



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON
October 10, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR UNDER SECRETARIES, ASSISTANT SECRETARIES, OTHER KEY OFFICIALS, AND FIELD FACILITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Employment and Advancement of Women, Minorities and People with Disabilities

Our mission is to serve America's veterans and their families with dignity and compassion. As their principal advocate, we must ensure that they receive medical care, benefits, social support, and lasting memorials that promote the health, welfare, and dignity of all veterans in recognition of their service to our Nation. To accomplish these responsibilities, we must have a high performing, diverse workforce that is inclusive of all Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees.

Of the Cabinet-level Departments, VA has an impressive representation of women, minorities, and people with disabilities. However, we must do more to improve that representation at the GS-13 through the Senior Executive Service levels. Each of you has a direct responsibility to assure that your organization and workplace reflect the rich diversity of America and our veterans.

The most important, single factor in attracting and retaining women, minorities and people with disabilities is direct, conscientious involvement by all managers. Managers can identify where external targeted recruiting efforts will best succeed and stimulate interest in VA careers. We should also ensure that we take advantage of the very talented pool of employees within the Department from which we can draw, such as nurses and nurse executives and other professional fields. Leveraging our in-house talent enhances our ability to retain exceptional employees and provide them opportunity for continual growth.

VA managers must compete for the best and brightest employees, who are precisely the people we need to serve veterans. I have identified several initiatives below. I expect full cooperation from each of you in support of these efforts as we reach out to women, minorities, and people with disabilities. The initiatives include:

- Partnering with the Office of Personnel Management on its initiative to improve the representation and the career development of underrepresented groups;

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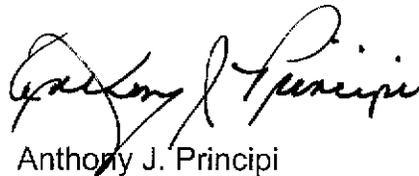
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and Field Facility Directors

- Working with professional organizations to enhance VA's ability to recruit and retain highly-skilled and qualified women, minorities, and people with disabilities and prepare them to be future VA executives;
- Identifying ways to publicize and recognize accomplishments;
- Conducting a survey and focus groups with women, minorities, and people with disabilities; and
- Ensuring the development and implementation of mentoring programs.

I have already taken steps to address the concerns of women in the Department. I commissioned a Task Force, comprised of women executives in Central Office and the field, to develop a comprehensive plan addressing the needs of women in the Department and to make recommendations to me on enhancing representation of women at the GS-13 and above grade levels. The Task Force completed its work. The report contains strategies for success that will move VA into a position of leadership in the employment and advancement of women. Additionally, I directed the expansion of the Women's Executive Leadership Forum to include women from VA field facilities.

Likewise, steps will be taken to focus on and address issues pertaining to the underrepresentation of minorities and people with disabilities in GS-13 and above positions. I expect your support in identifying causes and solutions.

I am holding each of you accountable for ensuring that you leverage diversity in your respective organization. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Mr. William H. Campbell, Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, at (202) 273-4901.



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