New technology at USNH Yokosuka improves pediatric services

By Richard McManus,
USNH Yokosuka Public Affairs

New technology at U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka is bringing enhanced cardiology services to patients in the pediatric department.

The hospital is now home to one of only eight unique heart sound recording devices called Signal. The device was designed and tested at Tripler Army Medical Center (TAMC) and approved by the Food and Drug Administration in August. It is now in place in Yokosuka to help quickly diagnose potentially dangerous heart murmurs in pediatric patients.

Signal is the culmination of a six-year project to design a high-quality system that allows for a patient's heart sounds to be recorded and then evaluated by a pediatric cardiologist located anywhere in the world. In this case, that cardiologist is close to 4,000 miles away at TAMC and the heart sound recording device works with the TAMC telemedicine system called Pacific Asynchronous TeleHealth.

"We see a lot of children with heart murmurs from remote sites like Guam or Korea," said Lt. Col. C. Becket Mahnke, chief of pediatric cardiology at TAMC. "Most of these are innocent heart murmurs, but it is difficult for primary care providers to make that determination with confidence."

Previously, children who were found to have a potentially suspicious heart murmur may have been referred to TAMC to be seen by a pediatric cardiologist. But in many cases the findings were normal, resulting in unnecessary costs and significant stress on the child's parents.

The Signal device allows TAMC pediatric cardiologists to listen to a child's heart without the need for travel, in turn improving access to pediatric cardiology care for USNH Yokosuka's beneficiaries and reducing cost and stress for many families.

"Additionally, those with suspected abnormalities can be seen sooner, thereby improving the quality of care delivered," said Mahnke.

Heart murmurs vary in levels of seriousness, some being completely innocent. A pediatric cardiologist often can accurately diagnose an innocent heart murmur or something more serious such as a congenital heart defect, which is a problem in the formation of the heart that sometimes can result in a murmur. Congenital heart defects affect approximately one percent of all children, but more than half of all pediatric patients will have an innocent heart murmur detected at some point in their lives. The Signal device means that determination can be made much faster and much easier, especially for patients not located near a major medical center.

"Patients won't have to wait for a specialist to come to USNH Yokosuka to get an appointment with pediatric cardiology," said Jay Bradbury, a pediatric medical assistant at USNH Yokosuka. "Instead, within just a few days, the patient will know if further evaluations or an in-person consultation will need to be scheduled. We are really proud to be able to offer this service to our patients."

NSPS employees to receive full January 2010 base salary increase

By Lisa D. Marsh, CNFJ Human Resources Office

Each year, the Secretary of Defense authorizes an across the board annual pay adjustment for National Security Personnel System (NSPS) employees. The amount is based on the annual January General Schedule (GS) base salary increase.

By law, NSPS employees rated above "unacceptable" or who do not have a rating of record will receive at least 60 percent of the GS increase. The secretary may allocate the other 40 percent to NSPS pay pools for performance-based salary increases.

For the performance cycle ending Sept. 30, 2009, the Secretary of Defense has determined that NSPS employees, except for those rated "1 - Unacceptable," will receive 100 percent of the GS base salary increase. No portion of the GS increase will be allocated to pay pool funds.

While the GS base salary increase will not be used for pay pool funding, pay pools will continue to have money available for performance-based salary increases and bonuses, preserving the link between pay and performance under NSPS.

The actual amount of the January increase will not be known until the president signs an executive order implementing the 2010 pay adjustment.

The following are some frequently asked questions and answers regarding NSPS base salary pay increases:

Q. What does the secretary's decision regarding the January 2010 GS base salary increase mean for NSPS employees?

A. NSPS employees with ratings of record of "2" or higher will receive 100 percent of the GS base salary increase as an across the board pay adjustment.

Q. Do NSPS employees with a rating of record of "2" or higher receive local market supplement adjustments?

A. Yes. Employees with ratings of record of "2" or higher will receive local market supplement adjustments equivalent to the GS locality pay adjustments specified for their work locations. Employees who have a rating of record of "1 – Unacceptable" are not eligible for local market supplement adjustments.

Q. What happens to an NSPS employee who does not have an NSPS rating of record?

A. NSPS employees without ratings of record will also receive the full GS base salary increase and locality pay adjustments.

Q. What is the amount of the January 2010 GS base salary increase?

A. The actual amount of the GS base salary increase will not be known until the president signs an executive order implementing the 2010 pay adjustment.

Q. How is the secretary's decision different from last year?

A. Last year, the secretary exercised his discretion to allocate 40 percent of the GS base salary increase to NSPS pay pools for performance-based salary increases. This year, no portion of the GS base salary increase will be allocated to pay pool funds. Instead, 100 percent of the GS base salary increase will be paid as an across-the-board increase to employees with ratings of record of "2" or higher.

Q. Does this mean there is no money for NSPS pay pools?

A. No. While the NSPS pay pool funds will not include any money associated with the GS base salary increase, pay pools will continue to have money available for performance-based salary increases and bonuses, preserving the link between pay and performance under NSPS.

Q. Why is the department doing this?

A. Given the ongoing leadership review of NSPS and in consideration of recommendations made by the Defense Business Board in its recently published report on NSPS, department leadership decided this was the most prudent course of action.

Contact your performance management consultants at Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan (CNFJ) Regional Human Resources Office for more information.

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"All of us have careers prior to being an astronaut," Cassidy said. "You need to pick something that you enjoy so that you can do it well and succeed in that career, so that you'll be a competitive applicant at the time when you do decide to put in an application to become an astronaut.

"To set yourself up for that you need to have a bachelor's degree in some sort of technical major [such as] math, science, physics, engineering. Then there are some basic medial requirements with eye sight and things like that. However, the thing you are in control of is your education and that's what I would encourage these kids to focus on."

According to Cassidy, enjoying the weightlessness due the lack of gravity is an interesting aspect of being in space.

"The coolest thing about being in space… I think it's floating around," said Cassidy. "Just imagine the room that you are in, wherever you are, just slightly pushing up on your feet and floating to the ceiling and when you get there just pushing off at a weird angle and enjoying that.

"In fact your brain kind of gets used to that. When you are done writing with a pencil you just let go and you grab the papers and the pencil is still right there. When you come back to Earth, the first day or so you try that trick and the pencil suddenly falls to the floor, so your brain has to learn how to be back in [gravity] again."

Jacob agrees that it would be cool to float around in a space ship.

"[I would] eat my lunch in the air," he said. "It would be fun."

Laughingly, Mason told his brother, "Aw, you can't do that."