

## "Community Care" for Vets: It's Really a Big Deal!

By James Edwards, DC

As a preamble, while I regrettably never served in the military, I have the highest respect for those who did and those who currently serve. In fact, on many occasions since 9/11, I have looked somewhat goofy sprinting down an airport terminal **to thank** a veteran wearing a military service cap, or a man or woman in uniform.<sup>1</sup>

Having said that, on June 7, 2018, I was delighted to watch on television as President Trump signed the "**VA Mission Act**" into law. My good friend and strong chiropractic / veterans supporter, Kansas Senator Jerry Moran, stood behind him, and the president turned around to shake his hand in congratulations for his work on the bill.

### Community Care for Vets

After the bill became law with the president's signature, I decided to research it and see exactly what it will do. Without getting into all of the details, here is the thumbnail sketch of why this new "community care" law is so important to veterans ... and doctors of chiropractic.

The new law states on page 1 (with italicized emphasis included in the statute), "This section *requires* access to community care if VA does not offer the care or services the veteran requires." As a result, veterans will have the ability to access private practitioners if the VA does not offer the treatment or service that is needed. The way I see it, that means if the patient needs a treatment or service not offered by the VA (such as laser therapy, decompression therapy, etc.), the vet can access a private "community care" health provider – like yourself – to obtain those needed services and be reimbursed for them.

### How Else Can a Veteran Access Community Care?

The new law includes additional stipulations that allow a veteran to consult with and/or receive treatment from a "community care" provider:

- If the VA does not operate a full-service medical facility in the state in which a veteran resides.
- If the veteran was eligible for care in the community under the 40-mile rule in the Veterans Choice Program and meets certain other criteria.
- If the VA is not able to furnish care within the designated access standards established by VA.
- If the veteran and the veteran's referring clinician agree that furnishing care or services in the community would be in the best medical interest of the veteran after considering criteria.

### Dovetailing With the Opioid Crisis

If that was not enough, the new law references the **opioid crisis** seven times; yes, the crisis killing 175 Americans every day and about which I have twice written columns.<sup>2-3</sup> If that doesn't make this new law a win for veterans, a win for the chiropractic profession by being reimbursed for VA services, and a win for veterans who can choose safe and effective chiropractic care instead of opioids, I don't know what does.

### That Was Then, This Is Now

It was my greatest honor to serve as ACA chairman in 2003 when the 107th Congress authorized chiropractic care for our veterans;

### The VA Mission Act: Your Chance To Serve Those Who Served

How do we provide veterans with timely, appropriate health care? Admittedly, the Veterans Administration has done a poor job addressing that question in recent years. Enter the VA Mission Act, sweeping reform legislation that, among other stipulations, consolidates multiple community care programs (including VA Choice, funding for which ended May 31) into a single entity and ensures veterans receive timely, appropriate health care without service lapses.

Section 101 of the act establishes "the Veterans Community Care Program to provide care in the community to veterans who are enrolled in the VA healthcare system or otherwise entitled to VA care."

The act does not stipulate which provider type(s) can provide community care; the summary notes that section 102 requires

and then watch the law being implemented by attending every meeting of the two Veterans Administration Chiropractic Advisory **Committees**.<sup>4-5</sup> But this new expansion for veterans is also a big deal because in many cases, it will offer veterans the opportunity to choose the "community care" doctor they want to see and receive the type of treatment recommended by that doctor!

#### References

1. Edwards J. "Thanks for What You Do!" *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Dec. 17, 2006.
2. Edwards J. "The Opioid Crisis: It's Time We Stand and Fight." *Dynamic Chiropractic*, October 2017.
3. Edwards J. "The Opioid Crisis: Let's Roll!" *Dynamic Chiropractic*, June 2018.
4. Edwards J. "B.J. Would Be Proud!" *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Nov. 30, 2003.
5. Edwards J. "Scoring Touchdowns From the 5-Yard Line!" *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Oct. 20, 2003.

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the VA "to enter into Veterans Care Agreements (VCAs) [with community health care providers] that are not subject to competition or other requirements associated with federal contracts, so that they can more easily meet veterans' demands for care in the community." Per Dr. Anthony Lisi, VA director of chiropractic services, doctors of chiropractic are eligible to enter into such agreements and provide community care, as they were under VA Choice.

Currently, 70 VA health care facilities staff DCs, and chiropractic is a benefit available to all eligible veterans. It will be interesting to see what opportunities are afforded to chiropractors to provide community care under Veterans Care Agreements – and how many DCs take advantage of such opportunities.

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