



**DELAWARE VALLEY VETERANS HOME  
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - May 10, 2023**

**Advisory Council Members**

**In person**

James Ritchie, Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Allan Abramson, President Advisory Council (JWV)  
John O'Donnell, American Legion  
Larry Holman, Jewish War Veterans

**Conference Call**

Benjamin Mastridge, Vietnam Veterans  
Claudette Campbell, Military Officers Assoc. Of America  
Richard Fine, AMVETS  
Samuel Huhn, Blinded Veterans Association

**Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Delaware Valley Veterans Home**

Dontie Brooks, Regional Compliance Officer  
Mia Woods, Compliance Officer  
Thomas Caffrey, Administrative & Privacy Officer  
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes  
Barbara Raymond, Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes  
Maureen Weigl, DAG  
Yahvae Jones, Admissions Coordinator  
William McGoldrick, Volunteer Resource Coordinator  
Aurelio Peter Ojeda, Commandant  
Rita Yeung, Business Manager  
Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director  
Veronica Royster, Administrative Secretary

**Absent**

Charles Trainor, Marine Corps League  
Bruce Boice, Disabled American Veterans  
Daniel McCollum, American Legion  
Charles Petronis, Catholic War Veterans  
Martina White, PA House of Representatives

**Residents**

William Grooms, President Resident Council

**Visitors**

Dr. Wally Quinlan; For Council Member Brian O'Neill Office

- Moment of Silence
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Introduction of Attendees
- Approval of Minutes from February 08, 2023

#### **Report from Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director**

- Good news is no news, I do not have any news today, good stuff we are covid free.
- We are green we cannot wait to drop the mask off our face, it is going to happen soon.
- We are getting a lot of new admissions, some very complicated cases. We are getting our nursing staff educated almost every day.
- Otherwise, we are good.

#### **Report from Yahvae Jones, Admissions/Marketing**

- Good morning, currently we have a census of 151, we have (1) admission today and (2) admissions tomorrow, which will put us at 154. From the last meeting we have done 39 admissions, we had (4) discharges. Only (11) people passed, that is due to the wonderful care from our staff under the medical director that we have here.
- As far as marketing, I am on the VA monthly call. I attend the weekly meetings with the social workers at the VA, as well as all the local hospitals. I have been doing the Saturday musters, they are usually held bi-weekly in different counties. I have weekly meetings with the VFW, and I have my first meeting with the National Association for Black Veterans (NABVets) on the 18<sup>th</sup> of this month, just to let them know what DVVH provides as a whole. I have been going out to the VFW Post and passing out brochures. The meetings are on Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday around 6pm or 7pm. They do ask me to come speak briefly, so I do that as well. I have also been meeting with the councilman & representatives about their major events that they have in the summertime. That way I will have a schedule of the events that are going on.

#### **Report from Dontie Brooks, Regional Compliance Officer**

- We have three on-going items to report on, the first is BVH is non-compliant with the federal law. This law says that we must run exclusion checks, which is background checks on individuals who provide direct services to our residents. To fix this we are waiting for Justifacts to be implemented so we can run those checks. The compliance department is conducting reviews for the contracts Benchmark and VistaMed, to ensure that the services they are providing us align with the contract.
- That is all I have, any questions? Allan Abramson responded yes, background checks is that the new people coming in or the people that are already here. Dontie responded it is for both. Barbara followed up the response with, Al, we do criminal background checks, especially where we are here, we get people from New Jersey and out of state, so we do a federal background check. The background check that Dontie is talking about is what we call exclusionary background checks. What that piece of it means is we just have to make sure that anybody for any services that we billed the federal government for, that there are no fraud concerns. It is an exclusionary background check and not a criminal background check.

#### **Report from Thomas Caffrey, Administrative and Privacy Officer**

- Hello everyone, my name is Thomas Caffery, I joined the DMVA team in January of this year. I joined the compliance team and one of my capacities is HIPAA and Privacy concerns.
- Today is my fourth meeting, we will be meeting with the Medical Director and just learning everything we can about procedures in each of the home's policies, ensuring that everything is up to date.

#### **Report from Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General**

- Good morning, everyone, just a few things. The Adjutant General was confirmed two weeks ago, so we do not have to call him acting, he is the Adjutant General. He passed unanimously, that was nice.
- The Governor has been really involved with the DMVA already, we had at Hollidaysburg a groundbreaking ceremony, we needed the governors help, he jumped right in and helped us, he actually came up for the ceremony. It was a wonderful event.

- We had a conference this week, we talked to a bunch of legislatures that came for a tour, the first lady came for a tour. We took them all around and the Blackhawks gave them a tour of Fort Indiantown Gap and what the National Guard does in all our different facilities, they enjoyed that.
- The OVA is going to really start doing town halls, really focusing with all the American Legions and VFW working on the PACT Act. We found a lot of people did not know how to get their benefits, so we been working, and we are going to go out to all the communities.
- One legislation that is on the Senate floor today at the house, which is why Martina is not here, one of the things that impact Veterans is the pension. The blind veteran's pension has not been increased in years; they are proposing the increase go from \$150.00 to \$200.00 per month. It passed through the Veep committee right away, we believe it is going to pass. That has been long overdue, so that will be a good thing for veterans.
- They also signed off, that in 2025 two years from now in November, we are having the big Navy & Marine Corps birthday in Philadelphia. They are actually finishing up, refurbishing Tun Tavern, which is the birthplace of the Marines. Right there, down on the water they are going to have a lot going on. We will have a lot of information coming up for all your organizations. Everyone will probably be there the President, the Governor, the Governor from NJ, the USS New Jersey will fire off some rounds, and it will be a huge party. That is all I got.
- Samuel Huhn asked, is the \$150.00 per month for the blinded veterans and the paralyzed veterans? General Weigl replied yes, both and it is supposed to go up \$200.00.
- James Ritchie asked have they thought about tying those pensions to something like social security, where they get an automatic increase every year? General Weigl replied, I do not know, I did not see the final legislation, it is on the floor today. We will see if they sign and what they edit in there. Once I have a copy of it, I can get it to you.
- Allan Abramson said, I can say this to you, your Governor is a rock-solid guy. I worked with him for years. You may not like what he does a lot of times, he is very pushy. General Weigl added he has been to the Gap three times already; he is really hands on.

### **Report from Travis Davis, Executive Director, Bureau of Veterans**

- Right now, across the hallway, we have a Senior Leadership Conference going on. We pulled our senior leaders from each Veterans Home, clinical and administrative and we go over several things. This two-day conference is heavily focused on new regulations that have come out through the feds and the state. This is kind of our last craft with our leadership, they are going into effect, we have done several education sessions throughout the last several months, we are here today and are moving forward. It is great not only to get some education in, but also to pull all our leadership together, so they can have some time to network and talk with each other. That is what is going on across the hall, and Peter has been a gracious host.
- It has been over three years since the public health emergency was enacted for nursing homes. There is a lot that goes into that, there was a lot of waivers that were granted, that comes to an end tomorrow. I know Barbara is going to touch on some of the big things that are impacted through that waiver. It has been a long three years and three months certainly that we have been living in, and to see some of our homes not in mask right now it feels like a blessing to be able to see a face and talk to our residents. I know for our staff it has been a tremendous burden on them with providing care. It is really nice to see, I think Delaware Valley is going to be on the short list of the next facilities that we see without mask on soon.
- We had a really busy beginning of the year, from our inspection agencies, which is the Department of Health, Department of Human Services and the VA, we had over 14 visits this year across our six homes. They all went very very well. In addition to that we had Mia's team, the Compliance team go into four of our facilities and conduct our own internal audits and those turned out very well. We are really pleased where the team is going and what they have done so far.
- Three of our homes are five stars currently including Delaware Valley. We have two four stars, Hollidaysburg & Southwestern and we have Southeastern as a three star.

- The COVID numbers are really low across the board. I think Barbara will go into the specifics on that, but it is nice to see.
- Admissions, we are at the highest level that we have been in over two years. We broke the 1000 mark, so we are at 1005 today. We have also decreased our waiting list; we are down to just over 200 veterans and spouses across the six homes.
- Our staffing numbers remain high, so our ratios are really strong, although our biggest need today still remains getting more staff in, because we cannot fill all of our beds across the homes without additional staff. Going into that recruitment, Delaware Valley just had a tremendous turn out with their latest job fair, Peter will touch on the numbers. It was an overwhelming response, so hopefully we convert a lot of them into employees, we will see where it goes. Certainly, it was a great sign that the job market is coming back a little bit. There are a few positions we are recruiting for now, here at Delaware Valley, we are recruiting for a Director of Nursing, we are thanking Andrew for stepping in as the interim here and we also have a Medical Director that we are recruiting for at Southeastern Veterans Center and we have a Commandant position we are recruiting for at Hollidaysburg.
- We are in the midst of Nurses Week right now, please on your way throughout the facility, thank our nurses for all that they do. Nurses' week is a special time for us to step back and thank our staff. We cannot give out the gifts and the bonuses and the special prizes that a lot of nurses receive in the private sector. So really word of mouth and how we appreciate them and recognize their tough jobs is something that we need to do even more. So please take a moment and recognize all the nurses doing everything that they do. They truly are the driving force behind what our Veterans' Homes are all about.
- That concludes my report, any questions I can answer? Allan Abramson asked William Groomes (resident representative) what do you think of the nurses? Mr. Groomes replied, the nurses are great. I never had any problems, and they go out of their way to help us. What I wanted to ask you is what makes us a five-star company? Travis replied, the five-star rating system is something that come out on a federal level through the centers of Medicare and Medicaid. There are different criteria that get reported, your health inspection, so when those surveyors come into our buildings if we have deficiencies, our quality metrics, and our staffing. Those are kind of the three core components that generate your overall star rating. Peter has been a five star for quite a while, there are only a small percentage of homes in each county that are five stars. The fact that we have three is very good, especially given the size of our buildings. A lot of the facilities if you look at nursing home compare website, if you pull up your county, a lot of the five-star facilities tend to be smaller in terms of their bed count, it tends to be fifty or sixty beds. Really difficult for the larger facilities like most veteran homes to obtain that five star, not only to achieve it, but to maintain it for years.
- The one point I did leave out as well, just giving a special thanks to Yahvae and Peter, they have driven admissions so well. Their numbers compared to the other homes is remarkable. The occupancy survey definitely helped us, but their push on admissions as you heard from Yahvae report it far exceeds our other homes right now. Kudos to the two of them. Mr. Groomes added, one of the things that I like about the nurses here is when they pass by you know matter where you are they ask you are you ok, do you need anything. That is a great response from them, they are terrific.
- Claudette Campbell asked Travis, could you go over again what you are doing in the interim as you are recruiting for your Director of Nursing, I could not here that clearly. Travis replied, as we are recruiting for our Director of Nursing here at Delaware Valley, we have an interim Director of Nursing, who we pulled from our Gino Merli campus up in Scranton. Andrew Ruscavage is serving as the interim Director of Nursing, the posting for this Director of Nursing is not currently up, we should probably see that posting within the next month or so. Barbara replied to Claudette, we posted it right around the time Debbie left, we really did not get any good applicants. We only got one and that individual did not want to interview. We are waiting on it to see if the longer we wait there may be some additional applicants internal or external.

### Report from Barbara Raymond, Director

- Good morning, everyone, as Travis has mentioned we are looking forward to the public health emergency ending tomorrow. The federal government and the World Health Organization has dropped the public health emergency. We been watching various news reports coming out to see what changes may happen. Masking is one of them, currently what our guidance is, it depends on the transmission rate and outbreak status, we are lucky enough currently right this minute have three of our homes out of masks unless you are unvaccinated. As of this very moment there is a vaccine mandate, so individuals that were unable to obtain the vaccine for religious or ADA accommodation, we were required to put things into place to protect the staff and the residents. One of the things we put into place, was to make sure they are wearing mask, even if that transmission rate was low or there were no outbreaks in the facilities. We are not sure if that is going to go away, assuming that it will because the vaccine mandate itself is going away. We are going to assume even our unvaccinated staff will be able to be without mask, we are just not sure about that just yet. In case any of your folks in your organization are questioning that, because we have had a lot of questions from our staff, we are just following the current regulations and guidance that we have. We are hopeful that we will know more tomorrow after that ends.
- One of the other items is, if you are indeed going to want vaccinations, we are looking at annual vaccinations just like influenza, there was some questions if Medicare was going to cover the COVID 19 vaccination. Medicare is going to cover the COVID vaccination without a cost share, just like influenza. There won't be any co-pays or a deductible or anything like that, so we will continue to provide that service to our residents with any additional guidance that comes out from the FDA.
- From the COVID prospective we are doing very very well, currently right this minute. I say right this minute because the minute I leave the room things change, we have no residents in any of our six homes that currently have COVID. We have two of our staff members, one at our Del Val facility that Peter will touch on and one at our Southwest facility that have COVID. We had done very well all this year and even through the end of last year, very little minor illnesses from the COVID infection.
- Influenza, we have done very well with that as well. I will say my guess is it is because of the mask. We will see if there is any guidance that comes out with the flu season for nursing homes, because overall there has been very low influenza.
- As Travis mentioned, we have our leadership team across the hall going over the new regulations. Primarily what those regulations were, is the Pennsylvania Department of Health for the most part is mirroring the federal regulations. There are some slight changes and differences, that is what we are going over with the leadership team, just to make sure everybody is up to date, new forms and new processes, that sought of thing. Generally speaking, it is not a lot different than what we are already use to, the state just caught up with the feds, that is all.
- We are getting ready for State Veterans Homes week. The State Veterans Homes Week will be going on starting around June, it is always around flag day, it is 12<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>. It always incorporates June 14<sup>th</sup>; Peter will touch on all the fun stuff we have going on. We always certainly hope that you can join us.
- With those surveys Travis was mentioning, out of those surveys we are really excited about the federal VA surveys in all of our homes, we are just waiting on our Hollidaysburg facility to be surveyed, that should be in June. We did get deficiency free surveys out of two of our facilities, Gino up in Scranton and our Southwest facility in Pittsburgh, so those two facilities were deficiency free from the clinical side of things. The clinical aspect is essentially everything but life safety, they will look at the criminal background checks, employee health records, and we had one of our VA surveys here and we did not have the activities calendar posted, that is what tied us up last year at our Del Val facility. They look at everything from the employee records to the activities calendar being posted, to the menus being posted, to the care we are providing, and to the medications we are administering. In our Erie facility when the PA Department of Health came in to review their regulations, everything gets looked at and we were deficiency free at that facility too. I am very very excited, because that is really really hard to do. In any of

the deficiencies that we have gotten out of the other surveys we went through they were very minor concerns, that are really easy to correct. We are very excited to have a great team moving forward across the commonwealth. That is the end of my report.

#### **Report from William McGoldrick, Volunteer Resource Coordinator**

- Good morning, everyone, just a recap. April was volunteer appreciation month, we had a volunteer luncheon and we awarded two presidential silver awards, two bronze presidential service awards from the presidential volunteer program. We are open for business again for the volunteers to come back. I have spoken to many different organizations, American Legion, VFW and the Auxiliaries. They are all starting to come back. Like Barbara said we have State Veterans Home week in June, we look forward to having more volunteers come in and help us out with our whole week of events.
- On May 27<sup>th</sup> it is our Memorial Day memorial service at Delaware Valley, we currently have 32 resident Veterans that passed away since last Memorial Day. Our service is going to be sponsored by American Legion Post 810 and we are going to have a ceremony out front.
- In June we are going up to the GAP for a fishing trip. The General sponsors a very elaborate fishing trip in a creek and we are looking forward to taking a couple busloads of the guys.
- Peter added we are also inviting the families on May 27<sup>th</sup> to the memorial service since it will be outside, and the staff will also participate. We are trying to go back to as normal as we can.
- Allan Abramson commented thanks Bill, and you are doing a great job.

#### **Report from Peter Ojeda, Commandant**

- Thank you very much for coming, over the past 3 months we had 38 admissions and 4 discharges. We must have four beds empty at this time, because we are doing renovations. As soon as the renovations are completed, we will go to full census. Yahvae has done a great job filling up the beds, thank you very much for that Yahvae.

Monetary Donations for the past 3 months totaled \$3372.16 donated to the welfare fund.

##### **Activities**

- We had a lot of events, and we are going to the Philadelphia Zoo, taking several trips because we cannot take all of the residents at one time. We started going out to different restaurants, we started going to the movies again. We are trying to continue doing what we used to do.
- We are changing the coffee for all the residents to the same coffee that Bill prepares in the Canteen. We will have the same coffee for everybody, starting sometime in the next two or three weeks because we were supposed to get it this past week, but something happened, and we did not get the coffee yet.
- There is one employee that has COVID, she did not get it in here. She went to a cruise and came back, and she tested positive. We did not have to worry about the residents at all being exposed. We are doing very well.
- Allan Abramson said to Peter, I just want to compliment you publicly, for everybody I know that works very close with people, I want to say you are top of the line. There is not anything that we cannot talk to you about. You are always available.

##### **COVID**

Presently, Covid is pretty much under control, but things can change daily.

##### **CONSTRUCTION**

General maintenance continues of the grounds and building.

**Allan Abramson, President Advisory Council**

- I have not been around lately, due to some family problems, Jack you been around is there something you would like to say? John (Jack) O'Donnell replied just some personal problems, I lost two brothers in the last nine months that is not good, otherwise this guy does an outstanding job.

**Mr. Groomes, Resident**

- I had never had COVID, but I did catch it, how, I do not know. While I was laying in the bed, I knew that Peter was going to come to visit me. One morning I woke up and there he was. Barbara added it was just Peter's birthday two weeks ago and Travis birthday is tomorrow.

Peter added I just want to say something, during the volunteer's week I mentioned about Jack. All the Commandants took all the volunteers and Jack came to me and said, do not worry about it we can help. At the time I was an acting Commandant, he not only helped me, but he started the whole Canteen, and his wife and two of my ladies (I used to call them) was working as volunteers. There has been a lot of volunteers. The stained glass you see in the chapel, it was done by a veteran, Delaware Valley Veterans put up a lot of that money. Thanks to Jack we have that painting in the entrance. That painting is going to be really valuable one day. I ask of the volunteers if you can get someone to put clear plastic at least in the bottom part so it will not be damaged or anything. That also was done by an artist who was a veteran in the Vietnam War. Thank you all very much for the past seven years it has been incredible, and Dr. B thank you so much for everything and your support.

Allan Abramson added I can't speak for these people right here, because they deal in the other part of the system, but for people that is in here, I have to say you have such compassion and help people and are loved. I been around 20 something years, keep up the good work and I want you to know that this guy will be with you at all times. Peter replied thank you everybody.

Allan commented Everyone have a good trip back home.

**Old Business:**

**New Business:**

**Good of the Counsel:**

**Adjourned: 10:37 AM**

**Next Meeting: August 09, 2023**