

VHMAC-ST Meeting Minutes (17 March 2021)

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 1102 on 17 March 2021, via Zoom video/teleconference.

Council roll was called by Council Secretary Karah Smith.

Roll Call— Present or Excused: Carlos Acosta, David La Pointe, Edsel Thomas, Gingerlei Seda, Karah Smith, Kevin Crozier, Larissa Martinez, Leah Whitmire, Lisa Firmin, Michael Carrion, Natasha Walden, Wil Seda

Dr. Betsy Davis, Becki Williams-VA Care Provider, Daniel Perez, Sammy Lewis-looking for volunteer opportunities, Rizaldyjim DeJesus-South Texas Coordinator-Burn Pit Registry, Dr. Elder-PTSD Clinic.

Not Present: Andrea Strong, Christopher Vidaurre, Jill Palmer, Jose Gonzales, Kesha Delasbour, Michael O'Connell, Robin Soto

II. Approval/Review of Previous Minutes/Current Agenda

Council Chair Dr. La Pointe motioned to accept previous (January) meeting minutes. No February meeting minutes due to February meeting cancelation. Motion seconded by Kevin and approved at 1127 (after guest speaker).

Started council with New Business due to having presenters on the call to present.

III. New Business

VHMACST— Guest Speaker Dr. Will Elder, PTSD Clinic

- ✓ **SPEAKER:** Dr. Will Elder – PTSD Clinic-started presenting 1104- PTSD clinic at Audie Murphy VA-Provided a slideshow of information, Discussed the PTSD continuum of care. There are ongoing evaluations to see if individual needs greater or lesser care. Start with Primary Care. The PTSD is a specialty care clinic, and you need a referral to come to PTSD clinic. There is national oversight of the clinic to keep the evidence-based treatment up to date. They only treat PTSD; treatment usually takes 2-4 months with weekly sessions. Discussed community resources that a veteran may use prior to PTSD treatment with VA. This VA program is only able to focus on military related PTSD. Treatment is not focused on discussing the past trauma in depth, instead the focus is more on learning skills that help with current symptoms. IE. Sleep management, stress management, Discussed the difference of tier 1 and tier 2 services (included in PowerPoint). Discussed admission

criteria. They are willing to see clients that use THC, but there may be limits to certain clients that use other drugs. Discussed how veterans get referred in, which is usually through PCMHI/BHIP provider in VA. They focus on letting the individual participate in choosing their personal goals through services. Discussed the residential treatment services for PTSD. They typically use Bonham near Dallas, Temple-now doing outpatient due to Covid, Houston Riser or Rover programs. Will provide a copy of his PowerPoint presentation. Transportation is not provided but the VA partners with community resources that can provide rides. Discussed if someone is having difficulty to get connected to a primary care physician, they need to call the Telecare line at 210.949.3994. All services are currently only available virtually right now. There is a small team of providers that do EMDR, but they are not a part of the PTSD clinic-you can be referred to this group. There is no EMDR provider available directly with the PTSD clinic. Mr. Rizaldyjim reports that you can also contact Enrollment and Eligibility at 210.949.3981 and press option 1 to get connected to PCP.

VHMACST— Guest Speaker Rizaldyjim E. DeJesus-Burn Pit Registry

- ✓ **SPEAKER:** Rizaldyjim E. DeJesus – 11:28 Burn Pit Registry-South Texas environmental health coordinator. The goal is an online questionnaire that leads to a scheduled no-cost exam. They reach out to veterans through newsletters, webinars, websites. The VA collaborates with DOD to discuss treatment and get data. In order to get an evaluation, you can contact the department 210.949.3981 option 2-ask for Jim in order to get evaluated for a goal. Discussed difference between gulf war and burn pit registry. Col. Firmin asked how long it should take to be contacted after requesting a consult. The PCP is the one who does the evaluation after the veteran completes the link and questionnaire. The OEF/OIF coordinator has the list of veterans that requests to be contacted and reports they are making the calls out to the veterans. DeJesus reports he will provide the link to the website with the contact information for individuals to reach out to regarding burn pit/agent orange. Larissa asked if there are studies being conducted looking at the children of veterans that were exposed to chemicals during service. DeJesus reports that if the veteran identifies there are effects on the children the VA will reach out to the family. Gulf war registry is set up with the Gulf war registry-the airborne and burn pit is a link that is sent to the veteran that they fill out and then see the PCP. Airborn hazard and burnpit hazard is a lengthy process to complete the questionnaire. DeJesus reports that Gulf War registry is the one that they follow as it is a research study and that is the one that creates the call list to reach out to veterans. This is the one that they use to identify specific illnesses that are likely related to the environment.

<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>

<https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home>

Kevin provided a link to <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/index.asp>

The smoke and fumes from open burn pits

Sand, dust, and particulate matter

General air pollution common in certain countries

Fuel, aircraft exhaust, and other mechanical fumes

Smoke from oil well fires

DeJesus provided the following link

<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/index.asp>

Please email Rizaldyjim.dejesus@va.gov for personnel that are waiting to be contacted regarding registry.

IV. Old Business

VHMACST— Veteran Resilience and Recovery Operation/ Collaborative. (Dr. Davis) They have been sharing resources and identifying issues. Is it possible to have a space for a veteran in need that is not in danger to self but is in crisis to go? Larissa discussed that they are trying to create/enhance an option to have a living room/safe space for a veteran in non-crisis situation (panic attack) that is open 24 hours to be able to defuse/deescalate to prevent the crisis-manned by mental health provider. San Antonio Club house is currently brainstorming an idea to be open to their members after hours and poll their clients about what they might like to see happen.

VHMACST— Women Veterans Sub-Committee-(Col Lisa Firmin)-A series of virtual events coming up, **Take A Walk In Her Boots virtual event Time: Mar 30, 2021, 1pm**

- Join Zoom Meeting <https://utsa.zoom.us/j/92641276185>

On 29 April there is a Panel event-wanting to bring awareness to women in the military and MST. Col Firmin is having discussions on the national level to discuss policy and will be meeting with the VFW magazine. LULAC is hosting statewide summit in California and is hoping Larissa can be on the panel for it. The Vanessa Guillan act has slowed down in Congress and she is hoping that will change.

Col. Firmin will send out an email with upcoming event information, which will also be added to council website.

VHMACST— Outreach Sub-Committee. Will and Mike Carrion were not on the call.

- “Check-In” Program 14 people are being tracked right now, 2 added this last week. Folks are looking for assistance with VA benefits review and home modifications.
- “Nextdoor Community” Program: **(Dr. La Pointe)**-we are waiting on the final okay of what we can use on Nextdoor.

VHMACST—Budget. VA Rep Dr. Davis discussed there are no updates. Booklet requests have been passed along to Dr. Auster. (Open)

VHMACST—Women Veterans Forum: (Dr. Davis) nothing to discuss at this time

- ✓ National VMHC: **(Dr. Davis)**

- ✓ South Texas Veterans Health Care System (STVHCS): **(Dr. Davis)**
- ✓ National Mental Health Illness (NAMI): **(Dr. Davis)** new support group for veterans which is a weekly drop in, also one for family of veterans, Nami Homefront which is more like a class. They have a lot of great classes available and connection opportunities. Larissa is looking to get signed up to bridge to care but does not have a direct contact person. Dr. Davis provider Verna contact info Verna Lister (NAMI): 210-838-1945 Here is Verna's email for NAMI also verna.l@nami-sat.org

https://veteranshealthymindsadvisorycouncilsouthtexas.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NAMI-SAT_All-Support-Groups.pdf

VHMACST—Veteran Spouse Network: (Natasha Walden) -Dave reports he will include a document of what they are discussing. Natasha reports they meet weekly on Tuesdays.

VHMACST—Resource Guide: (Dr. La Pointe) resource guide was delayed due a resource that takes up a lot of space on the guide is updating and changing their information, when complete, he will send it out.

VHMACST—Caregiver Support Program:(Dr. La Pointe)-had a recent meeting, they are putting together paperwork, but they are not ready to give an update.

VHMACST—Loving My Veteran Program: (Leah Whitmire)-Leah had oral surgery and not able to speak right now so we will get update later. She reports in the chat she has not heard anything.

VHMACST— Other. -Miscellaneous-

- ✓ **Upcoming Training;** Traumatic Brain Injury – March 25, 2021 – 1300 – 1500 **(Endeavors)**
 - NAMI Homefront (Vet/Family Members experiencing trauma) **(Dr. Davis/Susan Becmer)**
- ✓ **Upcoming Events;**
- ✓ Other: “What’s Your Story” - Gulf War Illness 5-week virtual workshop.
- ✓ From boots to pumps, women empowerment
- ✓ 25 March 830-930 supporting military
- ✓ 3.25 1-3 pm covering traumatic brain injury. All of these events have already been sent via email to council members.
- ✓ Endeavors benefits briefing.
- ✓ 4.6 legal consultation briefing
- ✓ Nami Homefront training was discussed.

Events are on website calendar

<https://veteranshealthymindsadvisorycouncilsouthtexas.com/calendar/>

Discussed Talking with Veterans during crisis handout-previously sent to council members

Larissa-Be your own lucky charm - we will do a 3-mile hike and then pass out financial info at the end. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/ALKwjbtfnfZgegQz7> Lady Bird Johnson Trailhead
<https://fb.me/e/gm6V9yCG7>

They offer COVID VACCINE at Balcones Height call 210 949 9702 to schedule an appointment

Next meeting Dr. Currian will be on to talk about Telemental Health.

Invited new member Edsel (Ed) to introduce himself-He is passionate about finding ways to decrease the stigma regarding MH. He is a peer support recovery specialist, focused on reaching vets that have MH issues.

Larissa asking about a gap that he is wondering if the council can work on-her husband shared an experience of how to fill the gap. Veteran who goes through VA, but most appointments are through Community Care. Dr has to put in referral for care, but specifically for his pain management there is a 3-month cut off. He has to get a new referral. He is wondering if there is a way to send a reminder that time is running out and asking veteran if they need to extend services and not leave it up to veteran to remember on their own to request extensions of services. He is considered a new patient each time his time is ended. Lisa reports that if her time ends, she contacts the doctor directly and her doctor contacts that VA to get an extension. Discussed that the VA does not make it easy for the doctor appointments. Discussed maybe having a focus group about the disconnect between the VA and Tricare.

V. Next Meeting

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

VI. Adjournment

Meeting ended at 12:28

VII. End of Minutes

Minutes submitted by Council Secretary, Karah Smith.

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