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Kurt Priessman

THE VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION REPORT CARD

Veterans' Advocate Kurt Priessman crunches the data and comes up with a not-so-rosy picture of the workings of the VBA.

NOTE from Larry Scott, VA Watchdog dot Org ... A few days ago the VA released their report card on VA hospitals. That here ...

<http://www.vawatchdog.org/09/nf09/nfdec09/nf121109-3.htm>

The reports are in a raw data format, difficult to access, not readable by every computer user and don't do a side-by-side comparison because multiple reports must be accessed to paint a complete picture.

Veterans' Advocate Kurt Priessman, who wrote the series [Tear it Down Brick by Brick](#), decided to do his own report card ... this time on the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

His report, and commentary, are below.

The Complete Failure of the VBA Is Here

by Kurt Priessman

Not very many people actually read the [VA's Office of Inspector General \(VAOIG\) inspection reports](#), and almost no one actually takes a look at the "big picture" by combining the available data; i.e. a running scorecard of how the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) actually manages claims. Below is that scorecard, which is bleak at best and brings the need for VAOIG inspections of every Regional Office in the VBA immediately at worst.

Claims Processing

1. Haas (Blue Water Navy)

Determine if Haas claims were properly identified and if service connection was correctly granted or denied. (38 CFR 3.313) (M21-1MR Part IV, subpart ii, Chapter 1, Section H) (Fast Letter 09-07 and 06-26).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – 39% of Haas Claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Passed.

VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – 25% of Haas Claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE - 20% of Haas Claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Nashville, TN - 50% of Haas Claims were processed erroneously.

2. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Determine whether service connection for PTSD was correctly granted or denied. 38 CFR 3.304 and (M21-1MR Part III, Subpart iv, Chapter 4, Section H.28.B).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – 26% of PTSD claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – 26% of PTSD claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – 33% of PTSD claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE - 23% of PTSD Claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Nashville, TN - 50% of PTSD Claims were processed erroneously.

3. Traumatic Brain Injury

Determine whether service connection for TBI and all residual disabilities was correctly granted or denied. (Fast Letters 08-34 and 36, Training Letter 09-01)

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK - 29% of TBI claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – 68% of TBI claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – 17% of TBI claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Passed.

VA Regional Office Nashville, TN - 13% of TBI claims were processed erroneously.

4. Diabetes

Determine whether service connection for diabetes related to herbicide exposure (Agent Orange) and all related disabilities were correctly granted or denied. (38 CFR 4.119) (Fast Letter 02-33) (M21-1MR Part III, Subpart iv, Chapter 4, Section F)

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK - 19% of Diabetes claims were

processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – 40% of Diabetes claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – 25% of Diabetes claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE - 2% of Diabetes claims were processed erroneously.

VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Passed.

While the consensus from the OIG was that most of the errors did not affect payments to veterans, it is most doubtful that denials didn't have an impact on the veteran, but to admit it did would be a complete and total scandal that "might" have Congress up in arms.

[click chart for larger view](#)

Data Integrity

5. Date of Claim

Determine if VAROS accurately recorded the correct date of claim in electronic records. (M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 1, Section C).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – 17% of claims were processed with an erroneous date of claim.

VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Passed.

VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – 30% of claims were processed with an erroneous date of claim.

VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Failed.

VA Regional Office Nashville, TN - Failed.

6. Control Of Veterans Records System (COVERS)

Determine if VAROs complied with the use of COVERS to track claims folders.

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Failed.

VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Passed.

VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Failed.

VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Failed.

VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Passed.

Management Controls

7. Systematic Analysis of Operations (SAOs)

Determine if VAROs performed a formal analysis of their operations through completion of SAOs. (M21-4, Chapter 5, "Manpower Control and Utilization in Adjudication," Systematic Analyses of Operations, updated April 1, 2009).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Failed.

VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Failed.

VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Failed.

VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Passed.

VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Passed.

8. Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STARS)

Determine if VAROs timely and accurately corrected STAR errors. (M21-4, “Manpower Control and Utilization in Adjudication,” Quality Assurance, dated June 29, 2007).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Failed.
VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Failed.
VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Failed.
VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Passed.
VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Failed.

9. Date Stamp Accountability

Determine if VAROs accounted for and safeguarded date stamps. (M23-1 1.12, b. (1), (2), (3), (4)) (VBA Letter 20-09-10 Revised dated March 19, 2009).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Failed.
VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Failed.
VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Failed.
VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Passed.
VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Passed.

10. Claims Process Improvement

Determine if VAROs complied with VBA’s CPI Implementation Plan 08-05.

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Passed.
VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Passed.
VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Passed.
VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Passed.
VA Regional Office Nashville, TN - Failed.

Information Security

11. Mail Handling Procedures

Determine if VAROs complied with mail handling procedures. (M23-1) (M21-4, Chapter 4) (M21-1MR Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 1 & 4).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Failed.
VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Failed.
VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Failed.
VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Passed.
VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Failed.

12. Destruction and Safeguarding of Documents

Determine if VAROs complied with VBA policy regarding proper destruction and safeguarding of documents. (VBA Letter 20-08-63 revised dated March 13, 2009, and attachments).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Failed.

VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Failed.
VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Failed.
VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Failed.
VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Failed.

Public Contact

13. Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS)

Determine if IRIS responses were accurately and timely processed. (M21-1MR, Part II, Chapter 6).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Failed.
VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Failed.
VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Failed.
VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE – Passed.
VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Failed.

14. Congressional Inquiries

Determine if congressional inquiries were timely in processing. (OFO Letter 201-02-64) (Fast Letter 01-40) (VA Directive 8100).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – Failed.
VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – Passed.
VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – Failed.
VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE - Failed.
VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Passed.

15. Fiduciary

Determine if the Fiduciary unit was properly overseeing the welfare of beneficiaries to include protecting their assets, assuring their benefit entitlement rights, and selecting and monitoring the best-suited fiduciary. (38 CFR 13.100-13.111) (M21-1MR, Part XI) (FBS Users Guide) (LIE Program Guide).

VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK – N/A.
VA Regional Office San Juan, PR – N/A.
VA Regional Office Baltimore, MD – N/A.
VA Regional Office Wilmington, DE - Failed.
VA Regional Office Nashville, TN – Failed.

This is a cursory review of the findings of five regional offices, and please remember, these are the only five that have been reviewed in the last eighteen months results in the failure of all Regional Offices as far as claim processing and adherence to Federal laws and VA Regulations.

When all Regional Offices failed in control of mail, control of date stamps, most failed in determining the correct date of claim, “Shreddergate” is not over; it hasn’t even been addressed. We know it; they know it, so why hasn’t Congress demanded proof.

In fact, in fifteen areas reviewed the best these five did combined was a 60% failure rate. How this equates to a 78% projection by OIG or an 88% projection by VA of correct claims is beyond me. This says nothing of the

multitude of programs, special subject areas, combined assessments, and CBOCs that have shown failure after failure unending for the last five years. Therefore, if you think this is the best we can do, if you continue to publish reports of how great the VA is, you need to start firing the Regional Office management from the top down.

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