



# DENTAL CATEGORY

OF THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

## USPHS Dental Category

### White Paper

### 2010 DePAC Retention Workgroup

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The official function of the Retention Workgroup is to make recommendations to DePAC on items reflecting recruiting USPHS Dental Officers, retention of officers, and the standards to which new officers are appointed. These recommendations may relate to or include any of the following functions:

- Maintain communications between the DePAC and the Associate Recruiter Program (ARP) of the Division of Commissioned Personnel (DCP).
- Support and supplement the newly reconfigured ARP dental program.
- Act as a liaison role between DCP and DePAC.
- Solicit and analyze items of concern for officers in respect to retention.
- Analyze the USPHS Dental Corps in comparison to other uniform services dental corps.
- Maintain the Dental Category Appointment standards and construct changes to be advised to DePAC to reflect the changing role of the Commission Corps.
- Submit pertinent information from the Retention Work Group to the newsletter.
- Identify opportunities for recruitment activities and facilitate the utilization of those opportunities.
- Investigate further methods available to establish and maintain a fully staff and qualified dental corps.

#### **Issue of Retention for the Dental Category:**

Some of the issues that are of concern to dental officers that often force them to leave the Public Health Service are related to with quality of life and job, such as the following:

- Duty station located in very remote areas, which may lack quality schools.
- Lack employment opportunities for the dentist spouse.
- Duty station located too far from family/relations.
- Assignment site locale offers limited social amenities, such as entertainment.
- Facility or dental equipment may be outdated at the duty station.
- Lack of staff which will cause dental officer to be overworked.

- Dental officer cannot take off on leave when they want to.
- Duty station does not provide career opportunities.
- No support from superior in participating in Public Health Service activities.

### **Trends in Retention of Dental Officer:**

Several trends have affected the retention of dental officers. Some of these trends include the economy, and the development of new promotion and dynamic readiness benchmarks.

The state of the economy has an impact on the number of civilian dentist who might choose to pursue a career with the Commissioned Corps. When the economy is good, there are more patients who are able to get routine and cosmetic dentistry. However, when the economy is bad, than patients are more likely to get only those dental services that are needed. Therefore, during the recent economic downturn, there has been an increase in mid-career dentists recognizing that they no longer can make a profit in the private sector. Many of these dentists have joined the Commissioned Corps.

Another trend which might have adversely affected the retention of dental officers is the implementation of new promotion benchmarks and readiness standards. In 2003, when the Secretary of Health imposed the new requirement for readiness, and promotion benchmarks, some of the PHS dentists felt that the requirements were too harsh, and voluntarily opted out of the promotion cycle. Some dentists at this point even left the Commissioned Corps.

Fortunately, those dental officers, who have remained in the Commissioned Corps are now meeting the Basic Readiness Standards quarterly and reaching the promotion benchmarks. The Public Health Service is also experiencing more dental officers who have gone back to school and received advanced degrees.

These very dental officers have become more involved in Public Health Service activities by becoming mentors to junior officers, becoming involved with DePAC and other professional committees, participating in deployments both in the United States and abroad, and participating in recruitment activities, thus allowing dental officers to become more visible in the public sector.

### **Incentives and Policies which Increase Retention:**

One factor that helps in retaining dentists and making the Commissioned Corps not only appealing, and competitive to the private practice, is the pay incentives that are available to

dental officers:

- Accession Bonus (AB) is \$75,000, which is given to qualified dentists who agree to serve on active duty for 4 years. The AB is paid as a single \$75,000 lump-sum payment or in two equal installment of \$37,500. The last installment will be paid at the 25<sup>th</sup> month of service. The installment approach is only available to officers who will work for the Indian Health Service (HIS) or the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP).
- Variable Special Pay (VSP) is a monthly special pay available to all dentist based on years of credible service. The creditable service entry date (CSED) reflects the officer's years of active duty as a dental officer of the Uniformed Service and/or the years spent participating in an accredited dental internship or residency training while not on active duty in a Uniformed Service. This pay ranges from \$3,000 to \$12,000.
- Board Certified Pay (BCP) for Dental Specialist is a monthly special pay based on board certification in a dental specialty. This pay ranges from \$2,500 to \$6,000 annually based on years of CSED.
- Additional Special Pay (ASP) is payable to all dental officers who commit to serving at least a year. It ranges from \$10,000 to \$15,000 annually depending on CSED.
- Multi-year Retention Bonus (MRB) is payable to dental officers who are Board Eligible Specialist or Advanced General Practice Residents (AGPR) trained in recognized dental specialist who commit to active duty for a prior of 2 to 4 years. This pay ranges from \$13,000 to \$50,000 annually.
- Incentive Special Pay (ISP) is a pay that is paid to officer in hard to fill billets at the discretion of the agency.
- Loan Repayment Program (LRP) often up to \$20,000 per year for the repayment of quality health profession education loan. The dentist is obligated to serve 2 years at an Indian Health Program or Bureau of Prison site. The dentist can extend the loan in the same area or another location until the loan is repaid.

Some of the nonmonetary incentives that an officer may be entitled to are listed below.

**Nonmonetary Incentives:**

- Health benefits – dental officers can receive free health care from any uniform service military treatment facility or both the dental officer and their dependants can receive medical care through TRICARE.
- 30 days of annual leave.
- Paid sick-leave as needed.

- Non-Taxable income – Housing allowance, subsistence allowance, and Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA). COLA is designed to compensate for being stationed in certain "high-cost" locations in the continental United States (CONUS).
- Life Insurance- Service Member's Group Life Insurance (SGLI)
- Retirement eligible after 20 years of service.
- Paid moving expenses for initial assignment, transfers, separation and retirement.
- Privileges at the military base, which include usage of recreation facilities, housing, etc.
- Military discounts.
- GI Bill
- Space-A-Travel
- VA Loans
- Military Law

### **Recommendations for Retaining USPHS Dental Officers:**

- Insure that dental officers coming into the Corps are informed on the different Incentive Pays that are available.
- Require each dental officer to have at least two mentors. This should be a mentor in their current agency and also in another agency.
- Help dental officers become aware of the different jobs that they qualify at each agency.
- Benchmarks should not only follow the career path of a dentist who is an administrative billet, but also one that is in a clinical billet.
- Provide more guidance and support working in a Non-PHS setting. Many dental officers feel that they do not have any one to help when a problem occurs.
- Create more billets for higher ranking dental officers.
- Receive priority Career Counseling. Dental Officers will be counseled individually on what

they need to do to enhance their career as a dental officer. This will not only help those officers who are junior officers, but those are senior officers as well.

- Identify high school student, who live in the area where there are shortages of dentists.
- Help these students as they go through college on through dental school, by providing incentives such as loan repayment.

Finally, as we move to the future, the primary goal of the DePAC Retention Work Group will continue to be supporting the USPHS Dental Category with recommendations, strategies and guidance which encourage retaining all commissioned dental officers.