



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting via ZOOM

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81708243259>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 817 0824 3259 followed by #.

If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting, you can raise their hand if on video and Chair will recognize you or you can use the “hand raise” function under the reactions tab at bottom of page. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the middle of the page and the functions will be at the bottom of the page. Use the Zoom app to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press *9 to raise your hand. Those calling into the meeting can press *6 to mute or unmute their phone.

- 6:00 Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance, Approval of March 2022 Meeting Minutes – *Wayne Miller, Chair***
- 6:10 Discussion on the Services/Plans of the DC VA Medical Director – *Michael Heimall, FACHE - Director (CEO), Washington D.C. Veterans Medical Center***
- 6:45 Discussion on the Homefront Interview of Commissioners Dr. Cynthia Macri and Jameelah Johnson on Women Veteran Issues and Planning for Upcoming Homefront Shows – *Wayne Miller and Mike Subin***
[Watch the Homefront Interview](#)
- 7:00 Commission Work Priorities for Upcoming Year and Planning for Next Meeting – *Wayne Miller***
- 7:15 Updates**
- 7:30 Adjourn**

ADA Reasonable Accommodation: If you need a sign language interpreter or any other reasonable accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov or 240-418-4865.

Commission's Website – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva
Veterans Network Directory – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vnd

****See duties on next page**

Duties of the Commission on Veterans Affairs

The Commission duties include:

1. research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of veterans and their families;
2. institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;
3. advise the Executive and the Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of veterans and their families; and
4. assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
April 19, 2022**

****MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM****

I. Call to Order

Wayne Miller, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Wayne recognized prisoners of war and asked for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the March 2022 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the March 2022 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Discussion on the Services and Plans of the DC VA Medical Director - Michael Heimall, FACHE - Director (CEO), Washington D.C. Veterans Affairs Medical Center

PowerPoint: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/DCVAMedicalCenterApril2022.pdf>

Mr. Heimall presented the PowerPoint to the Commission. Please review slides for information.

Mr. Heimall reported that the DC VA Medical Center is no longer listed on the VA's high risk list based on metrics and star rating. The DC VA Medical Center is listed as a five-star community living center and continues to receive rave reviews from every outside accreditation body. Six months ago the inspector general inspected the facility and Mr. Heimall expects that report to be published within the next three months. The report should be significantly more favorable than the May 2018 report. Inspections are completed every three years.

The floor was opened to questions.

Sharon Hodge, Public, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), reported nominations of Commissioners for the Mission Act have not been sent to the Senate yet as there may be a conflict of interest with one of the members. Nine members are needed in order to move forward with recommendations by the Secretary. Sharon said Veterans have concerns about the possible closure of the DC VA Medical Center and its relocation. She noted that a new location would need to have access to public transportation. Veterans need to know that the transition will not happen overnight and they will not lose access to services. Mr. Heimall said he has had discussions for the past two years with Mayor Bowser and her office, which has been incredibly supportive in establishing a new VA Medical Center. The current location is not accessible to mass transit. A new location should provide better parking and better access to Metrobuses and Metrorail which would be beneficial to both staff and Veterans. The VA's Office of Construction and Facilities Management will be reviewing multiple sites in Maryland and Virginia although Mr. Heimall said most likely the VA Medical Center would be relocated within DC. He added that once the design is approved it will still take approximately five to seven years to complete.

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, asked if the Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) would have additional services such as nutrition, mental health, hearing tests, physical therapy, or gynecology. Mr. Heimall said services available at CBOCs are dependent on the demand at those particular locations. Multi-specialty

CBOCs ideally would have women health services available. He noted that the new CBOC which opened a year ago at Charlotte Hall has a large physical therapy suite and offers optometry. The VA needs to seriously consider offering both of these services at CBOCs. Other specialty services such as cardiology are also beginning to be offered at CBOCs. Mr. Heimall is interested in offering mammography at the Woodbridge COBC or Fairfax CBOC. The Department of Defense (DoD) offers mammography at their clinics in Fairfax and Dumfries. He has had discussions with Fort Belvoir about partnering with them on the VA's next set of clinics in Fairfax. Given the number of women Veterans, the VA wants to offer women health services and make it more convenient to access outside of the Beltway. The VA will be working through all of these recommendations as they go through the design and development process.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, said she is a veteran and a gynecologist. She said gynecological care is needed, not just overall women's health services. Specialty doctors and surgeons are not readily available. Specialty health services need to be provided throughout a woman's lifespan. Medical issues such as pelvic floor dysfunction are difficult to diagnosis and are very disabling. Dr. Macri asked if veterans can make appointments directly through the individual CBOCs rather than having to go through the DC VA Medical Center. Mr. Heimall said the DC VA Medical Center had one full-time and one part-time operative gynecologist on staff. They recently lost the full-time provider and the part-time provider has now become full-time but they are still down a part-time staff person. The VA has been working closely with Dr. Ernie Lockrow, Program Director for the Minimally Invasive Gynecologic Surgery Fellowship at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC). The VA has had a longstanding partnership with the gynecological team at WRNMMC. The DC VA Medical Center's Chief of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation formerly worked for the National Interpid Center of Excellence (NICoE). The VA is working with the physical therapy department to be able to better address issues such as pelvic floor disorders. The VA recognized the need from an operative standpoint as well as a non-operative standpoint. Regarding appointments, the VA will be moving to a centralized appointment system at the regional level. The VA's Call Center books the majority of primary care appointments and has a nurse advice line and a pharmacy advice line. The pharmacy advice line has transitioned to a region wide center. Feedback from veterans has been positive. Calls are answered faster and first call resolution is at a higher percentage. The VA is in the process of transitioning primary care appointments. Mr. Heimall said the VA's secure messaging system is a great way to reach out to your primary care physicians and to receive information back in a timely manner.

Dr. Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair, said this Commission continues to work on and address veteran suicide. Dr. Koffman is a psychiatrist who has worked for the NICoE for 13 years. He reported that there is overwhelming positive literature that promotes the use of ketamine infusions to temporarily stave off suicide and create total remission from suicide ideation four times what the current state of care is for acute suicide ideation as opposed to admitting the individual and providing custodial care. Approximately 30 different VA's throughout the country are using ketamine infusions, but there is no VA policy, understanding or universal appreciation that these infusions can save lives and bide time. Dr. Koffman asked if the DC VA Medical Center knows about these ketamine infusions and where they stand on providing them to veterans. Mr. Heimall said the DC VA Medical Center has a new Chief of Anesthesia and a new psychiatrist with research background that have recently joined and are starting to initiate Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) for the VA, but who also have experience with ketamine infusions. Since Mr. Heimall joined the VA and due to his experiences with both of these modalities at WRNMMC from a complex pain syndrome point of view, he has been working on how to incorporate these modalities. One of the challenges is the VA has very limited space for infusions and a limited number of inpatient beds. It has been a challenge to provide therapeutic COVID infusions due to the demands of MS patients and patients with other infusion needs. These services would also require nurses and several anesthesiologists who have experience with ketamine infusions. Mr. Heimall said this may require another partnership with WRNMMC. He would like to continue this discussion further with Dr. Koffman. Mr. Heimall said another issue is having psychiatrists providing care in person given that services have largely been provided virtually over the last several years. He said his biggest concern is that an overwhelming majority of veteran suicides are veterans who have never interfaced with the VA or who have not interfaced with the VA within the last five years. If a veteran is in the VA system they can identify risks sooner, provide significantly more outreach with suicide prevent coordinators, and provide significant resources that reduce veteran suicides for patients who are engaged in care in the VA. Mr. Heimall has concerns about getting those

veterans into the system for care to begin with so that the VA can provide those intensive services. Dr. Macri said ketamine infusions can also help with post-partum depression.

Gloria White Gardner, Public, is a neuropsychiatrist nurse who has concerns about women who have severe depression and who may not be able to access ketamine infusions due to limited chairs. She would like to see more discussion and engagement around this issue. Dr. Heimall said the DC VA Medical Center will be expanding their oncology center. The VA is reviewing if the center should be consolidated into a comprehensive infusion center to provide infusions not just for chemotherapy but infusions for neurology and a number of other services. He noted that when he was Commander of the Army hospital in El Paso, Texas, the infusions were consolidated into one unit and it provided better and safer care and they were able to serve more veterans.

Jane McCarthy, former Commissioner, said there is a new FDA approved intranasal ketamine spray. The intranasal ketamine spray has been used in mental health clinics and must be administered under healthcare provider supervision.

Mr. Heimall said the Maryland Delegation and Senator Chris Van Hollen, Senator Ben Cardin, Congressman Jamie Raskin and Congressman David Trone are the VA's biggest supporters. He speaks with them frequently about the needs of the VA. Betsy noted that representatives for the Senators and Congressmen regularly attend Commission meetings. Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Van Hollen, and Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Cardin, along with Betsy and Michael Subin, Commissioner, met with the DC VA Medical Center for 4 years to advocate for a CBOC in Montgomery County.

Mr. Heimall offered to attend Commission meetings more often than once in 3 years. Betsy will be sending his PowerPoint presentation to her eSubscribe list which has over 5,000 subscribers, including all the local Veteran Service Organizations (VSO). She offered to send VA information and updates out on his behalf.

IV. Discussion on the Homefront Interview of Commissioners Dr. Cynthia Macri and Jameelah Johnson on Women Veteran Issues and Planning for Upcoming Homefront Shows

[Watch the Homefront Interview.](#)

Dr. Macri and Jameelah were interviewed by Michael Subin and spoke about women's issues, challenges and concerns including disparities.

Betsy said the Commission needs to identify future topics for Homefront. It was suggested that a show focus on sports and recreational opportunities for veterans. Betsy suggested inviting Team River Runner (TRR) to present on their program and the accessible launch at Riley's Lock. TRR is organizing a blue ribbon cutting for the accessible launch on May 1. She will send information out to the Commission.

Dr. Macri reported Team Red, White and Blue (RWB) is a non-profit organization that connects veterans and civilians, organizes group runs and walks, and sponsor events for veterans. It is free to join.

Betsy asked Commissioners to send her information for sports and recreation programs and organizations. The Commission should be promoting health and mental wellness and helping veterans to stay active, involved and engaged. The last few years everyone has experienced stress and isolation.

V. Commission Work Priorities for Upcoming Year and Planning for Next Meeting – Wayne Miller

Wayne reported he submitted the Commission's FY23 budget priorities to the County Council on April 18. Priorities include advocating for Montgomery Parks to receive \$100,000 to install a picnic shelter at Riley's Lock; continuing to support vouchers for homeless Veterans and their families; supporting continued funding of \$150,000 for ServingTogether; and supporting continued funding of \$50,000 for Warrior Canine Connection. The County provides \$600,000 in funding per year to provide housing subsidies to 15 dishonorably discharged Veterans who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Jameelah reported Alyssa Goggan, an Art Therapist with Workhouse Arts Center (WAC), is available to present before the Commission at the June meeting. WAC offers a Military in the Arts initiative. She added that

she along with her husband and Dr. Macri have been participating in a free flame working program offered by WAC.

Wayne suggested inviting ServingTogether to give an update to the Commission. Jen Hodge, Local Behavioral Health Authority, monitors the ServingTogether contract. She recently stepped down as co-chair of ServingTogether's Montgomery County Veterans Collaborative in order to have more time to monitor the contract. Jen reported funding is now available to assist Veterans that have a behavioral health diagnosis and that have exhausted all other resources. Betsy asked for Jen to present alongside Jason Marshall, Program Manager, ServingTogether.

VI. Chair and Vice Chair Report

None.

VII. Updates / Announcements

Jameelah reported the Women Veterans Workgroup met with Lourdes Tiglao, Director, and Elizabeth Estabrooks, Deputy Director, VA Center for Women Veterans, to discuss how women can be included in

the federal bill that requires "the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study on disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to certain benefits administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes". The Workgroup is also discussing how to convene focus groups to identify specific needs of women Veterans in Montgomery County.

Bill Gray, former Chair, reported Jane will be a featured speaker at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Memorial Day Ceremony May 30 at 1:30pm at the Women's Monument on DC. For the full list of speakers, to RSVP for the event, or to learn how to watch the event live that day, visit www.vvmf.org/2022-Memorial-Day.

Carly Clem, Staff, reported that a press release will be sent out in May about the Commission's Fallen Hometown Heroes website for Memorial Day.

Adjournment

7:25pm

Next Full Commission Meeting

Tuesday, May 17, 2022, via Zoom from 6pm to 7:30pm. Please view the agenda for information on how to join the meeting. Agenda to be announced.

Respectfully submitted: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I; Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Josephine Bahn; Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman, Vice-Chair; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller, Chair; Reggie Mitchell; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Anneke Vandenbroek; Susan Webman; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: Lisa Schuster; Michael Subin

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: None.

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Christa Burton (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Austin Morris (Senator Chris Van Hollen); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I