



## Quick Reference Guide – New Dental Officers



**Welcome to the USPHS Commissioned Corps!** The [Dental Professional Advisory Committee](#) (DePAC) congratulates you on your recent commissioning. Here are some dental category specific information, tips, and links to help get you started in your USPHS career.

DePAC's first recommendation is to sign up for the [mentorship program](#), where a senior dental officer will be assigned to help guide you in your USPHS career. If you're interested in participating on a DePAC Workgroup/Subcommittee (WG/SC), contact the DePAC Chair for more information. WG/SC's typically meet by teleconference every month or two for about an hour. WG/SC projects are often completed during clinic downtime or after hours. Supervisor authorization is required by some agencies before joining a WG/SC, as the conference calls may occur during clinical hours. After serving on a WG/SC you may want to apply to become a DePAC Voting Member (VM). A request for VM nominations is sent out every spring, and those selected serve a 3-year term. For more information, click on the DePAC webpage link above.

Be sure to sign up for the Dental Category's email [listserv](#), the Dental Bulletin Board (DBB). This is the primary contact route that the Chief Professional Officer, DePAC leadership, and others utilize to distribute information. Do not reply to the listserv email, as this will email the entire group. Instead, copy and paste the individual's email address to whom you are responding. If you are on Facebook, subscribe to the [Dental PAC page](#) and ask another officer for an invitation to join the closed group "Commissioned Corps Officers USPHS (UNOFFICIAL)". Lots of great information is shared on these pages.

Career Development – Your mentor and the templates provided may help with the following:

- [Promotion Benchmarks](#): Although meeting all of the benchmarks is not required for promotion, it is recommended that officers are familiar with them and use them to help plan and prepare for promotion.
- [Curriculum Vitae](#): DePAC has a category-specific CV format which is based directly on the promotion benchmarks. Your mentor can help you develop your CV and learn to use the benchmarks to plan your best career path.
- [Commissioned Officer's Effectiveness Reports \(COERs\)](#): Each year, typically in October, your supervisor will evaluate your performance using the COER. Keeping a running list of your achievements throughout the year will be helpful when providing input for your COER. It is important to frame your achievements in terms of their specific impact.
- Collateral Duties: Accepting additional responsibilities and projects at your duty station can broaden your professional experiences and lead to unexpected accomplishments. Examples include: developing/presenting oral health programs at local schools or serving on a clinical committee in your facility.
- [USPHS Awards](#): Awards are important for marking achievements or surpassing job expectations. Award nominations can be submitted by anyone (including self-nominations), but the approval level depends on the level of the award.
- [DePAC Awards](#): Officers are nominated annually in several categories, nominees are voted on by the DePAC VMs, and the winners are selected by the dental category's Chief Professional Officer (CPO). Notification of the annual awards is through the DBB, and nominations are due mid-September.
- Billet Level: The billet level of a position indicates the workload/expectations, in line with training and education, associated with an officer of that rank. Officers are encouraged to pursue assignments at billets a level above their rank and favorable for promotion. Moving to a new duty station, i.e. PCS (permanent change of station), may be required to achieve this.

Education and Professional Development

- Licensure is required for service, so make sure that every time yours is renewed it is uploaded into your electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF), located in the [Officer Secure Area \(OSA\)](#).
- Keep a list of your CE courses (AGD members have their CE tracked for them) and upload it annually into your eOPF along with CE course documentation. If you need ideas for obtaining free CE, especially online CE, you can go to the [IHS CDE website](#) or look at the list of CE opportunities in the [dental category newsletters](#).
- HHS has online public health responder courses that are accessible for free, including those required for earning the [Field Medical Readiness Badge](#).
- The [Uniformed Services University](#) offers a free graduate certificate in global health online to USPHS officers and we are eligible to attend free, week-long [U.S. Navy CE courses](#) at Walter Reed in Bethesda, MD.
- Long Term Training opportunities are occasionally advertised for dentists interested in advancing their training in general dentistry, healthcare administration, public health, or one of the other dental specialties.

Professional Contributions – We want our officers to be visible and involved!

- There are other uniformed service organizations that you can join. The [Junior Officer Advisory Group \(JOAG\)](#) advocates for concerns specific to junior officers, and is a great way to network with junior officers from all across the PHS.
- The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States ([AMSUS](#)), a society of federal health professionals with great annual meetings and online resources, as well as officer award opportunities.

- The [Commissioned Officers Association \(COA\) of the USPHS](#) has local branches at many Commissioned Corps duty stations, and hosts an annual USPHS symposium in the late spring every year. The COA advocates for the USPHS and Commissioned Officer interests through multiple venues, including legislative action.
- Membership in organized dentistry is an excellent way to get involved with cutting edge issues in oral health. There are many organizations to choose from, such as the ADA, AGD, NDA, AAPHD, HDA, ASTDD, etc. The PHS has delegates that provide input to the ADA and AGD, and when opFenings occur applications are sent through the DBB listserv.
- As a U.S. Public Health Service officer, you are a leader in public health. Please reach out to the [state oral health program](#) in your new duty station location, and work collaboratively with them to help improve oral health in your region.

Readiness – basic readiness is critical for deployment, promotion, special pay eligibility, and retention in the Corps.

- [Do not under any circumstances allow yourself to be “Not Basic Ready”!](#)
- Make sure you stay fit to pass the [Annual Physical Fitness Test \(APFT\)](#) and [keep your weight in check](#).
- Stay current on your [medical examinations](#), and report any significant health changes to the [Medical Affairs Board](#) including injury or pregnancy.
- Upload your [immunizations](#), licenses, BLS cards, and APFT forms immediately into [eDOC-U](#).
- Check the RedDOG self-service area and your eOPF monthly, both are in the [OSA](#). Sometimes errors do occur in the system and you don’t want to be labeled “Not Basic Ready” because of a computer glitch or an error uploading one of your documents.

Loan Repayment – Here are some of the more popular options, but there may be others that are not listed:

- [National Health Service Corps \(NHSC\)](#): Offers loan repayment in exchange for service at sites designated as underserved. Awards are made based on how high a site scores on their needs metrics (NHSC HPSA score). Most IHS sites and some BOP sites qualify.
- [Indian Health Service](#): Offers loan repayment in exchange for a service commitment in the IHS.
- [Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(PSLF\)](#): Forgives remaining student loan balances (tax-free) after 120 on time “qualifying” payments made over 10 years of public service. Not all payments are treated the same; it is critical that you are enrolled in an income-based repayment plan the entire time, you recertify your employment annually, and you transfer your loans to FedLoan Servicing (no other servicing contractor can process PSLF).
- Note of caution about ALL loan repayment programs – read the fine print. Both the NHSC and IHS programs, as well as some state programs, restrict both your movement to another billet and/or the amount of leave that you take during your service commitment. Breaking contracts may result in significant repayment penalties.

Deployment

- Although forensic dentistry skills may be needed in larger disasters, there is often little call for dental care in the initial response. Instead, you may find yourself triaging patients or being recruited into an administrative or logistics role. Therefore, taking the online FEMA courses that focus on non-clinical deployment specialties can lead to a more purposeful role during deployment, as well as helping you meet one of the promotion benchmarks.
- Ensure your supervisor approves your deployment. Some chronically understaffed facilities may not be able to let you go. There is a place to note this in the RedDOG self-service system.

GI Bill

- Understanding the differences between [GI Bill programs](#) can be challenging. In general, most USPHS officers will be enrolled in the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which has morphed into the Forever GI Bill.
- If you want to use the benefit yourself, perhaps for an MPH or MHA program, you can find the instructions [here](#).
- After six years of service, you can [transfer your GI Bill](#) to one or multiple dependents in exchange for a commitment to serve another four years. The transfer commitment forms can be found [here](#). If you do transfer your benefit to your dependents, retain one month for yourself. If you ever need to leave service due to a VA rated disability, then that one month makes you eligible for either a four-year training program or a rehabilitation program.
- You may be eligible for [in-state tuition](#) while using GI Bill benefits even if you are out of state for that institution.

[VA loans](#) – Require little or no down payment for a home and may have a reduced interest rate. You will need a letter of eligibility for a VA mortgage application, which can be found at the [eBenefits Portal](#).

[Thrift Savings Plan](#) – As a new officer, part of your retirement is invested here, and there are a wide variety of funds to choose from with various levels of risk and return. It is wise to maximize your contributions early to take advantage of government matching. You will need to fill out an [election form](#) and submit it to the Compensation Branch.

Please check out the [Career Resource Guide](#) for additional useful information. Welcome to the dental category!