This presentation (narrative) contains information for veterinarians about public sector opportunities in the United States Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps.

By the end of the presentation, you will have an understanding of the PHS Commissioned Corps, the type of work that Commissioned Corps Veterinary Officers do, the pay and benefits that come with being a Commissioned Corps Officer, and where to obtain a public sector job as a Commissioned Corps Officer.

The PHS dates its beginnings to a 1798 act to provide for the medical care of sick and injured merchant seamen. The PHS Commissioned Corps was authorized on January 4, 1889 establishing, by law, the policy of a mobile corps subject to duty anywhere upon assignment.

The PHS Commissioned Corps is a specialized career system within the Department of Health and Human Services designed to attract, develop, and retain highly-trained and mobile health professionals to carry out its programs. Commissioned Corps officers may be assigned to Federal, State or local agencies or international organizations to accomplish its mission.

A majority of Commissioned Corps officers work in a multidisciplinary environment in cutting edge science and technology fields. There is a large emphasis on education of the public.

The MISSION of the PHS is to promote the physical and mental health of the Nation by: understanding and preventing disease and injury; assuring that only safe and effective drugs and medical devices are put on the market; food is safe and wholesome, cosmetics are harmless, and that electronic products do not expose users to dangerous amounts of radiation; delivering health services to Federal beneficiaries; and furnishing health expertise in time of war or other national or international emergencies.

The benefits provided to Commissioned Corps officers are the same as for the Armed Services. The rank system is the same as the Navy’s. Commissioning into the PHS affords the officer the same rights and respect provided to military officers.

The PHS Commissioned Corps is led by the Surgeon General and consists of approximately 6,000 officers with 90 – 100 veterinarians.

The MISSION of the Veterinary Category of the U.S. Public Health Service is to apply veterinary science so that a greater understanding of the causative mechanisms of illness is gained, strategies to prevent disease are developed, and programs to improve the general health of the public are implemented.

There is no set career path established for each PHS discipline. Instead a myriad of career paths, developed by the individual officer, are possible. Commissioned Corps veterinarians may work in several
federal departments during their career. Commissioning allows an officer to retain their career standing when they move to a different federal job position.

THIS SLIDE CAN BE LINKED TO A PRESENTATION ABOUT A SPECIFIC AGENCY THAT THE PRESENTER IS KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT AND WISHES TO RECRUIT FOR.

Slide 7:
The Commissioned Corps can provide a training ground for any field of public veterinary practice. Often assignment as a Commissioned Corps officer opens a window to a career in government, academia, industry, and other non-government organizations.

Slide 8:
Assignment locations are potentially nationwide.

Slide 9:
Areas of expertise found in the Commissioned Corps Veterinarians include those shown on the slide.
- Public health epidemiology and surveillance
- Laboratory animal medicine
- Pathology and other laboratory sciences
- Entomology
- Food safety and zoonoses control
- Biological/chemical terrorism preparedness and security
- Quarantine and inspection
- Drug safety
- Environmental health and toxicology

THIS SLIDE CAN BE LINKED TO A PRESENTATION ABOUT A SPECIFIC JOB CAREER THAT THE PRESENTER IS KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT AND WISHES TO RECRUIT FOR.

Slide 10:
Commissioned Corps Veterinarians may be deployed to assist with national emergencies. Deployments are voluntary and are generally 2 – 4 weeks long. Recent events with deployment opportunities for Commissioned Corps veterinarians include:
- 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon - to provide care to rescue dogs.
- 2003 Exotic Newcastle disease outbreak in California.
- 2005 Hurricane Katrina Relief Effort
- 2005 Assessment of needs following Hurricane Rita

The role of the Commissioned Corps Veterinary Corps is expanding as a secondary emergency response force for the Nation through the Office of Force Readiness and Deployment http://oep.osophs.dhhs.gov/ccrf/

Slide 11:
The minimum starting pay grade/rank for a veterinary officer in the PHS Commissioned Corps is as a Lieutenant (O-3). Most veterinarians come into the Corps as either an O-3 or as a Lieutenant Commander (O-4). Movement to a higher-graded position at the time of appointment is affected by time spent after receipt of the doctoral degree, in degree-related activities.

PHS commissioned officers are paid monthly. Pay consists of two parts – basic pay and allowances. **BASIC PAY + ALLOWANCES = GROSS PAY.** Veterinarians also automatically receive an additional SPECIAL PAY that is taxed.

Slide 12:
**Basic pay** is taxable while **allowances** are usually non-taxable.

FOLLOWING IS DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT PAY FROM THE USPHS.GOV WEBSITE. IT IS PROVIDED AS A RESOURCE FOR THE PRESENTER.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASIC PAY</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Basic Pay portion is considered to be the officer’s actual salary and is subject to Federal income tax,</td>
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Version: July 24, 2006
Social Security tax (FICA), and in most cases, state income tax. The rate of basic pay is based on the officer's temporary grade/rank and the **Base Pay Entry Date** (BPED). The BPED is usually the officer's call-to-active-duty date, although it may be adjusted for prior service in other Uniformed Services. The second important date is the **Training and Experience date** (T & E) which reflects the officer's creditable training and experience related to the officer's professional category/specialty and determines rank and promotion eligibility.

Veterinary graduates automatically receive 8 years of Training and Experience (T & E) credit for their schooling that lead to the D.V.M. Additional T & E credit is earned for time spent after receipt of the qualifying degree in **degree-related** activities. This could be for:
- employment (paid or volunteer)
- research
- further training in the pertinent field
- teaching at college or university level
- allied and relevant graduate studies and/or research

The initial rate of Basic Pay is determined by the officer's Base Pay Entry Date (BPED) and rank. Subsequent increases in base pay result from length of service and promotion to the next higher rank. A url for the web where you can review the basic pay rates and compute your military compensation is on the HO.

**ALLOWANCES**

**Basic Allowance for Subsistence** (BAS) is a monthly allowance payable to all officers at the same rate regardless of rank/BPED unless meals are provided by the Service. BAS is non-taxable.

**Basic Allowances for Housing** (BAH) is a monthly allowance payable to all officers stationed within the Continental United States (CONUS), including Alaska and Hawaii. It provides compensation for housing rental, renters insurance, and utilities. The rate is determined by the officer's permanent duty station zip code, grade, and dependency status. If an officer is assigned to government housing (does not live on the economy), he/she will not be entitled to this allowance. BAH is non-taxable.

**Conus Cola Allowance** (CCOLA) is a monthly allowance payable to certain duty stations that are considered high cost areas within the Continental United States. It provides compensation for variations in non-housing expenditures to adjust to regional cost differences within CONUS. The rate is determined by the officer's permanent duty station zip code, grade, and dependency status. CCOLA is taxable.

**Overseas Housing Allowance** (OHA) is a monthly allowance paid to officers stationed out of the Continental United States (OUTCONUS), other than Alaska and Hawaii, who live on the local economy. It provides compensation for housing rental plus compensates for utility/recurring maintenance. The monthly amount payable is based on comparing the officer's rent, up to a rental ceiling for the duty location and adds on an allowance for utility/recurring maintenance for that location. The rent cap and utility allowance is determined by grade and dependent status for each location. OHA is non-taxable.

**Cost of Living Allowance** (COLA) is a monthly allowance paid to officers stationed in high-cost areas out of the Continental United States (OUTCONUS), including Alaska and Hawaii. It provides purchasing power so the officer can purchase about the same goods and services overseas as in the United States. The rate established is based on the officer's grade, base pay entry date, and the actual number of dependents residing in his or her household. COLA is non-taxable.

**STATE INCOME TAXES**

Commissioned officers in the Public Health Service are covered under the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act which protects their Uniformed Services' pay from the income taxes of the State in which the officer resides by reason of military orders, unless that state is the officer's legal state of residence. The Act further provides that no change in an officer's State of legal residence/domicile will occur solely as a result of the officer being ordered to a new duty station.

Next we will look at two examples of what you would earn in the PHS Commissioned Corps and the amount of money you would need to earn as a civilian to have a comparable salary.

 Slide 13:
The first example is for a person with no prior Uniformed Services time who enters the Commissioned Corps directly after graduation from veterinary school. Veterinary graduates automatically receive 8 years of
Training and Experience credit for their schooling that lead to the D.V.M. This and post-graduate degree related experience determines rank and promotion eligibility. The person has no dependants and takes a job in the Washington DC area and lives in an area that falls under the Baltimore, MD Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) cost area.

**Slide 14: Compensation Comparison 1**

The gross pay of $56,982 includes money for housing and subsistence that are not taxable. When the tax break is considered, the realized salary for the officer is $66,429. However, the comparable sample was determined at a website that does not allow entry of the $100/month special veterinary pay so that pay needs to be added. Additionally, officers receive benefits that may need to be paid out of pocket in the civilian sector. The next slide takes special pay and benefits into account.

**Slide 15:**
The civilian job would need to pay at least $69,782/year. There are still other financial benefits of being in the Commissioned Corps that will be covered after the next example.

**Slide 16:**
In the second example the officer has been in service for 9 years, has a family, has been specialty boarded for 1 year, and has a Baltimore, MD zip code. The spouse’s income is not considered in the example.

**Slide 17:**
Again, the gross pay of $90,477 includes money for housing and subsistence that are not taxable. When the tax break is considered the realized salary for the officer is $104,841. As for the first example, this comparable salary was calculated at a website that doesn’t allow entry of the $100/month special veterinary pay or the Diplomate pay so that compensation needs to be added along with benefits that may be paid out of pocket in the civilian sector.

**Slide 18:**
Taking veterinary special pay, Diplomate pay, and indirect benefits into account, the civilian job would need to pay at least $114,420/year.

**Slide 19:**
Besides the opportunity to create an exciting career working on cutting edge national health issues, other benefits available to Commissioned Corps Officers are:

- Relocation expenses paid
- Educational debt deferment or forgiveness is available
- 30 days annual leave
- Sick leave and maternity leave
- Healthcare at Uniformed Services Facilities
- Families covered by Health and Dental Insurance
  - Free medical to officer & family
  - Free dental to officer, low cost dental to family
- Commissary privileges
- VA Home loans – guaranteed by the government; the amount of closing costs that can be incurred by the buyer is limited.
- DoD Recreational facility access
- Temporary lodging/officers’ clubs
- Non-contributory retirement
- Thrift Savings Plan – this plan is available to all government workers. Funds are contributed by the officer and grow tax free.
- $400,000 of term Life insurance
- Disability and survivor benefits
- Montgomery-GI Bill - for higher education.
- Optional retirement at 20 years
- Retirement at 30 yrs with 75% of base pay
- Space-Available flights
- Legal services
2003 National Veterinary Medical Services Act
A bill to provide loan forgiveness for graduates who work in underserved areas, population groups, and disciplines. Not yet funded.

Slide 20:
To decide whether an officer will be recommended for promotion, several criteria are considered about the officer’s career:

- Additional training and education received following commissioning.
- The amount and quality of their experience
- The amount of time they have been in service
- Their individual job performance per yearly evaluations
- Physical fitness and training useful in a crises situation i.e. deployment readiness
- Mobility both geographically and within and between programs
- Potential to continue obtaining skills and knowledge beneficial to the Commissioned Corps.

Slide 21:
To be accepted as a Commissioned Corps officer you must meet the following qualifications:

- **Have earned a D.V.M. degree** from a program which, at the time the degree was conferred, was accredited by the Council of Education of the American Veterinary Medical Association.
- Have a **current, unrestricted, and valid veterinary license** in any of the 50 States, Washington D.C., the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands or Guam (recent graduates are an exception).

  Individuals that recently graduated from an Accredited veterinary school but do not yet have a veterinary license, may still apply and be accepted into the Commissioned Corps. A one year grace period from the date of graduation is given to obtain a license. Evidence of licensure is required for removal of the one-year limitation and for retention in the Corps.

- Be a **U.S. citizen**;
- Be **under 44 years of age** (age may be offset by prior active-duty Uniformed Service time and/or civil service experience in a Public Health Service agency at a PHS site at a level commensurate with the duties of a commissioned officer);
- Meet **medical requirements**; and
- Pass an initial **suitability investigation**.
- **Identify and compete for a position**
- **Have served less than 8 years of active duty** if you are/were a member of another Uniformed Service (waivers can be made to this)

Slide 22:
Appointment Process

**Step 1:** Fill out a PHS Application. The required forms can be found at the Commissioned Corps Management Information System (MIS) Web Site [http://dcp.psc.gov/](http://dcp.psc.gov/) under Services/Official Forms. Additional information about applying to the Corps can be found at the same website under Jobs/Commissioned Corps Job Vacancies Database then Commissioned Officer/applicant instructions.

**Step 2:** Identify a vacancy – it is important that individuals seeking a position with the USPHS Veterinary Corps understand that they must identify and be a successful job candidate for a position that will hire them as a Commissioned Corps Officer.

**Step 3:** Accept the job offer

**Step 4:** Be called to active duty

Slide 23:
For More Information

- About the USPHS: [http://www.usphs.gov](http://www.usphs.gov)
Slide 24:
This slide provides contact information for veterinary liaisons within federal agencies that commonly employ USPHS Commissioned Corp Veterinary Medical Officers. The listed officers can provide information about their agency and they will assist with facilitating progress of your application to the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

Slide 25:
This slide shows where jobs, which may be filled by a USPHS Commissioned Corps Veterinary Officer, are posted. However, be aware that regardless of where a job posting is found e.g. JAVMA, if you apply for a job within any of the government agencies previously mentioned (see slide 6), it is highly likely that you can obtain the job as a Commissioned Corps officer.

END OF SLIDE PRESENTATION

STUDENT OPPORTUNITY INFORMATION: COSTEP POSITIONS ARE CURRENTLY DIFFICULT TO FIND DUE TO CURRENT GOVERNMENT FTE AVAILABILITY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>There are two possible opportunities for students to perform service in the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps. Available positions are effected by government FTE ceilings. The Commissioned Corps offers two excellent opportunities for students in commissionable health-related categories throughout the academic year. The most commonly implemented program is the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP). Less commonly used for veterinarians is the Senior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (SRCOSTEP). Both programs are highly competitive.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>JRCOSTEP</strong> allows students to gain valuable professional experience with the PHS early in their education. They serve in assignments throughout the country during their official school breaks for periods from <strong>31 to 120 days</strong>. Most, however, are hired for the summer months (June, July, August). Upon completing his/her professional education, the student may serve an extended active-duty assignment with any of the agencies/programs that hire PHS commissioned officers. Those who go on to a career in the Commissioned Corps are credited for their JRCOSTEP time for pay and retirement purposes. <strong>JRCOSTEPS do not have an obligation</strong> to serve in the Commissioned Corps after graduation.</td>
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<td>The <strong>SRCOSTEP</strong> program is designed to assist students financially during their final academic year of their qualifying degree in return for an agreement to work for the PHS Commissioned Corps after graduation for twice the time sponsored. Current selection priorities are directed toward students in the following disciplines: <strong>dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, engineering, physical and occupational therapy</strong>.</td>
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