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Assistant Secretary for Health
Office of Public Health and Science
Washington D.C. 20201

TO: Commissioned Officers of the U.S. Public Health Service

FROM: Assistant Secretary for Health

SUBJECT: Statement on Quality Principles for Public Health Practice in the U.S. Public Health Service

The public health system is the nation's first line of defense to protect the health of the entire population. As you know quality is one of my top priorities and concepts for quality must be mainstreamed in all segments of the public health system if this covenant with the nation for population health safeguarding is to be achieved. The U. S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps has a critical role in protecting, promoting, and advancing the health and safety of the Nation. To promote uniformity of practice in public health quality improvement, the following definition is provided:

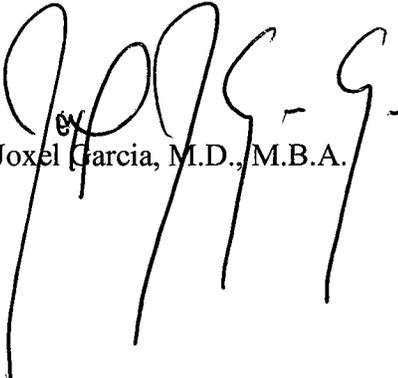
Quality in public health practice is the degree to which functions and services for the population increases the probability of desired health outcomes and conditions in which the population can be healthy.

In a 1998 report, the President's Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry recommended that all segments of the health industry should embrace quality improvement and to support this commitment with clearly established aims for improvement. The Commission asserted that the health industry needed to be accountable to demonstrate quality with standardized quality measures. Expanding on this was the 2001 Institute of Medicine (IOM) publication *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century* where six aims for improvement in quality-of-care were documented.

I am dedicated to highlighting a culture of quality in the public health and emphasizing that the Commissioned Corps take a leadership role in articulating a national commitment to quality in public health. Under my leadership a Public Health Quality Task Force (PHQTF) was established made up of Officers from various segments of the Corps. I charged the group with identifying a set of principles for quality improvement. Identifying these quality concepts and producing a listing of them is intended to catalogue positive lessons learned, potentially adding to the tools that can be used to improve existing best practices.

Through the PHQTF, principles for quality improvement in the public health system have been identified as an initial step to fulfilling this commitment to quality. The PHQTF recognized that there is an intersection between public health and the health care delivery system that needs to be strengthened. Accordingly, four of the IOM aims for improvement are combined with an additional three principles that reflect the uniqueness of the Commissioned Corps' public health mission. The principles are intended to clearly document characteristics of quality that should be present when carrying out public health functions in the Commissioned Corps. An overarching goal that must be woven throughout all functions is prevention. Since public health services/activities can be multidimensional when testing for quality, several principles may apply to a single service. As an example, when testing for quality in patient care, among other characteristics, care should be safe and effective. The attached document provides a list and functional definitions of the seven principles for quality in public health developed by the PHQTF. The goal of this quality improvement process is to ensure the continuous evaluation of practices that produce desired results while giving significant attention to those that need to be improved. Simultaneously, the Commissioned Corps should take a leadership role in articulating a framework to the Nation of principles and components of quality in a public health system.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Garth Graham, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Minority Health, at 240-453-2882.



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Attachment

Public Health Quality Task Force (PHQTF)

Quality Principles for Public Health Practice in the USPHS Commissioned Corps

The Office of Public Health and Science (OPHS) is the primary office within the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services for advising the nation on matters related to public health science. The U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (USPHS) is organized under OPHS and serves a key function in the fulfillment of this responsibility. The Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH), as head of OPHS, exercises leadership over the Commissioned Corps by providing strategic and policy direction. The uniformed officers of the USPHS are the nation's lead public health professionals charged with advancing public health science and delivering national public health promotion and disease prevention programs. The Mission of the USPHS is protecting, promoting, and advancing the health and safety of the nation. Underscoring this goal are the USPHS values that emphasize leadership, service, integrity, and excellence. As part of its goal towards excellence and leadership the ASH created and tasked the Public Health Quality Task Force (PHQTF) to develop principles for defining quality in public health for the USPHS. These principles clearly articulate characteristics that will facilitate improved performance of the public health mission with an overarching goal focused on prevention. When implemented into practice, these principles should be used to examine current practices to determine what is working well and what needs to be improved. The consensus set of principles for quality improvement in public health selected by the PHQTF are listed below:

- **Safe**
Ensuring practices that minimize risk and avoid injuries to individuals and populations
- **Efficient**
Economic use of resources to achieve desired outcomes
- **Effective**
Evidence-based best practices to achieve desired results
- **Equitable**
Fair distribution of resources across populations
- **Transparent**
Utilizing standardized practices (valid, reliable, timely, and readily available) that are visible and understandable by all stakeholders
- **Population-centered**
Protecting and promoting conditions in which the entire population can be healthy, the essential element of all public health
- **Responsive**
Preparing extensively and responding rapidly