

COLVIN HONORS NADE, PRESENTS AT CONFERENCE



Written by Jeff Price

Visiting with NADE members during the Presidents' reception on Sunday evening, August 9, and again during her formal address to the conference on Tuesday morning, August 11, Commissioner Colvin stressed how appreciative she was for all the hard work that is performed in the DDSs each and every day. "Your commitment to quality work in the disability programs makes a difference in each of your communities and to the American people across the nation." The Commissioner reiterated that all of us probably know someone who has applied for disability benefits and she reminded everyone that the claimants we interact with are usually struggling with serious health conditions. "Your quality, compassionate interaction with each claimant during this process makes a difference." (cont. p.3)



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A MESSAGE FROM YOUR PRESIDENT



President Sharon Summers

The 2015 NADE National Training Conference is now history. The training, information and friendships will continue to linger with many of us. The Oregon chapter really did a superb job with their planning and execution of the conference.

The speakers from SSA presented useful and necessary information to keep us on track with what is happening at Headquarters. It was special to have the Honorable Ms. Carolyn Colvin, SSA Acting Commissioner speak to us and spend time answering our questions whether formally or just sitting down and chatting. We appreciated her openness and willingness to do what she could to keep us informed. We also heard Ms. Nancy Berryhill, SSA's Deputy Commissioner for Operations; Ms. Ann Robert, SSA's Associate Commissioner for Disability Determinations; and Ms. Gina Clemons,

SSA's Associate Commissioner for Disability Policy. We always enjoy the report of the Honorable Patrick O'Carroll, Esq., SSA's Inspector General. John Allen, Esq., SSA's Deputy Chief Administrative Law Judge gave the perspective of the ALJ in Adjudication. It was very helpful to hear from Ms. Cindy Duzan, SSA's Director of the Office of Program Evaluation, Office of Research, Demonstration and Employment Support; and equally Mr. Philip Doyle, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Compensation Levels and Trends, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The medical speakers were quite informative and gave valuable and exemplary training. It is always so special to have the opportunity to mingle with all our guests who are very gracious and lenient with their time. NADE business was accomplished throughout the conference at various times. Each region had an opportunity to meet and get their ideas together to advance NADE. Awards were won by those who went above and beyond the call of duty in their respective DDS. New officers ascended to leadership roles. New Regional Directors took their place at the New Board Meeting. It was my absolute honor to become NADE President at the end of the General Membership Meeting on Wednesday. This is a position I had only dreamed of obtaining one day, but somehow circumstances fell into place and my time had come. I expressed my appreciation to the membership and pledged my loyalty, dedication and service to them.

I cannot end this article without telling you about an experience I had going back to Nashville from Portland. On the first leg of my trip from Portland to San Diego, I boarded the plane in normal fashion. A young Hispanic lady was sitting in an aisle seat near the front of the plane. She helped put my carry on in the bin above us. As it turned out, she was an attorney and had actually represented SSA claimants in the past. She explained that she is no longer working in that capacity, but rather is working as a corporate attorney for a huge online travel company. She talked about the company with much enthusiasm. It sparked a question in my mind: What could I learn from her? I asked her to give me one thing that any organization could use to increase business or membership. She said, "The organization has to become **CONTAGIOUS!**"

Let each of us do what we can to make NADE **CONTAGIOUS!**

COLVIN HONORS NADE, PRESENTS AT CONFERENCE (cont.)



The Commissioner commented, "As disability professionals, your claims processing on the frontline is a key piece of the Social Security Administration's commitment to public service. NADE plays an important role in developing and maintaining the high standards of professional and ethical service to the public. NADE's mission, after all, is to advance the art and science of disability evaluation." The Commissioner observed that the work is challenging and changes frequently due to budgetary constraints, regulation and policy revisions, and the continued embrace and enhancement of technology. NADE helps facilitate training, mentorship, and communication across DDSs to adapt and evolve with these changes.

The Commissioner said that she was pleased to meet with the NADE leadership earlier this year and engage in spirited discussion about some of NADE's priorities for 2015 including budget and hiring, fraud, and focus on customer service. "Your leadership represented you well in our discussion and in their advocacy work on Capitol Hill. Your voices are being heard."

She observed that many of NADE's priorities were aligned with SSA's vision for the future as outlined in the Agency's Vision 2025 Plan. That plan has three priorities: superior customer service, exceptional employees and innovative organization.

Commissioner Colvin observed that NADE works toward and advocates for improvements to customer service, training to develop exceptional employees, and to simplify procedures for improved innovation. She expressed her appreciation for NADE's forward-looking approach.

The Commissioner proudly shared SSA's accomplishments for 2015:

Highlights from FY 2015

- In fiscal year 2015, SSA received \$11.806 billion for our administrative appropriation, which is a \$109 million increase over fiscal year 2014.
- We have been pleased to be able to continue the service improvements started in fiscal year 2014 and to continue to balance our service and stewardship efforts.
- Beginning March 16, we expanded our field office hours by one hour on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. The Agency had previously trimmed \$79 million from its budget by closing 19 Field Offices so the ability to extend operating hours for those remaining was a critical factor in meeting SSA's targeted goals.

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COLVIN HONORS NADE, PRESENTS AT CONFERENCE (cont.)

- SSA plans to hire more administrative law judges and support staff to help with the hearings backlog. SSA is concerned that this backlog, previously successfully tackled, had resurrected itself due to ongoing budget constraints but the Agency hopes to attack the problem early so as to avoid a resurgence of the hearings backlogs.
- The DDSs had an increase in hiring in fiscal year 2014, which enabled replacement of about half of all employee losses from the three previous years when we faced budget cuts and sequestration.
- In fiscal year 2015, the budget provided for one for two hiring replacement. Commissioner Colvin noted she recognized the need in the DDSs for even more hiring above the one for two level and authorized some additional hires for the DDSs.
- The DDSs are working to process our target of 2.767 million initial disability claims and 738,991 reconsideration claims.
- The DDSs are also processing our CDR program integrity workload. This workload was authorized by the Budget Control Act of 2011, and we are working to meeting the target of 790,000 full-medical CDRs – a 50 percent increase from fiscal year 2014.
- The DDSs have done a remarkable job keeping claims processing times relatively stable and pending levels down while adjudicating significantly more CDRs.
- In addition to increasing CDRs, SSA is continuing to invest in our aggressive anti-fraud strategy. The Agency is expanding the number of CDI (Continuing Disability Investigation) units and hopes to have at least one in all states within the next three years (SSA's Inspector General, in testimony before Congress, had previously declared that, "SSA's best defense against fraud is the well-trained disability examiner who has a manageable caseload."). The Commissioner observed that SSA's new Office of Anti-Fraud Programs will provide oversight of and accountability for the Agency's many anti-fraud activities and the National Anti-Fraud Committee will provide guidance to this office.

After reviewing this list of accomplishments, which the Commissioner described as an extraordinary achievement with such a lean budget, the Commissioner looked into the near future to describe what she foresaw for the Agency in Fiscal year 2016:

- The President's Budget, which was released on February 2nd, would provide SSA with \$12.513 billion in fiscal year 2016 for our administrative expenses. The President's Budget request and the budget SSA actually receives from Congress can be quite different. Until a final budget is passed by Congress, the Agency will hope for the best and hope Congress will adopt the budget proposed by the President since it will allow the Agency to improve our service to the American public, modernize our service delivery, and strengthen the integrity of our programs.

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COLVIN HONORS NADE, PRESENTS AT CONFERENCE (cont.)

- SSA remains fully committed to making sure its DDS partners have the resources to balance their important service and stewardship efforts. To that end, the President's budget calls for replacing all DDS personnel losses in fiscal year 2016. The Commissioner emphatically stated she was well aware of the 16.9% attrition in the DDSs and noted we have to stop this bleeding of experience and the threat it poses to the Agency's ability to deliver on its promise of customer service.
- President's budget includes 2.773 million initial disability claims, allowing us to continue to keep up with incoming claims.
- At the same time, we are continuing to increase our program integrity work with an estimate of 908,000 full medical CDRs.
- The request will also allow us to continue to hire more administrative law judges and support staff to help us with the hearings backlog – allowing us to complete a record level of hearings, begin to reduce the volume of hearings pending, and position ourselves to start reducing hearings processing time in fiscal year 2017.
- We will know more about workloads and hiring when we receive a budget from Congress for fiscal year 2016. Congress is dealing with tight spending caps and the possibility of sequestration. The latter would prove to be an administrative nightmare and result in real cuts to customer service. The Commissioner hopes such budget cuts can be avoided but it is not known at this time how the process will develop.

In closing, the Commissioner paused to reflect on the past 80 years, reminding conference attendees that the Agency's birthday was just a few days away. Eighty years ago on August 14, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law with profound and relevant words: "Today, a hope of many years standing is in large part fulfilled... We have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against the loss of a job and against a poverty-ridden old age." In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law amendments to the Social Security Act establishing the Social Security Disability Program. Commissioner Colvin declared, "Together, across the nation, from the past, to the present, and into the future, we continue to embody President Roosevelt's vision of hope and protection for the most vulnerable members of the public."



A PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

Written by Sharon Summers

At the close of his most recent term in office, Jeff Price began his speech by thanking several people, including his family, DDS Administrators, the NADE Membership, the NADE Corporate Members, the 2014-2015 NADE Board of Directors and National Committee Chairpersons/Committee Members. He recognized previous NADE Presidents and previous NADE Board Members who helped to build our organization. He thanked the leadership at the Social Security Administration, the Illinois NADE Chapter who hosted the national conference during his term and the Oregon NADE Chapter who hosted this year's national training conference. He noted attendees in the audience for their efforts as well.



Mr. Price listed several highlights of the past year, including the successful 2014 conference in Springfield, Illinois. He noted NADE and SSA have continued an ongoing dialogue throughout the year to address issues of mutual interest. NADE continues to have ongoing communications with SSA, OMB, SSAB, GAO, Congress, Administrative Conference of the United States (ACUS), Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), NASI, NAS-IOM and many others, he said. NADE presented at a national conference exploring the issues of childhood disability hosted by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Brookings Institution (BI). NADE is also an active participant in National Disability Advocates conference calls hosted quarterly by SSA. The NADE President, President-Elect and Legislative Director met with the Acting Commissioner of Social Security and congressional staff to advocate for issues and concerns expressed by NADE members. NADE prepared and submitted responses, based on member input, for NPRMs and ANPRMs on hematological disorders, expanding the list of acceptable medical sources, and the new musculoskeletal listings. NADE was also asked to serve on an Advisory Committee for the National Academy of Social Insurance on an initiative to improve services and supports for persons with disabilities.

Mr. Price noted one of the benefits of a NADE membership is empowerment to work on the issues that matter while helping others in the process, or the freedom to act. NADE allows members to calibrate their priorities within the bigger picture. Membership in NADE helps us to know, not only what the priorities are, but why. It is knowing the "why" that allows all of us to buy into our DDS priorities and make them our own. NADE allows members to connect through networks; power can reside in one's access to talent. Discovery of a solution to a problem becomes possible when we draw upon an extended network to tackle issues.

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A PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE (CONT.)

Mr. Price noted that NADE offers alternatives to the consequences of heavy production demands:

- Recognition
- Career Advancement
- Professional Certification
- An avenue to increased morale and reduced attrition, two factors needed in any DDS
- Opportunities for members to be involved
- Opportunities for collaboration and innovation

He also noted some of the challenges to NADE's future:

- Increase membership growth and retention
- Completion of 501c(3) tax filing
- A new NADE website coming January 1, 2016
- New income resources
- Increased support from SSA for attendance at NADE training conferences
- Increase NADE's interaction and collaboration with other groups and organizations
- The need to restore State and Regional Training Conferences
- The need to continue professional relationships with SSA, Congress and others toward fostering a national dialogue about the current status and the future of the disability program.

The NADE President concluded by noting that NADE is what it is today because of what was achieved yesterday. He said it will become what we make it because of what we will achieve tomorrow! He encouraged each of us to work together to make tomorrow great! Every NADE member has within themselves the power to make a difference, he said.

"NADE gives you that opportunity. Take it!"



Office of Disability Determinations Focuses on Recruitment for FY 2015

Written by Thomas Gautier

Ms. Ann Robert spoke at the conference about the Office of Disability Determinations (ODD). ODD is the liaison between SSA and DDS offices, promoting discussions about budget, training, policy, and advocacy on behalf of the DDS.

Ms. Robert started her presentation by thanking all the NADE members for the work we do on a daily basis and is able to understand what we are facing with our workload from being a former disability examiner, DDS Administrator, and NADE member herself. NADE President, President-Elect, and Legislative Director have a quarterly conference call with Ms. Robert to discuss the top issues DDS's are facing and NADE's viewpoint on those topics.



Ms. Ann Robert spoke briefly about the disability workload for this year and how they have tried to limit on shifting workloads but still being able to meet the budget. For the 2015 FY, we have closed 84.6% initials so far, 84.5% reconsiderations so far, and 89.8% CDRs so far, this year. She provided us with DDS staffing numbers to show we have been lucky the past 2 years with the budget for hiring about 3000 in 2014 and over 900 in 2015. Although those numbers are good, we have not gone without losing staff as well with around 1,480 lost in Disability agencies, and of that number, 1,180 disability examiners this fiscal year.

ODD is hoping to revitalize a workgroup to come up with strategies and solutions for recruitment and retention of DDS employees, by the start of the new fiscal year in October. There was an examiners experience survey done recently showing almost 50% of examiners across the nation have less than 5 years' experience. The hope is to brainstorm and come up with best practical ways to recruit and retain DDS staff for years to come.

Ms. Robert also spoke on a number of various topics to interest us on what is coming in the months and years ahead. They are currently working with 57 health care organizations to bring them on board with Health Information Technology (HIT), and hoping to increase HIT sources in the near future. They are continuing the process with HSPD-12 and hope to have all DDS's completed by the calendar year 2016. SSA decided not to move forward with releasing DCPS Beta 5.0 in production. Despite an extended test and fix period, critical problems continued to surface, and the software failed to deliver working key features.

SSA is in the process of working with experts to develop a core process and hope to have a layout in place by the end of 2016.

NANCY BERRYHILL DISCUSSES DEDICATION AND UNCERTAINTY

Written by Jennifer Nottingham

Nancy Berryhill, Deputy Commissioner for Operations, shared the national landscape during the conference. Nancy began by thanking the NADE members for their continued hard work and dedication to the public service. Nancy reminded us that the DDSs are the lifeline of the disability program, serving the public each and every day.

As we are entering into the last few weeks of the fiscal year, Nancy thanked everyone for ensuring that the new hires were on board and encouraged everyone to use the remaining hours of overtime. She then began to talk about the unknowns of the FY16 budget. At this time, we don't know whether there will be a "continuing resolution" or not and we don't know the impact of a "potential sequestration". As we move into FY16, we will be in a hiring and overtime freeze.

Nancy talked about a newer unit at SSA called the Workload Support Unit or WSU. The WSUs are responsible for processing retirement claims that are filed online. In a few locations, Denver, Birmingham and Kansas City, the WSUs are also piloting completing disability claims. Nancy expects the pilot to expand to a few other locations such as Durham, Chicago, New York, Seattle and San Francisco to allow for workload balancing in the country.



Nancy encouraged everyone to establish a [my Social Security account](#). You will want a [my Social Security account](#) to:

- Keep track of your earnings and verify them every year;
- Get an estimate of your future benefits if you are still working;
- Get a letter with proof of your benefits if you currently receive them; and
- Manage your benefits:
- Change your address;
- Get a replacement Medicare card; and
- Get a replacement SSA-1099 or SSA-1042S for tax season.

Setting up an account is quick, secure, and easy.

Nancy mentioned that the agency continues to look for efficient work processes by developing a "Smart Claim" application, developing a message center and using customer engagement tools like click to talk.

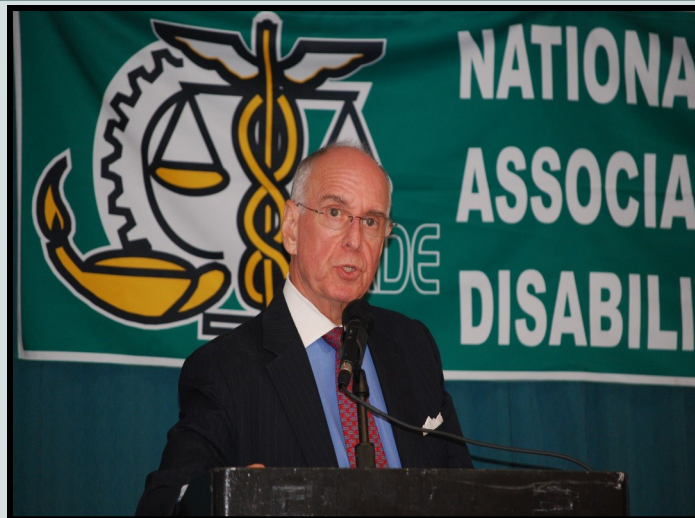
In closing, she thanked everyone for serving the public with care and compassion.

U.S. Inspector General Touts CDI Units, New and Old

Written by Todd Deshong

Social Security Inspector General Patrick O'Carroll thrilled attendees at the 2015 Portland National Training Conference with stories of several fraud cases, including the case of a disability applicant who was a reality TV star from "Deadliest Catch."

The Inspector General thanked the DDS community for its assistance in identifying potentially fraudulent cases. The OIG couldn't do its work without DDS, he said, because DDS offices screen applications at the front end, pursue CDRs, and refer allegations to either a Cooperative Disability Investigations (CDI) Unit or the OIG itself. O'Carroll said it was critical for the two components to work together to preserve funds for people who were rightly eligible to receive them.



The Inspector General said the CDI program was about to enter its 19th year of operation. He stated that CDI's success was due in large part to the outstanding partnership between the OIG, SSA, DDS, and local law enforcement agencies across the country. In the first nine months of fiscal year 2015, CDI had saved a projected \$340 million for SSA's programs.

He reported that there were 28 CDI units covering 24 states and Puerto Rico and said units opened in Detroit, Baltimore, and Providence in the past year. Since the National Training Conference, SSA and the OIG opened new CDI units in Little Rock and Des Moines, bringing CDI to 30 units. CDI is also close to opening units in Miami, St. Paul, and Charleston, West Virginia. The Inspector General said plans call for the opening of four more units by the end of 2016, bringing CDI to 37 units.

O'Carroll noted that Oregon's CDI unit in Salem was one of the five original CDI units. The Salem unit began investigating disability claims in August 1999. He expressed his appreciation for the Oregon Department of Justice, which has assisted in investigating disability claims.

He reminded attendees of the conference that if they were at a DDS that did not have access to a CDI unit, they could still submit fraud allegations to OIG agents, through the e-8551 form on the SSA Intranet. OIG investigators evaluate every fraud referral. SSA recently released a National Anti-Fraud Training video that provides a step-by-step guide to completing e-8551 reports.

The OIG is hopeful that its Regional Disability Fraud Pilot, launched in 2013, will follow the success of the CDI program, according to the Inspector General. These units employ data mining and analysis, focusing on questionable disability claims involving doctors, lawyers, interpreters or other third parties in the claims process. The first fraud pilot sites were established in Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Oakland and Phoenix, with new units recently added in Kansas City and St. Louis.

Office of Disability Policy Focuses on Effectiveness, Transparency

Written by Janet Geeslin

NADE was honored to have Gina Clemons, Associate Commissioner for the Office of Disability Policy (ODP), and Jennifer Pecora, a technical expert from the Office of Vocational Evaluation and Process Policy, speak at the 2015 NADE training conference. ODP is involved in just about every aspect of the disability program (as the name would suggest) and the responsibilities of the ODP staff are vast and varied.

Gina explained that ODP's goal is to create effective policy that is efficient, empowers individuals with disabilities and minimizes hardships, and is consistent with statutory intent. She stressed the importance of SSA disability policy decisions being transparent and data driven (evidence based). She then shared the process involved in determining whether a policy action is required through to fruition and monitoring.



Left: Gina Clemmons, Right: Jennifer Pecora

- Step 1: Detection – Scan the external environment for improvement opportunities as well as in coming claims and data for anomalies.
- Step 2: Identify – Look to research and stakeholder input for best practices and to identify internal suspect areas.
- Step 3: Investigate – Conduct a more in-depth assessment to assess the possibility of capitalizing on an opportunity and to pinpoint the root cause of suspect areas.
- Step 4: Understand – Work with internal and external stakeholders to develop a holistic understanding of an issue and determine if additional steps are needed.
- Step 5: Formulate a Resolution – The resolution can vary from proposing a policy change to identifying a training need to deciding that more research is needed.
- Step 6: Implement Plan - As with formulating a resolution, this step can range from writing a new policy to creating new user tools, or even determining that even large research efforts are required.
- Step 7: Monitor – Conduct analysis to ensure that the desired change (see step 6) occurred.

Ms. Clemons also shared the top eleven disability work objectives that support ODPs strategic goals.

All are encouraged to visit their intranet site <http://ordp.ba.ad.ssa.gov/ODP/content/office-disability-policy-odp> to learn more about how ODP is helping us help others. Please also see the “Disability Policy in Motion” conference handout on NADE’s home page: <http://www.nade.org/>.

Office of Research, Demonstration and Employment Support Joins With U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to Replace D.O.T.

Written by Malcolm Stoughtenborough



Cindy Duzan, SSA Office of Research, Demonstration and Support

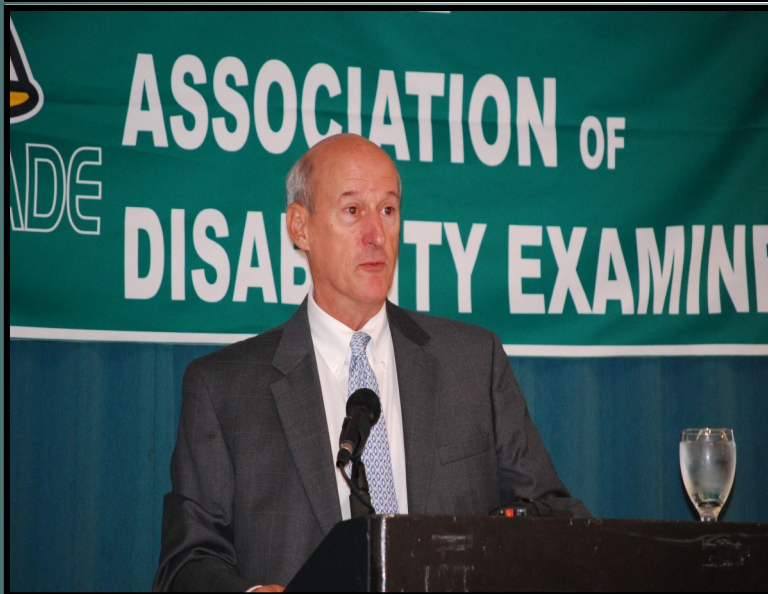


Phil Doyle, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

In July of 2012, SSA signed an agreement with Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to develop and test occupational data collection methods that could lead to the development of a new Occupational Informational System (OIS). The OIS will replace the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) that we currently use in our disability adjudication process. The new OIS will include many occupational descriptors similar to those currently used in the DOT. The OIS will expand on DOT information by describing basic mental and cognitive work requirements with more details regarding occupations skill ratings and exertional levels. This new system will reduce the number of listed occupations from the current 12,000 in the DOT to approximately 1,000 in the new OIS.

The mission of the BLS is described as AORTA: A-Accurate, O-Objective, R-Relevant, T-Timely and A-Accessible. The Department of Labor (DOL) first developed the DOT in the late 1930's to match job seekers to jobs. For the past 50 years the DOT has been SSA's primary source for occupational information. The DOL discontinued updating the DOT in 1991. The OIS will be updated regularly to reflect changes in occupational requirements and provide information about new or obsolete occupations. The OIS will integrate with the current SSA system, be web-based and available for public access at no cost. This public data will be the same as the disability programs will use for disability adjudications. Training for adjudicators on the new OIS system is expected to begin in 2016.

An ALJ Perspective From Deputy Chief John Allen



Written by Crystal Bach

A featured speaker at the 2015 NADE National Conference with a presentation on "An ALJ Perspective" was Deputy Chief Administrative Law Judge John Allen, who supports and shares oversight responsibility with the Chief Administrative Law Judge for SSA's national hearing operation.

Judge Allen was appointed Administrative Law Judge in April 2008 and was initially assigned to the Columbus OH hearing office. Thereafter, Judge Allen was appointed Hearing Office Chief ALJ for the Columbus OH hearing office in October 2009.

Judge Allen said ODAR and ODD are working on better communication between ODAR and the DDS offices. "Public service in our world is different," he said. "ALJs are eyeball to eyeball, person to person."

When he became an ALJ in 2008, the wait time for a hearing was 2 ½ years. Now it appears ODAR's backlog has returned, with 1,059,000 cases pending.

"Why the backlog?" he asked. He chuckled to the audience, "It's your fault! You need to meet the goals each fiscal year." He said the primary way out of the backlog problem is to hire more judges.

Judge Allen said judges are asked to adjudicate 500-700 cases a year. Most do hear 500 cases per year. He said hearings can last 45 minutes to an hour. And it may take 2-3 hours to prepare. ALJs on average conduct 5-6 hearings in a day. Typically in the hearing room are the judge, claimant, claimant's representative, and a hearing monitor. Judge Allen said most reps are helpful and some even turn in memorandums that walk you through the case and point out specific medical evidence. There also may be a vocational expert and a medical expert on hand.

He said there are 5 National Hearing Centers where judges hear cases only by video. And there are multiple regional hearing centers. He said the average processing time for ODAR is 472 days.

Judge Allen also indicated that the Agree Rate was in the 70s, but now is in the high 80s. He said the Agree Rate measures those cases that are denied then appealed but not remanded. This rate does not look at fully favorable determinations. He said that means we are not hearing those cases again. Last year, the agency saved about \$2,500 times 11,000 claimants as a result of cases that were not remanded due to improvements in the quality of decision making.

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Dr. Carolyn Aldwin Presents on the Effects of Stress on Aging and Recovery

Written by Meggen Gladue

Dr. Aldwin has committed her research to the effects of stress and coping in search of what we can do to keep our population aging in a healthy way. She has found that our environment and the choices that we make will dictate the way we age. It is these factors, combined with our resources, that will shape our ability to respond to stress.

In order to reach optimal aging, Dr. Aldwin explained that we must have a combination of avoiding disease and disability, high cognitive and physical function, and engagement with life. Given that we are in the midst of the “Silver Tsunami”, learning the steps we can take to age as healthy as possible is becoming increasingly important.



Stress, and how we cope, can be a key element in the aging process. Stress impacts our neuroendocrine and immune systems, which can then impact every cell in the body. Biogerontologists define aging as the process our body goes through when our ability manage stress decreases. Stress itself can be defined as any demand that taxes or exceeds an individual's resources. Dr. Aldwin has studied the impact of trauma, life events and daily stressors on individuals of different age groups. She found that there are large differences in how older individuals cope with trauma and daily hassles; in that older individuals reported fewer daily stressors. There was no significant difference across the age groups in how individuals deal with life events such as marriage, divorce, a new job, etc. Overall, she found that the amount of people who experience a decrease of stress with age depends on the individual. In general, your perceived amount of hassles decreases until around age 64, at which point it has been shown to start increasing again.

When looking at mortality rates when compared to stress, it was found that people who experience a high level of stress were 50% more likely to die than those who experience a low level of stress. Those who experience a moderate level of stress were also noted to be 44% more likely to die than those with low stress. Interestingly, she also found that individuals who abstain from alcohol are 40% more likely to die than those who imbibe in moderation. Married men were discovered to have a 40% higher chance of living longer than single men. Marriage was not shown to have a significant protective factor for women.

Stress will always be linked in comparison to the individual and their environment. Resilience is the ability to recognize, utilize, and develop or modify resources at the individual, community and societal levels. Resilience in those who suffer from a disability can significantly expand their life span.

Dr. Aldwin praised Social Security as being the most successful program in improving the aging process “bar none” by increasing longevity and individuals functional ability later in life.

An ALJ Perspective (cont.)

He said the hearing can be a difficult hour for claimants, and judges need to work on their people skills. The claimant could be angry or terrified to be there.

The hearing is important to assess the claimant's credibility. He said the judge might ask the claimant if he/she has a Facebook page. This is not to mean the judge will go to that page but it can give an indication of if the claimant has keyboard skills, cognitive abilities or literacy. The claimant might claim to be agoraphobic, but testimony might reveal whether he/she has friends, goes to school events, goes camping or hunting. Under-reporting might actually be the claimant's problem.

ODAR has increased its training and has quarterly sessions. Judge Allen said improper RFCs are the #1 reason for remands nationally. Judges are also being taught to be precise in their language.

In conclusion, he said, "We ALJs do what you do, we just do it differently."

Johnson: NADE is a Bridge Between NCDDD and DDS

Written by Kimberly Underwood

Vicki Johnson, the past president of the National Council of Disability Determination Directors (NCDDD), presented at the NADE conference and spoke of the agency's concerns and goals. In keeping with the theme of the conference, "NADE: Your Bridge to Excellence," she discussed the importance of knowing "which bridge to cross and which bridge to burn."

NCDDD presented a strategic hiring plan to SSA, Johnson said, which was ultimately deemed not feasible.

However, discussions with SSA regarding the staffing of DDS offices are ongoing. NCDDD also continues to work with SSA on policy simplification. The organization is pleased that SSA procured the services of US Digital Services to work on DCPS.



Finally, Johnson touted NADE as a NCDDD's bridge to working with and representing DDS employees. NCDDD looks forward to working with NADE on secession planning, coaching and mentoring for DDS staff.

Diagnosis of Neurodevelopmental Disabilities in Children, Dr. Peter Blasco

Written by Betsy Slease

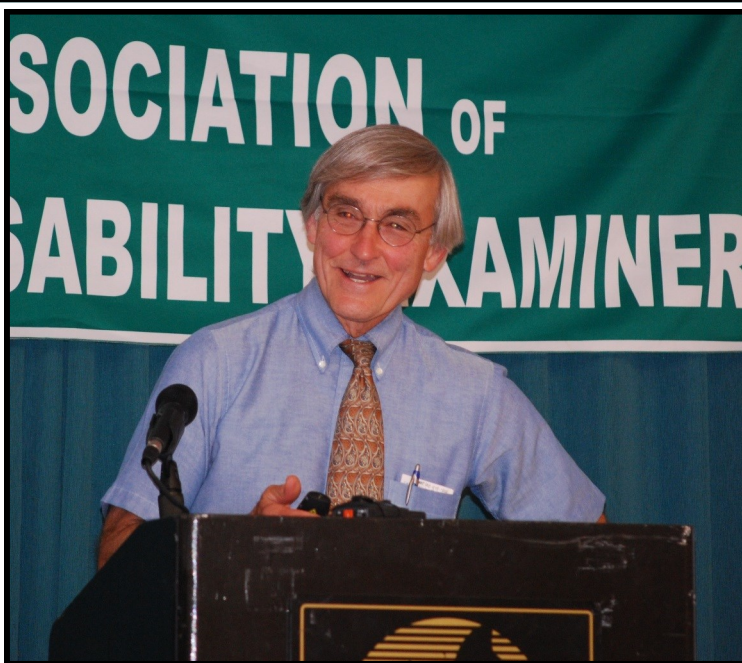
Peter A. Blasco, MD discussed the framework for diagnosing neurodevelopmental problems, steps in the diagnosis, and utility of some commonly used developmental tests. His perspective is from the clinical, diagnosing side of the disability process and not an examiner's perspective. Commonly seen neurodevelopmental disabilities include intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, ADD, Language Impairments, autism, blindness, deafness, and chronic childhood neurological disorders.

These disabilities are diagnosed using a *clinical* diagnosis, meaning that they are based on a neurological exam and functioning. There are no definitive imaging tests, such as x-rays, to diagnose many of these disorders. When diagnosing these disorders, there are often two diagnostic levels. The first level is the "problem diagnosis" which answers the question "What's the problem?" The second level is the "cause diagnosis" which answers the question "What is the cause of the problem?"

Developmental Disabilities can be caused anything that injures the brain. Congenital causes include genetic, such as down syndrome; infections, toxic or metabolic issues, or unexplained central nervous system malformations. Acquired causes include perinatal, such as hypoxic-ischemic insult; head trauma, spinal cord injury, infection, such as meningitis or encephalitis; neoplasm, toxic or metabolism issues, or other diseases such as CVA's, nutritional deficiency, or collagen vascular disease.

When a developmental disorder is being evaluated by a doctor, they typically look at three developmental categories: cognitive or intelligence, motor competence, and behavior issues. These categories are evaluated by the combination of the child's history, physical exam, neurodevelopmental exam, labs, imaging tests, and consults to other doctors.

The best predictor of cognitive function is a child's early language, followed by their problem solving skills. Motor milestones are irrelevant when making an assessment of cognitive functioning. Cognitive tests include IQ testing (Stanford-Binet, WISC, etc), academic achievement testing (Woodcock-Johnson, Kaufman), language testing (PLS, CELF, etc), and problem-solving tests (fine-motor or visual-motor, or perceptual-motor tests).



(continued, p. 17)

Peter Blasco, MD (cont.)

Tests scores that fall 2 standard deviations below the mean are abnormal. Age equivalents are more useful. However, in the clinical setting, the Developmental Quotient (DQ) can be used to make an IQ estimate for infants or young children prior to the age of 5. The DQ is determined by adding the language age and problem-solving age together, then dividing the sum by the child's chronological age.

Common motor tests in the clinical setting include the Peabody Gross Motor (GMQ), Peabody Fine Motor (FMQ), and Bruininks-Oserestky to determine the skill age. When reviewing these tests, look for the motor age. While motor quotients are often listed, they tend to be inflated. The motor age is a more precise measurement.

Common function tests, or tests to help evaluate behavior include the Vineland and Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS). These tests give functional scores in communication and social skills.

There are also tests available that measure symptoms for ADHD, depression, anxiety, autism, etc. These tests give a general impression, but it is up to the psychologist to interpret and give a diagnostic impression.

When all of these pieces are gathered and analyzed by a specialist in neurodevelopmental disabilities, a diagnosis can be made and a child can be treated for their disability.

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"NADE: MILE HIGH EXCELLENCE"

On Pain and Pain Management, M. Weimer, DO

Written by Lisa Hayes

Dr. Melissa Weimer, an Assistant Professor of Medicine at the prestigious Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) began her presentation with a staggering statistic: over 116 million Americans suffer from chronic pain, at a cost of over \$600 billion per year— a higher cost than that of cancer or diabetes.

She explained that Pain is a sensory and emotional experience that is associated with nerve and tissue damage. Types of pain include nociceptors that detect signals from the damaged tissue and respond, inflammatory pain, neuropathic pain that is caused by the damage affecting the somatosensory nervous system, and finally non inflammatory/non neuropathic pain, which mean no known tissue or nerve damage. People with chronic pain can have long lasting problems that adversely affect their daily function and quality of life. Mere analgesics sometimes just do not work. In severe cases, opioid pain medications may be the only effective course.



Chronic pain is shaped by several different factors such as genetics, mood, motivation, and bio-psycho social factors. She gave us two patients as examples, Darryl and Tracy. Darryl (age 56) was injured on the job in 2000 after being a successful business owner. During the months he was in severe pain, he quit exercising, socializing, and gained 50 lbs; he became depressed as well, and quit trying to care for himself. Dr. Weimer noted he has had much difficulty getting past the symptoms and finding the motivation to do something about his pain. Tracy (age 43) has intractable migraines for the past five years. She has four children, but spends most of her time in bed or in a dark room. She has been in and out of emergency rooms for acute treatment.

Dr. Weimer discussed that both of these patients have been stuck in the fear-avoidance cycle. This means that they avoid any movements or activities based on fear, which then results in deconditioning. For many people, this will eventually lead to disability. Treatments have included Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, hypnosis, manipulation, and yoga. Patients following CBT have reported that their pain has been cut in half.

She ended her presentation with a quote: "Pain is mandatory, suffering is optional." She invited the audience to explore more information on pain mechanics with a visit to www.scopeofpain.com.

WINNER OF THE EARL B. THOMAS AWARD: CHARLES A. JONES, LANSING, MICHIGAN DDS

The **Earl B. Thomas Award** is presented annually in the name of a charter member of NADE who actively supported NADE as an association of disability professionals.

Charles A. Jones started out as an examiner in 1970 and has worked his way up to DDS administrator. He is responsible for the DDS and the state Medicaid/Disability Programs, and the retirement unit, which processes state disability and retirement disability claims. He oversaw the merging of both programs after the Affordable Care Act changed the Medicaid qualifications. He has always encouraged the participation in NADE and recognizes NADE's value. Despite his own demanding schedule, he attends chapter meetings. He has been a presenter at and attended state training conferences. He attended the last regional conference. He is supportive and encouraging of all staff to attend training conferences, regardless of their NADE member status. Even in difficult economic climates, he has approved administrative leave for his employees to attend national, regional, and state Training Conferences. He is a strong leader, committed to the disability program and dedicated to public service.



Lansing, MADE president Michelle Ferris presents Charles A. Jones with his award

WINNER OF THE NADE AWARD: CELESTE LILLY, N. CAROLINA DDS

The **NADE Award** honors and recognizes the disability professional of the year who has made outstanding contributions not only to the service of the claimant, but also has contributed substantially of his time and talent to promote harmonious and more effective working relationships among his immediate professional community.



Celeste Lilly was the founding president of the NADE Chapter in her Midwestern DDS and was recognized by NADE as "Rookie of the Year" for her involvement and for the quality of her work as a Disability Examiner. Since moving to her current DDS, she has served as the editor of the chapter newsletter for two years and chaired many of the chapter's committees, including the social committee, membership committee and the ways and means committee. As a Disability Specialist III, Celeste does not forget that her primary focus must be on her job performance where she maintains an "outstanding" rating. The DDS management has asked her to mentor trainees in their casework, assist them in the organization of their work, and provide helpful tips and cues to effectively and efficiently manage their caseload. Through her assistance, these trainees were able to organize their work more effectively and keep their caseloads at a manageable level. Celeste is tenacious in obtaining MER and going the extra mile to search for records that may be hard to obtain.

WINNER OF THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD: ALABAMA DDS

The **President's Award** is presented by the NADE President each year in recognition of an outstanding chapter.



From left: Tena Fleming, Jeff Price and Maria Whiting

During the past year, **Alabama** sponsored and participated in many activities. Here are just a few:

- In celebration of Labor Day and the theme, "Fruits of Your Labors," AADE provided fresh fruit to the DDS staff to thank them for their hard work.
- In October, the chapter sold breast cancer awareness T-shirts and had a weeklong awareness campaign to raise funds for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. The chapter had a walking team for the Komen Breast Cancer Walk and donated almost \$500.00 in all, and sold \$1,200 of the t-shirts to help the foundation. Many other pink-themed activities accentuated the week including a pink gift basket raffled off and won by an employee whose relative was fighting breast cancer.
- In November, the chapter hosted a Luncheon for their agency veterans; they held a food drive for local charities and held a bake sale; they held several successful memberships drives, including a presentation of the "Five Top Reasons to Become a NADE Member," written by NADE President Jeff Price.
- In March, they enjoyed dress casual days, and a Mardi Gras Casual Week. The chapter hosted a St. Patrick's Day casual week fundraiser and funds were donated to the Autism Awareness Foundation in preparation for Autism Awareness Month.

WINNER OF THE CHARLES O. BLALOCK AWARD: THOMAS GAUTIER, N. CAROLINA DDS

The **Charles O. Blalock Award** is presented annually in the name of the founder of NADE. It is made in recognition of an individual who has made extended efforts and major contributions toward the organizational advancement of NADE. This award is generally regarded as the second highest individual award presented by NADE for service to the organization.

Thomas Gautier has been employed as a DDS Disability Examiner for more than six years. His commitment to a strong work ethic led his immediate supervisor to describe him as, “ABSOLUTELY WORTHY (of this award)!” His dedication to NADE is demonstrated by his rapid rise within his Chapter, Region and at the National level. He is widely recognized because of his leadership qualities and his ability to bring together competing personalities to work as a team.

NADE members in his Region chose him to serve as the President-elect of the Region in 2013-2014, and then to serve as the Regional President in 2014-2015. Across the nation, his humble nature has failed to keep him hidden and he has attracted much attention, including from his fellow chapter presidents who elected him in 2014 to serve as their Chairperson for NADE’s Council of Chapter Presidents, a position that includes service on the NADE Board of Directors.



In spite of the increased commitment of time and effort required for him to perform his duties for NADE, his work as a Disability Examiner has not been adversely affected. He has managed to remain one of the top performing disability examiners in his DDS!

WINNER OF THE DIRECTOR'S AWARD: ELIZABETH HOOKS, ALABAMA DDS

The **Director's Award** honors and recognizes an outstanding member of the support staff who demonstrates work performance efficiency and characteristics, which contribute to the operation of the unit and the morale of coworkers.



Elizabeth Hooks is active in her chapter activities including chairing several committees. She serves every day as an example to other members of the DDS that even the smallest actions can be a great help when it comes to furthering NADE's cause. As a long-time member of NADE, she has consistently provided input concerning raising funds and awareness for the organization. Some of the tasks she has successfully assisted with include Breast Cancer Research Fundraising, National Disability Professionals Week Celebrations, Food Drive and Bake Sales, and a Casual Day Tickets Sales. Daily she serves as a liaison between disability examiners and claimants to make sure that the claimants' needs for assistance are fully met. She completes her work both independently and accurately, and still finds time to assist in any capacity with NADE organization functions within her office.

WINNER OF THE LEWIS BUCKINGHAM AWARD: TONYA SCOTT, GEORGIA DDS

The **Lewis Buckingham Award** is to honor and recognize a leader of the National Association of Disability Examiners at the National level; this award is generally regarded as the highest individual award presented by NADE for service to the national organization.

Tonya Scott has been a member of her chapter since 2001. She has served as Treasurer for her chapter during the period 2006 to 2010 and served as president during the period of 2010-2011, and is currently serving as president. She has served on multiple chapter committees, including being the chairperson for the ways and means committee and membership committee. She spearheaded the Wall of Fame in honor of those within the organization who have served in the Armed Forces. The Wall of Fame is generally displayed during the month of November in observance of Veterans' Day. Tonya has served on the NADE Board from 2009 to the present. She takes her responsibilities with the highest regard and completes her tasks with the utmost professionalism. She has a passion for cancer research in all forms, and is an active participant in fundraisers for this cause. In her community, she serves as a member of the Physical and Mental Health Committee, which provides health information and screenings for the public.



WINNER OF THE FRANK BARCLAY AWARD: FRED FERGUSON, N. CAROLINA DDS

The **Frank Barclay Award** recognizes an individual who has demonstrated exceptional ability to personally, or through the development and promotion of programs, motivate and challenge personnel in a disability program and/or in their personal and professional growth.

Fred Ferguson (no photo available) was quickly promoted from an Examiner I position to an Examiner II position in 1999 and then to an Examiner III position in 2002. He was then assigned to be a Quality Assurance Analyst. In 2014, he was promoted to supervisor of the DDS Training Department, with responsibility for training new employees and overseeing the ongoing training for experienced staff. He has consistently been assigned duties and responsibilities that exceed those normally expected of an individual serving in his position, and is frequently called upon to assist the agency in providing training to all staff. Because of his natural leadership on projects within the DSS and the Region, Fred was selected for a special leadership class conducted by our parent agency in 2011-2012. He is always willing to step up and help with events throughout the agency, whether to chair the Wellness Committee, moving furniture, or grilling hot dogs for the Employees' Appreciation Day. His professionalism in the work environment consistently shows his ability to enhance the image of SSA, the DDS, and the Parent Agency.

WINNER OF THE MARTY BLUM ROOKIE AWARD: PAULA GRAY, N. CAROLINA DDS

The **Marty Blum Rookie of the Year Award** honors a disability professional who has made a significant contribution to a local, regional and or national level to the National Association of Disability Examiners.

Paula Gray has served in a vital role in the short amount of time she has been a NADE member. She is always called upon to give her opinion and advice within the organization. Everyone within her local chapter and her DDS has great respect for her. She participates in and leads several chapter committees. She takes her job as an examiner very seriously and treats every applicant for disability with respect and compassion. Her involvement outside of work includes spending time with her two young boys and all the many activities they enjoy. The state agency and NADE are fortunate to have such a caring and dedicated individual as a team member. Her service to others and her exceptional work ethic make her worthy of the Marty Blum Award for Rookie of the Year.



NC DDS Director, Mike Kaess, presents
Paula with her award

WINNER OF THE JOHN GORDON AWARD: MARJORIE GARCIA, OREGON DDS

The **John Gordon Award** is presented to honor and recognize superior performance of a supervisor.

Marjorie Garcia is not only a DDS supervisor, but also has been her chapter president twice, and remains active in several committees. She has served as a DDS delegate to the Pacific Regional Conference (2011), a facilitator in the NADE 2009 Pacific Regional Conference panel discussion and has enjoyed attending many national conferences over the years. Her staff report that she continues to demonstrate growth and professionalism through programs offered via NADE and the NADE chapter such that today Marjorie is a well-respected member of the DDS management team. She has not forgotten the NADE trajectory and has demonstrated superior performance as a supervisor by mentoring and supporting staff in her branch, across the DDS and beyond. As a leader, Marjorie is conscientious, hardworking, and fun-loving.



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Letters to the Editor and story ideas are welcome. All correspondence should be directed to the editor by November 1st for inclusion in the fall issue.

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