

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS FIELD HEARING ON VA HEALTH CARE IN THE ISLANDS

Tuesday, August 19, 2014-Oahu Veterans Center

Aloha and Good Morning

INTRO: Cummins Kameeiamoku Mahoe III, Vietnam Combat Veteran, representing Koa Kahiko, Molokai Veterans Caring for Veterans in the Maui Veterans Council.

I want to thank the committee for allowing Hawaii veterans to voice their experiences regarding VA Health Care. I share my feedback not with anger or hostility but with a hope of value-oriented use of VA assets and resources for Hawaii veterans.

ACCESS: A veteran's long and arduous access to VA Health Care begins with digesting this handbook, see Chapter 1. This 2013 edition arrived on Maui on August 5, 2013, 8 months into the year of its' validity. An electronic version did come out in March 2013 available for download on one's e-book or computer. 40% of Hawaii's veteran population is over age 65 and many are not comfortable with the electronic access of eBenefits; MyHealtheVet, VA's Facebook page, VA's website. **VA=VISIBLY ABSENT (60s,70s,80s); VERIFIED APATHY (90s); VERTICAL ASCENT (2000s)**-the single soldier climbing the mountain of paperwork and frustration. Tragically, the 2014 handbook, hard copy or electronic version, has not been received on Maui County's shores.

Step #1- VA Benefits Counselor appointment (see handout) Consultation leads to first appointment at the Maui Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). Video teleconference-1 hour per week. Molokai continues to experience in-person visits from a VA Counselor. July 12-VA Benefits team visit to Molokai; August 2-VA Team visit to Maui

Step#2- A Health Technician schedules appointments for his/her Primary Care Team. A Primary Care Team consists of a Doctor; An RN; A LPN; Social Nurse; and a Health Technician. Maui CBOC has three Primary Care Teams. One Health Tech left in May 2013-position currently unfilled; One Health Tech left in September 2013-position is still vacant. The remaining Health Tech handles most of the duties of the vacant positions. Her name is Serine, which does not describe the atmosphere she works under.

The virgin road trip visit of our Mobile Vet Center to Maui positioned the vehicle in 8 different locations. 5 of the 8 locations were located within 3 miles of the two existing physical VA facilities. Positive-it operated on a Saturday at the popular weekend swap meet.

Hawaii's uniqueness offers challenges

VETERAN CULTURAL DIVERSITY: Dominant mixture of Polynesian, Asian, Pacific Islander, Caucasian, Afro-American, Native American Indian

TRANSPORTATION: Hawaii's geographical separation from the continental United States, similar to Alaska and Puerto Rico, presents unique travel to appointment difficulties. More so, we have island separation requiring advanced ticketing to ensure seat availability. Molokai veterans have missed appointments known for months in advance, because seats were not available to accommodate passage when reservations were attempted only 48-72 hours before the appointment. There are only two contracted airlines that service Molokai veterans.

Travel reimbursements-although supposedly done electronically, reimbursements are slow.

DAV Transportation Shuttle Service-I am the Coordinator of Maui's DAV Transportation Shuttle operation. Lack of support from Oahu cripples the Maui DAV Shuttle operation. All paperwork is handwritten, although we have two (2) desktop computers, using electricity since January 2013, that we cannot use because we do not have computer access.

MEDICATION: The Maui CBOC has no pharmacy/pharmacist. With 11,000 veterans in Maui County (@200 on Lanai; @600 on Molokai; @10,000 on Maui; a handful in Kalawao County) a veteran pays "out of pocket" medication expenses exiting Maui Memorial/Molokai General Hospital and then endures the reimbursement gauntlet. An Oahu veteran leaves Tripler with several days worth of medications provided.

EPILOGUE: Hawaii veterans share the use of Tripler Army Medical Center for Health Care services. Tripler, specifically for active duty personnel and their families, of all branches of service and we have large bases of all branches, has an area of jurisdiction that covers 52% of the earth's surface. They have a big role to fulfill. It is time for Hawaii to have its' own Veterans Hospital dedicated to caring for the approximate 116,000 veterans residing in Hawaii. Finally, Federal policies, where usually one size fits all, does not always work out here in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

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