

**Department of Veterans Affairs
Advisory Committee on Women Veterans
Meeting Minutes
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420
October 29-31, 2007**

Advisory Committee Members Present:

COL Shirley Quarles, USAR, Chair	1SG Pamela Luce, USA, Retired
CAPT René Campos, USN, Retired	Brenda Moore, USA
CMSgt Helena R. Carapellatti, USAF, Retired	COL Jacqueline Morgan, USAF, Retired, Vice-Chair
Velma Hart, USAR	TSgt Barbara Pittman, USAF, Retired
CPO Kathleen Janoski, USN, Retired	Celia Renteria Szelwach, USA
Marlene R. Kramel, USA	Joanna Crosariol Truitt
Mary Antoinette Lawrie, USAF	MGySgt Rosemarie Weber, USMC, Retired

Ex-Officio Members Present:

COL Denise Dailey, Military Director, Department of Defense (DoD) – Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)
Cheryl Rawls, Director, VA Regional Office (VARO), North Little Rock, Arkansas

Ex-Officio Members Excused:

Cynthia Morrison, Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service

Advisors Present:

Dr. Patricia Hayes, Acting Chief Consultant, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Women Veterans Health Strategic Healthcare Group (WVHSHG)
CDR Lucienne D. Nelson, Program Manager, Critical Infrastructure Protection for Healthcare and Public Health Sector, Department of Health and Human Services
Linda Piquet, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Program Manager for Women Veterans Outreach Program

Advisors Excused:

Lindee Lenox, Director, Memorial Programs Service, National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

VA Staff Present:

Center for Women Veterans	Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris, Director Dr. Betty Moseley Brown, Assoc. Director	Desiree Long Michelle Terry
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Guests:

Brenda Blair, VARO Muskogee, Oklahoma
COL Matrice W. Browne, MD, USA, Retired
Yanira Gomez, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW)

Don Green, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Walter Elmore, HUD
Shannon Middleton, The American Legion
Denise Williams, The American Legion
Joy Ilem, Disabled American Veterans
Richard Larson, Associated Veterans
Teresa Morris, VFW
Rebecca Pass, VBA
Mary Rooney, VA Homeless Veterans Program
Linda Graham, VAMC West Palm Beach, Florida
Ron Przygodzki, VA Office of Research and Development (ORD)
Sara Clark, ORD

Monday, October 29, 2007

Meeting was called to order by the Vice-Chair. Items discussed included:

- Introduction of Members & Visitors.
- Agenda review.
- 2006 Report.
- Assignment of Subcommittees.
- Review and approval of June 2007 Palo Alto Advisory Committee Site Visit Minutes.
- Summit June 2008 meeting.

Remarks: The Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield, Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs

- Group photographs with Acting Secretary and Committee.
- Overview of VA initiatives/legislation.
- Discussed 2008 budget and statistics on women veterans.
- Stressed the importance of the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

Briefing: Overview of VHA Initiatives, Michael J. Kussman, M.D., MS, MACP, Under Secretary for Health

- Elevation of the VHA Women Veterans Health Program to the Women Veterans Health Strategic Healthcare Group (WVHSHG) in March 2007.
- Initiatives for 2008 include:
 - Providing primary care providers with innovative training in women's health skills. The new initiative will match provider needs with Women's Health curriculum modules.
 - Initiative to prevent birth defects. This is an important initiative because VA treats a large number of women veterans of childbearing age.

- Initiative to produce a methodology for interventions in pharmacy management. VHA clinicians will work with patients to develop interventions, determine their interest in family planning, and their needs for contraception.
- Cardiac risk intervention and cancer prevention for women over the age of 55.
- Leadership – succession planning, consistency in grooming leadership, gap in filling positions due to retirement. Develop environment/culture where leaders understand their roles.
- Studies on schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and PTSD.
- Welcomes suggestions of committee regarding issues/conditions to track.

Update: 2006 Advisory Committee Report, Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris, Director, Center for Women Veterans (CWV)

- Report contained 23 recommendations and one comment.
- Discussed timeline of report processing:
 - The report was submitted to the Secretary on June 30, 2006.
 - Departmental responses submitted to the Secretary for approval and signature on February 9, 2007.
 - Signed by the Secretary on March 25, 2007
 - Report, with responses, was sent to Congress on May 10, 2007.
 - The report will be professionally printed and widely disseminated to members of Congress, Library of Congress, VA medical centers, VA Administrations, State Departments of Veterans Affairs, veterans service organizations, and other veteran-related organizations. Estimated publication date is December 15, 2007.
- The report recommendations are tracked on an excel spreadsheet. Status briefings and written updates are scheduled during Washington, DC meetings, as outlined by the report.

Update: Summit 2008 and Center Activities, Dr. Betty Moseley Brown, Associate Director, CWV

- Provided information on outreach activities.
- Discussed VA's strategic goals and the Center's performance measures.
- Center's recent and upcoming events.
- 2008 National Summit on Women Veterans Issues:
 - Targeted attendance is approximately 350-400.
 - The Summit will be held June 20-22, 2008 in Washington, DC.

Briefing: Overview of VBA Initiatives, Keith Pedigo, VBA, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary, Office of Policy & Program Management

- Discussed Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 statistics and amounts paid:

- Compensation – 27 million veterans on rolls, \$27 billion.
- Pension – 329,000 veterans on rolls, \$2.7 billion.
- Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Service (VR&E) – 89,000 veterans received vocational rehabilitation assistance, \$747 million.
- Education – 500,000 veterans on rolls, \$2.7 billion.
- Loan Guaranty – 130,000 veterans received loans, \$25 billion.
- Insurance – \$2.3 billion death benefits paid, \$422 million dividends paid.
- Current war has focused significantly on what VA and DoD are doing for service members and veterans.
- President directed the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish Task Force on returning Global War on Terror Heroes.
- Commission on the Future of America's Veterans.
- President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors (Dole/Shalala).
- Veterans Disability Benefits Commission.
- Operation Enduring Freedom / Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) has also created closer working relationship between VA and DoD.
- VR&E coming home to work initiatives.

Briefing: Overview of Women Veterans Health Strategic Healthcare Group (WVHSHG), Patricia M. Hayes, PhD, Acting Director. Recommendations 3, 4, 15, 17 & 18

- Discussed statistics on women veterans
 - Shrinking total veteran population but a doubling of women veterans using VHA for their healthcare.
- Increasing recognition of women veterans' unique and complex health needs-gear up for influx of younger women veterans.
- The new OEF/OIF-era veteran.
- Focus on disparities in performance results.
- Increase attention to comprehensive view of women's health - beyond reproductive health issues
- Examine women's health as a population of women veterans –and how military experience plays a role in health outcomes.

Briefing: Overview of National Cemetery Administration, Mr. Richard A. Wannemacher, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

- Honors veterans with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service to our Nation.

- Responsibilities are to provide burial space for veterans, maintain cemeteries, National shrines, administer the Federal grants program for consideration of State Veteran Cemeteries, furnish headstones, markers and administer the Presidential Memorial Certificate Program.
- Discussed the National Cemetery Administration:
 - 1,527 staff,
 - 125 national cemeteries,
 - 2.8 million gravesites,
 - 96,797 interments (FY 2006).
- Eligibility and burial benefits.
- FY 2006 Memorial Program
 - 336, 266 Headstones and Markers provided
 - 405, 538 Presidential Memorial Certificates
- NCA's budget request – FY 08, total programs equal \$508 million.
- Projected veteran deaths.
- Strategy to meeting burial needs of veterans.
- New and future national cemeteries.

Briefing: Ethics: Jonathan Gurland, Office of General Counsel

- Provided information on ethics rules for Advisory Committee members who are special government employees.
- The Federal Criminal Code.
- Standards of ethical conduct.
- Provided information on how to get ethical advice.

Discussion: Wrap-up, Dr. Shirley Quarles, Chair, ACWV

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

Meeting called to order by the Chair. Items discussed included:

- Review of recommendations on report matrix.

Briefing: Overview of Center for Veterans Enterprise (VetBiz), Ms. Gail Wagner, Deputy Director

- Provided a program snapshot:
 - Three percent contract goal for service-disabled veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB).
 - Three percent subcontract goal for SDVOSBs.
 - Objective: expand population of businesses and increase capacity to support Federal requirements.
 - Improve performance with Veteran-owned Small Businesses (VOSB)
 - Increase the capability and capacity of both SDVOSB and VOSB concerns and stay Green on SBA Scorecard.

- Discussed data integration, joint outreach, info exchange and operation transformation.
- SBA's new loan program for veterans.
- Education - Federal workforce awareness, Federal Acquisition Regulation changes, corporate support, Online training tools.
- Recent legislation.
- Prime Contracting Procurement Goals and Subcontracting Changes
- Eligibility Requirements.
- Next in FY 2008
 - Verification roll-out.
 - Data transparency (SBA, DoD).
 - Focus on Subcontracting Program.
 - Formalize DoD partnerships
 - Grow state programs.
 - Publish strategic plan.

Briefing: Overview of Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, Ms. Christine Hill, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs

- Provided an overview of the political structure and positive working relationship OCLA has with the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees.
- Upcoming legislation with regard to women veterans' issues.

Briefing: Overview VA Homeless 2006 Report, Pete Dougherty, Director, Homeless Programs Office

- Homeless Women Veterans Programs (HWVP) started in 2000 in response to Congressional requests for more outcomes evaluations of homeless programs.
- The following VA medical centers participate in the HWVP: Boston, Brooklyn, Tampa, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dallas, and Houston.
- HWVP's goals are to:
 - Provide outreach to the community to identify female veterans who are either literally homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
 - Provide case management for their medical or psychiatric needs, as well as provide assistance with navigating VA and social welfare systems.
 - Provide residential treatment in partnership with non-profit programs in the community.
- Discussed socio-demographic characteristics within these Special Programs:
 - Median age: 50 years.
 - Race: more than 53 percent are Black, not Hispanic
 - Marital status: nearly 60 percent previously married

- VA benefits: 40 percent are service-connected
- Services provided during the first three months of care.
- 2005 Annual Report Summary.
- Various other programs:
 - Homeless Providers Grant & Per Diem Programs.
 - Acquired Property Program
 - Stand Down
- Other Key VA Housing and Homeless Programs
 - Project CHALENG –
 - Multifamily Transitional Housing for Homeless Veterans
- With the assistance of faith-based and community organizations the number and percentage of veterans among the homeless is declining (from 250,000 on a given night to 195,000).

Discussion: Review of Committee Initiatives and Recommendations, Dr. Shirley Quarles, Chair, ACWV

- Wrap up

Wednesday, October 31, 2007

Meeting was called to order by the Chair. The following items were discussed:

- Site visit.
- Subcommittees met to discuss 2008 Report.

Briefing: Overview of Veterans Disability Benefits Commission Final Report, Mr. Ray Wilburn

- Commission Charge: P.L. 108-136: National Defense Authorization Act 2004
 - Determine Appropriateness
 - Benefits
 - Level of benefits
 - Standards for determining whether compensated
 - Evaluate and Assess
 - Laws & Regulations
 - Rates (Rating Schedule average loss of earnings capacity)
 - Comparable disability benefits by Federal, State, and private sector
- Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission Profile.
 - Twelve of thirteen Commission members are veterans and nine are combat veterans. Combined, they have over 260 years of military experience.
- Employment rates for male and female veterans by disability rating
- Earned income for male and female veterans by disability rating

- The Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) Survey of Disabled Veterans & Survivors which reviewed the following:
 - Impact of disability on quality of life.
 - Disincentives to work or treatment
 - Survey of VA Raters and VSOs
 - Processing veteran claims
- The Commission released its final report on October 3, 2007. The report can be found at: <http://www.vetscommission.org/reports.asp>.

Update: Women Veterans Research, Dr. Elizabeth Yano, GLAHS, Sepulveda Campus

- Discussed increased funding rates for research focused on women veterans' health and health care needs
- Proposals targeting priority areas in chronic disease management, prevention, mental health
- Impact of practice structure on quality of care for women veterans.
- VA Women's Health Care Research on OEF/OIF
- MST screening/treatment.
- Identified current demographics, health care needs, and VA experiences of women veterans.
- Determined how health care needs and barriers to VA health care use differ among women veterans of different periods eras (e.g., OEF/OIF vs. earlier periods).
- Assessed women veterans' preferences for and perceived value of different types of VA interventions to improve access and quality.
- Growing consortium of VA-based women's health researchers.
- Increased mentorship of Women's Health fellows and career development awardees
- Importance of tracking veteran status.
- PTSD, sexual harassment and sexual assault.
- Greater specialization and referrals to VAMCs.

Update: Defense Advisory Committee On Women In The Services (DACOWITS), Colonel Denise Dailey

- Colonel Dailey provided an overview of DACOWITS' mission, strategy, and emerging topics.

Briefing: Overview of Genomic Medicine, Dr. Sumitra Muralidhar

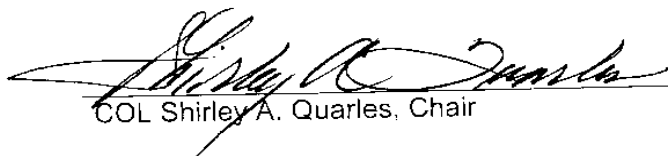
- Dr. Muralidhar provided an overview of VHA's Genomic Medicine Program.
 - In 2005, VHA launched the *Eight For Excellence* strategic plan to enhance the health and well-being of veterans. Specifically, Strategy 6.1 indicated: *Identify and assess opportunities for Genomic Medicine*

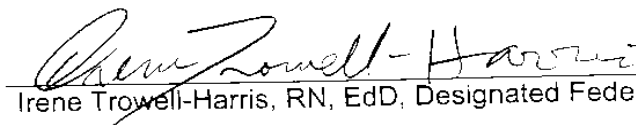
- Genomic Medicine (personalized medicine) is customized healthcare tailored to an individual based on their genetic makeup (genes).
- Topics of discussion included:
 - Benefits of Genomic Medicine.
 - Treatments based on genetics.
 - Shift from reaction to prevention.
 - Public policy considerations.
 - VA Genomic Medicine Program goals and implementation.
 - Veteran Consultation Project.
 - Fears about genetic research.
 - Data/sample sharing policy
 - Genomic Medicine Program Advisory Committee and working groups.
 - Ongoing genomics/genetics-related projects.
 - Infrastructure development.
 - Planned studies.
 - Interactions with other organizations.

**Discussion: Review of Committee initiatives and Report recommendations,
Dr. Shirley Quarles, Chair, ACWV**

Breakout of subcommittee groups.

Meeting Adjourned


COL Shirley A. Quarles, Chair


Irene Trowell-Harris, RN, EdD, Designated Federal Official