

The Ins and Outs of VA Benefits

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“It is a different VA [Veterans Administration],” Annie Tuttle told 25 members and guests at the American Legion Post 360 meeting last week. Tuttle is the public affairs officer for the VA Loma Linda Healthcare System.

“Imagine a health care system where all your records are on computer, all your x-rays are on computer,” Tuttle said. “Anytime your doctor needed to get those, they were immediately at his fingertips. There was no delay. This is the VA today.

“Imagine a time when your doctor says, ‘I want my patient to have this test or that procedure.’ There is no gatekeeper—the patient gets all the requested tests.

“Imagine you’re in the hospital and you’ll be 99.9 percent guaranteed of getting the right medications. With the technology the VA has in place, that is a reality.”

Tuttle brought some very good news to the veterans of the mountain communities.

Veterans who have a disability determined to be at least 10 percent service related are eligible for care at little or no cost.

“If you even think you have a service-connected disability,” said Tuttle, “take the time to file. It is never too late.

“A 10 percent service connection is the key to the door,” she added. “With that determination, a veteran is eligible for care.”

Tuttle went on to say the VA stresses preventive medicine. Female veterans get annual mammograms and pap smears. Diabetic veterans must have annual retinal scans.

“The VA,” she said, “is constantly looking at the numbers. Have the female vets had their mammograms? What about the diabetics? Are vets getting their flu shots?”

When it comes to medications, Tuttle noted, the VA will get them for the vets. “There’s a new culture of designer drugs out there. The drug companies give free samples to physicians, who pass them on to their patients. But when the patient tries to obtain that drug through his insurance company, the formulary won’t allow it.

“At the VA,” she said, “if you try another medication and it doesn’t work—if you find the only one that does work is the expensive one—the VA will provide the expensive one for the vet at the \$8 co-pay.”

If a vet needs glasses and has a 10 percent service connection, the glasses are free. “The rules for hearing aids have changed,” Tuttle said. “If you have a hearing problem that affects your life and your ability to communicate with others, there’s a good possibility you are eligible. That’s new.”



Armand LeSage, commander of American Legion Post 360, thanks Annie Tuttle from the VA Loma Linda Healthcare System for her presentation on veterans’ benefits.

PHOTO BY MARY-JUSTINE LANYON

Current vets should be aware, Tuttle said, they are eligible for two years of free care, no questions asked. “This is something we learned from the Vietnam experience. We didn’t do as well with those returning vets. We did better with the Persian Gulf, and we’re doing even better now.”

The Loma Linda facility, Tuttle said, has 160 in-patient beds and 190 nursing home beds. The latter, she explained, give the patients a chance to recuperate for 30 days after surgery while the VA works with them to find a place closer to home, should they need it.

Tuttle said she hates to even mention the national cemetery in Riverside in the same breath as health care, but it’s something vets and their spouses need to be aware of. “There is no charge,” she said, “for opening or closing the grave site, for burial, for the marker, for the flag. Don’t let funeral homes sell you a veteran’s package—these things are available to you—free.”

To determine eligibility for health care, veterans should call the VA in Loma Linda at (909) 825-7084, extension 5312.

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