



MEETING MINUTES

June 22, 2012

The Veterans' Rural Health Advisory Committee (VRHAC) convened its spring teleconference on Friday, 22 2012.

Committee members present:

Charles Abramson
James Ahrens, *Chairman*
Cynthia Barrigan
Bruce Behringer
Janice Casillas
Rich Davis*
Michael Dobmeier
James Floyd
Rachel Gonzales-Hanson
Hilda Heady
Admiral W. Clyde Marsh
Terry Schow
Debra Wilson

Committee members absent:

Susan Karol, M.D.*
Tom Morris*

*Ex –Officio Members

Presenters and other participants:

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

Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Ahrens opened the meeting with welcoming remarks.

Approval of the March 29-30, 2012 VRHAC Meeting Minutes. The Committee unanimously approved the minutes from the March meeting in Uvalde, Texas.

Planning and Discussion of VRHAC Semi-Annual Meeting Morgantown, West Virginia

Dr. Skupien opened by giving an overview of the October meeting location, dates. She asked Ms. Heady if she could provide details about the meeting.

Ms. Heady stated the meeting would be held in Morgantown, West Virginia at the Waterfront Place Hotel.

- The official travel day is Wednesday, October 24, followed by the committees annual dinner at the Heston Farm Winery and Distillery. The general meeting will begin on October 25, at 8:00 a.m. followed by a Town Hall meeting at the Waterfront Place Hotel.
- Day 2 of the general meeting will begin on October 26, at 8 a.m. at the Waterfront Place Hotel.
- Judy Bowie will send out an information email describing hotel, travel, and transportation requirements (She will coordinate mass transportation, if possible).
- Agenda items were discussed for the October meeting.

VRHAC Accomplishments

- Dr. Skupien provided a brief overview of the VRHACs accomplishments as requested by the VRHAC.
- Ms. Bowie will have the VRHAC accomplishments laminated into a two-sided pocket size document.

Project Access Received Closer to Home (ARCH) Overview

- Project ARCH has served over 2100 Veterans in the program to date.
- Five sites were selected and are providing VHA healthcare services by partnering with non-VHA community healthcare providers. Two sites are providing primary care and three for inpatient/outpatient care.
- The evaluation covers a 3-year time frame (2012-2014). The evaluation will be complete in 2014, and it will measure the feasibility of Project ARCH implementation nationally.
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Office of Rural Health (ORH) Update – Dr. Mary Beth Skupien

- One hundred and seventy (170) Veterans attended the “Outreach/Benefits Fair” event that took place on March 31, in Uvalde, Texas.
- On March 31, the VISN 6 Rural Health Teams engaged 9,000 Veterans at the Welcome Home for Vietnam Veteran’s event.
- The first Native Veteran formal consultation session took place on April 3-4 in Washington, DC. ORH was well represented with field projects by Kelly Duke, VISN 16 and Doug Edwards, VISN 1, and ORH Director presenting at the meeting. In addition, Dr. Skupien presented at the Native consultation session in Nebraska on June 17.
- As part of the White House Rural Council Initiative, ORH, and Health Resources Service Administration (HRSA) and the Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) are collaborating to distribute vouchers to Veterans for Health Information Exams. To date, they have already had over 40 requests and sent vouchers to 26 Veterans.
- Dr. Skupien briefed the Senate and House Appropriations Committee on VA’s efforts to improve access to quality health care to rural Veterans, including ORH’s role and resources as well as the current and planned initiatives to provide additional support and access for Veterans in rural and highly rural areas.
- On May 25th, Dr. Skupien was interviewed by the US News reporter on the background and accomplishments of ORH since its inception.

- ORH solicited Fiscal Year 2013 project proposals and received approximately 320 project requests. Final funding determinations for the approved projects will be completed by July 6, 2012 and VISNs and Programs will be notified.
- The ORH team met with the Office of Information Technology to discuss the Broadband Mapping project we are engaged in to determine gaps in broadband coverage in all rural Veteran communities. They are going to partner with us to complement this activity once the gaps and needs are identified.
- The comprehensive assessment of the VRHRCs is in process now by ORH as well as all the telehealth projects ORH has funded since 2009. The findings of these assessments will be shared with the VRHAC in October 2012.

Overview of Dual-User Studies

Mary Charlton, Deputy Director, Central Region, Veteran Rural Health Resource Center (VRHRC) and Al West, Deputy Director, Eastern VRHRC provided a brief overview of their findings of the dual use studies.

- Received a Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) grant to look at VA and non-VA health care use in Iowa, Maine, New Hampshire, and South Dakota to see how the Veterans are using both systems of care. Mary will collect data from Wellmark Insurance Company (In Iowa and South Dakota) and Al will collect data from a claims database in Maine and New Hampshire, which is a part of a nationwide project to get everything in one repository.
- The project will be complete in two years.
- The Central Region is developing a tool-kit for non-VA provider use.

American Legion Rural Health Care Report

Dr. Skupien provided an overview of the American Legion's Final Recommendations:

- Revisit definition of rural and highly rural – Dr. Skupien reported that a committee has already been established and is working on refining the definition of rural and highly rural.
- Partner with local post offices in rural areas that can share space – Chairman Ahrens suggested that we add this to the agenda for our October meeting.
- Invest in more telehealth capabilities dependent on Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Veterans.
- Continue expansion of community base outpatient clinics (CBOCs) and mobile Clinics.
- Implement a Veterans Transportation Service Department within each VA Medical Center.
- Improve communication between CBOCs and medical centers, and more visibility.

Workforce Management Call with Hilda Heady, Tom Morris and Dan Mareck

Dr. Skupien provided a brief overview of her call with Ms. Heady, Tom Morris, and Dan Mareck from HRSA on the Workforce study recommendations by the VRHAC.

- Tom Morris is consulting with Mary Wakefield, Director, HRSA to compile a list of Health Care Providers who have contracts utilizing Medicare numbers linking data.

- ORH will meet with HRSA Health Shortage Designation Director in July.

Discussion of OEF/OIF Candidate

- The Committee expressed the desire to recruit a younger OEF/OIF Veteran to serve on the VRHAC.
- The committee came to consensus to have Mr. Schow and Mr. Marsh recruit names, resumes and submit them to Mr. Ahrens and ORH Director by June 29, for consideration. A nomination will go forward in July for the vacant VRHAC seat.

Committee Management Items and Upcoming Meeting

- October Meeting – October 25-26, 2012 – Waterfront Place Hotel Morgantown, WVA
- Behringer and Abe Abramson terms end on September 30, 2012.

Public Comments

There were no public comments for the record.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned on June 22, 2012 at 4:10 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 June 22, 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.