

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) and NHSC Scholars:

Disciplines, Designations and Your Future Service Site

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) are designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as having shortages of primary care medical, dental or mental health providers. National Health Service Corps scholars must work at an NHSC-approved site of greatest need, as defined by a HPSA designation, or score. By law, “greatest need” is determined annually.

For the 2013 Scholar Placement class, greatest need is defined as a site with a HPSA score of 16 or above for all disciplines (primary care, dental, and mental).

Here is a quick guide HPSAs and disciplines, designations and your future NHSC service site.

- **Disciplines.** Often a site will have a different HPSA score for different disciplines—primary care medical, dental, or mental health. For example, a site may have a dental HPSA score of 18, but only a primary care HPSA of 6. In this example, an NHSC scholar who is a dentist may seek a position at this site, but this site would not be an option for a doctor or a nurse. You must work at a site that holds a HPSA score of 16 or higher for your field (primary care, dental, or mental health). So when you begin to search for a position, make sure you look at the site HPSA scores closely.
- **Designations.** Within each discipline (primary care, dental or mental health) there are different types of HPSA designations. HPSA designations may be: 1) *geographic* (a county or service area) meaning all individuals in an area have insufficient access to care; 2) *population group* (low income population, migrant farm workers, etc.) meaning a subpopulation of people living in the area has insufficient access to care; or, for some types of sites, 3) *facility* (federally qualified health center, non-profit medical facility, etc.) where individuals served by a specific facility have insufficient access to care. For the purpose of selecting a site, you don’t need to worry about the HPSA designation. If you are a nurse, for example, you can go to a site with a primary care HPSA of 16 or above whether it has a geographic or facility HPSA score. However, the score may provide a little bit of insight into the service site.
- **Your Future Service Site.** With a better understanding of HPSAs, you can begin your search for an NHSC-approved site. Start by visiting the NHSC Jobs Center at <http://nhscjobs.hrsa.gov>. There you can narrow your site search by state, discipline and HPSA score, among other things. Your Regional Placement Advisor is always available to assist you, and NHSC state partners, such as Primary Care Offices and Primary Care Associations may help to support your job search. Find their information at: <http://www.nhsc.hrsa.gov/currentmembers/scholars/nhscsupportnetwork/index.html>.

