



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH
VETERANS' RURAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE



MEETING MINUTES

January 30, 2012

The Veterans' Rural Health Advisory Committee (VRHAC) convened its winter conference call on Monday, January 30, 2012.

Committee members present:

Charles Abramson
James Ahrens, *Chairman*
Bruce Behringer
Michael Dobmeier
Rachel Gonzales-Hanson
Hilda Heady
Major General John Libby
Terry Schow

Committee members absent:

Cynthia Barrigan
James Floyd
Susan Karol, M.D.*
Tom Morris*

Office of Rural Health Staff Present:

Anthony Achampong
Judy Bowie
Elmer Clark
Katie Dziak
Dr. Thomas Klobucar
Michael Privman
Dr. Mary Beth Skupien
Sheila Warren

**Ex-officio members*

Presenters:

Mary Beth Skupien, Ph.D., MS, RN, *Director, Office of Rural Health (ORH)*
Judy Bowie, MA, *Designated Federal Officer (DFO), VRHAC and Management Analyst, ORH*

Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Ahrens opened the meeting with welcoming remarks.

Approval of October 13-14, 2011 VRHAC Meeting Minutes

The Committee unanimously approved the meeting minutes from the October 13-14, 2011 meeting in Portland, Maine.

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Planning and Discussion of VRHAC Semi-Annual Meeting Uvalde, Texas

Dr. Skupien opened by giving an overview of the March meeting location, dates, the town hall event, and the Veteran Outreach event.

Mrs. Hanson stated that the meeting would be held in Uvalde, Texas at the Community Health Development, Inc. The committee will actually be staying at the River Rim Resort on the River.

- The official travel day is Wednesday March 28, and the general meeting will begin Thursday morning at 8:00 a.m. followed by the committee's annual dinner at the River Rim Resort.
- Day 2 of the general meeting will begin at 8:00 a.m. on March 30, followed by a Town Hall meeting at the Multiplex Center, Veterans Way, Uvalde, Texas from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
- A Veterans Outreach event will be held on Saturday, March 31 at the Multiplex Center from 10:00 – 4:00 p.m.
- The committee will travel to Uvalde, from San Antonio, Texas airport to the River Rim Resort in Concan, Texas on March 28 and return to the airport on Saturday March 31.
- Judy Bowie will send out an information email describing hotel and travel requirements.

The Agenda for the Uvalde meeting was discussed. The State Director, the Eastern Region Veterans Rural Health Resource Center Director, the Network and Medical Center Director from the South Texas Veteran Health Care System (VISN 17), and Mrs. Hanson will speak.

Chairman Ahrens asked Mrs. Hanson if she would provide an overview of the Community Health Development Delivery System. She will highlight the services they provide to Veterans, and the difficulties they face trying to provide specialty care services. A tour of the facilities will be included for the VRHAC.

Mr. Behringer asked Mrs. Hanson if she could enlighten the committee on two issues:

- How dual care is coordinated between two providers when the Veteran is receiving care from the VA, and from the community health center?
- How do you share medical record information?

Mr. Behringer asked if Telehealth services could be extended beyond rural community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC) where there are contracted clinics.

Ms. Heady requested a brief overview on the White House Rural Health Council (WHRHC) activities and collaborations with the Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP). This will be done at the meeting.

The Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) will be invited to speak as well as the National Guard. General Libby asked Mrs. Hanson if the VSOs worked for the Veteran Service Organizations. Mrs. Hanson responded that they are part-time County employees and usually represent themselves and other veterans.

Outreach Event Update:

The framework is being planned to host the outreach event, by utilizing the National ORH Toolkit. There will be:

- Over 50 community Partners in attendance.
- Events creating awareness on how to access services
- Meals provided to Veterans and their families.
- Health information resources provided.
- VSO and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) booths present.

Dr. Skupien shared with the committee that the ORH National Toolkit was developed by Dr. Bair and his staff in the Western Resource Center.

Office of Rural Health (ORH) Update – Dr. Mary Beth Skupien

ORH has successfully implemented over 200 ORH projects for FY2012; \$143M for sustaining projects, \$71.5M on CBOCs and \$35M on Project ARCH (Access Received Closer to Home).

- ORH can track obligations daily.
- ORH has implemented measures to track more frequently, project performance and funding accountability.

Project ARCH

- ORH has assumed all operations of Project ARCH effective October 1, 2011. Collette Alvarez a former VRC is managing this program.
- Project ARCH has served over 800 Veterans in the first four months of operation. The project has saved Veterans in Maine over 12,769 travel miles in the month of November 2011 alone.
- OHR is tracking the number of Veterans being seen (Veteran consults), patient satisfaction, and quality clinical measures. Veteran needs assessments are also being performed.
- Evaluation of Veteran needs within Project ARCH is ongoing and will continue over the next few months (e.g. physical therapy is needed after Veterans have hip surgery).
- Patient satisfaction results will be obtained this year.
- ORH will be allocating \$35M for Project ARCH this year (FY2012).

Communications:

- Dr. Skupien presented a national webinar titled “Caring for Rural Veterans,” for National Rural Health Day in November. A copy of the presentation will be distributed to the committee members.
- Dr. Skupien shared with the committee that she is actively participating in the President’s Rural Council Initiatives. Dr. Skupien is working with Tom Morris, on developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) related to education, and joint rural training (Security/Privacy) opportunities.

The highlights of the three Veterans' Rural Health Resource Center (VRHRC) accomplishments were presented to the committee:

- Central Region: There was a ribbon cutting for ceremony for the new Telemental Health Clinic for Veterans at Western Illinois University, which was built on the idea of collaboration with non-VA entities. Dr. Klobucar shared they have such a large Veteran student population at that university.
- Eastern Region: The pilot study on follow-up of Multiple Sclerosis (MS) care has become a multi-site trial in collaboration with both MS centers of Excellence in the east and the west. Ten sites throughout the country are going to extend this study.
- ORH is collaborating with the Veterans Transportation Services (VTS) to address transportation needs and developing efficient and effective transportation services in rural communities.
- ORH is collaborating with the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) and National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH) on several ORH Strategic Plan Refresh Objectives for FY2012 and beyond.
- All ORH positions are filled at this time. ORH recently hired Dr. Thomas Klobucar, Program Analyst, and Ms. Lindsay Knauff, Visual Specialist and Web-master.

Chairman Ahrens asked Dr. Skupien if ORH could send the Resource Center annual report out to the committee and if she could discuss the rurality workgroup in March this will be done.

Chairman Ahrens asked if there are any State, National, or Regional models for Veterans transitioning back into the community that will provide job training programs and access to medical records. This will be discussed at the March meeting. Dr. Skupien said she would contact Mr. Thomas Palladino, Texas State Director for the Veteran's Commission, to present at the meeting.

Ms. Heady expressed her concern with the increased number of homeless women Veterans seeking shelter, and the number with children. Ms. Heady asked ORH if someone from the VISN could talk about collaboration with community based agencies and look at success models for women's healthcare. This will be part of the March meeting.

Public Comments

There were no public comments for the record.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned on January 30, 2012 at 12:18 p.m. EST.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Bowie

Judy Bowie
Designated Federal Officer
Veterans' Rural Health Advisory Committee

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes from the January 31, 2012 meeting of the Veterans' Rural Health Advisory Committee are true and correct.

James F. Ahrens

James F. Ahrens
Chairman
Veterans' Rural Health Advisory Committee

These minutes will be formally considered by the Committee, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the meeting minutes.