

12<sup>th</sup> Annual FHP Conference:  
Bringing Military Health Care Leaders Together

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The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Force Health Protection Conference was held this year from August 16-21 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Co-sponsored by the United States Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM) and Force Health Protection and Readiness (FHPR), the mid-August conference was a gathering of approximately 2400 military health care medical providers, policymakers, and vendors from around the world, with 105 exhibitors in attendance.

Organizers agreed to the main mission of this year's FHP conference: to provide tools to anticipate, recognize, evaluate, and counter environmental and occupational health and disease threats to health, fitness, and readiness for those personnel who provide preventive medicine, public health, and health promotion.

The FHP Conference has been a staple in the world of military health care for over a decade, providing an interactive learning environment and networking opportunity for medics, providers, doctors, Service members, and DoD civilians. Each year the conference bears a theme to which the presentations and breakout sessions are specifically designed. This year's sessions pivoted around the theme of "military preventive medicine and public health." Lt. Gen. Eric B. Schoomaker, U.S. Army Surgeon General, stressed the importance of the FHP Conference, saying "this conference is a true meeting of the experts in all the fields of military public health and preventive medicine, and reflects the importance of these topics around the world."

Conference attendees chose from a wide variety of health care and medical tracks to attend. The specialized sessions included presentations and panel sessions regarding health promotion and readiness, veterinary medicine, behavioral health, deployment health care, preventive medicine, and substance abuse. Spearheading the opening plenary session was Brig. Gen. Timothy K. Adams, Commander, USACHPPM, who remarked that he was very proud to see professionals from such a wide variety of fields in attendance.

Opening remarks from Col. Don L. Noah, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Health Protection and Readiness, during the conference's plenary session, highlighted the role that the Force Health Protection and Readiness (FHPR) office plays in developing important health care and readiness policy for the DoD. His presentation took an all-encompassing approach, touching on a slew of the various military health-related topics to be showcased throughout the week. Col. Noah spoke of the main pillars of Force Health Protection around which all of the policy and medical services pivot. The pillars are comprised of a healthy, fit and resilient force; a medically protected deployable force; common medical support services; and an agile, responsive medical force. These components are what drive the successful protection and readiness of the Armed Forces.

Along with an overview of the several capability areas that comprise the FHP&R office, Col. Noah described the proposed future of each program. He stressed the importance of medical research support, citing Secretary of Defense Robert Gates saying “beyond the recent one-time increase by the Congress for this specific purpose, I request that development of a tailored plan to provide R&D investments that advance state of the art solutions for world class medical care with an emphasis on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Prosthetics, Restoration of Sight & Eye-Care, and other conditions directly relevant to the injuries our soldiers are currently receiving on the battlefield.”

Col. Noah also stressed the importance of DoD’s role in national disaster response, saying that while the requirements to respond and recover to a disaster remain the same, the response time of the local, state, and Federal agencies will invariably differ. Therefore, the capability gap of a timely response must be filled by resilience. Resilience, he added, is the key to effective disaster response.

FHPR recently purchased a brand new display, which debuted at the FHP Conference this year. Several of the directorate programs were seen featured on the towering display which was positioned in the back corner of the exhibit hall area. Conference attendees had the luxury of walking through the display to learn more about the ongoing work and initiatives that are being undertaken by several programs: Force Readiness and Health Assurance; Medical Countermeasures; Civil-Military Medicine; Deployment Technologies; Health Science and Force Optimization; Psychological Health; International Health; and Operational Medicine and Medical Force Readiness.

This year’s conference built upon the foundation which was laid in past years. Jane Gervasoni, Deputy Director of the FHP Conference, said “the conference exceeded our expectations. Our use of radio frequency identification (RFID) to track attendance ensuring attendees received all appropriate continuing education credits is a major advance over previous conferences.” While the conference was the ideal location to learn about the advances and field work being done in the world of military medicine, it also served as a primary hub for cross networking. “Working with other organizations such as Deployment Healthcare and the Army Substance Abuse Program is helping our attendees to develop new relationships to help the Soldier,” said Gervasoni.

Gen. Shoomaker remarked that he has a “great personal interest in preventive medicine and public health - we have made this a key focus of Army Medicine. All of this must be done while continuing to provide the highest quality, life-saving and restorative care when “bad things happen to good people” and they fall off the balance beam of good health. The war in Iraq and Afghanistan is a constant reminder of the need to advance prevention and to protect our Soldiers with world class, clinically proven, preventive measures, so we continue to improve survival from battlefield wounds and illnesses,” said Shoomaker.

The FHP Conference is held in a new location each year. The 2010 conference will be seen in Phoenix, AZ, from August 6-13. Jane Gervasoni expressed her sentiments towards next year's conference saying "we are hoping to encourage more cross-service attendance. We plan to build on the successes of 2009 to make 2010 an even more successful year."