

**ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION**  
**Eastern Arizona College, Activities Center, 615 N Stadium Ave Thatcher, AZ 85552**  
**Saturday, January 16, 2010**

**M I N U T E S**

**Call to Order** - The meeting was called to order at 10:12 a.m. by Chairwoman Fulkerson and the opening ceremonies included the posting of colors by the San Carlos Apache Veterans' Association and the Gila Valley Honor Guard.

**Present**

Advisory Commissioners

Linda Fulkerson, Chairwoman  
Gary Fredricks, Vice Chairman  
George Cushing  
Terrie Gent  
Larry McKim  
Lionel Sanchez  
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Joey Strickland, Director  
Mike Klier, Assistant Deputy Director  
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner  
Valerie Williams, Veterans Benefits Counselor

Absent

Jeffrey Olson\*

Recognized Guests:

Lyle Ford, Southeastern Arizona Consumer Run Services (SEACRS)  
Royce Hunt, Southeastern Arizona Consumer Run Services (SEACRS)  
Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, U.S. House of Representatives  
Michael Pastor, District II Supervisor - Globe County Board of Supervisors  
Terri Soloman, VFW Commander  
Eastern Arizona College staff  
Safford Town Council

Representing the US Department of Veterans Affairs:

Brandi Bell, Globe VA Clinic - Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System  
Monica Cabrera, Public Information Officer, Arizona VA Regional Office  
Carrie DeKorte, Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System  
Deborah Lown, Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System  
Sally Petty, Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System  
Daniel Sanchez, Globe VA Clinic - Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System  
Ann Stone, Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System

Chairwoman Fulkerson provided an overview of the Advisory Commission and an explanation of how the outreach meetings support the mission. In light of the current budget, the town hall style meetings have been reduced to one per year, effective immediately. The commissioners introduced themselves and guests were recognized.

**Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick**

Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick welcomed the attendees, saying that she has been very supportive of veterans and welcomes comments from her constituents. Col. Strickland asked that she support a CBOC to be established on the Navajo Nation.

Question: Is there was any way to establish satellite dental clinics in the immediate area.

Answer: Rep. Kirkpatrick said she was supportive of the concept; in the meantime, the mileage to reimburse veterans for travel has been increased.

Q: Is there any way to get at least one more doctor here in Safford so there aren't such long delays? Is there a way to get a doctor who really WANTS to be in the area?

A: Sally Petty is the chief of the CBOCs (Community Based Outpatient Clinics) for Southern Arizona VA Healthcare System. The Safford clinic has struggled to get stable physician coverage. The successful candidate indicated she wanted to work in a rural community and wanted to serve the underserved. For the first six months after joining staff, the new physician was provided additional time to spend with each patient, to allow her to get acquainted with clients. The doctor's schedule now has more follow up visits and fewer new patient consults, which should decrease scheduling delays.

### **Minutes**

Chairwoman Fulkerson asked the Commissioners to review and approve the minutes. Ken Yamanouchi moved to accept the minutes as prepared, which was seconded by Larry McKim. The motion was approved unanimously.

### **Agency Overview**

Chairwoman introduced Col. Joey Strickland (Retired - Army), Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, to provide an agency overview.

- As far as federal projects, Arizona is comparable to the rest of the United States. We have 28 CBOCs, 6 Vets Centers, and 3 VA Medical Centers. What Arizona lacks is state-supported veteran projects. We need more veteran homes and state veteran cemeteries in the state. The 120-bed Tucson veteran home has a groundbreaking ceremony scheduled in March, creating jobs for 130 employees. The state veteran homes cost about \$30 million and the state must raise 35% of the construction costs.
- The backlog of disability claim processing by the VA: the backlog is getting worse because we are in war now and keep adding to the number of claims being filed with the VA.
- There are only 2 places for veterans to be buried in Arizona: the national cemetery in north Phoenix and in Sierra Vista. Wherever there is sufficient population to establish a home, we need to also build a cemetery.
- The agency created a Homeless Veterans Division. There is no excuse that any veteran in the state of Arizona should be homeless. On any given night, there will be 2500 veterans sleeping on the street in Maricopa County. Director Strickland has given \$250,000 to take 75 veterans off the street and is trying to lease the YMCA to house even more.
- Women make up 14% of the military today and there has recently been an increase in the number of homeless women veterans. An estimated 14% of the homeless women in Maricopa County are veterans, and many homeless women veterans have children.
- AZ ranks third in the nation in transitioning Troops to Teachers. Arizona has placed 444 veterans in teacher positions.
- The State Approving Agency is responsible for approving education and training programs where students can take advantage of their GI Education benefits. The new bill is the best thing that has happened since the one from WWII, but processing delays. The National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs warned the VA they have been hard on veterans and their families.
- Native American outreach: Director Strickland has given \$5000 to veteran organizations in both San Carlos and Navajo Nations. He has been working with VA counterparts to support requests from the tribes to establish a CBOC.

### **Community Based Outpatient Clinics**

Sally Petty provided an overview of the health services available in the Safford area. There 917 clients in the Safford community and she is starting Rural Health Care in Sierra Vista. She wants to coordinate appointments so that veterans can schedule multiple appointments in a single visit when possible.

Ann Stone is an RN in Globe, but was filling in for an administrator by providing an overview of her CBOC. It was established in 2003 and is now in a permanent facility. There is a nurse practitioner at the facility, and a shuttle is available to transport veterans to specialty clinics at the Phoenix VA. Mental

Health coverage is offered twice a week. Veterans are to have diagnostic tests or emergency care in the community.

Q: There is a rumor that the Globe CBOC will be closed.

A: Once a CBOC is established, it was almost impossible for it to close. Ann Stone suggested that any further questions could be directed to Gabriel Perez, Director of the Phoenix VA.

Q: What do you do when you are unhappy with the care you receive?

A: Sally Petty recommended veterans to take it up the chain of command. She offered her business cards and offered to handle individual questions after the meeting.

Comment from Commissioner Gent: The comment cards that were handed out are to be prepared by individuals so that their issues can be properly followed up by the Commission. There is a note taker so that problems are counted and categorized so that they can inform the Governor and the Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services.

Q: What do I do when I can't get a response from the VA on a claim?

A: Call Col. Strickland and he'll get on top of it.

Q: Why aren't you planning to build a home in Safford?

A: Col. Strickland said that we need six more homes and he would certainly consider any community with sufficient numbers of veterans to justify building a facility.

Q: I don't want to write down a question, so why don't you listen to my issues right now?

A: Every effort is being made to answer questions that have been properly documented on the comment cards first. It is important that the Commission keep track of issues that veterans are raising.

Q: Bills for emergency services are the responsibility of veterans when they have been told in the clinic's automated phone attendant to call 9-1-1 or go to an Emergency Room. Why don't you change the recording so that veterans understand they will have to pay their bills themselves?

A: Primary care clinic isn't an emergency room and Sally Petty recommended that veterans with life threatening issues go to the local ER (chest pain, eye injuries, shortness of breath). There were complaints about the hospital services. Any specific questions need to be directed to her so that she can assist them.

Q: I was not able to use the GI bill in the 10 year timeframe. Is there any effort that the 10 year timeframe be expanded?

A: Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick's staff was going to research that question, but she did not know of any effort to expand that timeframe.

Q: How do I ask for a change in my disability?

A: Speak with Valerie Williams or another Veterans Benefits Counselor (VBC) for help.

Q: Why does the VA have such complex instructions to fill out so many documents?

A: Speak to a VBC for assistance in navigating the VA system.

Comment: The Safford veteran community really appreciates the CBOC and Valerie Williams. The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services needs to get Valerie Williams more help.

Q: What transportation is available for veterans to go to the Tucson or Phoenix VAMCs.

A: Sally Petty admitted that transportation is a big issue throughout southern Arizona. Volunteer Services in Phoenix coordinates getting a van to the CBOCs. The drivers, however, are volunteers and they are required to meet stringent safety standards. More volunteer drivers are needed to provide dependable shuttle services. Valerie Williams said that there was a van donated by a local dealership

for that purpose, but there are no volunteer drivers available. She asked for volunteers from the attendees.

Comment: Commissioner Gent said that the VA and the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services function as well as they can *within their individual budgets*. She encouraged attendees to talk to your state and federal lawmakers to let them know how critical it is to properly fund the services you need.

Comment: Col. Strickland invited the veterans service organizations to attend the biannual training provided by the agency. His VBCs can't possibly initiate every claim in the state and he wanted to make sure that service officers were aware they were invited to the agency's VBC training.

Veterans Task Force issues: Becky Phifer served on the Veterans Task Force. A couple of issues that were raised by the Task Force required continued study.

Q: What ever happened to the issues raised by Gov. Napolitano's Veterans Task Force?

A: Several of the Task Force's recommendations were enacted into law. The five issues that required further study were provided to the Veterans Research Council created by former Governor Napolitano. While the Veterans Research Council was finishing their final report, they were told that it was a no growth budget year and that our proposals could not require additional funding.

Q: When I have not received the care I require, who do I call?

A: Call the patient advocate.

Q: There is no transitional housing in the Thatcher/Safford area, which means that veterans have to spend many weeks or months away from their families while they get the services they need. Why isn't there a way to stay here?

A: Adrian Molina, Southeastern Arizona Consumer Run Services (SEACRS) works with patients with mental health and addiction recovery issues. They are trying to set up services here in Graham County.

Q: Why don't you get Valerie Williams some help?

A: Col. Strickland doesn't have money to make any hires now, but will see what he can to.

Q: What is going on for suicide prevention?

A: Sally Petty spoke about full-time Suicide Prevention Officers who provide outreach to families and friends of veterans. There is a full-time social worker in Safford who will get them the proper level of care (for both younger veterans and veterans from prior wars). There have been significant efforts in active duty forces, and the VA has worked diligently to continue that outreach. Chairwoman Fulkerson recommends the veteran community to help a fellow veteran who is speaking about suicide. Even if you are not trained as a health care professional, you can be supportive and stay with an individual until they get the care they need. Lyle Ford, Executive Director of SEACRS, acknowledged that the VA needs support from the community. He started an all-volunteer support group before learning that the VA can provide funding for peer support services. He plans to set something in Graham County. There are times that a veteran may not wish to speak to a clinician, but would be willing to open up to a fellow veteran.

Q: Why can't I get care at the Safford Clinic?

A: Please see Deb Lown for any Enrollment issues.

Q: Why is it that I come to an appointment in Tucson or Safford and find out hat the appointment has been cancelled?

A: When a provider needs time off, Sally Petty requires 45 days notice in advance. Health care providers do occasionally call in sick, however, which makes it very difficult to contact patients before they arrive at the clinic.

Q: Why does it take so long to get an appointment?

A: This was dealt with earlier in the meeting. The CBOC significantly slowed down the number of appointments when the physician was newly hired, but that should not pose a continuing problem. There are also winter visitors that may slow appointment schedules somewhat. If veterans must wait longer than 27 days to be seen in as a new patient, Sally Petty is notified by the computer and is required to develop a specific plan for decreasing the delays. Every call for an appointment results in a computer entry. Discussions between a veteran and the physician that occur outside of a medical appointment may not be documented in the electronic VA record...

Comment: Col. Strickland said that he is willing to call Jon Gardner and/or Gabriel Perez to let him know about specific problems the veterans are having with the Globe and Safford CBOCs.

Q: There may be three issues that are all related, so why are veterans being told that there is a policy that patients can only seek assistance with a single issue at a time.

A: Sally Petty said there is no such policy. The VA physicians are trying to partner with their clients so they can work on all medical issues. Veterans are actively encouraged to present their doctors with a prepared list of questions and concerns. Sally Petty thought time constraints may have been more the issue. She invited the veteran to see her after the meeting.

**Adjournment** – Chairwoman Fulkerson adjourned the meeting at 12:21 p.m. The next meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, February 11, 2010, in the.