

**Department of Veterans Affairs
Advisory Committee on Women Veterans
June 26-27, 2000
Minutes**

The meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans convened at 8:30 AM, on June 26, 2000, VA Central Office, in Washington, D.C.

Advisory Members Present

Dr. Linda Schwartz, Chair
Col. Lois Johns, USA (Ret) Co-Chair
Col. Karen Ray, USA (Ret)
Mrs. Bertha Cruz Hall
Ms. Joy Ilem
Cmdr. Constance Evans USPHS (Ret)
MSGt. Sherry Blede
Capt. Lory Manning, USN (Ret)
CSM Douglas Russell, USA (Ret)
LTC. Consuelo C. Kickbusch , USA (Ret)
Capt. Barbara Brehm (DACOWITS)

VA Staff Present

Ms. Joan Furey, Director OOW
Ms. Maryanne Carson, EA, OOW

Advisory Member Absent

MG Marcelite J. Harris, USAF (Ret)

Guests

Mr. Edward Chow, Office of Planning and Analysis (OO8)
Janice S. Raynor, US General Accounting Office

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Linda Schwartz, Chair. At 8:40am.

Topic: Testimony of Chairman before the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC)

Discussion: Dr. Linda Schwartz discussed her testimony before the HVAC, on three different occasions. She testified in reference to the K Award for a simple or radical mastectomy. She said that the bill is under the Gender Equity Act of the year 2000.

Dr. Schwartz said she answered several questions during her testimonies. Topics included the privacy plans for VA health care providers; the expansion of health care to Reservist; permanent counseling for sexual trauma victims; Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program; appointment of women for VA appointed positions and; compensation for birth defects of children whose mothers' served in Vietnam.

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Action: None

Topic: Meeting with Deputy Secretary Hershel W. Gober

Discussion: Mr. Gober met with the Committee. He discussed the Summit on Women Veterans Issues, and congratulated Ms. Furey on its success. He introduced the idea of having the next Summit in a more centralized location, with the feeling this will generate a larger participation from the women veterans' community.

Mr. Gober then presented Drs. Schwartz and Johns with certificates of appreciation. He thanked them for all their hard work as members of the Committee and as advocates for women veterans. Before his departure, he thanked the Committee for their dedication to the Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

Action: None

Topic: Secretary's Letter to the Field

Discussion: . Joan Furey passed out a memorandum signed by Secretary West to all Administration Heads and VISN Directors. This memo gave full support to women veteran programs (copy attached). The Center will be developing a strategy to monitor the status of VA services to women. She stated that the VA is developing a task force to study the impact of opening sexual trauma counseling eligibility to National Guard and Reservists.

Action: None

Topic: Homeless demonstration project.

Discussion: Ms. Furey stated that the White House has allocated \$50 million to the VA for all homeless programs. From that amount, \$3 million was specifically allocated for women veterans who are homeless. Ms. Furey said that eleven projects were funded and that the money had just recently gone out to the field. They looked for areas where there was strong community collaboration and support. She stated that these areas were allotted 18 months of funding and at the end of 18 months, a decision would be made as to whether or not to continue the programs.

Action: Committee requests an update on this project at the fall meeting.

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Topic: *National Summit on Women Veterans Issues.*

Discussion: The Committee shared comments that were expressed by Summit attendees. All of the comments were positive. Ms. Furey stated that there were 350 attendees and that most stayed for the entire Summit. It was suggested that the DAV be sent a personal thank you note from the Committee for all of their contributions. Doug Russell volunteered to tally the surveys and tabulate the results. Ms. Furey hopes that a draft report will be ready by the October meeting.

Action: Recommendations from the Summit will be incorporated into the 2000 Report

Topic: Appointments of Chair and Co-Chair of the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans for 2000-2002 term.

Discussion: Ms. Furey announced that Col. Karen Ray was nominated as the new Chair and Connie Evans will serve as the Co-chair.

Action: None

Discussion: The 2000 Annual Report. A subcommittee consisting of Linda Schwartz (acting as a consultant), Lory Manning, Karen Ray, Doug Russell, Joy Illem and Barbara Brehm was appointed to write the first draft of the report. The report will be discussed at the fall meeting. The report format was outlined as follows:

1. Matrix
2. Format from old report
3. Site Visits
4. Testimonies
5. Input from working groups
6. Committee report from working groups
7. Summit Survey

Action: The Subcommittee will meet in Washington D.C. August 24 and 25 to prepare a draft of the report.

Topic: Site Visit Update

Discussion: Msgr Sherry Blede gave her site visit report to Leavenworth, KA. (copy attached)

Topic: Problems associated with PTSD diagnosis

Discussion: The committee discussed problems associated with veterans problems with obtaining a PTSD diagnosis. The problems discussed were 1) If such diagnosis is given by Nurse Practitioners or other they must still wait for a rating by a psychiatrist;

2) In order for a claim for PTSD to be processed, VBA must identify a stressor; 3) inconsistency in rating decisions across the system; 4) a belief by some staff directly involved with evaluating sexual trauma cases, that the veteran “asked or provoked” the rape; and 4) the necessity of the veteran to repeat their story a number of times, to different individuals, a situation that is often traumatic for the individual. Additionally, The Committee discussed the use of the “heightened benefit of the doubt” used in combat cases and questioned why this is not applied to sexual trauma cases. This will be discussed with VBA at a future meeting.

Action: The Committee will discuss this with VBA during their next briefing.

Topic: Agenda for October Meeting:

Discussion: Ms. Furey reviewed the Agenda for the October meeting and asked if there were any items she overlooked. The topics were identified as:

1. Compensation and Pension Program
2. Women’s Health Briefing: maternity care, infertility treatment, treatment for sexual dysfunction
3. Briefing on Implementation of the Millennium Bill
4. RCS: Treatment of Persian Gulf Veterans
5. Treatment of Transsexuals in VHA
6. FBS _ in reference to active duty personnel who are boarded out
7. Training of Rating Specialists in VBA
8. Sensitivity Training for foreign health care workers who provide treatment to women veterans
9. Women veterans who are homeless
10. Studies on Women Persian Gulf Veterans.

Action: None

Topic: Proposed Site Visit

Discussion: Ms. Blede is planning on doing a site visit to the VAMC in Topeka, Kansas and requested that time be allocated for her to give the committee a briefing on her findings at the October meeting.

Action: None

Action: The members then met as subcommittees.

The date for the next meeting was set for October 24-26, 2000.

The meeting of the Advisory Committee adjourned at 4:40p

Respectfully Submitted by

