

To: All IHS

From: Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.
Director

Date: 3/2/10

Subject: Message from the Director – Performance Management

I am writing today to discuss the need to improve the way we manage employee performance in the Indian Health Service (IHS). The input I received from staff on Internal IHS reform revealed that improvements are needed in this area. There are two problems: good employees often do not receive the recognition they deserve; and poorly performing employees are often not held accountable for their poor performance. The root cause of these problems is that the manner in which we conduct performance management is ineffective and needs to be improved. This message outlines my instructions to both supervisors and staff on how to improve our performance management process. These changes are a result of the widespread input and suggestions of staff throughout the Agency. There is great support for this work.

We are addressing the first fundamental problem with our performance management process by making our performance management tools more specific to the priorities and work of this Agency. As the new IHS Director, I have announced four priorities to guide our work over the next few years: to renew and strengthen our partnership with tribes; in the context of national health insurance reform, to bring reform to IHS; to improve the quality of and access to care; and to make all our work transparent, accountable, fair and inclusive. HHS is allowing us to tailor our performance measures to the priorities of our Agency. Therefore, specific critical elements, addressing the priorities, will be cascaded to supervisors and employees so that the performance of all employees will relate to their job duties in the context of our priorities.

We also need to address the second fundamental problem in our performance management process that relates to a need for stronger leadership and direction about how we manage performance throughout the Agency. Based on the input I have received, as well as changes that are being made throughout HHS, I want to clarify a few basic principles of performance management in IHS:

1. Performance management is an important part of how we do our work
2. Supervisors are expected to manage and evaluate the performance of their staff in a fair, effective and accountable manner. Employees who perform well should be rewarded and praised for their good work; employees who are not performing their job duties should be counseled on how to improve; employees who refuse to improve or who perform at a

- consistently poor level should be held accountable for their poor performance.
3. Employees are expected to conduct their work in the most professional and excellent manner possible, should be receptive and responsive to suggestions to improve, and should expect that their supervisors will hold them accountable.
 4. Performance ratings are EARNED and are not an entitlement. Each year, staff performance begins anew, and, regardless of last year's rating, this year's rating is dependent on performance THIS YEAR. No one is entitled to an exceptional performance rating based on prior year ratings. Performance evaluations are based on the current year's work.
 5. Performance management means regular communication about performance between the supervisor and the employee. Supervisors should tell employees when they are doing a good job, and also when they are not and give suggestions for how to improve. This communication should happen regularly, not just at the end of the year.
 6. Employees should expect to be given suggestions on how to improve their performance. No one is perfect – in an organization devoted to quality as one of its priorities, everyone should be willing to receive feedback on how to do a better job on a regular basis.
 7. Supervisors who need assistance in conducting performance evaluations should ask their supervisors for training.
 8. Employees who have questions or concerns about their performance should talk with their supervisors.
 9. Everyone has a responsibility to communicate professionally about performance issues during the course of our work.
 10. The Agency has processes in place to help address problems with supervisors and employees. Supervisors and employees should follow the chain of command and established processes to address problems if they are not able resolve these problems together. Again, the expectation is that both supervisors and employees should try to resolve problems in a professional manner.

Thank you for your assistance with this matter. We plan to do more work on our performance management process over the next months to years, including more training for supervisors and clarification of the process for all staff. Everyone in the organization has a responsibility to help our staff perform in the most outstanding manner.

Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.
Director