

OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

HISTORY

The Marine Hospital Service was established with the July 16, 1798 signing by President John Adams of an act for the relief of sick and disabled seamen. The first permanent Marine Hospital was authorized on May 3, 1807 to be built in Boston.

It was not until 1875 that the title of Surgeon General came into being. A bill passed on March 3 of that year authorized admission of Navy seamen and seamen of other government services to Marine hospitals on a reimbursable basis. In recognition of the progress Dr. John Maynard Woodworth made in reorganizing the Marine Hospital Service, his title was changed by law to Supervising Surgeon General.

The Public Health Service Commissioned Corps was authorized on January 4, 1889 establishing by law the policy of a mobile corps subject to duty anywhere upon assignment.

Other Surgeons General of the Public Health Service, in addition to Dr. Maynard:

John B. Hamilton	April 3, 1879	to	May 31, 1891
Walter Wyman	June 1, 1891	to	Nov. 21, 1911
Rupert Blue	Jan. 13, 1912	to	March 1, 1920
Hugh Smith Cumming	March 3, 1920	to	Jan. 31, 1936
Thomas Parran	April 6, 1936	to	April 5, 1948
Leonard A. Scheele	April 6, 1948	to	August 2, 1956
Leroy E. Burney	August 8, 1956	to	Jan. 29, 1961
Luther L. Terry	March 24, 1961	to	Oct. 1, 1965
William H. Stewart	Oct. 2, 1965	to	August 1, 1969
Jesse L. Steinfeld	Dec. 18, 1969	to	Jan 20, 1973
Julius B. Richmond	July 13, 1977	to	May 1, 1981

During the period between January 20, 1973 and July 13, 1977, the post of Surgeon General of the U. S. Public Health Service was vacant. Various members of the PHS Commissioned Corps assumed these duties in an acting capacity.

Julius Richmond was the first Surgeon General of the Public Health Service who did not come from the ranks of the Commissioned Corps. He is also the only Surgeon General to also hold the post of Assistant Secretary for Health, HHS, simultaneously. However, Dr. Richmond served with the Air Force during World War II as a flight surgeon and was in Federal service in a civilian capacity as the first director of the National Head Start Program and as director of the Office of Health Affairs, Office of Economic Opportunity.

DUTIES:

The Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service advises the public on health matters such as smoking and health, diet and nutrition, environmental health hazards, and the importance of immunization and disease prevention. He oversees the activities of the 6,000-member PHS Commissioned Corps. The Surgeon General reports directly to the Assistant Secretary for Health.

The Assistant Secretary for Health directs all of the activities of the Public Health Service, including the Office of the Surgeon General. The assistant secretary directs the activities of the six operating divisions: the Health Services Administration; the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration; the Centers for Disease Control; the Food and Drug Administration; the Health Resources Administration; and the National Institutes of Health.