

VVA CHAPTER 1069 BENEFITS PRESENTATION 4/13/2016

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2. IOM UPGRADES BLADDER CANCER AND HYPOTHROIDISM: On 3/10/2016, the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) announced that the Institute of Medicine (IOM) was UPGRADING the status of Bladder cancer and HYPOTHROIDISM (low thyroid) to the LIMITED/SUGGESTIVE Category of Association. I e-mailed the VVA to ask what LIMITED/SUGGESTIVE meant. The VVA spokesperson e-mailed me to say that the VA Secretary (Robert A. McDonald) has "a six-month window from March 10, 2016, in which to act on the IOM's findings. So, until the Secretary announces his decisions from the IOM's findings, we cannot be sure what will transpire in relation to the AGENT ORANGE PRESUMPTIVE list."

3. VETERANS GET TELEPHONIC HEALTH CARE APPLICATION OPTION: The VA announced 3/16/2016 that it has amended its enrollment regulations to allow Veterans to complete applications for enrollment in the VA health care system by telephone without the need for a signed paper application. The change is effective immediately for newly released combat veterans and will be effective July 5, 2016, for all veterans. (404) 828-5200

4. BACKLOG OF VA CLAIMS: As of January 30, 2016, the VA says its backlog of disability claims (those claims waiting more than 125 days) was 77,437, down from a high of 611,073 in March 2013. The total number of pending claims on 1/30/2016 was 352,666, which the VA says is down from a high of 883,930 in July 2012.

5. VETERANS HEALTH BENEFITS HANDBOOK: If you are enrolled in the VA Health Care System and your personalized Veterans Health Benefits Handbook (VHBH) is more than three years old or you have had an increase in compensation that moved you to a higher priority in the VA health system, you should call the VA Health Eligibility Center at (404) 828-5200 to request a new personalized handbook.

6. VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PRIORITIES GROUPS: The VA administers a patient enrollment system that is based on priority groups to ensure health care benefits are readily available to enrolled veterans. There are eight priority groups with PRIORITY GROUP ONE being the highest priority. Veterans with VA-rated service connected disabilities of 50% or more disabling OR veterans determined by the VA to be unemployable due to service-connected conditions are placed in PRIORITY GROUP ONE. I will discuss other Priority Groups in the coming months.