System Office Colleagues,

As a result of your feedback to our recent survey, we are taking a slightly different approach with this edition of your USNH. First, several employees expressed interest in learning more about the OS/PAT Council. Therefore -- for this month only -- we are replacing the employee profile with a question and answer-style interview with Council Chair Lisa Pollard. Second, you indicated a desire to learn of current issues directly from our senior staff. As a result, we will be launching a series of “brown bag lunches” beginning on February 10 and 11 with Ron Rodgers, the USNH General Counsel. Ron will be discussing “Emerging Trends in Public Higher Education Law, Enterprise Risk Management, and Life.” Specific details will be coming shortly. Third, questions were raised about navigating the USNH web sites. We recognized the need for more precise information and appreciate the many responses already received to the follow-up survey (reminder, the deadline is February 5th). We will release the findings later this month.

There is much going on at our four institutions. This newsletter includes links to some recent articles of particular interest: the 100-year old woman who received her degree from Keene State College, global education initiatives at Plymouth State University, and the unveiling of the UNH Strategic Plan. Also please look for an announcement in mid-February naming the finalists for the presidency at Granite State College.

Finally, some of you may have noticed my new (temporary) column picture. Yesterday we celebrated Groundhog Day together with a pancake, sausage, and fruit breakfast, anxiously awaiting news whether Punxsutawney Phil would see his shadow. Well, predictably, there will be six more weeks of winter (in NH at least). We will slog through it together and despite the dampening forecast, are very appreciative of the volunteers who came in early to prepare and make Groundhog Day a little brighter and warmer — David DeLuca, Maggie Hyndman, Diane Cotter, and Lorna Jacobsen. This is typical of the efforts you exhibit on a daily basis to make our organization and workplace better, and I want to thank you and assure you that these efforts are noticed and appreciated each and every day. Ed

1. According to the web site, the OS/PAT Council serves in an informational advisory capacity to the System Office on matters of concern to the System Personnel Policy Council (SPPC). Can you describe how the OS/PAT Council operates and what issues commonly come before the Council?

The USNH OS/PAT Council is a group of USNH staff members who meet regularly to discuss updates and changes in personnel policies, benefits, and similar topics that will have an impact on the staff. It’s made up of both Operating Staff and PAT representatives, so that both types of employees can provide input based upon their respective viewpoints. Currently we have an equal number of each, and have one representative from each building. We also have an advisor from USNH HR, Maggie Hyndman, who keeps us up to date on topics coming down the pike that might be of interest to staff members. The Council is often asked to weigh in on topics currently under consideration at the SPPC level, or to go out and gather feedback from constituents. For example, we might be asked to talk to our coworkers to gauge their interest in a new employee-offering, or on a benefit that might be scaled back. In turn, the Council can be a sounding board for staff concerns, and will bring those concerns or questions back to HR to be addressed. The communication works both ways.

2. How does someone become appointed to the Council and what time commitment is needed?

A supervisor can nominate someone to serve, or a staff member can nominate him or herself. If we have more nominations than openings on the Council, we hold an email election. Serving on the Council involves attending a one-hour meeting each month and occasional email communications. The Council members also take turns attending SPPC meetings every other month.

3. How would someone bring an issue before the Council?

If someone had an issue they wanted to bring to the Council’s attention, they could contact an individual Council member in person, by email, or over the phone, or they could send an email to the Council’s mailbox at USNH.OSandPAT.Council@unh.edu. The Council will not identify the staff member to anyone outside of the Council, if anonymity is requested.

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Health Reimbursement Account for 2010 (HRA)
The Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) is a $500 employer–funded account that reimburses eligible employees for qualified medical expenses. To be eligible for the HRA you must be a full-time benefits eligible employee, who is a subscriber to a USNH medical plan and not covered by a collective bargaining agreement. For 2010, the annual $500 HRA account was funded in the same manner as in 2009 and available to you January 2010. Any balances remaining in your HRA account from 2009 are available in 2010, to be used for reimbursement for future eligible expenses. If you are eligible for the HRA and are enrolled in the Health Flexible Spending Account (FSA), the Health FSA balance will be used first for expenditure reimbursements, followed by HRA funds. By registering at www.wageworks.com you are able to check your HRA balances and if applicable FSA balance and track payments.

Wellness Connection Program
Take steps toward a healthier lifestyle! You’re eligible to participate in the Wellness Connection Program if you are a Harvard Pilgrim subscriber.

Log in to the Wellness Connection Program. The program has new online features for submission of activity cards and reimbursement for taking health education classes. We encourage those of you with Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Coverage to create a Wellness Connection account (please note you’ll need your HP ID#, located on your HP Card in order to set-up your account) and also for you to provide us with feedback regarding the new site.

Program Highlights
Health and Nutrition Solution (Diet.com) NEW!

Catching Up With Colleagues, continued from page 1...

4. Once the Council makes recommendations to the SPPC, what is the process from that point on?
The Council would additionally, provide any research or supporting documentation we had to the SPPC membership for review. One or more members of the Council would then attend the next SPPC meeting to discuss the recommendations.

5. I see that the Council also runs the Staff Professional Develop Grant (PDG) program. Can you tell us more about what types of professional development opportunities are most often funded and what the review process is?
The PDG program was set up to assist USNH staff members with attaining new skills or experiences that will benefit both the employee and USNH. In most cases, it’s awarded to help an employee and his/her department offset some of the costs of attending a conference or workshop. The application is forwarded to the Council, where it is reviewed and voted on at an upcoming meeting.

6. How can I stay current with the work of the Council?
The Council has a website which links from the USNH HR/SPPC website, http://www.usnh.edu/ospat/index.html, and comments or suggestions about the site are always welcomed.

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?
The Council is always looking for feedback or ideas for topics or things that staff members would like to see. Our meetings are open, and anyone who would like to get an idea of what we do in person, is welcome to attend. We’d also like to give a quick thank you to Chancellor Ed MacKay, for always supporting our work and encouraging discussion.