

Tripler Army Medical Center

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Tripler Army Medical Center doctor honored for work in Pacific Islands

by Les Ozawa

Tripler Army Medical Center Public Affairs Office

HONOLULU—In appreciation for providing specialized healthcare to more than 5,000 patients in the U.S. Associated Pacific Islands (USAPI) since 1990, Tripler Army Medical Center and Col. (Dr.) Donald A. Person were recently recognized by the Pacific Island Health Officers Association (PIHOA). Dr. James Hofschneider, PIHOA president and secretary of health for the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI), presented plaques March 9 to Tripler's Commanding General Maj. Gen. Gale S. Pollock and Tripler's Pacific Island Health Care Project Medical Director Col. (Dr.) Donald A. Person in a brief ceremony at Tripler.

“You will never know just how much this means to our islands; the needs are so great,” said Hofschneider, in presenting the plaques. “You’ve saved us millions of dollars in medical costs and provided definitive medical and surgical care of inestimable value to our peoples.”

Because of limited medical resources in the hundreds of islands spread over the massive expanse of the Pacific Ocean that are situated in five time zones, doctors in the USAPI have worked closely with doctors at Tripler since 1990. Congress appropriates \$4.5-5 million annually to provide medical care to the more seriously ill patients.

Caring for these patients provides Tripler residents and interns with a unique patient population unavailable in any other medical center, according to Person. The residents gain experience in diagnosing and treating diseases and injuries rarely encountered in developed countries.

When the program was first conceived in 1989, medical referrals were made by telephone, mail, facsimile and even diplomatic pouch, recalled Person.

“I remember that one of the first uses of technology was a Polaroid print of a child’s image attached to a brief description of the patient’s condition and then faxed from Ebeye (in the Marshall Islands) to Tripler,” he said.

Since then, Tripler has taken advantage of advances in communication technology. In 1997, with the assistance of Project Akamai, Person developed an internet-based consultation and referral network that has helped nearly 2,500 patients from the USAPI.

The USAPI (formerly the U.S. Trust Territories) include CNMI, the Republics of Palau and the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap). They also include the U.S. Territories of Guam and American Samoa.

Person was given a special tribute in appreciation for his work with the Pacific Island Health Care Project since 1987, of which he has been the medical director since 1991. “It’s been a labor of love,” said Person, in receiving the award.

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Tripler Army Medical Center’s Col. (Dr.) Donald A. Person, medical director of the Pacific Island Health Care Project, was presented a plaque March 9 by the Pacific Islands Health Officers Association (PIHOA). He received the koa plaque in recognition of his 17 years of work in American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Marianas Islands, Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia.