

NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION

Director

VA and Defense Secretaries Hold Joint Press Event

On December 6, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta joined VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to discuss ongoing and future efforts to work together on everything from health care and benefits to transition assistance. "Collaboration" was a strong emphasis, because as Secretary Shinseki explained, VA takes in Veterans once under the care of DOD. To that end, the hand-off must be improved between the agencies.

Deputy Director for Healthcare

Health Policy Unit

On the week of December 7, 2012, the Health Policy Unit conducted two trips for the System Worth Saving Program with a focus on women veterans. The Deputy Director for Health Care, Jacob Gadd; Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation Chairman, Ralph Bozella; and Director for Media Marketing, Marty Callaghan conducted a site visit to Chicago, Illinois and Fort Wayne, Indiana. The Captain Lovell Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois is a DoD/VA joint facility and Fort Wayne, Indiana was visited due to their closure of the medical center's inpatient facility. The System Worth Saving Task Force conducted a town hall meeting prior to each site visit. There were 30 veterans in attendance for the Chicago town hall meeting and 40 for the Ft. Wayne town hall meeting.

In addition, Senior Field Service Representative, Warren Goldstein and Task Force Member, Tom Mullan conducted a System Worth Saving site visit to Fargo, North Dakota. The System Worth Saving Task Force had 8 veterans in attendance for the Fargo town hall meeting. National Field Service Representatives, Roscoe Butler and Jonathan Naraine attended an interview with a potential candidate for the Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation Division's Women/Minority Veteran Coordinator. Furthermore, the Health Policy Unit Secretary and Employee League President, Jillian George organized and lead the United Way Giving Campaign on the 7th Floor Conference Room on December 5, 2012.

Assistant Director for Policy and Research

Heart Study Conference Call

On Monday, December 3rd, Brian Bertges participated on a conference call with Beryl Love from AMVETS, Stephanie Burns, the Chief of Voluntary Services for the DC VAMC, and Dr. Kheirbek about a request to support a heart study that is proposed to be conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The proposal is being submitted to the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). PCORI is authorized by Congress to conduct research to provide information about the best

available evidence to help patients and their health care providers make more informed decisions. PCORI's research is intended to give patients a better understanding of the prevention, treatment and care options available, and the science that supports those options.

This study focuses primarily on creating an accurate prognosis tool for congestive heart failure. More than 5.3 million people are affected and suffer from heart failure (HF). 60% of the people that are diagnosed with HF die within five years of diagnosis.

Unfortunately treatment regarding HF costs more than \$15 billion per year. This is due to the aging of our population, obesity, and growth of HF in women. This figure is expected to triple in the next 20 years.

This study plans to address multiple areas that deal with prognosis and treatment of HF which include:

- Hospice & palliative care versus no admission
- Acting in a timely manner (not too early or too late)
- Training physicians and patients on end-of-life conversations
- Alerts in the electronic health record
- Analyzing co-morbidities to HF for prognosis tool
- Examining rate of change in HF prognosis
- Patient preferences
- Family involvement

Board of Veterans' Appeals

During the week ending November 30, 2012, the Board of Veterans' Appeals reached dispositions on **151** American Legion represented appeals. Of those dispositions, **64.9%** of the denials were overturned with outcomes favorable to the veteran. In **34** cases, the Board granted benefits outright after considering The American Legion's arguments. In **64** cases, The American Legion was able to point out errors in the development of the veteran's claims which mandated corrective action under the law. Of the total number of dispositions, **46 (30.5%)** were outright denials.

Also during this period, the BVA Appeals Unit reviewed, prepared written Informal Hearing Presentations (IHP), and/or orally argued **143** veteran's appeals. These claims included originals, remands, as well as specialty cases (Advance on Docket, Independent Medical Opinions, Court Remands, etc.). The BVA unit handled numerous telephone inquiries and provided consultations with veterans, VSO's, and Congressional Offices. The administrative team completed **198** phone

inquires during this period. The appeal representatives provided assistance for three (3) walk-in veterans for their respective VA Central Office Hearings.

Insurance, Pension and Debt Management

The VA&R VA Insurance unit reviewed and processed 152 applications for new insurance coverage, of which 21 were for Supplemental insurance for totally disabled veterans in the Service-Disabled insurance program, along with 99 disability and settlement claims on other veteran's VA policies. Further case development included 64 other insurance inquiries or transactions, 35 phone calls with veterans, family members and VSOs, and 92 veteran insureds were contacted by mail on their policies, insurance options and action deadlines. There were also 36 direct contacts with VA personnel in regards to correcting or having additional actions taken on veteran's accounts.

The Philadelphia VA&R Pension unit processed 2 new claims for Veterans or Death pensions, along with receiving, reviewing and preparing 31 case actions for support of on-going pension benefits. Casework included processing 95 additional transactions and case inquiries to VA, performing 73 audits of Rating reviews and 39 phone contacts with claimants and VSOs with 3 personal contacts and 2 appeals.

The VA&R Pension offices in St. Paul and Milwaukee processed 187 new claims for Veteran's pensions and Death pensions, and presented supporting casework material on 148 claims already in progress, while also processing 131 inquiries and pension transactions and 140 rating review audits. Phone contacts with claimants and VSOs amounted to 112 calls and there were 5 appeals handled for the two weeks ending December 5, 2012.

Appeals Management Center

Vincent Covert, Appeals Representative, signed off on approximately 40 Veterans claim waivers. Mr. Covert spoke to veterans, claimants, and Department Service Officers by telephone approximately 40 times. Mr. Covert reviewed 20 rating decisions for accuracy and completeness and reviewed 15 partial grants. Lastly, Mr. Covert interfaced with rating coaches, claims assistants, and veteran service representatives approximately 120 times during the past week.

Lee Southerland, Appeals Representative, signed off on approximately 60 claim waivers. Spoke with approximately 10 veterans via telephone. He is currently in the process of obtaining his Public Key Infrastructure (PKI), which is mandatory for him to send encrypted emails. He also interacted with 3 rating coaches to further veterans' claims process.

Wanda Kennedy, Administrative Secretary, answered approximately 80 phone calls from veterans and Department service officers, which included returning phone calls to veterans. Ms. Kennedy scanned 150 pieces of VA correspondences (letters, SSOCs, VA Rating Decisions, etc). Ms. Kennedy also mailed approximately 110 items of correspondences to DSOs in different departments of The American Legion. She also assisted numerous raters, claims assistants, and veterans' service representatives.

Western Region BDD Office (Salt Lake City, UT)

The Western BDD Office reviewed 19 BDD claims with 146 issues. Each claim required reviewing the rating, C&P examination, and service treatment records. Additional research was required on some cases. One claim was questioned and discussed with VA Rating Team Coaches. The BDD office also received 21 phone calls from veterans and Department Service Officers throughout the country requesting the status of a claim or had questions concerning a rating. The office provided an update for the status of the claim or provided options concerning the rating. Additionally, one veteran visited the office with general VA benefit questions. The office received and reviewed 51 pieces of VA correspondence.

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division

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Week Ending 12/07/2012

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National VA&R Chairman

Sons of The American Legion

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