INNOVATION CATEGORY:
READINESS

INNOVATION TITLE:
MEDICAL READINESS INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Ongoing intense global operations have created a requirement for a robust group of knowledgeable Medical Readiness Officers (MRO) at the Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) level. The current method for preparing Readiness Officers is to send individuals to two weeks of training, then let them learn the role while on the job. On average, a new MRO spends four weeks TDY and devotes several days to position-specific computer-based training courses to meet the recommended baseline training. Throughout their first year, they learn how to manage the deployment process, the Home Station Medical Response program, and the medical readiness training program. Also, they learn how to plan exercises and interface with Wing Plans, and to serve as the Medical Readiness Program Administrator.

Current operations tempo does not afford sufficient time for an individual to truly learn the nuances of Medical Readiness' programs. As the Medical Readiness Officer position is "one deep," there is little opportunity for a no-fault learning environment and little room for error. Medics depend on their Readiness flight to prepare them for deployment. Administrators rely on the flight to run an effective training program, to prepare accurate reports, and to serve as reliable advisors on plans and contingency response.

With the need for a pool of tactical-level Readiness Officers, and in the absence of an extensive training venue, Air Combat Command's (ACC) Readiness shop requested that the 633 MDG's Readiness Officer draft a Medical Readiness Officer Internship Program. ACC's planners met with the MDG's MRO in December 2010. A draft of the program was prepared by March of 2011, and an intern was identified by summer of the same year. The intent of the initiative – to create a Medical Readiness Officer Internship Program for the MTF-level – was met in less than a year of identifying the need.

The Internship program's objective is to grow Medical Readiness experts through several means: mentorship by an experienced Medical Readiness Officer (MRO), senior officers, and senior enlisted; exposure to daily Readiness operations; interface with related agencies; attendance at the Readiness Symposium and formal classes; web-based training; and completion of a special project. Measuring the effectiveness of an administratively-oriented internship is challenging. Possible indicators of program success are that the ACC's Medical Readiness Flight Commander positions are always filled with readiness-experienced officers, and that other Major Commands

(MAJCOMs) adopt the program. The logic behind the second indicator is that if commanders and the Air Force Personnel Center see the program as value-added, then the program will spread throughout the Air Force.

METHODS

The Medical Logistics career field has sponsored a Medical Logistics Internship Program for well over 20 years. Due to its success, the program is still running. Given that the Medical Service Corps can support a Logistics Internship, it stands to reason that it could support a Readiness one as well. Although the Readiness Internship derived some inspiration from the Logistics Internship, it is a unique program. The intern's time will be divided three ways: between tactical Readiness, operational knowledge, and understanding Readiness from the strategic perspective. Approximately 75% of the program will be devoted to the practical aspects of running a Readiness flight. By gaining a solid grasp of basic Readiness flight operations, the intern will gain credibility as a Medical Readiness Officer and be able to confidently lead a Readiness flight. Approximately 15% of the time spent in the program will be aimed at learning operational Readiness knowledge – seeing how a Medical Readiness flight fits into the base's mobility and disaster response web. The remaining 10% of the time in the internship program will allow the intern to gain insight into how the mobility process is orchestrated at the MAJCOM level.

The greatest resource expended on the Medical Readiness Internship program is time. The Medical Readiness staff must dedicate time to mentor the Intern. This said the internship program is structured to foster a symbiotic relationship between the intern and the Air Force. The intern is granted a unique opportunity whereby his/her primary purpose is to learn, observe, and offer ideas. This experience will prepare the intern for future Readiness roles through an operational (as opposed to classroom) venue. In return, the MTF and thus the AF gains a professional well-positioned to see processes from a fresh perspective. Fresh perspective often leads to process improvement, and the intern is invited to coordinate with his/her flight commander to articulate insights.

RESULTS

The 633 Medical Readiness Flight successfully partnered with Air Combat Command's Readiness Office to create the USAF's first Medical Readiness Internship Program. Candidates competed, and an intern was identified in Spring 2011. The Intern arrived in September and is working his way through the program. Part of his task is to create a master Readiness competency-skills list, and to build "statements of behavior" from the technical reading material forwarded to him. Throughout the program, he will offer objective feedback to help shape this internship for future students. Once this program is well established, Air Combat Command may consider rotating it to other large-platform MTFs such as Nellis AFB and Travis AFB.

CONCLUSION

Considering the low cost in manpower and resources and the high return for MTFs, the Medical Readiness specialty anticipates that it will be able to sustain its internship program. After a couple of rotations to gather lessons learned and to refine the program, ACC predicts that other commands may adopt and tailor the Medical Readiness Internship Program.