

RADM Thomas J. McGinnis



Build the Strongest Foundation of Knowledge and Skills That You Can

How many of us, when presented with three job offers, would choose the lowest paying? Not many, I suspect. But that is exactly what Rear Admiral (RADM) Thomas J. McGinnis did after graduating from pharmacy school, choosing to pass up two more lucrative offers to join the United States Public Health Service (PHS). Tom has spent his entire career in the PHS and, looking back on it, he has never regretted that decision.

Tom's letter describes his remarkable career at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and later taking the helm of the U.S. Department of Defense's TRICARE Pharmacy Program, which provides pharmacy care to almost 10 million members of the seven uniformed services and their families. His work has provided many interesting challenges and many opportunities to improve our citizens' health. One of his most memorable and rewarding experiences was his deployment to storm-ravaged areas along the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Tom currently serves as Chief, Pharmaceutical Operations Division, responsible for pharmacy operations of the Defense Health Agency. He earned his bachelor of science degree in pharmacy from Rutgers University and a certificate in general administration from the University of Maryland. He is a graduate of the Federal Executive Institute.

Tom's advice to young pharmacists is to *record your observations, milestones, and lessons learned over time; build the strongest foundation of knowledge, skills, and contacts that you can; and build a strong personal foundation.*



Dear Young Pharmacist,

In a world full of career choices, I commend you for choosing the profession of pharmacy. Pharmacists are involved with all facets of the health care system and knowing what is available and how to achieve meaningful and rewarding goals early in your career will help ensure your success.

While still a student, I began my career with the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) in the Commissioned Officer Student Training & Extern Program at the St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, DC. This three-month internship program gave me my first insights into the PHS and what pharmacists were capable of doing. After graduating from Rutgers, I had three job offers: one from the pharmaceutical industry, one from a chain pharmacy, and the PHS. I chose the lowest paying job with the PHS and have never regretted that decision. Little did I know, nor even imagine at the time, that I would spend the next 36 years performing a variety of different, interesting, and challenging PHS assignments.

From very early in my career, I remember volunteering for projects and working closely with the PHS Chief Pharmacy Officers, RADM Dick Church and RADM Richard Bertin. At the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) Midyear and the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) annual meeting, I would help with the PHS exhibits and recruiting activities. An extra pair of hands was always needed to work on important pharmacy projects, and I learned a great deal from performing this volunteer work. I was introduced to other pharmacists at these professional meetings, and I developed a network of pharmacists and allied health professionals that was extremely valuable as I advanced to higher levels throughout my career. These Rear Admirals were very positive thinkers and always expressed things in a positive way. Everything was possible, and their enthusiasm was an inspiration to junior officers who met them. I counsel you to seek out positive people and learn their ways. While they exude enthusiasm, these leaders also seem to have ice in their veins and do not fear making mistakes. They know how and when to adjust their goals quickly and would assume whatever role was necessary to