

# THE CHIROPRACTIC CHOICE

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## Chiropractic Advisory Committee Completes Implementation Phase of Integrating Chiropractic into Veterans' Program

The Federal Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Chiropractic Advisory Committee held its final meeting December 6-7 in Washington, DC. The Committee was created by Congress to advise and assist the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in developing and implementing legislatively mandated permanent chiropractic benefit program in the nation's largest health care delivery system. The Chiropractic Advisory Committee was active over several years, and with the implementation phase of the chiropractic program now in full swing, its primary mission has been completed. The legislation authorizing the chiropractic program in the DVA, HR 3447, passed the U.S. House of Representatives on December 11, 2001, and was signed by the President in mid-January of 2002.

"The establishment and operations of the Chiropractic Advisory Committee are quite significant in the history of the chiropractic profession," said Michael S. McLean, DC, ICA Board Chairman and a member of the DVA Chiropractic Advisory Committee. "The chiropractic profession can be proud to have finally integrated chiropractic into the DVA health care system, and while the integration is neither as comprehensive nor as easily accessed as ICA would prefer to see, it is at least a start.

"As of December 2005, there are 31 doctors of chiropractic employed by the DVA at various facilities, with at least one in each of its 21 geographic divisions called Veterans Integrated Service Networks or VISNs. These doctors include graduates of almost every chiropractic college, and 13 are full-time, permanent employees. The full-time permanent hiring of doctors of chiropractic as health professionals by the federal government is itself a major milestone for our profession," Dr. McLean said.

During the December meeting, the Chiropractic Advisory Committee members participated in a conference call with more than 20 of the DCs employed by the DVA. The doctors working in DVA facilities reported that the demand for services was great and that their focus was on basic adjustive care, with little time left over for modalities although approximately half of the providers indicated that they did provide them.

Also at its final meeting, the Committee reiterated its recommendation that veterans who are under chiropractic care as active duty military personnel through the Department of Defense (DOD) chiropractic program, be allowed direct access to DVA chiropractors. The VA has not yet allowed direct access to

chiropractic care. Under the present system, and in the face of strenuous objections by the ICA, but supported by four of the six doctor of chiropractic members of the Committee, the current DVA program provides access to chiropractic services by referral only. Currently, approximately three fourths of all referrals come from primary care physicians, with the balance coming from specialty clinics within the VA.

"Interestingly, the physical therapy departments within some VA facilities will neither make nor receive referrals

from doctors of chiropractic," said Dr. McLean. He also reported that in some facilities, it is the PT's who makes fee-basis referrals (fee basis is an arrangement at all VA facilities whereby a veteran requesting chiropractic will be authorized to have it provided by a local private chiropractic practitioner on an outside the clinic basis, which is paid for directly by the VA). "All fee-

basis referrals must go through a referral gatekeeper and it is troubling that at some facilities, that gatekeeper is a physical therapist, especially in light of the emerging pattern of non-cooperation in the implementation and accessing of chiropractic services, and refusal to refer. This is an issue that will require close attention," Dr. McLean said.

At all facilities, waiting lists for chiropractic care are common, varying from several weeks at some locations to seven months at others. The standard waiting time protocols in the DVA call for patients to be seen within one month. This is their goal and is not being adhered to within most chiropractic clinics because of a shortage of chiropractic providers.

"One of the biggest changes in the chiropractic profession that will flow from the DVA program is the ability of chiropractic students to receive an important portion of their training via internship programs at VA facilities nationwide," said McLean. Traditionally medical schools have used DVA facilities as their number one source of training opportunities for their various specialties. "Chiropractic educational institutions now have this ability but as of December, 2005 only four institutions have availed themselves of this opportunity," Dr. McLean reported. Institutions that have entered into or are in the process of finalizing such teaching arrangements with the DVA include New York Chiropractic College, Logan College of Chiropractic, the University of Bridgeport School of Chiropractic and Southern California University of Health Sciences.

In order to provide for information sharing, organizational support and quality of care, a field advisory committee composed of DCs working at the VA has been constituted by the DVA. Continu-



Dr. McLean

## CHIROPRACTIC IS SAFE

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cerns are not an issue of free speech," said ICA President Dr. John Maltby. "This is a matter akin to the famous 'Crying fire in a crowded theatre.' The public is entitled to honest, accurate information on such important issues as safety and effectiveness, and the ICA is determined to provide a strong, accurate message in the face of the offensive and inappropriate efforts we have seen from some of chiropractic's critics and competitors."

The ICA has plans to expand this campaign with additional billboards placed around the nation funded by local groups of ICA members, corporate sponsors and other allied organizations. State and local chiropractic organizations and associations can also participate in this program by sponsoring the placement of these billboards in their communities. DCs interested in participating in the campaign should contact the ICA via email at [chiro@chiropractic.org](mailto:chiro@chiropractic.org).

In addition to the billboard the ICA has also printed an initial 10,000 "Chiropractic is Safe" bumper stickers to further spread the important safety message. These stickers are available to ICA members and anyone who contributes to the program. They are also being distributed at upcoming chiropractic events where ICA officials will be making presentations about this new campaign. Doctors and students can support the campaign by becoming ICA members.

ing information regarding the chiropractic program will be provided to the chiropractic associations and posted on the VA website by this committee. The initial Chairman will be Dr. Anthony Lisi from Connecticut.

"It has been a great honor to have represented the ICA and our profession in this historic and challenging endeavor, and I know that the ICA is committed to maintaining the most vigilant and aggressive program of monitoring and lobbying, seeking additional legislative direction if it proves necessary, to ensure that our nation's military veterans receive the chiropractic care they need and deserve," Dr. McLean added.

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