

VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE-HUT JUNE 2017

Veterans Affairs New Enhanced Website

Maybe you read the article in the Winona Daily News last month, but here it is again. The VA has unveiled a new website aimed at providing information on the quality of care at VA medical centers. This website is www.accesstocare.va.gov. Go ahead and browse this site. You can still access the VA on their homepage at: www.va.gov.

DO YOU WANT A COPY OF YOUR VA HEALTH INFORMATION?

Just fill out VA Form 10-534a-MHV. You can select several options: US Mail, In-person, a telephone call, and finally the most efficient means via My HealtheVet account. To establish a My HealtheVet account go to: www.va.gov. Then click on the tab that says: "Health." Then you'll have a dropdown box that says: "My HealtheVet." Click on that and register.

Calling All Vets & Family Members!

The Minneapolis VA Medical Center is conducting a voluntary research study about a germ called *E. coli*. This germ normally lives in human and animal intestines. The goal of this study is to determine how common it is for veterans and their household members to have *E. coli ST131* (a certain type of *E. coli*) or another drug-resistant kind of *E. coli* in their lower intestines. Another goal is to identify risk factors that can be altered to reduce a person's likelihood to carry *E. coli ST131*. If you have either another drug-resistant kind of *E. coli or ST131*, there are no known harmful consequences and no action is required.

This research project is for gaining further insight to *E. coli ST131*, and has no known importance for your health or health care. In an effort to maintain the integrity of this research project, the results will be confidential and won't be shared with you and will not become part of your medical record.

All members of your household are encouraged to participate. Both children and adults may participate. Individuals will need to provide and send stool samples monthly for a period of three years. As an incentive, you'll receive \$20.00 for each sample submitted.

If you'd like to participate in this study, call Ms. Tricia L. Bender at 612.467.4280, extension 9-4280. She will gladly explain the details and answer all questions. This is a very important clinical research study.

MILLION VETERAN PROGRAM (MVP)

How do I participate?

Today (9 May 17), I just got off the phone with a fellow veteran who is employed by the VA; his name was George. His phone number is: 866.441.6075. His hours are between 8:00 Am – 6:00 PM ET Monday through Friday. The purpose of this program is to learn more about how genes affect health and help improve health care for veterans. At the

present time the VA has 560,000 veterans enrolled in this program – they need 440,000 more!

Call 866.441.6075 and the representative will tell you what form(s) need to be filled out. You can participate whether you are or are not enrolled with the VA. Oh, by the way, MVP is open to active duty personnel also.

For more information, go to: www.research.va.gov/MVP. You will not receive travel pay to participate in this program.

VA Makes Wait Times Transparent for Veterans in New Web-based Tool

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is taking unprecedented steps to increase transparency. The VA has launched a new web-based Access and Quality Tool www.accesstocare.va.gov that provides Veterans with an easy-to-use, easy-to-understand way of accessing patient wait time and quality of care data.

“Veterans must have access to information that is clear and understandable to make informed decisions about their health care,” said [Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin](#). “No other health-care system in the country releases this type of information on wait times. This allows Veterans to see how VA is performing.”

The tool allows Veterans to access the average times patients are waiting to be seen in their local area; how Veterans describe their experiences scheduling primary- and specialty-care appointments at specific VA facilities; timeliness of appointments for care needed right away; and the quality of health care delivered at VA medical centers compared with local private-sector hospitals. The Access and Quality Tool is the most transparent and easy to understand wait time and quality data website in the health-care industry.

“This tool is another example of VA leading the way,” said Acting Under Secretary for Health Dr. Poonam Alaigh. “No one in the private sector publishes data this way. This tool will instill a spirit of competition and encourage our medical facilities to proactively address access and quality issues while empowering Veterans to make choices according to what works best for them and their families.”

VA Accountability Office Created

President Trump signed an Executive Order creating the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Office will advise VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin about how to discipline poorly-performing VA employees. In a released statement VA Secretary Shulkin said the office will work to ensure, "that we identify systemic barriers that prevent us from making the right decisions and also make sure that we're honoring the commitments that we have to our whistleblowers who come forth and identify issues so that there's not retaliation."

Shulkin added, "Congress also needs to change the law to allow the VA to more expeditiously discipline and fire problem employees."

The House has already passed the legislation "VA Accountability First Act" (H.R. 1259), sponsored by Rep. Phil Roe (Tenn.) and supported by FRA. This bill would increase the authority of the VA Secretary to discipline and fire workers while still protecting the legal rights of those employees. It is unclear whether the measure can gain enough Democratic support to pass the Senate.

Is the Water From Wurtsmith AFB Making People Sick?

The Veteran & Civilian Clean Water Alliance, which was started by individuals who believe that they have become sick due to toxins that have seeped into the water supply surrounding Wurtsmith Air Force Base located in Michigan, which was closed by the Base Realignment and Closing (BRAC) Commission in 1993.

Most of the base and some adjacent ground is known to be polluted with jet fuel, cancer-causing chlorinated solvents and toxic fire retardants. In February of 2016 Michigan officials warned about consuming well water near Wurtsmith. This is only the latest in a long line of events that have poisoned the water around Wurtsmith, starting with the state of Michigan suing the Air Force when TCE was found in the base's drinking water in the late 1970s. TCE is the toxic chemical that was found in the drinking water at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and is responsible for sickening thousands of Marines and their families from 1957-1987.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs was forced by an act of Congress to start presumptively treating anybody who lived at Camp Lejeune as if their illness, from a list of pre-approved illnesses, was due to their time there.

People who lived and worked at Wurtsmith want the same presumption.

Toxic fluorocarbons, specifically perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs), also called polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFASs), are a large class of compounds being studied as "emerging contaminants," which have been widely used to make consumer products more resistant to stains, fire and water. They were discovered in the water surrounding Wurtsmith in 2010 are now showing up in concentrations above federal guidelines. Investigators say plumes may have been leaching through the groundwater for years. Only two of 19 different types of PCEs have been positively identified as being toxic to humans, however. The other 17 have not been studied enough to know their effects on the human body.

In Oscoda, the plumes came from a PFC-laden fire suppression tool called Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF), which the military and airports around the world have used since the 1970s to put out jet fuel fires.

The Veteran & Civilian Clean Water Alliance Facebook group is for all people,

veterans and military, who believe that they have been exposed to toxic chemicals coming from current of former military installations.

For more information, go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/296949220676070/>

<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/04/16/wurtsmith-air-base-pollution-health/83040138/>

http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2016/06/wurtsmith_veterans_health.html