



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
February 18th, 2020**

I. Call to Order

Dan Bullis, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Dan asked for all present to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and to remain standing for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged. A moment of silence was also held for Sgt. 1st Class Javier Jaguar Gutierrez, 28, from San Antonio, and Sgt. 1st Class Antonio Rey Rodriguez, 28, from New Mexico, who were killed in action in Afghanistan on February 8th, 2020.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the January 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the January 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Update on Veteran Health Care at Holy Cross Germantown Hospital, Holy Cross Silver Spring Hospital and Holy Cross Health Partners in Kensington – Dr. Norvell “Van” Coots, MD, MSS, Brigadier General, US Army (Ret.), President and CEO, Holy Cross Health and Maryland Region of Trinity Health

PowerPoint: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/HCMilitaryVeteransHealthProgram.pdf>

Website: <http://www.trinity-health.org/military-and-veterans-health-program>

Dr. Coots reported Trinity Health’s Military and Veteran Health Program has been implemented and is still being deployed across all of the 22 regions of Trinity Health over the last two-year period. Please review the PowerPoint presentation for details. Through the Military and Veterans Health Program, they are committed to providing respectful and culturally competent health care services in the following ways:

Providers and staff are trained in military and Veterans health. Providers have undergone training to help understand and respond to the health concerns and challenges specific to the military community. The training includes:

- Understanding of military culture, including the nuances of various military service branches.
- Key illnesses, injuries, and occupational exposures associated with military service and military deployments.
- Effect of military service and deployments on family members.
- How to provide competent and compassionate care for current and former female service members.

Identify patients who are military service members, Veterans or their families. The first step in getting the right care is making sure your health care team knows that you're a service member, Veteran or family member. To streamline this process, they have added military-community specific questions to their registration and intake forms and electronic medical records.

They welcome you. From the moment you walk in to one of their facilities, you'll know that you and your family will be taken care of. Your military background is part of who you are. At Trinity Health, it's part of their health care, too.

Warrior Centric Health, LLC, beta-tested the Military and Veterans Health Program at Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC). Dr. Coots, who was serving as final commander at WRAMC before it closed, was familiar with the program prior to working at Holy Cross Health (HCH). When WRAMC was receiving a large number of casualties from Iraq and Afghanistan, patients were pushed out into the private, civilian sector. HCH was part of the Tricare network. As Warrior Centric Health, LLC, was the only agency offering a cultural competency training it was easy to obtain a sole source requisition for their services. Dr. Coots said Trinity Healthcare is the only national health system that has this commitment to Veteran and military services and is the only national health system that is fully utilizing the Warrior Center Health training and have modified it to their needs.

HCH is a federal contractor that receives National Institute of Health (NIH) research grants. HCH negotiated to be a sub-contractor for QTC which has a contract under the VA to provide medical disability examinations for the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). If a Veteran needs to upgrade their VA benefits or if a military servicemember is transitioning out of the military, they can request to go to the HCH Kensington Clinic to have their compensation exam. Dr. Coots noted that the HCH Kensington Clinic has provided just under 200 exams and they are seeing Veterans from all over Maryland.

HCH staff do ask specific questions during intake to help identify if the patient is a Veteran, as well as when and where they served in order to help medical staff identify diseases or areas they may have been exposed to such as Agent Orange and burn pits. HCH offers a two-hour class every month that discusses diseases that can be attributed to military service and how it affects families. Anyone is welcome to attend.

HCH offers a Volunteer Vets Visiting Vets program at both the HCH Germantown and Silver Spring hospitals. Volunteers are Veterans that have completed the military culture competency training program and who visit Veterans who are inpatients. To become a Veteran volunteer, fill out the online application: www.holycrosshealth.org/veterans-volunteer-application.

HCH's goal is not to take patients from the Military Health System (MHS) or the VA, but HCH will work with the VA when needed. For example, HCH recently worked with the VA with a sleep study backlog. Dr. Coots noted that MHS is contracting down and many retirees are being converted from Tricare Prime to seek their care in the private sector. HCH is a partner with the WRNMMC and hosts their OBGYN residence.

The floor was opened to questions.

Bob Norton, Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), asked if HCH receives referrals from the Gaithersburg VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) or the VA DC Medical Center. Dr. Coots said they have received some referrals from the VA DC Medical Center but is not aware of any referrals from the CBOC. If HCH did receive referrals from the CBOC, they would most likely go to the HCH Germantown location as it is the facility closest to the CBOC. Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported she has been notified that the doctor-in-charge at the Gaithersburg CBOC has taken a new position and they may not be taking new patients at this time. She suggested Dr. Coots contact Michael Heimall, Medical Center Director, VA DC Medical Center, and ask if HCH could assist with patients.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, asked how patient information is securely shared between HCH, TRICARE, and the VA. She also asked how prescriptions are monitored. Dr. Coots said many of Trinity's healthcare facilities use Cerner, but they will be converting to Epic so all Trinity facilities will have a single common platform to share information between facilities or it can be shared with the MHS. In terms of prescriptions, it will be up to the individual to convey what medications they currently are prescribed. The new Epic platform offers a chart that patients can interact with via their smartphone. Dr. Coots said all Trinity Health facilities are in-network for TRICARE. The pharmacy at HCH is in network. HCH is signing national and local agreements with the VA community care. Cynthia added that Carroll Community College will be hosting a Veterans Claims Clinic & Resource Fair on March 19th. She suggested attending to provide outreach about HCH.

Bob Kaufmann, Commissioner, asked about in-patient PTSD treatment. Dr. Coots explained HCH does not offer behavioral health services. If a person is identified, there is a six-bed voluntary behavioral health unit at HCH Germantown. There the behavioral health intake team will refer them to PTSD care at Adventist Healthcare Shady Grove Medical Center. If there is a service-connected issue and they receive VA care, they will be referred back to the VA. If they receive care in the MHS the person is referred back to their primary provider for behavioral health. Wayne Stinchcomb, Silver Spring Vet Center (SSVC), said HCH can contact the SSVC if they identify a combat-deployed Veteran who needs behavioral health counseling.

Susan Webman, Commissioner, asked about Walter Reed closing down and patients being transferred to the private sector. Dr. Coots clarified that patients were transitioned to either Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) or to Fort Belvoir Community Hospital. Patients only went out of the network when they were overwhelmed by catastrophic injuries from Iraq and Afghanistan that would not have survived any other war, but they were surviving these wars. The partnership Walter Reed has with the VA was for amputee care and prosthetics. That partnership still exists with WRNMMC.

IV. Chair and Vice Chair Report

Dan thanked Betsy Luecking and Carly Clem, Staff, for their work with the Black History Month display cases at the Silver Spring Civic Building (SSCB) that honored 19 military service members and Veterans with detailed tributes. Carly also designed a section on the Veterans website that featured these profiles. Dan thanked Neil Greenberger, Office of Public Information (OPI) for sending out press releases with details of each individual. Dan along with Betsy, Carly, and several Commissioners attended the event at the SSCB honoring Brigadier General Charles McGee. It was very well attended and an enlightening experience. The event can be viewed on Silver Spring Connect's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/silverspringconnect/videos/1521250241384590/>.

Neil announced Councilmember Will Jawando will be presenting General Charles McGee with a proclamation on Tuesday, February 25th. County Executive Elrich is not involved with this presentation. Dan suggested inviting General Charles McGee to a Commission meeting and asking the County Executive to attend as well.

Betsy and Carly are beginning to gather information for the March Vietnam Veterans recognition display to be placed at the SSCB. Betsy noted that we will have limited space with only three cases. Profiles of Veterans who served in the Vietnam War and who are still living will also be included. Depending on the number of individuals, some profiles may be online only. There are digital displays located at the SSCB and the Rockville Memorial Library that have all Montgomery County residents killed in action dating back to WWI. This information can also be found on our Veterans website under the tab titled Fallen Heroes:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans.

V. Discussion - Gold Star Families

Dan reported that he and Betsy have discussed opportunities to work with Gold Star Families (GSF). Betsy shared her recent experience with a local Gold Star wife who had trees cut down in her yard by Pepco in October and months later they had still not been removed. Betsy called Pepco, explained the situation that the wife's husband had been killed in Afghanistan, and asked them to remove the trees. After a second phone call, Betsy reported that the trees have since been removed. Betsy said the Commission should establish a program for GSF, especially for those with minor children. This may include working with Rebuilding Together to offer programs that do not have income eligibility. Dan suggested creating a workgroup to start on this effort and to identify GSF in the county. Julie Riggs, Blue Star Families (BSF), will discuss this effort with BSF leadership as they may be connected to GSF. Betsy has reached out to the President of the Maryland Chapter of GSF but has not heard back yet.

Cynthia suggesting engaging with the children so they understand that their fallen family member was important and a role model. Betsy said she has been told that Gold Star children get very upset when they are witness to a parent returning home to their child and it becomes an event at school.

Shani Lindsay, Commissioner, asked how the Commission will ascertain the needs of GSF. It was suggested identifying leaders in the Gold Star community to understand the gaps, how this Commission can help, and to understand the sensitivities of working with GSF. Betsy said she has received calls from organizations like the Maryland Building Industry looking to do projects for Veterans and their families. Commissioners Susan Webman and Jameelah Johnson said they would join a GSF workgroup.

Joanna Starling, Montgomery College (MC), said MC has Chapter 35 recipients who are dependents receiving VA education benefits from a service member who died as a result of their time in service or has a 100% permanent disability. She can send an assessment survey out to these recipients, although they would be over the age of 18.

Gregory Jolissaint, Vice President, Military and Veterans Health Program, Trinity Health, suggested including Gold Star Families where the Veteran or military service member has committed suicide. Spouses lose their connections due to the stigma associated with suicide and they don't know where to seek help or support.

VI. Updates / Announcements

Betsy said the Commission needs to hold a retreat soon to discuss priorities.

Neil reported he will be assisting the Commission with the Vietnam Veterans tribute that will be displayed in March in the SSCB display cases. He noted the Black History Month display received a lot of media attention. The meeting minutes are available to the public online and will include Dr. Coot's PowerPoint presentation.

Bob Norton reported that there are two locations in Maryland currently in consideration for the second Veterans home – the site of former Red Gate Golf Course in Rockville and the former Sykesville Hospital in Carroll County which is owned by the state. The City of Rockville has proposed a smaller facility consisting of 60-beds on only 10-acres. MMC's objective is to work with state and local officials to work with the City of Rockville to agree to the original plan of a 120-bed facility on 25 acres. Red Gate Golf Course consists of approximately 131 acres. The City of Rockville has asked for a study to be conducted of various options for Red Gate Golf Course. As it may take up to a year for the study to be completed, MMC will be reaching out to Secretary George Owings, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Dan suggested inviting Secretary Owings to a future Commission meeting to provide an update.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, asked for guest suggestions for Home Front. Betsy said Michael Heimall indicated he would like to come back for a second show. Mike suggested having Michael and Dr. Coots together and extending the show to a 30-minute presentation. He asked Neil Greenberger to arrange it. The program will be about VA Health care which includes the CBOC and Trinity Health.

Bernadette Garrett, Toastmasters, announced a Toastmasters meeting will be held on Saturday, March 14th from 11:30am to 12:30pm at the Steven A. Cohen Clinic in Silver Spring. Toastmasters International is a non-profit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. She asked for help in spreading the word as they need at least 20 Veterans, active duty service members, family members, or caregivers in order to establish the club. Toastmasters can assist members with dues.

Julie Riggs, BSF, announced she moved from her position with Serving Together and is now the DC Chapter Director for BSF. BSF works to connect military families to their communities and neighbors to ease the transition from the military to civilian life. The annual BSF Military Family Lifestyle Survey analyzes trends related to major shifts in military life issues and helps local and national government leaders better understand the realities military, Veteran, and National Guard/Reserve families face. The results are shared with the Department of Defense (DoD) community and help drive BSF programming interally to focus on the issues noted in the survey. Julie asked to present the latest survey results to this Commission. Due to the large number of participants, data can be obtained locally as well as nationally. She added that it is free to become a BSF member. Monthly e-mails are sent to members about BSF's free events.

It was reported that the Washington National Cathedral holds a Military Recognition Sunday the first Sunday of every month at 11:15am. Those in active duty, Veterans and their families are recognized with a welcome and prayers during the primary Sunday morning service. Following the service, chaplains from the Cathedral's Center for Prayer and Pilgrimage are available to offer individual blessings and prayers in War Memorial Chapel and St. Joseph's Chapel. Different organizations can sponsor each Sunday and it is a way to bring awareness to your mission and your population because the National Cathedral has a national audience. For example, BSF is sponsoring October's Military Recognition Sunday. Information about sponsoring organizations is available at coffee hour after the service.

Cynthia reported Congress currently has a bill going through the House to form a task force for Veteran Suicide Prevention. She also announced the Maryland Veterans Commission presented before the Maryland Opioid Operational Command Center with a plan to reduce Veteran opioid overdoses. There was a study that recently came out of California that showed that Veterans homelessness can be reduced by creating a transitional housing center with medication assisted therapy and other services.

Donald Masters, Public, said he was a City of Rockville Councilmember candidate during the November 2019 election and came out in support of the second Veterans home. When he learned in January that Red Gate was an option he became more involved in the issue and has been reaching out to neighboring counties. He asked that information be shared with him.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, March 17th, 2020 from 6pm to 7:30pm. Held at Health and Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted, Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I, Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager