



Quad Council

of Public Health Nursing Organizations

April 15, 2008



American Nurses Association
Congress on Nursing Practice & Economics



American Public Health Association
Public Health Nursing Section



Association of Community Health
Nursing Educators



Association of State and Territorial
Directors of Nursing

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt,

This communication is being sent to you by the undersigned, leaders of the professional nursing and public health community in connection with our long standing assessment of the need for the Chief Nurse Officer (CNO) of the US Public Health Service and hence the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to be given equivalent rank with counterpart officers in the other uniformed services. Promoting the current serving CNO would validate the leadership and responsibility of that position within DHHS and properly provide rank parity with peers in the other three uniformed services – Major General (MG) Melissa Rank, USAF; Major General Gale Pollock, USA; and Rear Admiral Chris Bruzek-Kohler, USN. This is clearly the intent of Title 42 USC §206.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 2003, H.R. 4546, *SEC. 505*, titled *Increased Grade for Heads of Nurse Corps*, authorized increased ranks for the chiefs of the Nurse Corps of the Air Force, Army and Navy to the equivalent rank of a two star Rear Admiral or Rear Admiral (Upper Half) (0-8) from the current rank of a one star flag officer or Rear Admiral (Lower Half) (0-7).

The Air Force promoted their CNO to that rank immediately. MG Barbara Brannon, Director, Air Force Nurse Corps, was promoted to that two star rank on 18 July 2003. MG Melissa Rank followed as the next Director, Air Force Nurse Corps, and currently holds this rank. The Army intended to promote their CNO to 0-8 but he retired at the end of his term.

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That service then promoted his successor, MG Gale S. Pollock, Chief, Army Nurse Corps, on 1 October 2004. MG Pollock was promoted to her current rank (O-8) directly from Colonel (O-6). In July 2007 the Navy promoted the Director of the Navy Nurse Corps, RADM (Upper Half) Christine Bruzek-Kohler to the rank of O-8. This is the first time the Navy promoted the Director of the Navy Nurse Corps to RADM (Upper Half). All three Armed Service Nurse Corps Chiefs now hold the rank of Major General or Rear Admiral (Upper Half).

The chief nurse officers of the uniformed services (including the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps), have taken on much broader responsibilities in the past decade as members of their corps have assumed a variety of non traditional jobs in research, teaching, consultation and multidisciplinary leadership posts. In addition, their corps have increased not only in numerical size but also in the proportion that their discipline represents as part of the total health and medical strength of their services. As an example, the Commissioned Officer nurses of the US Public Health Service have been the **largest single discipline** in the entire Corps since 2004. That number is also destined to rise given the forward recruitment target that is part of the DHHS "Transformation Plan." The Public Health Service Nurse Corps also has taken on increasing leadership roles and responsibilities in public health preparedness and response. There is currently no nurse officer in the Commissioned Corps with the O-8 rank of Rear Admiral (Upper Half).¹

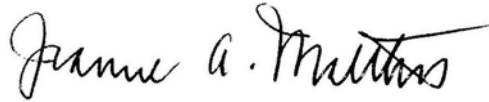
The Chief Nurse Officer (CNO) of the PHS Commissioned Corps represents over 1398 nurse officers as well as the over 3,000 nurses who work in DHHS and the agencies that DHHS supports with nursing service. In addition the CNO represents the DHHS on the Federal Nursing Services Council (FNSC). The FNSC is comprised of the Federal Nursing Chiefs of the Air Force, Army, Navy, Public Health Service, Veteran's Affairs and the American Red Cross. Formed in 1943, the mission of the Council is to *"bring together its collective leadership and experience to advance and strengthen professional nursing practice among federal agencies and the American Red Cross."* The FNSC provides leadership for four strategic areas of collaboration: clinical skills sustainment training; nursing processes; advanced practice licensure issues in the federal services and maintenance of senior clinical expertise. The FNSC also serves as an Advisory Board to the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Graduate School of Nursing. The current PHS Chief Nurse Officer chairs this group.

Finally, as you may be aware, there is a growing movement to create an "Office of the National Nurse." Many of us in the nursing community firmly believe that the PHS Chief Nurse Officer is already the "National Nurse." We feel it would be counterproductive to establish a separate office or re-title the current position which would ultimately compete with the PHS Chief Nurse Officer for authority, recognition, and already scarce resources. The outcome will be to dilute the effectiveness of all nursing programs.

To promote the Chief Nurse Officer, USPHS would help to continue the inspired leadership of the Department and its' Public Health Service in both nursing related issues and in the broad leadership needed to extend enhanced health status to our citizens. The undersigned have appreciated your broad leadership for the health promotion of our citizens and will continue to work with you in continuing that merited health initiative.

¹ Department of Health and Human Services. United States Public Health Service. (2008, January 9) Retrieved January 9, 2008, from http://dcp.psc.gov/rpt_tgrade_by_category.asp

Thank you for considering our request.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeanne A. Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Jeanne A. Matthews PhD, RN
Chair
Quad Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations

and

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)
American Nurses Association (ANA)
American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE)
American Public Health Association (APHA)
Association of Community Health Nursing Educators (ACHNE)
Association of PeriOperative Registered Nurses (AORN)
Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing (ASTDN)
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric & Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN)
Commissioned Officers Association (COA)
Mary Pat Couig, MPH, RN, FAAN, USPHS CNO 12/2000-10/2005
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP)
National Student Nurses' Association, Inc.

Julia R. Plotnick, MPH, RN, FAAN, USPHS CNO 2/1992-2/1996
Public Health Nursing Section, American Public Health Association
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