



Federal Update for November 2 - 6, 2015



VA Launches Hepatitis C–Advanced Liver Disease Disparities Dashboard

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is stepping up its efforts to accelerate treatment for Veterans with hepatitis C and advanced liver disease (ALD) through the creation of a Hepatitis C–ALD dashboard. The dashboard works by using a set of criteria, including age, gender, geography, service era along with and race and ethnicity, to distinguish Veteran groups at highest risk for ALD as a result of hepatitis C.

“The dashboard is a powerful data tool to help VA identify Veteran groups disproportionately affected by Advanced Liver Disease and to ensure they receive the appropriate health care,” said Dr. David Shulkin, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. “VA will provide data directly to facilities for any of the vulnerable groups identified by the dashboard and support outreach efforts to Veteran populations disparately impacted and not currently served by VA health care. This is an important step in assuring all Veterans with ALD receive timely, appropriate care.” VA’s Veterans Health Administration’s Office of Health Equity developed the dashboard as part of its efforts to target and accelerate care of Veterans with this serious disease. The new resource promotes equitable diagnosis and treatment of underserved Veterans with hepatitis C and ALD nationally and compliments existing clinical hepatitis and liver disease dashboards available in some Veterans Integrated Service Networks or VISNs.

Chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is the most common blood-borne infection in the world. Complications that result from untreated HCV infection include progressive liver damage leading to cirrhosis, primary cancer of the liver, liver failure and death. Although many of these complications are treatable or even preventable, three-quarters of the individuals with HCV infection in the U.S. are unaware they are infected. VA leads the country in [hepatitis](#) screening, testing, treatment, research and prevention.

The Hepatitis C-ALD dashboard further advances the vision for quality care and improved access to care identified in VA’s [Blueprint for Excellence](#). For more information on the dashboard, visit: <http://www.hsr.d.research.va.gov/news/video/heap.cfm>.

Legion Commander to VA: ‘Hold People Accountable’

by Donnie La Curan in Veteran News

The leader of the nation's largest veterans organization called a senior VA official's concession during a congressional hearing tonight that the department has an accountability problem "one of the understatements of the year."

American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett said he was pleased that VA Principal Deputy Under Secretary Danny Pummill appeared to indicate that some disciplinary action is underway for Philadelphia VA Regional Office (VARO) Director Diana Rubens and St. Paul VARO Director Kimberly Graves. "Under Secretary Pummill would not say exactly what disciplinary action is being taken, but he did cite the appeals process allowed by the Veterans Accountability Act. This is a sign that VA is taking the IG Report seriously."

The IG Report accuses Rubens and Graves of using their senior positions to pressure the previous VARO directors to accept transfers so they themselves could fill their lower-level positions while retaining their higher salaries and collecting hundreds of thousands of dollars in relocation allowances. Both Rubens and Graves repeatedly invoked their Fifth Amendment Rights against self-incrimination when questioned at the hearing. They were dismissed from the hearing by Miller when it became clear that they would not answer questions.

"As veterans, we have defended the Constitution and we fully support the rights of the witnesses to invoke the Fifth Amendment. At the same time, we hope the Justice Department conducts a vigorous investigation looking at all of the evidence," Barnett said. "The VA Inspector General's report is damning. The financial records are extremely disturbing. The American Legion is optimistic that the VA said it would implement the IG Report recommendations. We now expect VA to demonstrate that it is serious about holding its senior officials accountable when they put their own interests ahead of veterans. Chairman Jeff Miller, Ranking Member Corrine Brown and all of the members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee deserve credit for its bipartisan attempts to get answers."

Barnett also praised Baltimore VARO Director Antione Waller for his forthrightness. "Waller confirmed that he was indeed pressured to leave St. Paul and transfer to Baltimore because of pressure from Rubens and Graves. Los Angeles Director Robert McKenrick said he wasn't coerced, but admitted to having reservations about accepting the position and said that he knew he could be fired for refusal. Rubens and Graves combined received more than \$400,000 in relocation expenses. This is exactly why The American Legion agrees with Rep. Jackie Walorski that VA 'suffers from a crisis of confidence.' The American Legion will continue to monitor VA's progress in implementing the IG recommendations. The system is extremely flawed but it is still worth saving. We call on VA to engage with veterans, American taxpayers and the press."

With a current membership of 2.2 million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and

youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through nearly 14,000 posts across the nation.

SOURCE: The American Legion

VA Convenes Commission for the Selection of Next Under Secretary for Benefits

WASHINGTON – The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today he is convening a commission, which will serve to make recommendations to the President for the appointment of VA's next Under Secretary for Benefits (USB).

Suitable candidates to serve as members of the important commission will be selected based upon criteria outlined in the law and their skills, knowledge and attributes as leaders, managers and educators. VA is required by law to convene a commission to seek the next Under Secretary for Benefits.

Position announcements will appear on USAJOBS on Friday, November 6, 2015.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) provides a variety of benefits and services to Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families. VBA has been undergoing a major transformation that is people-centric, results-oriented, and a forward-looking integration of solutions that will ensure total lifelong engagement with Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families. To learn more please go to <http://www.benefits.va.gov>

VA Partners with YMCA of the USA to Support Veterans

Washington D.C. – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) have refreshed and expanded their partnership to promote and enhance the health and well-being of Veterans and their families.

A new agreement will make it easier for Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Offices and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities to work with local Y-USAs to ensure that Veterans are connected to needed resources and opportunities in their communities. “Since the Civil War, the Y has been a friend to Servicemembers and Veterans—the Y-USA’s education scholarships were forerunners of the GI Bill,” said Secretary Bob McDonald. “I’m pleased to announce that VA and Y-USA have agreed to continue that legacy by further expanding our partnership.”

In communities where VA and the Y-USA choose to work together, the partnership connects Veterans to VA services and benefits in the areas of employment, homelessness, healthy lifestyle programming, and reintegration into the local community.

“This enhanced agreement makes it easier for local VA facilities and Y-USAs to collaborate on helping transitioning Servicemembers and Veterans connect to the resources and opportunities that they need,” said McDonald.

“Our nation’s Veterans, and their families, have dedicated so much in service to our country. The Y-USA is honored to have the opportunity to show our appreciation by doing what we do best – improving the lives of individuals in the communities we serve,” said Kevin Washington, President and CEO of Y-USA. “There are many Y-USAs across the nation that are already working with VA and providing services directly to Veterans, this formal acknowledgement between the Y and VA will make it easier for that work to continue, expand and flourish.” VA is committed to working closely with nongovernmental organizations, such as the Y-USA to identify new and innovative ways to support VA’s commitment to care for those who “have borne the battle” and their families. Strengthening collaborations within communities and with community-based organizations helps to achieve VA’s goal of improving the lives of Veterans, servicemembers, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

While the collaboration might look different in each participating community, the mutual goals of improving the lives of Veterans and their families will remain consistent nationwide.