

Summary of Veteran Engagement Sessions 4 & 5

Presented at GWVI RAC August 4, 2021

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Set up and participation

- VES #4
 - Hosted by VA Puget Sound Healthcare System, Seattle, WA
 - February 17, 2021, 1100-1400 ET
 - Adobe connect platform
 - 68 participants on Adobe Connect, 60 on VANTs telephone line
- VES #5
 - No designated host facility
 - May 19, 2021, 1500-1800 ET
 - Webex platform
 - 76 participants

Format

- Four Domains of Inquiry
 - What are the health issues of concern?
 - How can research help?
 - How can VA improve quality of life?
 - What should the VA Secretary know?
- Public Comment Period
- Brief intro to each domain by VES subcommittee members
- Veterans, caregivers, and advocates responded on the audio and in the chat mechanism on the platforms

Major Themes

- Health Concerns
 - Diverse, common and esoteric, potent negative impact
 - Difficulty accessing expert health care in VHA and elsewhere
 - Some concerns about special vulnerability to COVID and COVID vaccine side effects
 - Difficulty navigating the service connection process for GW-related benefits
- Research Role
 - Some positive testimonials about participating in research
 - More widespread unawareness of research opportunities or barriers
 - Imperative to communicate research results to veterans and health care providers
 - Need to fund appropriate infrastructure to facilitate clinical research related to GWI

Major Themes

- Quality of Life
 - Need a clear indicator of GWI in the medical record to target appropriate, high quality care
 - Providers (especially VHA) need to treat the whole person and work with the patient to alleviate impact from chronic symptoms of GWI
 - Service-connected benefits are critical to improving quality of life given tenuous or unemployment and financial insecurity caused or worsened by GWI symptoms
- VA Secretary
 - Listen to Veterans with GWI- acknowledge them and their suffering
 - Understand that Veterans with GWI are not getting high quality care and change the system to prioritize that care (e.g., provider education, expert at every facility, whole health approach, complementary & integrated health, accelerate clinical research into practice)
 - Make the service-connection process for GWI-related claims more transparent and efficient

Conclusions and Implications

- Veteran Engagement Sessions continue to provide important and evolving information to the RAC GWVI and the research and research policy communities
- Participation continues to be high even with the virtual-only platform
- Content from the VES's informed the draft RAC GWVI recommendations to the VA Secretary (to be discussed at this meeting)
- The VES discussions inform the RAC GWVI meeting content

Questions/Discussion