It was the Physicians’ Desk Reference® (PDR) that first inspired LTC Jasper Watkins III to seek training in the pharmaceutical field. Living in Okinawa, Japan, where his father was stationed as a military cook, Watkins was selected to participate in a pharmacy youth week program. Thus, he often observed going over this cryptic book, and he was intrigued. “Instead of being the one to quiz the book, I wanted to be the one to comprehend the book,” said Watkins.

To further explore his interest in medicine, Watkins spent his massage time working at a pharmacy dock. “I had been around pharmacy for a long time. I didn’t frighten me. I went into pharmacy with my eyes wide open, instead of wide shut,” said the marathon runner who runs up to five miles at 5 a.m. each day.

After spending his childhood living at military bases across the United States, Watkins never thought about a military career until he decided on a career in pharmacy, which is the last line of defense in detecting the root of a health problem when traditional diagnostic procedures stop. “The Army allowed him to pursue his specialized focus and offered a residency, which led him to become the first African American pharmacist to be board-certified and licensed by way of an American Society of Health-System Pharmacists residency.

Safety with medicine use also has been a core focus for Watkins. Throughout his 22 years in the military, he has traveled around the world as part of a multidisciplinary health care team, mining health care providers on emerging medical safety tools. “There is a continuous need for us to maintain competency in the practice of pharmacy,” he said. “There are now drugs being released each day. We need to maintain education competence and cultural awareness as to their effects,” he said.

Pharmacists, he believes, must continue to be advocates and collaborators with other health care organizations to address disparities in health care, as in particular the medication use process. “The same drug can affect each person differently. For those with dietary issues or certain religious beliefs, such as fasting between sunrise and sunset on certain days, it can affect their treatment. We have to figure out ways to address patients by relating their medications to their daily activities,” said Watkins.

The military has allowed Watkins to practice in many areas, from the front lines, to administration and policy, to administering medications. “It is my goal to be part of the health care team that creates a standard of excellence that delivers quality pharmaceutical service and leadership in support of readiness and managed care missions of the Army.”

Watkins also volunteers his time to speak to medical students about trends in pharmacy practice because he believes it is important to give back, especially to his alma mater, Florida A&M University, where his daughter, Aja, is studying to be a nurse. And when he’s not traveling, he’s on the sidelines watching his son, Jasper Watkins IV, play high school football and run track. “He says I’m his favorite fan.”

ONE GOAL: To Protect
“We have to figure out ways to address patients by relating their medications to their daily activities.”

3 1865: The Quakers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, take their first known public stand against slavery.


5 1886: Krsna, a stunt performer, is arrested by authorities during the Chicago Race Riot.

6 1961: Lester McKinnie, the first black to own a dairy farm in the United States, is named to the National Dairy Council.

7 1977: Roberta Flack wins five Grammy Awards.

8 1989: The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of affirmative action programs.


10 1865: Congress passes the 13th Amendment.

11 1898: The U.S. Supreme Court agrees to hear a case challenging the constitutionality of segregation in the New Orleans schools.

12 1968: Frederick Douglass is named Poet Laureate of the United States.

13 2002: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the government may not require religious organizations to pay taxes.

14 1972: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the government may not require religious organizations to pay taxes.

15 2002: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the government may not require religious organizations to pay taxes.

16 1972: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the government may not require religious organizations to pay taxes.

17 1865: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the government may not require religious organizations to pay taxes.

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26 1959: President Harry S. Truman issues Executive Order 10960, creating the President’s Committee on Equal Opportunity.


28 2000: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the government may not require religious organizations to pay taxes.

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