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THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

28 September 1998

MEMORANDUM FOR: ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

SUBJECT: Policy Memorandum DoD/VA Separation Physical Examinations

Military members separating or retiring from Active Duty, Guard, or Reserve service should undergo one physical examination for Department of Defense (DoD) purposes and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as the basis for rating disability compensation. The VA needs sufficient information from an examination report to adjudicate benefit eligibility for individuals filing claims for service-connected compensation. Currently, physical examinations performed within the military are not always suited to this purpose and often necessitate a second physical examination performed by VA physicians. This redundant system is inconvenient for servicemembers and contributes to delays in claims processing time for adjudication of service-connected disabilities and initiation of disability compensation. Changing this business practice will not only benefit servicemembers, but should result in significant long-term cost-avoidance for the Government as a whole by reducing redundant physical examinations.

DoD has worked closely with the VA to determine how best to perform comprehensive physical examinations that document the physical status and medical condition of military personnel at time of discharge in order to speed the processing of claims for VA compensation. In 1994, the Department of the Army and the VA jointly initiated the Separation Examination Test. The attached final report on this test was published in December 1997 and demonstrated that DoD and the VA can work together to perform a combined separation physical examination which meets the requirements of both agencies.

To maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the separation physical examination, the DoD Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) Commanders shall collaborate with the appropriate VA Medical Center (VAMC) Director to develop and execute a cost-neutral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between their respective facilities. Issues that cannot be settled at that level can be referred to the regional lead agent and Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director as well as through Service channels to the Surgeons General. The VA and DoD have created a Healthcare Financial Management Committee to resolve resourcing issue policies between the two Departments. Since no additional funding or funds transfers between Departments is anticipated, the following guidelines are recommended to enable facility commanders to meet this goal.

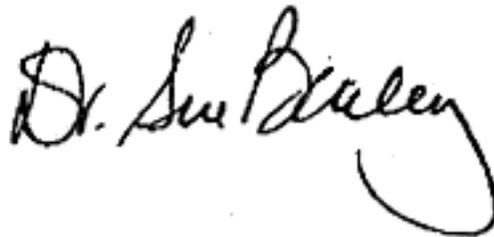
A standard VA Compensation and Pension (C&P) physical shall be performed on servicemembers who are referred to the Disability Evaluation System for determination of fitness, or who at the time of separation/retirement indicate a desire to apply for service-connected

disability compensation from the VA. The individual's medical record should substantiate a potential for disability claim and include a DD Form 2697, "Report of Medical Assessment". For those individuals, the Service Medical Record, proof of Line of Duty Determination if necessary, and recent laboratory, radiological and all other associated test results, should accompany the claimant for VA benefits to the place of the examination so that testing is not duplicated. A complete Review of Systems (ROS) that documents the individual's physical condition at the time of separation from the military Service shall also be conducted as part of the physical examination package to minimize duplication.

Since the completion of C&P examinations to support the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) claims adjudication process is a core Veterans Health Administration (VHA) responsibility, the VA staff is expected to lead in the performance of such examinations. However, MTF commanders may leverage their manpower and facilities in any way they see fit to achieve an equitable MOU that benefits the servicemembers within the spirit of this memorandum. Therefore, the location for performance of such examinations, as well as which facilities shall be used for laboratory, radiological and other specialized testing will be determined by the MTF Commander and the VAMC Director and clearly delineated in the MOU. This policy guidance also applies to geographic areas where VA providers are not available but may be contracted by the VA and functionally supported by the MTF.

Pre-discharge initiatives between DoD MTFs and the VA are ongoing in various parts of the country. It is understood that as geographic areas vary, so do resources and demands on the DoD MTFs, and availability of VA resources. This memorandum seeks to nurture the creative, cooperative spirit of our MTF leadership and allow policy to evolve based on what is shown to work. In doing so, the DoD and VA will best accomplish what is clearly a benefit to our servicemembers seeking VA claims.

This policy is effective immediately. My point of contact for this project is LtCol(Sel) Steven Humburg who may be reached at (703) 681-1703, or DSN 761-1703.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Sue Bailey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Dr. Sue Bailey

HA Policy 99-001

cc:

Surgeon General of the Army

Surgeon General of the Navy
Surgeon General of the Air Force
Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness)

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Last update: 10/15/1998