



NATIONAL QUALITY COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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Ms. Alma Lee, President of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)/ National Veterans Affairs Council, and Mr. Bob Snyder, the Acting Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning are pleased to announce the re-establishment of VA's National Quality Council (NQC). The NQC is mandated by Article 7 of the VA/AFGE Master Agreement. More importantly, the Council provides a mechanism for Labor and Management to work together to improve the quality of services and benefits that VA provides to Veterans and beneficiaries, while also enhancing the environment in which VA employees work.

The National Quality Council had not met in several years, but has met three times thus far in 2014, meeting first in April, then in June, and then again in August. President Lee and Mr. Snyder serve as the Co-Chairs of this Council, which includes both management and labor representation. AFGE representation on the council includes Mr. Bob Fetzer, 4th District AFGE/NVAC Representative, SalemVAMC; Mr. Curtis Jackson, 3rd District AFGE/NVAC Representative, PittsburgVAMC ; Mr. Joe Malizia, President AFGE Local #940, Philadelphia RO and Insurance Center; and Mr. Bill Jefferson, AFGE/NVAC National Representative, Washington, DC. Management representatives include Ms. Yuri Walker and Ms. Kathy Lockhart from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Ms. Janice Jacobs from the Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA), Ms. Paige Lowther from the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), and Ms. Martha Orr from the Office of Information and Technology (OIT). Going forward, Mr. Tom Murphy is replacing Ms. Jacobs and Mr. Eric Malloy is replacing Ms. Lowther on the Council.



Back row (left to right): Bill Jefferson, Eric Malloy, Kathy Lockhart, Curtis Jackson, Joe Malizia, Bob Fetzer; Middle row (left to right): Janice Jacobs, Yuri Walker, Martha Orr, Paige Lowther; Front Row (left to right): Alma Lee and Bob Snyder (co-chairs of the NQC)

In its initial meetings, the Council has agreed to work on some significant projects to improve quality and safety operations across VA. The Council has appointed a small working group to review VA's Carey Awards Program. The Carey Program is the Department's most prestigious internal awards program for quality excellence and is based upon the internationally known Baldrige criteria. Specifically, the working group is looking at ways to improve the visibility of the program across VA, expand the number of examiners that participate in the program (particularly among bargaining unit employees), and better share lessons learned from those organizations that participate in the program to enhance operations across the Department.

The Council is looking at a program originally initiated within VHA entitled "Stop the Line" that emphasizes that all employees have the right and responsibility to step in when they see activities that are unsafe or improper. The Council is helping to reframe that initiative to see if it can be more universally adopted to apply to the other administrations and staff offices. This initiative should also help reinforce the concept of sustainable accountability emphasized by Secretary McDonald and the focus on VA's core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence (ICARE).

Pending availability of funding, the Council is going to work with VHA's Office of Environmental Programs Service (EPS) on an Environmental Cleaning Program. The purpose of this initiative is to elevate awareness, generate action, and sustain a high level of cleanliness within VA's medical centers. We want to set an expectation that VA will provide a positive experience and a great first impression for our Veterans in every facility.

At the Council's most recent meeting, the representatives from the three administrations discussed quality programs being executed within their organizations. The group discussed the need to better understand concepts that should be applied to those quality programs including ISO 9000, Lean Six Sigma (LSS) and the Baldrige criteria. Additionally, the Council discussed ways to get local quality councils established and/or reinvigorated. The Council will include these topics as major points of discussion at the next council meeting scheduled for December.

Questions or suggestions?

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