

## LTC Shannon Merkle takes command of Dunham Army Health Clinic

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*COL Jennifer Saenz (center) passes Dunham Army Health Clinic colors to MEDDAC Cdr COL Tracy Michael who will pass to incoming commander LTC Shannon Merkle (left), June 17, 2021 at Carlisle Barracks, completing Saenz's 2-year command.*



*Lt. Col. Shannon Merkle takes command of the Dunham Army Health Clinic and its associated regional clinics at a change of command ceremony, at the Carlisle Barracks Golf Course, Thursday, June 17 at 9 a.m.*

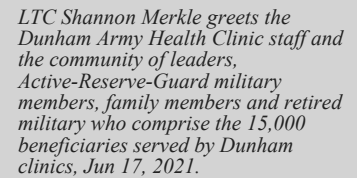
Carlisle Barracks, Pa. – The change of command for Dunham U.S. Army Health Clinic inspired reflections on the commander, the time, and the challenge. “She served at a time when it mattered the most ... one of the most challenging and unsettling times in our nation’s history,” said Col. Tracy Michael, Fort Meade MEDDAC Commander, who officiated a ceremony that echoed with credits to the strength of teamwork.

Passing the colors, outgoing commander Col. Jennifer Saenz signified transfer of command to Lt. Col. Shannon Merkle in a traditional ceremony June 17 at Carlisle Barracks, witnessed by community members and the employees of Dunham Clinic at Carlisle Barracks and its associated clinics: Fillmore Clinic at New Cumberland Army Depot, Fort Indiantown Gap Troop Medical Clinic, and the occupational health clinic at Letterkenny Army Depot.



*COL Jennifer Saenz expresses gratitude & admiration for the nearly 200 staff of Dunham Army Health Clinic, Fillmore Clinic, Fort Indiantown Gap Troop Clinic and the occupational health services at Letterkenny Army Depot, at June 17, 2021 command chan*





*LTC Shannon Merkle greets the Dunham Army Health Clinic staff and the community of leaders, Active-Reserve-Guard military members, family members and retired military who comprise the 15,000 beneficiaries served by Dunham clinics, Jun 17, 2021.*

“Your calm, caring and compassionate leadership helped steady this team to do what the Carlisle Barracks community needed, what Army medicine required, and what our Army expects of great leaders,” said Michael.

“Jennifer Saenz and her team have led us through a proverbial storm,” said Michael, he said about the team of more than 200 military and civilian clinicians and support personnel providing care for nearly 12,000 beneficiaries of Pennsylvania’s only military treatment facility, while ensuring health readiness for nearly 3,000 military personnel assigned to the region.

**Col. Jennifer Saenz** spoke of gratitude and respect for the Dunham team’s dedication and commitment to beneficiaries.

“The unknown and unpredictable pandemic ... tested us in ways we could never have imagined – something that affected not only us at work but it affected our families and our way of life,” said Saenz.

“You amaze me every day with your professionalism, work ethic and positive attitude. You’ve been challenged, pulled out of your comfort zone, given multiple competing missions, all equally important – none voluntary.

“Everyone stepped up,” she said.

Saenz maintained patient support throughout her two years in command, while directing and implementing immunizations, testing, mitigation plans and policies in support of the military and beneficiary population of four Army installations. She directed planning and execution of COVID vaccinations for healthcare beneficiaries and DoD employees, managed COVID testing for Army War College student cohorts and at-risk personnel, counselled the Army War College and Carlisle Barracks in safe, healthy COVID mitigation measures to enable continued operations of the strategic education mission, and maintained patient support throughout the period.

The Army promoted Saenz to colonel in April 2021, and has assigned her to next serve at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, as USCENTCOM Chief Nurse and Chief of Managed Care.

“The Dunham Clinic is the largest, most diverse and most complex clinic within the Fort Meade Medical Dept. Activity, serving the most deserving group of people ... our soldiers, our families, and all of our beneficiaries who have served,” noted Tracy.

Merkle spoke of her first impressions of the Dunham team. “You are an

adaptive, resilient, courageous team that puts patient needs and community health needs first,” she said.

**Lt. Col. Shannon Merkle** started her Army career in 1999 as an Army medic, and was commissioned an Army Reserve officer in 2002, and returned to the Active Army in 2010. She has served at the Army Center for Initial Military Training as the chief of Holistic Health and Fitness-Non-physical Domains Division. She was deputy chief of the Military Performance Division at the USA Research Institute of Environmental Medicine. She commanded the detachment at the 4224 US Army Hospital, Iowa; Officer-in-Charge of a Level II Concussion Care Center in Regional Command East, Afghanistan, and Chief of the Occupational Therapy Clinic at Moncrief Army Community Hospital, Ft. Jackson, SC.

Merkle earned a master’s degree in Occupational Therapy from Washington University, St Louis, Mo., and a Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Science from the University of Iowa. She is a board certified hand therapist.

Among other awards and decorations, Merkle has been awarded the Bronze Star Medal and Purple Heart. She earned the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Combat Action Badge and Expert Field Medical Badge.