

News > Columbus participates in unique doctor exchange

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Posted 8/9/2011 Updated 8/10/2011 Email story Print story

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14th Flying Training Wing Public Affairs

8/9/2011 - COLUMBUS AIR FORCE BASE, Miss. -- Scheduling appointments in Flight Medicine may be getting a little easier at Columbus Air Force Base, Miss., in spite of high physician deployment tempo. Keesler AFB, Miss. flight surgeons, many of whom have completed additional specialty training, are rotating through the 14th Medical Group, bringing their specialty expertise to both patients and medical staff.

Photos



Keesler AFB, Miss. flight surgeons, many of whom have completed additional specialty training, are rotating through the 14th Medical Group, bringing their specialty expertise to both patients and medical staff in a new program between the two bases.

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Air Education and Training Command's unique regional physician exchange program shares medical personnel and expertise between Keesler AFB, Columbus AFB, and Maxwell AFB, Ala. The program not only maintains flight medicine access in a high demand career field, but also builds deployment capability within the career field as well.

For example, Maj. Wendi Wohltmann, a former Air Force Special Operations Command flight surgeon and current Chief of Dermatology at Keesler AFB, is scheduled to take a deployment tasking this fall, covering another AETC flight surgeon's office that would otherwise have low manning during this period.

At the same time, these flight surgeons maintain their aeromedical currency by both seeing patients and flying with 14th Operations Group. Additional recent participants include Maj. Tom Paynter, Chief of Orthopedic Surgery at Keesler AFB, and Capt. Robert Henley, an experienced Flight Surgeon who plans to train in Ophthalmology in his next assignment.

"This is an opportunity for us to not only get robust flight medicine support, but specialty care as well," notes Col. Billye Hutchison, 14th Medical Group commander. "In turn, with great support from the 14th Operations Group, we are getting the visiting physicians flying experience in our T-1, T-6 and T-38 aircraft."

While this program has obvious patient benefits, it also executes the Air Force Surgeon General's vision of returning operational flight surgeons into operational medical support while maintaining their specialty expertise.

Brigadier Gen. Kory Cornum, 81st Medical Group commander at Keesler AFB, a practicing orthopedic surgeon and flight surgeon, thanked the 14th Operations and Medical Group commanders for their support. Cornum observes that "We're all in the same Air Force....everybody wins when we take care of patients together!"