VA PAIN MANAGEMENT

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) on April 30 used his position as chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee to press for expanded veterans’ access to treatments such as acupuncture, yoga, meditation and animal-assisted therapy for chronic pain.

In a hearing on overmedication at the Veterans Affairs and the Defense departments, Sanders, a longtime admirer of complementary and alternative medical treatments, said VA must do more to reduce its doctors’ reliance on prescriptions to treat pain. “For many veterans, chronic pain is a part of their daily life ... options for managing chronic pain are paramount to improving their quality of life,” Sanders said. According to Pentagon data, about a quarter of active-duty personnel received a prescription for an opioid-based painkiller in 2013. At VA, about half of patients with chronic pain are prescribed opioids such as OxyContin, Vicodin and Percocet. In the past five years, both VA and DoD have moved to reduce the number of potentially addictive prescriptions. A DoD task force in 2010 released a comprehensive pain management plan for physicians, and the Pentagon has cut the percentage of active-duty troops receiving opiates from 26 percent in 2011 to 24 percent last year. And VA in April launched a department wide Opioid Safety Initiative focused on patient education, prescription monitoring and emphasis on complementary and alternative practices. According to VA, the program already is seeing success, reducing the number of VA patients receiving opiates in the past 18months by 50,000, said VA Undersecretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel. The long-term use of highly addictive opioids pain medications can lead to chronic abuse, overdose and accidental death if taken in conjunction with other medications.

In the hearing, Sanders said alternatives should be considered before prescribing these drugs. The program on which VA’s OSI effort is modeled uses a comprehensive approach that includes acupuncture, relaxation, meditation, tai chi and aromatherapy along with traditional psychotherapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy. Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) cited the case of a veteran prescribed medication for chronic pain because it was inexpensive and expedient. “Is this the ‘veteran-centric’ care we constantly hear VA describing? When it comes to the care we are providing to those who have sacrificed so much ... we can’t afford to get it wrong,” Burr said. Sanders introduced legislation earlier this year that would require VA to expand access to alternative treatments. The bill failed on a procedural vote, but Sanders has pledged to try again this year. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | May 12, 2014]

A veteran is someone who, at one point in their lives, wrote a blank check made payable to ‘The United States of America’ for an amount of ‘up to and including my life’.
Vet's Vantage

WAR ON TERRORISM DC MEMORIAL - CWA REGULATIONS PROHIBIT

Veterans of the war on terrorism say they deserve a monument in downtown Washington to recognize their sacrifices, but they are hindered by a rule that says a conflict must be long finished in order to build a memorial, leading some to wonder how to commemorate a “never-ending war.” Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) wants a location by the end of 2015 for a monument to those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, the major battlefields of the war on terrorism. The fighting has wound down as the war stretches into its 12th year, but veterans are struggling to define an end date.

“One of the things that’s very difficult is, because these aren’t technically declared wars, they’re operations of the global war on terror, it’s difficult to fit the statutes,” said Lauren Augustine, a member of the veterans organization’s legislative team. “We’ve been in the wars for over a decade, but it’s particularly difficult to have that closing date.”

Under the Commemorative Works Act of 1997, a war memorial can’t be authorized until at least 10 years after it officially ends, said Lucy Kempf, an urban planner with the National Capital Planning Commission. “Usually a time lapse between an event or an individual’s death is needed, just to give some historic perspective,” she said. The end dates of other wars were easy to determine. They were when the United States signed documents to end the country’s involvement. All U.S. combat troops are out of Iraq and likely will be out of Afghanistan by the end of this year, so there is an easy way to mark a concrete end date to those operations, said Terry Anderson, a military history professor at Texas A&M University. But the global war on terrorism was declared by a 2001 authorization for the use of military force that goes far broader than a single country. Indeed, it deems the shadowy, transnational al Qaeda the enemy. That makes it almost impossible to determine whether and when the conflict will end. “This shift happened because we’ve never fought an enemy like Osama bin Laden types, we’ve never fought an enemy like that before,” Mr. Anderson said. Mr. Anderson said the war will not end as long as terrorists disagree with the Western way of life because no one can negotiate with or change the minds of extremists. “As long as there are radical Islamists who will kill themselves to kill others, we never will have a peace treaty with the [global war on terrorism],” he said. “It is the never-ending war.” Such a lack of conclusion likely will become a factor in future U.S. conflicts as well, he said. “I don’t think any country would ever want to start an atomic war,” Mr. Anderson said.

“Therefore, I think this unfortunate type of warfare, this terrorism warfare, is probably the type of thing we will be seeing in the future.” To build a memorial in Washington, Congress has to enact federal authorization, then a panel has to find an appropriate place and design, Ms. Kempf said. How long the construction process takes can vary because of the time and money required to raise public funds, she said IAVA is eager to start the process by finding a congressional sponsor. Finding a place for the memorial may be tricky. The IAVA has said it wants to secure a spot on the Mall, but the Commemorative Works Act prohibits new memorials or monuments there, Ms. Kempf said. Other areas of the District and places in Arlington are open to construction. Ms. Augustine, however, said a memorial on the Mall is important to remind Americans of the sacrifices made by this generation of veterans. “When we’re thinking about the legacy and the service of those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, it’s so important to start thinking about that today to ensure their services are honored on the National Mall alongside many of the other wars and that our country never forgets,” she said.

IAVA is eager to start the process by finding a congressional sponsor. Finding a place for the memorial may be tricky. The IAVA has said it wants to secure a spot on the Mall, but the Commemorative Works Act prohibits new memorials or monuments there, Ms. Kempf said. Other areas of the District and places in Arlington are open to construction. Ms. Augustine, however, said a memorial on the Mall is important to remind Americans of the sacrifices made by this generation of veterans. “When we’re thinking about the legacy and the service of those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, it’s so important to start thinking about that today to ensure their services are honored on the National Mall alongside many of the other wars and that our country never forgets,” she said. [Source: The Washington Times | Jacqueline Klimas | 20 Apr 2014 ++]
Here are the general rules as to who gets reimbursement for VA appointments and how it works:

- If you are 30 percent or more service-connected by the VA.
- If you are less than 30 percent, then the treatment you are receiving must be for a service-connected condition.
- If you receive a VA pension, Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits.
- If you are traveling in relation to a Compensation and Pension (C&P) exam.
- Veterans with an annual income below the annual VA pension rate (determined by a means test).
- The current allowable reimbursement amount is 41.5 cents per mile. There is a $3 deductible for each one-way visit, or $6 for each round-trip visit. Upon reaching $18 in deductibles or six one-way (three round) trips, travel payments made for the balance of that particular month will be free of deductible charges. A waiver of these deductibles is given to eligible veterans with low income.
- You must have an appointment to be eligible for travel pay. Visits that are solely for obtaining pharmaceuticals or lab tests are not considered appointments. If you have separate appointments on the same day at the same location for medical different conditions, you can only receive one travel pay for the day.
- Travel reimbursement is not solely given for appointments at the Veterans Affairs' Regional Medical Centers. If you travel to a VA clinic and you meet the requirements as laid out above, you are eligible for travel reimbursement.
- You qualify for special mode transportation (Ambulance, Wheelchair van etc.) if you meet one of the first 4 eligibility items on this list and:
  a. Your medical condition requires an ambulance or a specially equipped van as determined by a VA
  b. The travel is pre-authorized (authorization is not required for emergencies if a delay would be
- It is your responsibility to apply for any VA travel benefits. You can go back normally 30 days to claim any travel reimbursement. You should be able to obtain the travel form at any VA facility.

- You have the option to direct deposit the reimbursement in your banking account.

The VFW wants VA-enrolled veterans to call the toll-free 1-800-VFW-1899 telephone line and tell them if your VA medical facility is properly serving you.

According to VFW National Commander Bill Thien, recent allegations about improper care in Arizona, Colorado, Texas and elsewhere has made it difficult to separate truth from conjecture. "Veterans die every day, but veterans dying due to wrong diagnoses, unsterilized equipment or while awaiting treatment is a failure of leadership and management both in Washington and out in the field," he said. "We need to hear real life stories, good or bad, not hearsay. Only then can we hold VA officials properly accountable for their actions or inactions."

The toll-free number was rolled out in 1996 as the VA was transforming from primarily a hospital-based system into an integrated healthcare system that now includes 820 outpatient clinics that serve veterans closer to where they actually reside.

Call 1-800-VFW-1899 to voice your VA healthcare experiences.
FREE TICKETS TO THE ZOO

Enjoy free Zoo admission and parking
Sunday, July 6, 2014 • 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Milwaukee County Zoo
10001 W. Bluemound Road
Milwaukee, WI 53226
414-771-3040

Don’t miss the Veterans Benefit Expo at the US Bank Gathering Place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. This is a one-stop-shop where veterans can learn about getting the benefits they deserve. Sponsored by the Milwaukee County Veterans Service Office.

Admission tickets will be available from May 27 to July 3. Tickets can be picked up at your local County Veterans Service Office (CVSO). Contact your local CVSO for details on ticket pick up.

Tickets are required for entry and will be available for immediate family only, with a limit of 10 tickets per family.

Waushara County Veterans Services
(920) 787-0447 Between May 27-Jul 3

MENTAL HEALTH HELP

Andy Heitman 608-264-5342 of the Madison Vet Center, comes to Waushara County Courthouse by previously arranged appointments, 2nd Wednesday of the month. Call for appointment. Free Counseling to combat veterans and sexual trauma veterans. 5 sessions to non-combat veterans. Marriage counseling, also.

VETS FINANCIAL HELP

Jamie Kolpjen from Supportive Service for Veterans Families (SSVF) will meet with veterans facing eviction from rentals or post foreclosures, every 4th Wednesday at the North Annex 230 W. Park St. Wautoma, WI between 10 am to 3 pm. For an appointment call 866-823-8387

OFFICE CLOSED

National Accreditation
Waushara County Veterans Services is closed the week of June 9-13. We will be in conferences renewing our National Accreditation which allows us to work with several veterans groups such as American Legion Disabled American Veterans, VFW… etc.

CLOSED
JUNE 9-13, 2014
Please call ahead for appointment.
(920)787-0446
A veterans group has been formed to eliminate the Veterans Administration (VA), accusing the VA of being a "medical gulag system." The group, Veterans Against the Veterans Administration (VAVA) was formed prior to the current scandals engulfing the VA in Phoenix, Ohio, and Florida. The group's plan calls for all veterans to receive insurance under President Obama's Affordable Healthcare Act, for American tech giants Apple, Google, Microsoft, or Yahoo to work with private insurance companies to create an efficient compensation apparatus, and for all education benefits to be handled by the colleges and universities instead of the VA. The VAVA cites a shockingly prophetic 1995 column by the late New York Times columnist William Safire entitled "This Dinosaur Must Die Soon" as validating its position.

According to the VAVA's data, the changes would end all delays in veterans receiving proper healthcare, compensation, and end the epidemic of patient deaths throughout America. Media reports reveal that the VA has paid out over $200 million to settle 1,000 wrongful death allegations. The group's founder warned US Senators Carl Levin and Richard Burr of the danger posed by untreated veterans. The VAVA also notes that any private hospital system that followed the VA system would be sued out of business in short order and shut down by government regulators. The VAVA charges that VA as a "bureaucratic welfare racket" rather than medical system. The VAVA asserts that organizations such as the America Legion and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The VAVA also notes that the VA has not properly warned veterans of health threats that exist due to their service in the Desert wars, such as a lethal allergy to bed bugs. The allergy has been verified by one of America's top immunologist located in South Carolina. The VAVA is calling on Congress to immediately provide private mental healthcare to veterans, due to the threat posed by untreated veterans to civilians and other soldiers. The group cites Navy SEAL Chris Kyle's murder, the DC Naval shipyard and Ft. Hood shootings as evidence of the need for urgency in this area to avoid Columbine and Newtown like incidents involving veterans. The VAVA will present its recommendations and personal accounts of VA incompetency. This includes the tale of the life-saving treatment the VAVA's founder received at Mt. Sanai hospital in Miami due to the VA's refusal to provide such care. [Source: PR Newswire | VAVA PR | 13 May 2014]
A much-anticipated Veterans Affairs Department study into the effectiveness of service dogs for treating post-traumatic stress disorder will restart in the coming months, with veterans receiving dog care training in anticipation of being paired with an animal. The study, “Can Service Dogs Improve Activity and Quality of Life in Veterans With PTSD?” will include 220 veterans, half teamed with a dog trained to address their disability and the rest paired with an emotional support dog — basically, a pet or companion that has passed a rigorous obedience course but is not specifically trained to perform tasks to mitigate PTSD. The research aims to determine the impact of a service dog on the quality of life and activities of a veteran with PTSD compared with a common companion animal or pet.

The differences between the two are notable. Trained, well-bred service dogs can cost upward of $25,000, including purchase, training and care, and they are allowed by law to accompany their handlers in public spaces.

And, depending on the study outcome, they might become an accepted treatment for PTSD covered by VA.

Emotional support dogs essentially are well-trained pets that provide comfort and support. They do not have the same public access as service dogs under the Americans with Disabilities Act, although they’re offered some protections under the Fair Housing Act and on commercial airlines.

The 2010 Defense Authorization Act required VA to study the effectiveness of service dogs for treating PTSD. VA provides support and veterinary care for dogs for visual and hearing disabilities, as well as mobility impairments, including traumatic brain injuries that cause seizures or affect a vet’s ability to move or make decisions. But it does not cover service dogs for mental health disorders.

VA has partnered with several service dog organizations to pair veterans with PTSD with potential service dogs, but the vets in these programs are working with dogs that are later trained as guide or service dogs for veterans with physical disabilities. VA has said there isn’t enough scientific evidence regarding their effectiveness for that purpose to warrant benefits coverage. And when it comes to PTSD, VA officials say they must use proven treatments.

While stories abound about veterans with PTSD and service dogs, few clinical studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of animals for PTSD. In April, a Texas State University researcher completed a small study on the topic that found PTSD symptoms were reduced by 22 percent in veterans who completed training their own psychiatric service dog through the program Train A Dog Save A Warrior. According to graduate student Jeff Nelson, study participants completed the PTSD Checklist-Military Version, or PCL-M, a self assessment of PTSD symptoms. Those who finished the program scored nearly 12 points lower — they had fewer symptoms — than those entering the program. Nelson acknowledged some limitations in the study.

For example, it did not measure results against a control group or incorporate companion dogs. And because of time constraints, Nelson was not able to administer the PCL-M to the same participants before and after the training — a measure that he said would better reflect the effectiveness of the program. But, he said, the findings should nonetheless contribute to the somewhat scant clinical research. “This is a good first step. Serious organizations are not going to give money for more research or programs without evidence of it being effective and, if it works, it hopefully will bring more people into the treatment,” Nelson said.

VA’s original study on the effectiveness of service dogs for PTSD was suspended in September 2012, amid concerns over the animals’ care at some facilities, as well as the dogs’ training. According to VA, 17 dogs were placed with veterans before the shutdown. Six participants have completed the study, six are still involved and five withdrew. Sixteen veterans still have their dogs; one dog was euthanized for health issues, spokeswoman Gina Jackson said.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | May 12, 2014 ++]
MOST DECORATED WWII VET DENIED MEDAL OF HONOR

Lt. Garlin Murl Conner left the U.S. Army as the second-most decorated soldier during World War II, earning four Silver Stars, four Bronze Stars, seven Purple Hearts and the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions during 28 straight months in combat. But despite backing from congressmen, senators, military veterans and historians, he never received the Medal of honor, the nation's highest military distinction, awarded for life-risking acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty. Now, a federal judge in Kentucky has ended his widow's 17-year quest to see that her husband received the medal. U.S. District Judge Thomas B. Russell, in an 11-page opinion issued late 11 MAR, said a technicality will prevent Pauline Conner of Albany, Ky., from continuing her campaign on behalf of her deceased husband. Russell concluded that Pauline Conner waited too long to present new evidence to the U.S. Army Board of Correction of Military Records, which rejected her bid to alter her husband's service record. Roughly 3,400 people have received the Medal of Honor since it was created in 1861, including actor Audie Murphy, the most decorated U.S. soldier in World War II. Murphy fought in the same areas as Conner and went on to star in dozens of Hollywood films, most of them Westerns and war epics. Conner served with the 3rd Infantry Division, which fought in France and Europe in 1945. The Army in 2001 named Eagle Base in Bosnia-Herzegovina after Conner, who died in 1998 in Clinton County, Ky., where he lived after his fighting days and served 17 years as president of the Clinton County Farm Bureau. "He was a real hero," said attorney Donald Todd of Lexington, who represents Conner's family. Conner's citation for the Distinguished Service Cross states that on Jan. 24, 1945, near Houssen, France, he slipped away from a military hospital with a hip wound to rejoin his unit rather than return home to Kentucky and unreeled a telephone wire, plunged into a shallow ditch in front of the battle line and directed multiple rounds of fire for three hours as German troops continued their offensive, sometimes getting within five yards of Conner's position. The board first rejected Conner's application in 1997 on its merits and turned away an appeal in June 2000, saying at the time no new evidence warranted a hearing or a new decoration despite more than a dozen letters of support for Conner. In the years that followed, lawmakers in Kentucky, Tennessee and three other states passed resolutions backing the effort to see Conner receive the Medal of Honor. After Chilton found three eyewitness accounts to Conner's deeds in 2006, Pauline Conner resubmitted the case to the board in 2008 — two years after the statute of limitations expired. A bipartisan group of current and former members of Congress has backed Conner's application in the past, including retired Sen. Bob Dole, a Kansas Republican and World War II vet; retired Sen. Wendell Ford, a Democrat from Kentucky; current Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky; and Whitfield, who represents Conner's home town near the Tennessee line. Noted World War II historian Steven Ambrose, who died in 2002, wrote in November 2000 to support Conner's application, saying his actions were "far above the call of duty." While the military board has upgraded other recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross to a Medal of Honor, the action is rare. As of 2012, the last year available, 178 Distinguished Service Crosses had been elevated to Medal of Honor status out of 13,000 issued since 1917. Military policy dictates that the first decoration must be reexamined, rejustified and then re-evaluated with new evidence before any action can be taken. Conner's commander in World War II, retired Maj. Gen. Lloyd B. Ramsey of Salem, Va., filed an affidavit saying Conner's work, while injured, provided valuable intelligence. "There is no doubt that Lt. Conner should have been awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions," Ramsey wrote. "One of the most disappointing regrets of my career is not having the Medal of Honor awarded to the most outstanding soldier I've ever had the privilege of command- ing." [Source: Associated Press | Brett Barrouquere | 12 Mar 2014 ++] This article was altered to fit into the space allotted please see full article at the source above.

L.T. Garlin Murl Connor
FORT MCCOY HOST RETIREMENT APPRECIATION

Retiree appreciation days will be held at Fort McCoy, WI on September 5, 2014.

Retiree appreciation days are a great source of the latest information for retirees and family members in Wisconsin. RADs vary from installation to installation but in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups and various other services. Some Retirement Appreciation Days include special events such as dinners, or golf tournaments. Contact your Retirement Service Officer at Fort McCoy for more information on their Retirement Appreciation Day!

September 5, 2014.

For more information call (608) 388-3716

Waushara County Veterans Services

CLOSED

June 9-13, 2014

for National Accreditation

Normal office hours resume: Monday June 16th, 2014.