



The Office of Commissioned Corps Operations (OCCO)

Presents:

Career Development

Of The Commissioned Corps Officer



A Training Guide to a Successful PHS Career

(Based on current CCPM)

by
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USPHS Commissioned Corps Career Development

USPHS Commissioned Corps Mission Statement

“Protecting, promoting, and advancing the health and safety of the Nation”

As America’s uniformed service of public health professionals, the Commissioned Corps achieves this mission through:

- rapid and effective response to public health needs,
- leadership and excellence in public health practices, and
- the advancement of public health science.

The new Mission Statement became effective February 17, 2005 and clearly establishes a new and exciting direction for the Commissioned Corps. This direction embraces **officer leadership** along with **readiness and rapid response** in times of crises for our nation in addition to the many other basic principles that were established over 200 years ago. Career Development for all Commissioned Corps officers will be based on these clear and basic principles.

Career Development: Definition

Career Development defined is a focused effort or process in which an officer obtains needed experience and utilizes the most current knowledge and tools available to enhance his/her capacity to serve and to make choices that will guide him/her through a successful and fulfilling Public Health Service (PHS) career. Successful Career Development is dependent on a combination of experience and training. The purpose of career development for PHS commissioned officers is to enhance the mission of the PHS and the Commissioned Corps by providing opportunities for professional growth for officers (CC25.2.C.2).

Difficult Decisions

The process one uses in making career decisions in the PHS Commissioned Corps is multi-sided and complex. Unlike the Department of Defense (DoD), which exists primarily for the training and deployment of uniformed assets in armed conflict, the PHS exists in an environment that specifically promotes the health, welfare, and safety of the American people through research, regulation, and direct health care. The different types of employees used within this system include: 1) civil service employees; 2) contract employees; and 3) Commissioned Corps officers. Except during deployment situations, each of these employees can and do perform many of the same functions, so it becomes the officer’s personal responsibility to show that there is value in having a Commissioned Corps officer assigned within that Agency not only on a cost effective basis, but also by portraying the highest level of personal integrity possible and by having an outstanding work ethic that clearly puts the mission of the agency and the needs of the Corps above personal gain.

Within the Commissioned Corps, **responsibility for career development lies with the commissioned officer.** It is necessary for the officer to define his/her career goals early in his/her career. In selecting a career track an officer should avail him/herself of career counseling by the Chief Professional Officer (CPO) and Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) of the officer's discipline, the assigned Agency/Program, and from the Office of Commissioned Corps Operations (OCCO) (CC25.2.C.3).

The “Officer” Difference

Commissioned Corps officers are not just 8-to-5 employees. First, PHS officers must excel in performing their duties within the Agency they are assigned. Second, PHS officers are expected to take an active role within their work section and the PHS to promote and enhance the Agency's mission and the image of the Commissioned Corps. Third, an officer must also juggle a large assortment of other responsibilities in order to perform their PHS mission successfully. These responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- 1) Understanding how to work with OCCO in order to maintain their CV, OPF, promotion papers, COERs, assimilation paperwork, awards etc;
- 2) Constantly reviewing policies of the PHS that exist now or have been changed and/or updated to better understand the expectations of each officer and how things work within the personnel system;
- 3) Maintaining professional credentials, to include licensing and continuing education;
- 4) Preparing for and continuing the Commissioned Corps officer training (i.e., BOTC/IOTC, Leadership Training etc.);
- 5) **Readiness preparation** along with updating and/or maintaining any current and new Readiness Standards and capabilities that become effective; and
- 6) Preparing for and/or meeting the specific Category Benchmarks.

Even if a Commissioned Officer has performed all of the above responsibilities, he/she must be ready at a moments notice to deploy and possibly go into harms way anywhere in the world to help promote, enhance, and protect the Public Health of the American people.

Planning Your Career – The Process

Usually, when an officer enters onto active duty, he/she doesn't understand the importance of this decision. He/she has simply started a new job, which coincidentally wants him/her to wear a uniform. The new officer thinks, no big deal, I'm in the Commissioned Corps, I'll work, do my job well, go home, and get my pay at the end of the month. He/she doesn't even think about what's ahead in his/her new career, what's expected of him/her as an officer, or how he/she's expected to become a future PHS leader.

And don't forget, the Commissioned Corps is not DoD, so he/she will never have to be deployed.

Right???

WRONG!

The Commissioned Corps is changing. **Deployment, readiness, and response** in addition to the normal day-to-day activities such as health science research, safety and regulatory compliance, and healthcare of the underserved are values that officers need to embrace. Officers in the Commissioned Corps must accept the responsibility that they are the leaders now and in the future for the United States Public Health Service. Planning ones own career is of paramount importance in all stages of growth and development as a commissioned officer.

A timeline graph has been developed to assist and give guidance to officers throughout a 30-year career within the PHS (See Exhibit #1). The graph is based on Training and Experience (T&E) along with time in the service (TIS), and **not rank and/or promotions**. It is expected that officers with certain amounts of experience will perform at expected levels of responsibility. The graph is broken down into several areas of concern for officers. These areas include:

- 1) Administrative Officer Responsibilities
- 2) Assimilation timeline
- 3) Physical Examinations
- 4) Professional Credentials
- 5) Agency Performance Standards, Guidelines, and Programmatic Roles
- 6) Training
- 7) Readiness Standards
- 8) Category Benchmarks and specified Career Tracks
- 9) Retirement Planning

H Assumption: The timeline graph is for **guidance only**.

H Assumption: Those officers who enter onto active duty with greater than four years of T&E will quickly assume the roles and responsibilities of their current T&E and complete and/or catch up with all requirements listed on the graph for earlier T&E.

H Assumption: Officers are responsible for initiating contact with their PAC, mentor, or OCCO representative for Career Development guidance.

Administrative Officer Responsibilities

Many Career Development responsibilities for a Commissioned Corps officer are important and “should” occur weekly, monthly, or annually. These types of activities include: 1) reviewing for accuracy and/or updating the Promotion Information Report (PIR), 2) reviewing and/or updating information in the electronic Official Personnel File (eOPF), 3) updating the CV, 4) performing the annual Commissioned Officer’s Evaluation Report (COER), 5) reviewing the billet and/or requesting changes that reflect all current job responsibilities, 6) reviewing the CCMIS web-site for policy changes and important information, 7) signing up for all listserv communication that is appropriate, 8) reviewing the Vacancy Announcement and Tracking System (VAATS), and 9) reviewing and/or applying for appropriate PHS training. It is the officer’s responsibility to keep abreast of any and all changes that occur within the PHS, the polices that govern the service, and the personnel system that supports their career.

- 1) **PIR:** The PIR is a quick glance at an officers PHS career. Information regarding entry onto active duty date, creditable service time, seniority date, retirement date, assimilation date, license status, current and previous assignment history, previous COER history, and uniformed service awards are all listed. It is important to review this information regularly/annually. This document is reviewed by the Promotion Boards and provides invaluable information about an officer's career progression, mobility, and performance. The PIR also gives an excellent overview of PHS and non-PHS awards when it is difficult to locate within the officers CV.

- 2) **eOPF:** The eOPF is a complete representation of your PHS career and experiences. Sections within your eOPF include:
 - a. Letters of Reprimand
 - b. COER Documents
 - c. The (real time) PIR
 - d. The Current Curriculum Vitae (CV)
 - e. Licensing Information
 - f. PHS and Non-PHS Awards
 - g. Continuing Education Documentation
 - h. Special Skills
 - i. Outside Activities Forms and Information
 - j. PHS Support Activities
 - k. Privacy Act Information
 - l. ID Card Information
 - m. Insurance Forms
 - n. Statement of Service
 - o. Miscellaneous Documents
 - p. Personnel Orders
 - q. Security Clearance Information
 - r. Application Documentation
 - s. Confidential Documents from various boards that review your information

The information in the eOPF can be used to assess the overall status of an officer in his/her career. The contents of the eOPF may be a key tool utilized to reflect the unique combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as the experiences possessed by an officer in documenting career development. The information is also used to establish an officer's rights and benefits under pertinent laws and regulations governing service in the Commissioned Corps and to determine eligibility or entitlement of dependents (CC25.2.F.1). **Therefore, it is very important to review and update this information on a regular basis.**

The information contained in the eOPF file is also important because it may be reviewed and used by Promotion Boards, Assimilation Boards, and other Reviewing Officials when making decisions that affect an officers' career. Make the eOPF look the way you want to be viewed by others personally. It should be organized, professional, and accurate.

- Helpful Hints:
 - i. Keep a weekly log of your accomplishments for your COER
 - ii. Maintain an annual log of your CEUs
 - iii. Maintain an annual log of your “Thank-you” letters
 - iv. Maintain an annual log of your “Letters of Appreciation”
 - v. Remove duplicate items when possible
- 3) **Curriculum Vitae (CV):** This is an account of the career and qualifications prepared typically by an applicant for a position. A CV should also be a part of the officer’s official personnel folder (eOPF). When applying for a position, it may emphasize current professional duties, and address specific criteria and/or selective factors required to perform the job. When prepared for an officer’s eOPF, it generally emphasizes increasing professional responsibilities and accomplishments, as documented by a career history, that have resulted in significant impact upon program goals (CC.25.2.F.2). It is important that all officers review the suggested CV format from his/her PAC and update the CV annually within his/her eOPF. Only the most current CV is maintained in the eOPF.
- 4) **COER:** The Commissioned Officer Evaluation Report (COER) is an officer’s annual report card. This document is **required** and depicts the work that officers perform for the agency in which they are assigned from June 1st through May 31st each calendar year. Although it is important that officers do the best they can while performing their assigned duties, it is equally important that officers discuss the elements in the COER with the supervisor on a regular basis. These discussions not only allow the supervisor to become aware of the grading criteria for a Commissioned Corps officer, but also allow open communication of the supervisor’s performance expectations. If an officer is concerned that the supervisor does not fully understand the COER process, it is suggested that a senior Commissioned Corps mentor communicate with him/her for better understanding and interpretation.
- Helpful Hint:
 - i. Keep a weekly log of accomplishments to complete the COER
 - ii. Meet with management regularly to explain the COER system and to clarify expectations of the desired outcomes
- 5) **Billet:** The officer’s billet is a Human Resource management tool that helps the agency leadership/management understand the scope of work and the qualification requirements for that position. Officers should not engage in duties that are not reflected within their billet. In addition, the billet helps to link the Civil Service system with the Commissioned Corps system in terms of Rank and GS grade for cost effectiveness (See Guidelines to Career Progression below). Each officer should have a copy of his/her current billet. It is the officer’s responsibility to periodically review his/her billet with their supervisor in order to make sure his/her duties are understood, and the job responsibilities are accurately portrayed. Although an officer cannot simply change the billet level in which they are assigned, a review of the billet will assist leadership in determining if a higher billet can be justified.

- 6) **CCMIS Website @ <http://dcp.psc.gov>:** This website is the gateway to information for the PHS Commissioned Corps Officer. Contact information, frequently asked questions, the Electronic Official Personnel File (eOPF), the Commissioned Officer Leave Tracking System (COLTS), vacancy announcements, available services, the Commissioned Corps Personnel Manual (CCPM), payroll information, information pamphlets, training information, important contact numbers, and other links are all available. In addition, day-to-day operational changes that affect every officer's career can be found on the front-page area of this website. Information includes: 1) transformation information; 2) policy updates; 3) Uniform information; and 4) promotion information, and other important material. It is highly suggested that every officer visit this website several times a week.

- 7) **Listserv Communication:** Another important gateway for information is a listserv. These communication outlets are focused on specific types of information and serve an important role in keeping an officer up-to-date with information. This information may include professional, category, or job related data. Listservs' to be maintained at a minimum include OCCO, the appropriate PAC, OFRD, and the appropriate Agency/OPDIV if available. Others include JOAG (O-4 and below), MOLC and/or the appropriate sub-section, and any discipline specific sight that may provide an officer with information important for the performance of his/her job.

- 8) **Vacancy Announcement and Tracking System (VAATS):** VAATS is a database that contains vacancies voluntarily submitted by PHS Agencies and approved by OCCO as appropriate for commissioned officers. The system is designed to match vacancies with officers who are qualified and interested in the position. VAATS is utilized by:
 - a. Agencies, as a means of advertising vacancies;
 - b. Officers, as a means of identifying vacancies of professional interest;
 - c. OCCO, as a means of identifying officers who may fill career enhancing positions; and
 - d. Agencies, as a means of identifying officers with the interest and qualifications to meet their personnel needs.

Vacancies in VAATS are displayed during the period vacancies are available. Officers can access and view vacancies in PHS programs and consider application consistent with personal career strategies. Periodic review of vacancy listings can also assist in development of career planning strategies by identifying the types of positions that become available with the PHS (CC25.2.F.3-4).

- 9) **Training:** Training supported through the PHS must be of benefit to both the PHS and the assigned Agency. Training funds are usually controlled/supported by the Agency to meet program goals. Training may be utilized:
 - a. To help the Agency meet it's mission
 - b. To prepare an officer for future deployment roles within the PHS

- H **Documents sent to OCCO for processing include:**
- o Documents sent directly to the eOPF by the officer. These include: 1) the CV; 2) all continuing education documents; 3) all thank-you letters; 4) all letters of appreciation; 5) special skills documents; and 6) all other PHS support activity documentation, Officer Statement (OS) when appropriate, and the Associate Recruiter Certificate.
 - o Documents sent to program staff for processing. These include: 1) all application documentation, 2) award documentation; 3) license information; 4) Long-Term training documentation; and 5) Assimilation documentation (unless the Agency/OPDIV Liaison requires additional review procedures).
 - o Documents routed through Agency/OPDIV Liaison's. These include: 1) COER documentation; 2) Assimilation documentation (for an Agency/OPDIV Liaison that requires additional review procedures); 3) Billet changes; 4) Permanent Change of Station documentation; 5) all other Personnel Actions (1662); and 6) the Reviewing Official Statement (ROS) for promotion.

Assimilation Timeline

Although the “regular corps” is the career service of the PHS Commissioned Corps, it is the PHS policy to appoint all officers to the “reserve corps” upon entry onto continuous active duty. Therefore, it is highly encouraged that all motivated reserve officers apply for “regular corps” status as soon as eligible to avoid permanent grade restrictions in the higher permanent ranks later in their career (P-04 and above). Important assimilation facts include that an officer (CCPM23.3.7.C-D):

- 1) **Must have completed a minimum of two years of continuous active duty (A)*** in the current tour of duty in order to apply. Exception: A regular officer that separated less than two years ago, may apply for immediate assimilation;
- 2) Must meet the appointment standards for his/her particular professional category;
- 3) Must meet the required medical standards at time of application and assimilation;
- 4) Must not have any open Adverse Actions currently being investigated;
- 5) Must meet current Readiness Standards;
- 6) Must have received a D or E overall score on his/her current COER;
- 7) Must be in compliance with the PHS Commissioned Corps Licensure policy; and
- 8) **Must have completed three consecutive years of continuous active duty (B)*** before an assimilation board may review him or her. (This rule applies to each tour of duty performed by the officer)

*See Exhibit #1 – Career Development Quick Reference

Physical Examinations

Once on continuous active duty, an officer is required to have periodic complete physical examinations. Currently, these examinations are required every 5 years during an officer's career. In addition, an examination/history may be necessary for long-term training, assimilation, and the promotion process. When an officer applies for long-term training, he/she must have a current physical on file and must also fill out and send in a "Report of Medical History". For assimilation, an officer may not apply if a current physical has not been recorded. In addition, if an officer does not have a current physical exam in place at the time of being assimilated, the effective date of assimilation will be postponed until such time the information is updated and current (CCPM23.3.7.D.3). During a year when an officer is being considered for Permanent Promotion, the 5-year physical must be current and the "Report of Medical History" is required to be updated within the one year time period prior to the effective date of the promotion (CCPM43.4.1.J.4). In all cases, DD Form 2807-1 "Report of Medical History" must be filled out and turned into the Medical Affairs Branch (MAB) along with a "Disclosure Statement" to comply with these requirements. Finally, a complete physical exam is recommended for separation or retirement. Officers are encouraged to take this physical exam in order to identify and/or clarify any health problems that may exist at the time of separation or retirement. Currently, regulations allow this exam to be waived if requested in writing to OCCO (CCPM.CC29.3.5.D.3.b).

Professional Credentials

Officers that belong to categories in which licensure and/or certification is a part of their appointment standards, job performance responsibilities, and/or pay requirements are required to maintain those credentials. It is the officer's responsibility to make sure that OCCO / OCCFM / OCCSS and/or CCSB receive the necessary documents when required. In addition, it is highly encouraged to obtain and maintain additional certifications that will enhance your performance as a PHS Officer in your job function, professional capacity, or deployment status. Additional professional licenses and certifications may also be suggested/recommended through the officers Category Benchmarks.

Agency Performance Standards and Progression Guidelines

Performance Standards: At the most basic level, PHS officers are required to meet all Agency performance standards throughout their career. This should occur without having to be stated. But more importantly, at a more advanced level, PHS officers are expected to perform above the expectations and requirements of a job description or billet. Not only is becoming a PHS officer a privilege that very few Americans will ever realize, but being an officer comes with an expectation from others that he/she will excel at his/her performance and lead the way within the organization. Don't shy away from these professional expectations. Every officer should embrace them and utilize the empowerment that comes with them to move both their career and the agency's mission forward. Remember, it is the officers' responsibility to educate the supervisor about the COER grading system and to help him/her understand how the evaluation system fits within their program.

Guidelines to Career Progression include:

1) **Billet Structure (CC25.2.G)**

- a. Officers pursuing career opportunities along a career path within their category are provided specific career track guidance through a category **standard billet** structure. Position and their associated billet grade are identified according to minimum training, experience and active duty service requirements.
- b. Each Agency's mission and goals dictate the knowledge, skills and abilities required of its work force. Agencies may develop **Agency-specific billets** modeled after the category standard billet "career ladder" structure to meet specific personnel needs and when category standard billets do not apply. Agency-specific "career ladder" billets are for the most part consistent with at least one of the career tracks outlined in CC25.2.E. Officers pursuing career opportunities outside the usual category career path are provided specific guidance through an Agency-specific billet structure that describes successive positions according to a "career ladder" model.
- c. Agencies may also meet unique manpower needs not provided for in the category or Agency-specific "career ladder" billet structures by developing **nonstandard billets**. Officers currently assigned to Agencies in nonstandard billets are best able to determine successive positions according to structure within civil service models or established Agency staff utilization patterns.

2) **Career Tracks**

- a. Upon call to active duty (CAD), commissioned officers initially pursue professional interests within their health disciplines, applying knowledge and abilities in a manner that maximizes their effectiveness. Early in an officer's career, the opportunity exists to consider career opportunities and set career objectives that are in keeping with their professional interests. This can be facilitated when an officer: 1) maintains current and accurate professional information on-line through the CCMIS; 2) maintains an up-to-date curriculum vitae (CV) in his/her eOPF; and 3) conducts periodic review of positions advertised in the VAATS.
- b. As officers' careers develop, they are faced with professional and personal challenges that provide opportunities to demonstrate career growth. Within this early-to-mid career stage, officers are encouraged to pursue progressive assignments that increase professional responsibility and value to programs. There may be a need to consider further training in the development of professional expertise. Alternative career tracks may be considered according to one's qualifications. Through a process of continued assessment of individual career objectives, a logical plan can be established to achieve the

desired goal. Tools utilized by the officer during this time include: career counseling as provided by the officer's category, Agency/Program, and OCCO; an understanding of the billet structure in relation to future goals; consideration of training programs that augment a career development strategy; and maintaining current, accurate professional information in the eOPF that identifies experience, accomplishments, and impact within programs. Officers are encouraged to develop familiarity with the professional expectations required to progress toward career goals within or outside their current professional setting, by applying personal initiative to become familiar with programs that are of interest and by interacting with individuals who can provide programmatic insight.

- c. Officers in later years of their career often possess exceptional and specialized knowledge, skills and abilities. The leadership skills developed through an officer's career may contribute to his/her ability to act as a mentor and authority for professional categories, individuals, and programs; to serve as a role model; and to assist in establishing mentorship relationships.

Agency Program Roles

During a PHS career, officers are expected to perform a variety of job roles that carry out the assigned agency's mission and vision and help to advance and improve the Public Health needs of the American people. The job roles available throughout the PHS are too numerous to account for in this guide, but whatever professional category an officer belongs to and/or career track that is chosen as described above, remember that two (2) basic concepts apply.

- 1) **The Experience Continuum:** With each billet position an officer occupies, there will be a period of time that he or she is the novice or beginner (**initial - green**)*, a time period of growth and competence (**intermediate - yellow**)*, and a time period that he or she will be referred to as the expert in that position (**advanced - red**)*. The period of time it takes to move along the continuum from novice to competence to expert is different for each officer. As a Commissioned Corps officer, every attempt should be made to perform at the highest level of competence possible, to move along the continuum quickly, and to maintain a professional demeanor along the journey.
- 2) **Reach Higher:** As an officer increases in professional experience, training, and rank, more visible and responsible positions should be sought out. This is true, not only to be cost effective for the agency in which the officer is assigned, but also, to become a more effective PHS leader. Three levels of program involvement should be considered by a commissioned officer.
 - a. **Program/Clinical Involvement (C)*:** Early in an officer's career and usually when an officer has limited Training and Experience (T&E), program/clinical involvement is performed and improved upon. Program/Clinical involvement by definition means that whatever and where

ever an officer is assigned, he or she will be fully engaged within that position. Simply going to work from 8 to 5 is considered unacceptable for Commissioned Officers in the PHS. The officer should be an integral part of the program from the very beginning. Whether that means committee work, extra-curricular agency activities, or community/organizational activities is dependent on each individual situation. (Usually has T&E of 4 – 10 years)

- b. **Program/Clinical Management (D)*:** After achieving the title of expert in program/clinical involvement, a natural track for the Commissioned Corps officer is into program/clinical management. This level is usually achieved after the officer has several years of Training and Experience that prepare him/her for the management of local agency programs. At first, the size and scope of the programs are typically smaller and more performance based, but as competence grows, an officer may be responsible for several programs that are more complex and may be more strategic in nature. This does not necessarily mean an officer should expect to leave the clinical setting. Even in a clinical setting, the officer may be responsible for programs within the scope of the agency's mission. (Usually has T&E of 10 – 17 years)

- c. **Advanced or National Program/Clinical Management / Supervisory or Advanced Leadership (E)*:** As an officer continues to advance in his/her career, they must be willing to move into more advanced and challenging positions in order to be cost effective for the agency they are assigned, to help move the mission of HHS forward, and to become competitive for future promotions. Advanced Program/Clinical Management, National Program/Clinical Management, Supervisory positions, and Advanced Leadership (SES) positions are examples of this continuum. Early in this stage, a continuance of the previous section occurs, but the officer has become the expert within the program(s) assigned. This level of involvement is almost always strategic in nature and very valuable to the assigned agency. If the officer is performing as expected, the transition into these higher levels of responsibility should occur naturally and seamlessly. (Usually has T&E of 17 + years)

*See Exhibit #1 – Career Development Quick Reference

Obviously, there are many different avenues to success where program roles are involved. No two PHS officers will advance in the same way or have the same experiences. What is important to remember is that each officer must plan his/her career far in advance, choose a career track that interests him/her, and plan at least five years into the future (review regularly). Officers must set goals that are achievable and that add value to his/her career, the Commissioned Corps, and the PHS as a whole. Officers should also consider involvement in Agency/OPDIV level committees, programs, and support activities that broaden their experiences within the organization. One concern to consider is if an officer decides to change career tracks in mid-career, all the rules above apply, but will occur at different stages of the career continuum and may reduce the chances for advancement if not timed appropriately.

Awards: Awards are an Agency/OPDIV responsibility that gives formal recognition to deserving PHS Commissioned Officers whose accomplishments or achievements are of outstanding or unique significance to the missions of the PHS, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and other programs to which PHS Commissioned Officers are assigned (CC27.1.A.1). Officers are highly encouraged to seek out opportunities within his/her scope of job responsibility or within the Agency/OPDIV in order to earn these PHS awards. Currently, there are six individual honor awards for which PHS Commissioned Officers may be nominated: the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM), Meritorious Service Medal (MSM), Outstanding Service Medal (OSM), Commendation Medal (CM), Achievement Medal (AM), and Citation (CIT). There is no progression or order in which an officer must receive these awards. Rather, the individual award criterion determines the appropriate level of an award, in conjunction with: 1) the scope of impact; 2) the level of achievement; 3) demonstrated leadership; and 4) the length of time involved (CC27.1.E.1).

Training: Officer Training

1. **BOTC (F)*:** Training for Commissioned Corps officers is one of the cornerstones to a strong, successful, and competent Uniformed Service for the future. The Commissioned Officers Training Academy (COTA) is currently offering the Basic Officer Training Course (BOTC), a course designed to introduce officers into Uniformed Service with “starter” courses on Uniforms, Military Protocol, and Standards of Conduct. Other classes provided within the BOTC framework describe a basic understanding of the Commissioned Corps personnel system and the rules and regulations that govern that system. Although BOTC is not a required course, it is highly encouraged that all Commissioned Corps officers attend in order to gain a better understanding of the HHS system in which they work. In addition, BOTC may be part of the Category Benchmarks in which the officer is affected. After completion of the in-class BOTC training, there is an Independent Officers Training Course (IOTC) in which the officer completes 15 training exams on-line. Successful completion of both BOTC and IOTC by the officer will earn the Commissioned Corps training ribbon.
2. **Leadership (G)*:** In addition to BOTC, leadership courses are highly recommended. VADM Carmona, the United States Surgeon General (SG), specifically stated that Commissioned Corps officers are expected to be the future leaders of the PHS. Although COTA is not prepared to offer any leadership courses at this time, it is encouraged that officers seek out opportunities to attend leadership courses either through the agencies in which they are assigned or in the private sector on their own. Although not required, a beginning leadership course before 8 years of T&E, an intermediate leadership course before 12 years of T&E, and an advanced leadership course before 17 years of T&E would be ideal. Leadership courses would help to prepare officers for the roles and responsibilities that will be necessary during a successful career within the PHS. It is likely that COTA will begin preparing leadership training as the Commissioned Corps transformation moves forward.

Training: Personal Training

- 1) **Financial Planning:** Because of the rapid increase in the cost of living, it is unlikely that the non-contributory retirement system offered through the PHS Uniformed Service will be sufficient to live without suffering from a drop in the standard of living an officer may enjoy while on extended Active Duty. Therefore, all officers are encouraged to begin financial planning early in their careers. Considerations include: 1) the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP); 2) an Individual Retirement Account (IRA); 3) a Roth IRA; 4) Stock investments; 5) Bond Investments; 6) Mutual Fund Investments; 7) Insurance Annuity Investments; and 8) Real Estate.
- 2) **Retirement Planning** – (See Retirement Planning below)

*See Exhibit #1 – Career Development Quick Reference

Readiness Standards

The new “Readiness Standards” have become synonymous with the Commissioned Corps transformation. From the top leadership down, especially after the 9/11 disasters, readiness of the Commissioned Corps has become a priority. The current paradigm shift of the Commissioned Corps is quickly moving forward, and officers who choose not to embrace the new direction may be left behind. As of May 31, 2005, it is expected that 70 – 100% of the Commissioned Corps will have reached the “Basic” level of readiness. It will then be expected that readiness will be maintained throughout an officer’s career.

Currently, the Standards for the Basic level of Force Readiness include three components: (Taken from Manual Circular – PHS No. 377)

- 1) **Health and Safety Standards:** In order to optimize mission performance of the Corps and allow it to accomplish the Department’s required mission(s), officers must be involved in an ongoing process of health maintenance and improvement. Part of this process involves the periodic monitoring of officers’ health and well-being and ensuring that they are protected against preventable diseases. Areas of concern in this section include:
 - a. Physical examination and medical history every 5 years;
 - b. Immunizations as prescribed; and
 - c. Height/Weight Reporting every 12 months.
- 2) **Physical Readiness Standards:** Physical readiness standards have been established to assure that the physical capabilities of officers are consistent with their assignments. The physical readiness standards necessary to meet the Basic level of force readiness are not designed or intended to place undue demands on officers with regard to training or physical strength. Therefore, officers may choose one of two physical fitness alternatives for meeting the physical readiness standards annually.

- a. President’s Challenge Physical Activity and Fitness Awards Program; or
- b. Annual Physical Fitness Test (APFT)

Completion of the Physical Readiness Standards must be documented on the OFRD website and with the Medical Affairs Branch on the appropriate forms. It is the officers’ responsibility to ensure this documentation is complete.

- 3) **Training and Professional Competency Standards:** To accomplish the Department’s mission(s), officers must possess a basic level of knowledge and competency in the areas of public health and deployment/response activities. In addition, officers must demonstrate proficiency in at least basic life support measures and, if applicable, maintain a valid and unrestricted professional license/certification/registration. Therefore, officers must complete or maintain the following training and professional competency standards every 12 months:
 - a. PHS Commissioned Corps Readiness Training Modules: Complete 12 Web-based readiness training modules (9 mandatory, 3 elective);
 - b. Basic Life Support (BLS): Complete training from an authorized source every 2 years;
 - c. Professional Competency:
 - i. Licensure: Healthcare providers must maintain a current unrestricted professional license/certification/registration appropriate for their profession
 - ii. Deployment Role: All officers must identify a deployment role and the appropriate clinical officers must perform a minimum of 112 hours of direct patient care documented appropriately; and
 - d. Uniforms: Officers must have and maintain all required uniforms.

Category Benchmarks

In 2004 as part of the transformation, the Office of Commissioned Corps Force Management (OCCFM) released new transparent promotion policies and procedures. These new policies and procedures introduced a standardized process to better guide the officer through the promotion process. The standardized process is based on “Promotion Precepts”. By definition, these Precepts describe the “best qualified” officers for promotion. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health directs the Precepts* with input from each Chief Professional Officer and their respective category. Precepts are broken down into Benchmarks. **Benchmarks are not requirements**, but merely indicators that assist commissioned officers to make important career choices. The Precepts are listed below with their respective Benchmarks.

- 1. **Performance.**
 - a. COER
 - b. Award History
 - c. Reviewing Official’s Assessment

2. **Education/Training/Professional Development Related to the Needs of the PHS**

- d. Degree Requirements
- e. Certifications/Credentialing, Licensure (beyond appointment standards)
- f. Continuing Education
- g. Public Health Training/Experience beyond initial degree

3. **Career Progression and Potential**

- h. Billet level
- i. Assignments
- j. Mobility
- k. Assimilation
- l. Collateral Duties

4. **Characteristics of Career Officer and Service to the Corps**

- m. Membership/Involvement in PAC/Advisory Groups
- n. Associate Recruiter
- o. Mentoring
- p. BOTC/IOTC
- q. Professional Organizations
- r. Service Awards
 - i. Special Assignment Award
 - ii. Isolated Hardship Award
 - iii. Hazardous Duty Award
 - iv. NEPA/CRSA
 - v. Foreign Duty
- s. Daily Wearing of Uniform
- t. Other Official Commissioned Corps/PHS Activities

5. **Readiness Standards** – See above section.

Officers are highly encouraged to review their categories Benchmarks and/or contact a category mentor for assistance in understanding what is expected in this area of Career Development.

*See OCCO Annual Self Checklist

Category Professional Tracks (CC25.2.E)

No two Commissioned Corps officers will have the same professional goals, training, or experiences. Because of this, each officer will be responsible for choosing his/her own career track. A Career Track is a distinct direction an officer chooses to go professionally. The six Career Tracks established within the PHS Commissioned Corps include:

- 1) **Clinical/Clinical Management:** Professional activities that relate directly to patient treatment ranging from hands-on care to consultation and/or guidance of other patient care staff.
- 2) **Epidemiology/Public Health Practice:** Professional activities that involve the study, analysis, and/or recommendation of health measures based upon the incidence, distribution, and control of disease in a population.
- 3) **International Health:** Professional activities to address the influence of the global health environment on the PHS domestic mission.
- 4) **Program Management:** The application of control in directing the day-to-day operation of Agency programs requiring planning, development, budgeting, assessment, supervision, and/or coordination.
- 5) **Regulatory Affairs:** Professional activities related to implementing, enforcing, controlling, directing, evaluating/inspecting, developing policy, and/or regulations designed to safeguard public health.
- 6) **Research:** 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).

There are many career choices possible for a commissioned officer depending on the professional category an officer is assigned, the skills and competencies an officer maintains, and/or the professional choices he/she makes while advancing through a PHS career. It is also recognized that a commissioned officer may elect to work in more than one career track and functional area during his/her PHS career. The career track and functional area designated as “primary” is that which reflects the officer’s principal responsibility and is reflected in his/her billet. No matter which direction or track an officer chooses, mentoring from his/her category or assistance from the Office of Commissioned Corps Operations (OCCO) Career Development officer is encouraged. Knowledge and good communication are the keys to success in this area.

Retirement Planning

Whether an officer intends on making the PHS a lifetime career or simply wants to fulfill an inner desire to perform public service in the Commissioned Corps for a few years, it is never too early to begin retirement planning. That said, for commissioned officers, retirement planning is the advanced planning necessary for completing a career with the PHS and the full understanding of what benefits, pay, and allowances will be available for the officer and his/her dependents upon retirement. Officers should start sooner, but no later than the 15-year point of their career for retirement planning. Important areas of consideration when planning retirement include:

- 1) **Application/Effecting Retirement.** Similar to the process when an officer enters onto active duty, there is an application process for retiring from active duty and from the Commissioned Corps. The retirement application process includes:
 - a. Requesting permission. If the officer has more than 20 but less than 30 years active duty service, he/she must request voluntary retirement and must get approval to retire. 30 year and Medical retirements are handled differently.
 - b. Requesting retirement. After approval to voluntarily retire has been received, he/she may apply for retirement by completing form PHS 1373 "Separation of Commissioned Officer" and forwarding to the Retirement Coordinator in the Officer of Commissioned Corps Support Services (OCCSS).

Important: It should be noted, that this process is time sensitive. Several things need to occur **BEFORE THE EFFECTIVE DATE OF YOUR RETIREMENT** in order to coordinate the process.

Remember: Prepare in Advance.

A number of the more important things that need to be considered when preparing for retirement include:

- o A Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP);
- o A Direct Deposit Form for retirement pay;
- o An Employees Withholding Allowance Certificate;
- o A Request for Voluntary State Income Tax Withholding from Retired Pay;
- o A Request to Establish/Change Mailing Address form;
- o Choosing a Home of Selection;
- o The Officer's Leave Record;
- o An Exit Physical Examination;
- o Terminal Leave and Lump-Sum Leave Payments;
- o Decisions about your Thrift Savings Account (TSP); and
- o Retirement of the Active Duty ID Card.

- 2) **Travel and Transportation Allowances:** As a general rule, when retiring from the PHS Commissioned Corps you are entitled to travel and transportation allowances from your last permanent duty station, from a designated place in the Continental United States (CONUS), from storage, or any combination thereof, to the member's home of selection (HOS). The HOS of selection may be currently chosen anywhere within CONUS and does not have to be the officers Home of Record (HOR) or place last entered onto active duty (PLEAD). Currently, the allowances include travel and transportation (mileage and per diem) for the officer and his/her dependents for each authorized travel day, shipment of his/her household goods (HHG) up to the authorized weight limit, and Non-Temporary Storage (NTS) for one year at the **point of origin** of those HHG. Contact your agencies travel representative or the travel and transportation coordinator at OCCO for current information on travel regulations.

- 3) **Benefits in Retirement:** Some benefits that are available to retired officers include:
 - a. Use of the Uniformed Services Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs)
 - b. Enrollment in TRICARE
 - c. Medicare at age 65
 - d. Use of Military Facilities (commissaries, exchanges etc.)
 - e. Space-A Travel

- 4) **Survivor Benefit Plan:** This plan allows an officer to provide an annuity to the spouse, children, or in some cases a third party, upon the officers death. Enrollment is automatic unless the officer and spouse voluntarily withdraw from the program.

- 5) **Veterans Affairs Benefits (VA):** Based on the officers career with the PHS Commissioned Corps, the officer and dependents may be eligible for a variety of benefits from the VA that include:
 - a. VA Hospitals;
 - b. Life Insurance;
 - c. Disability Compensation;
 - d. Educational Assistance;
 - e. Home Loan Guarantee;
 - f. Death Benefits; and
 - g. Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)

- 6) **Employment and Political Activity:** Employment after retirement is authorized; however some restrictions may occur if a conflict of interest is possible. All retired officers should contact their Agency/OPDIVs ethics counselor for clarification.

- 7) **Assistance after Retirement:** All retired officers should designate someone that will act as their personal representative in the event that he/she becomes incapable of acting on his/her own. A memo submitted to the retirement coordinator and placed in the Official Personnel Folder (OPF) should occur as soon as possible.

- 8) **Social Security:** PHS Officers who entered onto active duty after January 1, 1957 are eligible for Social Security benefits. The Social Security Administration determines the eligibility and amount of benefits.

- 9) **Former Spouses' Protections Act:** the Former Spouses' Protection Act (FSPA) affects retired PHS officers. Disposable retirement pay may be divided by a court and paid to the former spouse by the Corps.

- 10) **Survivor Benefits and Assistance:** Death and survivor benefits are available to a retired officer and his/her dependents depending on the status at the time of death.

Complete and detailed "Information on Commissioned Officers Retirement" can be found in CCPM Pamphlet No. 24 on the CCMIS Website at "<http://dcp.psc.gov>."