

Commission on PTSD & TBI Meeting Notes
Walker Building, Room 274
Thursday May 16, 2019
Recorder: Tony Paradiso

Member attendance:

Denise Roy-Innarelli	NHES
Ken Norton	NAMI
Suellen Griffin	NHCBHA
Peggy LaBrecque	NH Veterans Home
Tony Paradiso	Veterans Advocate
Eric Johnson	NHCBHA
Michael Rice	SVAC
Maj Gen Gretchen Dunkelberger	NH Veterans Cemetery Association
Ana McKenna	Care Coordination Program NH

Excused

Robert Motolla	Manchester VA
Dr. Nicole Sawyer	NH Psychological Association
Nick Tolentino	Disabled American Veterans
Dr Richard Wren	WRJVA
Gavin Cherry	Easter Seals Military Veterans Services
Amy Cook	DHHS
Catrina Watson	NHMS

Guest attendance:

Melanie Spears	Congresswoman Kuster's Office
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I. Welcome & Introductions

Pledge of Allegiance

New Member Introduction:

None

New Guest Introductions:

None

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the April 18, 2019 meeting were approved as written.

III. Commission Updates (Updates pertinent to COPT mission)

General Membership

Melanie Spears: Melanie has a newsletter that she distributes that summarizes activities in Washington. Anyone who would like to be added to the distribution list should feel free to contact her.

Denise Roy-Innarelli: The next job fair will be held on June 20th in Manchester from 10:00 to 2:00 pm. Companies can still register for a booth space. The recent Seabrook job fair for experienced workers had over 100 people attendees with 80 employers represented.

The BLS statistics for April have been released and the unemployment rate for New Hampshire was 2.4%. This was the same as in March. The national rate was 3.6%. The national rate for veteran unemployment was 2.3% as compared to 3.7% last year. This is the lowest level of veteran unemployment in many years.

Ken Norton: Susan Stearns is in DC with the Governor's Challenge. Ken had an interesting meeting with the head of the National Institute of Mental Health for India regarding the use of yoga and meditation as an alternative treatment for mental illness. Ken would like to see New Hampshire move forward with similar programs. One issue is getting insurance companies to pay for alternative treatments.

Suellen Griffin: The restraint bill (SB177) was presented and numerous citizens came forward to advocate for changes in the use of restraint. This is not a veteran specific bill but impacts everyone including veterans. The goal is for the bill go through on a consent agenda. Suellen views this as a very exciting step forward. She also noted that the military liaisons plan to meet again on Tuesday May 21st.

Eric Johnson: Eric has learned of a number of new commissions formed by the governor. One is workforce related, one is justice involved, and the other is efficiency related. The Association is looking to have a representative on these commissions. He is also looking to get support for alternative supportive therapy related to outdoor activity. The therapy is conducted with licensed therapists and evidence exists to support its effectiveness. This therapy applies to a variety of disabilities not just mental illness.

UNH and Northern Passages have been doing work in this area. As with other alternative treatments, reimbursement is an issue for this program.

Maj Gen Gretchen Dunkelberger: The next SVAC meeting will be held at the VA to support the VA Mission Act. The goal of the program is to provide patients more options for care (including urgent care), to broaden the national network, and to offer more veteran-to-veteran peer supports.

Peggy LaBrecque: The Veterans Home is still experiencing fairly high turnover and many job openings remain. Come September, the community colleges will start up their LNA courses. She noted there is a state funded tuition program designed to be an incentive for those willing to commit to staying in NH for a prescribed period of time.

Peggy is also keeping an eye on legislation. In particular, there is a proposal to earmark \$24 million for Keene State and UNH to accept more nursing applicants. The hope is to facilitate many more nursing graduates four years from now. However, it looks like the House has moved the funds around so an effort will be made to ensure the proposed funding stays committed to help alleviate the nursing shortage.

In the meantime, The Veterans Home is thinking outside the box to try to stretch nursing resources. They are constantly looking to improve efficiencies and they have mandated additional shifts be worked.

Suellen agreed that we need to start thinking differently. Women today have many more employment options. As a consequence people are not going into nursing fields because acquiring a degree is costly and salaries are not competitive. In New Hampshire the starting pay is very low. The middle range is competitive but then salaries tails off again the longer a person stays. The opportunities in Massachusetts are much more lucrative. She suggested that we should look at subsidizing tuition and other strategies to alter the economic disadvantages of going into these professions.

It was noted that the state budget process may present further challenges. If the state cannot agree on a budget - and adopts a continuing resolution - no new funds will be available.

NH DHHS Update

Amy is in Washington meeting on suicide prevention with the Governor's Challenge

IV. Action Items (Items that require decision /action by COPT)

None

V. Old Business

Peggy still needs to draft the cover letter for the survey.

VI. New Business

Information on mind/body workshops was e-mailed to commission members.

Catrina Watson: The NH Medical Society newsletter is looking for content/articles on PTSD/TBI etc.

Peggy polled the Commission members about taking July and August off. There was consensus that due to vacations and expected absences that it makes sense to take the summer months off.

Amy has distributed the new ATQ link. She would like the Commission to help move the needle again with ATQ and the toolkit as well with military culture training.

Senate Bill 208 has cleared consent. It codifies the Governor's executive order to establish additional resources and rename the adjutant general's department to the department of military affairs and veterans services. The bill budgets two new people this fiscal year. If the budget doesn't go through it could create an issue.

Senate Bill 59 is adding PTSD to the definition for workman's compensation. Specifically it adds post-traumatic stress disorder and acute stress disorder to the definition of "injury" for purposes of workers' compensation and establishes a commission to study the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in first responders. The bill has good support and is expected to pass. Advancements like this help to reduce the stigma associated with PTSD.

Bill Kenny sent out a FAQ on the VA Mission Act explaining what it is and its goals. One issue is that spouses don't consider themselves caregivers and may be losing an opportunity to access funds related to caregivers and respite relief. Peggy will distribute this information to Commission members and encourages everyone to share it with community providers.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 pm

Next Commission Meeting is Thursday, June 20, 2019 from 2:30 – 4:30 pm at the Walker Building, Room 274, 21 South Fruit Street, Concord