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VHMACST Meeting Minutes 20 April 2023

Call To Order

Council Chair Dr. Dave La Pointe called to order the regular meeting of the Veterans Healthy Minds Advisory Council South Texas on 20 April 2023 at 1305, via Zoom & in person at AACOG.

Council Chair Dr. Dave La Pointe called council roll.

Roll-Call Chair called role: Present or Excused: Angie Bukowski, Becki Williams, Dr. Betsy Davis, Carlos Acosta, Dr. David La Pointe, Edsel Thomas, Fred Thomas, Kevin Crozier, Larissa Martinez, Laura Knoll, Leah Smith, Priscilla Bell, Dr. Shirley Johnson

Not Present: John Nelson, Karah Smith, LaKeisha Howard

II. Approval/Review of Previous Minutes/Current Agenda

Council Chair, Dr. Dave La Pointe motioned to accept previous meeting minutes (February 2023) as published to council for review. Angie Bukowski seconded the motion. Minutes were approved and adopted by the council members with unanimous vote.

✓ **GUEST SPEAKER (S): NO Guest Speaker this month**

III. Old Business

Veterans' Resilience and Recovery Collaborative: Dr. Davis discussed the main update is that the VA has a new position called the Suicide Prevention Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator, Michelle Conway and her whole job is to help build and connect coalitions and help promote suicide prevention for veterans in an “upstream way.” There may be additional personnel to help in this effort. Dr. Davis recommended that we ask Ms. Conway to be a part of an upcoming VHMACST meeting. **(OPEN)**

Mental Health Community of Practice: This is an internal VA meeting across the mental health leads, to problem solve, how can we improve our services, what current issues are they addressing, and the VHMACST won't routinely be a part of these meetings. But they have received guidance that this is an outlet to address “how we can get more veterans using mental health services involved with our council. The next meeting is on May 1st at 1000 and the VHMACST is on the agenda, and we want to have a couple of representatives from the council to attend and provide input on our behalf. **(OPEN)**

VET-to-Vet Program: Currently active at a couple of other VA's, it's basically a program of Veterans helping other Veterans. It's not a formal VA program, it's just a structure for veterans to be a resource for other veterans. Sometimes it happens on VA properties, other times it happens offsite. I could be a helpful support for people waiting for formal VA appointments. Dave and I talked with Dr. Crowley, our Chief

of Psychology, about the Vet-to-Vet Program locally. He was very receptive to that but, it's a call to make from the Peer Support Leadership, can it be supported or are there other programs that may already be functioning in this role within the VA. So, more to come on that. Dr. Davis stated that if we can get this up and running, we would like to utilize VA space for it. Larissa Martinez added that there was a similar program, Veterans' Path - <https://veteranspath.org/about/> currently working in Veterans hospitals as well. Dr. Davis again asked for input from the council members for ideas to "fill the gap" between when members are asking for help and waiting for their actual VA appointments. Is it time for the council to reinstitute the "Check-in Program" that Wil Seda and Carlos Acosta headed up in the early days of our council?

Masking Update: Dr. Davis read/reviewed the latest "Masking Requirements" for VA office/appointments/visits, lifting a majority of the restrictions. **A copy of the specific notification will be attached to these minutes.** Masks are now "optional" for Veterans at appointments. HIGH RISK areas still require masking.

2023 VA Community Mental Health & Wellness Summit: Dr. Davis advised the council of the time/date for the upcoming MH Summit. Thursday, May 18, 2023, 0830 – 1200, virtual on Webex focusing on Creative Arts and Mental Health for Veterans, painting, poetry, and a variety of speakers. **Flyer will be attached to minutes.**

VAMAC Quarterly Meeting: No information **(OPEN)**

VA National Council: Dr. Davis reviewed/discussed the National Council's Conference that was just completed. She Stated that they received a lot of valuable information from councils across the nation, information on focusing on the goals and leadership and the fact that she might be able to share those recordings with the council if there was an interest from the council. **(OPEN)**

Veteran Health Education and Information Committee: Dr. La Pointe reviewed the flyers, brochures, and trifolds updated or edited by the Committee this past month. He asked that a "female" think about getting involved with this committee, that he had reviewed a few items that concerned topics specifically directed to woman issues/concerns and thought they would be much more capable of providing input on the subjects than he was. If you might be interested, please contact him directly. **(OPEN)**

Unaccompanied Burial Memorial Service: March 15, 2023: at 0900. (Bexar County), 3rd Wednesday of each month, Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, 1520 Harry Wurzbach Rd., SATX 78209 (follow the signs when you enter the main gate). VHMALST provides arrangement and roses for the persons being memorialized. PLEASE wear your VHMALST badge when attending an event. Ed Thomas briefed us on our participation and requested that ALL council members make an effort to attend one of our upcoming Burial Events. **(OPEN)**

Website/Communications: Kevin Crozier submitted an updated Website listing, reflecting the site currently has 565,626 visits! A copy of the report will be included in these minutes. Look at where we are getting the most traffic. It should be noted that "immediate Assistance" only has 1365 inquiries but if we only helped ONE PERSON, we are doing our job. **(OPEN)**

VHMALST Conversion to A Non-Profit Organization:

Fred Thomas updated the council on the progress on our conversion to a Non-Profit organization. He advised the group that all the IRS paperwork had been signed and completed and our submission was pending. He stated that Dr. La Pointe had the appropriate documentation to open our checking and savings accounts and would proceed as soon as we have confirmation back on our application. **(OPEN)**

Veteran Letters Committee: Priscilla Bell, Committee Chair, spoke about the Veterans Letters Committee. She wants to change the name of the program to “**Victory Mail.**” Becki Williams has volunteered to assist Pricilla with the program. They want to start out by sending 50 cards per month. There was discussion about council member access to MH in-patients. We will have to coordinate with the appropriate VA staff agencies to determine specifics requirements and access to initiate and control who/how/when we can successfully implement the program. It May be best to just provide the VA staff with the cards/letters and let them hand them out as appropriate on each specific event. The council would then just be required to provide replacement items as needed. We will discuss and be prepared to provide more information at the next council meeting. **(OPEN)**

Caregiver Information: Information was provided concerning the Elizabeth Dole Foundation – Caregiver Micro Summit: Tuesday, May 23, 2023, 1000-1400. There were also comments/questions about the “specifics” of the caregiver program, who can be a caregiver, how/who you contact to let the VA know you want to be a caregiver, etc. We will contact the VA office that controls this program and get the current – CORRECT information and/or request that they be a guest speaker at an upcoming VHMACST meeting. **(OPEN)**

VHMACST Secretary and Treasurer: **We really need to fill these open positions! Need volunteers ASAP.** **(OPEN)**

IV. New Business

Guest Speaker: We had no Guest Speaker for this month.

VA Harassment/Sexual Harassment – Letter from the Secretary of Veteran Affairs. A letter was reviewed, and a copy of the letter will be attached to these minutes.

Unaccompanied Burial Services - Flowers and roses: Dr. La Pointe and Ed Thomas discussed the use of flowers and roses in lieu of flowers and crosses, and it was determined that it was more appropriate to use flowers and roses for these services. Dr. La Pointe invited council members to provide feedback if there were any questions about or opposition to this change. **(OPEN)**

VA Experience Office: There has been a lot of use, questions and positive feedback concerning the site information provided to us from the VA Experience Office. We have passed that information along and plan to invite a representative from that office to speak at an upcoming meeting. **(OPEN)**

Increasing Membership: of the right “type/category” (veteran’s and family members utilizing VA MH services) on our council. We understand that we must rely on input/referrals from actual VA providers to acquire the right people. We have a few opportunities to provide input to VA in aiding us in getting these folks and ask you to please participate in those meetings/events as they unfold. **(OPEN)**

Press Ganey Survey: The Press Survey is a current VA tool for patients to provide feedback to VA Staff. Dr. Davis gave a brief explanation of the survey and is going to see if we can get a copy for us to review so we can understand what/how/why the survey is useful for us to respond to if/when we receive them. Also, it would give us an opportunity to recommend how the VA could increase response rates or even how to get Veterans to respond to the survey to them initially. **(OPEN)**

VHMACST “Check-In Program”: In an earlier topic from our old business, there was discussion of the VHMACST reinstating our “Check-in Program.” Essentially council members make calls/visits to other members, veterans, family members or anyone that may benefit from simply checking in on one another to see how we are doing. Previously, Wil Seda and Carlos Acosta had chaired this effort. What we need:

1. Volunteers to make the calls and possibly visits.

2. Names/contact information on participants who would receive calls/contact
3. Frequency of contacts and types of contacts would be determined by each individual wanting to be a part of the program
4. There would be not “formal” reporting for the program (names/numbers, personal information would never be used)
5. There may be some reporting on number of contacts during a particular month, but no personal information would be shared (unless an individual decided to provide that on their own initiative)

We can add, delete, modify, whatever is needed/recommended by council members to get this program up and running again. If you are interested in participating (in any way), please let Dr. La Pointe know ASAP.

**ALL – Please be prepared to discuss this at the next meeting so we can move forward quickly.
Thank you.**

OTHER:

VHMACST Outreach:

- ✚ **Northwest Health Care Clinic** - May 8, 2023, 1100 – 1300, ALM Hospital Canteen, 7400 Merton Minter, SATX 78229
- ✚ **South Bexar Outpatient Clinic** – May 10, 2023, 0830 – 1030, 4610 East Southcross Blvd., Suite 100, SATX 78222 (210-648-1491)

VHMACST Events:

- ✚ **Painting with Friends – In Person (Connectability)** – Saturday, May 6, 2023, 1230-1430
- ✚ **Disability Rights Texas 101 – Virtual** - Tuesday May 16, 2023, 1200 – 1330
- ✚ **Unaccompanied Burial Memorial Service** - May 17, 2023: at 0900, (Bexar County), 3rd Wednesday of each month, Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, 1520 Harry Wurzbach Rd., SATX 78209 (follow the signs when you enter the main gate). VHMACST provides arrangement and roses for each person being memorialized. PLEASE wear your VHMACST badge when attending an event
- ✚ **2023 Community Mental Health & Wellness Summit** – VIRTUAL EVENT on WebEx, Thursday, May 18, 2023, 0830 – 1200, Register at: grco.de/2023STXMHSummit **(Click link on flyer attachment to minutes)**
- ✚ **National VA Office of MH & Suicide Prevention Site Visit** – Tuesday, June 13, 2023, 1130 – 1215, TEAMS link will be provided Contact Dr. La Pointe if interested (**currently, Dave, Kevin, Ed, and Larissa are scheduled to participate**)

VHMACST Training:

- ✚ **Military and Veteran Family Members - Micro Summit for Caregivers** – May 23, 2023, 1000 – 1400, Good Samaritan veterans Outreach center & Transition Center, FREE REGISTRATION: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/san-antonio-elizabeth-dole-oundationhidden-heroes-caregiver-summit-tickets-597280480997>
- ✚ **Texas suicide Prevention Symposium 2023** – June 13-15, 2023, New Braunfels Civic and Convention Center

VI. Next Meeting 15 March - 1300

VII. Adjournment

Meeting ended at 1352

VIII: End of Minutes

Minutes Submitted/Approved by Dr. David A. Pointe