



SOUTHEASTERN VETERANS' CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

April 13, 2023

The Southeastern Veterans' Center Advisory Council met April 13, 2023 at 10:00AM in the All- Purpose Room at the Southeastern Veterans' Center.

Advisory Council Members Participating:

Barry Amole, Vietnam Veterans of America, President
Mary Archey, Marine Corps League, Vice President
Kenneth Schweitzer, American Legion, Secretary
Richard Doherty, Military Officers Association of America
Thomas Applebach, Lehigh County Office of Veterans' Affairs
Kenneth Nadwodny, Catholic War Veterans
Ann Marie Grimes, Resident Representative
William Etkin, Resident Representative
Daniel Kuper, Resident Representative

Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs/Southeastern Veterans' Center:

Maureen Weigl, BG (PA) – DMVA
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Long-Term Care - DMVA
Barbara Raymond, BVH Director – DMVA
Samuel Estrada, Executive Policy Specialist- DMVA
Brian Gula, Commandant – SEVC
Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant – SEVC
Jeremiah Mensah, Interim Director of Nursing- SEVC

Visitors:

Nikki Whitlock, Constituency Relations, Senator Katie Muth's Office
Linda Neiman, Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary
Terra Shaner, Administrative Officer for Geriatrics and Extended Care, CVAMC- **via Microsoft TEAMS**

Excused Absence:

Robert Richardson, Resident Representative
John Getz, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Thomas Brown, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Jeffrey Elliot, PA AMVETS
Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans
VACANT, PA House of Representatives
The Hon. Tracy Pennycuik, PA State Senate
MG Mark J. Schindler, Adjutant General - DMVA
Robert Stone, American Legion
Josh Spigner, Regional Compliance Officer- DMVA
Lauren Stenson, Director of Nursing - SEVC
Jill Alwine, Admissions and Marketing Coordinator – SEVC

Call to Order:

The Advisory Council Meeting was called to order by Barry Amole at 10:10 AM. There was a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Review and Approval of January 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes:

A motion was made by Thomas Applebach and seconded by Richard Doherty to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on January 12, 2023. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

Report of the Medical Director:

Brian Gula, Commandant, reported on behalf of Medical Director Dr. Monika VanSant. Brian started by introducing Jeremiah Mensah, who is filling in as our Interim Director of Nursing while Lauren Stenson is on maternity leave.

Infection control update: Currently the facility has 5 Covid positive residents, 4 in skilled nursing and 1 in personal care, along with 1 staff member who is Covid positive. When a resident tests positive, the nursing administration and infection control nurses analyze whether the unit needs to quarantine. The unit is then monitored and tested regularly throughout a 14-day period to help mitigate the spread.

We had our annual VA survey the week of February 27th. A few minor Lifesafety and Clinical issues were identified. We are currently working on a corrective action plan, which will include education and auditing. We will submit the plan of corrections at the end of the month for the VA's approval.

Report of the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator:

Brian Gula, Commandant, reported on behalf of Admissions Coordinator Jill Alwine. Brian reported that as of the end of the 1st quarter the facility had 24 admissions, bringing our total numbers to 133 residents in skilled nursing, with 75 vacancies, and 37 residents in personal care, with 17 vacancies. Also, our memory care unit is at full capacity with 30 residents. The reasons for the bed vacancies are as followed: 24 beds are offline due to our 3 West unit being closed for staffing issues and 28 beds are offline on our personal care unit and 3 East because they are reserved for quarantine. We also have 32 beds that are offline to bring rooms with 3 and 4 beds down to 2 beds for infection control purposes. We are hoping to reopen our 3 West unit in May and start filling those vacant beds. There are currently 77 people on the waitlist, 62 veterans and 15 non-veterans/ spouses. The approximate waiting list times for skilled nursing and personal care are 3-5 months and 4-6 months, respectively. Our memory care unit is currently about a year wait, due to it being our smallest area.

Nikki Whitlock stated that they have received some phone calls regarding people on waitlists and was wondering how to handle them. Brian replied that they could provide Jill Alwine's contact info to address any questions or concerns. Nikki Whitlock asked if the waitlist is first come, first serve or if there are any adjustments for emergency purposes. Travis Davis replied that the wait list is first come, first serve, but there is a clause called the Temporary Admission for an Emergent Situation Clause that provides an exception. In order to fall under this clause, there must be no Federal VA beds available at a local VA, and it must also be deemed an emergency by the Admissions Committee. He also stated that if they receive any calls regarding those kinds of situations to give admissions a call right away.

Thomas Applebach asked if staffing is still a big factor regarding the admission rates. Barbara Raymond stated that this is still an issue, and we are working on various things to try and get positions filled, such as the Walk-in Wednesdays, which have been successful. However, we are still trying to combat things, such

as private homes and even the Federal VA offering bonuses and other incentives. We do have job fairs coming up in the spring for 5 of our homes.

Richard Doherty asked how many more people we will be able to admit with the opening of the closed unit. Brian responded that the 3rd floor of Coates Hall was designated as the Covid unit. Half of that floor, 3 East, will remain dedicated for quarantining. We will be opening the other half of the 3rd floor, 3 West, for new admissions. That will provide us with 24 beds to fill. Again, due to staffing, we will not be filling all the beds right away.

Report of the Deputy Adjutant General – General Maureen Weigl – DMVA:

General Weigl began by saying that Gen. Schindler has not been confirmed yet, but he is still the Acting Adjutant General. We are hoping to have a confirmation hearing in May or early June.

We were awarded the funding for Hollidaysburg’s new skilled nursing building and will have a groundbreaking ceremony on May 2nd. Please invite any of your agencies from the Hollidaysburg area to come join us. A save-the-date will be going out for the event once we have the governor’s confirmation. The governor will be there, along with General Schindler and possibly Secretary McDonough from the VA.

Some good news, we just hit over 1,000 residents in our nursing homes, which is the highest since pre-covid. Many of the homes are seeing a decrease in their waitlists, so the next item to address will be making the public aware that our homes are available for veterans and spouses. We want them to know that they can save a lot of money being at our homes versus being in private nursing homes.

Veterans’ Home week is right around the corner. Last year, we were able to get some Phillies tickets for the residents. We are keeping an eye out to see if they do a military appreciation day that we could possibly attend.

Townhalls are going out across the commonwealth. This year’s townhalls are about the PACT Act and pension poaching. We will send out information on when the one in the Philadelphia area will be taking place and will be taking residents to attend. We also encourage your organizations to attend and learn about the PACT act and pension poaching.

Today is the War Council meeting and tomorrow morning is the State Veterans’ Commission. Gen Weigl stated that she will be working with the American Legions, VFWs, and Gen Schindler to discuss the bylaws.

Nikki Whitlock asked Gen Weigl to repeat when the War Council meeting was and asked if it was a publicly shared meeting. Gen Weigl stated that the War Council meeting was a publicly shared meeting, and it was taking place today. She also stated that the State Veterans’ Commission meeting takes place on Friday and that the War Council is always the day before.

Report of the Executive Director, Long Term Care – Travis Davis – DMVA:

Travis Davis started off by stating that we have had a busy 1st quarter. We have had a total of 9 different health inspections take place across the 6 homes. We have also completed 3 internal surveys. So far this year, VA Annual surveys have taken place at our Southeastern, Gino J Merli, and at the Erie facilities. Out of the 6 homes, there are 3 homes that are 5- star facilities, 2 homes that are 4-star facilities, and 1 home that is a 3-star facility. Our staffing ratios remain very strong. This is also why some of our beds remain empty, because we do not want to sacrifice our staffing ratio just to fill beds. We are still dependent on

overtime and agency staff in our homes. Currently, we have a waitlist of 239 veterans and spouses from across the state. Out of 21 nursing facilities in Chester County, SEVC currently ranks 9th (lowest to highest) in the number of citations that we have received in the last 30 months and ranks the 7th highest in staffing. The facilities that rank higher than Southeastern are a lot smaller, having only about 30-50 beds with the largest being about 100-120 beds.

Currently, we are recruiting a Medical Director for Southeastern. Dr. VanSant, the current Medical Director, will be transferring to Delaware Valley as it is closer to her home. We also have an Interim Director of Nursing at our Delaware Valley facility, and we have an Interim Commandant at our Hollidaysburg facility. Both positions will be posted in the next couple of weeks.

Thomas Applebach mentioned that he has been sharing info regarding job fairs and such at the homes on his organizations' Facebook page. He went on to ask if the DMVA could also do some positive marketing of the homes themselves, so that he could help share the information and get some information about our homes out to the community. Travis Davis stated that it is something that they have been working on. He noted that our Department of Health surveys are public information to show how we compare to other nursing homes regarding our health inspections, our quality, our staffing. We are working on compiling that information together to determine how we stack up to other homes in terms of our inspections and citations, the number, the severity of them, and our staffing ratios. With our 6 homes, they are all in the top percentage of staffing and in health inspections compared to others throughout the state. Now the focus becomes getting that information out there to the public. Gen Weigl continued by stating that we recognize that most veterans get care through the veterans' hospitals, but there had not been much discussion taking place at the hospitals with the veterans regarding our veterans' homes and what we have to offer. We really want to use the veteran hospitals to work on educating people about our homes and the services we provide.

Richard Doherty agreed that he initially did not know that there were Pennsylvania veterans' homes and that he does not think many veterans in the general public are aware that we exist or that we accept spouses/non-veterans.

Report of the Director of Veterans' Homes – Barbara Raymond – DMVA:

Barbara Raymond started by announcing that there will be a meeting next month where all the senior leadership from the 6 homes will come together with the leadership at headquarters to go over various process changes and new regulations coming out. The first one was held about 6 months ago.

We do have new regulations coming out from the Department of Health starting July 1, 2023. Most of the regulations are just clarifications or enhancements to the federal regulations that we are already following, so not too many major changes.

The week of June 11th is Veterans' Home week. All 6 homes will have various activities and fun things going on for the residents all week. Nurses' week is also coming up in May. We are very excited to honor our nursing staff and the hard work that they do.

Covid update: our Pittsburgh facility has a small outbreak of covid, with 20 residents being positive. One resident had been out to the hospital, but it was unrelated to Covid. He is now back home. As Brian reported earlier, we have 5 positive residents at SEVC. Then for staff, we only have 6 staff throughout the 6 homes out with Covid, Southeastern, Hollidaysburg, and Southwestern. We do contact-tracing, but it is hard to determine where it is coming from with visitors coming in and residents going out. The public

health emergency is ending May 11th, but we have not received any additional guidance as far as masks and testing. Everything as far as we know will remain the same for now. We currently have no staff or residents with influenza. Luckily, we had very mild cases this year and no major outbreaks at any of the homes.

We do have a small abdominal gastrointestinal outbreak at our Delaware Valley facility. We test for norovirus and are confident that is what it is. The results for norovirus take about a week to get back. We are treating the symptoms, taking contact precautions, and keeping an eye on those that are infected. Also, there is a new 'superbug' out called Candida Auris, it is a fungal infection. We are currently educating our staff on it. We do have one individual at our Delaware Valley facility that is 'colonized' with the infection. Typically, colonization generally means that it is not transmissible. However, with Candida they are stating that even if it is colonized that it could be potentially transmissible. Because it is so new, we do not have a lot of guidance on it. The resident is currently isolated but should be able to come out in the very near future.

Richard Doherty asked if this is the one that is coming out of India. Barb Raymond clarified that it probably originated from out that way, but it has since spread to various parts of the US.

Report of the Commandant – Brian Gula– SEVC:

Brian Gula stated that we have our job fair coming up on May 9th. We are trying to advertise and get the word out to the community. We are hoping with kids graduating around the same time that we will attract some new graduates.

As mentioned before, Veterans' Home week is coming up. There was a meeting earlier this week to plan and organize events for that week. Brian wanted to highlight our Activity and Volunteer departments for the amazing job they do. One of our local high schools decided to start a volunteer club within their school and are working with our Volunteer Coordinator to help on a regular basis with Bingo and other various activities. Another great event that took place recently was the Daughters of the American Revolution sponsored a Vietnam Veterans Honorary ceremony, where they recognized 120 of our veterans with certificates and pins. Also, we want to give a special thank you to Barry Amole and the American Legions for sponsoring breakfast trips for our PC residents.

Next week we have our Volunteer luncheon to recognize our over 40 active volunteers who have contributes over 2800 hours of service this past year. We will also be recognizing one of our residents that will be receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award and 2 of our high school students that will be receiving the Presidential Service Award.

Nikki Whitlock asked that we pass along the names of the award recipients so they could also provide Senate Citations. Nikki also asked what high school the volunteer group was from. Brian responded that the high school volunteer group is from the STEM academy in Downingtown.

Report of the Deputy Commandant – Mildred Butler-Coleman – SEVC:

Mildred Butler-Coleman provided the council members with SEVC construction updates: we have 2 boilers that are being replaced in our CLC building. The contractors were here yesterday to start preparing for the replacements. We received 2 new wheelchair vans last week that will be replacing 2 that we had to take out of service. The vans were ordered about 2 years ago, but due to supply chain issues, we only just received them. Finally, we were having some issues with one of the main drains in the main kitchen in

Tilghman Hall. Our plumbing contractor came out to resolve the issues. The pipes are very old and had deteriorated, so we were unable to use some drains in the kitchen. They were able to fix the pipes and now the service to those areas is back online. Despite this issue, regular services were not interrupted.

Mildred wanted to let everyone know that we really appreciate everyone's kindness and dedication. We have seen an increase in number of volunteers and donations this year compared to last year.

With the warmer weather, we will be having some volunteers come in and spruce up the outside sitting areas and courtyards for the residents.

We are working with the Corporate Compliance team at Fort Indiantown GAP to make sure we are being compliant with all the regulatory agencies that we deal with. The Deputy Commandants are the leads of the committees at the homes and members of each department are included on these committees. Meetings are held quarterly. If a staff member sees something in their department, they can call a number to report it and the team at the GAP will investigate and make sure everything is being done properly. The first meeting was held backF in January.

Comments from the Council:

Ken Schweitzer stated that it was good to be back.

Old Business:

Nothing to Report.

New Business:

Nothing to Report.

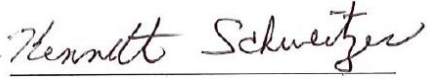
Good of the Council:

Nikki Whitlock took advantage of booking a day with the mobile unit from DMVA, so we are going to have that district on May 31st. Nikki Whitlock asked if it was possible if Jill Alwine could be present. Gen Weigl stated that the DMVA is usually good about getting all the regional people involved, but she will follow up to make sure and loop the homes in.

Time and Date for the next Meeting:

With no further business to discuss, a motion was made to end the meeting. Motion carried. The next regular meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on July 13, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

Approved:


Kenneth Schweitzer, Secretary

Minutes submitted by: Sarah Klufas