

Grant Steward

Testimony of
Grant Steward
United States Senate
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Field Hearing on
Health Care for Veterans on Maui
August 23, 2007

Good Morning. My name is Grant Steward and I am a US Army veteran. I feel honored to stand here before such prestigious individuals.

Since returning from the Middle East, I've been to five different VA's. Although I generally feel completely lost when I go there, the staff is always professional and courteous. Of the five different centers, the Maui clinic, in my opinion, is the best. The doctors and staff all deserve a pat on the back for how attentive they are to their patients' well being.

Having spent two and a half years going to the VA, here are a few suggestions that may help veterans in the future.

When the VA realizes that a veteran will require counseling, it may benefit the veteran if their family could get counseling as well; if only to let them know what their veteran is going through.

I find it difficult to open up with what's going on in my head, so unfortunately, my family can get left in the dark. My wife has been very understanding, and I do feel guilty for not being able to communicate with her as much as I know I should.

Recently, I had to deal with a rather messy landlord/tenant issue. If the local VA had a list of lawyers who work with veterans, it would have helped with the stress by pointing me in the right direction. While in the Army, whenever a legal issue happened, JAG was full of wonderful answers. These days, I call my counselor and have him tell me to try not to stress out. Unfortunately, with a wife and 3 little children, not having electricity in your house can bring on lots of stress.

There's nothing like being woken up with an elbow jabbing into your side. According to my loving wife, if my bruxism, teeth grinding, is going to keep her awake, her elbow will keep me awake. I even find myself clenching my teeth throughout the day. I don't have dental coverage, so my teeth get worse every month. I understand the VA wanting to cut costs, but when you have a service connection for two problems with your head, the VA should include care for the whole head.

The following paragraph comes from a published study, released March, 2001, (University at Buffalo, Buffalo VA Medical Center) where 40 veterans with PTSD and 40 patients without PTSD had an oral examination and evaluation of tooth wear.

"Results showed significantly increased wear of tooth surfaces in three dimensions near the gum line -- vertical, horizontal and depth -- in those with PTSD compared to controls. Erosion vertically was more than three times greater, horizontally more than four times greater and more than 10 times greater in depth than controls."

I hate the idea of missing an appointment. This usually results in several calls to the VA to make sure of my appointment times, as I have the tendency to lose the paper I write my appointments on. If the VA had a way of emailing appointments and appointment cancellations, my memory loss won't continue to result in an overworked VA staff.

Thank you for your time and I hope these few suggestions benefit all those who have served and sacrificed for our country.

Submitted August 17, 2007