

Chapter 64

ROLE OF THE MEDICAL COMMAND ALLIED HEALTH OFFICER

*Jeffrey E. Oliver, APA-C, MPAS, MSS, and Sharon D.
Denson, PA-C, DMSc, MPAS*

Introduction

The physician assistant (PA) assigned as the allied health officer (AHO) to the US Army Medical Command (MEDCOM) is the PA staff officer for health care delivery—clinical policy and services (HCD-CPS). The MEDCOM AHO is responsible for assisting with tasking, policy, and regulation development and review to ensure the maintenance of a healthy, mentally and physically fit, and medically protected force. The AHO provides policy guidance on PA education, credentialing, and scope of practice issues. They also act as the modified table of organization and equipment assigned personnel (MAP) medical augmentation manager for approximately 190 PAs to help the MEDCOM G33 (Current Operations Division), Forces Command (FORSCOM), and Human Resources Command (HRC) fill operating and generating force operational requirements. The AHO also acts as a subject matter expert and liaison with sister services, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the US Public Health Service on PA-related issues, including responding to inquiries from the White House, Congress, Office of the Defense Secretary (Health Affairs), the Army's Office of the Surgeon General, major subordinate commands, and medical treatment facilities.

Supervision

There are multi-level direct and indirect supervision methods for this position. Direct supervision is through the chief of HCD-CPS and the

chief consultant to the surgeon general. Indirect supervisory guidance is through the PA consultant to the surgeon general, the Specialist (SP) Corps chief, and the HRC branch chief for PA policy development and talent management.

Unit Structure

This is a strategic developmental position within the MEDCOM general staff for the surgeon general.¹ The position is within the G-3/5/7 staff section for planning, training, and mobilization at Joint Base San Antonio–Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

Roles and Duties

The AHO assigned to this position assists in establishing relationships with all organizations throughout the Army Medical Department (AMEDD) and MEDCOM.² The AHO maintains active lines of communication with the Office of the Surgeon General, Medical Center of Excellence, FORSCOM, Special Operations Command, and all units currently deployed to theaters of operation. The AHO also communicates with other Department of Defense (DOD) branches, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure proper coordination for joint initiatives and education.

As the MAP medical augmentation manager for the 65D (PA) area of concentration (AOC), the AHO provides counsel and support to all levels of staffing requirements by working with the G33 desk officer for Central Command and various other tasking authorities within MEDCOM.² The AHO works with HRC to keep all 65D MAP requirements filled to 100%. The AHO also provides medical augmentees for deployments and last-minute replacements for SP Corps, Nurse Corps, and Medical Corps shortages in contingency areas of responsibility.

The MEDCOM AHO works to identify and exploit opportunities for growth for PAs and other AHOs in AOC 65 within the Army and the AMEDD by working in concert with the dietician, physical therapy, and occupational therapy consultants to the surgeon general.³ The MEDCOM AHO should encourage the development of training opportunities for PAs and other AHOs for career enhancement and to support the surgeon general's priority initiatives and the AMEDD's transformation to a system of health.⁴

The MEDCOM AHO assists other members of the HCD-CPS staff with subject matter expertise to properly process relevant tasks and projects. For example, the AHO evaluates and provides revisions to numerous Army regulations, MEDCOM policies, executive orders, and other correspondence with clinical significance to the AMEDD. If the AHO is appointed as the deputy PA consultant to the surgeon general, he or she will have the additional duties of serving as the PA consultant in the consultant's absence. The AHO must maintain proficiency within their specialty. The consultant's duties may include, but are not limited to³:

- working closely with HRC and the Recruiting Command to manage the active duty and reserve component PA populations to ensure that requirements are filled for both the operational and generating forces;
- providing oversight for the AMEDD distribution plan and MAP deployments for the PA population;
- helping optimize the distribution of the other SP Corps AOCs to ensure mission success;
- serving as a member of the SP Corps Strategy Advisory Board and as the senior 65D advisor to the SP Corps chief on multiple lines of effort of the SP Corps strategy map that are synchronized with the MEDCOM strategy map; and
- serving as the PA consultant's representative on special review panels conducted by MEDCOM's Clinical Performance Assurance Directorate (formerly the Quality Management Division) for malpractice case reviews, providing subject matter expertise in cases involving PAs.

Desired Skills and Attributes

- Extensive experience as a PA and as an AMEDD and SP Corps officer.
- Rank of colonel, lieutenant colonel, or lieutenant colonel (promotable).
- Must be a graduate of Intermediate Level Education, and preferably Senior Service College.
- Must be an excellent role model with the desire to mentor others.
- Must have an interest in people and be able to encourage and assist others.

- Good speaking and communication skills.
- Strong multitasking capability.
- Strong work ethic.
- Solid writing techniques.
- Highly adaptable, flexible professional who embraces teamwork but also enjoys working independently.

Training

Training required for this position includes access to and familiarity with the Medical Operating Data System, which includes AMEDD human resources for HCD-CPS projections and MAP deployment decision tools; the AMEDD Resource Tracking System for MAP deployment taskings and management; and the Force Management System website for Army unit requirements and authorizations for personnel and equipment documentation. The AHO must also have access to the Soldier Management System, a web-based collection of data, applications, and tools to assist career managers and other human resource personnel in supporting active Army, Army Reserve, and National Guard soldiers, veterans, retirees, family members, and other stakeholders.

Key Factors

This is a key and developmental position, typically a 2- to 3-year tour, for a 65D in the grade of O-6 (colonel) with no additional skill identifier requirement. MEDCOM is currently located at Joint Base San Antonio. This position is primarily nonclinical; however, the AHO must maintain their credentials.

Lessons Learned and Tips for Success

The following are lessons learned and tips for success as a MEDCOM AHO:

- The strength of relationships make the difference between mission success and failure.
- The AHO should understand the mission, stakeholders, and unique operating environment.

- The AHO should share information with mission partners, safeguard sensitive information, and maintain frequent communication.
- The AHO should build and sustain credibility, trust, and positive relationships.
- Coordination and cooperation toward common objectives are essential to success, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organization, such as the Defense Health Agency or DOD.
- Best practices include establishing feedback mechanisms to identify lessons learned and successful techniques for use in future operations.
- The AHO should identify resources to combat staffing shortages.

Conclusion

The MEDCOM AHO role requires someone with exceptional communication and interpersonal skills, who can embrace teamwork but also enjoys working independently. The AHO is responsible for assisting with tasking, policy, and regulation development and review to ensure the maintenance of a healthy, mentally and physically fit, and medically protected force. The AHO must possess keen awareness of the strategic plan to transfer functions from MEDCOM to the Defense Health Agency, and be able to accomplish their duties while supporting the transition of both organizations. The AHO will regularly provide guidance to the field on management of the force, selection of personnel for deployment in support of combat operations, and oversight of military assigned personnel.

References

1. Department of the Army. *Army Medical Department Officer Development and Career Management*. HQDA; March 30, 2020. DA Pamphlet 600-4. Accessed September 9, 2020. https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN21605_P600_4_FINAL.pdf

2. US Department of the Army. *Composition, Mission, and Functions of the Army Medical Department*. HQDA: May 24, 2019. Army Regulation 40-1. Accessed September 9, 2020. http://www.apd.army.mil/pdffiles/r40_1.pdf
3. US Department of the Army. *Medical, Dental, and Veterinary Care*. HQDA: April 23, 2013. Army Regulation 40-3. Accessed September 9, 2020. http://www.apd.army.mil/pdffiles/r40_3.pdf
4. US Department of the Army. *Professional Education and Training Programs of the Army Medical Department*. HQDA; October 15, 2007. Army Regulation 351-3. Accessed September 9, 2020. http://www.apd.army.mil/pdffiles/r351_3.pdf