



DIETITIAN MENTORING PROGRAM MENTOR/MENTEE GUIDE



Prepared and Updated by the Mentoring Subcommittee*
Dietitian Professional Advisory Committee (Dietitian PAC)
U.S. Public Health Service

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A. MISSION & VISION STATEMENTS

MISSION: Match all new Commissioned Officers in the Dietitian Category with an experienced senior officer (O5, O6).

VISION: The USPHS Dietitian Mentoring Subcommittee will cultivate the most prepared and able officers for a successful and rewarding career.

B. OPERATING GUIDELINES: DIETITIAN MENTORING PROGRAM

Purpose and General Information

The Dietitian Professional Advisory Committee (Dietitian PAC) Mentoring Program is designed to facilitate the transition of recently appointed Registered Dietitians (RDs) into the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and to promote the long-term career development of RDs. The Program is open to all qualified Commissioned Corps Officers appointed into the Dietitian Category.

The success of the various operating divisions of the USPHS is dependent on the development of competent and capable individuals both uniformed and civilian. Investing time in the personal and professional development of the Mentee will enhance the overall effectiveness of the Dietitian Category and create stronger leaders for the future.

Mentoring is an active partnership between an experienced member of the Dietitian Category and a less experienced member to foster professional growth and career development. The Mentor's knowledge and insights gained over years of experience serve as a valuable tool to facilitate the effective and efficient growth of the Mentee.

The Mentor serves as an initial contact person from whom information about the Commissioned Corps and the Public Health Service (PHS) may be readily obtained. Mentors should be knowledgeable about many subjects of interest to new members, including: health care and other benefits, uniforms and military courtesy, awards, mobility, career progression, the promotion process, PHS-wide and category-specific activities, and military and professional organizations. While an individual Mentor will probably not have all of the answers, he or she should be able to refer a Mentee to the right source for appropriate information. Visit the website at <http://www.usphs.gov/corpslinks/dietitian/>

The DIETITIAN PAC web site has many useful documents for the Mentor and the Mentee. Take your time and visit the website, download all useful documents to assist with learning, timelines, and managing your career in the PHS.

In order for the Mentoring Program to be successful, both the Mentor and Mentee must be active and committed participants. The following guidelines are offered to ensure a successful relationship between Mentor and Mentee:

- Be proactive – if you're a Mentee, don't wait for your Mentor to make the first contact and vice versa
- Negotiate a commitment - agree to have regular contact at pre-defined intervals (twice a month)
- Establish a rapport - learn as much as possible about the other person
- Be confident and respectful- both the Mentor and Mentee have something important to offer each other
- Be enthusiastic - demonstrate mutual interest in the mentoring relationship
- Communicate - share knowledge and experience openly
- Be a good listener - hear what the Mentor or Mentee is saying
- Be responsive - act upon what has been learned
- Be accessible - have an open door policy
- Take responsibility - it takes two to have a successful mentoring relationship

C. Goals of the Mentoring Program

- Provide Mentee with timely, factual, and relevant information to encourage and support their professional growth as a Registered Dietitian in the PHS
- Instill in officers the importance of the PHS mission, officer responsibilities, and traditions of the Commissioned Corps
- Provide sound advice and counsel to officers throughout their careers, balancing category-specific and Operating Division-specific needs and priorities
- Promote career progression throughout the various employing PHS Operating Divisions

D. Role of the Mentor

A Mentor is an experienced and trusted individual who serves in a number of capacities: teacher, guide, counselor, motivator, sponsor, coach, advisor, referral agent, role model, and door opener. The Mentor must be flexible to serve in the various capacities the Mentee has need of.

1. Responsibilities of the Mentor:

- Serve as a role model - share personal experiences, present a good example
- Be prepared and responsive to the requests and needs of the Mentee

- Be a resource person - provide information on the organization, category, personnel system, training opportunities, networking contacts, etc.
- Listen - be open and understanding
- Counsel - help identify options for promoting goals and solving specific problems; offer specific and practical suggestions
- Offer insight - orient the Mentee to the spoken and unspoken rules of the organization
- Guide - offer guidance but allow the Mentee to make final decisions
- Validate - be an advocate and acknowledge achievements
- Motivate - help set realistic goals and provide encouragement to achieve them
- Give feedback - share positive reactions and offer constructive criticism
- Provide perspective - help the Mentee see the big picture
- Be knowledgeable – relay knowledge or be able to refer to those who know best

2. Benefits to Mentors:

- Satisfaction of helping a junior dietitian define and attain goals by identifying options and planning strategies
- Satisfaction in having a positive long-term impact, both on the individual and on the category
- Improvement in interpersonal communication, motivation, coaching, counseling, and other management skills
- Opportunity to gain perspective about comparable individuals supervised on a regular basis
- Impetus to reflect on one's own goals and performance

E. Role of the Mentee

A Mentee is a committed and motivated individual who is willing to work and take responsibility for their career development and professional growth. A Mentee must be honest, open, and receptive to the guidance their Mentor has to offer.

1. Responsibilities of the Mentee

- Discuss with your supervisor your interest in participating in the Mentoring Program
- Initiate and schedule regular discussions, actively seek out the Mentor's advice
- Be honest – open and frank, share your self-assessment of career development needs and personal career goals
- Listen - consider all suggestions without being defensive
- Participate - take full advantage of the services and assistance offered, make decisions based on all information gathered

2. Benefits to Mentee

- Connecting interpersonally with a caring, encouraging advisor
- Obtaining guidance in defining and achieving goals
- Gaining information to plan a clear and defined career track
- Gaining an appreciation for the corporate culture of the PHS
- Receiving constructive feedback
- Acquiring an objective and credible source of information
- Improvement in overall job performance

F. Qualifications to be a Mentor

- Currently in good standing with the U.S. Public Health Service with no adverse personnel actions filed
- Rank of Commander (O5), Captain (O6), or above and approved by the Chief Professional Officer
- Preferably, same agency as the Mentee
- Basic Readiness
- Show strong interest in mentoring individuals through periodic phone calls, e-mail, and/or person-to-person contact

G. Qualifications to be a Mentee

- Newly commissioned
- Desires to have a Mentor assigned to assist in his/her professional development

H. Implementation and Management

1. Mentor Solicitation

- The Chief Professional Officer will approve all Mentors
- Mentors will be recruited via email and phone
- The prospective Mentor will be contacted by the Chair of the Mentor Subcommittee to discuss responsibilities and expectations

2. Mentee Notification

- Mentor Subcommittee Chair will contact the Mentee informing them of the match
- The Mentor Subcommittee Chair will update the Mentor/Mentee roster

3. Matching Mentor and Mentee

- To ensure potential Mentors are able to optimally relate to the Mentee, an effort will be made to match a Mentor who has current or past experience in the Operating Division (OPDIV) and/or geographic location to which the Mentee is assigned
- The DIETITIAN PAC Chief Professional Officer will be responsible for the final match for Mentors and Mentees. Mentors and Mentees will be notified once an assignment has been made
- Unless indicated otherwise by either the Mentor or Mentee, the relationship will continue for at least one year
- At one year, the Mentee may opt to continue the relationship with the current mentor, terminate the relationship with the current mentor and request a new mentor, or terminate their participation in the Mentoring Program. As participants in the Mentoring program the Mentor and Mentee will evaluate the program at the end of one year

I. Career Topics for Mentor & Mentee

- a. Professional Licensure/Registration
- b. Billet Description
- c. Official Personnel File (eOPF)
- d. Curriculum Vitae/Resume
- e. Career Progression
- f. Promotion Benchmarks
- g. USPHS Uniform and Military Courtesy
- h. Commissioned Corps History
- i. Tricare Benefits for Active Duty and Beneficiaries
- j. Related PHS Facilities

More Information is provided on the DIETITIAN PAC Mentoring Program website as a guide to interactive discussions between mentors and Mentees.

J. Mentoring and the Officer's Career Potential

Each of us would like to grow and successfully meet new challenges as we move through our careers. Whether our goal is to experience a wide variety of different positions, or to explore a particular role to its limits, career development requires both

knowledge and planning if it is to be successful. Developing a successful career plan requires four elements: assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The most important thing to remember about your career is that you are responsible for it. While there are various resources, such as your mentor, available to you to help achieve your goals, you cannot rely on others to do the work for you. Career planning is hard work, but the rewards make good planning well worth the effort. The following topics and suggestions are additional areas that you and your mentor can focus on during discussions together.

1. Career Assessment

Career development efforts begin with an honest assessment of yourself and your career goals. While interests, values, and skills change with time, it is important to put both your life and your career in perspective in order to be able to recognize opportunities, which would be most rewarding and fulfilling for you. Ask yourself the following questions, both now, and as you move through your career. Share your self-assessment with your mentor. Use these responses to guide discussion topics between you and your mentor.

- Why did I choose dietetics/nutrition as a profession?

Your values form the core of your life. You chose dietetics/nutrition because at some point in your life, you felt that it reflected those values. You need to know what it is that you find important. What type of activities do you like? What type of work setting; alone or with others? Where do family and outside interests fit in? A successful career begins with a job that is compatible with the rest of your life.

- What skills do I bring to dietetics/nutrition and to the Public Health Service?

Skills are of both a professional and personal nature. Professional skills are those competencies which you have developed through training and practice. These may be very specific, such as diabetes education or critical care management, or they may be of a more general nature, such as communicating with a variety of people or coordinating a complex set of activities. These types of skills are often useable in a wide variety of settings. Personal skills are more fundamental and include such things as leadership.

- What do I find rewarding about my current position and what are its drawbacks?

The ideal assignment would be one which reflects your values and which allows you to utilize your skills to the fullest while at the same time acquiring new ones. Even if you found such an assignment today, life is

not static and growth requires change. Hold up both the good and the bad for examination and learn from the exercise.

- Is there any direction to my career and am I directing it?

Be honest.

Write your answers down. Take them out and review them from time to time throughout your career. Note how they change and think about the directions in which they move. Share your self-assessment with your mentor. Use these responses to guide discussion topics between you and your mentor.

2. Career Planning

The second step in the career development process is to begin to make conscious career decisions and to set career development goals. This is the planning phase of career development. What actions can you take now and in the future to optimize your career? Most people reach a point in their career when they feel that the satisfaction and excitement, which initially attracted them to a particular assignment, begins to fade. Step back and review the options.

- Expand your present position.

Perhaps your current position might be restructured so as to give you greater scope to utilize your talents or to develop new ones. Analyze your branch or division and try and identify new areas of responsibility, which would benefit both you and the organization.

- Change how you relate to your work.

Re-evaluate how you deal with stress, both on and off the job. Often it is not the work which has become stale, but rather how you approach it. Activities outside of work also have a major impact on how you view your job. The change needed to revitalize your career may not be at the job site at all.

- Increase your skills and knowledge.

Explore the opportunities which additional training might make available to you. Don't focus only on the area of dietetics/nutrition in which you might currently be working. Be open to new ideas, perhaps even outside of dietetics/nutrition.

- Consider a new assignment within PHS.

One of the most attractive features about the PHS is the tremendous variety of potential assignments available. Often a new job will bring with it new challenges and new opportunities and perhaps even a new locale.

When considering new assignments, whether with your current program or with a different OpDiv, it is useful to organize them and relate them to each other and your overall career goals. If you don't, you run the risk of simply drifting from one job to another with little continuity. The concept of career tracks may be a useful way of relating your assignments throughout your career. Career tracks are a series of professional experiences and/or specific positions through which you progress from the entry level to an expert level of skills, knowledge, and abilities throughout your professional career. Career tracks in the PHS often reflect broad missions and professional category disciplines within the USPHS. While the career tracks outlined below are established within the commissioned corps system, they are certainly applicable to the civil service professional as well.

- Clinical/Clinical Management

Many PHS OpDiv's offer opportunities for career growth within the clinical arena. This area encompasses professional activities that relate directly to patient treatment ranging from hands-on care to consultation and/or guidance of other patient care staff.

- Epidemiology/Public Health Practice

Epidemiology and public health practice involve the study, analysis, and/or recommendation of health measures based upon the incidence, distribution, and control of disease in a population.

- International Health

International health activities in the PHS focus on the influence of the global health environment on the PHS domestic mission.

- Program Management

Program management/administration encompasses the control of the day-to-day operation of Agency programs requiring planning, development, budgeting, assessment, supervision, and/or coordination.

- Regulatory Affairs

PHS dietitians assigned to regulatory OpDiv's participate in activities related to implementing, enforcing, controlling, directing, evaluating/inspecting, developing policy and/or regulations designed to safeguard public health.

- Research

PHS dietitians participate in and conduct many types of scientific research and reviews. Research in the PHS usually involves either investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery of new knowledge for the revision of existing theories or the development of new theories related to public health (basic research), or investigation or experimentation aimed at evaluating or mitigating potential risks to public health (applied research).

Several formal and informal means are available to you for investigating various types of positions and career paths. You should spend some time familiarizing yourself with these sources and with the information and guidance they can provide to you. Given the extremely wide range of health related activities which the PHS is involved in, it is unlikely that you will be able to determine the scope of career opportunities without substantial research. The following formal sources are a good place to start.

- The Commissioned Corps Management Information System (CCMIS) web site at <http://dcp.psc.gov> is available to answer questions about commissioned corps policies and procedures, available training opportunities, job vacancies and secure access to your own electronic official personnel file (eOPF).
- The DIETITIAN PAC meets regularly to discuss issues of significance and to make recommendations to the Chief Professional Officer for Dietitians. The DIETITIAN PAC is comprised of RDs, both civil service and commissioned corps, representing each PHS agency. The DIETITIAN PAC representative from your agency can be an excellent source for current information. Minutes from the DIETITIAN PAC meetings are available on line.
- As an advocate for all PHS dietitians, the Chief Professional Officer routinely advises the Surgeon General and others on issues affecting PHS dietitians.

In addition to the formal sources of information listed above, one of the most effective ways of expanding your career opportunities is through networking with other PHS dietitians and officers from other categories as well. Joining organizations and attending their meetings can provide officers and civilians an opportunity to meet program managers and dietitians from throughout the PHS and the Uniformed Services. Some of the organizations include the Commissioned Officers Association (COA), the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS), the Reserve Officers Association (ROA), The Military Officers Association (MOA), or dietetic/nutrition professional associations. Recruitment booths from several agencies are at national dietetic meetings; volunteering to staff these booths is a good method of information gathering while supporting your profession.

3. Career Implementation

After identifying specific career goals and developing a plan for achieving them, you are ready to evaluate positions that contribute to your professional development. Seeking new assignments in the PHS can be a challenging experience. As one moves into more senior positions, it is also very competitive. Although credentials are useful, the candidate with the most credentials is not always the one who gets the job. The candidate who has planned well, outlined and implemented a strategy, and remained flexible will frequently be the one selected.

How often you might consider changing assignments will be determined, in part, on your current career stage. Generally, initial positions are of shorter duration, perhaps two to three years. Assignments in several program areas provide enough time for you to learn the fundamentals and gain a general knowledge of the mission and function of the program. Entry-level RDs can usually make changes easily; however, it becomes harder to identify suitable positions if the job change is delayed too long.

As you move further into your career and into more complex positions, assignments may last for five years or more. Typically, individuals are considered too advanced for most entry-level positions after six years. However, they are generally not advanced enough to go directly into a senior level position in another program, especially an established one. It may be easier to advance in a new and growing program. Should you later decide on a career goal with a specific agency, one or two positions in related program areas of other agencies will be valuable to broaden your knowledge base and interagency understanding.

Once you have identified the position you are interested in, be prepared to work hard to get it. Again, prior planning is the key element to success. If you have already studied the requirements for the position and thoroughly familiarized yourself with the agency and/or program, you will be able to act quickly and decisively. Often positions may not be widely advertised or may be open for only a brief time. There are several strategies which you should follow to increase your competitiveness:

- Have an up-to-date curriculum vita (cv) ready at all times. If you are unfamiliar with how to write a cv go to the DIETITIAN PAC website for the template. A cover letter addressing specific job requirements and how you meet them allows you keep your cv more broadly applicable to a variety of assignments.
- It is most advantageous to be able to deal directly with the individual who will be making the selection. Make yourself available for necessary interviews, but do not badger the selecting official during the selection process.
- The interview is often the most important aspect of the selection process. You should prepare and practice for the interview. If your

planning has been thorough you will have a great deal of information on the organization and the specific position available. You should review this information before interviewing. During the interview it is important to ask questions about what your responsibilities will be and how your position fits into the overall program mission. Give honest answers to questions about your skills, abilities, and career interests.

- After the interview, contact the person who interviewed you to thank them for the opportunity to interview. You should also inquire as to when a decision will be made. This shows interest and professionalism. Even if you are not selected for this position, a follow-up call could ensure that you are considered in the future should another position become available.

4. Career Evaluation

Once a goal has been established and plans for reaching it have been implemented, it is necessary to evaluate your progress towards attaining it. There are many ways that progress might be measured and the following list is provided only as a sample of the types of benchmarks which you might consider. It is important that you review your career progress on a regular basis to determine if your goals remain realistic or if you might need to adjust them. The list is not in any particular order and the relative importance of the benchmarks will vary from person to person. Your career progression should include some or all of the following:

- Progressively more responsible assignments within PHS
- Professional publications and presentations
- Graduate training at the Masters or Doctoral level
- Awards or other professional recognition for work achievements
- Advanced professional certification in a specialty area
- Assignments in supervisory positions or other positions of authority
- Increased responsibility and participation in professional organizations as an officer, committee chairperson, seminar director, etc
- Assignments in advisory or consultant positions as a recognized authority on program areas or in highly specialized areas of considerable importance
- Recognition as a research specialist in areas of national or international importance

- Assignment to top-level positions involving responsibility for entire programs or important segments of extensive program activities

Remember, career development is not a static exercise. It is dynamic and ongoing, based on continuing assessment and changing conditions. While there are many resources available to help you in the process, it is ultimately up to you to achieve your goals. The PHS offers RDs an incredible diversity of professional opportunities in literally all areas of health care. With a coherent strategy and some hard work, you can realize a fulfilling and awarding career. The choices are yours!

K. Mentoring Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is critical to the improvement of the Mentoring Program. Part of the commitment to function as a Mentor and to participate as a Mentee, includes the responsibility to provide a constructive critique of the experience. The Mentoring Subcommittee is responsible for evaluating the feedback received from participants and incorporating necessary changes into the operating guideline.

- Mentors and Mentees are required to complete electronic feedback survey which will be emailed

Mentee Survey

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MP62CDK>

Mentor Survey

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/M6DPN6M>

- The Mentor Subcommittee Chair will collate information from the survey into a status report to the DIETITIAN PAC. Information provided by these status reports will be used by the DIETITIAN PAC to evaluate the effectiveness of the Program and make modifications as necessary

L. More Information on Mentoring

If you want further information about Mentoring:

Visit the DIETITIAN PAC web site at:
<http://www.usphs.gov/corpslinks/dietitian/>

US Coast Guard Mentoring Program at:
<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-w/g-wt/g-wtl/mentoring.htm>

Appendix A Mentor/Mentee Discussion List

This list is a tool that can be used to assist the Mentor in ensuring that pertinent issues are adequately addressed during the mentoring process. Many of these items should be covered by the Officer's direct supervisor and detail may not be necessary. However, many Officers are not provided satisfactory information on some topics or are unaware of their existence or importance. The introduction of each topic will give the Mentee the opportunity to determine whether he/she is familiar with the topic.

Mentor: _____ Mentee: _____

Date Mentoring Began: ____/____/____

Career Development Issues Date Discussed

- ⓪ Annual Physical _____
- ⓪ The Promotion Process and Precepts _____
- ⓪ Importance of the Curriculum Vitae _____
- ⓪ Conducting a file review _____
- ⓪ Maintenance of your eOPF _____
- ⓪ The Awards System _____
- ⓪ Education and Training _____
- ⓪ Licensure/Professional Development Portfolio _____
- ⓪ Duty Assignments and Progression _____
- ⓪ Office of Force Readiness and Deployment (OFRD) _____
- ⓪ Billets _____
- ⓪ Mobility _____
- ⓪ Officer Information Summary (OIS) _____

Personnel Issues

- ⓪ Leave _____
- ⓪ Pay _____
- ⓪ Performance Standards/COER'S _____
- ⓪ Standards of Conduct _____
- ⓪ Medical/Dental Benefits and Insurance _____
- ⓪ Life Insurance _____
- ⓪ Retirement _____
- ⓪ Military Protocol _____
- ⓪ Agencies/Opportunities in the PHS _____
- ⓪ Details _____
- ⓪ Separation _____
- ⓪ Probation _____

Support Issues

- ⓪ Role and Function of the DIETITIAN PAC _____
- ⓪ Commissioned Officers' Association _____
- ⓪ Professional Organizations and Associations for Officers _____

Appendix B

Mentor/Mentee References and Resources

References and Resources

- ④ General Information – Commissioned Corps Issuance System (eCCIS):
<http://dcp.psc.gov/eCCIS/CCISMain.aspx>
- ④ Uniforms – CCPM Chapter 26.3; Instruction 1, Summer 2006:
http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/documents/CCPM26_3_1.pdf
- ④ Health Care Services Reference – CCPM Chapter 29.3; Instruction 7, Spring, 1997: http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/documents/CCPM29_3_7.pdf
- ④ Commissioned Officer's Handbook – CCPM Pamphlet 62; Spring, 1998:
<http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/documents/PAM62.pdf>
- ④ A Supervisor's Guide to the Commissioned Personnel System, CCPM Pamphlet 58; Spring, 1999: <http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/documents/PAM58.pdf>
- ④ Commissioned Officer Roster and Promotion Seniority – CCPM, Chapter 23.4; Instruction 1, Winter, 2003:
http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/documents/CCPM23_4_1.pdf
- ④ Professional Growth and Development – CCPM, Chapter 25.2; Instruction 6, Summer, 1992: http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/documents/CCPM25_2_6.pdf