



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

P O BOX 2448
RICHMOND, VA 23218

KAREN REMLEY, MD, MBA, FAAP
STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

TTY 7-1-1 OR
1-800-828-1120

November 9, 2011

Dear Colleague,

As our nation prepares to honor the men and women who have served in the military on Veterans Day, I know that many of you receiving this letter are veterans or have family members who are veterans and I want to personally thank you for your service to our country.

Let me also introduce Paul Galanti, Commissioner of Veterans Services for the Commonwealth of Virginia. A highly decorated Navy veteran, he flew 97 combat missions before being shot down and captured on June 17, 1966. He remained a prisoner of war of the North Vietnamese for nearly seven years and was released on February 12, 1973. His personal decorations include the Silver Star, combat awards of two Legions of Merit and the Bronze Star, nine combat Air Medals and two Purple Hearts. Virginia is fortunate to have Commissioner Galanti overseeing the services and programs for our veterans.

Virginia is home to hundreds of thousands of veterans, many of whom served multiple deployments in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and may become patients of yours. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), there are more than 800,000 veterans in the state. That means 1 in 8 Virginians is a veteran.

Additionally, over the next six months, 1,200 – 2,000 servicemen and women in the Virginia National Guard will be returning home, many from the front lines of combat. While some will make their way through the VA for their health care, many will not; they will come to you. Each of us would like to provide the very best care to every patient and knowing their specific medical and social history can significantly change our diagnosis and treatment plan. Below are resources available to assist you in the coordination of care and support and to provide straightforward language to begin a discussion with a patient who may be a veteran. And lastly, there's information on where to turn for additional services for these brave men and women.

First and foremost, there is the Virginia Department of Veterans Services Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP). Mandated by law, VWWP provides behavioral health, rehabilitation services and support to veterans, National Guard members, reservists and their family members. These services are coordinated through local/regional VWWP consortia consisting of community providers, including community services boards, brain injury services providers, VA Medical facilities and other public and private providers. To learn more about VWWP and to locate the Regional Coordinator who serves your locality, go to www.wearevirginiaveterans.org. The Regional Program Offices can be accessed under "contact."

To help get you started, VWWP has provided six questions health care professionals should ask when assessing any patient who may be a veteran:

- **Have you or a family member ever served in the U.S. Military?**
Many women, Guard members or those who have not been deployed to combat believe that they did not achieve "veteran" status. The definition of a veteran in state law, which is consistent with federal law, is--*veteran means an individual who has served in the active military, naval or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable. (2.2-2001)*. It is important to note that VWWP provides services to any veteran, regardless of their discharge status. It is certainly appropriate to recognize this individual for their service at this time.
- **If so, when and where did you serve?**
This will help assess whether they may be having symptoms resulting from Agent Orange (Vietnam), Gulf War Syndrome (Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm) or PTSD/TBI, which are the "signature injuries" of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operation New Dawn (Current Operations in Iraq).
- **Were you deployed to a combat zone?**
This will help to determine potential exposure to blasts, injuries, and death as well as effects from lengthy and multiple deployments.
- **What was your job?**
Although military occupation may be a factor in injury or stress, many occupations that do not involve combat may still result in extreme stress or psychological injury, such as mortuary duty, chaplains, medical services corps, support units, etc.
- **Were you injured or exposed to blasts or trauma?**
- **Are you having trouble sleeping, other health issues?** Sleep disturbance, hyper-arousal, anxiety, depression and/or substance use are all symptoms of PTSD and may indicate an underlying traumatic brain injury.

Here are three other great resources for clinicians:

- VWWP Web page specifically for clinicians <http://wearevirginiaveterans.org/Resources/For-Clinicians.aspx>
- The Citizen Soldier Support Program, which provides training courses for health care providers such as "A Primary Care Approach," at www.ahe.connect.com/citizensoldier/
- If you are caring for a veteran, the US Department of Veterans Affairs maintains a toll-free Caregiver Support line at 1-855-260-3274.

Finally, I have also placed on the VDH website (www.vdh.virginia.gov/clinicians/) several informative presentations that offer an in-depth look at the changing face of our veterans, the challenges they and their families face when they return home, potential long-term care and what we as health care providers need to know.

Commissioner Galanti and I hope you find this information helpful in caring for these amazing men and women who have selflessly put themselves in harm's way and left their families in order to protect our freedom.

Thank you for everything you do to protect the health of all Virginians,

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP
State Health Commissioner

Paul Galanti
Commissioner of Veterans Services