

Public Health Careers in the Government Panel - Notes

Friday, March 19, 2010, 1:30-2:30pm

Harry Mayer (Fels '98) – Field Supervisor, *Regional Emergency Coordinator Program, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

Career Path and Day-to-Day Work: Harry started out with the FBI and transitioned to the military. After finishing up at the Navy, he attended Fels part-time and moved into public health emergency preparedness, starting at the American Red Cross (Southeastern PA chapter) and eventually moving to his role at HHS. Harry's regional office covers Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. He is always on call in his region and on call outside of his region for about 4 months out of the year. In response to the recent earthquake, he was in Haiti for three months recently as the U.S. liaison to the Pan American Health Organization. When he is not involved in a response to an emergency, Harry is working on preparedness. For example, he is now part of a team investigating a potential flooding issue in the region with lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina. He also notes the importance of building relationships with other agencies, citing an example where he was able to collaborate to arrange for 6000 H1N1 vaccinations to be provided within six days.

Job Search Advice:

- Most government public health jobs are in the DC area, though opportunities in Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are more plentiful in Philadelphia, as are Centers for Disease Control (CDC) positions in the Atlanta area.
- It is important to demonstrate how you can apply theoretical and academic knowledge on the job.
- In general, the HHS Emerging Leaders Program is a great opportunity for graduate students. Apply early.
- For emergency preparedness careers, those interested in clinical opportunities should look into the National Disaster Medical System for part-time positions which can help provide some relevant exposure and experience. Also the US Public Health Service is another good resource which provides mostly civilian opportunities.
- Try to use the exact words from job description when writing KSA (knowledge, skills and abilities) statements for government job applications.

Katherine Nguyen (Fels '03) – Health Insurance Specialist, *Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

Career Path and Day-to-Day Work: Katherine had planned for a career in Creative Writing, but found that the editing aspect was not appealing. She moved on to study at Fels, interning at Public Financial Management and FEMA before ending up at CMS. As a Health Insurance Specialist at CMS Region 3, Katherine oversees Medicare health plans' processing of consumer complaints and addresses constituent issues, as well. Katherine also participates in periodic Medicare health plan audits.

Job Search Advice:

- The application process for government jobs can be tedious. Study the job description carefully and ask for those who have been successful in the government job search to help you with your KSA.
- While it can help to connect with the hiring officer, CMS hiring is centralized via Human Resources in Baltimore, so you must appeal to recruiters as well.

Ernestine Steiner (Nursing '94) – Nurse Practitioner, *Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center*

Career Path and Day-to-Day Work: Ernestine received her undergraduate degree in Psychology, with an emphasis in physiological psychology. She also holds an MA in Music History and was planning to get a PhD in Music History. Upon finding that a career in academia was not for her, she decided to leverage her strong science background and study nursing. She began her career as a MICU step-down nurse, cross trained and worked in MICU, worked as a community health nurse as well, and decided to pursue graduate training as a Geriatric Nurse Practitioner. She now works in that role at the Philadelphia VA Community Living Center (nursing home). As an NP, Ernestine discusses patient status with Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses, particularly with those who are finishing up the night shift and with others throughout the day. She prioritizes her work, first she sees veterans who are ill and those coming for routine exams. Veterans also drop by her office during the day. She reviews challenging cases with her collaborating physician, or the physician covering. She also makes walking rounds weekly with members of the interdisciplinary team including RNs, collaborating physician, social worker, and pharmacist.

Job Search Advice:

- The Public Health Service and the Philadelphia Medical Reserve Corps are great programs for gaining experience in public health in the government. The Philadelphia Medical Reserve Corps is a volunteer program. You volunteer your time for training, for some of which you receive CEUs. You are paid if you are activated in an emergency.
- The Presidential Management Fellowship is a great program for graduate students seeking experience in the government.
- There are opportunities with Veterans Affairs all over the country.
- For NP positions, previous RN experience and research backgrounds are very much valued.
- The application process is cumbersome for government positions.
- For the interview, be interested, enthusiastic and courteous. Dress very well. Speak to your strengths. Let the interviewer know what YOU can bring to the position. Thank the interviewer for his or her time. Always send a thank you note, as you never know whether that may break a tie between you and another candidate.

Susanna Sung (SP2 '97) – Director, Marketing and Community Relations, *National Institute of Mental Health, National Institutes of Health*

Career Path and Day-to-Day Work: Susanna received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Magazine Journalism and went on to pursue a Master of Social Work degree with a clinical focus. She started her social work career in treatment research. After she became interested in the administrative side, Susanna eventually transitioned to a Marketing and Community Relations position at the National Institute of Mental Health that was created for her. (Initially, she worked in private practice on the side to continue her clinical work.) In her current role, she organizes patient recruitment for research projects, builds relationships with constituents and helps with special projects.

Job Search Advice:

- Be somewhat broad in your search; don't be too narrow as it relates to titles.
- Take time to write an excellent, tailored KSA for the position; this could take up to 2-3 hours. Make sure you tailor the KSA to the specific job, not just the title; two jobs with the same title may have different responsibilities. Use the same words as the job description uses when writing the KSA.
- Be persistent and patient.