

**Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans
North Carolina Site Visit
(Fayetteville, Salisbury, Winston-Salem)
Meeting Minutes
March 31 – April 3, 2008**

Fayetteville VA Medical Center (Monday, March 31):

Mr. Bruce Triplett, Director, Fayetteville VAMC (FVAMC), provided welcoming remarks and asked the Committee to note the diversity of leadership in the VAMC and VISN.

Significant Attendees:

- Darrell Ford, Administrative Officer & MVPC
- Eugene Paul, Patient Representative
- Ms. Patty Andrews, Executive Assistant
- Jim Belmont, PAO
- Norma Byrd, PAO
- Samuel Smith, Interim Chief of Chaplains

Introductions:

Dr. David L. Raney, Rep. VISN 6 (VA Mid-Atlantic Healthcare Network)

- Over 10,000 staff & 4,000 volunteers.
- Number of newest veterans served by VISN 6 since 9/11/01 is 24,306.
- 5 new CBOC's in FY08 (Charlottesville VA; Hamlet, NC; Hickory, NC; Franklin, NC; Lynchburg, VA).
- Expanded Outpatient Sites:
 - Jacksonville, NC-April 08-but delayed due to fire on March 17, 2008.
 - Winston-Salem, NC-expanded by 10,000 square feet.

**Ms. Beverly Ross, VISN 6 Lead Women Veterans Program Manager /MVPC
Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator**

- Virginia has the 4th largest population of women veterans/NC- ranks ninth.
- Women of child bearing years have issues with:
 - STD
 - Increase need for mental health
 - Sexual trauma
 - More pregnancies

Ms. Deborah Lee, VISN 5 Homeless Veterans Coordinator

- Rent burden veterans: Pay approximately 50% of their income towards rent. (Are the most high risk veterans).
- VISN 6 has approximately 2050 homeless veterans.
- Working to have HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUDVASH) program at every medical facility (one currently in Hampton-permanent housing).
- Re-entry program (one re-entry specialist located in Richmond, VA).
- Stand Downs-1,190 veterans participated.

Mr. Raney provided overview of Minority Veterans Program Coordinator activities/outreach events.

- Will recommend VISN consider MVPC at VISN level.

Mr. Bruce Triplett, Director, Fayetteville VA Medical Center

- Introduced Ms. Rosalyn Cole, Associate Director.
- Referring 3,000 veterans seen at Jacksonville Clinic to Morehead City (expected to open next week).
- To open new clinic:
 - Requires approval of Secretary
 - Funding availability
- Need cardiologist (have to contract) significant on budget (fee basis).
- Asian American population high in area of (colonoscopies) and dialysis.
- Have 6,000 OEF/OIF veterans.
- Aging Infrastructure (facility):
 - Space deficiencies (offices off site).
- More sharing agreements with Womack Army Medical Center:
 - Challenges under BRAC (Fort Bragg (currently 50,000) is getting another 10,000 soldiers in the next couple years).

Mr. Darrell Ford, Minority Veterans Program Coordinator

- 20 Counties served (two in SC)
- Demographic breakdown:
 - Asian-11,000
 - AA-175,000

- Naïve American-46,000
- Hispanic-52,000

Mr. Neil Brennecke, Team Leader, Fayetteville Vet Center

Mr. Tim Virgillo, OEF/OIF Program Manager

Mr. Jim Belmont, Coordinator, VA/DoD Sharing Agreement:

- Overview of Sharing agreements

Mr. Jim Bolger, VA Polytrauma System:

- April 07-TBI screening is mandatory:
 - 7077 screens administered (95%):
 - Screening is provided first five years after return from deployment.
 - 4 Questions are asked – did you experience a blast/intermediate residual (memory problem/dazed/are you currently experiencing these residuals).
 - 293 were positive

Ms. Jan Bolger, Suicide Prevention

- 11th leading cause of death in US.
- Suicide is double among male veterans population.
- Veterans are more prone to use guns to end their lives.
- Native Americans are high risk.
- Improve more interventions with African American through the church.
- Acknowledging tribal values and including education about interventions for suicide among Native Americans.
- Hispanic/Latino-Latino adolescents get extremely stressed due to their multiple roles in the household.
- Veterans are very environmentally sensitive and creative in ways to harm themselves.
- Black suicide maybe under-reported (may have to look at homicides).

Ms. Susie Willis, Electronic Health Record

- Can scan civilian records into electronic health records.

VSO Panel:

Mr. Wally Johnson, Adjutant Executive Officer, DAV:

- Build better alliance for our Nation's veterans and their families
- Consists of disabled American men and women veterans. Currently, 1.3 million members in DAV.

Town Hall Meeting (Holiday Inn Express-March 31):

ACMV conducted its 1st town hall meeting during its site visit to Fayetteville, North Carolina. The town hall meeting had approximately 130 veterans in attendance to include: African American, Native American, Asian American, and Caucasian veterans.

Introductions were made by Committee members, CMV staff, and VA staff in attendance.

Significant Attendees:

Mr. Bruce Triplett, Director, Fayetteville VAMC
Dr. Dave Raney, Communications Officer, VISN 6 Representative
Ms. Norma Byrd, PAO
Mr. BJ Parker, Chief, Health Administration
Mr. Jim Belmont, VA/DoD Sharing Agreements
Mr. Jerry Fountain, Wounded Warrior Program
Ms. Nina Tann, VBA
Mr. Daryl Ford, Minority Veterans Program Coordinator
Mr. Eugene Paul, Minority Veterans Program Coordinator
Mr. Greg Whitney, Director, Salisbury National Cemetery

VSO's represented:

DAV
VFW
Mr. Jimmy Goins, Tribal Chairman, Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina
Cumberland County Service Officer
Mr. Joe Wright, PVA

Concerns:

- Low Intensity Conflicts-Time served during classified missions (counter intelligence agent) - because of sealed records unable to file claim (or claim denied)

VBA response: Recommended standard request for federal records. Can obtain buddy and lay statements that validate mission.

- Veteran indicated that the incorrect location was given out for town hall meeting:
 - Had same issue as above
- Ms. Hunt (widow) spoke about husband (Vietnam veteran) in Lumberton Hospital and alleged that VA denied husband's admission to FVAMC. Doctor at Fayetteville Hospital told hospice nurse to take veteran to local hospital.

Womack Army Medical Center (Tuesday, April 1)

Briefing by COL Walton:

- Largest Medical Center-3000 employees.
- Under BRAC, Pope Air force base clinic will come under Womack Army Medical Center.

Challenges

Need for space (has outgrown):

- Added traumatic brain injury clinic
 - Symptoms:
 - Headaches.
 - Short term memory loss.
 - Can have both TBI and PTSD.
 - Revolving research on subject of TBI.
 - Treatment for both are the same (rest/speech therapy/anti-depressants/but PTSD may be more long term.
- Added Transition clinic
- Rural health problem:
 - Difficult to attract psychiatric/psychiatrist:
 - Has brought them in GS positions (to keep permanently)

Sharing Agreements:

- Working with VA to offer specialty specialist (surgical)

Mobilization:

- Currently 4,500 reservists are training to go to Iraq (provide medical service if needed)
- Inpatient OB/Orthopedic services decreased due to deployment of 82nd
- However, combat wounded has increased (4 to 5 a week) outpatient has increased also with family members especially when sponsor is deployed
- Mild traumatic brain injury is what is being seen most

Military Sexual Trauma:

- Military Sexual Trauma- 2 to 4 individuals a week (restricted and non-restricted reporting)

Soldier Service Center:

- Wounded Warrior Program
- VA is located in this building (all processing is conducted in that building)

Sharing Information:

- VISTA system:
 - VA cannot see pharmacy/lab data
 - Clinical verbiage the difficulty

LTC Jay Thornton, Warrior Transition Battalion

- Established June 2007
- 3 companies -14 June activated
- 7th floor, Soldier Service Center-June 27 activated
- Provide single chain of command to ensure quality of care and support to our warrior in transition and their families
 - Synchronize existing care and services
 - Providing knowledgeable and caring
 - Treating our soldiers and their families with honor and respect
- 2 MEB doctor
 - Medical Evaluation Board
 - Training/combat related injury
 - Treated through hospital if receive Profile 3
 - Profile will be reviewed by Deputy Commander for clinical services for determination if soldier has to board out. Or medically unfit

- Packet will be sent to Walter Reed Medical Center
- When process begins-communication is begun with VBA
- Within 30 days of arrival will get to initial VA brief
- Will start communication with three agencies-MEB/ACAP/VA for seamless transition
- Backlog of 140 of MEB doctors (part-time)
- Has vacancy recruitment agencies for providers
- 285 total active MEB cases

Mr. Bill Anglin, VA Liaison for Healthcare

- Agreements w/ 43 states.

Salisbury VA National Cemetery (Wednesday, April 2)

Significant Attendees:

Mr. Bruce Triplett, Director, Fayetteville VA Medical Center
 Ms. Rosalyn Cole, Associate Director, Fayetteville VA Medical Center
 Mr. Andy Roberts, MVPC, Salisbury VA Medical Center
 Ms. Carolyn Adams, Director, Salisbury VA Medical Center
 Ms. Sheila Womack, Associate Director for Operations, Salisbury VAMC

Veterans Honor Guard

Mr. Louis Reed-Korean War Veteran:

- Presented speech provided at veterans' funerals

Introductions

Mr. Gregory Whitney, Director/MVPC, Salisbury VA National Cemetery

- Director for 1 year:
 - Columbarium-holds up to 480
 - 500 burials per year
 - 50% are minority
- Outreach w/ veterans council (predominately African American) perform honors for veterans buried at the National Cemetery:
 - Meets monthly with the council

- LA and MS cemeteries headstones only identify graves with the following inscription USCT (US colored troops) or Buffalo soldiers.
 - Lucretia McClenney mentioned that Deputy Secretary Mansfield 's goal is to obtain headstones for all unmarked graves of USCT.
 - JT McLawhorn mentioned that each family member of USCT buried at the Beaufort SC National Cemetery received a letter from the President.

- Military Honor:
 - Live bugler
 - Color Guard
 - Rifle salute
 - Due to family history (such as suicide) may prefer not to have guns at the funeral.

- Cultural challenges:
 - South-people prefer to be buried in family plot.
 - Majority of burials are from Charlotte/Raleigh/Greensboro.
 - Encompasses up to 6 counties-54,000 veterans in age group of 65.
 - Pass an hour a way-families do not consider burial in Cemetery due to distance.
 - Packet is provided to family members-numbers for VBA/bereavement counseling/VHA.
 - Implementing Funeral Home Director's Summit in the fall:
 - Funeral Home Director's staff are not well versed in veterans eligibility
 - Will ensure information shared w/ family will be accurate
 - Free of charge for military honor (misconception of cost)

Winston Salem Regional Office (Wednesday, April 2)

Significant Attendees:

Mr. John Montgomery, Retiring Director, Winston-Salem RO
 Mr. Bob Kettles, Assistant Director, Winston-Salem RO
 Mr. Vince Hancock, Management Analyst
 Ms. Bonnie Ingram, Loan Guaranty
 Mr. Don Barnett
 Ms. Kim Albers, Winston-Salem RO
 Ms. Marcia Poston, Human Resources
 Ms. Sharon Butler-Norwood, MVPC, Winston-Salem RO

Fayetteville VAMC:

Mr. Bruce Triplett, Director, Fayetteville VA Medical Center
Ms. Rosalyn Cole, Associate Director, Fayetteville VA Medical Center
Mr. Darrell Ford, MVPC, Fayetteville VA Medical Center

Introductions:

Mr. Bob Kettles, Assistant Director:

- 773,630 total NC vet population
- 131,064 receiving compensation and pension from this office
- Disability compensation and pension payments-\$946.5 million a year (4th highest in the nation)
 - Six military bases (Pope AFB/Fort Bragg/Camp Lejune/Cherry Point/New River/Shaw AFB)
 - VBA offices in NC
 - Regional Office in Winston-Salem
 - Vocational Rehabilitation offices at Fort Bragg and New River MCAS/Benefits Intake Sites-Fort Bragg/Camp Lejune
 - National Initiatives
 - VA Regional Offices BDD rating activity site
 - Salt Lake City, UT
 - Winston-Salem, NC
 - Paperless claims processing pilot
 - Home Loan Eligibility Center
 - Eastern Center established 1997
 - National Center 2006
 - Growth
 - 511 office staff in 2007 vs. 297 in 2000
 - Vets disability 86,000 in 2000 vs. 110,000 in 2007
 - Rating claims pending 11,500 in 2000 vs. 19,575 in 2007
 - Rating claims completed 21,000 in 2000 vs. 45,600 in 2007
 - Total claims Rec'd 37,800 in 2000 vs. 68,600 in 2007
 - Total Claims completed 21,300 in 2000 vs. 47,100 in 2007

Ms. Bonnie Ingram, Loan Guaranty:

- There is no demographical data information
- Eligibility Center for the entire nation is in Winston-Salem
 - WSRO reviews application of eligibility:
 - Establish basic eligibility criteria
 - Demographic data information is requested on the actual application for the loan thru lenders (information is optional)

Ms. Kim Albers, Veterans Service Center:

- Covered outreach by WSRO

Ms. Sharon Butler-Norwood, MVPC:

- Provides overview of outreach conducted at WSRO
- Center Pointe partnership to assist in assessing veteran population
 - Mental health agencies
- Reading Connections in Greensboro
 - Assist to read/write in 37 languages

Town Hall Meeting (Winston-Salem Marriott, Wednesday, April 2)

Significant Attendees:

VA Regional Office staff

Mr. Gregory Whitney, Director & MVPC, Salisbury VA National Cemetery

Mr. Andy Roberts, MVPC, Salisbury VAMC

Mr. Darrell Ford, MVPC, Fayetteville VAMC

Committee conducted town hall meeting with veterans who reside in Winston-Salem, NC. Approximately 6 veterans were in attendance.

Introductions: ACMV, CMV and VARO Staff.

VETERANS ISSUES:

- A veteran who served in Desert Shield/Desert Storm and has had seven surgeries. She shared her frustration that no one could tell her what was wrong, now has degenerative arthritis in her feet and migraines, and still fighting VA for her compensation.
- A veteran stated he received letters from VA informing him that they are working on his claim but received no information regarding the town hall meeting. His concern was that VA denied his claim for dependency for child even though he is paying child support.
- A Navy veteran who has worked at the VA for six months was denied a shaving profile. If it was a medical issue in the military, how come I am being denied?
- A female veteran wanted to know why she wasn't selected or hired for positions within VA:
 - HR representative will follow-up.

- A veteran requested that the Secretary develop a central location for VA employees of VA to have their claim processed instead of farmed out. As an employee, we cannot call the 1-800#. Also, establish a toll free number for VA employees with claims to call. Employees have to go to their supervisor to check on the status of their claim.