

Army Echoes Issue 2, December 2002

Army strives to institutionalize Well-Being

While the word about Well-Being (WB) continues to spread to all the constituents the program affects, the WB team has one word in mind – institutionalize.

As we reported in the previous *Echoes*, WB is the personal – physical, material, mental and spiritual – state of soldiers (Active, National Guard and Reserve), retirees, veterans, Army civilians and their family members that contributes to their readiness to perform and support The Army's mission. WB takes Quality of Life programs one step further by creating a process where the success of these programs can be measured on every level – from the individual using the program to the Army leaders running the program. WB measures can be used when planning and funding these programs at the installation and HQDA level.

To succeed, WB must be institutionalized by September 2003 – it must be established as part of the Army culture, thought of at every level as The Army's concept for taking care of people.

There are signs that WB is achieving that status. WB staff members play a key role in initiatives such as the Strategic Readiness System and the Objective Force Transformation Action Plan creating the Army of 2015.

The Army is responding to the Secretary of the Army's directive that many military and civilian positions be reviewed to see whether these jobs can be best performed by soldiers, civilians or contractors. A critical element of this review will be anticipating the effect of any major changes on Army Well-Being.

When Army program managers at headquarters and installations measure the successes or shortfalls of their programs, now they'll consider how their programs affect their patrons' well-being.

As The Army of the 21st Century continues to evolve, one of the milestones of its progress will be the Well-Being of its people.

Help DFAS help you this tax season

The 2002 1099R tax forms for all DoD military retirees and annuitants were mailed to the home addresses on file with the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) by Jan 15, 2003. Former spouses who receive pay as a result of a court-ordered division of community property will also receive 1099Rs.

Retirees or annuitants who don't receive their 1099Rs by Jan. 31, 2003 or have questions about their 1099Rs call **1-800-321-1080** or **216-522-5955**. When calling to request a reissue of your 2002 1099R, press **1** when prompted and your call will be forwarded to the next available Customer Service Representative (CSR). You can expect to receive the reissued 1099R about seven business days after your initial request.

CSRs are available Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. - 7:30 p.m., Eastern time (except federal holidays). Paydays (the first business day of each month) and Mondays are the busiest days for the CSRs.

Saturday service is available through Feb. 15, 2003 from 7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., EST, to accommodate tax season.

You may also write to the following addresses for service:

Retirees:

Defense Finance and Accounting Service
U.S. Military Retired Pay
P.O. Box 7130
London, KY 40742-7130
Fax: 1-800-469-6559

Annuitants:

Defense Finance and Accounting Service
U.S. Military Annuitant Pay
P.O. Box 7131
London, KY 40742-7131
Fax: 1-800-982-8459

****Always include your Social Security number and signature in all correspondence.***

There are several ways you can **update your address**:

- Log onto www.dfas.mil and click on "Contact DFAS." Scroll down the page to the appropriate title, i.e., Retiree Pay or Annuitant Pay. For **Annuitants**, complete the form and send. For **Retirees**, scroll down and click on questions or comments regarding retired pay. Select "Military Retiree", then fill out the data fields. After you have completed your inquiry, click "Submit" at the bottom of the page. E-mail inquiries will be answered in five to seven business days.
- Use <http://mypay.dfas.mil>.
- Call DFAS at 1-800-321-1080.
- Or, write or fax DFAS (see address listed previously).

If you're having state tax withheld, this does **not** automatically change when you change your address. If you want to change or start state tax withholding, you need to send a letter to DFAS at the addresses listed previously asking to change your state taxes. Include your Social Security number, printed name and signature. The monthly amount deducted for state taxes must be in whole dollars (no cents) with a minimum of \$10.

Federal tax exemption does **not** automatically carry over into the next tax year. IRS regulations state that a new W-4 must be completed **before** February 15 each year to maintain exempt status. To have a W-4 processed before that date, send a completed W-4 form to DFAS **after** Jan. 1, 2003 but **before** Feb. 10, 2003.

Marital status changes

If your **marital status has changed** through marriage, divorce, or death, your Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) election may need to be updated. Send a copy of the marriage certificate, divorce decree, or death certificate along with a brief letter to update your SBP election. Include your Social Security number and signature. Submit your request to the address or fax number listed previously.

Please note: Updating an SBP election **does not** automatically change beneficiary information for arrears of pay. The arrears of pay are any unpaid monies due the retiree up to the date of death. Complete a Change of Beneficiary form to update your beneficiary(ies). You may request these forms by calling 1-800-321-1080.

Highlights from Headquarters

Greetings Retirees and Family Members, Soldiers, and friends of the Army,

The last four months have been exciting for me. I was able to participate and speak at Retiree Appreciation Days at Ft McCoy, Ft Meade, Ft Myer, and Knollwood Military Retirement Residence. At each of these locations I was again reminded why our work here at Headquarters, Department of the Army, is so important. It's because of the great people I get to meet — both retired and active duty and their families; and, of course, the civilian workers on our installations who are so valuable in our total effort. At each location I was both humbled and honored to be in your midst. In visiting with many of you I feel like Tom Brokaw must have felt when he interviewed retirees and veterans for his book *The Greatest Generation*. It's obvious to me we have many generations of "great retirees and their families" all over this wonderful nation. While each location had its own unique features, I continued to sense a real thread of continuity at each place: your individual personal pride in having served in the Army and playing a role in preserving our American way of life.

I also have traveled to Ft Lee to a meeting of the Defense Commissary Agency Patron Council; and to the Army Air Force Exchange Service headquarters in Dallas, TX, as a member of the Retiree Advisory Council. Both organizations have new commanding generals who are highly dedicated to improving the commissary and PX systems to make them even more efficient and valuable to the retired Army community. Both commanders are placing strong emphasis on communications with the customer as they seek to maximize best business practices and meet your needs. In that regard, visit or communicate with your local commissary and PX manager and tell them what you like or dislike about their store. They really do want to know how they can serve you better.

All of us also participated in the Association of the United States Army annual convention in October. We gave briefings on Retirement Services Programs available at the installation level and on the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), and had an opportunity to meet some of you. In November, we were an integral part of the 19th Army Family Action Plan (AFAP) conference. At both events, we happily manned our display booth set up to provide informational handouts covering a variety of retirement issues, and discussed

issues important to you. Interestingly, at the end of the AFAP conference “Retirement Dislocation Allowance” was voted the #2 issue of the Top Five new issues, and “Army Retirement Benefits Awareness” was voted the 6th Most Critical Active Issue. Part of our job over the next few months will be to help resolve both issues.

One of the most important internal events this fall was the hiring to our staff of SGM (Retired) Bill Hursh. He served over 26 years in the Army in a variety of successively difficult personnel leadership positions. Bill has taken over management of the Army Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Program. All of us are glad he is on the team. As you get to know him, you will understand why he was selected to serve you as part of our team.

I am aware that the year 2003 will continue to present us all with many challenges. Each of us knows how America is being confronted with a long struggle to defeat terrorism. That effort demands continued national resolve and considerable national treasure. We all know that part of the resource dilemma your nearest installation faces is how to adequately fund and staff the personnel/family programs that serve all of us. One of the important ways you can help is to become actively involved with your local retiree council. Your council president is in close contact with the installation commander to insure your voice is heard. Get involved—your views are important!!

I look forward to meeting more of you in the weeks and months ahead. Thanks for your past service to our nation and our Army. It’s an honor to serve you!

John W. Radke
Chief, Army Retirement
Services

AER offers college financial aid

With the cost of post secondary education at an all time high and the need for this education equally high, it is important not to bypass an opportunity for financial aid. Army Emergency Relief (AER) offers financial assistance for undergraduate study for dependent children of Army retirees.

The MG James Ursano Scholarship Fund, administered by AER, is for students who study at an undergraduate, technical or vocational institution accredited by the U.S. Department of Education and approved for Title IV funds, or preparation for the service academies. This includes students who are contemplating enrollment for the next academic year, those already pursuing undergraduate post secondary or vocational studies, and those planning to attend these programs after high school graduation in 2003. Scholarships are awarded based primarily on financial need, and secondarily on academic achievements and individual accomplishments.

In academic year 2002-2003, 93 percent of students with complete applications were awarded scholarship funds. AER assisted 1,359 children of retirees with \$1,657,800 in scholarships ranging from \$800 to \$1,800 for financial aid. Awards are provided annually for up to four years of undergraduate study. Unfortunately, this year about 812 children of retirees missed the deadlines and were not considered for assistance. Others were not considered because their application packets were not complete.

A student applying for the 2003-2004 academic year must **not** have reached his or her 22nd birthday by June 1, 2003. The applicant must be an unmarried dependent child of an active duty or retired soldier or a soldier who died while on active duty or in a retired status. All soldiers and students must be registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). You can verify the student’s status with DEERS at 800-538-9552.

Applications for the 2003-2004 academic year (AY) are available by mail from AER HQ before Feb. 21, 2003. The application can be downloaded from their website, http://www.aerhq.org/Children_Main_education.htm, until Mar. 3, 2003. To obtain an application by mail, forward your request to Army Emergency Relief, MG James Ursano Scholarship Fund (RTD), 200 Stovall St., Alexandria, VA 22332-0600. **Completed applications with supporting documentation must be postmarked not later than Mar. 3, 2003 for the 2003-2004 AY.** Applications and supporting documentation are **not** accepted by Fax or e-mail. Other important deadlines are outlined in the scholarship instructions.

Letters will be mailed June 2, 2003 to notify applicants of the results. Scholarship funds are to be used for education costs including tuition, books and fees, and room and board. **Students must reapply each year** and be in good academic standing (Minimum GPA of 2.0 on 4.0 scale).

AER has a list of websites with college information and financial aid resources at http://www.aerhq.org/Education_Links.htm.

DeCA offers scholarship program

FT LEE, VA – Children of retirees can apply for \$1,500 scholarships in the Defense Commissary Agency's (DeCA) 2003 Scholarships for Military Children program.

Applications for the 2003 program can be downloaded from <http://www.commissaries.com> or <http://www.fisherhouse.org>. They can also be picked up at any commissary. Your completed application must be returned to your local commissary by Feb. 21, 2003. If you mail the application to the commissary, they must **receive** it by Feb. 21, 2003.

The scholarship program is open to dependent unmarried children (under the age of 23) of active duty personnel, Reserve, Guard and retired military. Eligibility will be determined using the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) database. Applicants should ensure that they, as well as their sponsor, are enrolled in the DEERS database and have a current ID card. All applicants must be U.S. citizens.

The applicant must be planning to attend, or already attending, an accredited college or university full-time in the fall term of 2003. Students attending a community or junior college must be enrolled in a program designed to transfer directly into a four-year program. Students must have a minimum grade point average of 3.0 to apply. See instruction sheets for additional criteria.

The program is administered by the nonprofit Fisher House Foundation. All scholarship funds are donated by manufacturers, brokers and suppliers that provide products for sale in military commissaries.

DFAS improves online pay account access

ARLINGTON, VA (DFAS) – Military retirees and annuitants have improved online services from the "myPay" program to manage their pay account information more easily and securely than ever before.

Formerly known as E/MSS (Employee/Member Self Service), myPay allows those served by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) -- military retirees and annuitants, active, Reserve, and Guard members, and civilian employees -- to take charge of their pay accounts online. With myPay, customers can perform the following activities by using their existing E/MSS Personal Identification Number (PIN):

- View, print and save account statements
- View and print tax statements
- Change federal and state tax withholdings
- Update bank account and electronic funds transfer information
- Manage allotments
- Edit address information
- Purchase U.S. Savings Bonds

myPay – easy, secure

myPay's new design helps customers find the information they want and complete any transaction in just three clicks. Available nearly 24/7, myPay means no waiting in lines or on the phone. myPay also improves customer confidence by providing clear confirmation messages.

myPay combines strong encryption and secure sockets layer technology with the user's Social Security number and PIN to safeguard information from unauthorized access.

myPay saves money

Those using myPay can save DoD and taxpayers millions of dollars in printing, postage and customer service costs if they turn off the print version of their leave and earning statements.

DFAS estimates another 17 percent of costs associated with traditional customer service activities can be eliminated by satisfying common questions and account updates online.

Members of the Armed Forces, DoD civilian employees, retirees and annuitants can continue to use their E/MSS log on information at mypay.dfas.mil.

Military retirees and annuitants receive PINs by mail. If you need a new PIN, just click "need new PIN." Log on once you receive your PIN in the mail.

Customers with questions about myPay can call customer support at 1-800-390-2348, Monday through Friday, between 7 a.m. and 7:30 p.m., Eastern Time.

Note: As this issue went to press, DFAS was testing myPay.

History project captures veterans stories

WASHINGTON (ARNEWS) - The Veterans History Project is giving veterans a chance to share their stories. Project organizers are also looking for volunteers of all ages to help chronicle veterans' oral histories. These stories will become a collection in the Library of Congress' American Folklife Center, in Washington, D.C., and part of the national Veterans History Project Collection at the Library of Congress. Eventually, portions of the material will be available digitally on the Library of Congress web site.

Volunteers interview veterans, collect letters, photographs and journals from former service members of WWI, WWII, and the Korean, Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars, and the civilians who supported them.

Charlie Mendoza, vice president of membership and member services for the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), a founding sponsor of the project, said everyone, particularly youth, have a lot to benefit from the project. A Korean and Vietnam veteran, Mendoza was interviewed by his youngest daughter.

Authorized by Congress through Public Law 106-380, the Veterans History Project has chronicled histories of about 1,500 veterans to date.

Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, director of the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress, hopes to reach more people for the ongoing project.

Already, more than 420 organizations have partnered with the project, including veterans' service organizations, colleges, museums and libraries.

To become involved with the project, visit the Veterans History Project web site at www.loc.gov/veterans or call the toll-free number at 1-888-371-5848.

Korean War Commemorative Events 2003

See the website *Visit the web site <http://korea50.army.mil> or call, toll-free, 1-866-KOREA50 for information.*

Give the gift of groceries

FT LEE, VA – Would you like to buy some groceries for your son or daughter stationed in Germany? Or send a practical gift to military retired friends across the country? You can buy commissary gift certificates online at <http://www.commissaries.com> or by calling toll-free, 1-877-770-GIFT (4438), in the U.S. Purchasers overseas should use the online link.

Anyone may purchase the gift certificates with a U.S. credit card, but only authorized commissary shoppers can redeem them at the store. The new gift certificates are good at any commissary location worldwide. Previously, gift "cards" had to be used in the commissary where they were bought.

The new customer service is made possible through a business agreement with CertifiChecks, Inc. DeCA does not derive any income from the agreement.

The gift certificates are available in a variety of denominations ranging from \$5 to \$100. Order forms are available at commissary customer service desks or can be downloaded from <http://www.commissaries.com>. The forms may be filled out and sent by mail or Fax to CertifiChecks. Customers may pay with a check if they use the order form.

A standard charge of \$4.95 pays CertifiChecks' costs for printing, mailing and handling of up to 20 certificates – as long as all are going to the same address. Typical delivery of certificates is 4 to 10 days. Additional charges apply for bulk orders and for special handling or delivery.

Star Card at lowest rate

DALLAS — Military Star card holders are benefiting from another drop in the card's interest rate.

After the Federal Reserve lowered key interest rates by a half percent, the Military Star card reduced its interest rate from 9.5 to 9.0 percent, effective Dec. 1, 2002. The interest rate on the Military Star card is at its lowest point since the card was introduced.

The Military Star card is comparable to a private label credit card, similar to those offered by retailers such as Sears and Target.

Frost new AAFES commander

DALLAS – Army MG Kathryn G. Frost is the new AAFES commander replacing Air Force MG C.J. Wax who retired after 33 years of service.

Before taking command of AAFES, Frost was the 60th The Adjutant General of the Army. Before that, she served as AAFES' Deputy Commanding General from September 1996 to July 1998.

AAFES serves 7.3 million customers at 1,423 retail facilities and 200 military clothing stores at military installations worldwide. In fiscal year 2001, AAFES earned \$373.1 million from retail, food, service, mail order and concessions on revenues of \$7.09 billion. AAFES paid \$243.9 million of those earnings to military Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs.

Honoring retirees

(This is reprinted from the September 2002 issue of Exchange Post, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) employee newsletter.)

I buried my father in Arlington last week. He was not only my hero, but a hero for our nation. He served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. He gave 33 years of his life to protecting freedom and liberty. The Army honored him as a true hero.

Arlington is burying veterans at the rate of 25 per day every day and more than 1,000 WWII veterans leave us every day. This made me stop and think about that special customer we serve and the respect they deserve from all of us.

When you have that older customer complaining about prices, take care of him, he may have hit the beaches of Normandy or struggled through the hell that was Okinawa in 1945. When that customer fumbles for his change, be patient, he may have frozen at the Chosin Reservoir or sweated through the horrible night at Ia Drang.

When that lady complains about the way people dress, listen, she may have spent many a lonely night waiting for that telegram or she may have gotten it, one cold and cloudy day.

The retiree has been our most loyal customer, honor them, and take the time to thank them. They may not be here tomorrow.

*By William Fair
Main Store Manager,
Schinnen, The Netherlands*

New TRICARE mail order pharmacy contract

Express Scripts, Inc., of Maryland Heights, MO, will be providing TRICARE mail order pharmacy services on or about Mar. 1, 2003. DoD's TRICARE Management Activity (TMA), awarded the five-year contract, valued at about \$275 million.

The new TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy (TMOP) contract will replace the National Mail Order Pharmacy (NMOP) contract, due to expire at the end of February 2003. The TMOP contract will provide a worldwide, full-service mail order pharmacy program to TRICARE-eligible beneficiaries.

Like the NMOP, the TMOP provides another option for TRICARE beneficiaries in addition to military and retail pharmacies. All pharmacy services will be monitored by the Pharmacy Data Transaction Service, a patient medication record that enhances patient safety.

More information about the program is available on the TRICARE web site at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil>. Beneficiaries using NMOP will receive information about TMOP before its start date. Beneficiaries also may visit the Express Scripts, Inc. web site at <http://www.express-scripts.com/> for more information.

DoD/VA test mail order pharmacy

The DoD Military Health System and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have joined forces to provide TRICARE beneficiaries with another option for prescription refills by mail.

The DoD/VA Military Treatment Facility (MTF) Refill Mail Service (MRMS), a joint initiative with the VA's Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP) program, began one-year tests in October at three sites

- Darnall Army Community Hospital, Ft Hood, TX; the Naval Medical Center, San Diego, CA; and the 377th Medical Group, Kirtland Air Force Base, NM. CMOP has no co-payments and involves only MTF refills.

To use the MRMS, beneficiaries must fill their original military or civilian prescription at one of the test site MTFs first. To refill that prescription, they can call the pharmacy with the prescription and select the refill by mail option.

Most prescriptions can be delivered within five to eight days. There are, however, some medications (such as controlled substances or locally compounded items) that may not be available for delivery through CMOP. The refill call-in system at each of the three demonstration sites, will inform beneficiaries if their medication is available for mail-out under the MRMS pilot program. To eliminate delays processing or delivering refill medications, beneficiaries should check with their MTFs to ensure their eligibility status and home address listed in the MTF's Composite Health Care System electronic record are the same as the information listed in Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

The telephone numbers for the refill pharmacies at the demonstration sites are: Darnall Army Community Hospital, Ft Hood TX, (800) 351-3636 or (254) 288-8911; the Naval Medical Center, San Diego, CA, 619-532-8414; and the 377th Medical Group, Kirtland AFB, NM., (505) 846-5770 or (800) 752-7990 (This line accepts calls from New Mexico only).

Court rules against Day's Class-Act group

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington ruled 9-4 in favor of the government in the Class Act Group's health care lawsuit brought by lawyer and retired Air Force Colonel Bud Day.

Day's lawsuit claimed that military retirees who had entered the service before June 7, 1956 were owed free lifetime health care because recruiting material promised this benefit and because the policy giving retirees military health care only on a space-available basis began after these members joined the service.

The court ruled that while the government conceded that recruiters did promise free health care, they and the government did not have the authority to promise free health care since this benefit wasn't guaranteed by law.

It's been reported that Day will take his case to the Supreme Court. Of course, the Court of Appeals was not the first court to hear the case. Day's Group and the government have each appealed previous court decisions. A federal judge in Jacksonville, FL, ruled against Day's Group in 1998. In February 2002, a three-judge panel of the Appeals Court ruled in favor of Day's group.

Does TRICARE for Life require new ID card?

Even though TRICARE for Life (TFL) celebrated its first anniversary in October, many beneficiaries still have questions. Do I need to update anything -- my ID card, my Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) record? Why does the back of my ID card read "Civilian No" while my spouse's reads "Civilian Yes?" The following information should answer these and other questions.

Retirees

If you're a sponsor, age 65 or over, eligible for Medicare, Parts A and B, and have purchased Part B, you do **not** need to update your current ID card to receive health care under TFL — even if the medical eligibility status printed on the back of your ID card indicates "Civilian No."

Medicare Part B **is** required for TFL eligibility. If you **have** used TFL and received a TRICARE explanation of benefits statement that TFL paid your claims, you do **not** need to notify DEERS that you have Medicare Part B. You do not need to update anything in DEERS other than changes in your residence, mailing address or family member status.

If you **have not** used TFL yet or think that your Medicare Part B information is **not** being picked up during TFL claims processing, you can call your regional managed care support contractor or visit the nearest military personnel office with an ID-card facility and have them register your Medicare Part B enrollment status in DEERS. If you visit an ID-card facility, bring your Medicare card with you. You can go online to locate the nearest personnel office or ID-card facility at www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl, or call 1-888-DOD-LIFE (1-888-363-5433) for these locations and other TFL information. You do **not** need to get a new ID card when you add your enrollment in Medicare Part B because you're only updating your record.

Family members

If you're a family member, survivor, or TRICARE-eligible former spouse age 65 or over, eligible for Medicare, Parts A and B, and have purchased Part B, you need to look at your ID card and see if it has expired. If you have an expired ID card, you should visit or contact the nearest military personnel office with an ID-card facility to have a new ID card issued.

You can go online to locate the nearest personnel office or ID-card facility at www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl, or call 1-888-DOD-LIFE (1-888-363-5433) for these locations and other information about TFL.

If you can't travel, contact your nearest ID-card facility for instructions on renewing your ID card by mail. To renew your ID card, you must have a pre-verified form, "Application for Uniformed Services Identification Card — DEERS Enrollment, DD Form 1172." If your sponsor is alive, your sponsor must sign the form in front of a notary public or other authorized verifying officer. If you're a survivor, contact your local ID-card office to inquire about the documents required to obtain an ID card.

ID cards are current for four years, unless you turn 65 during the four-year period.

If you're age 65 or older and have recently updated your ID card, the medical eligibility status on the back of your ID card might be "Civilian Yes." This means you're eligible for TFL.

If you have had no reason to update your ID card (it hasn't expired and you haven't recently turned 65), the medical eligibility status on the back of your ID card might show as "Civilian No." You do **not** have to update your current ID card to receive health care under TFL. The next time you update your ID card, the medical eligibility status will be changed.

To update Medicare Parts A and B eligibility and purchase of Part B in your DEERS record, the process is the same for sponsors, family members, and survivors, as long as their Social Security number (in addition to the sponsor's) is recorded in DEERS. If you **have** used TFL and received a TRICARE explanation of benefits, you do **not** have to update DEERS. You do not need to update anything in DEERS other than changes in your residence or mailing address.

To verify your eligibility in DEERS, call the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office at 1-800-538-9552, or TTY/TDD: 1-800-363-2883 for speech or hearing impaired. If you need more information on enrolling in Medicare Part B, call the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213, or TTY/TDD: 1-800-325-0778 for speech or hearing impaired. Medicare information is online at www.medicare.gov and up-to-date TFL information is online at www.tricare.osd.mil/tfl.

ID card update

Note: The Space-A article in Issue 2 referred to retirees with DD Form 1172 ID cards. We heard from several retirees who pointed out that the retiree ID card is DD Form 2.

TRICARE tests online appointments

WASHINGTON — TRICARE Prime and Plus beneficiaries in certain areas can make doctor's appointments and get health care information by clicking a mouse.

TRICARE Online at <http://www.tricareonline.com> is DoD's first effort at using the Internet to reach patients across the entire military health system, according to Navy Dr. (Capt.) Brian Kelly, E-Business director of the TRICARE Management Activity.

More than 4,000 TRICARE patients have made routine appointments using <http://www.tricareonline.com> since testing began in June 2001, he said.

"We're currently at 92 facilities in the Washington, D.C., area; Region 9, Southern California; Region 11, Washington state, Oregon and northern Idaho; North Carolina and Central Europe," Kelly said. "We hope to be worldwide everywhere by the end of April 2003."

Kelly said anyone with a Web browser can surf the site, but **only TRICARE Prime and Plus beneficiaries in the serviced areas can use the site to make appointments with primary health care providers**

The web site features a 30-to- 40-day calendar showing patients all available appointments with their primary care manager or the manager's team members where they're enrolled. They click on the appointment they want.

Beneficiaries must set up a password-protected personal account on the site to take full advantage of TRICARE Online.

“Once they do that, we know who the beneficiaries are and in which facilities they’re enrolled,” Kelly said. “We can then tailor the site to them. They’ll have access to a personal health journal, where they can record all their own health information in a secure medical journal.”

People will be able to refill their prescriptions on the web within the next year, Kelly said. That service is not available now.

TRICARE Online also has more than 18 million pages of health and wellness information and disease management tools for military beneficiaries.

FEHBP demonstration ended

The DoD Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) Demonstration Project ended Dec. 31, 2002. Beginning Jan. 1, 2003, FEHBP Demonstration Project beneficiaries resumed TRICARE coverage.

The Project was mandated by Congress for three years and was jointly sponsored by DoD and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). It was implemented on Jan. 1, 2000, and was among several DoD demonstration projects targeted to improving health care options for Medicare-eligible beneficiaries. The FEHBP Demonstration Project was available in 10 demonstration sites within the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

TRICARE Management Activity will mail information about the demonstration project end date and future health care options to beneficiaries of the FEHBP Demonstration Project. Beneficiaries also may contact the FEHBP Demonstration Project Customer Care Center from 9:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time, at 1-877-363-3342 (English) or at 1-866-363-3342 (Spanish), or visit the TRICARE web site at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/fehbp/> for information.

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New TRICARE handbook

After five years, TRICARE has updated its handbook. The 2002 TRICARE Handbook is online at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/TricareHandbook/> or at military treatment facilities upon request.

The new handbook highlights all three TRICARE options — Prime, Standard and Extra — and the programs and benefits added since the 1997 edition. New topics covered include TRICARE For Life, TRICARE Plus, Travel Reimbursement, Chiropractic Care, TRICARE Senior Pharmacy Program, Debt Collection Assistance Officer Program, Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinator Program, and more. Also included are improved charts and graphs for cost comparisons, tips and helpful reminders for beneficiaries to consider before seeking care from authorized civilian providers.

Sponsors and family members with questions or in need of assistance are still encouraged to contact their local beneficiary counseling and assistance coordinator, health benefits adviser, or TRICARE service center representative. A list of local and regional toll-free TRICARE telephone numbers is in the handbook and on the TRICARE web site at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/main/tollfree.htm>.

Disabled vets get VA health care priority

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is establishing priority access to health care for severely disabled veterans under new regulations.

“It is unacceptable to keep veterans with service-connected medical problems waiting for care,” Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi said.

The regulation is being implemented in two phases. In the first phase, VA is providing priority access to health care for veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50 percent or greater. This new priority

includes hospitalization and outpatient care for both service-connected and non-service-connected treatment. VA will continue to treat immediately any veteran needing emergency care.

In the second phase, which will be implemented in 2003, VA will provide priority access to other service-connected disabled veterans for their service-connected conditions.

The number of veterans using VA's health care system has risen dramatically in recent years, increasing from 2.9 million in 1995 to a projected 4.4 million in 2002. An additional 600,000 veterans are projected to enroll in VA health care in 2003. Unable to absorb this increase, VA has more than 280,000 veterans on waiting lists to receive medical care.

Although VA operates more than 1,300 sites of care, including 163 hospitals and more than 800 outpatient clinics, the increase in veterans seeking care outstrips VA's capacity to treat them.

VA assesses national cemetery conditions

WASHINGTON — The VA has released a study, *National Shrine Commitment*, providing the first independent, nationwide review of conditions at VA national cemeteries. VA will use the information in the report to make funding decisions and set priorities for making repairs.

Independent teams of engineers and architects visited each cemetery and recommended projects for improving the cemeteries. They assessed burial sections, roadways, buildings, historic structures and identified 928 potential improvement projects at an estimated cost of \$280 million.

VA officials emphasized that the maintenance of cemetery grounds and facilities requires continuing efforts. VA's budgets for fiscal years 2001 through 2003 include a total of \$25 million for gravesite renovation and repair projects. This funding, as well as other expenditures and work already scheduled, will accomplish some of the improvements identified in the report. VA officials said they will set priorities for completing the recommended projects. Priorities will be based on the nature and severity of the problems and on data from the survey on customer satisfaction with the cemeteries. VA will also evaluate the long-term benefits of the contractor's recommended repairs and establish a timeline for funding the projects.

VA manages 120 national cemeteries in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, half of which date back to the Civil War.

Chemical weapons test info released

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — DoD has released data on biological and chemical weapons tests conducted aboard ships and at sites in the U.S., Canada and Great Britain. VA officials said they're trying to contact the service members involved in the tests.

DoD conducted the tests from 1962 through 1971. About 5,500 service members and civilians participated.

The tests examined how chemical and biological agents behave in different conditions. The code name for the land-based tests conducted by the Deseret Test Center was Project 112. During Project 112, DoD planned 134 tests and conducted 46 tests. DoD officials have confirmed that 62 tests were cancelled and are investigating the remaining 26 tests which may have been cancelled.

DoD has released information on 37 of the tests to the VA. Project 112 was conducted in remote areas of Alaska, California, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Puerto Rico and Utah. Further tests took place in the Marshall Islands, Baker Island and other Pacific Ocean locales.

Veterans who believe they may have been part of these tests should call the VA's Helpline at (800) 749-8387 (# 3 -- SHAD is the name for the shipboard tests). All the Deseret Test Center fact sheets are available online at http://deploymentlink.osd.mil/current_issues/shad/shad_intro.shtml.

COLAs 1.4 percent

The cost-of-living adjustment to retired pay and Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities is 1.4 percent. If you retired after Jan. 1, 2002, your COLA will be 1.4 percent or less depending on a variety of factors. Contact your Retirement Services Officer (RSO) (see pgs 9 and 10) for exact figures. The COLA for veterans' disability compensation and survivors' dependency and Indemnity Compensation, both paid by the VA, is also 1.4 percent. Both COLAs were effective Dec. 1, 2002, and payable in the Jan. 2, 2003 check.

DoD Authorization Act grants special pay for certain disabled retirees

A special payment to certain disabled retirees has been made law in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003.

Military retirees receiving VA disability pay have their retired pay reduced by the amount of the VA disability pay. Early versions of the Authorization bill had granted partial or full concurrent receipt; however, the reduction remains in the Authorization Act passed by Congress and signed by the President on Dec. 2, 2002. The new law does award special compensation to military retirees whose disability resulted from a combat injury or wound for which they were awarded the Purple Heart. The law also awards special compensation to military retirees who are rated at least 60 percent disabled because of armed combat, hazardous duty, duty under conditions simulating war or through an instrumentality of war.

Under the new law, DoD would be authorized to make special payments ranging from approximately \$103 to \$2,160. The payment cannot be greater than the monthly reduction to retired pay.

Military retirees with 60 percent or greater disability granted within four years of retirement who are receiving special payments authorized in the two previous Defense Authorization Acts must choose which compensation to receive if they're eligible for both.

The effective date of the Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) will be announced by DoD but will be no later than May 31, 2003. It's anticipated that payments would be applied to June entitlements, payable in July.

Keep retired pay records current

Too often, we hear about survivors who have been denied Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) benefits because the retiree failed to update retired pay records when the retiree married, divorced, remarried, was widowed or gained a child. We hear from surviving spouses who did not receive the retired pay for the portion of the last month the retiree was alive because this money went to someone else whom the soldier had named at retirement.

We hear from former spouses who lost SBP because neither the former spouse nor the retiree notified the Defense Finance and Accounting Service within a year of the divorce that SBP was part of the divorce by sending a letter and a copy of the decree.

To make sure your spouse (or former spouse) is prepared, keep a file of information that your spouse (or former spouse) will need when you die. Make sure your spouse (or former spouse) knows what benefits to expect or not to expect. Clip this article to your files as a reminder to keep your retired pay records current when your status changes.

Note: The SBP "paid up" provision which allows retirees to stop paying SBP premiums after 30 years of premium payment and reaching age 70 goes into effect Oct. 1, 2008.