

**VETERANS RURAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

September 12 – 14

Zoom virtual meeting

September 12th: 11 am – 3:00 pm (ET)

September 13th: 11 am – 3:00 pm (ET)

September 14th: 11 am – 3:00 pm (ET)

NOTES**Attendees:****Committee Members Present:**

Deanna Lamb, Chair
Joe Parsetich
Marcus Cox
Vanessa Meade
Francisco Ivarra
Keith Mueller
Lonnie Wangen
Pavithra Ellison
Andrew Behrman

Travis Lovejoy
Shannon Boyles
Sergio Romero
Anthony Achampong
Nancy Dailey
Bret Hicken
Karyn Johnstone
Maura Timm
Crystal Cruz
Matthew Rogers
Ajay Dhawan
Russell Peal
Virginia Grundler
John Shuster
Christopher Busk
Mark Rubertus
Ryan Lilly
Daniel Abrahamson
Cynthia Sopko
Amanda Schutz
Thomas Sebastian Valley
Abraham Staggs
Barbara Hyduke
Kristin Pettey
Tina Nelson
Matt Bristol

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Ben Smith
Kristi Martinsen
Kellie Kubena

Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:

Sheila R. Robinson, DFO
Judy Bowie, Committee Manager
Peter Kaboli
Carolyn Turvey
Jaime Wilson
Kelly Lora Lewis
Sarah Ono
Samatha Solimeo
Nikki Sanchez
Phillip Welch
Bret Hicken
Keith Myers
Matthew Vincenti
Ryan Sharpe
Byron Bair

Consultants Present:

Stephen Miles
Elizabeth Schwartz
Jasmine Williams
Natalie Gaynor
Robert Derby



Public Attendees:

Panangala Sidath, CRS

Wilbur Woodis, IHS

Clay Ward, OTGR

Juanita J Mullen

Col. Thomas Driscoll

David L Albright

M. Bryant Howren

Andrew Herrin

Logan Lecates

Matthew Mangan

Tess Wrzesinski, SVAC

Carol Wetuski, USDA

K. Conwell Smith, APA

**Meeting Objectives**

1. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of physician hiring and human resources policy challenges impeding rural Veterans' access to health care.
2. VRHAC will gain increased understanding of VA efforts to streamline the rural clinician hiring process to support rural Veterans' access to health care.
3. VRHAC will develop rural clinician hiring and retention policy recommendations for the VA Secretary.

Monday, September 12, 2022

Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Chair convened meeting and reviewed agenda.

Webinar Tools & Instructions

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting, and facilitation protocols.

2022 Fall Meeting Focus: Human Resources and Hiring Practices

Peter Kaboli, Acting Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Provided background information on rural health care challenges and Office of Rural Health structure and program portfolio, with an emphasis on rural workforce recruitment and incentive programs.

Presentation: Overview of VHA Hiring & Human Resources

Crystal Cruz, Executive Director, Workforce Solutions (106A4), Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Discussed how clinical occupational shortages and widespread labor market challenges cause difficulty recruiting and retaining clinical and non-clinical staff.
- Highlighted several VHA recruitment and retention strategies, including Education Debt Reduction Program, scholarships, and student loan repayment programs.
- Reviewed hiring and turnover rates for rural and highly rural areas. Discussed record-high turnover rates driven by resignations and inter-agency government transfers.
- Discussed recruitment and retention provisions included in H.R. 3967, the Honoring our PACT Act of 2022, including an up-front lump sum payment incentive and increased student loan repayment caps.

Panel: CRHs Approach to Addressing Rural Clinician Shortages

Mr. Matt Rogers, PA-C, Director, Clinical Resource Hub (CRH), Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Dr. Ajay Dhawan, M.D, FACHE, Chief Officer, Specialty Care Services, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Provided overview of the Clinical Resource Hub (CRH) structure and described how CRHs provide critical health care services to Veterans living in rural and highly rural areas.
- Highlighted cross-VISN partnerships, including Tele-Nephrology and Tele-Cardiology, that utilize the CRH hub-and-spoke model to fill rural provider and specialty care gaps.

- Reviewed quarter by quarter unique patient and encounter growth, noting an exponential increase in utilization of the CRH model for specialty care services.
- Discussed expansion into additional specialty care services using established CRH foundation, leadership, and governance structure.

Wrap Up & Close

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns, and outstanding questions regarding the day's presentations.

Tuesday, September 13, 2022

Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Chair reconvened meeting and reviewed agenda.

Webinar Tools & Instructions

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting and facilitation protocols.

Presentation: VHA Hiring Challenges and Solutions

Russell Peal, CPRP, CMSR, Director, Workforce Recruitment & Retention Service (WRRS), Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Reviewed factors that impact physician recruitment to rural and highly rural locations including location, recruitment partners, and recruitment tools.
- Highlighted several recruitment tools including the Physician Workforce Blueprint, Total Rewards Brochure, and Enhanced Recruitment and Onboarding Model.
- Outlined the importance of "The Three C's" in recruitment – practice culture, candidate experience, and incorporating community.
- Discussed hiring and recruitment provisions included in the PACT Act and the HR Specialist Training and Accelerated Readiness (STAR) internship program.

Panel: Firsthand Experience of VHA Hiring Practices from Rural Physicians

Mark Rubertus, MD, Muskogee VAMC

N Chris Busk, MD, Salt Lake City VAMC

John L. Shuster Jr., MD, Director, Clinical Resource Hub, VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9)

- Provided an overview of experience working in rural VAMCs, including benefits and challenges of the clinician hiring process.

- Discussed the VA health care system as a viable alternative to private practice and methods to improve recruitment to rural areas including advertising open positions outside of USAJobs.
- Discussed the importance of highlighting the benefits of working in a rural area and expanding the scope of care at VA health care facilities

Advisory Committee Management Office (ACMO) Update

Jeff Moragne, Director, Advisory Committee Management Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Provided overview of the Federal Advisory Committee Act requirements and best practices.

Presentation: Hiring from a VISN Director Perspective

Ryan Lilly, MPA, Veterans Integrated Service Network Director, VISN 1, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Provided an overview of the staffing challenges facing VA health care facilities VISN-wide.
- Discussed VA's aging workforce compared to the workforce at private hospitals, noting the average age of a VHA new hire is 47.5 years old.
- Outlined how HR modernization and consolidation at the facility level has increased time to hire.
- Highlighted the importance of providing VHA legislative authority to move to Title 38 hiring process, allowing facilities more direct hire authority and to set pay based on market rates.
- Discussed the importance of building more VHA training programs in accordance with VA's educational mission.

Presentation: Alternative Solutions to Physician Shortages in Rural Areas

Daniel Abrahamson, CPO, National Program Manager, Mobile Prosthetic and Orthotic Care (MoPOC), Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Provided an overview of MoPOC, an Enterprise-Wide Initiative (EWI) that offers mobile care to Veterans living with mobility disabilities.
- Outlined the location of ten total sites and discussed possibility of expansion into the south and southeast.
- Discussed distributing job postings to trade-specific publications as a standard practice and removing VA-specific language to reach a broader audience.
- Discussed the challenges of process ownership throughout the onboarding process and proposed an automated scheduling of onboarding components including fingerprinting, background checks, credentialing, and health screenings.
- Answered questions about expanding the current MoPOC model to include other forms of specialized care.

Wrap Up & Close

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee reviewed highlights, concerns and outstanding questions regarding the day's presentations.

Wednesday, September 14, 2022**Welcome, Introductions and Meeting Overview**

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Chair reconvened meeting and reviewed agenda.

Webinar Tools & Instructions

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Reviewed Zoom functions, meeting, and facilitation protocols.

Introduction to Afternoon Facilitated Discussions

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Provided overview of facilitated discussion process to generate recommendations to VA Secretary.

Facilitated Discussions: Methodology and Application

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Explained brainstorm methodology tools and process for facilitated discussion.

Facilitated Discussion, Part 1 (Learnings from Fall 2022 Meeting)

Peter Kaboli, Acting Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee members engaged in rapid idea generation around the topics of HR policy and hiring challenges
- Committee engaged in discussion about emergent themes, expanding upon ideas and generating potential solutions to problems raised.

Facilitated Discussion, Part 2 (Learnings from Fall 2022 Meeting)

Peter Kaboli, Acting Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee expressed interest in exploring strategic planning for physician recruitment and retention strategies.
- Committee brainstormed strategies to create career pipeline for entry level clinical positions including creating training and educational programs.

- Committee used treatment tool to identify potential barriers or challenges to goals developed.

Facilitated Discussion, Part 3 (Brainstorm Recommendations)

Peter Kaboli, Acting Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Robert Derby, Strategic Planner, DCG Communications

- Committee brainstormed several recommendations based on meeting presentations and discussions, including building a recruitment platform for VHA and establishing a workforce management HR committee.
- Discussed revisiting VHA hiring standard operating procedures and creating an expert committee to review physician recruitment and onboarding process and provide recommendations to streamline hiring process.

Wrap Up & Close

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- Chair thanked Committee members for their work and adjourned meeting.

Public Comment Period

Peter Kaboli, Acting Executive Director, Office of Rural Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Deanna Lamb, Chair, Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee

- No public comments.



**Veterans Rural Health Advisory Committee Meeting Notes Signature Page
September 12 – 14, 2022**

X *Deanna Lamb*

Deanna Lamb
Chair

X *Sheila R. Robinson*

Sheila Robinson, DHA, FACHE, PMP
Designated Federal Officer