Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary

VAVS Representative

&

Deputy Representative

Training Guide

Source for much of this information is VHA Handbook 1620.1
Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration,
Washington, DC

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About This Training Guide

The purpose of this Training Guide is to provide practical information on how to perform successfully as a VAVS Representative or Deputy Representative. Although general in nature, this Training Guide contains information that will be helpful to you in your appointed role. If you have speciic questions, please contact our MOPHA National Representative, Molly Ware at mophavavs@gmail.com.

As a Representative or Deputy Representative, you have a responsibility to be knowledgeable about the rules, regulations, policies and programs of the VAVS program. This information is provided to help you acquire this knowledge.

I. The VAVS Program

The Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) program, under the management of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), provides for community participation in the VA program of care and treatment of veteran patients. Through this program, community volunteers efforts and resources are combined to serve America's veterans by augmenting VA staff in such settings as hospital wards, nursing homes, ambulatory care, domiciliaries, community-based volunteer programs, end of life care programs, veterans outreach centers, national cemeteries, and Veteran Benefit Administration (VBA) Regional offices.

II. VAVS Goals

The VAVS goals are to:

a. Ensure that the VAVS Program is supportive of VA's mission.

b. Provide veterans served by VA with a comprehensive range of services, which are supplemental to budgetary appropriations.

c. Provide supplemental services in a timely manner through a Volunteer Program Manager. This is done in cooperation with individuals, veterans' service organizations, businesses, educational institutions and community organizations through human resources, gifts and donations.

d. Ensure all volunteers are informed of VA's primary responsibilities.

e. Provide a working environment that is safe, clean and comfortable.

f. Promote cooperation among employees and volunteers.

g. Earn the respect and gratitude of those who served.

h. Ensure volunteers are given assignments that provide satisfaction, utilize knowledge and skills and offer opportunities for learning.

i. Maintain a volunteer recognition system to ensure that volunteers are appropriately recognized.

j. Maintain interaction of volunteers with patients in ways that foster the healing process.

k. Ensure that all volunteers serve under the supervision of VA compensated employees in authorized assignments, which meet, identified needs.

l. Ensure that participation in the VAVS program does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, non-disqualifying handicap and national origin.

III. National VAVS Advisory Committee

The Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) National Advisory Committee (NAC) was established by VA Circular No. 117, May 17, 1946 and became a federally chartered advisory committee on February 5, 1975. The Committee advises the Under Secretary for Health on matters pertaining to the participation of volunteers in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities. Committee membership is open to all national organizations that provide volunteers or donations to VA medical facilities and meet or exceed minimum criteria established by the NAC. A Service Member (voting) must maintain the provisions of volunteers and VA recognized participation on local VAVS committees at a minimum of twenty five VA facilities.

IV. Medical Center VAVS Committee

Each medical center has a VAVS Committee made up of organizations whose members participate at the local level in the VAVS program for veteran patients. Each organization may certify one Representative and up to three, Deputy Representatives to the medical center's VAVS Committee. The actual certification of the MOPHA VAVS Representatives and Deputies is done by the MOPHA National Certifying Official, upon the recommendation of the respective Department President.

Note: *Local Representatives and Deputy Representatives may represent more than one local VAVS committee "if" the Facility Director believes accepting the appointment is in the best interest of the facility. An individual may only represent one organization.*

Organizations will be removed from the VAVS Committee when none of the certified members is in attendance at three consecutive meetings. Membership can be renewed with a letter of certification to the facility Director indicating the attendance requirement will be met.

Note: *Notification to the respective National Certifying Official is required when an organization is removed from a local VAVS Committee. Notification is to be in writing and submitted in a timely manner, with a copy to the Director, Voluntary Service Office, and to the facility Director.*

The VAVS Committee serves first in an advisory capacity to medical center management in coordinating on a local level the established plans and policies for volunteer participation in programs for patients. Second, it helps coordinate participation of the committee's respective organizations and resources in the VAVS program.

Each member of the committee will keep medical center management advised about their organization's policies and procedures for volunteer assistance and will provide guidance within their membership for appropriate volunteer participation in the VAVS program.

Quarterly meetings of the VAVS Committee must be scheduled each fiscal year. It is recommended, but not required, that one evening meeting is held each quarter to accommodate working VAVS members.

V. Qualifications for VAVS Representatives

1. The caliber of participation by an organization in the VAVS program can be largely judged by the caliber of leadership provided by its VAVS representatives. The following qualifications have been suggested by VAVS leadership, MOPHA leadership and medical center staff.

2. Willing and able to participate in the orientation provided by the Voluntary Service Office.

3. **Physically capable of performing regularly scheduled (RS) hours of service and have a source of transportation.**

4. **The ability to attend committee meetings regularly**. If MOPHA is not represented by a Representative or a Deputy Representative at three consecutive meetings, MOPHA may be dropped from the VAVS committee.

5. The ability to work effectively with members of his/her own organization, with representatives from other organizations on the VAVS committee and with VA staff.

6. A genuine desire to serve on the VAVS committee and a full realization of his/her responsibility and the work to be done.

VI. VAVS Representatives' and Deputies' Responsibilities

A. VAVS representatives will be responsible for the following functions:

1. **Recruitment of volunteers**

2. Coordination of the volunteer resources of MOPHA and all aspects of their participation in the VAVS program at the medical center.

3. Interpretation of policies and procedures of MOPHA to the VAVS committee and appropriate VA staff.

4. Annual evaluation of MOPHA participation in the VAVS program with the leadership of MOPHA and VA. (Annual Joint Review (AJR) scheduled with the Chief of Voluntary Services or Program Manager).

5. Establishment of procedures for keeping all participating units of MOPHA informed of ongoing medical center programs and needs.

B. MOPHA may have up to three deputy representatives to share the duties of the representative. Their responsibilities include:

1. Attending VAVS committee meetings in the absence of the representative.

2. Attending meetings with the VAVS representative in order to be fully knowledgeable of the work of the committee and to be able to represent MOPHA effectively when the representative is unable to attend.

Note: *When medical center management determines the need for VAVS support at satellite clinics for which they have administrative responsibility, MOPHA may appoint an additional Deputy Representative for the satellite outpatient clinic. (A clinic situated at a distance from the medical center). The appointment is to the parent (medical center) VAVS committee.*

VII. Associate Representative/Deputy Representative

Organizations represented on the NAC may appoint one VAVS Associate Representative and one VAVS Deputy Associate Representative from adjacent states/Departments to the facility, if MOPHA has members in an adjacent Department participating in that particular VAMC.

A. Associate Representative's duties (except for voting privileges, which may be delegated in the absence of the representative) are the same as a representative, but limited to the adjacent department. The Associate Representative must hold membership in MOPHA, in the adjacent Department.

B. Associate Deputy Representative's duties consist of those assigned by the Associate Representative. Deputy Associate Representatives may participate fully in discussions at facility VAVS committee meetings and may be appointed to subcommittees and task groups. The Deputy Associate Representative must hold membership in MOPHA, in the adjacent Department.

VIII. General Information

A. Recruitment of volunteers is "the" most important responsibility of an MOPHA VAVS Representative and is to be accomplished through your Unit and/or Department.

1. Representatives may invite VA staff to MOPHA meetings to discuss the volunteer program and assist in recruitment. MOPHA leadership may attend VAVS meetings, medical center briefings and tours to better understand the VAVS program.

2. VA staff members may effectively assist you in planning your recruitment by determining worthwhile volunteer assignments, preparing effective volunteer assignment guides and utilizing the media to enhance the recruitment efforts for both MOPHA members and non-members.

3. Voluntary Service staff is available to discuss Representatives new recruitment methods and techniques, effective utilization of medical center services and effective use of the media.

B. Classification of Volunteers

1. Regularly Scheduled (RS) volunteers are individuals who participate in the VAVS program on a regularly scheduled assignment under VA supervision. A formal orientation is required and in some medical centers a TB test is required. These volunteers are considered "without compensation" employees. Their hours are recorded and awards may be presented according to the number of service hours volunteered.

2. All other volunteers, serving either through MOPHA or independently, are designated Occasional Volunteers. MOPHA receives credit for service given rather than individually as with (RS) volunteers. No individual records are maintained for Occasional Volunteers.

3. Student volunteers under the age of 18, but 14 years old or those that satisfy the state's definition of underage, must have written parental or guardian approval to participate in the VAVS program and authorization for diagnostic and emergency treatment if injured while volunteering.

C. Training of Volunteers

1. The Voluntary Service Office is responsible for providing general user-friendly orientation to regularly scheduled volunteers about the role of the VAVS program

including policies and procedures, e.g. the Privacy Act, infection control, fire and safety, etc.

2. Additional orientation in the specific assignment to which the volunteer has been assigned and necessary on-the-job instruction will be provided by the assignment supervisor.

Note: *Every effort should be made to ensure volunteers have access to orientation and assignments that accommodate their schedules*.

D. Supervision of Volunteers

The Regular Scheduled Volunteer receives multiple, but not conflicting, supervision.

1. First, there is supervision exercised by the VAVS Representative of MOPHA.

2. Second, general supervision must also be maintained by the Voluntary Service staff.

3. Finally, there is supervision by VA staff in the work assignment area.

E. Recognition of Volunteers

1. Every April, during National Volunteer Week, each VAMC normally sponsors a Volunteer Recognition and Awards Ceremony at which a variety of awards are presented to eligible volunteers. Awards are based on the number of cumulative hours each award recipient has served through the preceding fiscal year.

2. MOPHA also accepts nominations, annually, from the Chiefs of Volunteer Services or Program Managers for the MOPHA VAVS Awards.

F. Volunteer Benefits

1. Meals may be furnished without charge to (RS) volunteers provided the scheduled assignment extends over an established meal period and to occasional volunteers when appropriate.

2. Emergency medical treatment is provided if a volunteer is injured or incapacitated while in his/her volunteer assignment. All uncompensated volunteers are considered employees and are eligible for injury compensation benefits. In all cases of accident or illness, report immediately to your supervisor who is responsible for contacting the Voluntary Service Office.

3. Volunteers are accorded the same privileges as employees in their patronage of the Canteen. The Canteen includes a cafeteria and a retail store which offers items at discounted prices.

4. The office of Voluntary Service will furnish letters of reference to regularly scheduled volunteers upon request.

G. Termination of (RS) Volunteers

The Voluntary Service Officer, Chief or Program Manager, may remove a VAVS volunteer for unsatisfactory performance, inability to perform the assignment, or violation of established policy and/or procedures.

1. The utilizing service must provide detailed documentation demonstrating that the volunteer, after appropriate orientation and training, has been counseled and sufficient cause for removal exists.

2. Written notification of termination must be sent to the volunteer and to the MOPHA National Certifying Official.

IX. Annual Joint Review

A Joint Review of the VAVS program will be made annually during each fiscal year by the VAVS Representative and the Chief of Voluntary Services or Program Manager.

The purpose of this review will be to make a joint annual inventory of MOPHA participation in the VAVS program and to jointly develop goals and plans for the next year. A strategy is to be developed to assure the most effective use of MOPHA volunteers.

All Annual Joint Review will be completed during the month of October for the MOPHA. When these reviews are completed, they will be signed by the VAVS Representative and the Voluntary Service Officer completing the review. The original is retained by the Voluntary Service Office with copies sent to the MOPHA National VAVS Representative and the local VAVS Representative.

In instances when the office of Voluntary Service is unable to arrange a meeting with the VAVS Representative, reviews can be conducted by telephone or mail. If Annual Joint Reviews are not completed, a report to that effect must be submitted by the Voluntary Service Officer and sent to MOPHA National VAVS Representative in a timely manner.

X. Gifts and Donations

All requests for and acknowledgement of gifts and donations should be cleared through the Voluntary Service Office. This procedure pertains to VA personnel, individual donors and all organizations.

Gifts and donations accepted through VAVS channels will be for the sole purpose of meeting particular needs and requirements for the welfare and comfort of veteran patients. Always

consult the Voluntary Service Office before bringing any items to the medical center to be sure they are needed and can be used.

When LAMOPH plans to undertake a specific volunteer project at the medical center, it is important that you thoroughly understand the scope, ramifications and responsibilities involved.

Both VA staff members and the Voluntary Service Officer concerned should, through a common understanding and planning of the project, make every effort to ensure that the best interests of the veterans and the VAVS program are served.

General Post Funds are special accounts established at the medical centers to support the needs of the veteran patients through volunteer donations. All contributions to the General Post Funds should be earmarked at the bottom of the check to the appropriate medical center fund.

XI. Automated Information System Records

Voluntary Service is required to record hours and visits of all volunteers each month. The processing of this data will be accomplished by utilizing the Voluntary Service System (VSS).

All volunteer information will be entered into the VSS. This information, including any additions and/or changes, will be recorded and retained as part of the permanent record. Monthly, semiannual and annual reports are printed directly from VSS. These reports are made available to the National MOPHA VAVS Representative.

When a volunteer transfers to another VA facility, upon the volunteer's request, hours of service, awards and other pertinent data should be transferred to the new VA facility. Transferred hours are creditable at the new location towards awards not previously received.

XII. Regulatory Guidance

All VA regulatory guidance governing Voluntary Service procedures is contained in VHA Handbook 1620.1

Copies of all VHA Handbooks/Guidelines are available on the VA's Website: http://www.va.gov/vhapublications