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Medical battalion serves as healthcare recruiter

By DIANA LaCHANCE Staff writer diana.lachance@thedstonerocket.com Mar 12, 2013



When a Soldier receives medical attention from a healthcare professional, whether at home or in the theater of war, there's a good chance that the 2nd Medical Battalion recruited that provider. After all, that's their sole mission, said executive officer Maj. Steve Jordan, who oversees the day-to-day administrative functions of the Arsenal-based battalion.

"We recruit civilian personnel from throughout the Southeastern region of the U.S. who are either currently serving in the healthcare field or matriculating into it as healthcare professionals," he said. That's over 370,000 square miles, from Kentucky to Puerto Rico.

Once recruited, those professionals fill positions in one of five areas: the Medical Corps, which includes physicians and surgeons; the Dental Corps; the Veterinary Corps; the Specialist Corps, which includes physical and occupational therapists; and the Medical Service Corps, which includes social workers and pharmacists.

The battalion, which is further divided into three medical recruiting companies, is one of just five tasked with this mission. And this year alone, it is responsible for filling roughly 300 positions across 70 distinct specialties, with a thoracic surgeon, a dietitian, and an audiologist among those needed. It's a massive job for the seven military and 12 civilian staff members who make up the battalion, but Jordan is up for the task.

"I went through the ROTC way to come on board as a medical search corps officer," said the Mississippi native, who has more than 22 years of service under his belt. Later he earned a master's in healthcare and human resources courtesy of the Army. "That's one of the benefits. The Army

ensures you receive the proper education to be competitive for promotion and advancement,” he said.

And that’s exactly the message he and his staff want to pass on to their potential recruits, especially students who plan to work in the healthcare profession. After all, more than a quarter of the Army’s recruiting mission is covered by their health professions scholarship program, which provides tuition, fees and books for medical, dental or veterinary school in return for a service obligation.

As for those already working in the healthcare field, there are plenty of benefits for them, too. “Service to country is the biggest selling point,” Jordan said. “And unlike in the civilian sector, you don’t have to worry about malpractice insurance. You can also retire after 20-plus years of service. And we offer repayment of school loans, bonuses depending on specialty, and stipends.”

Of course those perks also mean the battalion can afford to be selective. “I won’t say it’s difficult to recruit people, but we have our qualifications and they are rigorous,” Jordan said. “The biggest part is passing the physical and ensuring they have their licenses and certifications pertaining to their specialty. School is also important; GPA is important.”

If a graduate or active professional meets these qualifications and is successfully recruited, however, then they are automatically commissioned as an officer in the Army. After that, it’s off to the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School in Fort Sam Houston, Texas, for an officer course in which the recruits learn Army protocol and basic soldiering.

“It is not like basic training, definitely not,” said Jordan, laughing. “They do physical training in the morning and then they have classes or lectures in the afternoon, or they go to a hospital field setup and they’re shown what their role is in taking in patients in a theater of operations.”

What happens next depends on their status, whether they are Reserve or active. “If it’s a Reserve officer, they’ll go back to the hospital where they work or whatever the case may be. When their Reserve unit goes on training or is deployed, then they’re activated and go with them,” Jordan said.

“If they’re active duty, they’ll get assigned to one of our units. It’s up to the Army’s Human Resources Command to determine where they’re needed, so there’s always the possibility that they might be deployed.”

Of course, as an active duty member of the military, that rule also applies to Jordan himself. And indeed, this summer, his two-year assignment as executive officer will end and he will head over to Fort Benning, Ga., to become the troop commander at their hospital.

But that's just part of the job. And while he may be leaving Redstone Arsenal, one thing he is not leaving is the Army, despite the fact that he is more than eligible for retirement.

"I'm here as long as they allow me to stay. I love what I do," he said. "It's not about money. I don't think about that. It's just the fact of service – it's a great, wonderful feeling. We save lives. That's what we do."