

Consumer Council News

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New VA Under Secretary

Dr. Robert Roswell was sworn in April 2, 2002 as Under Secretary for Health for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Prior to his nomination, Dr. Roswell directed VA's health care network for Florida and Puerto Rico since 1995. Dr. Roswell previously held positions as chief of staff at the VA medical centers in Birmingham, Alabama, and Oklahoma City. The position of VA's Under Secretary for Health is a presidential appointment for a term of four years, subject to Senate confirmation. Roswell will serve as the chief executive officer of VA's integrated health care system. With a medical care budget of nearly 23 billion and health care staff of 180,000, VA operates the nation's largest medical system, providing care to veterans through 1,300 sites, including 163 hospitals, 800 outpatient clinics, 135 long-term care facilities, 206 readjustment counseling centers and 73 home-care programs. Roswell stated "For the past twenty years, I have devoted my professional life to serving the needs of veterans".

Newsletter sponsored by
VA Mental Health Consumer Council
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Promoting Community Integration New Freedom Initiative

In February 2001, President Bush released the New Freedom Initiative, a comprehensive plan to tear down the barriers facing people with disabilities and preventing them from participating fully in community life. As part of that initiative, the President issued Executive Order 13217, "Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities," June 18, 2001. The order calls upon the federal government to assist states and localities to swiftly implement the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Olmstead v. L.C.* The Executive Order directs six federal agencies that include the departments of Justice (DOJ), Health and Human Services (HHS), Education (ED), Labor (DOL) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) to evaluate their policies, programs, statutes and regulations to determine whether any should be revised or modified to improve the availability of community-based services for qualified individuals with disabilities. The

departments of Transportation (DOT) and Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), though not named in the Executive Order, also joined in the implementation effort. The participating federal agencies identified more than 400 steps to tear down barriers and improve community integration in a number of key areas. A few highlights are:



- HHS will provide funds through Systems Change grants to implement order (\$125 million), Medicaid grants to promote employment (\$25 million) and Caregiver Support Program grants (\$142 million).
- DOJ will develop technical assistance for those in institutions about their rights and assist states to implement alternatives.
- DOL will launch a comprehensive public awareness campaign to decrease stigma, eliminate attitudinal barriers.

Full Report at <http://www.hhs.gov/newfreedom>

Mental Health Service Lines-3 Year Review

Key findings from a 3 year service line evaluation study in VHA Mental Health appeared to show that there were shorter lengths of stay for inpatients, fewer readmissions, and a smoother transition for the first six months after discharge with regard to continuity of care. There was a total of 20 measures that were evaluated at 123 VA medical centers. There was a decline in access-related continuity meas-

ures which were drop out rates, any outpatients visit within 30 days after discharge, number of psych & substance abuse outpatients visits within 6 months of discharge and the number of medical stops within 6 months. Over three years the significant indicators began to decline. Further analysis is underway to study these changes.

*Transition Watch-February 2002, Vol 5, No.2

How did your VISN rate in Mental Health?

The Mental Health Report Card for VHA for Fiscal Year 2001 measures five domains: (1) Population Coverage/ Access (2) Inpatient Care (3) Outpatient Care (4) Economic Performance and (5) Customer Satisfaction. The monitoring system uses internal VA performance benchmarks to evaluate the work of each of VA's 22 VISNs and the work of the medical centers within each of those networks.

During Fiscal Year 2001, a total of 712,045 veterans, 17.5% of all VA patients, received specialized VA mental health services. This is a 4.9% increase in workload from Fiscal Year 2000. Half (50.6%) of all veterans who receive VA compensation payments for a psychotic disorder used VA mental health services. The number of veterans treated in outpatient mental health programs increased by 5.1%, although the intensity of services, as measured by the average number of visits per veteran decreased by 12.5%. Reported satisfaction with inpatient care declined 2% in 2001.

Some selected rankings are as follows:

Ranked #1-Customer Satisfaction	VISN 20
Ranked #1- Outpatient Care	VISN 20
Ranked #1 Overall (8 factors)	VISN 13
Ranked #1 Population Coverage/Access	VISN 8
Ranked #1 Economic Performance	VISN 8

The central goal of VA Mental Health is to develop an effective and efficient community-based system of care characterized by high quality of care. Clinical goals focus on the transition from a hospital-based mental health system to a community-based health care system which is sensitive to population needs. This report helps to track the quality of care and plan for future programs. The report is available upon request from the Northeast Program Evaluation Center (203)937-3850.

Mental Health/Substance Abuse Guide for Older Adults

Among older adults misuse and abuse of alcohol and medication are often overlooked. Mental health problems such as depression and anxiety are also often overlooked among adults over age 65. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and The National Council on the Aging (NCOA) have teamed up to help respond to these issues by releasing a guide for community-based organizations that help seniors. The new guide, Promoting Older Adult Health: Aging Network Partnerships to address Medication, Alcohol and Mental Health Problems, provides concrete, practical guidance for mental health, substance abuse, primary care and aging services

providers to help them join together to provide education, prevention, screening, referrals, and treatment for seniors experiencing or at risk for substance abuse and mental health problems. There is an estimated 20 percent of older adults who experience mental disorders that are not a normal part of aging. Another 17 percent of older adults are affected by alcohol and/or prescription drug misuse. The publication (DHHS Publication No. MS 02-3628) is available free from SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information. Call 1-800-729-6686. This effort is aimed toward improving the quality of life for older Americans.

Information and Resources

National Mental Health Association
2002 Annual Conference
Washington, D.C.
June 5-8, 2002
703-838-7504 or www.nmha.org

June 26-30th
NAMI Annual Convention
"Building Communities of Hope"

Cincinnati, Ohio
www.nami.org or 703-524-7600

National Depressive Manic Depressive Association
Annual Conference
August 9-11, 2002
www.ndmda.org or 1-800-826-3632