

VHMAC-ST Meeting Minutes (16 March 2022)

I. Call to Order

Council Chair Dr. David A. La Pointe called to order the regular meeting of the Veterans' Healthy Minds Advisory Council- South Texas, at 11:00 on 16 March 2022, at The Audie Murphy VA Hospital and live, via Zoom video/tele-conference.

Angie Bukowski called council roll.

Roll Call— Present or Excused: Dr. David a. La Pointe, Dr. Betsy Davis, Amelia Peacock, Becki Williams, Troy McGrath, Kevin Crozier, Lisa Firmin, Amanda Jenkins, Carlos Acosta, Angie Bukowski, Edsel Thomas (excused), Karah Smith, Robin Soto (excused), LaKeisha Howard, Leah Smith (excused), Jeff Anderson, Monica Garcia (Excused), Michael Carrion, Natasha Walden (Excused),

Not Present: Jose Michael Gonzales, Larissa Martinez, Leah Whitmire, Harold “Quinn” Brown,

II. Membership Updates:

We had enough for quorum, we have 23 members, 19 voting members, 4 non-voting members (from VA staff), 14 veterans, community partners, 6 remaining original members of the council (Dr. Davis, Dave, Karah, Kevin, Carlos, Lisa), 14 inactive members (those who want to remain connected to the council but cannot attend meetings). Dave will be sending out the address listing this month so please make sure to check your information and ensure it is accurate. Also, if you go to the site, it has everyone who is a member and their position if they have one and pictures of everyone. So, if you have a current headshot, please send Dave a copy so he can get it up on the website. The current number of hits on the website is 93,833 (per the chat). As soon as we get 500,000 hits on the website, Dave and Kevin will let us know. Please be aware this is intentional hits from people seeking help. **(CLOSED)**

III. Approval/Review of Previous Minutes/Current Agenda

Council Chair Dave asked for a motion to accept previous meeting minutes. Amelia motioned. Motion seconded by Kevin and approved at 11:10.

Please be aware that everything being discussed in the meeting will have also been sent via email. If you are missing something, or need another copy, please let us know so we can get you a copy.

IV. Old Business

VHMACST— Veteran Resilience and Recovery Operation/ Collaborative. Dr. Davis – this is a group of local veteran service providers specific to mental health, they are meeting once a month and discussing how to work together better, this is a sub-committee of a larger group called the Community Veterans Engagement Board which is supposed to be the Veterans leader community and collaborate with the VA hospital administration and how the VA and the community can work better together, not just for mental health but as a whole. This sub-committee is for mental health. So, the CVEB is going through a process starting next month for strategic planning and figuring how they can be most effective in terms of being a connection between the VA and the Veteran (family and supports) and the community. Dr. Davis is looking for information on where are the current breakdowns specific to mental health between the VA and the community. So, the group was getting information from community partners on where the breakdown is. A lot is with community care and general understanding on how community partners can access the VA and best get support from the VA. She did want to bring it to us for the Veteran perspective for where the gaps are for where the VA and the community or where the gaps are

that the community can fill. It was reported that the VA will not provide a psychiatrist for, so Guardian has had to seek outside care for the treatment. It was asked if the Guardian can follow up with Dr. Davis. Dave inquired if Dr. Davis is representing as a part of our council in this group or the VA and if not, can he participate as a representative in the council. Amelia would also love to get involved in the council to set up the connection for here that is quite different from how Houston works. Amelia learned that there is a training for women veterans, and she knows there is a guideline, but it is not very comprehensive, so the difference in care and getting the information out on transitioning people who are moving here. Those who are here in a dual role, please don't forget that we can also reach out to the council for help for our Veterans. It is important that all the community partners are on the same page and working on the same issues together, so please do not forget to get the council involved as well for collaboration. Dr. Davis will get with Quetta Rodriguez, who is the chair of the board (the big picture one), and she has dual roles as the VA mental health and also is the chair on a mental health and suicide committee and as a chair she is expected to bring all these perspectives to the CVEB. She is not specifically representing the group but because the group is a part of the sub-committee, she is bringing our issues to the CVEB. That is the structure they are asking for with representatives going to the meetings and bringing it back to the board but there is a possibility of us having formal representation. If there are other things coming to mind of systemic issues, please email Dr. Davis. The time it takes to get a doctor's appointment for community care of in facility, there is nothing less than 30 days out. (Lisa put in the chat that the difficulty in having community health providers get reimbursed by the VA continues to be an issue. Angie put in the chat that she emailed the question to coworkers who also collaborate with Veterans or are veterans themselves. Amanda put in the chat that from a vet's perspective, getting access for mental health that is not a crisis is hard. **(OPEN)**)

VHMACST – Annual Report. Dr. Davis has not sent the annual report to Sandy Jackson yet, so she will do that

VHMACST – VA Mental Health National Call – The national council call this month was particularly good and was about Arizona (3 councils) and how they all work together, and Dr. Davis wants to know if our council would be interested in collaborating with the other councils in Texas. She will reach out to her counter parts and see which ones are active. **(OPEN)**

VHMACST – VA Mental Health Executive Council – We had the opportunity to present our annual report and highlighted some things. We seem to have a lack of communication of us talking to the mental health staff. Other than Dr. Davis, most were not aware of what we do and how we do it, so we were going to get the word out to go out and share the information and share it with the staff and that has to be our responsibility. We also have the My Life, My Story program where Veterans can share a bit of who they are, and Leticia shares it, and it goes in the medical record and the first thing that every provider will see is this story to gain a better perspective on who you are for treatment. It was asked if the doctors would actually read this and the feedback from doctors and providers is that they are interested. It was asked what we can do to make it better and we will work on doing this. One of the follow ups was instead of going to the physical office because of space issues and people working remotely, to do a virtual meeting will be the best way to reach people. This is usually the first Wednesday of the month and we can provide a copy of the brochure. It's the mental heal call, and it is all the mental health providers who are on, not just the leadership. Dr. Davis will see if there is time for us to talk on it. **(OPEN)**

VHMACST – In Patient project. On March 26th we are planting the garden and painting a mural. There are 2 shifts, one at 9 and one at 11:30. Dave went on to the site and it did not have an option for a shift, and it is a 5-hour block. Andrea Strong through the Mission Continues is coordinating it and it is believed she will be following up. She is an inactive member for us. Dr. Davis can send the link again, but Dave will send it out again. Spots are limited. **(OPEN)**

VHMACST— Women Veterans Sub-Committee. Lisa Firmin presented.

Dweebs International – Lisa did a panel on MST that is airing in April (it was recorded several months ago) and this panel had a male survivor whose story is powerful, and she would like it linked to our page when it comes out. The airing date is pending.

TVC – is hosting a podcast on military sexual trauma, it will be recorded next week and will be shown in the first part of April. Larissa is also on the podcast with others. The word is getting out and once Lisa gets the link for it, she will share it.

A couple of weekends ago, Lisa spoke at the American Legion for women's vet for the Alamo region, she spoke a little about MST and had a lot of people talk to her afterwards. Other people see and hear about it and invite us to speak more

Lisa is going to speak at the Jacqueline Smith event later this week to honor women Veterans (Thursday evening) and they specifically asked her to speak about MST. Dr. Davis will also be there.

Publishing date is the last part of April. There are two dates for book launches. April 26 in Kingsville and possibly April 29 at UTSA at 2:00 that is pending confirmation. She will have people whose stories are in the book will also be at the event and will have the chance to speak about their stories in person. There will be counselors also present. It will be a powerful and educational event. We will also be there. The book has a trigger warning on it. It is not believed it will be recorded but Lisa is thinking of doing a series of podcasts on the book. In June, she is going to be in DC at the library of congress doing a presentation about the book. Lisa has not been in contact with the acting MST coordinator while Tracy is out, who will possibly return in May/June.

Lisa is still working on a something for Latina Style magazine for MST and having a panel in May and Tracy might be a part of it. **(Open)**

VHMACST— Outreach Sub-Committee – Dave does not have updates for Michael.

- “Check-In” Program – we have 0 participants right now, which is good. **(Open)**

V. New Business

VHMACST— Outreach events

We don't have anything on the books. The last event was at UTSA. Dave really wants to thank Becky and Kevin for showing up. It was a 2-hour event and felt like 10 minutes. There was a lot of traffic and our table had so much information that we provide. Dave went direct to the government training office and ordered some products from there. We do have posters, pens, etc. and he will take pictures and send it out to the council. If we need anything, just ask. We get a lot of traffic at our tables. We hope at some point we can set up a table at the VA outside and have our information, possibly for May. Dr. Davis does have outreach cards at her office so she will provide them. **(OPEN)**

VHMACST— Resource Guide – Dave will send out an invite this week for help to organize all the information. The 3-inch binder is packed full of information, and we need to go through all the information and resources and organize it into a functional readable document. This will have to be an in-person meeting to look at everything. **(OPEN)**

VHMACST— Other/Miscellaneous – Our guest speaker for today is sick so she will probably speak next month. We might have two speakers next month, but it will depend on what time they need.

Be aware of events and upcoming trainings, there are specific requirements for masks or vaccination cards. For example, the inpatient courtyard needs to show photo of vaccination card and wear masks as well as signing up in advance. If you participate in any training or event, please let Dr. Davis or the council know that you are doing it. This will help with our end of year information for participation. The annual report shows all the things we have done, and it counts as part of our representation.

Starting March 26th, Amelia has a financial planner from New York Life who will be doing a series of events for women veterans and their families. **(OPEN)**

Also take a look at the events/flyers that are being emailed because there are things geared toward children or caregivers, or taxes. It is not all just for the Veterans.

Dr. Davis has some events coming up in May for mental health month, including a potter who lost both his hands and eyesight in Vietnam and does pottery as part of his healing. He is going to come speak to the VA, veterans and staff and doing a pottery demo which will be the end of May, she wants to do a virtual event, (Lisa had mentioned last month about doing some kind of resource event). In speaking about setting this up, one of the themes being mentioned is household stress like finances, housing stability, couples' relationships, parenting, day to day stress. Do we have feedback or thoughts on what a virtual event would look like and who would invite to speak, who of us would be interested? Leticia reported it's a great idea because we can look at finances, taxes, house hunting, there are city programs available to help with daycare if you want to work. For example, if you work in service, the city will pay for daycare. Having housing would help with the homeless population so having someone from Section 8 or life skills and continual life skills. It was suggested that maybe having different topic and having those in one "room" and breaking it down by topics. Or letting individuals choose where they can go into the areas where they want. Or break it down by time like a half hour for housing, or half hour for childcare, etc. **(OPEN)**

Dave reviewed some of the handouts being sent that included children and pottery programs. Also, time management and something about helping veterans with their taxes, understanding TBI, strong families/strong forces that collaborate with parents being separated from their children, housing stability program that Leticia was talking about that helps Veterans find a place to live. If we run across information, we can put it on the calendar. We have over 65,000 hits on the calendar alone. Kevin is also on other pages for Veterans so he will get the information on those. Kevin is doing an excellent job of managing the website. (Kevin put in the chat that he has created an excel spreadsheet to track monthly website counts). **(OPEN)**

The Spurs organization reached out to Dave and are serious about wanting us to be involved in making their mental health night better for Veterans and their families. It is nice that they had that follow through. Outreach is so important because you make more of a connection in person that stays with you and please participate as much as you can. **(CLOSED)**

June 12th is Women's Veteran's Day in Texas. Judy Salmon is with the women's program at the VA so Dr. Davis will get Amelia in contact with her. Lisa does not having anything set up that day but a documentary for MST and Latinas will be released that day. She will check to see if TVC will be doing something. Also, Deb Parson's with Women's Veterans of San Antonio has something on June 11th and might have a book about their history. **(OPEN)**

VI. Next Meeting

20 April 2022; 1100; It will be held at Audie Murphy VA Hospital. Notice will be provided. Phone-In/ Video Teleconference (due to COVID-19 concerns and restrictions).

VI. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 12:02

VII. End of Minutes

Minutes submitted by Council Secretary, Angie Bukowski.

Minutes reviewed/approved by Council Chair, Dr. David A. La Pointe.