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Defense Health Agency to manage military hospitals for all branches

By Ryan Labadens
NCBC Public Affairs

Military healthcare management is undergoing one of its largest reorganizations in nearly 60 years. Starting in October 2018, the Defense Health Agency (DHA) began taking over the healthcare delivery management for each branch of the military, consolidating health care for all four services under one entity.

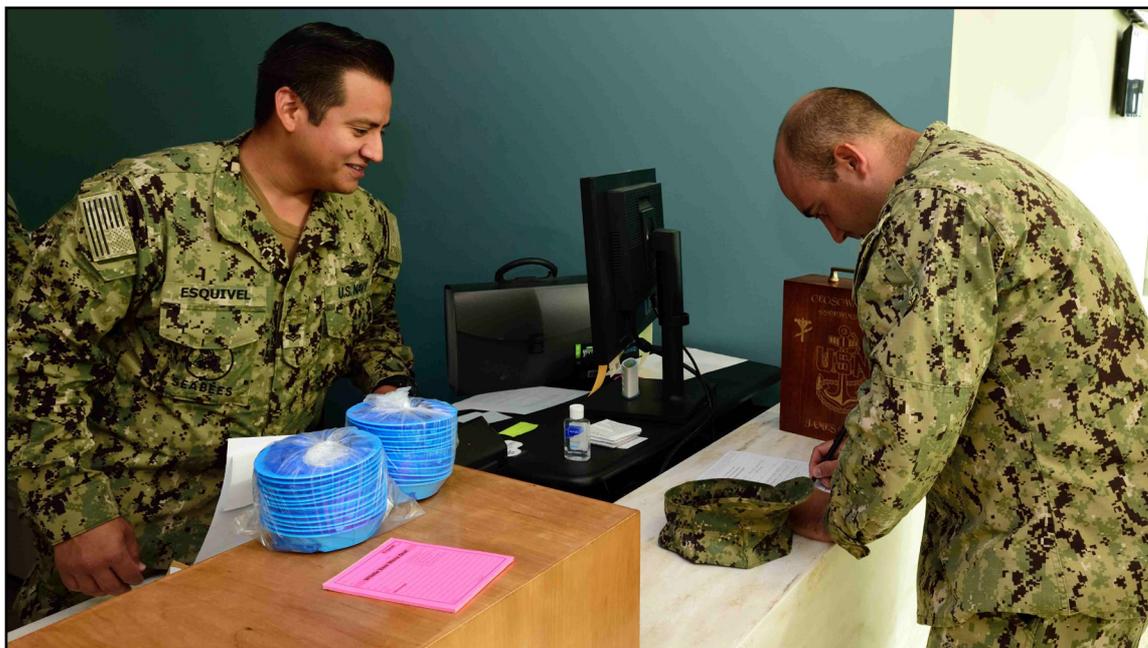
The National Defense Authorization Acts of 2017 and 2019 started the process of moving management of most defense-wide administrative and service functions for military hospitals and clinics under the direction of DHA. This includes administration, credentialing, referral management, patient appointments, hospital budget management, information technology (IT), and hospital/clinic policy and procedures, to name a few.

"For the most part, every military treatment facility – every hospital and clinic – used to be under the management and control of the individual services – whether it was Navy, Army or Air Force. So Congress mandated that all the administrative control would now fall under the Defense Health Agency so they could create standard processes for all the services to follow and get us all on the same page," said Cmdr. Venancio Maysonet, the officer in charge of the Naval Branch Health Clinic (NBHC) Gulfport.

The intent of this consolidation and standardization of processes is to cut costs and create greater synergy between the services while improving the efficiency of healthcare delivery management and patient care.

One way it will do this is by creating healthcare markets based on geographic regions. Naval Branch Health Clinic Gulfport, along with military personnel and facilities across the Mississippi Gulf Coast, would fall under the Coastal Mississippi Market, which is directed by the Keesler Medical Center at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss.

"The overall benefit is more localized care," said Maysonet. "Right now a lot of my support comes from [Naval Hospital] Pensacola [Fla.], which is a couple of hours away – a couple of states away. So instead of me sending referrals to Pensacola, I can send them to Keesler. This



Construction Electrician Chief James Bryant, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 133, fills out some medical forms for Hospitalmate 2nd Class Luis Esquivel at the Naval Branch Health Clinic (NBHC) Gulfport onboard Naval Construction Battalion Center (NCBC) Gulfport, Miss., Aug. 27, 2019. NBHC Gulfport, along with military hospitals and clinics from all military branches, are slated to fall under the management of the Defense Health Agency by Sept. 30, 2021. (U.S. Navy photo by Ryan Labadens)

consolidation of processes will allow us to work more effectively with services Keesler provides, such as labs, pharmacy, radiology and so forth. So for example, instead of sending lab work to Pensacola, I can just send it down the road to Keesler and have the lab results back much more quickly – instead of getting results back in 36 hours, it might be 24 hours or even the same day."

This consolidation also will allow NBHC Gulfport to focus not only on patient care, but also more on the medical readiness mission of the Navy, which involves ensuring the active-duty Sailors are medically prepared and cleared for deployment through the Navy Medicine Readiness Training Unit, said Maysonet.

"That's another part of this realignment for us, making sure we can focus on taking care of the active-duty forces to get them ready for deployment," said Maysonet.

The transition of healthcare delivery manage-

ment has been taking place in phases, but the ultimate goal is to have all military hospitals and clinics under DHA by Sept. 30, 2021. The plan was accelerated for all military hospitals and clinics to fall under DHA management by Oct. 01, 2019..

Maysonet said that while they still have a ways to go before health services are consolidated under DHA, he noted that he and his staff have a great working relationship with the military health professionals at Keesler AFB and that the goal is to make the process for transitioning to DHA management seamless for the patient.

"I'm very excited because we have an incredible relationship with Keesler. They've been supporting us since Day One, when we first found out we were going to be part of the same market. They have been fantastic, so I think we are going to be doing some great things in the future," said Maysonet.

Commanding Officer
Capt. William Whitmire

Public Affairs Officer
Brian Lamar

Assistant PAO
Ryan Labadens

Courier Staff
MCC Rosalie Chang
BU2 Mercedes Brotski
MC3 Kohen Gillis

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NCBC Gulfport continues making strides in safety with OSHA Challenge

By Ryan Labadens
NCBC Public Affairs

For more than 15 months, Naval Construction Battalion Center (NCBC) Gulfport has been on its journey to move from safety standard to safety excellence.

The installation started participating in Stage 1 of the OSHA Challenge, a U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration program geared toward developing and/or improving the existing occupational safety and health management programs of participating organizations.

"[The OSHA Challenge] brings about more involvement from the workers, the supervisors and all the shops to create a safer workplace for the individuals, and it gives the junior folks – whether they be military or civilian – a voice in how to safely perform tasks in their work space," said Tim Proctor, NCBC Gulfport safety director.

Since early 2018, NCBC Gulfport has been going through Stage 1, which according to Proctor involves assessing the performance of existing safety and health programs and policies, providing training to management and workers, and developing strategies, programs and policies to improve upon the safety practices already in place at the installation.

"One of the goals is to develop teams within the various department in NCBC that'll act as representatives for doing inspections and for doing process improvements across the installation," said Proctor. "This will allow us to categorize and determine which hazards are the most impacting to folks and which ones are the least impacting so that we can prioritize how to handle them for corrective actions."

One of the actions the Safety Department has given these representatives is to fill out Job Hazard Analysis forms that are used to identify the potential hazards in their particular working environments and note the processes and personal protective equipment that can be used to reduce and/or eliminate those hazards. This can involve, for example, anything from buying better hearing protection to purchasing new equipment that generates even less noise.

According to Proctor, Stage 1 is in the final process of wrapping up, and the installation is transitioning to Stage 2 of the OSHA Challenge, which involves implementing and improving upon the tools developed in Stage 1 for their safety program.

"We'll be able to go out and start training employees on how these policies and strategies work and what personal



The Naval Construction Battalion Center Installation Safety Team

protective equipment they would have for any new or existing processes to reduce the risk of injury on the job," said Proctor.

Stage 3 involves monitoring the safety processes implemented in Stage 2 and making any improvements necessary based on assessing the effectiveness of those processes.

"The biggest factor that comes into play with Stage 3 is fine-tuning all of our processes, so that at the end of Stage 3 OSHA will actually come onboard and inspect all of our processes, all of our documentation, all of hazard analysis and see how our employees and supervisors are performing, and then give us a rating," said Proctor.

The goal is to have Stage 3 completed sometime during 2021 so that the OSHA teams of safety and health professionals can come to NCBC to perform onsite evaluations and then rate the installation according to the Voluntary Protection Program (VPP), which looks at hazard prevention and control, worksite analysis, training, management commitment and worker involvement, said Proctor. If the installation receives a VPP Merit rating from OSHA, then it won't need to undergo another inspection for three years; a rating of VPP Star means it won't need to go through another inspection for five years.

Proctor stressed that the overall goal is to take the installation beyond the safety standards that it already meets, to safety excellence – to go above and beyond the requirements set by Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instructions and OSHA standards.

"What we want to demonstrate to OSHA is that our employees and our supervisors are both involved at a full, 'all-in' level and that we're ready to meet all of our obligations when it comes to safety excellence," said Proctor.

Information for this article also was compiled from the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration website: <https://www.osha.gov/dcsp/vpp/challenge.html>

Iwo Jima survivor tours Naval Construction Battalion Center

One of the few remaining U.S. Navy Seabees who served during World War II visited Naval Construction Battalion Center (NCBC) Gulfport Sept. 26, 2019. Paul Haplea, a 96-year-old veteran who served with the 62nd Naval Construction Battalion at Iwo Jima, attended the Bells Across America remembrance ceremony that day with his family members and then toured the Naval Construction Training Center (NCTC) to see how the schoolhouse staff trains the Seabees of today's Navy. Haplea served with the Seabees as a Seaman 1st Class driving heavy trucks from 1942 to 1948. (U.S. Navy photo by Ryan Labadens)

