

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

**FROM: Acting Surgeon General  
Senior Advisor to the ASH for Transformation**

**SUBJECT: FY08 Transformation Accomplishments and Future Directions -  
INFORMATION**

**Date: October 24, 2008**

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We have an important responsibility to continue to ensure that the HHS Transformation Initiative, one of the lead HHS priority efforts, strengthens our Corps. The initiative has two primary goals: to increase the size of the Corps and to significantly enhance our force management. With the conclusion of the 2008 fiscal year, we take this opportunity to review for you the key accomplishments of the past year toward these goals and to identify the priorities for the year ahead.

**Key FY08 accomplishments**

- Working closely with our agency partners, we have significantly streamlined and improved the Corps' recruitment and accession processes, resulting in the highest level of Corps officers in over ten years and an eight-fold increase in the number of individuals interested in joining the Corps.
  - The Corps officer level has been consistently above the FY08 Secretarial target of 6150 since July. As of Sept. 30, there were well over 6200 officers, a near 250 (4%) net officer increase from FY07.
  - FDA, BOP, DHS, IHS, SAMHSA, CMS and ASAM/PSC provided the greatest OPDIV/STAFFDIV contributions to this outcome (through either increases in total workforce levels or percentage growth from last year).
  - New operational improvements have improved the officer hiring process. The applicant accession time has been cut in half (to 2-3 months) and we have tripled the number of applicants who are cleared for potential placement in agency positions.
- Almost all professional categories grew in strength this past year, with the exception of dentists and physicians (declined by 3.1% and 4.6%, respectively). We have specifically targeted these two categories for specific pays and programs to assist their recruitment/retention, including a dental accession bonus, increased specialty pays and a pilot initiative to enhance physician recruitment.

- We developed an Assignment Incentive Pay (AIP) proposal which assisted OCCFM in developing a pilot program supporting critical need public health assignments in federal agencies.
- Future growth goals have also been identified - a sizing and allocation workgroup has identified a projected need for up to 50% more Corps officers across the federal government to advance public health missions, with significant demand for nurses, health service officers, physicians, scientists and pharmacists across IHS, FDA, BOP and other federal agencies.
- With OSG, we have begun a Corps officer training continuum, starting with an officer basic training course (Officer Basic Course). This two-week residential program ensures that incoming officers (over 500 to date) understand Corps missions and values, as well as undergo readiness training, at the beginning of their Corps careers.
- In accordance with OMB-directions on information technology improvements, we established a partnership with the US Coast Guard (USCG) to use their "Direct Access" IT system. This system has been in operation with the USCG for over seven years and serves over 50,000 users; our full participation (two dedicated staff and \$2.6 million currently invested) will allow the Corps to establish a robust personnel management system to more efficiently identify officers for both vacancies and emergency response missions.
- We developed an electronic billet collection system to facilitate the creation of a standardized and equitable position description system for all officers. Working with category leadership, we have also completed the development of nearly 300 standard billet templates for the creation of unique, position-specific billets, which will apply to all officers in category-specific positions (approximately 75% of the officer workforce).
- Working with OSG, we developed a workforce recruitment partnership with the DOD which will eventually allow up to 500 Corps officers to provide mental health and traumatic brain injury care and support to service members and their families in military treatment facilities across the nation.
- We created a web-based CAPS (Corps Awareness Program for Supervisors) program to assist supervisors and managers in hiring and supporting Corps officers. The website (accessible at [www.usphs.gov](http://www.usphs.gov)) is a one-stop source for information and materials on issues of interest and concern to Corps officer supervisors, and also links to other sites providing important Corps information. The website will be updated periodically to keep the material current and of maximum value for all supervisors.

### Future activities/proposals

- The new billet process will be a major focus for the Transformation Initiative this year, involving many officers as we finalize its development and implementation. Specifically, the electronic billet collection system will undergo prototype testing early this year, followed by a staged launch of the final system in winter/spring 2009. Completion of new billets for all Corps positions is anticipated by the end of 2009, with official utilization of these new billets by the Corps in FY 2010.
- As a result of the FY08 investments in the USCG Direct Access IT system, the Corps will launch the first phase of data collection and management functionality in Spring 2009. This initial release will contain officer profile (training, education, contact information, etc.) data as well as readiness-related information. Greater functionality will be added to Direct Access with continued FY09 investment and development.
- The Functional Group System will soon become an integral part of the Corp's infrastructure. In 2009, we anticipate that the Functional Advisory Committees (FAC's) will begin their work on enhancing training, expertise and professional development for officers within each functional area. The FAC's will also advise various Corps entities on work force issues such as recruitment, assignments, deployment, training, and career development.
- Improvements in Corps operations, institution of special pays and incentives for key categories/assignments, and development of enhanced recruitment programs will all continue to accelerate this coming year in order to keep growing the Corps toward its FY09-12 HHS workforce strength targets (a minimum of 6,600 Corps officers by 2012) and seek to attain our future potential sizing goals (up to 9,500 officers across the federal government).
- The Transformation Team is developing a white paper to identify the remaining force management tasks and activities (recruitment, training, assignments, billets, IT, etc.) that will need to be accomplished and implemented in the coming year(s) to complete the Transformation Implementation Plan.
- The FY09 Presidential budget submission includes a \$30 million Transformation Initiative request. If approved for the final FY09 appropriation, this will support a number of key programs and activities to implement the Corps transformation, including:
  - Recruitment programs (initialized loan repayment and scholarship programs, early commissioning, etc.);
  - Training resources (to develop intermediate, advanced and executive-level courses for all Corps officers);
  - IT systems support (to maximize the development and broadened use of the new personnel management system); and,
  - HAMR (Health and Medical Response) Teams, through the OSG, to support dedicated officers for emergency response needs.

As you can see, significant progress has been made in the Transformation Initiative this past year, and it is due to a team effort that truly spans the Corps workforce. It starts with the leadership provided by the Office of the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary for Health; it includes the outstanding efforts of the Transformation team, Office of the Surgeon General(OCCO, OFRD, ORA), and Office of Commissioned Corps Force Management staff; and it depends on the Corps professional category leadership, the OPDIV/STAFFDIV leadership and representatives, and the many officers who have devoted their personal time and effort to this important Corps initiative.

We want to thank all of you who have helped make the Transformation Initiative a success - we are modernizing and strengthening the Corps together. We look forward to another year of productive activities in support of our mission to protect, promote and advance the health and safety of our nation.

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