

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT, SEPTEMBER, 2020

by

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1. At our Feb. meeting, member organizations that were present volunteered to work on the congressional delegations of the states they selected, but so far, we have not had any new cosponsors from these states (Harold Washington American Legion: MN, NWVU: IN, Veterans for Peace: HI, Blue Star Platoon: WI, Vet Tech US: MI). We can still contact congressional staffers, even though there is the COVID-19 pandemic. At the meeting, I will ask the reps of the various organizations about how things have been going for them on getting more co-sponsors.

We got one more co-sponsor in the past month: Vicente Gonzalez (D-TX). So far, there are 70D and 1R co-sponsors.

2. As for all of the other bills that we have been advocating/tracking, there has been no progress on any of them. On the Federal level: H. R. 3932/S. 1573 (elimination of co-pays for preventive treatment) and H. R. 6845/S. 3724 (no co-payments for preventive services relating to COVID-19).

On the State level: HJR 84 (resolution urging the IL Congressional Delegation to cosponsor/support HR 96); H. R. 4903 (Veterans Bill of Rights); and H. B. 4944 (that would consider vets with less than honorable administrative discharges the same as those with Honorable Discharges when it comes to State programs). HJR 84 could get passed in late Nov./early Dec., but nothing will happen before that.

3. The WiFi signal at JBVAMC is now working, so we will be using it in the future for hybrid (in-person as well as zoom, for those who can not attend in person) meetings.

4. The next Town Haul Meeting for JBVAMC is at noon, Wednesday, Sept. 30, 1200-1300. It will not be in person. Don't forget to RSVP for it. Send your phone number to ContactJBVA@va.gov or call 312-569-6402 by Monday, Sept. 28.

It looks like they will once again attempt to use the system whereby just prior to the start time, you will get a robocall, where you press 1 (or some other number), to join in. The last time they tried this, they said that if you have a question, but they were unable to get to it during the hour, you will be given the opportunity to leave your question with a Patient Advocate.

5. We are once again soliciting statements from candidates that will be posted on our website. The response in previous years has been dismal, to put it mildly, but this year, we are in contact with the Parties' committees for vets. It is easier to contact the campaigns of the candidates, because their email addresses are listed in the Voter Guide that I previously spammed out. If anyone deleted it and wants to see it now, just ask me.

6. It's once again flu shot season. This year, there is an additional shot available for those over 65, the Adjuvanted Flu Vaccine, with an additional immune booster. The last time I saw a doctor, I asked for advice on which one to get, and I was advised, that with my medical problems, that I should get the Adjuvanted.

Unfortunately, the VA is not giving it. Walgreens has it, but they no longer have the VA contract. CVS has the contract, but their contract with the VA does not cover it. This appears to be an example of the VA putting money over our healthcare.

We can also get flu shots at a VA designated Urgent Care facility without any special authorization or paperwork. From the list, I contacted the Physicians Immediate Care group (under Presence) and Mile Square (affiliated with the U. of IL), but neither had the Adjuvanted shot. I also called the Midwest Express group, but they will not know until they get their supply, later this month. If you are able to find the Adjuvanted shot that we can get, please notify me.

7. To learn more about the Urgent Care program, including seeing the list of urgent care centers in your area, go to VA.gov, and put urgent care in the search box. You will see reference to an Urgent Care Card, which would suggest that it is a separate ID card, but this card is merely a list of instructions and information about the program in a PDF. For Urgent Care matters, we are in Region 2.

8. Those who have been getting their healthcare through the VA for a long time will remember when those who were ill could go to the Walk In Clinic, AKA Sick Call, without calling in first. This was changed to where you would be required to call first, but you would get an appointment for that same day without any problems.

Due to the PANdemic, this is no longer the case. If you call in, you will be told to call the Triage Nurse (888-598-7793) in Madison, WI. Because so many veterans are having to call, they are overloaded, so you will give your information to a clerk, and the nurse will call you later, perhaps several hours later.

The nurse will then send a message to your local scheduler who will call you. They will try to do everything in their power to keep you from seeing a doctor. If, for example, you have an earache, they may try to get you a telephone appointment, as if the doctor could look into your ear over the phone. If you press the issue, they will try to schedule you for an appointment some time in the future, perhaps a week later, even if, in this case, you may have an infection that could lead to a fever. In other words, the only way that you will get somewhat timely care is to fight for it.

9. Don't forget to participate in the VA's Activate study. You will be interviewed for approx. 45 minutes about VA Healthcare, and you will get a \$25 gift card for Walmart or Amazon. Call 734-644-1918. Like voting, it's your chance to be heard.

10. On Sept. 14, the WFLD (FOX Chicago) News at Noon, had a clip "COVID Connection to Oral Health," where Sylvia Perez interviewed NMH Dentist Mark Cannon about the connection of poor dental care with COVID-19 and other diseases.