

USAMRIID Salutes COL Cox, Welcomes COL Jenkins in Change of Command Ceremony

--By Caree Vander Linden, USAMRIID PAO

COL Constance L. Jenkins assumed command of the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases in a June 18 ceremony on Fort Detrick's Blue and Gray Field. She succeeds COL E. Darrin Cox, who had headed the Institute since July 2019 and will become the command surgeon for U.S. Army Forces Command Headquarters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Reflecting on his time at USAMRIID, Cox grew emotional as he bade farewell to the Institute's military, civilian and contract personnel. His first several months in command were especially challenging, as USAMRIID's biocontainment research program faced a work stoppage while the Institute dealt with facility challenges and implemented new standards.

"Two years ago, we found ourselves at a rough spot in our history," said Cox. "But thanks to everyone at USAMRIID, we banded together to overcome our temporary issues so we could continue to excel at our mission. I appreciate your willingness to accept a non-laboratorian surgeon as commander, and I cannot thank you enough for your support."

Cox also thanked his friends and family members, particularly his wife, Dr. Kathleen Cox, a former Army Nurse Corps officer who is a professor at the University of Texas, El Paso, and directs their Acute Care Practitioner program. His sons, Adam and Caleb, also traveled to the ceremony.

During his tenure, Cox re-aligned the Institute's staff with its core competencies to improve efficiency. He also oversaw the restoration of USAMRIID's biocontainment research program, in accordance with Army and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. USAMRIID's core mission, conducting research to support medical countermeasure development for the nation's biodefense, successfully continued under his leadership—even as the Institute also made significant contributions to the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Among those key accomplishments are developing multiple animal models for testing vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics; creating a novel biosurveillance approach to enhance screening for COVID-19 and other diseases; evaluating novel drugs and antibodies as potential treatments; and serving as a 24/7 confirmatory laboratory for the Department of Defense, providing diagnostic testing for mission-critical military personnel to help leaders make informed decisions about force protection and return to duty.

"It takes the right kind of commander to lead an organization like USAMRIID through a pandemic, and COL Darrin Cox was that 'right time, right place' commander," said BG Michael J. Talley, former commander of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command and Fort Detrick. "To say it was a sporty time is an understatement, but Darrin became a needed change agent. [He] inspired his subordinate leaders and their teams to accomplish more than they thought possible and realize their full potential."

COL Jenkins, an Army Nurse Corps officer, is the first female commander of USAMRIID in its 52-year history. She most recently served as Chief of Staff for the Army's Regional Health Command - Atlantic, Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Throughout her career, Jenkins has served in leadership positions encompassing a wide range of experience as a clinician, educator, staff officer and commander.

Jenkins is a Distinguished Military Graduate of Indiana University - Purdue University at Indianapolis Army Reserve Officer Training Corps, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in nursing from Indiana University. She also holds a Master of Science in nursing from the University of Texas Health Science Center, a doctorate of nurse anesthesia practice from Texas Wesleyan University, and a master's degree in national resource strategy.

Some of her key assignments include chief anesthetist of the 759th Forward Surgical Team at Fort Bragg, with a deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan; chief nurse anesthetist at the 47th Combat Support Hospital, with a deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom; director of the U.S. Army graduate program in anesthesia nursing at the Army Medical Department Center and School; director of talent management for the Army Surgeon General; and commander of the U.S. Army Medical Activity - Alaska at Fort Wainwright.

In her remarks, Jenkins thanked Cox for his leadership and said she is looking forward to serving as USAMRIID's commander.

"I am grateful to inherit an organization that has been expertly led—and I accept the challenge to lead it to even greater heights," said Jenkins. "I'm honored to be a part of this great team as we embrace the challenging and exciting times ahead... [to] evolve and transform and modernize. We will continue to forge the future in science in supporting the warfighter and our civilians around the globe."

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Caption:

COL Constance L. Jenkins, USAMRIID's incoming commander, accepts the unit colors from USAMRIID SGM Nubia N. Rivera during a change of command ceremony June 18 at Fort Detrick. *(Photo by William Discher, USAMRIID VIO)*