

# KNOXVILLE REGIONAL VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH COUNCIL



TNVHC  
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4812 Asheville Hwy., Knoxville, TN 37914  
865-336-2624

## **Council Minutes**

**August 11, 2014 - 12:00 p.m.**

**William C. Tallent Outpatient Clinic (KOPC)  
8033 Ray Mears Blvd.,  
Knoxville, TN 37819**

- 1) Call to Order by Ed Junod, Chairman
- 2) Prayer & Pledge of Allegiance by Ron Morton
- 3) Roll Call: Ed Junod, Fred Owens, Ron Morton, Frank Vollmer, Henry Cleveland, Jesse Rivera, Charles Dabbs, Randall Baxter Absent: Andrew Parrott  
Council Guests: Dean Powell, Howard Jenkins, Robert Cooter
- 4) Welcome/Opening Remarks by Ed Junod
- 5) Previous Meeting Minutes: July 15, 2014 – Discussion ensued on issue of VAMC altering or filtering Council Minutes as submitted by the Council. Council encouraged the VA to participate in the preparing the Council meeting minutes; Chair assured that Council would note the VA's comments if in conflict with the Council draft. Dr. Farina-Morin suggested VAMC comments as "separate note" to Council submission. Agreed to by Council, VISN 9 and VAMC.
- 6) VA Guests:  
VISN 9 Chief Mental Health Officer Dr. M. Cecelia Farina-Morin, MD, MS and Mr. Robert Campbell, VISN 9 representative and Mountain Home VAMC ACOS Dr. Heidi Vermette and Deputy ACOS Dr. Patrick Sloan.
- 7) New Council Member Candidate: Robert Cooter, Desert Storm veteran, LPG member  
Motion by Ronald Morton, second by Fred Owens to accept as new member of the Council; passed by unanimous vote.
- 8) Discussion on VA response of 7/28/14 to action items presented by the Council at the meeting of 7/15/2014:
  - a. VJO – Dr. Vermette stated that a VJO had been hired and would start in the position on 8/25/14. She stated the VJO supervisor will be Joan LePage, but refused to provide the name of the individual hired as VJO. Ed Junod stated we want Ms. LePage and the VJO to meet with the VTC and Court Director. On inquiry as to who the VA POC for the Knox County VTC Director will be, Dr. Vermette stated it would be Ms. Christie Cook. Fred Owens immediately objected. Frank Vollmer pointed out that Ms. Cook previously refused to support the VTC or VTC Committee, and had notified the Court Director there was to be no reference to VA affiliation or support. He also pointed out that Ms. Cook hired an individual in 2012 as VJO and refused to let that individual work in the VJO capacity. Ms. Cook consistently lied about VJO availability to the Council. Ed Junod stated that VTC committee worked without VA participation, and resolved the communication "*glitch*" between the Court Director and Knox County Sheriff Office (KCSO) Detention Center. The Council previously reported that 72 "JIV's" had been processed at the KCSO Detention Facility between January 1 and May 31, 2014. For the month of July, 2014,

another 41 JIV's were processed – all without any VA contact or representation. For the second month Dr. Vermette did not address the issue of the 2012 VJO hiring by Ms. Cook. By a unanimous vote the Council voted Ms. Cook as being “not acceptable” and the Council will not accept her as POC for the VTC and Court Director. Council requested again for a VA employee to immediately serve the JIVs in KCSO Detention Center immediately; request was denied by Dr. Vermette.

Dr. Vermette questioned why JIV's won't admit to being veterans. Dean Powell responded “shame”. Dean Powell is the founder of InFocus Ministry, a successful faith-based ministry in the Detention Center.

Council requested to meet with the VJO and her supervisor. Ed Junod requested the professional experience and background of the newly hired VJO; Dr. Vermette denied the request. Charles Dabb recommended that the VJO and supervisors need to go into the jails and detention centers to see how veterans are processed and treated. Mr. Dabbs asked Dr. Vermette to schedule those meetings.

- b. Mental Health Process Group: Ed Junod referred to the 7/15 minutes and acknowledged that the Council's reference to “first aid” was not correct. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a program which Ron Morton has offered to the Legacy Peer Support Group<sup>1</sup>. Stephen A. Sams, Ph.D. (CAVHCS) provided their VA Monthly Process Group <sup>2</sup>program in Tuskegee Alabama<sup>3</sup>. Dr. Sloan spoke with Dr. Sams and now has a better understanding of our request for the program.
- c. Ed Junod introduced Ron Morton. Ron Morton explained that he is a senior manager for BCBS/TN and initiated the “Recovery and Resiliency” and “Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS)” programs for the State of Tennessee. Ron Morton was the first professional in the TN to be certified in MHFA. He explained MHFA was a program to help non-professionals provide intervention in crisis situations. The successful program was developed in Australia and has been adopted by the US Mental Health professionals. Vet to Vet TN has two TN CPRSs and a third completing the CPRS application. The current PSS are not practicing Peer Support according to their functional statement and observations from LPG and Vet to Vet TN and Council members.

Ron Morton has scheduled an 8 hour MHFA training program to members and families of LPG which will be held at Elmcroft on October 21, 2014. The program is being offered at zero cost to the veterans.

Ron Morton requested that all Council attendees begin using Recovery and Resiliency language which will help promote the veteran centered peer-oriented model of care.

- d. Dr. Sloan followed up on the referral websites provided by Ed Junod on providing a mental health process for VTC mentors and peer facilitators. He consulted with Dr. Donald Richardson, KOPC,

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<sup>1</sup> USA Mental Health First Aid <http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/>

<sup>2</sup> Council's VA Monthly Process Group Support letter emailed to Dr. Vermette on 7-22-14.

<sup>3</sup> Email from Stephen A. Sams, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist, PTSD Clinical Team, (PCT) Program Manager - East Campus Local Evidence-Based Psychotherapy (EBP) Coordinator at the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) dated 7-21-14.

who agreed to provide the needed care on a monthly basis. Ed Junod met with Dr. Richardson and the program will start September 29 2014.

Ron Morton recommended we change the name of the program from “VA Monthly Process Group Support” to “Recovery and Resiliency Support Group”.

- e. Dr. Farina reported that she and VISN 9 are very interested in promoting and expanding MHFA services and programs in the VISN. Ron Morton offered to introduce her to his MHFA contacts in Nashville and provide names and contact numbers.
- f. Dr. Vermette provided the contact name, telephone numbers and procedures that KCSO personnel were to use in obtaining medical information on incarcerated JIV's. Frank Vollmer notified her that the KCSO contact would be Mike Mower in the mental health office. The KCSO switchboard telephone number is (865) 281-6700, and the caller is to ask for the mental health office or staff member.
- g. Ed Junod asked if KOPC will have a Local Recovery Coordinator (LRC)<sup>4</sup>. Dr. Vermette initially stated that they would first have to find a replacement for Zebbie Brandt at the VAMC before looking into KOPC. However, due to the size of KOPC the MHEB is seriously considering a LRC at KOPC.
- h. Dr. Vermette and Dr. Sloan will serve as both KOPC's VA Liaison and LRC for the Council.
- i. At 1PM the Council was interrupted. The room was reserved by other VA staff and the attendees had to leave. Ed Junod requested the VA find another conference room since numerous items had not been reviewed. The VA found a small conference room and the meeting continued. Ron Morton made a motion to move the monthly Council meeting to Elmcroft to avoid future interruptions. Council noted the Council meetings are scheduled for 1 ½ hours. September 11, 2014 is our next meeting at Elmcroft, 8024 Gleason Drive, Knoxville, TN. VA attendees were asked to carpool from the Clinic to Elmcroft to reduce the number of vehicles parking at Elmcroft.
- j. In response to our request in seeking fee-based service providers, Dr. Vermette's reply of 7/28/14 stated: “Patient-Centered Community Care (PC3) is a Veterans Health Administration (VHA) nationwide program that offers health care contracts to provide eligible Veterans improved access to care. Under PC3, VHA has contracted with Health Net and TriWest to develop a network of providers to deliver the covered care when the local VA Medical Center (VAMC) cannot readily provide the needed care to Veterans due to lack of available specialists, long wait times, geographic inaccessibility or other factors. TriWest has been awarded the contract for Tennessee and is actively developing a provider Network in our patient service area”.

Council and Drs. Vermette and Sloan recommended a pipeline communication between the VAMC, KOPC and the Council. This communication link about medical care will be categorized and submitted directly to Dr. Vermette and a response to the issues will be reported monthly at the Council meeting. Freddie Owens will collect the written data from veterans and report the information to Dr. Vermette.

- k. Dr. Vermette's reply of 7/28/14 stated: “...recognition for VA staff performance can be accomplished by sending compliments to the employee's supervisor. The supervisor will process the compliment and send it to the facility Awards Committee for review. The Awards Committee

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<sup>4</sup> VHA Handbook 1160.01 Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics dated 9-11-08.

has union representation. Final approval of the award is granted by the Medical Center Director.” Ed Junod requested a written copy of the VHA’s VA staff performance evaluation for bonuses. VAMC to provide the procedure to Council. Dr. Vermette confirmed this procedure is from the VHA.

- I. Council requested a copy of the MCM 00-13-09 “Management of Patient Complaints and Patient Advocates” policy and procedure for veterans to have the ability to contact all levels of service and management within VISN9. The reply from the Mountain Home VAMC was: “Open communication is promoted through Service Partners and Patient advocates. All issues and concerns are addressed at the lowest level possible... We are open to discussing the process for communication of the Council to VA leadership. We propose that minutes from the Council may be submitted to the ACOS, Mental Health who will in turn review the minutes with the Mental Health Leadership Team and submit the minutes to the Facility Director”. Several members pointed out that this procedure was in effect under Ms. Cook’s position and there were no acceptable results. It took 903 days to meet with Ms. Ehret despite repeated requests to Ms. Cook, and then only after the Council filed formal complaints with the VA/OGC, VA/OIG and the VISN 9 Network Director John Patrick.

9. Peer Support:

- a) At the 7/15/14 meeting with Ms. Ehret the Council was told it would not be discussed. Ms. Ehret stated that she “does not trust peer support”. After some discussion, Ms. Ehret said “Maybe Dr. Farina could help her with that...”. Dr. Vermette’s reply of 7/28 had no mention of peer support. Ron Morton claimed that Mountain Home and KOPC have ignored peer support even though it is a requirement of the VA and recognized by SAMSHA<sup>5</sup>, NADCP<sup>6</sup>, INAPS<sup>7</sup> and others. He asked when they (VAMC and KOPC) will comply with VHA Handbook 1160.01, paragraph 17, VHA Handbook 1163.01<sup>8</sup>, VHA Handbook 1163.05<sup>9</sup> and H.R. 3230 Act of 2014<sup>10</sup>.
  - b) Dr. Vermette requested the Council send her a copy of LPG’s transition plan on July 17, 2014<sup>11</sup>. Ed Junod said he sent the plan to Dr. Vermette on July 22, 2014. The transition plan was developed by Dr. Patricia Sweeney from the VISN 1 MIRECC and Vet to Vet USA. The plan has been presented to Ms. Cook for almost two years and it is only being used by Drs. Richardson at KOPC and Gannon at the Sevier County CBOC.
  - c) Fred Owens reported that Mountain Home and KOPC did not subscribe to the use and integration of the VA’s Peer Support Specialists with our Legacy Peer Support Groups (LPG’s) or mention the issue of travel pay. KOPC has two PSS and that we only see one PSS per month, and for only one of the five (5) LPG. He stated this is not acceptable nor is it part of our original agreement with the Mountain Home VAMC leadership in June 2012.
- 9) Ed Junod asked Dr. Vermette how H.R. 3230 would be implemented for facilities under the Directorship of the Mountain Home VAMC area of responsibility. Frank Vollmer reminded Dr. Vermette of the VA News Release of July 29, 2014, that included the statement: “*Employees who have been found to have*

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<sup>5</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<sup>6</sup> National Association of Drug Court Professionals

<sup>7</sup> InterNational Association of Peer Support Specialist

<sup>8</sup> VHA Handbook 1163.01 Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Services dated 7-1-11.

<sup>9</sup> VHA Handbook 1163.05 Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Services Peer Support dated 7-1-11.

<sup>10</sup> H.R. 3230 Veterans Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act of 2014 signed into law by President Obama on 8-7-14.

<sup>11</sup> Council’s Transition Plan from VA Evidence-based Workgroup to Strength-based Peer Support Group emailed to Dr. Vermette on 7-22-14.

*manipulated data, withheld accurate information from their supervisors, and affected the timeliness of care Veterans receive do not reflect VA's values, and their actions will not be tolerated,"* said Acting Secretary Sloan D. Gibson. *"VA must earn back the trust of veterans. Part of earning back that trust is holding people accountable..."*. Frank also referenced H.R. 3230's Title IV – Health Care Administrative Matters – sections 408 (penalizing VA employees) and 409 (removal of any individual from the VA Senior Executive Service).

10) NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Ed Junod reported that no Council members would be attending this year's VA Mental Health Summit at the Mountain Home VAMC. This decision was due to not receiving any information from last year's Summit. Frank Vollmer said he sent an e-mail to the VAMC in response to this year's invitation which said last years "report" would be the first agenda item. He asked for a copy of the report, but has not had any response to the request after 45+ days. Dr. Vermette stated the report isn't actually available because she hasn't finished it yet. Frank Vollmer told Dr. Vermette that taking twelve months to submit a Mental Health Summit report was not acceptable.
- b. Dr. Sloan requested that the Council reconsider its position. He acknowledged our Council participation in 2013 provided much information and experience to other attendee's. Ed Junod asked Dr. Sloan to give the Council one reason to attend; response was "hope". On review, following Dr. Sloan's request, several Council members agreed to attend the 2014 event.
- c. Ed Junod reported our Council was collaborating with other TN Veterans Mental Health Councils to form a TN VMHC. Currently working with the Murfreesboro VHMC and developing the statewide VMHC bylaws. Council believes this would help with VISN 9 and other VHMCs. The TN VMHC will use the VMHC Council Guide and adopt bylaws similar to our Council<sup>12</sup>.
- d. Ed Junod reported that our Council's East TN Veterans Treatment Court Committee will hold a press conference at the end of September. Dr. Farina was interested in our Public Relations event and stated the VA has missed out on several PR opportunities. Council invited VISN 9's participation.
- e. Henry Cleveland stated that *"we served with pride but were betrayed and the County. We had hope and persistence to keep us going"*.
- f. Our Council has received complaints and concerns from veterans about VA employees One VA care provider at the Mountain Home VAMC was of particular concern of the Council. Many ask how this could happen. Ed Junod reported our Council discovered on August 9, 2014 an "OSC Whistleblower Comments" from Phyllis A. M. Hollenbeck, MD, FAAFP<sup>13</sup>. The complaint was against several individuals at the Jackson, MS VAMC.
  - i. Dr. Hollenbeck provided witness testimony to the Department of Veterans Affairs on August 22, 2013 and September 9, 2013. The original OIG complaint was filed in July 2012. After an expose article in the New York Times, one of the physicians mentioned in the article left the Jackson Mississippi VAMC "under a cloud". This VA physician was hired at Mountain Home VAMC as a Primary Care Physician.

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<sup>12</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs "Veterans Mental Health Council Guide dated 9-09.

<sup>13</sup> OSC Whistleblower Comments, Phyllis A.M. Hollenbeck MD, FAAFP dated December 2013 to Ms. Catherine McMullen, Chief, Disclosure Unit, U.S. Office of Special Counsel.

- ii. Ed Junod reported that a copy had been sent to VISN 9 ND John Patrick. Frank Vollmer provided copies to Drs. Vermette, Sloan, Farina-Morin and Mr. Campbell. The Council explained that we received the report too late to include on the agenda, but due to its urgency and importance, we felt it had to be included at the last minute.
- iii. Council requested the immediate removal of the VA care provider based on the history at the Jackson MS VAMC, complaints and concerns of the VA staff and concern.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Vollmer  
Secretary  
Knoxville Regional Veterans Mental Health Council