



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington, DC 20420

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January 29, 2008

UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER

**UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE IN NUTRITION CARE PRACTICE**

1. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Information Letter announces that nominations are being solicited for the annual Under Secretary for Health's Award for Excellence in Nutrition Care Practice.
2. The services provided by VHA dietitians can have a significant impact on the comprehensiveness and quality of patient care. Within VHA, dietitians work collaboratively with interdisciplinary treatment teams to ensure that the nutritional needs of patients are met. Dietitians serve as management team members providing leadership and guidance to ensure quality nutrition and food services are provided for the veterans served. This award recognizes those VHA dietitians whose work has had a significant impact on the provision of patient care services. This award may be issued to any VHA dietitian in an administrative, management, or clinical position, at a General Schedule (GS)-11 through GS-14 level, and employed in a full-time capacity. *NOTE: A VHA dietitian receives this award only once.*
3. The Under Secretary for Health presents an engraved plaque and an honorarium of \$2,000 at a ceremony in Washington, DC. *NOTE: The nominee's facility is responsible for all nominee expenses incurred, including the nominee's per diem and travel.*
4. **Selection Process.** An ad hoc selection committee, including representatives from the Office of the Chief Patient Care Services Officer; the Office of the Director, Nutrition and Food Services; a nominee from the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N); and a facility Director or Associate Director; is convened annually by the Under Secretary for Health. This committee:
 - a. Reviews all nominations received and makes a final recommendation to the Under Secretary for Health. *NOTE: The Ad Hoc Selection Committee may select the award recipient using conference calls.*
 - b. Recommends, at its discretion, appropriate recognition for finalists who were not chosen as the recipient of this award, such as congratulatory letters.

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5. See Attachment A for Award Criteria and Attachment B for the Nomination Procedures.
6. Questions may be addressed to the Director of Nutrition and Food Services (111N) at 202-461-7153.

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Under Secretary for Health

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ATTACHMENT A

AWARD CRITERIA

The recipient must have demonstrated excellence in at least five of the eight following criteria, which are based on the High Performance Development Model's Eight Core Competencies:

1. **Personal Mastery.** The nominee must possess knowledge of dietetic practice through continuously pursuing professional education and study, e.g., obtaining an advanced degree or specialty certification, or attending and/or providing workshops and/or lectures to enhance professional skills of self and others. The nominee must encourage personal and professional development of peers and/or subordinates. The nominee must inspire and demonstrate a passion for excellence in all aspects of work.

2. **Interpersonal Effectiveness.** The nominee must have exhibited commendable interpersonal skills, and be respected by peers and members of the interdisciplinary health care team. The nominee must be sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities and of different backgrounds. The nominee must have independently and continually demonstrated exceptional skill in effectively communicating with management, multi-disciplinary staff, personnel, and veteran patients and their families. The nominee must have collaborated with other disciplines, departments, and care lines to ensure the nutritional needs of veterans are served. The nominee, as a manager, must have provided effective leadership and vision for subordinates.

3. **Customer Service.** The nominee must have demonstrated a thorough understanding of the needs of internal and external customers. The nominee must have modeled exemplary commitment to customer service, and effectively utilized customer feedback to identify systems barriers and areas for improvement. The nominee must have established a customer-oriented culture and there must be evidence that the nominee has taken a proactive role in pursuing, measuring, and improving all aspects of customer satisfaction at the facility.

4. **Flexibility and Adaptability.** The nominee must have demonstrated flexibility and resiliency in an ever-changing work environment. The nominee must have demonstrated a commitment to lifelong learning as a tool for change.

5. **Creative Thinking.** The nominee must have demonstrated an ability to generate new and innovative ideas for improving the quality of processes and systems to enhance the nutritional and food services provided to veterans. The nominee must have encouraged and supported innovation from co-workers, and have demonstrated appropriate risk-taking.

6. **Systems Thinking.** The nominee must have demonstrated awareness of the impact of provision of nutrition services on interdisciplinary practice and worked to remove barriers within the system that prevent or impede the successful provision of nutrition services. The nominee must have developed strategies for improving service delivery. Special consideration is given to those nominees who have demonstrated improvements in recent VHA initiatives and strategic

goals which have resulted in cost savings or significant innovation in the provision of nutrition and food services.

7. Organizational Stewardship. The nominee must have promoted a positive image of dietitians and the profession within the facility and the community, and demonstrated how the mission, vision, and values of the organization allow for effective delivery of nutritional care and services. The nominee must provide a clear vision of the future and lead the organization through necessary changes.

8. Technical Skills. The nominee must have demonstrated competence to a degree that is routinely above that expected of a fully competent dietitian, e.g., has authored or co-authored a published study, developed a new process with significant impact on quality of care or efficiency of work processes, significantly improved an existing program despite reductions in staff, demonstrated leadership in facility-wide committees, initiatives, and/or maintained a high-degree of nutrition care. Any environment of care violations, as cited by internal and external examiners, must have been within regulatory limits.

ATTACHMENT B

NOMINATION PROCEDURES

Nominations may be made by the facility senior management or by an immediate supervisor. The nomination must:

1. Include a narrative statement responding to the applicable criteria and be specific in describing the nominee's accomplishments.
2. Not exceed three pages.
3. Define acronyms the first time they are used, i.e., Nutrition and Food Service (NFS), Associate Director for Patient Care Services (AD for PCS), etc.
4. Be sent through the facility Director, endorsed by the respective Network Director, and forwarded to the Director, Nutrition and Food Services (111N), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420 by February 28, 2008, for the 2008 awards selection process.