the MEDCoE. There are also assigned additional duties and opportunities to complete strategic projects for the PA branch, TRADOC, AMEDD, or Office of the Surgeon General.

Area of Concentration Day

The PA SGL coordinates “AOC (area of concentration) Day,” also referred to as “PA Day,” for the PAs in the course. AOC Day occurs during the beginning of the course. The PA SGL arranges for guest speakers to present information to the students on issues pertinent to promotion, career progression, or professional education. Topics include long-term health education and training opportunities, job progression, future promotions, and job opportunities (delivered by a representative from Human Resources Command).

Desired Skills and Attributes

PA SGLs have a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Success is maximized when selectees have combinations of the following traits, experience, and training:

- Candidates must be CCC graduates in the rank of lieutenant colonel or major. Intermediate Level Education graduates are preferred.
- Hospital leadership; operational, tactical, and strategic planning experience as a PA; and senior leadership positions (division or corps PA, company command, clinic command) are preferred.
- Candidates must have strong knowledge and application of leader attributes and competencies.
- Candidates must be excellent role models and have a strong desire to mentor others.
- Knowledge of MEDCoE business practices and processes is preferred.
- Strong written and spoken communication skills and excellent teaching skills are required.
- Experience working on strategic-level projects is preferred.
- PAs chosen as SGLs in CCC should be able to serve for no less than 2 years (3 years is preferred).

Small Group Leader Training

SGLs must complete the 2-week faculty development training (parts 1 and 2) after arriving, which results in a “5K” additional skill identifier. SGLs will have an opportunity to complete this training prior to the start of their primary instructor duties at MEDCoE. Further educational opportunities specific to SGLs are available and include the Curriculum Development Course.

Lessons Learned

Flexibility and adaptability are keys to success for MEDCoE PA SGLs. As the Army continues to evolve in the demanding realm of multi-domain operations, so too will the MEDCoE and Army medicine.

It is highly recommended that SGL PAs maintain lines of communication with previously established Forces Command entities

in order to stay relevant with today's complex operational environment. PAs can leverage contacts within the US Army Combined Arms Center, combat training centers, and Center for Army Lessons Learned for the most up-to-date operational trends and relevant data.

Additionally, SGL PAs should stay abreast of the evolving doctrinal changes to better understand and apply the lessons learned from past successes and failures. The most updated doctrinal references are available at the Army Publishing Directorate, <https://www.armypubs.army.mil>. Knowledge of current doctrine coupled with education on lessons learned from the National Training Center, Joint Readiness Training Center, and Center for Army Lessons Learned will allow SGLs to influence the leaders of tomorrow.

While stationed at Joint Base San Antonio, PAs may complete professional credentialing at Brooke Army Medical Center. This ensures seamless transfer of provider credentials and allows for completion of the required annual 40 clinic hours. Patient treatment is not part of the instructor primary duties; however, it is essential to stay medically relevant.

Conclusion

The CCC PA SGL works in a nonclinical capacity as the PA representative in the MEDCoE CCC. The PA SGL provides a clinical perspective during the course and acts as a resource for clinical operations to all other instructors. This position is vital in developing and influencing future leaders who can relate and apply doctrinal concepts to medical operations.

As part of the institutional learning domain, the CCC establishes a foundation for leaders to think both critically and creatively to address the myriad challenges of tomorrow's Army. Both course graduates and SGLs gain a greater appreciation of how the Army operates at the operational and tactical levels, and how the MEDCoE supports decisive operations through sustainment and protection.

PAs who are looking for a broadening assignment that challenge their communication skills, understanding of Army doctrine, and small group leadership should consider competing for this rewarding position.

References

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