

VA Mission Act

The Veterans Administration recently announced that the VA is on track for a 6 June implementation of the Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act. This Act is designed to improve Veterans access to community health resources, giving the Veteran more choices in receiving health care. This Act will help Veterans in communities where VA medical services are not available or are at a great distance. This has been a difficulty for Veterans living in a community with health care services but not from the VA, requiring the Veteran to drive long distances to a VA hospital. This is the situation for many of our Veterans living in rural northwest MN and in rural ND. When the project is complete, Veterans will have more options for community care, eligibility criteria for community care will be expanded, scheduling will be easier, coordination between the VA and community providers will be improved and Veterans will have more access to walk-in and urgent care facilities for minor injuries and illnesses. I personally experienced some of the problems while living in Arizona this winter. Although there was a VA clinic in Green Valley where we are living, they couldn't see me until my records had been transferred from Fargo to Tucson. I tried getting that done by phone with no success, we finally drove to Tucson, about 25 miles to get it done. It appears that the VA will only allow one location for health care. For those of us who spend the winter in AZ and summers in MN, that causes a problem. Hopefully, the Mission Act will solve that. Yesterday, I went to Tucson and got an electronic copy of all my records from my care while in AZ. I will be taking them back to MN with me. For the past few years, I've been co-managed for my care between the VA and Sanford. Under the Mission Act, the VA has been giving community providers education and training materials to make the new Act easier to implement. I'll report on its success later this summer.

While at the Tucson VA, I again noticed the number of volunteers working there. Many Veterans organization members such as the Legion, VFW and their Auxiliaries spend many hours providing volunteer services such as help desk, escorting patients, staffing coffee and donut stands. Thanks to all of you who volunteer. I recently talked to a Veteran who has completed over 1,700 hours at the Tucson VA.

A Military Mental Health Conference will be held on May 2 and 3 at Camp Ripley. The conference is a military/civilian partnership aimed at uniting community mental health providers with existing VA services and resources to provide quality care for our service members, Veterans and their families. The conference is open to active or retired Veterans and family members, clinicians, social workers and military service professionals.