

OVERVIEW OF WILFORD HALL ORGANIZATION, 1942-1996

The following is a survey of how our organization has developed, based on a spot check of documents in our historical archives. It does not attempt to document every minor change, but rather to show how the grand design of the organization has evolved over these 54 years. The evolution and role of the medical services squadron and the military chain of command are not examined in this study.

1942

Looking at the overall picture, our organization has remained remarkably constant. What became Wilford Hall was formed as a station hospital in June 1942. We have no records of that period, but an organization chart of the "type hospital" in World War II shows two major services, administrative and professional, with the adjutant, medical supply officer, chaplain, personnel officer and the veterinary service coming directly under the commander.

The administrative services included much of what we would expect; the registrar, mess officer, commanders of medical department troops and of patient detachment, utilities officer (utilities and supply being separate disciplines then) and receiving and disposition officer.

The administrative services contains one surprise to the 1996 medic. The principal chief nurse fell under admin. The reason is found in the duties of the chief nurse of that time. She was defacto the commander of the nurses, responsible for their welfare and conduct and the state of their billets as much as for their professional conduct.

Professional services oversaw the surgical, medical, laboratory, dental, and roentgenological services. A sixth service, dispensary and outpatient included pharmacy and prophylaxis, as well as a general examination and treatment section.

The records do not indicate whether the Station Hospital, San Antonio Aviation Cadet Training Center, which later became Wilford Hall, was organized in that way, but it was a station hospital among many, and it would be unlikely to have deviated by much from that matrix.

1954

In 1954, the first year for which we have a written history, the organization was much the same. The bulk of the organization was broken down into administrative and professional services. In general, the breakdown was much the same as we know it today. Administrative services included registrar and food service, which were until lately part of our operations division. Transportation, linen control, medical material and utilities, now part of logistics, were separate services. Two differences were the training service, which is today represented by ET, and pharmacy service which is now part of PS.

Professional services consisted of ten services, with the surgical service broken down into six sections. Orthopedics was not part of surgery. Nursing and outpatient were services under the chief, professional services, in

In addition to the two major parts of the hospital, the dental services, preventive medical and veterinary services, aviation medicine and processing service and the technical training squadron were directly under the commander.

1966

Twelve years later, in 1966, the names were changing to be more like those we know today, but the overall organization was much the same, with administrative and professional services being the two major subordinate organizations. Several deputy commanders became directors, with the Directorate of Plans and Operations Support established as the operating agency for the administrator, who reverted to a senior member of the staff. The Directorate of Education was formed at the same time, with the former deputy for education becoming the director. In 1966 the other directorates were hospital services, base medical services, dental services, dental services and the Aerospace Medical Laboratory. Under the directorate of hospital services were departments, with services under the departments.

1977

After taking command of Wilford Hall in 1971, Maj. En Paul Myers visualized a vastly expanded medical center with a new organization to match. He made the administrator a deputy commander, with the commander, vice commander and administrator becoming SG-1, 2 and 3 respectively (reflected today by the phone numbers of tiptoe alley, 7351, 7352 and 7353.) Professional services remained a directorate, but under

professional services the former departments became divisions, and the former services became departments. The service was something of an endangered species, although they were to be found here and there such as in the Department of Radiology, with its diagnostic, nuclear medicine and other services. It should be noted that the current directorates of surgery, nursing and medicine date from that time. The order of battle included the directorate of support, consisting of pharmacy, pathology and radiology, and the directorate of maternal and child care with OB-GYN and pediatrics. Mental health had a twilight existence as the sub-division of mental health under the division of medicine until about 1989.

Under the SG 1-2-3 system, every function came under the SG 2 or 3, with the commander only directly supervising a few functions such as his executive officer.

The Directorate of Plans and Operations Support initially remained over registrar, food services, personnel and plant management and the other administrative chiefs becoming the associate administrators for resource management, operations plans and programs and materiel. The plans and operations support directorate was later transformed into another associate administratorship.

The remainder of the medical center was organized into directorates (development, dispensary services, veterinary services, education dental services and the aeromedical space laboratory) and special staff sections (aide, chaplain, the medical service squadron, legal medicine, the 4th ASF, the information office, the inspector and equal opportunity and treatment).

1992

And there the organization remained for fifteen years plus. The Duke of Wellington is said to have exerted such an influence on the British Army that for thirty years after his death the decision process was an attempt to decide what the Duke would have done. So the Gen. Myers organization remained at Wilford Hall long after he had become the surgeon general, and then departed.

Although there were minor adjustments every year, such as the aide becoming the executive officer and new sections such as health promotions and volunteer services, most of the changes were in name rather than function.

In 1992, the basic organization was changed back to something not unlike that in effect from 1942 to 1971. The administrator was made the director of healthcare support rather than a vice commander, and the associate

administrators were in charge of division under healthcare support. At around the same time, the Division of Nursing, under came out from Professional Services (which hospital services became), and was established the Directorate of Nursing Services directly under the commander.

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Since 1994 the medical center has been in a state of flux, with the advent of TRICARE and managed care, the demise of the operations division, and scores or hundreds of other changes which are familiar to most of us, and are not recounted here.

A time traveler, coming to the “Big Willie” of 1996 from the Station Hospital, San Antonio Aviation Cadet Training Center of 1942 would be impressed and amazed by the size of the organization a half century later. He would be somewhat confused by the changes in nomenclature, but if he could see a wiring diagram-type organization chart of the 59th Medical Wing, he could orient himself to the organization of today in minutes.

The conclusion may depend on whether one sees the glass as half-full or half-empty. The traditionalist may conclude that an organization which has stood the test of time and has proven itself to be so flexible over the years is still sound and can take on whatever new changes are coming. The innovator

could equally well conclude that, with a 1957 building and a 1942 organization, it is no wonder that we have problems adapting to the coming millennium.

I can get more details. Our archives are spotty, but I can probably find or extrapolate other information if we want it.