

Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission
4141 N. 3rd Street (North S. Herrera Way), Phoenix, AZ 85012

February 13, 2014

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners

Jeff Olson, Chair
Ron Perkins, Vice Chair
Kara Caldwell
George Cushing
Philip Hanson
Wayne Krula
Brett Rustand
David Toliver, Sr.

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Ted Vogt, Director
Steve Weintraub, Outreach Coordinator
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer
Judy Smith, Administrative Secretary

Guests

Joe Cuffari, Governor's Policy Advisor for
Public Safety
Marion Cartland, Arizona Veterans Connection
Justin Smothers, AmeriCorps VISTA
Melvin Morris, ADVS Veterans' Benefit Counselor
Edward Dean, Citizen
Sharon Helman, Director, Carl T. Hayden
Medical Center
Scott McRoberts, Public Affairs Officer, Carl T.
Hayden Medical Center

Call to Order – Chairman Jeff Olson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. There were no corrections to the January minutes. Commissioner Cushing moved to approve the minutes as presented. Commissioner Hanson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Introduction and Welcome to Invited guests – Chairman Olson noted that Medical Director, Sharon Helman is scheduled to join the meeting after 10:30.

Chairman Olson recognized guest Joe Cuffari, the Governor's Policy Advisor for Public Safety and Military Affairs. Joe has held his current position in the governor's office for about 7 months. He retired last June from the U.S. Justice Department where he served as Senior Manager in the Office of the Inspector General. Before that, Joe served 11 years active military duty.

Joe commended the Advisory Commission collectively on their military service and service to state veterans. In his tenure with the director, the Advisory Commission has taken on significant challenges with the department. The governor will be attending a press conference in Prescott on Saturday, February 15th, to celebrate the elimination of chronic veteran homelessness within the Phoenix metropolitan area. It's the first achievement of this nature in the country. The program that ADVS developed has been a model the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs benchmarked and has asked other states to implement.

Joe is responsible for 5 agencies in the Executive Branch. They are AZDVS, the Department of Public Safety, AZ National Guard Emergency Management Division, Adult Corrections and the Department of Homeland Security.

Commissioner Olson said he and Joe spoke before the meeting and Joe volunteered to look into getting the 9th member appointed to the Advisory Commission. We would like to have a full board of commissioners.

Dave Hampton advises the commission of legislative matters. Chairman Olson asked Joe if he saw any issues with the veteran-related bills that look good for passage. Joe said the governor will continue to be supportive of veteran issues. There are 9 or so veteran related bills coming up in the legislature and the governor's office has to be cautious, given the financial status in the state, that passage of these bills does not impact the general operating accounts. He does not see the veteran bills as having much opposition.

Commissioner Toliver said he left the Washington D.C. area 10 years ago and a safety issue at that time was that trucks and other large vehicles could not travel in the left lane in certain places. Dave sees this as a safety issue and wonders why a city as large as Phoenix would not have that same kind of restriction and whether this comes under Joe's jurisdiction. Joe believes this is an Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) issue, but if Dave will e-mail him the information, he will forward it to a colleague who handles ADOT matters.

Commissioner Hanson asked to have Joe Cuffari's contact information listed in the minutes. Joe's contact information is as follows:

Joe Cuffari
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Director Vogt noted that ADVS has a collaborative and constant working relationship as well as a good line of communication through Joe to the governor's office. Joe has had good dealings with veteran, National Guard and the Department of Emergency & Military Affairs (DEMA) issues. Director Vogt developed a good relationship with the Adjutant General at the Army National Guard in addressing issues that guardsmen and veterans face in Arizona. He has enjoyed working with the governor's office during the last 7 months and looks forward to the future, especially as we go through the legislative cycle.

Vice Chair Ron Perkins asked where the press conference to announce functional zero veteran homelessness will be held. Director Vogt said it will be at 9:00 a.m. Saturday, February 15th in the South Hall of the Arizona Memorial Coliseum at the State Fairgrounds. Director Vogt, Arizona Department of Housing Director Michael Traylor and Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton will be there along with many coalition partners.

Governor's Office Budget Update

Commissioner Olson asked Joe for an update on the state budget situation; whether it is in a surplus or deficit.

John Arnold of the Governor's Office of Strategic Budget & Planning, gave a presentation to executive staff indicating that this fiscal year, the state is in a neutral position. John anticipates that in the next four years, there will be a budget surplus.

Director Vogt advised there are two budgets; the governor's budget and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) budget. The JLBC predicts that next fiscal year and the fiscal year after, the state may be in a deficit situation. Both budgets show uncertainty and caution.

Joe noted that six years ago when Governor Brewer assumed the governorship, the state was in a \$9 billion dollar deficit. The deficit has been eradicated and the state budget is in a positive upward trajectory and is at a neutral position at this time. The governor's office is fiscally conservative and the budget reflects that.

Chairman Olson asked Joe to extend his thanks to Governor Brewer for her support of veteran homelessness. The commission is very concerned with the changing demographics of returning veterans and what we are seeing throughout the nation in homeless veterans, and especially the increase in women veterans with families. He said the state may need to rethink and retool some of the veteran homeless shelters to accommodate more women veterans and children.

Joe noted that the governor's office was encouraged by being able to get funding from the Federal government, to be matched by the state, for building the veteran home in Yuma and the cemetery in Marana. These issues were of high priority to Governor Brewer and she was encouraged by the commission's support of these issues.

Veteran Treatment Courts – HB2457

Chairman Olson said there may be some legislation on the expansion of Veteran Treatment Courts. Veteran courts have increased in Arizona, for which some retooling of the judicial system may be needed, but it saves money and lives over time and reduces stress for veterans.

Jeff said as he talks with homeless veterans, some are of the opinion that they must remain homeless because they have so many problems facing them in courts. Once they get to the court they find that their problems can be worked out as long as they do the right things and clear their debt. Any expansion of veteran treatment courts is a good thing.

Joe Cuffari said the Veteran Courts were a pilot project started in Pima County with the presiding Pima County Superior Court judge in charge, and in conjunction with the county attorney. It was then transferred to the Maricopa County courts.

The legislative bill that deals with establishing veteran courts throughout the court system is the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts and it is this office that requested the bill. The Federal U.S. District Court of Arizona is implementing a veteran's court within the Federal system, for the state of Arizona, based on the Pima County success.

Director Vogt said House Bill HB 2457 (Mental Health; Veterans Courts; establishment) passed the Military Affairs and Public Safety Committee unanimously. Representative Eddie Farnsworth of Gilbert is the prime sponsor of the bill.

Director Vogt attended the meeting to answer committee questions and said General Gregg Maxon testified on behalf of the Supreme Court. Support for the bill was unanimous in committee and they don't expect the bill to face much opposition in its passage.

Commissioner Rustand said Judge Pollard is handling cases at the state level and General Maxon at the federal level. This bill would help Pima County because at this point, the court is staffed voluntarily by U of A law students.

Chairman Olson asked Joe if there are any fiscal implications regarding Bill HB 2457. Joe said, "To his knowledge, there are no implications."

Vice Chair Ron Perkins noted that the Veteran's Court had a meeting yesterday and the United Arizona Veterans was working with a veteran's caucus to show support and were pushing for a good turnout. Was there a good turnout at the committee hearing?

Director Vogt said he was there and there was a good turnout; it was apparent to the committee that veterans were in attendance and several veterans did testify.

Marion Cartland – Arizona Veterans Connection

Chairman Olson recognized visitor Marion Cartland, Publisher/Owner of Arizona Veterans Connection, a publication whose goal is to connect veterans and their families with information and activities of importance and relevance to the veteran community.

Justin Smothers - Americorps VISTA

Chairman Olson recognized visitor Justin Smothers of Americorps VISTA, a veteran's outreach organization. Justin is assigned to the City of Mesa as a VISTA outreach coordinator. He is conducting a needs assessment for the veteran community and wanted to make himself known to the veteran commission.

Chairman Olson asked how Americorps VISTA and veterans come together. Justin said 2014 is the 50th anniversary of Americorps VISTA. It started as an anti-poverty initiative under President Lyndon Johnson and during the past few years, the Corporation for National Community Service that oversees both VISTA and Americorps national, has made veterans and military families a priority. There has been a lack of veteran engagement in the east valley; he is not sure of the history of veteran issues, but came here to research long term sustainable solutions for the Mesa veteran community.

Commissioner Cushing asked if Americorps VISTA is located throughout the state. Justin said it is and he is the only VISTA veterans outreach coordinator for the state. Other VISTA coordinators are assigned to U.S. Vets and local Maricopa Community Colleges. Each coordinator is handling different projects. The opportunity of Justin's assignment is looking at an entire veteran community as opposed to a subset of the veteran population such as student veterans. Americorps VISTA is a national program with just over 7,100 vistas in service at this time.

Commissioner Krula asked if Americorps VISTA has a mission statement that encompasses Justin's focus. He asked if there are any interesting developments in Justin's needs assessment phase.

Justin said the VISTA assignment description outlines three deliverables. The primary deliverable is the community needs assessment. After that, he looks at long term sustainable solutions that address actual community needs. Right now Justin is conducting key informant interviews in the needs assessment phase.

He has found there is fragmentation in the veteran community and competition among all stakeholders. In talking with people, he found Maricopa County and central Arizona are fragmented with so many municipal entities and veteran service organizations, making it a competitive challenge for everyone.

Melvin Morris - ADVS Benefit Counselor

Chairman Olson recognized Melvin Morris, ADVS Veteran Benefit Counselor. Melvin's primary assignment is serving the needs of veterans at the Phoenix Veteran Home in applying for service connected disability and pension claims, and answering veterans' benefit questions.

His secondary responsibility is serving as the veteran's court representative attached to the City of Phoenix Veteran Court under Judge Sandra Griffith, which deals with class 1, 2, and 3 misdemeanor charges.

Melvin interviews veterans to determine if they've ever filed claims for benefits and helps them resolve any barriers. He is finding that many have had disciplinary or behavioral problems with less than honorable discharges. He helps them develop packages to submit to their respective branches of the service for discharge upgrades. Melvin is here to ask Director Helman about disability benefits questionnaires.

Commissioner Krula noted that Melvin has been a great help to Korean War Veterans through their "Loyal Brother Program" in working with a young marine last year and answering veterans' questions. He appreciates Melvin's good work.

Chairman Olson recognized visitor, Ed Dean. Mr. Dean did not have a comment.

Sharon Helman, Carl T. Hayden Medical Center

Sharon Helman, Director of the Carl T. Hayden Medical Center and her assistant, Scott McRoberts, were welcomed upon their arrival.

Veteran Homelessness – Ms. Helman appreciates Mayor Stanton's zest and efforts in spotlighting chronic veteran homelessness, which is getting the attention of bosses up the chain of command in the VA regional office who are taking notice. Ms. Helman will attend the Veteran Stand Down on Friday, February 14th.

VA Initiatives - The VA is not relaxing on any of its initiatives; in the last six months, a formal Community Resource & Referral Center (CRRC) was developed. It is a one stop shop with a nurse practitioner and the VA no longer has to shuttle veterans back and forth to the hospital.

The VA's relationship with Hud-Vash is good and is a key program that other cities are looking at, as their relationships are not as good as Phoenix's. The VA believes it has the right people in position to gain veterans' trust of the VA and it must be sure to deliver what is promised. Her office is continuing to work on these measures.

Ms. Helman introduced her Executive Assistant, Scott McRoberts, who works behind the scenes and will ensure that her office follows up on what is talked about here today.

Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) was mentioned the last time Ms. Helman spoke before the commission. Two years ago, the waiting time for a new veteran to be seen at the Phoenix VA was one year. Now the waiting time is within two weeks and the VA is working to bring that number down further.

New teams are being brought in to the VA; 240 new positions are being recruited. Some of these are HR specialists to do the recruitment. One thing that has hurt the VA was losing urologists to retirement and some went to other medical facilities. Last year there were six urologists providing care and exams through the VA; the number is now one urologist and the VA has to contract out urology care.

Last year the number of veterans seen by a contracted urologist was 67; the number is now 463 veterans being seen by contracted urologists and the number is rising. The VA is not going to make veterans wait three months for a procedure; it may not be with the VA, but with a contracted urologist.

Additionally, the VA is down 13 psychiatrists, who left at same time. Some went to other VA's in other states at increased pay, some retired and others went to community practice. One VA psychiatrist went to California for a \$30,000 pay raise, plus a bonus. The VA had no choice but to increase psychiatrists' pay \$25,000 to retain psychiatrists. Another successful recruitment is underway to bring another 9 psychiatrists on board. Some matters are within Ms. Helman's control and some such as the above, are outside her control.

Ms. Helman noted that the Free Legal Clinic that was started recently on a Saturday, which took some time to accomplish, is a success.

VA Construction – A Mental Health Center in Building #31 on the east side of the campus on 7th Street is being built and is expected to open by February, 2015.

The residential treatment substance abuse program from out in the community will be brought to the center, as well as female veteran substance abuse care, which were contracted out. There will be 24 beds on campus with wrap around services vs. shuttling the patients for care.

The community living center, nursing home, hospice care and short term rehab building will be closed to add a 3rd floor to the existing building and replace the entire building's plumbing.

Ms. Helman noted that with the opening of new offices and the addition of the 3rd floor to the community living center, employee parking is needed. The VA is land locked and cannot spread out any further, so a parking garage has to be built. Currently, the VA is using the empty Montecito School parking lot on 7th Street, across from the VA for overflow parking.

An area will be blocked off soon to build a parking garage with 150 to 250 parking slots. Director Vogt asked when the parking garage structure will be completed. It is to be completed by November this year and Building #31 is to be completed and open at the end of March, 2014.

Commissioner Krula asked about the large amount of cars parked at Steele Indian School Park. Ms. Helman said 200 parking spaces have been designated for VA staff at the park because they cannot park in the main parking lot due to the requirement that veterans must park in front of the medical center.

The Emergency Department will be expanded from 9 exams rooms to 20 and there will be construction to the core building. A dental building will be added so, again, more parking will be needed. During construction, more employee parking areas are pushed out by contractors to allow space for their work vehicles.

The building projects are creating an impact in many areas, but the VA is trying to make the impact as minimal as possible for patients. Short term patients will be shifted to Unit 4B in the hospital; minor renovations are being made to accommodate these veterans.

Chairman Olson asked where the patients would be housed while the living center is closed for renovations. Ms. Helman is working with Director Vogt and ASVH Administrator, Colleen Rundell to house 20 to 25 long term care veterans at ASVH or at contract nursing homes for at least 1.5 years. The veterans already have a relationship with the VA, so it will be a smaller level of change for them. The VA team will be coming to the veteran home and connecting with the veterans, making the level of impact on them smaller.

When finished, the 3 floor bed tower of single rooms will have a home-like vs. an institutional environment. The renovations will take place throughout this year.

The VA is waiting to build a 200,000 s.f. annex in downtown Phoenix. It requires the normal contracting process. The approvals are done but legislation will not allow the VA to go forward with a major lease because legislation states the VA has to show 20 years of lease payments in an account before the approval to build can be granted. Lawyers are holding the VA to that rule, so until legislation changes, the VA is waiting to build.

Veteran Outpatient Clinics

Ribbon cutting for the grand opening of the Southeast Outpatient Clinic will be held April 24th. It is the biggest clinic in the network at 60,000 s.f. and is located at Val Vista and Loop 202, across from the AutoMall. Director Vogt and the commissioners will be invited to attend.

Southwest Clinic (formerly located in Buckeye) was closed and patients were moved to the northwest clinic in Surprise. Ms. Helman received many good comments on how the transition went.

The VA is required to issue a contract for a building in Buckeye for the Southwest Veteran Clinic to be reopened and permanently staffed with VA personnel. The contract must state the square footage

needed, which is required to be less than 10,000 s.f., to include multiple exam rooms. The contract is put out for bid; bids can be from another federal agency or private contractor. All bids go through the normal process of a technical evaluation team. The evaluators review the bids and determine the location and what the leasing costs would be. They get points if the clinic is near a bus route and city agencies that would support it.

The contract will not require getting a Station I.D. number from Congress, which is already established; paperwork stating the VA wants to establish a permanent staffed clinic in the southwest area has already been issued. Ms. Helman is not involved in the contracting process; the evaluation team advises her of their choice.

Commissioner Cushing noted that a building for the clinic had been offered by a private citizen in Buckeye, however, there was a problem and the VA was required to go through contracting and, technically, if Buckeye wants to donate a building and if it meets the VA criteria, wouldn't the evaluation team have to consider it? Ms. Helman said contracting would have to rank and score the building. She also noted that those who don't get the bid are told why they didn't get the bid and they have the option to protest.

A new clinic in the northeast Scottsdale/Fountain Hills area has been approved and a proposal is going out for bid. There will be two clinics in that area.

There has been discussion about the clinic in Anthem. It belongs to the Prescott VA but has a Phoenix city address. The VISN director is looking at geographics to determine if the clinic should belong to the Phoenix VA. Eighty per cent of the veterans in that area are seen at the Phoenix VA.

Veteran Clinic Signage – Ms. Helman noted that the VA has struggled with the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) about better signage for the veteran clinics. ADOT has severe restrictions on signage for VA clinics. By their rule, the clinics must be open to the public, or open 24/7. VA clinics meet one of those rules.

The VA has services available to veterans in several areas but some veterans are not aware because there is not good signage. The Northwest Veteran Clinic is hard to find as there is only one small sign in the strip mall signage area. If a person didn't have the address, they wouldn't be able to find the clinic. The VA wants to put up proper signage so veterans can find clinic locations.

Ms. Helman asked if there is an appropriate platform the commission could use to draw ADOT's attention to this matter, and could the commission intervene on the VA's behalf to see if better signage can be implemented on all the clinics, from Show Low to Globe to Payson. In talking with area people she learned that if a local group or elected official is very vocal about it; ADOT will waive the requirement and put up signs.

Commissioner Krula asked if the problem was money or approval of the signs. Input from this commission would have to go to ADOT and would the VA provide a list the offices that are in need of signage?

Ms. Helman said the problem is both money and approval. The City of Phoenix wants to provide signage for the veteran clinics because they want veterans to continue spending money in those areas.

One of the complaints she heard at the Buckeye Town Hall Meeting was that there was no signage depicting the location of the clinic. If patients didn't have an address, they couldn't find the clinic. Signage is needed on the Loop 303 Highway for veteran truckers or others to know there is a clinic in the area where they can be seen or get medications.

Chairman Olson said one state solved the issue by making the veteran clinic signs a different color and there are ways to handle the financial portion. In some states, signs were paid for through service organizations, or private donations.

Joe Cuffari asked Chairman Olson to send an action item request to his department for someone from the Arizona Dept. of Transportation to be available to attend a future Advisory Commission meeting to discuss veteran clinic signage. Joe will work through his office to see that someone from ADOT comes to the meeting.

Chairman Olson thanked Joe for his input at today's meeting and his offer to assist the commission in obtaining veteran clinic signage. Jeff will forward an action item to his office. Mr. Cuffari departed the meeting.

Melvin Morris introduced himself to Ms. Helman and noted that he works with members at the Community Resource & Referral Center (CRRC). He sees how well CRRC services are working and commended Ms. Helman and the VA for these services.

Melvin said veterans with two sources of healthcare who disagree with a decision on a medical claim, can go to a private doctor or specialist to get a Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) completed.

Feedback from veterans who don't have two sources of healthcare is that when they ask a VA physician at the hospital to complete a DBQ, they are told the physician is prohibited from doing so. Melvin asked Ms. Helman for clarification.

Ms. Helman was not aware VA staff is prohibited from completing DBA's and will look into the matter and follow up.

Chairman Olson defined the DBQ which is a 2-page form with all the information a claim rater needs to rate the disability of a veteran. There are about 70 templates of DBQ's for various ailments/injuries that are used for rating veteran disability, as opposed to the veteran submitting several pages of medical records and documentation. It takes the rater less time to evaluate when the information is on the DBQ form.

Ms. Helman asked if anyone was familiar with the "Blue Button". It allows veterans to go online to My HealtheVet, the VA's personal health record site. The veteran's Compensation & Pension (C&P) exam is transcribed into their record, as well as their DBQ information.

My HealtheVet allows veterans, their dependents and caregivers the opportunity to make informed decisions in managing their health care. The drawback is that sometimes the veteran is seeing the exam results before the raters are and, if they have disagreements, they are calling the providers, or coming to clinics to voice disagreements or say what needs to be changed in the reports.

The intent of the Blue Button is good, but these records are sensitive and this creates an indirect result. Staff is uncomfortable in noting what they need to in the report; the DBQ is an example.

Pain Management - Commissioner Cushing asked Ms. Helman where the VA stands on pain management. This issue was brought up to him by veterans he interacts with at veteran associations.

Ms. Helman thanked George for bringing up pain management. Two OIF and OEF veterans advised Ms. Helman that pain management was nearly non-existent. She learned it consisted of two alternatives; medications and managing with primary care.

Ms. Helman's brother recently went through a successful pain management program in Florida. The VA recently sent a team to Florida to learn about their pain management program which is working

quite well. The team gave a proposal of what staffing needs would be, and the space and equipment needed to implement Florida's program.

The VA now has a staff of 10 people that consists of a multi-disciplinary team in a centralized location that will bring veterans with the highest narcotic usage to the VA to be seen. The program is in progress now but will be completely up and running in April or May. It is modeled after the Florida program and, for now, veterans will have to come to Phoenix for treatment.

The VA will always use telehealth, but because we are trying out this program, we need the veterans to be face to face with the multi-disciplinary teams, which will be the key to their success.

Ms. Helman offered to have someone attend a future advisory meeting to give an update of the program's progress. It will be a multiple wrap around care program in prosthetics, pharmacy, social workers and chaplain services. The VA is hiring a new chiropractor to administer acupuncture, tai chi, and yoga.

Director Vogt noted that pain management for veterans was discussed by Secretary Shinseki at the N.A.S.D.V.A. Conference.

Commissioner Cushing questioned if the primary physician at the clinic now has to evaluate their patient in their use of stronger medications.

Ms. Helman said they have always done that; the patient has to sign a contract and is required to renew the narcotic every 30 days.

Through data, the VA is able to see who the narcotics high usage patients are and work with the primary care team to bring the veteran to the panel proactively vs. the care team sending counsel to the pain management group.

They will continue to send counsels through to the pain management group. Right now they are taking the highest cohort of users to the primary care team and at that point, there will be more staff hired; it will be a robust team and is expected to be 30 members.

The VA cannot see a veteran who belongs to a primary care team without a primary care team knowing about it because they must co-sign everything. When the veteran goes into the Emergency Department (ED), the primary care team has to co-sign the note so they know the veteran is in the emergency department and for what reason.

Commissioner Rustand said he appreciates all that Ms. Helman has done in the pain management area and, as the VA institutes the pain management plan, is this something that will be done statewide, or will it remain in Phoenix?

Ms. Helman said over a year ago, Phoenix formulated what the program should look like and what the disciplines should be. She expects it will be mandated statewide as should have been done all along.

Because of the shortage of psychiatrists, and the VA had to work with community providers in psychiatry, Commissioner Rustand wanted to know how that is working. He noted that Tri-West got a contract through Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Ms. Helman said what she struggles with the most in mental health is the handing off of a veteran to a community provider. The information shared with that provider is so sensitive that you begin a trusting relationship with them. Then, after six months, if the patient has to come back to the VA, they have to tell their story again and give sensitive information to the VA team. Veterans do not want to go through this again and many say no to the transfer and try to pay for the care themselves. Commissioner Cushing inquired whether there is any plan for additional vet centers.

Ms. Helman said the veteran centers don't report to her; they are a stand-alone entity with separate veteran center records, budget, and reporting structure.

The separation was intentional; the Vietnam Veterans didn't want anything to do with a typical government VA and wanted a separate center of their own. During Secretary Shinseki's tenure, the subject of joining the vet centers with the VA was discussed but it has never happened.

Commissioner Hanson inquired about the Social Security number on hospital identification bands and Personal Identity Verification (PIV) cards and what is future of it?

Ms. Helman said this is a National VA matter. The identification band, PIV and Veteran Identification Card (VIC) procedures are all being changed at the national level; the VA is waiting to hear when that has been done. Until National makes the change to a patient I.D. number, the hospital is held to the current national standard. The national patient safety goal that the hospital is touted for is now having the veteran's picture on the patient I.D. wristband.

Private care nursing homes are still using social security numbers as an I.D.; some are using the patient's date of birth.

Commissioner Krula noted that staff retention and the attraction of good employees is one of her biggest challenges and asked what kind of competitive tools are at her disposal to attract new psychiatrists. Do you have to go to medical schools to recruit people?

Much of it is in her control through looking at market data. The chief of staff looks at specialty market data and base pay. Base pay is pretty standard.

Market pay allows leniency to increase the pay level every year, depending on the specialty. It is recurring and each year she knows what pay psychiatrists will be making and that pay for the entire group must increase. Pay raises affect the budget and she has to be fiscally prudent in order to afford pay raises the following years.

Chairman Olson wanted to know when the VA gets a request for a Veteran Compensation Exam, how long does it take to get it scheduled?

Ms. Helman said the exam has to be scheduled and documented within 30 days.

On behalf of the commission, Jeff thanked Sharon Helman and Scott McRoberts for attending the meeting and providing pertinent information. He hopes they can attend more often and we will keep the partnership going.

Communications – At the January meeting, the secretary was asked to follow up with the Governor's Boards & Commission regarding Terry Tassin's application for commissioner that was submitted in August, 2013.

Tom in the governor's office said the office has all that is required with Terry's application and it is considered "current". They cannot provide a date when they will make a decision to fill the commissioner vacancy. His application is good for two years and would only need to contact the board if his contact information changes.

When the commissioner position is filled, the applicants who are not chosen are sent a letter thanking them for their application. Because our commissioner position is still open, none of the applicants have been notified about their application.

Patty Nelson of the Health Dimensions Group called for Chairman Olson on January 14th. She is assisting the VA in a market feasibility study of feedback from organizations on how veterans view the VA. She would like the commission's comments. Chairman Olson was notified of this message.

Director Vogt made a correction to Patty Nelson's message; the ADVS engaged Health Dimensions Group in looking to the future to see what veterans needs will be in Arizona as far out as 2030, as we move forward on projects.

Agency Announcements and Updates – Flagstaff and Marana Cemetery Projects -_ADVS

Director Ted Vogt reported that the general consultant contract for the Marana Project was awarded to Orcutt Winslow Architects/Planners.

Camp Navajo is much farther along in the planning process. We are expecting two people from the National Cemetery Administration later this month to sign off on the projects so we can get moving on them. Groundbreaking will take place in July or August this year, with completion expected by January, 2016.

ADVS is pleased that the governor announced her support for building the new veteran home in Yuma. We continue to do all the prep work and move forward with planning processes while waiting to see how the budget in the legislature is resolved. We have made an analysis of what the state demographics might be by 2020 and 2030 and expect to see the women veteran population in Arizona grow. Currently in Arizona, 10% of the veteran population is women; by 2030, we expect that number to be 25% nationally. Arizona has been a bellwether state.

Commissioner Hanson questioned if the federal government has a priority on veteran homes as they do with cemeteries and where does the Yuma veteran home stand on the priority list?

Director Vogt said the priority list is described as an "unmet need". The statewide effort is not as specific as with cemeteries. The VA calculates how many beds will be needed and Arizona, by the VA's determination, is eligible for 1,520 beds. Arizona currently has 320 veteran nursing home beds. We feel confident that once the state has the land and the 35% state commitment, ADVS would be near the top of the list because of the unmet need criteria.

Commissioner Rustand questioned how the unmet need factors into the construction of the proposed veteran home at the Navajo Nations. Because the Navajo Nations is tribal land, does it fall under the same federal resources?

Director Vogt is not sure how the VA calculates the Indian Nations number. Even if the Navajo Nation Veterans were included in the overall unmet need, because we have room to grow, the Yuma home would be at the top of the list. The state is so far below the eligible figure, it probably would not be a factor for the Navajo Nations, and, Director Vogt would need to look into the matter.

Director Vogt assumes the VA considers all 531,000 statewide veterans and calculates the unmet need. The issue the tribes have are per diem payments. At present, members of tribes on tribal lands aren't receiving per diem payments and this matter has to be handled at the federal level. Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick is trying to get legislation moving in anticipation of building a veteran home on tribal lands so it will be funded the same way.

Chairman Olson said this has been an issue for veteran service organizations for 20 or 30 years. Service organizations have said the state veteran homes save the federal government money so why not fully fund the states already on the list and let them build their respective veteran homes? It has never happened.

The VA is working to increase funding for state veteran home programs by \$250 million at the federal level. Because of the economic downturn, many states have waited to submit grants and the VA is working to be sure there is funding when these grants come through.

Chairman Olson inquired whether the \$250 million the VA is trying to get for state veteran home programs is going to meet all of the current demand on the list.

Director Vogt said the \$250 million will not meet the current demand. The demand has always been above the available resources.

ADVS has heard from the national leadership of Veteran Service Organizations (VSO's) such as the VFW and American Legion. One of the issues they brought to us and VA leadership is transitioning from paper claims to paperless claims. They want to be sure the VA is acknowledging and accommodating those people who are not capable of making the transition.

There are older veterans who may not have computer capabilities or don't have online resources and some of our (VSO's) may not have the resources or computer skills to file paperless claims. We want to make sure we are not turning off one avenue of filing claims and turning on another one and leaving a population unserved.

Director Vogt said the VA's goal is 140 days of adjudication with 98% accuracy and they have a ways to go to reach that.

Commissioner Krula asked how far the VA is into the process of transition from paper to electronic claims. Have they formulated a sequential plan to accomplish this?

Director Vogt cannot quantify how far the VA is in the process toward paperless claims or whether they have a sequential plan. He has been hearing the same issues Jeff mentioned when he talks to VSO's. ADVS has already moved to paperless claims, but in talking with the VSO's, they have raised the issue that they are not ready to make the transition.

Director Vogt was able to tell the VSO's that National leadership is also bringing that message to top VA officials. They can expect that processing time may be slower on the paperless claims vs. the electronic claims when the VA gets the system running and that is to be expected. It is a big transition.

N.A.S.D.V.A. Conference

Director Vogt attended the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (N.A.S.D.V.A.) Conference in Washington D.C. this week, but had to leave the conference early to fly out ahead of the snow storm that blanketed the east coast. He noted that Arizona was recognized for its program to reach functional zero in chronic veteran homelessness in Maricopa County. Another Arizona state agency; the State Parks Department, was recognized for its pilot program started by Director, Bryan Martyn. He has employed eight formerly homeless veterans at the state parks and has trailers for them to live in. Lisa Pape, Director of Homeless Issues for the VA, noted that what Arizona is doing is very promising and she encouraged other states to look at what is happening in Arizona.

Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veteran Affairs, gave a briefing on the VA claims backlog, which is first and foremost on his agenda. We are hopeful the VA will be entering claims electronically by April.

Chairman Olson asked if Secretary Shinseki had renewed his pledge to erase the backlog of VA claims by January, 2015.

Director Vogt said Secretary Shinseki acknowledged there have been setbacks; but his goal is still in place to get as much accomplished for the time allotted.

The Quality Control concerning VA claims at VARO has been handled. Mike Klier rearranged staff so there is another set of eyes reviewing claims for issues or mistakes and, if needed, the claim is reverted back for correction before it goes to the federal level.

Secretary Shinseki talked about the importance of Veteran's Courts. The VA is seeking additional funding for Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) coordinators who do the case management work. They want more VJO's and more outreach coordinators. The steps the Supreme Court is taking to

consolidate jurisdictions will be beneficial which means we would be able to approve more VJO's and there will be a limited number of these personnel to be the liaison to the VA.

Legislative Report – Dave Hampton noted that Monday, February 10, was the deadline for introducing House Bills to the legislature. Seven hundred one House Bills, 12 house concurrent memorials, 37 house concurrent resolutions, 2 house memorials and 8 house resolutions were introduced. The last day to hear Senate Bills in Senate Committees and House Bills in the House Committees is Friday, February 21st. Bills that are not heard at next week's first hearing will probably drop off the legislative list.

Wednesday, February 12th, Brigadier General Mike McGuire was recommended to the full Senate for confirmation as the State Adjutant General by the Senate Commerce and Military Committee in a 5-0 vote.

Director Vogt was officially confirmed as Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services by the Senate.

Dave presented the commission a report of actions by the legislature since February 7th. The next full legislative report will be issued Friday, February 14th.

Commissioner Toliver drew attention to the Legislative Report and the numerous bills aimed especially toward the quality of life for veterans. The person who publishes the legislative update has consistently given us updates on the Senate and House bills and should be commended for those efforts. Kudos to Dave Hampton for getting the legislative reports out to the commission so we can see what is going on in the legislature.

Chairman Olson inquired about SB 1328 (State Parks; Disabled Veterans' pass), whereby state parks would issue a disabled veterans' pass at no charge to Arizona veterans with 30% or less service connected disability. He believes most veterans fall between the 0 to 10 and 20% disability range. What is the discussion about using the 30% rating?

Dave Hampton said arbitrarily, we don't know the reason for the 30% rate. He reminded members that state parks get no general fund money; they operate entirely from park entry fees. It is the same with the Game and Fish Department.

Commissioner Krula advised the commission that the local chapter of Korean War Veterans, along with Senator Al Melvin, is supporting legislation that would devote a portion of lottery receipts to homeless veterans. The legislative wording of the bill is being crafted similar to a program in Texas wherein over a 3 year period; they raised \$16 million dollars for homeless veterans.

The state is currently in good shape regarding caring for homeless veterans; however there will be scores of veterans returning from combat in the next two years and there will be a need to sustain that effort. Senator Melvin will sponsor the bill. A senate bill number has not been assigned as they are in the formative stages of crafting the bill.

Brett asked about the conflict between HB2499 and HB2500 which are similar but are conflicting; one is for spouses and the other is for service members for professional certification. He noted both bills were brought forth by the same person.

Dave doesn't know if they will be resolved. Each bill is trying to do something different under the same statute. His guess is that one will pass and the other won't, or neither will pass.

Student Veteran Education – Steve Weintraub, ADVS Outreach Coordinator, reported that five veteran support campus schools have submitted applications. They are Arizona College, Glendale

Community College, Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Institute, Prescott College and Scottsdale Community College.

Outreach Activities for the Commission – No outreach activities were reported.

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order – There was no open discussion from members.

Chairman Olson declared a good meeting in having Joe Cuffari, Sharon Helman and Scott McRoberts present information. He is certain the commission can work with each of them for the common good on veteran matters.

The commission looks forward to seeing VA Regional Office Director Sandra Flint at the April meeting.

Chairman Olson adjourned the meeting at 11:58 a.m. The next Advisory Commission meeting will be held March 13, 2014 at the Tucson Veteran Home.