



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington DC 20420

IL 10-2008-005

In Reply Refer To: 11SW

February 15, 2008

UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER

**THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S AWARDS
FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK**

1. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Information Letter announces that nominations are being solicited for the two annual Under Secretary for Health's Awards for Excellence in Social Work; one for "Excellence in Social Work Practice" (see Att. A), and one for "Excellence in Social Work Leadership" (see Att. B).

2. The services provided by VHA social workers can have a significant impact on the comprehensiveness and quality of patient care. Social workers typically work collaboratively with interdisciplinary treatment team members to ensure that the psychosocial issues and needs of veterans served are addressed and do not become obstacles to effective treatment. This recognizes those VHA social workers whose work has had a significant impact on the provision of patient care services and on the leadership and oversight of social work practice. **NOTE:** *Generally, a VHA social worker receives this award only once.*

3. **Selection Committee.** Each year, a selection committee is appointed by the Under Secretary for Health to select award recipients. The selection committee is comprised of a representative from the Office of Care Management and Social Work Service, a representative from the Office of Patient Care Services, a representative from the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, and a facility Director selected by the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management. This committee is responsible for:

a. Reviewing all nominations received and making a final recommendation to the Under Secretary for Health; and

b. Recommending, at its discretion, appropriate recognition, such as letters congratulating them on their nominations, for finalists who were not chosen as the recipient of this award.

4. **Award Presentation.** The Under Secretary for Health presents a plaque to each award recipient at a ceremony in Washington, DC, as part of National Social Work Month in March 2008.

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5. **Nomination Procedures.** See Attachment C.
6. **Inquires.** Inquiries may be directed to Kristin Day at 202-461-6780.

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP
Under Secretary for Health

Attachments

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ATTACHMENT A

CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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

1. **Personal Mastery.** The recipient must have assumed responsibility for personal development and career goals; taken the initiative for continuous learning; and improved behavior, skills, and knowledge as a result of evaluation and feedback.
2. **Interpersonal Effectiveness.** The recipient must be a team player and readily collaborate with interdisciplinary treatment team members on care plans, discharge plans, and problem resolution. The recipient must work effectively to build a sense of community within the organization.
3. **Customer Service.** The recipient must have demonstrated a thorough understanding of the needs of internal and external customers. The recipient must have modeled exemplary commitment to customer service, and must have effectively utilized customer feedback to identify systems barriers and areas for improvement.
4. **Flexibility and/or Adaptability.** The recipient must have demonstrated flexibility and resiliency in an ever-changing work environment; and must have demonstrated a commitment to lifelong learning as a tool for change.
5. **Creative Thinking.** The recipient must have demonstrated an ability to generate new and innovative ideas for improving the quality and processes of social work practice. The recipient must have encouraged and supported innovation from co-workers. The recipient must have demonstrated appropriate risk-taking.
6. **Systems Thinking.** The recipient must have demonstrated awareness of the impact of the provision of social work services on interdisciplinary practice. The recipient must have worked to remove barriers within the system that prevent or impede the successful provision of social work services. The recipient must have developed strategies for improving service delivery.
7. **Organizational Stewardship.** The recipient must promote a positive image of social work and the profession within the facility and the community. The recipient must have demonstrated how the mission, vision, and values of the organization allow for effective delivery of social work services.
8. **Technical Skills.** The recipient must have demonstrated expertise in social work practice. The recipient must have sought out and integrated outcome-based interventions into daily practice.

ATTACHMENT B

**CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK
LEADERSHIP**

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

- 1. Personal Mastery.** The recipient must have encouraged personal and professional development of staff. The recipient must have taken advantage of opportunities to expand the recipient's knowledge of management principles and inspired and demonstrated a passion for excellence in every aspect of work.
- 2. Interpersonal Effectiveness.** The recipient must have provided effective leadership and vision for subordinates. The recipient must have collaborated across disciplines, departments, and care lines to ensure the psychosocial needs of veterans are served.
- 3. Customer Service.** The recipient must have initiated policies that reflect commitment to providing the highest-quality social work services possible. The recipient must have solicited and utilized feedback from internal and external customers to improve service delivery and responsiveness to needs.
- 4. Flexibility and/or Adaptability.** The recipient must have responded to changing priorities and the availability of resources with optimism, encouraging staff to respond positively and proactively. The recipient must readily and regularly assess workload and allocate staffing resources to best meet patient needs.
- 5. Creative Thinking.** The recipient must recognize and reward creative thinking among staff and support appropriate risk-taking. The recipient must have served as a role model for innovation and creative thinking.
- 6. Systems Thinking.** The recipient must have helped staff understand how their functions relate to, and complement, the organization's mission. The recipient must be involved in projects at the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) or national level.
- 7. Organizational Stewardship.** The recipient must have provided a clear vision of the future and led staff toward accomplishment of goals. The recipient must use resources wisely and assist facilities in reducing costs and increasing revenue.
- 8. Technical Skills.** The recipient must be involved in community projects and with professional organizations. The recipient must provide technical expertise and knowledge of social work interventions as part of patient care. The recipient must oversee the practice of social workers at the facility, ensuring the highest standards of practice. The recipient must provide clinical supervision and technical guidance to staff.

ATTACHMENT C

NOMINATION PROCEDURES

1. Nominations may be made by the facility senior management, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) staff, an individual social worker, or a group of social workers employed in the same facility.
2. The nomination must not to exceed three pages, and must include a narrative statement responding to the applicable criteria. It must be specific in describing the nominee's accomplishments. Acronyms must be defined the first time they are used, i.e., Chief, Social Work Service (SWS); Associate Director, Patient Care Services (AD for PCS), etc.
3. Nominations must be sent through the facility Director, endorsed by the respective VISN Director, and forwarded to the Director, Social Work Service (11SW), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, by March 3, 2008.