

**Department of Veterans Affairs  
Federal Advisory Committee on Prosthetics & Special Disabilities  
Programs**

**April 9-10, 2008**

**Committee Members Present:**

Thomas H. Miller, Chairman  
Douglas G. Smith, M.D.  
Norman B. Hartnett  
Jerry P. Steelman

Col. Paul Pasquina, M.D.  
Ann Adair (for Gary Coates)

Paul Rao, Ph.D.  
Robert D. Rondenelli, M.D.  
Margaret G. Stineman, M.D.  
Robert S. Gailey, Ph.D., P.T.

Joseph A. Miller  
Rory Cooper, Ph.D.

**Guests:**

Ms. Barbara Stephens  
VA Office of Policy & Planning

Ms. Alexandra Wile  
VA Office of Policy & Planning

Mr. John Milani  
VA Prosthetics Services

Mr. George Fitelle  
VA Office of Policy & Planning

Ms. Shasta Hood  
VA Prosthetics Services

Ms. Michaela Lemen  
VA Rehabilitation Services

Mr. Ed Caparas  
VA Office of Policy & Planning

Mr. Robert Baum  
VA Prosthetics Services

Mr. Matthew St. Laurent  
Walter Reed Army Medical Center

***Minutes — Wednesday, April 9, 2008***

**Welcome and Opening Remarks — Mr. Miller, Chairman.**

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman. The Chair highlighted the agenda for the next two days, and announced that this morning, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs would meet with Committee members.

**Presentation & Comments from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs – The Honorable James Peake, MD**

Secretary Peake thanked the Committee for its work to improve the quality of care for disabled veterans. He talked about the use of telehealth for outreach, and commented on expanding educational benefits and vocational rehabilitation to the same levels WWII veterans received. He talked about partnering with the private sector to provide health care for veterans. He charged the Committee with making recommendations which shows what VA should look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with respect to Special Disabilities Programs. He presented a certificate of appointment to Paul Rao, PhD, the newest Committee member, and photographs were taken of the Secretary with Committee members.

### **Highlights from presentations:**

**Annual Ethics Review** – Mr. Jonathan Gurland, Office of General Counsel, provided the annual ethics review for Committee members.

**Update on Chiropractic Care** – VHA’s Director of Chiropractic Service, Dr. Anthony Lisi, provided an overview of chiropractic care. He stated, “VHA’s Chiropractic Program began in 1999 and the services are required by law.” In 2004, 26 programs opened, and there is at least one program in each VISN. The Chiropractic Care Service is aligned under Rehabilitation Services.

**Update on Veterans Benefits Administration** – Mr. Bradley Flohr, Assistant Director for Policy, provided updates on compensation and pension services (i.e., C&P Projects; Court Mandates; and Commissions & Legislation).

**Update on Care Coordination and Tele-Rehabilitation** – Dr. Adam Darkins, Chief Consultant for Care Coordination, provided an overview of VHA’s Tele-Rehabilitation Program. He stated, “each VISN has its own Polytrauma Telecommunications Network, and there are 6,000 trained providers in the program.”

**Update on Polytrauma Rehabilitation System of Care** — Dr. Barbara Sigford, National Program Director, VHA’s Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Service (PMRS), provided updates on PMRS program challenges, the Emerging Consciousness Program and the Geriatrics & Extended Care Clinical Polytrauma Rehabilitation Task Force activities. She stated, “the program goal is to prepare each patient for the next level of rehabilitation, to include community care or home care. The process consists of minimizing barriers to consciousness, which includes weaning patients from sedating medications, treating acute medical and co-morbid problems. There is a full inter-disciplinary team which is responsible for assessing family needs, providing logistical support for families, and respite services.”

**Update on Blind Rehabilitation Services (BRS)** – Ms. Gale Watson, Acting Director of Blind Rehabilitation Services, provided an overview on Blind Rehabilitation Centers, Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST), Visual Impairment Services Outpatient Rehabilitation Program, Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists, Continuum of Care for Visually Impaired Veterans, services for OEF/OIF veterans, Hybrid Title 38, and the Employee Education Program on Visual Impairments. She stated, “all Blind Rehabilitation Centers are CARF accredited and the VIST Program provides a full spectrum of inter-disciplinary care which is led by a VIST Coordinator. BRS schedules bi-monthly conference calls as part of its OEF/OIF outreach services.”

**Update on Spinal Cord Injury & Disorders** – Dr. Margaret Hammond, Chief Consultant for Spinal Cord Injury & Disorders Services (SCI), provided program updates. She provided a status report on new construction, staffing and OEF/OIF veteran’s issues. She stated, “a search is underway to fill the Chief, SCI Service vacant position in San Antonio. Active duty personnel with spinal cord injuries increased from 61 in FY 2003 to 81 in 2007. Most veterans are getting care in rural areas, but a good number make the choice to not seek care for various reasons. They feel fine and do not come to VA for care.”

### ***Minutes — Thursday, April 10, 2008***

**Overview of VA Central Office Library** – Ms. Caryl Kazen & Ms. CJ Janus, provided highlights on the weekly MEDLINE searches which are made available for the Committee. She explained that the general idea is to provide late breaking news on topics of interest to the Committee. The articles will have a rehabilitation focus, to include assistive technology, special disability populations (e.g. low vision, hearing loss, stroke, TBI, and vocational rehabilitation).

She distributed a copy of the book titled “Best Care Anywhere” by Phillip Longman to each Committee member.

### **Committee Discussion Summary:**

1. There was a discussion on responses from program areas to Committee recommendations.
2. The Committee stated, “the Director, Chiropractic Services needs to initiate a VA wide outcome measurement tool to track utilization, interdisciplinary interaction, and outcomes of patients using his services.” The Committee supports the initiative to create a Postgraduate Residency Program within VA for Chiropractors.

3. The Committee would like an update on VA's Amputee Care Assistive Device Clinics.
4. The Committee advocates there is a need for stronger collaboration between Vocational Rehabilitation (VBA) and medical Rehabilitation Services. The Committee would like to invite Ms. Ruth Fanning from VBA's Vocational Rehabilitation & Education Service to present on measures of success. It was pointed out that there are linkages to VHA, i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors located at each Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. A meeting was held with representatives from Rehabilitation Services and VBA to discuss compensated work therapy and begin to coordinate rehabilitation with VBA. In 2004, a Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Task Force Report produced 200 recommendations for the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program. The Committee would like a copy of this report.
5. The Committee discussed the need for VA-VBA, Department of Labor, and U.S. Department of Education-Rehabilitation Services Administration to develop agreements which facilitates state, local collaborations and partnerships. The Committee would like to see a program of evaluation for VA and State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation partnerships be implemented. The Committee would like an update on agreements between VA-VBA, Department of Labor, and U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration which facilitates state, local collaborations and partnerships.
6. The Committee stated, "technology is a cornerstone to the successful rehabilitation of veterans with disabilities. These veterans may use a variety of technologies, such as, computer access, augmentative communication, cognitive aides, driving aides, mobility devices (e.g., wheelchairs, prosthetics, orthotics), and recreation technologies." The Committee would like to have updates from Mr. Griffin Dalianis, VA Committee on Rehabilitation (VACOR).
7. The Committee would like to invite the new Director, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service, to provide program updates during the next meeting.
8. The Committee would like to be briefed by the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation & Education.