

**Department of Veterans Affairs  
Advisory Committee on Women Veterans  
Committee Meeting Minutes  
Residence Inn by Marriott  
Washington, DC  
September 16 – 18, 2003**

**Advisory Committee Members Present:**

Ms. Marsha Four, Chair

COL Mitzi Manning, USMC (Ret), Vice Chair

SFC Gwen M. Diehl, USA (Ret)

Ms. Cynthia J. Falzone

Ms. Bertha Cruz Hall

MAJ M. Joy Mann, USAF Reserve

CPT Lory Manning, USN (Ret)

COL Kathleen A. Morrissey NJ ANG

CDR Joan O'Connor, USNR (Ret)

Ms. Sheryl Schmidt, CA Dept. of Veterans  
Affairs

Mr. Edward E. Hartman, Disabled American  
Veterans (DAV)

LTC Kathy LaSauce, USAF (Ret)

MSgt Lewis E. Schulz, II, USAF (Ret)

CMSgt Luc M. Shoals, OK ANG

**Ex-Officio:**

COL Denise Dailey, DACOWITS

**VA Staff Present:**

Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris, Director, Center for Women Veterans

Harriett Heywood, Associate Director, Center for Women Veterans

Desiree Long, Center for Women Veterans

Petra Johnson, Center for Women Veterans

Carole Turner, Director, Women Veterans Health Program

Garry Bernard, Women Veterans Health Program

Maureen Brown, Women Veterans Health Program

Dr. Robert Allen, VHA

Dorothy Hartung, VHA

Karen Ashton, National Cemetery Administration

**Guests:**

Jennifer Coale, The American Legion

Sandy Miller, Vietnam Veterans of America

Renaee Allen, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

Tuesday, September 16

Meeting called to order by Chair, Marsha Four. First item of note was a change to the meeting agenda: time and date change for speakers Pete Dougherty and Chief of Staff, Nora Egan. Change occurred because of the impending arrival of Hurricane Isabel.

Minutes from the January 2003 Advisory Committee meeting and the June 2003 Phoenix site visit were reviewed. Motion to accept both sets of minutes was moved and seconded.

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The entire package, with attachments, is located in a three-ring binder in the Center for Women Veteran's (CWV) office.

Thank you letter to Mr. John Fears, Director, Phoenix VAMC, for support during Phoenix site visit was mailed on August 7, 2003.

Report 2004 discussion: List of items for recommendation, development of a "Hit List" and work out details between meetings. COL Kathleen Morrissey and CAPT Lory Manning will chair the subcommittees on Health and Benefits, respectively.

Dr. Mackay submitted his resignation effective September 30, 2003.

- Committee profile sheet distributed. Committee members were asked to make corrections as appropriate. The Center will provide the Committee members with an updated profile sheet.

**Briefing: Congressional and Legislative Affairs, Pamela Iovino, DAS, Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs**

- VA must have programs and policies to address women veterans' needs and involve women veterans in the decision making process.
- Status of current and pending legislation:
  - VBA responsible for completing PL 107-330, effective 12/06/02, (Compensation for Mastectomy – Sec. 102: Clarification of entitlement to special monthly compensation for women veterans who have service-connected loss of breast tissue).
  - VA proposal of healthcare for newborns ("Omnibus Health Bill").
  - Privacy of Women Veterans (HR 1720 – Rep. Rob Simmons) "Veterans Healthcare Facility Improvement Act."
  - Authority of PL 106-117 (Veterans Sexual Trauma Counseling and Treatment) Extension beyond 2004?
  - Extension beyond 2004 – requirement of biennial report by Committee.
  - No action on SR 548 (To improve mental health programs for veterans – Section 1: Permanent authority for counseling and treatment of veterans for sexual trauma).

**Update: Veterans Health Administration, Dr. Susan Mather, Chief, Public Health & Environmental Hazards Officer, VHA**

- Upcoming briefing on whether the Women Veterans Health Program should be a permanent office by Congressional legislation.
- Discussion of the duties of Deputy Field Directors.
- Need for special programs (MST) and improving privacy.
- Relevancy of cultural issues.
- Passing of health legislation, infant care.

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- Surveys: problems of data collection and quality of data; general figures from VA's Data Management Center expected early in 2004 (for FY2003); last large scale survey was conducted in 1986 – need for a new survey; Committee to look into the issue and advise the Secretary accordingly.

**Update: Women Veterans Health Program, Carole Turner, Director, Women Veterans Health Program, VA**

- Brief report on the National Meeting of VA Ambulatory Care Managers.
- Recap of Study conducted on different healthcare models.
- Committee was shown the newly produced video, "*A Promise Kept.*"
- Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management sent memo to all network directors on July 25, 2003, regarding Women Veterans Coordinators (now referred to as Women Veterans Program Managers [WVPMs] to emphasize program management responsibilities).
- Support of VHA Handbook 1330.2 (Attachment 1); to improve quality of care to women veterans, goals and outcomes to be accomplished are outlined in proposed 5-year Integrated Business Plan (IBP) (Attachment 2), including the goal to have each Women Veterans Program Manager (WVPM) dedicate at least 10 hours/week to program activities.

**Update: Susan Krumhaus, VA Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness**

- Slide presentation on 2001 National Survey of Veterans (NSV, Attachment 3) – Female veteran data.
- Additional point of contact for survey data is Steve Maskin, Chief Actuary.

**Briefing: Veterans Benefits Administration, Lynda Petty, VBA , Compensation and Pension Service**

- Benefit update for women veterans.
- Claim status of Spina Bifida (birth defect).
- Outreach efforts, new rates, and claim status for Children of Women Vietnam Veterans (CWVV - Web page and e-mail, publications, toll-free telephone service, Women Veterans Coordinators training [WVC], outreach letter).
- VA Regional Office training: two training broadcasts on rating Military Sexual Trauma claims, review of PTSD claims, WVC training conferences in 1997, 1999, 2002; Satellite Training broadcast August 7, 2003.
- Operation Iraqi Freedom: Updated Casualty Assistance Program procedures for all in-service deaths, OIF/OEF coordinators make initial contact with hospitalized service members upon return from combat theater; priority claims processing for compensation claims; Disabled Soldier Liaison Team – joint VA/DA; full-time Benefits Advisor at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.
- Have briefed more than 40,000 Reserve and Guard forces on VA benefits.

**Full Panel Discussion:**

- Thanks to Sandy Miller for Phoenix site visit minutes.

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- 2004 Summit Planning Committee: set up monthly conference calls, drafting agenda, inviting speakers, and briefing Secretary on progress.
- Marsha Four thanked everyone involved with 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration for a successful event.
- Marsha Four discussed artwork for the 2004 Advisory Committee report on September 17. Ed Hartman promised to bring some suggestions for artwork.
- Summit 2004 dates are June 18-20, 2004.
- Date for subsequent Advisory Committee meeting possibly late April to pull together the 2004 report before the Summit rather than at the end.
- Mount Rushmore International State Women Veterans Conference will be held May 20-23, 2004, in Rapid City, South Dakota. The National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators will host the conference.

**Wednesday, September 17, 2003**

Meeting was called to order by Marsha Four. Meeting opened with thank you and recognition to VSO's for support and assistance to the Committee as well as during the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.

- Revised agenda items.
- Ideas for 2004 Advisory Report cover.
- Next meeting of Advisory Committee scheduled for January 26-30, with Monday and Friday as travel days.
- Revised travel plans for committee members due to impending arrival of Hurricane Isabel.
- Advisory Committee Report due to CWV June 1, 2004.

**Update: Dr. Irene Trowell-Harris, Director, Center for Women Veterans (CWV)**

- Handout on CWV activities update distributed (Attachment 4). Highlights include: Advisory Committee on Women Veterans 2002 Report; nomination package and charter renewal; town hall meetings, veterans forums, speeches, media interviews and outreach efforts; other projects in progress or completed; scheduled or planned meetings; Advisory Committee meeting and related follow-up on items/issues.
- Dr. Trowell-Harris requested assistance from Committee with public outreach efforts, partnership with Center for Minority Veterans and special effort to reach out to American Indian population.
- IRIS website and 82 FAQ's.
- DACOWITS - committee report in progress.
- Article about 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary sent to VANGUARD.
- Marsha Four remarked that not all states have a Women Veterans Coordinator and that the Committee could possibly help with recruitment efforts.
- General Vaught is scheduled to speak at the International Women Veterans Conference (planning in progress; scheduled for May 20 – 24, 2004 in Rapid City,

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South Dakota). Point of Contact: Linda Waldroop from the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs.

- Reports from prior site visits reviewed for recurrent findings.
- Marsha Four mentioned Veterans Day activities and 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vietnam Women's Memorial; a schedule of events during week of Veterans Day will follow (not ready for distribution at this time).

**Briefing: Phil Riggin, White House Liaison and Advisory Committee Management Officer**

- Renewal of Charter and copy of statutory language distributed to Committee members.
- Charter expires December 31, 2003; requires renewal every 2 years. Normal length of Committee membership term is currently 2 years, however, terms of appointment may not exceed 3 years.

**Update Continuation: Women Veterans Health Program, Carole Turner, Director, Women Veterans Health Program**

- July 25, 2003, memo from Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management distributed. Memo discusses program management responsibilities of the WVPs and the Women Veterans Health Program (WVHP) Integrated Business Plan.
- Discussed results from the Women Veterans Health Services Survey (Attachment 5) - not a qualitative survey – data only, goals of survey were to assess variations in structure and organization of women's healthcare delivery (VHA), experience of women veterans who are under VA care; 140 facilities, 166 distinct sites of care surveyed (7,400 women); top 3 priorities (slide "competing priorities") PTSD, Homeless issues, Hepatitis C; VISN directors primarily thought the perceived value of mental health highest.

**Briefing: National Cemetery Administration, Lindee Lennox, NCA, Office of Memorial Program Service (Attachment 6)**

- Grave markers for women veterans (slide presentation, different options available).
- Office also processes applications for markers to be placed in private cemeteries.
- Inscription policy described; non-English inscription policy – applications available online.
- Marsha Four suggested Committee compile a list of additional inscriptions tailored for women veterans. Mitzi Manning suggested that this list be included in the Committee's recommendations.

**Briefing: CARES, Dr. Barbara Chang, National CARES Program Office (Attachment 7)**

- Need for CARES because of shifts in veterans population and aging infrastructure.
- Population changes recommended are to be included in the next recommendation for projection models.

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- o Private industry benchmarks not adequate.
- o How CARES can help with women veterans concerns such as improvement in quality of and access to care, consideration of special populations (new Blind Rehab Centers, new Spinal Cord Injury Centers, etc.).

**Update: VA Homeless Program, Pete Dougherty, Director, VA Homeless Program**

- o 11 pilot projects with 2 main goals (Attachment 7).
- o Difference: period of military service compared to men.
- o Existing providers to receive a special needs grant.
- o Dr. Roswell thinks additional action and/or funding necessary to provide better service and/or implementation of new programs.
- o Seven states remain without homeless programs.
- o PL 102-590 did not require meeting of fire and safety codes; VA will appropriate approx. \$4 million to correct fire and safety deficiencies at existing programs.
- o 1,000 or 2,000 new housing beds, new technical assistance provider.
- o U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) expected to announce future funding and sites of housing under joint VA/HHS/HUD collaborative NOFA (Notice of Funding Availability).
- o VA will provide case management services (in agreement with HHS and HUD) and program management.
- o Service connected claims resolved in average of 95 days, non-service connected claims resolved in average of 33 days.
- o 76% of homeless veterans disability claims approved; no breakdown by gender.

**Discussion: Nora Egan, Chief of Staff**

- o Concurrent receipt of retired military an issue; redefine for purposes of Title 38 (line of official duty provision), claims must be submitted within two years of discharge.
- o Secretary Principi will testify at Senate Congressional Hearing on September 18, 2003, at 10 a.m.

Committee closed out afternoon session with subcommittee report preparations.

Sessions scheduled for Thursday, September 18, 2003, were cancelled due to Government closings as a result of inclement weather.

Approved: Marsha Four  
(Marsha Four, Chair)

Date: 01/06/04