

CRDAMC honors physician assistant graduates

By Brandy Gill

CRDAMC Public Affairs

FORT HOOD, Texas – Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center staff, providers and Family members gathered on Friday, May 11, to congratulate two Soldiers who officially completed the CRDAMC Physician Assistant Graduate Medical Program.



Figure 1: Captain Justina Assmus and 1st Lt. Charles Gang display their Masters of Physician Assistant Studies diplomas following their graduation ceremony at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center May 11 (Photo by Brandy Gill, CRDAMC Public Affairs).

Captain Justina Assmus, of Duarte, Calif., and 1st Lt. Charles Gang, of Peoria, Ariz., were both recognized for successfully finishing the grueling two-year Interservice Physician Assistant Program (IPAP) course of study that prepared them to become Army Physician Assistants.

The commencement ceremony was the first step in the students' new occupations as Army Medicine providers. Col. Mark Croley, acting CRDAMC deputy chief of clinical services, said.

“Graduation marks the end of something, but in all actuality this is really just the beginning of your physician assistant career,” he said. “Physicians appreciate and admire physician assistants, and we are grateful to have you.”

W. Darrin Weaver, the CRDAMC phase II IPAP program coordinator, praised Assmus and Gang for their dedication to the program.

“The Interservice Physician Assistant Program has a 20 percent attrition rate and a 50 percent divorce rate. It is arguably the most arduous, competitive and stressful physician assistant program in the world,

but it is a stressful program for a reason,” he said. “It has prepared you to manage the healthcare of an entire battalion.”

Although both students have successfully finished their formal training they must still pass their Physician Assistant Board Certification tests later next month.

Assmus, who enlisted in the Army in 1997 as a medical laboratory technician and then graduated from Officer Candidate School with honors in 2005 as a second lieutenant in the Ordnance Corps, said the IPAP isn't for the faint of heart.

“I don't have any regrets, but this was definitely the hardest thing I've ever done,” she said. “You really have to want to be a physician assistant though.”

Assmus said she is excited about her next step.

“I still have to take the certification exam, but I feel Fort Hood and Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center have really prepared me to do this. I’m finally going to be taking care of Soldiers on my own, which is what makes all the studying and lack of sleep and family time over the last two years worth it.”

Gang, who initially joined the Army in 2005 as a dental assistant said, “I’m still in disbelief. It hasn’t really hit me yet, but I know this program has prepared me to do well on the test and to care for Soldiers too.”

Assmus’ next duty station is Fort Stewart, Ga., and Gang’s is Fort Polk, La.

The Army initiated a training program for physician assistants in 1972. Currently there are more than 500 active duty PAs. Their primary role is as a battalion general medical officer, and their duties include briefing battalion commanders on health issues, treating the battalion Soldiers and providing general medical training to the medics employed in the battalion aid station to support combat operations.



PA grads May 2012

First Lt. Charles Gang and Capt. Justina Assmus were both recognized May 11, for completing the Interservice Physician Assistant Program, a grueling two-year program that prepared them to become Army Physician Assistants (Photo by Brandy Gill, CRDAMC Public Affairs).



1st Lt. Gang and Col. Mark Croley

First Lt. Charles Gang receives his Master of Physician Assistant Studies diploma from Col. Mark Croley, the CRDAMC acting deputy chief of clinical services, during a ceremony at the hospital May 11 (Photo by Brandy Gill, CRDAMC Public Affairs).



Capt. Justina Assmus and Col. Mark Croley

Captain Justina Assmus receives her Master of Physician Assistant Studies diploma from Col. Mark Croley, the CRDAMC acting deputy chief of clinical services, during a ceremony at the hospital May 11 (Photo by Brandy Gill, CRDAMC Public Affairs).