



BRIANA KENERSON

COMMAND/ORGANIZATION: Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense, Joint Project Manager for CBRN Medical, Joint Product Manager for Chemical Defense Pharmaceuticals

TITLE: Assistant product manager

YEARS OF SERVICE IN WORKFORCE: 1

DAWIA CERTIFICATIONS: Practitioner in program management

EDUCATION: M.S. in forensic science and B.S. in forensic chemistry, Towson University

AWARDS: JPEO-CBRND's Employee of the Quarter; JPM CBRN Medical Special Act or Service Award; JPM CBRN Medical Certificate of Achievement

JUST KEEP MOVING

What's that saying—when one lab door closes, another one opens? Such was Briana Kenerson's experience. In late 2019, staff reductions at the U.S. Army Research Institute for Infectious Diseases threatened to bring her work there to an end. But before that could happen, she was contacted by a recruiter who offered her a position with the Joint Project Manager (JPM) for CBRN Medical within the Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense (JPEO-CBRND).

"I didn't know anything about the work or what a bioengineer does. It sounded intimidating to me," she said. "However, when I spoke to the site lead, she talked me off the ledge and encouraged me to join."

Things ramped up quickly. Kenerson was only in the organization for six months before she was assigned to support JPEO-CBRND's Joint Assisted Acquisition (JA2) for COVID-19 test kit efforts. JA2 organized and led the acquisition efforts for DOD's assisted acquisition teams to procure and deliver medical countermeasures needed worldwide to combat the pandemic and to stand up a domestic medical countermeasure supply chain to protect the U.S. in the event of future public health emergencies. Overall, the JA2 team helped procure more than 2 billion vaccines and 1 billion test kits.

The JA2 COVID work provided "amazing experiences in terms of what I was able to do and accomplish," Kenerson said, including the opportunity to brief senior leadership at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She has also briefed Jason Roos, the former joint program executive officer for JPEO-CBRND, other senior leaders and White House staffers. "I remember speaking to my manager afterward and I was absolutely star-struck at the names that I had the privilege to be on the call with. It really shows that our work is important and relevant."

After the JA2 work was completed in 2022, Kenerson returned to JPM CBRN Medical and has been there ever since. She manages new start portfolio programs for the Reactivating Nerve Agent Treatment System (RNATS) and the Consolidated Nerve Agent Treatment System (CNATS)—"products that have the potential to save lives in case of a nerve agent attack," she said.

"I enjoy the fast pace of the work, and there aren't many boundaries in my current role," she added. "The number of people I get to speak with and the operations tempo where I get to do something different every day—it's impossible to get bored."

The goal of the RNATS effort is to increase survivability against chemical threats through development and delivery of U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved medical countermeasures. The CNATS program aims to increase survivability by delivering a medical countermeasure that integrates multiple therapeutics in a modernized multi-drug auto-injector, providing greater defense against chemical warfare nerve agent threats without adding to the warfighter's load.



UP AND OVER

Kenerson, shown here in August 2018, has competed in equestrian events for most of her life. (Photo courtesy of Briana Kenerson)

One of her favorite parts of her work is collaboration. “I enjoy working with industry and interagency partners within DOD and greatly appreciate establishing connections with those organizations,” said Kenerson. “I also enjoy visiting our industry partners and getting the chance to view and discuss their capabilities for the warfighter.”

She credits mentors for playing an important role in her career advancement. “I worked closely with Patricia Alexander, program lead in the JPEO-CBRND Office of the Chief Engineer, when I first came to the organization and she helped me with my career development. She showed me what I needed to know, and I got to work at a very senior level in terms of my responsibilities. She’s become a good friend to me now.” Kenerson’s boss, Col. Owen Roberts, who leads JPM CBRN Medical’s Chemical Defense Pharmaceuticals team, “is always asking about what we want to do with our lives, personally and professionally, and he’s pushed

me to reach my goals and shaped my career. I appreciate him for that,” she added.

She’d advise younger members of the acquisition workforce to follow a similar path. “Try and find a good mentor. And if you think you have a good one, keep them. Never burn bridges and be a go-getter! You need to like what you do for work, or at least enjoy the challenge.”

Kenerson has her sights set on a leadership position, “and the training coordinator will tell you I’m always trying to take a new class and working to expand and challenge myself with new opportunities, courses and learning. The experience I’m getting is invaluable,” she said. Her list of recent programs includes the Civilian Education System Advanced course, a postgraduate program at Tufts University in clinical drug development and the Program Management Professional course.

“There are constantly opportunities coming across my radar and I’m always thinking about whether they’re the right ones for me,” Kenerson said. “[Col.] Roberts reminds me that I cannot do everything at once and that I’ve got time to do what I want to in my career. I’m now thinking about when the right time for me would be and for the programs that I manage. So I will keep strategizing about when I can participate in the right opportunities for me and my career.”

When she’s not at her desk, you’ll find Kenerson at a horse jumping competition, either as a competitor or announcer, or working out at an Orange Theory gym. “I like the community that both activities provide and the connection I have with my horse when I’m riding,” she said. “Being in the barn with my horse—that’s where I can get away from everything.”

Movement is important, personally and professionally, she added. “Over the course of your career, you’re bound to have a challenging job assignment or work relationship, but that doesn’t need to define you or your career. You just have to keep moving forward and find what really suits you. I feel as though I’ve finally found that in my current role and it makes all the difference.”

—SUSAN L. FOLLETT