



IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

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Jeffrey T. Lindeman, County Veterans Service Officer

WINTER, 2016

Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER)

The VA health administration is encouraging all veterans utilizing VA healthcare services in addition to private healthcare to participate in a program to expedite information exchanges between VA medical providers and non-VA medical providers. By signing a release form (VA Form 10-0485), the VA patient is authorizing secure access to certain parts of the electronic health record to providers outside the VA system. The Veterans Service Office has several copies of this form available which needs to be forwarded to the VA hospital upon completion. If you are interested in taking part in this program, do not hesitate to contact the office. I will be happy to send the form out to you, or you can complete it in the office, and I will fax it to the VA hospital.

Camp Lejeune: Water Contamination & Health Benefits

From the 1950s through the 1980s people living or working at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, were potentially exposed to drinking water contaminated with industrial solvents, benzene and other chemicals. This chemical exposure may have led to a number of health conditions. If you have been diagnosed with one of the following qualifying health conditions:

- Esophageal Cancer
- Kidney Cancer
- Renal Toxicity
- Scleroderma
- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma
- Breast Cancer
- Multiple Myeloma
- Female Infertility
- Lung Cancer
- Bladder Cancer

- Leukemia
- Myelodysplastic Syndromes
- Neurobehavioral Effects
- Hepatic Steatosis
- Miscarriage

You may be eligible for VA health benefits if you resided at Camp Lejeune for 30 days or more between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987.

Madison VA Hospital begins direct scheduling for routine audiology, optometry appointments

MADISON, Wis. — Scheduling routine audiology and optometry appointments just got a lot simpler for veterans enrolled for care at the Madison VA Hospital.

The Madison VA Hospital is implementing direct scheduling for patients who wish to request routine audiology and optometry services. That means veterans will no longer need an audiology or optometry referral from their primary care provider before they can be seen in these two specialty clinics.

Beginning Aug. 22, veterans can call the hospital toll-free at 888-478-8321, then press #2 to make an appointment. Veterans will be screened to make sure their individual circumstances do not require them to be seen first by a primary care or other provider and if not, their optometry or audiology appointments will be scheduled directly.

Direct scheduling will eliminate unnecessary steps and unneeded waiting, which should decrease wait times and improve access for audiology and optometry clinics. Primary care access should also improve as veterans requiring only routine

audiology or optometry referrals will no longer need to consume primary care clinic resources they do not require.

Direct scheduling is being implemented at VA medical centers across the country to make visits easier for veterans and to improve hospital access.

For more information about the Madison VA Hospital, visit www.madison.va.gov or www.facebook.com/MadisonVAHospital.

VETERANS EVALUATION SERVICES

Veterans Evaluation Services (VES) is a contract agency working with the VA to assist in addressing the backlog of veterans requiring compensation and/or pension evaluations. This arrangement allows for these evaluations to be completed in facilities outside the VA healthcare system. If you have a disability or non-service connected pension claim pending you may receive an appointment notice from VES. This partnership is a newer endeavor, and has had a few glitches to work out. An example being a veteran being scheduled for a compensation exam appointment 100+ miles from their home though the veteran resides within 15 miles of a VA medical center.

Please be aware that the appointment notices do not have the VA seal on them, and they do look a little like junk mail. Do not hesitate to contact the Veteran Service Office if you have questions about one of these notices. I do have a sample notice in the office, feel free to stop in if you would like to know what the appointment notices look like.

VA Clinical Pharmacists: Expanding Role Cuts Wait Times

For roughly the past year, Wm. S. Middleton VA Medical Center (VAMC) has been utilizing the services of Clinical Pharmacists to cut primary care appointment wait times. Many veterans are able to get next-day or even same-day appointments for primary care, no longer waiting a month or more to see a provider as many once did. The reason is they are not all seeing doctors. Clinical Pharmacists are specially trained to be able to prescribe medications, order lab tests, make referrals to specialists and perform physical examinations. These providers are handling more patients' chronic care needs. That

freees physicians to concentrate on new patients and others with more complex needs. A quarter of the primary care appointments at Madison VAMC are now handled by clinical pharmacists since they were integrated into patient care teams in 2015. Several other VAMCs are following Madison's approach and more than 36 other VAMCs are considering it. According to Dr. Jean Montgomery, chief of primary care services at Madison VAMC, "It's made a tremendous positive impact in improving access".

Clinical Pharmacists receive two additional years of education beyond their pharmaceutical training to prepare them to handle many primary care needs for patients, particularly after physicians have diagnosed their conditions. Clinical Pharmacists have been in the VA system for more than 20 years, but their expanding role in patient care is more recent. The VA's goal is to increase the use of clinical pharmacists to help patients with mental health needs and pain management. This should open up appointment slots for physician to provide care for patients with more acute care needs.

VA and Social Security Partner to Speed Up Disability Decisions for Veterans

The VA and the Social Security Administration (SSA) launched a new Health IT initiative that enables VA to share medical records electronically with social security disability processors. This secure process will save time and money resulting in better service for Veterans and dependents that apply for social security disability benefits. The SSA requests nearly 15 million medical records from health care organizations yearly to make medical decisions on around three million disability claims. For decades, SSA obtained medical records through a manual process. This new program put in place an automated process to obtain Veterans' medical records electronically.

The joint venture is expected to significantly speed up social security disability decision, utilizing VA's VLER Healthcare exchange under the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record Program, for more information on the VLER program, see page one of this newsletter.

GULF WAR SYNDROME **Claim Time Limit Extension**

The VA is seeking to extend the time limit that veterans can claim disability benefits for Gulf War Syndrome by five years from 31 Dec 2016 to 3Dec 2021. The VA is inviting the public to comment on their plans by 18 Dec 2016. The document, with instructions for commenting can be found on the Federal Register website: <https://federalregister.gov/agencies/veterans-affairs-department>.

Gulf War Syndrome is defined by the VA as a cluster of medically unexplained chronic symptoms that can include fatigue, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, respiratory disorders and memory problems. There is no medical or scientific evidence about the nature and cause of the illnesses suffered by Gulf War veterans, however the VA states studies by the National Academy of Sciences proved that these conditions occur in Gulf War veterans at a rate three times more than they do in a comparable civilian population. As such the VA grants a presumptive disability to Gulf War veterans suffering from these conditions.

In the request to extend the time period, the VA cited a study done earlier this year by the National Academy of Sciences that found that at present there is insufficient basis to identify a point, if any, at which the increased risk of chronic multi symptom illness may abate. The symptoms may still show up in veterans more than 25 years after the war's end. In light of this the VA states they want to continue to provide disability benefits to veterans suffering from Gulf War Syndrome regardless of when the illness began after the veteran's active service.

VA Mobile Apps

The VA has launched several mobile apps for internet (smart) phones with more planned, aimed at improving the lives of veterans and making VA services more accessible. Currently the VA has 16 apps available for I-phones in the Apple store and 6 apps available for Android based phones through Google Play. These apps are designed to help veterans manage their PTSD, pressure ulcers,

preconception care and other aspects of their health care. Some of the applications are also available for download on desktops and laptops. VA is field testing 11 more applications that should be released soon, including a self-scheduling application, an app to help track your healthcare by receiving notifications from your primary care team and sending health information such as blood pressure and other vital signs to your primary care team. Current and future applications can be found at: <https://mobile.va.gov/appstore>.

VA RETAIL IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM **2016**

From now through 31 Mar 2017, all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system can receive free flu shots at any Walgreens pharmacy. This initiative is designed to help serve veterans closer to where they live. If you are planning to take advantage of this program you will have to provide your VA health care ID, an additional photo ID, and complete a four-question application which will be used to update your VA Electronic Health Record. No appointments are necessary.

AIRBORNE HAZZARDS & OPEN BURN PIT

VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry allows eligible Veterans and Service members to document their exposures and report health concerns through an online questionnaire. Those eligible to participate include those who served in:

- Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn
- Djibouti, Africa on or after 11 Sep 2001
- Operations Desert Shield or Desert Storm
- Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after 2 Aug 1990

There is no cost to participate in the registry and you do not have to be enrolled in the VA healthcare system. The information is based upon the participant's recollection of service, not on their official military records. To document any exposures and health concerns, obtain a free health evaluation and stay informed of VA's research, you can go to the Public Health section on the VA's website under "Exposures" and "burn pits". The registry is your opportunity to help answer the question of what burn pit exposure could mean for your health and that of your fellow veterans.

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Veterans Newsletter

IMPORTANT DATES

VA TOWN HALL (PUBLIC) MEETINGS: *Wm. S. Middleton VA Hospital, Madison, WI @ 3:30 p.m.*

Held the first Thursday in the months of March, June, September and December.

Thursday, November 24th – Thanksgiving Day

Saturday, December 24th – Christmas Eve

Sunday, December 25th – Christmas Day

Saturday, December 31st – New Year's Eve

Sunday, January 1, 2017 – Happy 2017

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS

Christmas Eve Holiday

Christmas Holiday

New Year's Day

Friday, December 23rd

Monday, December 26th

Monday, January 2, 2017