

Navy Medical Team Provides Care Above Arctic Circle During Alaskan Humanitarian Mission

From Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs

KOTZEBUE, Alaska (NNS) -- A Navy Reserve medical team from Operational Health Support Unit Camp Lejeune (OHSU CL) is participating in a two-week humanitarian mission to Alaska April 10-24 in a real-world operation called "Operation Arctic Care."

The mission is a joint cold weather military exercise involving all branches of the service, Reserves and the National Guard who team up with local health organizations to provide medical care for native Alaskans who live above the Arctic Circle, an area with some of the harshest weather in the United States.

More than 26 Navy Medical Reservists from OHSU CL were hand-selected to participate. The Navy team, comprised of four medical officers with expertise in gastroenterology, emergency room, family practice, internal medicine, along with dental officers, podiatrists, nurse practitioners, staff Nurses and hospital corpsmen, will work with teams from the Air Force, Army and Navy, including Reserve, Guard and active duty units, positioned in more than ten different remote villages near Kotzebue, Alaska in subzero conditions.

"It certainly is our privileged and honor to take part and represent Navy Medicine on this important mission to Alaska," said Navy Capt. Kathleen Thorp, commanding officer of Operational Health Support Unit Camp Lejeune. "Missions like this help my Sailors prepare for future deployments in a Joint Service environment as well as training them to work in cold weather conditions. They are very excited to offer their clinical expertise working side-by-side with our sister services providing medical and dental care with the less privileged of eleven remote communities of Alaska."

Operation Arctic Care is an Innovative Readiness Training exercise (IRT), where military medical personnel team up with civilian authorities providing expert medical care to the underserved populations. This type of mission prepares the medical team for both operational and humanitarian deployments, and working in a joint environment. IRTs are sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs. This is the 16th year, Navy Medical personnel have participated.

With no vehicle access to the sites, the teams will be airlifted in by Army Blackhawk helicopters. The Navy Reserve team will join military medical professionals from more than 30 states in what has become the largest recurring joint military medical and logistics training exercise of its kind, while providing real-world humanitarian assistance and medical care.

Cmdr. Shane Bowen arrived at headquarters for this mission April 10 and was requested to fill in as one of the two area's emergency room physicians at the local remote hospital

due to a recent unexpected departure of their emergency room physician.

All 250 military medical personnel could see a population of anywhere from 150-3,000 Alaskans for common health issues.

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