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Inside this Issue:

Dedicated to the Indomitable Spirit and Sacrifices of the SOF Medic

A Peer-Reviewed Journal that Brings Together the Global Interests of Special Operations' First Responders

SPECIAL TALK: *AN INTERVIEW*

An Ongoing Series

"The central theme is helping the men become the best Operators they can be."

—Steve Rush on US Air Force Pararescue and Pararescuemen Today

Interviewed by John F. Kragh Jr, MD, January 15, 2015

How did you come to SOF medicine?

I had been in a career of private medical practice with some academic responsibilities. Through friends, I became involved in a 2008 function to honor the Long Island PJs [US Air Force Pararescuemen] who were the rescue team for the crisis at sea later known by the movie title *The Perfect Storm*; the team was being honored for its service in the Global War on Terror. After interacting with the Team Commander, he "recruited" me. I joined the military at the age of 48 to be a Flight Surgeon for the New York Air Guard Pararescue team. Over a couple of years, I began to interact at the national level and develop relationships across the DoD's SOF community.

Steve Rush
Pararescue Flight Surgeon

How was your first SOF job?

I have loved my first and only SOF job. As a Pararescue Flight Surgeon, I have enjoyed the challenges of learning the mission and my job. Rescue is an exciting mission in which emergency medical and trauma care play an important role to support the skills needed in tactical and technical rescue. The challenges of determining what the necessary medical capabilities are for these Operators, how to best teach the PJs, and how to maintain proficiency have been the essence of this job. In addition to these roles, I became involved in human performance and psychological resilience. In each role, the central theme is helping the men become the best Operators they can be from the operational medical perspective, keeping them healthy, and thus optimizing their performance and [helping them] reach their potential as rescue warriors in providing the support that other teams and units across the DoD and [US Government] expect of PJs.

"Steve loves New York pizza – flour, fresh mozzarella and tomato sauce." *Operational medicine should always begin with and focus on the basics.*

Your thoughts on personal development in SOF medicine?

From the Pararescue perspective, the foundation for personal development is the commitment to the rescue mission. Some PJs really enjoy the medicine intellectually, it comes easy to them, and they seek training beyond the requirements. Some PJs who are not as innately interested in the medicine but are fully committed in their soul to the nobility of rescue, excel equally well because the mastery of rescue medicine occurs alongside mastery of other skills. The Operators who have made it through the selection process have proven to have the intellect and problem-solving skills to excel at what they put their minds to. Stimulation from senior PJs, peers, Flight Surgeons, and Independent Duty Medical Technicians provides a foundation to support their development.

I recently began to spend more time trying to get more PJs involved in SOMA. Those who have attended have been inspired to go further with medicine, and are stimulated by their colleagues who spoke about real-world experiences at the annual meeting. PJs who read the JSOM universally feel that it has a positive impact on their general feeling about operational medicine.

Finally, personal development naturally follows years of commitment to being a professional, the evolution of

interpersonal skills that come with life and the job, and having the mission experiences they do.

What's most important to your PJs today?

I can only answer that from my perspective, and that is an incredible impetus for me to do a survey and find out. With that said, I believe getting out our new handbook, standardizing and dialing in extended care, improving our approach to human performance, sports medicine, and psychological health are among critical areas that I have heard from the men.

Any thoughts on current challenges in preparing PJs for the future?

The challenges are related to the evolving mission and role of PJs on those missions. Refinements in gear and techniques need to be more adaptive in real time.

Any other current work aims?

We finally got the podcasts, "PJ MEDCAST," off the ground. The podcasts help us to further standardize operational medical care for PJs out of the schoolhouse as things change. Guys download podcasts for PT [physical training], car rides, and long flights. Medcasts allow me to get more info out to more men who are scattered around the globe. We are actually able to apply some of the hours towards paramedic recertification, which saves some time for the men. Medcasting has led to an effort this year to introduce a website for open-source info to complement [PJ MEDCAST] with a video library of procedures and a photo library of physical findings with which we most commonly deal.

Any guidance for the operational medicine community on life–work balance? Work longevity?

I have gotten a lot out of Eastern philosophy, and taking the middle path has always paid off. The answer, of course, is in your question regarding balance. Work longevity is related to the balance and avoiding burnout, but also making sure you are a medical Operator for the altruistic reason that gives you meaning and purpose. The data for the importance of purpose and meaning are overwhelming. But here are three thoughts:

First, we have always heard mind, body, and spirit are three pillars for individual health and happiness. Development of the mind by learning and continually improving as a medical professional is part of reaching our potential and the human condition. Taking care of your body (nutrition, fitness, sleep, stress management, injury prevention, and reduction) will not only improve your job performance, but improves mood, judgment, and higher cognitive function, and also increases the likelihood of a full career and retiring as whole as possible (e.g., reducing the risk of arthritis, joint replacement, bad backs, cognitive decline, etc.). Taking care of your spirit and psychological health, whether it is the love and nourishment you get from your family, faith, friends, or other pursuits, provides you with that last intangible piece to remain capable of working at your highest level to do the best job possible for those we serve.

Second, when I was finishing my radiation oncology residency in 1989, I remember reading a study on oncologist burnout. The results were clear: physicians who devoted themselves completely to their profession had the most burnout. Conversely, those who were academic physicians and taught and performed research (balanced approach), and those in private practice who took time off, had the least burnout. Any profession like ours, which can be emotionally draining and physically demanding, is often unsustainable without balance in and out of your profession.

Finally, another approach was advice from an "old lady next door" in a Vince Flynn spy novel. Paraphrasing, she said something like: find work you love, something you love to do, and someone you love to do it with.

Future plans?

In SOMA, we are excited to get the medic scholarship fund off the ground and try to make it more and more meaningful for the Operators pursuing further healthcare education and professional development. In Pararescue, I hope to engage more PJs to help the career field develop other aspects of Pararescue medicine, and continue to increase the enthusiasm and culture for the medical piece of rescue.

Closing thoughts for the operational medicine community?

I have been humbled to have the opportunity to support the mission and develop friendships in Pararescue and the larger op med community. I have begun to count on people like you, CAPT (Ret) Frank Butler, COL (Ret) Russ Kotwal, LTC Bob Mabry, MSG Harold (Monty) Montgomery, SGM F. Bowling, Col (Ret) Warren Dorlac, and many others across the DoD and US Government who have made the PJs better, and allowed Pararescue to provide whatever support we can both operationally and with institutional knowledge. The ability to develop relationships across this community with people of character and substance provides added inspiration to pursue the nobility of the missions you all do.

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