

VA Clarifies Voter Registration Regulations

Sep 07, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has clarified its policy on assisting veterans' voter registration activities, with particular focus on inpatients and residents of VA community living centers, domiciliaries and patients with limited access to community voter registration resources.

The Department will welcome state and local election officials and non-partisan groups to its hospitals and outpatient clinics to assist VA officials in registering voters at VA facilities. Such assistance, however, must be coordinated by those facilities in order to avoid disruptions to patient care.

"VA has always been committed to helping veterans exercise their constitutional right to vote, which they defended for all Americans while serving their nation," said Dr. James B. Peake, secretary of Veterans Affairs. "We've now established a uniform approach to helping those of our patients who need assistance to register and to vote."

The policy requires that information about the right of VA patients to register and vote, and other patients' rights, be posted in every VA hospital, and that all VA patients be provided a copy of these rights when they are admitted to a VA facility.

Every hospital is now also required to publish a written policy on voter assistance, allowing patients to leave the hospital to register and vote, subject to the opinions of their health care providers. Patients unable to leave the facility must be assisted to register and to vote by absentee ballot.

In their written policies, VA hospital are required to establish the criteria they will use to evaluate requests from outside agencies to register voters, and to determine where, when, and how such registration activities will be conducted. They will also develop procedures to coordinate offers of assistance from state and local governments and from non-partisan organizations, and how to work with VA's Regional Counsel offices to determine whether or not groups offering registration help are non-partisan, as required by law.

Voluntary Service Program Managers at each of VA's 153 hospitals will be responsible for implementing the new policy, and for providing timely and accurate voting information to

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veterans cared for at their facilities. They will also obtain and maintain materials that are needed to assist veterans with voter registration requirements.