

## **Article Title: Dietitians with the U.S. Public Health Service: Endless Possibilities!**

Primary Author: **Commander (CDR) Celia R. Hayes, MPH, RD**  
Senior Program Analyst  
U.S. Public Health Service  
Health Resources and Services Administration  
HIV/AIDS Bureau  
5600 Fishers Lane, Room 7C-07  
Rockville, MD 20857

Phone: 301 443-3669  
Fax: 301 443-4965 E-mail: [chayes@hrsa.gov](mailto:chayes@hrsa.gov)

### **Dietitians with the U.S. Public Health Service – Endless Possibilities!**

*CDR Celia Hayes, CAPT Sandra Robinson, LCDR Graydon Yatabe*

Are you interested in adventure? Do you want to be challenged? Are you looking for diverse opportunities? If so, you may find what you are looking for in the U.S. Public Health Service. With possibilities unmatched by any other organization, the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) offers dietitians opportunities far beyond traditional roles.

“Living and working in Alaska is great! The hospital is state of the art. I love my job learning and working with the Native patients”, exclaims LT Juli Haws, clinical dietitian at the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage, Alaska.

“The Commissioned Corps continues to offer me excitement, challenge, and an opportunity to maximize my potential as a dietitian. After 18 years in clinical nutrition research, I recently took a position with the Office of the Director in Planning and Organizational Development at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Over my 22 year career thus far, the Commissioned Corps has prepared me to seek new assignments and has supported my continued growth as an officer”,

CAPT Denise Ford, former Director of Clinical Nutrition Services, Clinical Center, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland.

LT Sandra Magera is a dietitian at the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation, and she transferred from the Civil Service to Commissioned Corps in April 2001. "Job stability and mobility are very important which make the USPHS the perfect job for me!"

All of these roles fall under the auspices of the USPHS. "Our officers are on the cutting edge of biomedical research, they treat victims of natural disasters, and they help lead the way in AIDS, cancer, and heart disease research," explained CAPT Shirley Blakely, Chief Professional Officer for the dietitian category. CAPT Blakely is responsible for providing leadership and coordination of the USPHS dietitian professional affairs for the Office of the Surgeon General and is a Senior Research Nutritionist at the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. She is presently detailed to the US Army Research Lab in Natick, Massachusetts where she contributes to obesity and metabolic research studies.

### **Who We Are and Where we Serve**

The USPHS is one of seven Uniformed Services of the United States and the only uniformed service whose primary mission is to protect and promote health. The over 6,000 Commissioned Officers serve under the direction of the U.S. Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona. The mission of the USPHS is to provide highly-trained and mobile health professionals who promote the health of the Nation, understand and prevent disease and injury, assure safe and effective drugs and medical devices, deliver health services, furnish health expertise in time of war or other national or international emergencies, conduct and support biomedical, behavioral, and health services research, and assure a safe food supply.

This exciting and diverse organization boasts a long and interesting history. The USPHS is just over 200 years old and has pursued one goal...improving and advancing the health of our Nation. The PHS healthcare team has helped defeat killers like smallpox, defined the characteristics of Toxic Shock Syndrome and Legionnaires' Disease, dramatically decreased environmental and occupational health risks, and developed a significantly greater understanding of the genetic basis of disease processes . Natural disasters sites, Native American reservations, remote mountain areas, and inner city communities all continue to benefit from the Nation's number one mobile healthcare team, which includes the USPHS Dietitian.

The service of dietitians and nutritionists in the USPHS dates back to the year 1919. During that year, the first dietetic section was organized in the USPHS Division of Hospitals, which operated a medical care program for American seamen. These hospitals were primarily located in port cities. Presently, the 80+ officers in the dietitian category in the USPHS work throughout the United States in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and in other Federal agencies and programs. Other professionals serving in the USPHS with dietitians include physicians, dentists, nurses, engineers, health services specialists, scientists, pharmacists, environmental health specialists, veterinarians, and therapists.

### **Diversity of Opportunities**

"I've enjoyed the opportunity to look at population based nutritional health risks that extend from basic medical conditions to protecting the Nation's food supply from terrorist events," stated LCDR Alexandra Cossi. LCDR Cossi, who has been in the Corps for five years, has moved from coast- to- coast following the needs of the USPHS and has benefited from the Corps' diversity of opportunities. She is presently working as an Emergency Coordinator in the Emergency

Operations Center of the FDA. This position gives LCDR Cossi an opportunity to contribute to our Nation's security, a goal of hers since the terrorism events of September 11, 2001. "This combined experience has given me the skills needed to assess multiple food and nutrition issues that occur during emergency situations," explains LCDR Cossi. *(Insert photo of LCDR COSSI here)*

Commissioned Corps dietitians contribute to public health in unique ways. "My radio show, *Shooting Stars Production*, is a culmination of all the work I've done in public health," states CDR David Nelson, a Public Health Educator at the Hopi Health Care Center in Polacca, Arizona. Nelson has created a radio show, broadcast each weekday morning on Hopi Public Radio, that addresses topics such as *Elder Thanks* – featuring Hopi Youth, Native language lessons, and a variety of health-related issues. "I've created over 300 shows in the past 4-years," exclaims Nelson. "I'm so pleased to have a job where I can spread my nutrition knowledge and appreciation of Native culture with the community." . CDR Nelson's next duty station? He is preparing to move to Peach Springs, Arizona, where he will continue his work as a Public Health Educator to the Havasupai Native American Tribe who live at the base of the Grand Canyon. Nelson states, "I'll be strapping on my USPHS backpack and hiking down into the Canyon to help and inspire others to follow the message of good public health."

### **Major Agencies**

CDR Nelson is one of 44 Corps dietitians currently working with the IHS. As his career shows, the opportunity within IHS for a variety of assignments seems almost endless. The IHS delivers health care to over 1 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. Most sites are west of the Mississippi in areas of great natural beauty – including the northern Plains States, the Southwest, the Pacific Northwest, and Alaska. *(Insert photo of IHS dietitian, here)*

Although 51% of the dietitian officers work with IHS, several other HHS agencies utilize dietitian expertise. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is one of those, regulating over one fourth of all goods in the marketplace. Sixteen percent of the Corps dietitians help ensure the safety of foods and food products through research and testing, complaint review, consumer education and a host of other efforts. Many work at the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition in Washington, D.C.

The National Institutes of Health is the steward of medical and behavioral research for the Nation. Its mission is science in pursuit of fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to extend healthy life and reduce the burdens of illness and disability. Corps dietitians work with researchers in the Clinical Center, the research hospital of the NIH, and with extramural Institute programs. LTJG Blakeley Denkinger, who joined the Commissioned Corps of the USPHS in February of 2004, is actively involved in research at the Clinical Center (CC). As a member of the Clinical Nutrition Research staff of the CC, she serves as co-investigator on several research protocols. Her work includes developing research diets to investigate human metabolism, managing the preparation and delivery of metabolic meals, and evaluating food records, recalls, and questionnaires to assess nutrient intakes, *(insert picture of Blakeley Denkinger and John Urban – dietitians graduating from Basic Officer Training)*

At the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), nine Corps dietitians help formulate and administer important national programs addressing maternal and child health issues, bioterrorism and emergency preparedness, health promotion and disease prevention, health professions training, and HIV/AIDS. Officers work primarily in the Washington, D.C. area, where they plan and implement programs, set national dietary guidelines, develop resource

materials, and administer Federal funds. Additionally, there are officers stationed in some of the ten DHHS regional offices who work directly with the States on programs funded through HRSA.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS – formerly the Health Care Financing Administration) employ four dietitian Commissioned Officers, who utilize their skills in administrative areas of health care, such as formulating and reviewing policies, analyzing program performance, and reviewing/assessing health care provided in Medicare-certified facilities.

Three Corps dietitians work in the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), in both the clinical and administrative areas. BOP facilities are located throughout the Nation, and many are progressive in design and near major metropolitan areas. Others, such as the former Olympic compound at Lake Placid, New York, provide more rural settings. In all, there are over 86 institutions and 6 medical centers, ranging from maximum security to minimum security.

Two other dietitians work for the Centers of Disease Control (CDC), headquartered in Atlanta GA. The CDC investigates the epidemiology of public health problems, including the relationship between diet and health. CDR Charlene Sanders is a senior program management officer in the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “The best thing about being an officer in the USPHS is having the opportunity to associate with fellow officers who are creative and have a ‘can-do’ attitude.” CDR Sanders works with the WISEWOMAN Program which provides low-income, uninsured or underinsured 40-64 year old women with the knowledge, skills and opportunities to improve their diet, physical activity, and other life habits to prevent, delay, or control cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases.

Dietitians in the Commissioned Corps have amazing flexibility in career choices. CDR Jean Makie started her career with the USPHS at the NIH Clinical Center. She then became a Senior Regulatory Project Manager in the Division of Reproductive and Urologic Drug Products in the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research where she provides regulatory oversight on urology drugs. CDR Makie recently accepted an opportunity with FDA's Office of the Commissioner where she will be part of the Agency's Medicare Modernization Implementation Team for the Medicare Modernization Implementation Act.

### **Public Health Service Transformation**

A major goal of the Commissioned Corps is to meet the public health needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the result of these needs, the Commissioned Corps is currently undergoing an unprecedented transformation to a corps that uses force management personnel practices and is highly and quickly deployable. Ultimately, this transformation will enable the PHS Commissioned Corps to present an efficient and timely public health emergency response capability, provided by officers who uphold the highest standards of quality and leadership. As Tommy Thompson, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), stated: "The end product will be a visible, physically fit, highly motivated, and expert mobile Uniformed Service of public health professionals." Now, more than ever, the Commissioned Corps is expected to call on one of its greatest strengths, defined by current Surgeon General Vice Admiral Carmona as "the ability to adapt to the changing demands of public health."

Dietitians and Nutritionists with the USPHS are expected to play a major role in emergency preparedness, possibly assisting in a range of settings such as emergency mass feeding, clinical backfilling, and clinical or public health guidance. Depending upon their education and experience, Dietetics officers are not limited to strictly nutrition related deployment roles,

however. They can be involved as liaison officers between PHS and other federal, or state and local agencies and programs; general health educators; epidemiologists; and even assist in coordinating emergency response situations.

Dietetics category officers are poised to become leaders in developing and/or implementing innovative and effective programs to battle this epidemic. This is one of the many ways that U.S. Public Health Service dietitians make a difference in the lives of millions of Americans while building challenging health careers.

*(Insert photo of CAPT Blakely here)*

More information on U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps opportunities can be found at [www.usphs.gov](http://www.usphs.gov), or contact one of the Commissioned Corps Dietitian Recruiters:

CAPT Sandra Robinson (Baltimore, MD) [srobinson2@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:srobinson2@cms.hhs.gov)

CDR Celia Hayes (Washington, D.C.) [chayes@hrsa.gov](mailto:chayes@hrsa.gov)

LCDR Graydon Yatabe (Phoenix, AZ) [graydon.yababe@chinle.ihs.gov](mailto:graydon.yababe@chinle.ihs.gov)

CDR Shirley Turpin (Washington, D.C.) [shirley.turpin@cfsan.fda.gov](mailto:shirley.turpin@cfsan.fda.gov)

CDR Peggy Barrow ((Washington, D.C.) [peggy.barrow@cfsan.fda.gov](mailto:peggy.barrow@cfsan.fda.gov)

LCDR Kari Blasius (South Dakota) [kblasius@abrmail.ihs.gov](mailto:kblasius@abrmail.ihs.gov)

LT Sandra Magera (Tuba City, AZ) [smagera@tcimc.ihs.gov](mailto:smagera@tcimc.ihs.gov)

LCDR Kristen Warwar (Florida) [kwarwar@hrsa.gov](mailto:kwarwar@hrsa.gov)

LT Carma Pauli (Illinois area) [carma.pauli@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:carma.pauli@fsis.usda.gov)