Did You Know?

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That over the last 90 days or so that I have been “sheltered in place” I have seen the COVID19 virus cause sudden, and sometimes deadly changes in peoples’ lives. One minute you’re fine, the next day you are in ICU, then a ventilator and (worst case scenario) you answer your final roll call! With that in mind here are some pointers for you to think about. In these uncertain times, we all need to be PROACTIVE.

1. If you are the spouse, partner or a relative who may find themselves taking a veteran to the ER for a medical emergency be sure you have a good and current list of their medications and dosages. Often times the veteran is in great pain, confused or unconscious at the time of their visit. Current info helps the staff avoid confusion and possible overdoses. And due to COVID19 you may not be able to stay with them, so have copies of this stuff in an envelope to give the staff.
2. If not taking the vet to the VA ER then also be sure you have a copy of their NEW Medicare card with the new number. Also copies of private insurance cards. Again, copies in an envelope help.
3. Relatives and partners may have a close relationship to the veteran but they can’t make medical decisions if the veteran is unable. Have a current properly executed Power-of-Attorney for health care and be sure you know where in their home or apartment it is located.
4. Many veterans have been living together with their partners for years. Before you know it they have gotten accustomed to this arrangement and never actually get married. I often hear when the vet dies that they were going to get married but kept putting it off. Illinois is not a common-law state so there would be no benefits for their partner. And even if the vet realizes their death is near and tie the knot, a couple has to be usually married for at least a year to later get benefits. I just had one case exactly like that and the vet died 11 months after their marriage. Sorry, no VA survivors benefits.
5. What are your burial wishes? Do you want to be cremated or have your body donated to science? Want to be laid to rest at a VA cemetery or a private one? These choices should be written down somewhere and given to whoever will be handling your funeral arrangements. And what about your military mementoes? Spouses and children often times could care less about the veterans medals or scrapbooks and don’t want to hold on to them. Discuss this with your relatives and if they don’t want them, do what my uncle did; he had them placed into the casket with him
6. Do you have a current will or was it written twenty years ago when you kids were tots and you just got married? So much can change and wills need to be updated. Likewise for your accounts, stocks, retirement funds and your home. Are they titled properly?
7. And my perennial comment, exactly where is the vet’s DD 214 if it’s needed? Having it in a safe place is no good if no one knows where that safe place is!

These are just a few ideas, I am sure there are many more. Take it from someone who, over the last few months, has had to counsel people in these situations. It’s not an easy job and sometimes they take it out on me because the veteran wasn’t organized and proactive. I always try and help but some things can’t be corrected after the fact, and families and relatives go through much grief and anxiety, which could have been avoided.

**“In times of stress and danger such as come about as the result of an epidemic, many tragic and cruel phases of human nature are brought out, as well as many brave and unselfish ones.” ― William Crawford Gorgas, US Army physician in the Panama Canal Zone, during the Yellow Fever epidemic.**