

VA**U.S. Department
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News Release

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Better health care for veterans and active-duty service members, and increased savings for taxpayers, are the results of greater coordination between the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Defense (DoD).

An executive council of senior VA and DoD health care officials is improving communication between the two departments, finding ways in which their health-care systems can work together, proposing and conducting joint research projects, and reducing or eliminating overlap in the services each department provides.

"It makes sense for us to find ways to work together better," said Kenneth W. Kizer, M.D., VA Under Secretary for Health. "While our missions are different, the work of our two organizations in the health-care arena is very similar. What we're doing is combining the strengths of our two organizations in ways that will enable us to provide world-class health care now and for many years to come."

"Improved collaboration between our two agencies is long overdue," said Edward D. Martin, M.D., Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. "The initiatives we have begun to implement should make a major difference in the care we provide to those who so proudly serve our nation, and those who have served so proudly in the past."

The two departments have already agreed to conduct joint exit physicals for service members who are returning to civilian life. Previously, DoD conducted an exit physical before separation, and VA would conduct another physical afterwards. VA's requirements are now incorporated into DoD exit physicals. Also, VA is conducting physicals for separating service members filing claims with the department before the person leaves service.

In addition, DoD and VA have agreed to create a committee to make it easier for the two departments to enter into reimbursable arrangements that are mutually beneficial.

Other initiatives the executive council is working on include:

- Developing a long term effort that builds on the experience of the existing Joint Gulf War Illnesses Group through the establishment of a joint Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board.
- Allowing both veterans and service members to make use of VA "Centers of Excellence" and DoD's "Specialized Treatment System," which are specialized treatment centers within each department providing world-class care. Agreements have already been made to share VA's spinal cord injury, blindness, amputation and traumatic brain injury centers, and DoD's burn units.
- Creating compatible, computer-based patient records to ensure a smooth transfer of information between DoD's health-care system and VA's.
- Working on ways the two departments can share existing automation and technological products and collaborate in the ongoing and future development of medical automation and technology.
- Creating and publishing joint clinical practice guidelines for disease treatment.
- Collaborating in or combining laboratory and pathology programs.

