

**Department of Veterans Affairs  
Advisory Committee on Women Veterans  
Chicago Health Center System - Site visit  
September 21 – 26, 1998  
Minutes**

The September meeting of the Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Women Veterans convened at 8:30 am on September 21, 1998.

**Advisory Members Present**

Dr. Linda Schwartz, Chair  
Ms. Connie Evans  
Ms. Karen Ray  
Ms. Bertha Cruz Hall  
Ms. Joy Ilem  
Ms. Veronica A'zera  
Ms. Sherry Blede  
Ms. Lory Manning  
COL. Christine Cook  
Mr. Douglas Russell  
Capt Barbara Brehm (DACOWITS)

**VA Staff Present**

Ms. Joan Furey, Director 00W  
Ms. Kathy Zeiler, Director, WVHP, VHA  
Dr. Susan Mather, ACMD, VHA  
Ms. Maryanne Carson, EA, 00W  
Ms. Connie LaRosa, Deputy Field Director

**Members Absent**

Dr. Lois Johns, Vice Chair  
Ms. Jan McSparren

The Advisory Committee meeting was held in conjunction with a site visit to the Chicago Health Care System. Monday, September 21 through Thursday, September 24, was spent visiting VA facilities in the Greater Chicago Area. Committee members received briefings from VA staff relating to VA programs in the area that had a particular focus on services and programs for women veterans (agenda attached). The Committee met in executive session on Friday, September 25, 1998 (minutes attached). Town hall meetings with the women veteran community were conducted at the North Chicago VA Medical Center on Thursday afternoon, September 24, and at Hines VA Medical Center, on Saturday morning, September 26. The meeting was adjourned at 12 noon on September 26.

**Advisory Committee on Women Veterans  
Executive Session**

**September 25, 1998**

**Minutes**

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Karen Ray, acting chair, at 8:30 am. Both Chair and Vice-chair were absent.

**I. Review of Site Visit**

**Topic:** Site Visit

**Discussion:** Members agreed that the site visit was both informative and valuable. Overall, the visit was considered successful and members were impressed with much of what they had seen. Areas that received particular praise included:

- a. Comprehensive Women's Center at VAMC West Side
- b. Co-location of community-based outpatient clinics and vet centers
- c. Compensation and Pension Processing Center established at the North Chicago VAMC for service members separating from Great Lakes Naval Base
- d. Commitment by the VISN to improve women's healthcare
- e. Presentations by women veteran coordinators from across the VISNs
- f. The assignment by VBA of women rating specialists to work with sexual trauma cases

The Committee expressed interest in obtaining more information about the following issues:

- a. Status of formal communication between Women's Health Programs and the Network Director/Management Advisory Committee
- b. The extent to which VA encounters difficulty in recruiting and retaining gynecologists because of low salaries
- c. The difficulties associated with the inpatient treatment of women veterans with psychiatric disorders, and what is being done to address them
- d. Steps that individual VAMCs are taking to assure the availability of gender specific care in the Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC).
- e. VA's plans for the future of CBOC's, e.g. VA vs. contract; numbers of clinics to be established; provision of specialty care
- f. The plans being made to replicate the C&P processing center that has been established at North Chicago VAMC for sailors out-processing from Great Lakes Naval Base
- g. Backlog of unprocessed claims by VBA
- h. Consistency of rating specialists
- i. Information regarding State Homes for Veterans

**Action:** A report on the site visit will be prepared by Ms. Manning, Mrs. Azera and Mr. Russell, prior to the next meeting.

## **II. Old Business**

**Topic:** 1998 report

**Discussion:** The Committee reviewed and edited the 1998 report.

**Action:** Recommendations for revision of the report will be presented to the Chair

**Topic:** West Los Angeles site visit report

**Discussion:** Ms. Furey reported that the Committee had not completed a report on the May 1997, visit to the Los Angeles area. Her notes from the visit were made available to the Committee. The Center for Women Veterans prepared a formal letter of thanks to the Network Director and facility staff for their cooperation.

**Action:** An attempt will be made to reconstruct the site visit report from the materials Ms. Furey has. The chair, Mrs. Ray, Mrs. Evans, and Mr. Russell will work with Ms. Furey to reconstruct the visit and prepare a report.

## **III. New Business**

**Topic:** 2000 report.

**Discussion:** The following topics were identified for further review and study, and possible inclusion in the Committee's report:

- a. Income level for co-payments for VA care and pharmaceuticals
- b. Clinic environments
- c. Advocacy role of women veteran coordinators
- d. Availability of results of VA patient satisfaction surveys by gender
- e. Incorporating sensitivity to women's issues, particularly the need for privacy and safety, in new employee orientation
- f. User friendly VA facilities
- g. Status of military honors
- h. Study of women veteran coordinators workload in relation to women veteran users

**Action:** None

**Topic:** Access to Care Report

**Discussion:** The 1997 Access to Care Report is pending transmittal to Congress. It has been revised in keeping with the recommendations of OMB and Ms. Furey anticipates it will be sent soon. A copy of that report will be provided at the next meeting.

**Topic:** Videotapes on Women Veterans Issues

**Discussion:** The Committee expressed interest in viewing the teleconference videotape on women veteran's issues that was prepared for VBA staff last year.

**Action:** Ms. Furey will have the tapes available for the next meeting.

**Topic:** National Summit on Women Veterans Issues

**Discussion:** Ms. Furey informed the Committee that she submitted a proposal and requested funding to support a National Summit on Women Veterans Issues to be held in 1999.

**Action:** Ms. Furey will keep us informed of the status of the funding request.

**Topic:** Briefing by Ms. Furey

**Discussion:** Ms. Furey briefed the Committee on the presentations she conducted this summer. They included:

- a. Issues of Native American Women Veterans at VA's Special Emphasis Training on Native American Issues. Mrs. Evans, Committee member, participated in this presentation
- b. AMVETS annual convention: keynote speaker and women's committee
- c. DAV annual convention: women's committee
- d. WACS annual convention: keynote speaker
- e. Women Marines annual convention: keynote speaker
- f. American Legion annual convention: veterans affairs committee

**Action:** None

**Topic:** Consultant Fee

**Discussion:** Committee members discussed their concern regarding the costs associated with the Committee and their belief that the current fee is not in keeping with other committees. Ms. Furey was asked to consider requesting an increase in the consultant fee.

**Action:** Ms. Furey agreed to follow-up on this request with an answer for the Committee by the next meeting.

**Topic:** Committee member visits to VA facilities

**Discussion:** Committee requested guidance on appropriate protocol for individual visits to VA facilities. Ms. Furey provided guidance to the members and reminded them of the guidelines for such visits that was developed last year by the Committee. All members were reminded to work through the Center for Women Veterans when they wish to visit any VA facility.

**Action:** None

**Topic:** Sexual Trauma Brochure

**Discussion:** The Committee discussed the possibility of developing a brochure on sexual trauma counseling and claims issues. This will be used to assist the veteran service organizations with a better understanding of the issues and sensitively involved in dealing with affected veterans.

**Action:** Ms. Ilem, Mrs. Cruz-Hall and Mrs. Azera volunteered to develop the brochure for review by the Committee. Ms. Furey will work to have it approved, published, and distributed.

**Topic:** Briefings for next meeting

**Discussion:** Committee requests briefings at next meeting on these topics:

- a. Plans for CBOC's
- b. Plans for replicating the C&P outprocessing center at North Chicago
- c. Plans for addressing the backlog of C&P claims
- d. Plans for addressing mental health care for women veterans
- e. The status of VA long term care services
- f. State Veterans Homes
- g. Training of VBA staff in women's issues: particularly rating specialists.

**Action:** 00W will prepare the agenda accordingly

**Topic:** Date of meeting

**Discussion:** The Committee agrees that the next meeting will be held in Washington D. C. in March, 1999.

**Action:** 00W will coordinate the planning for a March meeting. Ms. Carson will notify members as soon as hotel and travel arrangements are finalized.

The meeting was adjourned at 5pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan A. Furey