



## Federal Update for October 5 - 9, 2015



### ***Walz and Emmer visit St. Cloud VA Health Care System to address questions raised in Inspector General Report***

Mankato, MN – Today, Representative Tom Emmer (R-MN) and Tim Walz (D-MN), who sits on the House Veterans Affairs Oversight and Investigation Sub-committee, visited the St Cloud VA to conduct oversight following the release of a report by the Office of the Inspector General that was conducted by the VA Midwest Health Network (VISN-23) in 2013.

The VISN report substantiated five of the six allegations regarding abusive and disrespectful work environment by management, patient workload 150% of normal, cancelled appointments, and patient safety issues stemming from five of the twenty-one providers leaving in just under forty days.

After hearing from staff and providers today, Walz and Emmer suggested federal mediation to resolve the on-going conflict between leadership and staff. The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) is an independent federal service that can get involved and help mediate in situations such as this at the joint request of the parties involved.

“A positive workplace is essential to continuing valued and necessary care for those who sacrificed for our freedom,” said Walz. “I heard today from staff, patients and leaders to determine whether the culture identified in the Inspector General report has changed. I learned the communication is still very strained and management still has significant work to do.

Providers who work at the VA are the very foundation of caring for our veterans and deserve nothing less than our full effort to improve the situation. I thank Representative Emmer and his staff for their work to address these important issues.”

“Our veterans across the United States have dedicated their lives to protect this country and it is our duty to ensure they have access to excellent care once they return home,” said Emmer. “Today we listened to VA staff, union officials, and veterans to discuss their concerns and suggestions for improvement. It is vital that necessary action is taken at every level to ensure our veterans receive the care they've earned, and those caring for them receive the utmost respect and attention. That's why both sides agreeing to federal mediation is a substantial step

in the right direction. I'm very grateful to Congressman Walz and his staff for their help in this effort for our veterans."

A copy of the report and answers to additional questions by the Veteran Affairs Office of Inspector General is available on Congressman Walz's website

<http://walz.house.gov/issues/veterans-issues>

Additional information from the reviewing agency, VA Midwest Health Care Network (VISN-23) is also available.

## ***VA's Million Veteran Program hits 400K Milestone***

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Million Veteran Program (MVP) has enrolled its 400,000th Veteran volunteer, squarely putting it on track to become one of the world's largest medical databases, linking genetic, clinical, lifestyle and military-exposure information, with the goal of learning more about the role of genes in health and disease.

"We are proud to see the progress being made in MVP, and we are confident the knowledge gained through this research will have a very tangible and positive impact on the health care that Veterans and all Americans receive," said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. "We applaud our Veterans participating in the program. The selfless sacrifice they are making will allow researchers to gain valuable, important information."

Veterans who volunteer for the program donate blood, from which DNA is extracted, and periodically fill out surveys about their health, health-related behaviors and military experiences. They also consent to having authorized researchers access the information in their VA electronic health record, and to being re-contacted for future research opportunities. All information, genetic and otherwise, is kept secure and de-identified. Samples and data are coded; no names, birthdates or social security numbers are shared.

MVP, in operation at more than 50 VA medical centers nationwide, is already the largest database of its type in the United States. Data collected through MVP are available to researchers for use in approved studies, to include posttraumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, substance use disorders and heart and kidney disease. MVP is a part of the Precision Medicine Initiative announced by President Obama earlier this year. The initiative aims to move health care forward into an era in which disease prevention and treatment will be tailored to individual patients on the basis of their genes and other factors.

"VA is thrilled to be working closely with the White House and other federal partners on the president's Precision Medicine Initiative," said VA Chief Research and Development Officer Timothy O'Leary, M.D., Ph.D. "We are committed to making precision medicine a reality for Veterans and the nation."

For more information about MVP and VA research in general, visit [www.research.va.gov](http://www.research.va.gov).

## ***Study Shows Military Leaders are the Key to Service Members Seeking Help***

by Donnie La Curan in Veteran News

The Bowen Group today released the results of a study undertaken to better understand where military members, veterans and their families seek help when they're feeling stress. The results overwhelmingly lead to one conclusion: military leaders.

Company president Deborah Mayberry said "This study clearly demonstrates what we've known all along. The military culture is unique and close-knit. Unlike in civilian communities, a military member's first stop for information and help is going to be his or her direct supervisor. The chain of command is built to support the troops, and it does." Leaders range from unit sergeants to battalion commanders and others. "Those charged with marketing wellness and prevention services need to take note."

The study involved a survey of Bowen's Military Test Group – more than 450 service members, veterans and spouses – and explored questions about perceived stress, where military community members seek help, and use of websites and social media.

Results indicated that when military members do seek help online, they're more likely to start with a search engine than a government-sponsored website. Cate Michaud, director of communication for The Bowen Group and former Marine Corps officer, states "Because of our service and family affiliation with the military, we at Bowen knew that it was a matter of trust. What is different today is that we have the data to prove it, and the data will drive the outreach solutions we present to our Department of Defense clients."

The study also revealed that when seeking help, less than 1 percent of military community members start their search via social media. Ms. Mayberry states "It's all about trust and influence. Without a doubt, we know that the most successful outreach and prevention programs within the Department of Defense are predicated on trust in leadership. For example, when our company stood up a wellness coaching program for at-risk service members, we did not start a social media or marketing campaign. We knew exactly where to go –first, to key, uniformed policy leaders, then to the uniformed commanders. As experts in this field, we knew who to talk to and what data was needed to garner buy in, and we got it. This resulted in a high client conversion rate, with 600 service members' lives being touched by our professional coaches and counselors. It was and continues to be a huge success."

Ms. Michaud continues "We are committed to understanding the military community's needs and preferences and to meeting them where they are. We bring our expertise to bear in all of our work with the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs. Nobody knows this community like we do."

The Bowen Group will be conducting more studies in the future to inform our programming and outreach solutions. For more information or to participate as part of the Bowen Military Test Group, please contact [research@thebowengroup.com](mailto:research@thebowengroup.com).

### **About The Bowen Group**

The Bowen Group supports government clients who are committed to improving the well-being and readiness of the military community. We tailor services and technology to meet the needs of the military community where they live and serve.

SOURCE The Bowen Group

## ***Team Rubicon's Leadership Conference Prepares Veteran Volunteers to Respond to Disasters***

"Veterans are the greatest asset of this nation," Secretary Bob McDonald told a packed room of 200 Team Rubicon volunteers and supporters Wednesday night at the organization's annual leadership conference in Chicago. Team Rubicon is a nonprofit disaster relief organization that combines the skills and experiences of military Veterans with first responders to rapidly deploy emergency response teams.

The Secretary weighed in on purpose, leadership, and connecting with those who share a common goal.

Team Rubicon co-founder and CEO Jake Wood introduced the Secretary by revisiting a light-hearted moment in 2014 when he received a call on his cell phone two weeks before McDonald was officially named as the next Secretary.

"Hi, is this Jake Wood?"

"Yeah, who is this?"

"It's Bob McDonald. I'm going to be named the Secretary of the VA soon, and I wanted to introduce myself and pick your brain on some things."

It was apparent to Jake, that Secretary McDonald was eager to connect with leaders in the Veteran space, including the members of Team Rubicon who've built the organization from 8 to 30,000 volunteers in just under six years.

Team Rubicon has responded to more than 100 disasters across the world and much of its growth and ability to serve communities rests on the strong backs of volunteers who donate their time, intelligence, and skills to the mission. The Secretary challenged those in attendance to "get the right people on the bus" and help more Veterans and service-minded civilians find their purpose through disaster relief.

“It was an absolute honor to have Secretary McDonald help kick off our leadership conference this year,” said Wood. “His candor and advice resonated with our volunteers, all of whom are striving to be leaders in their community as our organization grows into a leader in disaster response.”

Currently, Team Rubicon is providing flood relief in Virginia and South Carolina and responding to wildfires in Washington.

## ***National Creative Arts Festival in North Carolina Showcases Veterans’ Artistry***

WASHINGTON – The Durham VA Medical Center in North Carolina will host more than 100 Veterans from across the country for the 2015 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. The festival will run Oct. 12 through Oct. 18.

The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival features gold medal-winning entries from 53 categories of art, ranging from oil painting to leatherwork to fiber art. Veterans’ artwork will be displayed at an exhibit at Gerrard Hall at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill on Oct. 18 from noon to 1:45 p.m. Performing artists will present a stage show at Memorial Hall also at the university, on Oct. 18 at 2 p.m. Tickets are free to the events and must be obtained by contacting 919-286-0411, ext. 6070. The exhibit and stage show are open to the public and media.

The weeklong Festival, sponsored by VA and the American Legion Auxiliary, showcases the artistic achievements of Veterans from across the country who placed first in national art, music, dance, drama and creative writing division competitions. The Veterans are participating in workshops, rehearsals and artistic interaction sessions, culminating in Sunday’s art exhibit and stage show performance.

Among many other therapeutic benefits, the Festival encourages artistic expression to help Veterans dealing with PTSD and other psychological issues. More than 3,500 Veterans participate in local competitions for a chance to attend the annual national festival. The Festival relies heavily on the support provided by numerous American Legion Auxiliary volunteers.