

# VHMAC-ST Meeting Minutes (16 December 2020)

## I. Call to Order

Council Chair Dr. Dave La Pointe called to order the regular meeting of the Veterans' Healthy Minds Advisory Council- South Texas, at 1101 on 16 December 2020, via Zoom video/tele-conference.

Council roll was called by Council Secretary Karah Smith.

**Roll Call**— Present or Excused: David La Pointe, Gingerlei Seda, Karah Smith, Kevin Crozier, Larissa Martinez, Leah Whitmire, Lisa Firmin, Michael Carrion, Robin Soto, Wil Seda, Carlos Acosta, Dr. Betsy Davis, and Dr. Tracy Auster-VA MST coordinator for South Texas VA.

Not Present: Andrea Strong, Christopher Vidaurre, Jill Palmer, Jose Gonzales, Kesha Delasbour, Michael O'Connell, Natasha Walden, Scott Rios.

## II. Approval/Review of Previous Minutes/Current Agenda

Council Chair Dr. La Pointe motioned to accept previous meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Kevin and approved at 1104.

## III. Old Business

**VHMACST— Veteran Resilience and Recovery Operation/ Collaborative.** VA rep Dr. Davis discussed that she had a meeting with the MH providers who work with veterans to collaborate. They had lower attendance the last few months. The project that they have been working on is a video project of short 1-minute videos of lessons learned in the military that helped veterans cope in 2020. Flyer is ready to go and they are moving forward on that. Requesting a couple people to do the short videos so they have an example to put into a video clip/pitch. Less than a 1-minute video thinking on 1 thing that you learned in military that has helped (examples: embrace the suck, lean on my comrades, strength and resilience) email to Dr. Davis. This is the pivot from the vet talks event due to Virtual platform fatigue for a number of people and changes in staff at Cohen clinic. Goal is to inspire hope for other veterans and help civilians to relate to military. Leah, Dr. David La Pointe, as well as Gingerlei stated that they will try to provide videos. **(Open)**

**VHMACST— Women Veterans Sub-Committee.** Sub-Committee Chair Col. Lisa Firmin asked if there is any more information about a women's clinic. Dr. Tracy is on women's health advisory council-she reports that her understanding is that one of the new locations in this upcoming year will be solely for female veterans. Dr. Tracy Auster states that there are a few clinics that may be moving locations this upcoming year, but she is aware that there are plans to have a stand-alone women's clinic. There is not a location chosen yet. Lisa reports that Bexar county is home to the largest number of female veterans in the state of Texas and has concerns that there is no women's clinic. Lisa discussed that she intends to put together stats to start working on creating a national criterion for the VA to consider implementing that when a threshold of female veterans is reached in a certain location that a women's clinic is created. **(Open)**

**VHMACST— Outreach Sub-Committee.** Sub-committee chair Wil is excused for this meeting, currently meeting with a veteran in need that had contacted the council.

- "Check-In" Program active, currently tracking 9 vets and family members **(Open)**
- "Nextdoor Community" Program **(In-work)** Dr. La Pointe discussed that he is not certain how far it reaches but he has received information from Dr. Davis about who we should be reaching and where we can reach out to. They continue to work on this. **(Open)**

**Mental Health First Aid Training.** Kevin discussed that numerous people showed up to the hike that Larissa hosted last week. Leah reported that she is an instructor for MH first aid through Circle of Arms, can provide training, no dates on the calendar yet. Larissa informed the council that you must go into your account that you registered with for the training (Mental Health First Aid) and print out your own certificate. Larissa does not have access to the account for people who attended, but the certificate should be posted to the account. **(Open)**

**VHMACST—Budget.** VA Rep Dr. Davis discussed there are no updates, information is submitted, we will continue to wait for approval. **(Open)**

**VHMACST— Resource Guide.** Council Chair informed Council that it is also important to check the council website for resources as well. **(Open)**

#### **IV. New Business**

##### **VHMACST— Guest Speaker**

GUEST SPEAKER: Dr. Auster – Military Sexual Trauma (MST) started 11:15 C.S.T.

Guest speaker is the MST coordinator at south Texas VA. She tries to help VA staff navigate care for veterans. She acts as a gateway into care for people who are considering getting treatment for MST. She makes sure that trainings are up to date and staff is aware of MST needs. She wants veterans to know that we are here and invested and MST veterans have a place to go and have options. She is looking at joining forces with primary care and physical therapy. She reports that she knows that veterans come in with a number of needs and she is hoping that they see it as part of whole health. She took over the job in June but in April they often do several events, and she knows it will still look different this year. She has the goal to make sure people know that this is still an issue that the VA is focused on. She is open to hearing ideas of what the VA could do to address MST. She wants to make sure that people have a voice. She is going to be sending contact information via email and can answer questions on how the process works in the VA and what the program will look like if a veteran identifies MST. Kevin requested to post information on Facebook and the healthy minds website. She will be sending information and is willing to come back to speak to the council again. She will also add information for men reporting MST as well. Dr. David requested the booklet regarding MST and Dr. Auster is going to look through her office to see if she can get some more to the council. **(Closed)**

Col. Lisa asked if Dr. Auster has seen an increase nationally or locally in veterans reporting MST. Dr. Tracy says yes there is an upward trend over the past 5 years. The numbers since Vanessa Guillen's death have not been released yet. Col. Lisa reports that she has never been asked regarding MST, despite reading online that the VA is getting more aware and asking veterans more often. Col. Lisa wants to know what things can be changed so the VA is doing what they are reporting they do in the news. Dr. Auster states that she needs to do more outreach at the primary care clinics level. Col Lisa points out that there is a breakdown of information from national to boots on the ground. Dr. Auster states that the mental health providers are the ones that tend to ask more often. Dr. Davis thanked the council for the feedback and information because they want to know what the veterans are actually experiencing. **(Closed)**

**VHMACST— Upcoming Training-** Dave discussed a recurring training that he is going to be sending out via email to council. **(Open)**

**VHMACST— Events-** No current events on the calendar. **(Open)**

## **VHMACST— Other/Miscellaneous**

Col. Lisa discussed she knows of a vet who needs help. He is a caregiver to his veteran spouse. He went to VA for help but was kicked out of the program because he missed meetings due to taking care of his wife. She saw him last week on Friday and he was opening up about his current issues with PTSD, his pain is really bad, and he is struggling. He is trying to work and take care of wife. Kevin states that he can help to get aid and attendance paperwork done. Dr. Davis offered to talk to warrior to tell him what is available. Col. Lisa reports that the VA should address the underlying cause of why people miss appointments. Dave, Kevin, and Dr. Davis gave contact info. Dr. Davis discussed a brochure of same-day service options so he could meet with a nurse to start care. Wherever he was established he could request a same-day clinic visit. Karah asked if there be a barrier since getting dropped from PTSD clinic, Dr. Davis is not sure if that is going to happen- Dr. Elder with PTSD clinic will be on a meeting in a few months. **(Open)**

Earlier this month Dr. Davis provided feedback that a lot of emails get sent out. Dr. La Pointe stated that he is taking that into consideration. If you are getting information such as Tricare, he states that anything he gets from someone on the council he forwards. He reported that the reason he sends out Tricare information is because every active-duty member and every retired Veteran and family member is affected by Tricare. Tell Dave if you get this information from someone else so that he can cut down on multiple emails. Larissa discussed that it is mainly Cohen and Endeavors information that is often what is duplicated because a number of us are on their list already. **(Closed)**

Dave wants to make changes to the Homepage so that if someone is seeking help, they can see that information as soon as they see our website. **(Open)**

Leah sent email with the title VA is failing our veterans and discussed that the author Stacy is hoping to come and talk about the issues. Leah states that there is a group called loving my veteran, where veterans are sharing their personal stories and Stacy has collected them and put them out on a website. She had reached out and tried to get ahold of a committee and now she has the attention of Robert Wilke and the stories are being shared with him and he wants to hear the stories that the veterans are going through as well as their families. It is starting to get some national attention. Robert Wilke is secretary of VA at the national level. Next month the council may have caregiver support and add this topic as well to the January meeting. **(Open)**

Dr. Davis discussed that the MH leadership is looking at how they can improve the MH services and leadership Dr. Brida (associate chief of MH for Texas) asked-how can we encourage more family involvement, and how can they encourage veterans to use secure messaging with providers and what are some barriers that some veterans may be experiencing. Leah discussed that her cousin was trying to use the secure messaging but is told that she must go in person to initiate that option and due to COVID-19 she does not want to go in person. Dr. Davis will work on getting out information on how to get verified without having to go in person. Col. Lisa stated that she uses secured messaging and finds it effective. **(Open)**

Dave showed PowerPoint slideshow of council members and the events hosted/attended thus far. **(Closed)**

## **V. Next Meeting**

20 Jan 2021; 1100; Phone-In/ Video Teleconference (due to COVID-19 concerns and restrictions).

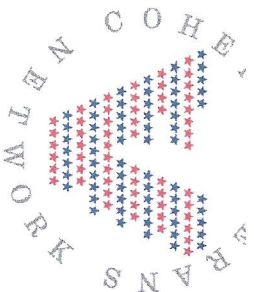
## **VI. Adjournment**

Dr. La Pointe motioned to adjourn, second by Larissa, Adjourned at 1140

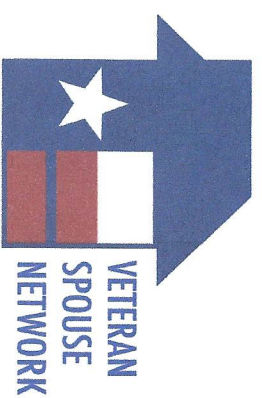
## **VII. End of Minutes**

Minutes submitted by Council Secretary, Karah Smith.

Minutes will be reviewed by Council Chair, David La Pointe.



The Steven A. Cohen  
Military Family Clinic  
at Endeavors, El Paso



# VIRTUAL COURSE: CAREGIVER FUNDAMENTALS

Every Thursday

January 14-February 4

5-6:30pm (MT) / 6-7:30pm (CT)

This 4-session course will help a caregiver, friend, family member, or spouse learn ways to identify the needs of a Veteran and how to advocate for and provide efficient support.

**This course is taught through:**

- Set tasks
- Problem resolution
- Open discussion

*Experience providing care to a Veteran is highly recommended but not required.*

**Instructor:**

Ismael Lopez

Outreach and Life Skills Coordinator

REGISTER BY VISITING:

[bit.ly/epvccf21](https://bit.ly/epvccf21)

# VETERANS' HEALTHY MINDS ADVISORY COUNCIL – SOUTH TEXAS

W  
H  
O

- . Veteran's and Family Members
- . VA Staff/Liaisons
- . Community Health Agencies
- . Veteran Service Organizations
- . Local Agencies and Groups

W  
H  
A  
T

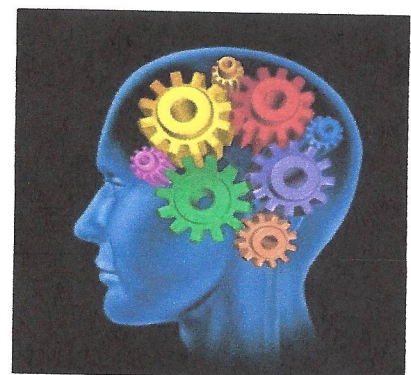
- . Refer for HELP – Suicide Prevention, PTSD, M.H. Assistance
- . Educate Veterans and Family Members on Issues and Resources Available
- . Provide Guidance and Direction on Veteran Assistance Programs/Options
- . Help them navigate the often-confusing system they are confronted with
- . Open Communication with Veterans and Family Members – Targeting People who need Help (Meetings, Website, BLOG, Twitter, Speaking Engagements, Multiple Sub-Committees - Women's, "Check-in Program", Outreach Programs, etc.)

W W  
H H  
E E  
N R.  
E

- . Monthly Council Meeting – Times and Location will vary
- . Hosting Outreach Programs
- . Participating in others' Outreach Programs
- . Attending VA, Community, VSO, Local Agencies meetings and functions
- . MOVE AROUND LOCATIONS – see/educate Council Members on VA Locations/Resources

W  
H  
Y

- . HELPING VETERANS – HELP THEMSELVES
- . Identifying and Reaching out to Veterans and Family Members
- . Provide Assistance/Make a Difference
- . Advocate for Veterans and Family Members with the VA System
- . Increase Awareness Options/Resources for Veterans and Family Member



**From:** Davis, Betsy <Betsy.Davis@va.gov>  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 10, 2020 03:06 PM  
**To:** davelp.lapointe@gmail.com; Gingerlei Seda; Karah Smith  
**Subject:** Feedback requested from MH leadership

Good afternoon,

Our VA MH leadership are doing some strategic planning on improving Veterans' experiences of VA MH services. We'd love feedback and ideas from the VHMAC about these two areas specifically. Could you either send this email out to the group and/or could we take a few minutes for people to share thoughts at the meeting next week?

1. How would you like to see your family members involved in your mental health care? What can MH providers do better with family involvement?
2. How can we encourage Veterans to use MyHealtheVet secure messaging to communicate with their provider and treatment teams? What would make this process easier?

Please send responses directly to me at [betsy.davis@va.gov](mailto:betsy.davis@va.gov).

Thank you!

Betsy A. Davis, Ph.D.  
Psychologist, Local Recovery Coordinator  
Mental Health Service (116B)  
South Texas Veterans Health Care System  
7400 Merton Minter  
San Antonio, TX 78229  
VA cell: (210) 740-8149  
[betsy.davis@va.gov](mailto:betsy.davis@va.gov)

*"Our job is not to judge who will and will not recover. Our job is to create environments in which opportunities for recovery and empowerment exist." Patricia Deegan, 1996*

Confidentiality Note: This e-mail is intended only for the person or entity to which it is addressed, and may contain information that is privileged, confidential, or otherwise protected from disclosure. Dissemination, distribution, or copying of this e-mail or the information herein by anyone other than the intended recipient is prohibited. If you have received this e-mail in error, please notify the sender by reply e-mail, and destroy the original message and all copies.