

**EARL G. JAQUES, JR**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
Twenty - Seventh District



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STATE OF DELAWARE  
LEGISLATIVE HALL  
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

COMMITTEES  
Veterans Affairs, Chair  
Education  
Health & Human Development  
Labor  
Transportation, Land Use &  
Infrastructure

**Veterans Affairs Committee**  
Meeting Minutes  
June 2, 2010

Chairman Jaques called the meeting to order at 4:11 p.m. Members present included Reps. Wilson, Kovach, Briggs-King, Schooley and George. For a list of guests, please see the attached document.

Chairman Jaques stated the committee would be hearing from Mr. Charles Dorman, Director of the Delaware VA Medical Center, regarding women veteran issues.

Mr. Dorman thanked the committee for their time and was glad to be able to address many of the issues that have been brought to the attention of the committee. He stated that patient advocates have been established within the VA to improve communication about issues. He then introduced Mary Alice Johnson, Associate Director of Patient Care Services at the Wilmington VA Medical Center, to speak in more detail about the services they provide.

Ms. Johnson stated that one area of her responsibility is with the women's health program. Because women veterans are the fastest growing group within the military, many provisions have been made to establish programs to meet the needs of these particular patients, not only with gender specific needs but also primary care needs. She stated that the Wilmington Medical Center has always had a women's health department, but the program is now moving many of its services out to CBOCs in New Jersey, Dover and Georgetown. They are also establishing residency centers around the state to make sure women are informed about the services offered. The VA hospital currently employs a private gynecologist to come once a month and perform specific gynecological procedures or surgeries. They have also established partnerships with many hospitals around the state to provide mammograms to women veterans. This enables patients to visit a doctor within their community instead of traveling to Wilmington for the procedure. They also offer support groups geared towards behavior health issues such as diabetes and hypertension. Discussion to offer parenting classes for women to help with balancing work and motherhood has also occurred, and they hope to implement the classes in the near future. Counseling for sexual trauma is offered, and a specific physician also works with transgender patients. Luncheons for women veterans are also planned throughout the year to inform women about the services offered.

In regards to services regarding sexual trauma, Rep. George asked what kind of counseling was offered and asked if one-on-one counseling and group counseling was

offered. She also questioned if there was any knowledge sharing between the VA Hospital and other non-profit groups offering group counseling. Ms. Johnson stated that currently they offer one-on-one counseling. She stated that they employ a Counseling Coordinator, out of the Wilmington VA Hospital, and that this position would have contact with other non-profits.

Rep. Briggs-King asked where the locations for sex trauma counseling take place. Ms. Johnson responded that veterans can visit any of the locations of CBOCs to receive counseling.

Rep. Briggs-King asked what specific OB/GYN services are offered to women veterans. Ms. Johnson stated that all OB/GYN services besides delivering babies are offered through their services. They provide fertility counseling, initial pregnancy screenings, and stressed again the employed gynecologist to perform specific gynecological surgeries. However, once a woman veteran is pregnant they receive services at other hospitals on their fee-based program.

Rep. Jaques asked if a veteran would need to travel to Elsmere in order to give birth. Mr. Dorman responded that they would not be required to travel to Elsmere, but that they could deliver at the closest hospital. He clarified that they have contracts with most hospitals around the state. The contracts allow for the VA to pay Medicare prices for the services.

Rep. Jaques asked if Delaware had clinics offering Pap smear services. Ms. Johnson responded that clinics or CBOCs around the state offer Pap smear services. However, she did clarify that for any type of gynecological surgery, the patient would be required to travel to Wilmington for the procedure.

Rep. George asked for clarification. It was her understanding that if a patient needed a surgical procedure, they would be required to go to Wilmington, but if the patient needed an annual visit or Pap smear, they could visit county CBOCs. Ms. Johnson and Mr. Dorman said that was correct.

Rep. George asked if they knew the number of patients to come in seeking help for sexual trauma. Ms. Johnson said they did not have the numbers on hand but that numbers could be provided. (Please note: These statistics were provided by email the following day and are attached to the minutes.)

Mr. Dorman stated that in the past 2/3 of 2010 they have already treated more women than in all of 2009. He stated that they saw 1,717 female veterans in Fiscal Year 2009 but that the numbers of female patients continues to rise because in 2010 up until May 2010, we have seen 1,559 patients.

Rep. George asked what this increase was attributed to and if the VA has expanded their outreach. Mr. Dorman stated that he believed this increase was due to the overall

increase of women enlisting in the military. Mr. Dorman also stated that they have been more aggressive with their outreach as well.

Rep. George asked if veterans on active duty had anyone available to refer them to the VA and its services. Mr. Dorman stated that for the most part he believes veterans leaving active duty are focused exactly on that. These veterans are provided information and resources about the available services but most do not take advantage of the help initially. Veterans have five years of eligibility, and Mr. Dorman believes it is during outreach efforts during these five years where veterans finally get the necessary help.

Rep. George stated that she believed the federal government needs to do more to encourage women veterans who encounter sexual trauma to get help when needed. Rep. George then asked how much information sharing was occurring between victims of sexual trauma, the VA centers, and the military in regards to military rules and regulations. Mr. Dorman responded that the issue of sexual trauma is a sensitive one but that it was also not one relating just to women. Men have reported incidents of sexual trauma as well. He clarified that they document all claims so the information is available to all military departments, but that the Delaware VA is not necessarily a liaison to discuss many of these issues at a federal level or with the Department of Defense.

Rep. Briggs-King asked if a event of sexual trauma is reported during counseling, will a claim or report be made. Mr. Dorman stated that if a criminal act was committed and the patient wants to pursue and go public with the incident, then law enforcement would be contacted.

Rep. Jaques asked if all categories were currently accepted at the VA hospital. Mr. Dorman stated that prior to 2001, priority 8 veterans were grandfathered in for services. However, currently priority 8 veterans are provided services based on income within their geographical location.

Rep. Jaques asked what percentage of category 8 veterans the Delaware VA serves. Mr. Dorman stated that in Cape May they service about 500 category 8 veterans but that in the Wilmington facility the number is lower.

Rep. Jaques asked what types of services were provided for women suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Mr. Dorman stated they have a large number of services for PTSD patients and that in the last three years they have hired an additional 50 positions in the behavior health services primarily focusing on PTSD. However, he was unsure if any gender specific services were offered for patients suffering from PTSD.

Rep. Jaques asked what type of relationship the Veterans Hospital had with the Delaware Veterans Home. Ms. Johnson responded that there was a good established relationship between the two organizations. The VA hospital has some oversight over the Veterans Home and conducts annual inspections of the facility. Additionally, if any negative incident occurs, the Veterans Home must contact the VA Hospital when reported.

Rep. Jaques stated issues regarding prescriptions availability have been brought to his attention. He asked if certain prescriptions were only available at specific hospitals. Mr. Dorman believed this was an old issue. If a doctor believes a patient needs a prescription, the doctor can make a request for the medication and it should be made available to the patient.

Ms. Johnson concluded, stating that they are very proud of the VA hospital. While the Wilmington facility is old, many renovations are taking place. She stated that in the last year alone, they have been granted \$30 million for construction purposes. This money has contributed to the new 10,000 square foot emergency department, a 10,000 square foot Hospice and Palliative Care Addition, a renovated recovery and G.I. area, and third floor to the Clinical Addition which consolidates the OEF/OIF and Women Veterans' Healthcare programs.

Rep. Jaques thanked the speakers for their time and valuable information and without any further questions or comments, adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Clark