



**DENTAL CATEGORY**  
OF THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE  
**USPHS Dental Category**

**White Paper**

**2010 DePAC Communications Subcommittee**

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The purpose of the DePAC Communications Workgroup is to provide a communications forum for the Dental Professional Advisory Committee and the U.S. Public Health Service Dental Category. The primary communications tools presently are: (1) the USPHS Dental Newsletter, published on a bi-annual basis; (2) the Dental Bulletin Board, an announcement-only mailing list; (3) the Dental Category LISTSERV, a discussion list; and (4) the USPHS Dental Category home page. Both the listserv and the Bulletin Board have more than 350 subscribers.

Begun in 2000, the USPHS Dental Newsletter also incorporates communications from all agencies that employ PHS dentists (IHS, BOP, USCG, HRSA, NIH, CDC, etc.) and from professional organizations (COA, ROA, ADA, AAPHD, APHA, AGD, AAWD, HDA, NDA, and AMSUS) into one source.

The Communications Workgroup is also responsible for developing and maintaining other category communication tools, including two LISTSERVs (the USPHS Dental Bulletin Board and USPHS Dental Discussion List,), the Dental Category Home Page (web site), the USPHS Dental Directory, and the periodic Dental Category Survey, a survey that helps set priorities and an agenda for the Dental Professional Advisory Committee.

### **BENEFITS OF OPTIMAL DENTAL CATEGORY COMMUNICATIONS**

- **Enhanced esprit de corps** -- officers in the field will remain engaged in the pursuit of a common purpose through an increased sense of ownership and awareness
- **Improved officer response** to directives and guidance from the Commissioned Corps, the Office of the Surgeon General, the CPO, and the DePAC.
- **Increased participation and representation** in professional organizations
- **Enhanced professional competence** through exposure to the latest advances and educational opportunities in the profession
- **Increased Category Cohesion**, where leadership can remain apprised of the needs and desires of the officers in the field.

### **DePAC COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS**

#### **I. Dental Category Newsletter**

The electronic category newsletter was originally conceived and developed in 2001 by CAPT Tim Ricks. He proposed the idea to then CPO, RADM Dushanka Kleinman, who enthusiastically supported the idea. Before this time, a category newsletter was distributed periodically through the mail to all active duty officers. The first online issue was released in June of 2001 and was distributed using a directory of officers also created by CAPT Ricks. The first issue was distributed to about 100 officers. The second issue was released just after the 9/11 disaster and became a viable means of communications in

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the category illustrating its utility as a communications tool. CAPT Ricks published 3 newsletters annually through 2004 and in 2005 a Co-Editor was included, CAPT Suzanne Saville. Since then the newsletter has been published 2-3 times each year with the co-editors serving two year terms (*CAPT Suzanne Saville/CAPT Steve Torna 2005-06, CAPT Coleman Palmtree/CAPT Tsao Peng 2007-08, CAPT Todd Tovarek/CDR Shani Lewins 2009-10*). The original intent of the co-editor was to train the incoming officer through a collaborative year of newsletter creation and publication. Currently the co-editors produce the newsletter together during their two year term and publish the first newsletter of the next term as consultants for the incoming editors to provide support and guidance.

The newsletter has evolved to become an important means of disseminating a wide array of information to officers in the field. Two main issues are to be published each year with main cover stories relating to the annual ADA convention (December release) and the annual Commissioned Officers Scientific and Training Symposium (July Release). The composition of the newsletter has varied slightly over time but has retained a basic core of informational sections as follows:

- 1) Cover story-- ADA or COA conventions
- 2) Clinical perspective—clinical article from officers/specialists in the field from various agencies including the DoD.
- 3) One junior and senior dental officer spotlight interview of officers in the both Commissioned Corps and Civil Service
- 4) Agency spotlight—article highlighting either a single agency or all agencies in the PHS with a dental presence.
- 5) Associate recruiter update article
- 6) Upcoming events and educational opportunities—highlight upcoming professional meetings and conventions as well as available online educational resources
- 7) Chief professional officer article
- 8) DePAC Chair's article
- 9) DePAC Vice Chair's article
- 10) Civil Service dentists' article—pertains to issues of relevance to civil service dentists; ideally, written contributed by a civil service dentist, Currently Dr. Jerry Lapington fulfills this capacity.
- 11) Various announcements about and, reminders of upcoming PHS events; initiatives and directives ( OFRD readiness reminders, dental coin advertisements, solicitations for awards nominations, etc.)

## II. Dental Listservs

In March 2001, the communications workgroup created the first ever listserv for the dental category. This idea was the brainchild of CAPT Lee Shackelford and was carried to fruition by then LCDR Tim Ricks and CDR Chris Halliday. The purpose of the listserv was multifold: 1) to provide a communications tool for the DePAC to quickly disseminate important information to dentists assigned to each USPHS agency; 2) to

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allow for discussion of important dental issues that affect our clinical practices: 3) to provide a single place to get pertinent information from a variety of agencies and organizations. Initially, there were only 100 subscribers, the only e-mails they could find. By 9/11, it had expanded to about 300 subscribers, and the Listserv served as one of the major ways that the CDO communicated with the Category to line up officers to deploy to NYC (and later for the DC Anthrax attacks). In 2002, it was thought it might be a good idea to have a second listserv that would be used exclusively for announcements. That's how the Dental Bulletin Board was created. They automatically subscribed people to it with all of the e-mails they could find (again, this was the beginning of the Category Dental Directory).

Subscription to the discussion forum - Dentist-L – was left voluntary. The Listservs were managed by CAPT Ricks from 2001 - 2004, to include adding subscribers, monitoring content, etc. In 2005, CDR Lynn Van Pelt was asked to "co-manage", and by 2006 she took over as principal manager (CAPT Ricks still stayed on as he does today as list owner of both listservs). The current DePAC Vice Chair, CDR Angie Roach, has fulfilled management responsibilities this past year. Since 2005 all new dental officers called to active duty are automatically subscribed to the dental listservs. Information about posting announcements, subscribing or changing e-mail address, etc on the listservers is available here: <http://www.phs-dental.org/depac/listserv.html#DB>

### III. Dental Category Website

The DePAC website has been in existence for over 10 years. The majority of the hours dedicated to creating and improving the website were from personal time of the dental officers, above and beyond their required duty. What follows is the story of the DePAC website's history as well as future directions.

The original DePAC website was developed in 1999 on a National Institutes of Health (NIH) hosted intranet site. The design of the website was described by CAPT Jim Webb as "government looking" and not well utilized. At that time the Internet was still relatively new and updating and editing the website was likely difficult to complete. Web editing software was in its infancy, often requiring webmasters to understand HyperText Markup Language (HTML) code to perform updates. During this time RADM Chris Halliday served as the webmaster.

Observing the limitation of the NIH hosted website, CAPT Arlan Andrews (and later CAPTs Jim Webb and George Bird) used their personal funds to purchase a website address, phs-dental.org, which is still used today. Building on the original ideas of CAPT Arlan Andrews, CAPT Jim Webb, who joined DePAC in December 2003, dedicated an entire holiday break, working 8-10 hours per day, to create the initial DePAC website format that is currently being used.

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Continuing the tremendous amount of time and energy invested in website development, CAPT George Bird provided website maintenance, improvements, and development from 2004-2009. In 2009 CDR Kevin Lee became the webmaster. He accepted the responsibility of continuing the work to transition the website from its previous design to a uniform USPHS site that would be hosted on a USPHS server and comply with all necessary government regulations. CDR Lee used his skills to establish a database to provide password protection for the dental directory, DePAC meeting minutes, and dental resources. In addition, CDR Lee has spent countless hours debugging, reprogramming, and incorporating new features which have significantly reduced the loading speed and enhanced the performance of the website. Most recently, he has redesigned the website to be 508 compliant (i.e. accessible to individuals with disabilities), expanded the dental resources section, and is currently in the process of creating a new officer webpage to welcome and orient dentists to their first duty station.

Because of the fact that website information and links are constantly changing, regular updates are required. Communication workgroup members have all made significant contributions to the DePAC website, forwarding recommendations to the webmaster using an update form.

The DePAC website has gone through numerous improvements over the last decade. The USPHS dental program is fortunate to have officers that are willing to dedicate their personal time to improving communication amongst their colleagues. The website will continue to evolve through the years with the overall goal of effectively and efficiently communicating dental and USPHS related information to all USPHS dentists.

### **IV. Dental Directory**

The dental directory was developed in 2001 to facilitate communication between dentists from various agencies (e.g. Indian Health Service to Bureau of Prisons). The idea originated with CAPT James Lipton, who was the assistant to the Chief Dental Officer, RADM Dushanka Kleinman.

DePAC representatives from their respective agencies were tasked with collecting contact information from US Public Health Service dentists. This information was then compiled by RADM Chris Halliday, CAPT Tim Ricks and CAPT Jim Web into the dental directory as a page on the DePAC website. Due to programming constraints of HTML, CAPT George Bird later converted the database to an excel file. This allowed for easier updates and portability of the information. In 2005 & 2006, the dental directory information was again revised with the help of CDR Lynn Van Pelt, CAPT Tim Ricks, and LT Ben Brown in collecting the updated names of the current dentists. Annually, beginning in 2005, CAPT Bird would solicit all officers available through listserves to provide necessary updates to the directory. In 2009, recognizing the need for added site security; CDR Kevin Lee added password protection to the dental directory, restricting access to only USPHS dentists.

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The greatest challenge with the dental directory has been in keeping it current. As dentists join the USPHS, change duty stations, and retire, the dental directory must be updated. At present, active information gathering from individual dentists is necessary to keep the directory updated. If possible, a more passive approach involving existing databases from the various agencies would allow for a reliable and accurate means to contact USPHS dentists.

### **BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

#### ***Membership:***

- Minimum size of workgroup: 8 members to include: the current webmaster, newsletter editors and co-chairs
- Retain workgroup members from previous years for historical knowledge of process.
- When new workgroup members are needed, try to recruit from diverse agencies.
- Use previous workgroup chairs as consultants.
- Ensure workgroup members are recognized with letter of appreciation from DePAC Chair or CDO.

#### ***Newsletter:***

- Use previous editors as consultants to insure consistency and continuity
- Develop timeline template for each edition early on and establish deadlines for each step(i.e content of newsletter,solicitation of articles, development of rough draft for submission to DePAC Executive Committee (XC), time for DePAC XC to review and edit, timeline for final corrections, release date)
- Work backwards from desired release date to establish timeline for all steps in production
- Begin soliciting for articles early (two months in advance of desired release date) and be persistent
- Use DePAC calendar as a guideline for each step in newsletter production
- Solicit articles from throughout the category, encourage submissions and suggestions from officers in the field
- Make newsletter available to all DePAC workgroups for announcements and updates with each edition
- Include organizational updates from the following: ADA, AGD, COA,AMSUS
- Regularly solicit input from officers in the field for their suggestions on how to improve the newsletter to better fit their needs(surveys and e-mail correspondence)

#### ***Listserves***

- Verify current subscription totals and match with current dental directory

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- Post educational materials and subscription information in the newsletter and on the web site for the various other non dental listservs available to PHS officers to increase communications options and information sharing

### ***Category website***

- Assign each workgroup member several sections of the website to monitor throughout the year (monthly) and submit corrections, deletions or updates to the webmaster using the enclosed template
- Petition all DePAC workgroups each month for postings they may need for announcements and updates

### ***Dental Directory***

- Establish a more automated, passive approach to updating the dental directory by using existing databases from the various agencies to allow for a more reliable and accurate means to contact USPHS dentists
- Model the directory after the Commissioned Corps Blue Book roster to establish a real time database of active PHS dental officers from both the Civil Service and Commissioned Corps components

As we look to the future, the DePAC Communications Subcommittee anticipates continued and improved facilitation of a user-friendly forum for the Dental Professional Advisory Committee.