

## **Justification for Awarding 2018 Gary J. Gefroh Safety and Health Award to LCDR Jeffrey Conner**

LCDR Jeffrey Conner is nominated for the 2018 Gary J. Gefroh Safety and Health Award for his outstanding performance as an Institutional Environmental Health Officer for the Navajo Area Indian Health Service (IHS), Division of Occupational Safety and Health Management, from January 1, 2018 to December, 2018.

### **Background**

LCDR Jeffrey Conner is a Registered Environmental Health Sanitarian, EPA Lead-Based Paint Risk Assessor, and NFPA Certified Fire Inspector I. He has served in three Indian Health Service Areas in progressively higher billets and was recently deployed as a Safety Officer in response to the wildfires in northern California.

Healthcare facilities are required to be accredited to receive third party payments for services rendered, and show that the facility focuses on patient safety. Near the end of 2017, The Joint Commission (TJC) notified Gallup Indian Medical Center's (GIMC) executive leadership that the hospital was placed in immediate jeopardy of losing its accreditation. The immediate jeopardy designation was due to Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA) violations relating to long patient wait times for Emergency Department triage and leadership findings pertaining to the hospital's Executive Leadership Team (ELT) failing to address previously identified patient safety deficiencies. GIMC's immediate jeopardy designation also opened up the hospital to receiving a Center for Medicare and Medicaid validation survey. Failure to address healthcare accreditation deficiencies would result in loss of revenue, shuttered services, and potential loss/delay of healthcare for approximately 50,000 people. At the time, the GIMC had existing vacancies in Safety and Emergency Management. As healthcare accreditation issues progressed into 2018, the hospital also lost its Quality Management Director and two Infection Preventionists.

LCDR Conner was temporarily reassigned to the GIMC as a healthcare accreditation subject matter expert (SME) to assist the facility's ELT in reestablishing Joint Commission Hospital Accreditation and Center for Medicare Medicaid deemed status.

### **Accomplishments**

- In January, LCDR Conner acted as the Deputy Incident Commander for the hospital's accreditation response team. In this capacity he facilitated daily huddles with hospital administration and Navajo Area's Executive Leadership. He worked with the hospital's accreditation response team to develop the incident action plan, operational periods, and implemented use of a corrective action tracking tool to verify that identified healthcare deficiencies were resolved. LCDR Conner identified qualified staff to detail as a Facility Maintenance Subject-Matter-Expert, Safety Officer, and Emergency Manager to provide effective stop gaps for those three programs. He worked with Navajo Area's Acting OEHE Director and Division of Facility Management to request temporary duty assignments. LCDR Conner worked with Navajo Area's Director and Chief Medical Officer to identify SMEs in Quality Management, Infection Control, and Environmental Services.
- From late-January to March, the GIMC's operating rooms and central sterile reprocessing were shutdown to address low humidity concerns. LCDR Conner researched, developed and implemented a nonclinical CSR/OR Humidity, Temperature, & Air Exchange Guideline to address

Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) issues that interrupted patient care at the hospital. LCDR Conner also met with key stake holders to get their buy-in and agreement on a single best practice HVAC parameter. LCDR Conner walked this document through hospital administration for their approval and presented it to both the Environment of Care and Infection Control Committees for their approval.

- As a SME, LCDR Conner assisted GIMC's Quality Management Division by acting as the Safety Officer, Infection Control, and Emergency Manager as needed. He also completed special assignments as requested by GIMC's ELT and/or CEO. The special assignments completed include:
  1. Providing direct assistance to the hospital's short staffed Infection Control Program.
  2. Assisting Facility Management with rolling out a new preconstruction risk assessment process.
  3. Review and revising the hospital's vacant safety officer position description to strengthen the position and applicant pool.
  4. Performing infant and pediatric abduction drills.
  5. Conducting risk assessments to identify and prioritize Life Safety building upgrades and changes of use within existing hospital departments.

### **Impact/Outcome**

- To directly address EMTALA findings, LCDR Conner conducted code blue drills and a risk assessment to determine the most efficient way to get patients into the Emergency Department for life saving treatment. His risk assessment and code blue drills helped the hospital implement corrective actions by determining the quickest route to life saving treatment and illustrate that proposed reconstruction of the hospital's lobby was not needed. This work saved the hospital approximately \$15,000-20,000 and more importantly prevented disruptions to emergent patient care.
- LCDR Conner's Nonclinical CSR/OR Humidity, Temperature, & Air Exchange Guidelines allowed GIMC's operating room and central sterile reprocessing to reopen after being closed for more than a month. The document allowed surgeons to start performing elective procedures that had previously resulted in patients being referred to Albuquerque or Phoenix for treatment. The document was shared as a reference for other IHS Areas health care facilities to utilize, and in December 2018 the document was identified as a best practice by TJC during GIMC's triannual hospital accreditation survey.
- LCDR Conner's work helped create an occupational safety and health department at the GIMC. The department includes a supervisory safety officer that oversees an assistant safety officer, occupational health nurse, emergency manager, and a security supervisor. This work helped in the hiring of permanent safety officer at GIMC.
- LCDR Conner's temporary duty assignment involved 11 healthcare accreditation survey site visits by The Joint Commission and Center for Medicare Medicaid. His efforts directly contributed to the GIMC reestablishing its Joint Commission hospital accreditation, and not losing up to \$100 million in funding from Center for Medicare Medicaid and third party revenue, and loss of direct patient care services.

### **Conclusion**

For his outstanding leadership and performance, the Navajo Area IHS proudly nominates LCDR Jeffrey Conner for the 2018 Gary Gefroh Safety and Health Award.