

Congress Mandates Chiropractic at 11 Air Force Bases

By James Edwards, DC

In March 2001, I stood on the steps of the U.S. Capitol and listened to Kansas Congressman Jerry Moran lament the fact that officials at the Veterans Administration were simply not doing what Congress had told them to do. Congressman Moran, who was also chairman of the VA Subcommittee on Health at that time, then said, "That's not what I learned in civics class. However, I can assure you that Congress will get the VA's attention."

A few months later, and just as he had predicted, Congress passed HR 3447. The legislation mandated that chiropractic be implemented into the VA health care system and gave explicit directions on the mechanics of how it was to be done.¹

Since that entire VA process - and procrastination - was monitored closely by the Department of Defense (DoD), you would think that the United States Air Force would have learned that Congress has no intention of being ignored. Unfortunately, the Air Force did not learn that lesson and now Congress has acted.



As part of the Fiscal Year 2006 Department of Defense authorization bill, Congress included language to require the U.S. Air Force to complete implementation of chiropractic services at 11 sites that had not yet opened in accordance with a five-year-old Pentagon plan to make chiropractic care available to active-duty members of the military.²

Specifically, the bill, cleared for the president just before Christmas 2005, calls on the secretary of the Air Force to ensure that chiropractic health care services are available at 11 facilities previously slated to offer chiropractic care, but that have not opened a clinic or made the benefit available on-base. If the Air Force determines it is unnecessary or unfeasible to provide chiropractic health care services at any identified facility, the Air Force

shall provide chiropractic services at an alternative site located off-base. The Air Force has been given until Sept. 30, 2006, to complete implementation at the 11 locations. The 11 sites identified by Congress are:

- Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C.
- MacDill AFB, Florida
- Hurlburt Field AFB, Florida
- Nellis AFB, Nevada
- Elmendorf AFB, Alaska
- Luke AFB, Arizona
- Maxwell AFB, Alabama
- Randolph AFB, Texas
- Robins AFB, Georgia
- Kirtland AFB, New Mexico
- Pope AFB, North Carolina

The Air Force language contained in the FY 2006 authorization bill would increase the number of military bases with a doctor of chiropractic on duty from 42 to 53.

This latest congressional action comes on the heels of a September 2005 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on the status of chiropractic care in the armed forces.³ The GAO, a leading official government watchdog agency, confirmed that the Department of Defense is not complying with current law and has failed to fully implement its own plan to provide chiropractic health care services to active-duty military personnel. Furthermore, chiropractic services continue to be unavailable at military bases overseas - including those in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Hopefully, the DoD finally has learned that Congress will not be ignored.

References

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3. DoD's implementation of chiropractic benefit inadequate. *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Oct.

24, 2005: www.chiroweb.com/archives/23/22/06.html.

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