

Did You Know?

(By: Raymond P. Toczek Legion Service Officer)
312-980-4264

That if you put four economic professors in a room and asked them how to fix our economy you would get four different answers. One will say raise taxes, another reduce them and the third may opine more government regulations while the fourth says government should be reduced. Or if you asked experts on foreign affairs what is the best way to solve the Middle East conflict one might say more troops, another no troops and the third one buffer zones. And if you asked leading education pundits how best to educate our children their responses would be all over the spectrum. More parent participation, more computers in school, less TV at home, more homework and on and on. As you can see you will get a different opinion simply by whom you ask.

Your Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Chicago office handles hundreds of VA disability compensation claims monthly and run into the same problem. VA decisions are based in part on medical opinions and most times these come from VA doctors. When the opinion is adverse to the veteran it's like pulling teeth to get a different and helpful opinion from an independent doctor.

Some of our claims are simple and don't need any additional evidence. A veteran who lost two fingers to an IED can get three doctors to look at his hand and all will agree that, yep, he is missing two fingers. Or a veteran comes down with Agent Orange lung cancer and has one lung removed. Same thing. Three doctors looking at the surgery report will concur that he is missing a lung. These are the easy cases, or the **slam dunks** as well call them.

Where we run into difficulty are those grey areas where doctors will disagree as to the cause of a certain disability. Was the World War II veteran's hearing loss a result of being in an artillery unit or simply caused by the aging process? Is that Korean veterans' arthritis in his left shoulder from the time a shell blew him out of his jeep or from a forklift accident at his civilian job. Is the Vietnam veterans' PTSD from combat and the Purple Heart he earned or from some childhood abuse. And is the Iraq vet's migraine headaches from the oil well fumes he inhaled or from the hours he now spends at his civilian job staring at a computer all day.

On those claims where the VA evidence is against the veteran the only way we can rebut it is if we obtain a different opinion from another doctor, usually a private one. As many veterans only use VA hospitals this is sometimes impossible. For those that may have a private doctor, often times they are too busy to give opinions or will charge an exorbitant fee. Usually short on funds this puts the veteran in a "no win" situation.

For this reason your VA&R staff here in Chicago are looking for American Legion members in Illinois who are licensed medical professionals, either active or retired, and who would be willing to furnish us with their opinions on some of these difficult cases. We would have the VA furnish you with copies of the veteran's medical records for you to review. You could even call the veteran into your office for a personal exam. Then with your opinion we can rebut the VA's doctors and perhaps get the veteran the much deserved benefits they earned. These opinions need not be 100% absolute. An opinion that states "as likely as not" or possible link" will be enough for our staff to pursue the veterans claim to the next level, which is an appeal.

Specialists in dermatology, diabetes, neurology, oncology, ophthalmology, audiology mental health and really any other specialty are sorely needed. If you have a Post member who is licensed and would be willing to give opinions on a Pro Bono basis please have them contact our service officer, Raymond Toczek at 1-312-980-4264

With over 800 active Posts in Illinois I am sure we can find a few volunteers. Our old time favorite cartoon character Bugs Bunny use to say "Is there a doctor in the house"? I say instead, "Is there a doctor in the Post"?