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## Evans trains future physician assistants

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO



Physicians at Evans Army Community Hospital have a primary mission of caring for today's Soldiers, retirees and family members who live in the Colorado Springs area. Their secondary mission, however, helps ensure that tomorrow's warriors, veterans and their families will be well cared for as well.

Evans is one of 22 Department of Defense healthcare centers that is a Phase 2 Interservice Physician Assistant Program site. Each year 240 students from the Army, Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard start Phase 1 of IPAP at Joint Base San Antonio. There they spend 16 months in basic medical science courses such as anatomy, pharmacology, radiology and hematology.

"We get 2 to 5 students from each of the three Phase 1 classes per year," said Maj. Kerri Van Arnhem, Evans' IPAP Phase 2 coordinator. "Physician assistants are a huge part of the medical system and those that we have trained work in many different areas of medicine."

The PA profession dates back to the Civil War when the Union Army created a surgeon assistant corps to assist physicians on and off the battlefield. The modern PA profession officially began Oct. 6, 1967, when the first PA class of four students graduated from Duke University, Durham, N.C.

"Phase one at Fort Sam Houston is all book learning," said 1st Lt. Trent Lyman, a Utah National Guardsman and a physician assistant student at Evans. "In 16 months you go through what they call 4 semesters and you take anywhere from 22 to 27 credit hours in a 4 month span, with tests at least twice a week. It was like drinking from a fire hose."

Lyman arrived at Fort Carson last January and graduates from the 13-month Phase 2 in February.

"Being here at Evans has been great because it is a smaller hospital but has

most of the major services, which allows us to get a wide experience and see a wide selection of patients," Lyman said.

"The PA students do 11 mandatory rotations in different clinics in Evans, so they are in everything from the ENT (ears, nose and throat), to allergy to orthopedics to OB/GYN, to surgery, ER and dermatology," said Van Arnem. "But, as a student all patients they see are under the supervision of physicians and physician assistants."

"You get to see patients and take their history and learn the little nuances of their history that clue you into what is going on and that took a little bit of time," said Lyman. "After talking with the patient you present your patient to your preceptor or doctor and they say 'what about this, what about that' things I didn't think to ask."

"The PA students are not autonomous while they are here," said Van Arnem. "While in the departments they work with multiple people. This gives them a well-rounded experience in patient care. But each department has a preceptor (mentor) who gives them their final grade for that rotation."

Lyman said that Evans has great preceptors who are willing to teach him and his classmates, as well as help them through all the growing pains of being PA students.

"After the 100 credit hours of Phase 1 you think you know it all," said Lyman. "But the biggest thing you learn as a PA student is that you don't know as much as you thought you knew about medicine. You quickly learn you don't know hardly anything at all."

"As hard of a program that it is, it is a really great program that prepares us not only to be able to do an examination, but also prepares us as providers so that we will be able to take care of our troops," he added.

IPAP not only prepares the students to take care of troops, but for the National Guard and Reserve students it also helps them find jobs in the civilian sector. U.S. News & World Report listed IPAP as number 11 ranked PA program in the United States.

Not only has IPAP been nationally accredited since 1996, but each Phase 2 site is accredited. Evans recently found out that they passed their annual accreditation from the U.S. Army Medical Command.

"Coming from a highly reputable program, and getting the orthopedic experience we get is definitely beneficial," said Lyman, who just accepted a PA job at a hospital in Washington. "It makes us more marketable on the civilian side as well because it gives us more experience."

"The experience our PA students gain during their time at Evans is awesome," said Van Arnem. "When they leave here they are trained physician assistants who can work in many different areas of medicine providing top-level health care."



Officer Candidate Joshua Lane, a physician assistant student, presents an Emergency Room patient's case to PA Andy Flores. Photo by Jeff Troth