



MOPH April 2010 Department of Pennsylvania News Bulletin

LIFE EXPECTANCY Update 01:

When people think about aging, they often look to their immediate family for clues about their own longevity. But while genes certainly play a role in how we age, they may not be as important as people once thought. For most people, only about 30% of aging is based on genetics, according to scientists who study the aging process, which means that most of the factors that affect how quickly you age and how long you may live are under your control. These variable factors range from regular exercise, good nutrition and watching your weight to getting enough sleep and maintaining strong friendships and a positive attitude. Another piece of good news is that taking charge of these lifestyle factors can help people of any age to improve health and fitness, sharpen mental acuity, slow the aging process and enrich their lives. Recent studies have shown that seniors between the ages of 65 and 75, who exercise with resistance weights, can improve their memory and decision-making skills. Researchers in Germany found that staying physically active helps people over age 55 lower their risk of developing cognitive impairments. Other studies have shown that maintaining a network of close friendships and having a positive outlook can improve health, reduce frailty and help people live longer. So if you want to live longer and live better, start today. It's never too late to live a healthier and happier life.

[Source: About.com Senior Living Sharon O'Brien article 23 Mar 2010 ++]

VA HOMELESS VETS Update 15:

U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, held a hearing 24 MAR on VA's plan to end veteran homelessness in the next five years. It is estimated that over 100,000 veterans are homeless in the United States on any given night. The hearing ended abruptly at 11 a.m. after opponents of health insurance reform objected to allowing most committee hearings, including the Veterans' Affairs hearing, to continue. Senate rules require unanimous consent on the Senate floor for committees to meet two hours after the Senate convenes. Objections to the routine procedure are extremely rare. "The Senate should be a place for debate, but I cannot imagine how shutting down a hearing on helping homeless veterans has any part of the debate on the health insurance reform. I am deeply disappointed that my colleagues chose to hinder our common work to help end veteran homelessness," said Akaka.

The hearing included witnesses from the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor, and Housing and Urban Development, as well as community providers who help homeless veterans, and a veteran in transitional housing. Chairman Akaka was forced to gavel the hearing to an end in the middle of testimony from witness Dr. Sam Tsember is from Pathways to Housing, a service provider with hands-on experience helping homeless veterans, particularly those with psychiatric disabilities and addiction disorders.

"With a growing commitment from Congress, the federal government, and community providers, we are on track to end veteran homelessness in five years. We must stay focused and work together to accomplish this important and ambitious goal," said Akaka. For more information on the hearing, witness testimony and webcast, refer to veterans.senate.gov.

[Source: Sen. Akaka Press release 24 Mar 2010 ++]

VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS:

Veteran service organizations (VSOs) are designed for the benefit of the veteran and community. Most areas of the country have a local American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, or Veterans of Foreign Wars post/chapter. There are many more service organizations, such as the Marine Corps League, Viet Nam Veterans of America, Non-Commissioned Officers Association, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Fleet Reserve Association and others geared to particular groups of veterans. Each organization has its own individual requirements for membership, of which some are more stringent than others. The requirements range from honorable service during any time period to service in a combat zone to requiring a service-connected disability. These VSOs welcome any eligible member, regardless of age, race, religion or gender. Many of these organizations host auxiliaries so that spouses and other family members can also participate. These organizations provide countless hours of local community service. You'll see veterans proudly marching with our nation's flag at the forefront of parades or donating time and money to local causes. The firing squad and the person who presents the flag at a military funeral are members of veteran service organizations. Sometimes it's as simple as going to the VA hospital to play cards or bingo with the patients. Although they are all separate organizations, there is commonality in their goals:

- They are a voice for returning and currently deployed service members and their families;
- They monitor and lobby for legislation that directly impacts our veteran community;
- They help to develop the next generation of patriots through character-enhancing programs. VSOs sponsor Boy Scout troops, Badger Boy's State, Legion Baseball, scholarships and the annual oratorical contests.

Virtually all of our veteran's legislation has been driven by these VSOs or the combined efforts of 36 of them through the military coalition (TMC). The United States wouldn't have the GI Bill if not for them. Each of these groups has service officers who assist and advocate for veterans in filing claims for service-connected disabilities and negotiating the ways of the Veterans Administration. VSOs are responsible for getting post-traumatic stress disorder and the Agent Orange related diseases, among others, recognized by the Veterans Administration. VSOs are at the forefront of public policy related to national defense, services for homeless veterans, adequate funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, concurrent receipt of retirement pay and disability compensation by disabled military retirees, veteran's employment and training, POW/MIA accountability and flag protection. What can you do for them? Simply put, join one and participate. Contribute your time, energy, and assets. Take advantage of the camaraderie unique to military veterans. Help out at a fundraiser. There is strength in numbers. When the National Commanders go to Congress to lobby for veteran-friendly legislation, numbers count. Large organizations have clout. Nationwide, memberships in veteran service organizations are down. In order for these organizations to be around when you need them, they must be self-perpetuating. Joining one is something to consider the next time you are concerned about a veteran related issue. They are a voice for all of us.

[Source: Jackson County WI Service Officer Randy Bjerke article 24 Mar 2010 ++]

MOBILIZED RESERVE 23 MAR 2010:

The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 23 MAR 2010. The net collective result is 508 fewer reservists mobilized than last reported in the 15 MAR 09 Bulletin. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 108,456; Navy Reserve, 6,153; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 15,895; Marine Corps Reserve, 6,453; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 752. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 137,709, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found at <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20100323ngr.pdf>.

[Source: DoD News Release No.230-10 dtd 24 Mar 2010 ++]

VA CLAIMS BACKLOG Update 37:

The Veterans Affairs Department's chief technology officer said 18 MAR at a roundtable discussion about ways to cut the growing backlog of claims and improve accuracy that bailing wire and bandages can't save the veterans disability claims process. In my judgment, it cannot be fixed," said Peter Levin. "We need to build a new system, and that is exactly what we are going to do." Levin's comments came at a meeting organized by the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to toss around ideas for repairing a system that has a backlog of about 1.1 million claims awaiting decisions and an error rate of 17% to 25%, depending on who is counting. Rep. Bob Filner (D-VA), the committee chairman, described the system as an "insult to veterans" who wait an average of six months for a initial decision on benefits and can wait for years if the decision is appealed. "It looks like we are going backwards rather than forward," Filner said. "No matter how much we raise the budget, no matter how many people we hire, the backlog seems to get bigger. People die before their claim is adjudicated. They lose their home. They lose their car."

Overhauling the disability claims process is the top priority of veterans groups and the Obama administration, but there is no agreement on exactly what to do. The short-term solution proposed by the administration is what VA Secretary Eric Shinseki has called the "brute force" option: hiring more people to process claims. But because fully training new workers takes two years or longer, and the total number of claims received by VA is increasing, hiring more people is not expected to improve the process for three to five years, said Dan Bertoni, director of disability issues for the Government Accountability Office. VA is working on a number of pilot projects that might lead to a new way to process claims, by reducing steps and moving to a fully electronic record system. But the system remains so complex that an easy fix is elusive - which is why Levin talked about starting over. Veterans group, however, are not ready to blow up the system and start over. In a joint letter dated 17 MAR to veterans' committee members, major veterans groups say they are unaware of any "magic bullet" solution or alternative system to the current problems, but they support changes to the current system. They are pushing the idea of providing quick disability benefits - in 60 days or less - to veterans with disabilities that can be "easily or quickly resolved," which would include those scientifically linked to military service, orthopedic conditions and hearing loss.

[Source: Army Times Rick Maze 18 Mar 2010 ++]

MILITARY HISTORY ANNIVERSARIES:

Apr 01 1865 - Civil War: Battle of Five Forks - In Siege of Petersburg, Confederate General Robert E. Lee begins his final offensive.

Apr 01 1945 - WWII: Operation Iceberg - United States troops land on Okinawa in the last campaign of the war.

Apr 01 1948 - Cold War: Berlin Airlift - Military forces, under direction of the Soviet-controlled government in East Germany, set-up a land blockade of West Berlin.

Apr 01 1954 - President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorizes the creation of the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado.

Apr 02 1865 - Civil War: The Siege of Petersburg is broken - Union troops capture the trenches around Petersburg, Virginia, forcing Confederate General Robert E. Lee to retreat.

Apr 02 1917 - WW I: U.S. President Woodrow Wilson asks the U.S. Congress for a declaration of war on Germany.

Apr 02 1972 - Vietnam: The Easter Offensive begins - North Vietnamese soldiers of the 304th Division take the northern half of Quang Tri Province.

Apr 03 1865 - Civil War: Union forces occupy the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia.

Apr 03 1942 - WWII: The Japanese begin their all-out assault on the U.S. and Filipino troops at Bataan.

Apr 03 1945 - WWII: US 1st army conquers Hofgeismar, Germany

Apr 04 1917 - WWI: The U.S. Senate votes 90-6 to enter World War I on Allied side.

Apr 04 1918 - WWI: The Battle of the Somme ends.

Apr 05 1968 - Vietnam: Operation Pegasus was launched by the 1st Air Cavalry Division to relieve the marines at Khe Sanh.

Apr 06 1862 - Civil War: The Battle of Shiloh begins - in Tennessee, forces under Union General Ulysses S. Grant meet Confederate troops led by General Albert Sidney Johnston.

Apr 06 1865 - Civil War: The Battle of Saylor's Creek - Confederate General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia fights its last major battle while in retreat from Richmond, Virginia.

Apr 06 1917 - WWI: The United States declares war on Germany (see President Woodrow Wilson's address to Congress).

Apr 06 1972 - Vietnam: Easter Offensive - American forces begin sustained air strikes and naval bombardments.

Apr 07 1862 - Civil War: Battle of Shiloh ends - the Union Army under General Ulysses S. Grant defeats the Confederates near Shiloh, Tennessee.

Apr 07 1943 - Holocaust: In Terebovlia, Ukraine, Germans order 1,100 Jews to undress to their underwear and march through the city of Terebovlia to the nearby village of Plebanivka. There they are shot dead

Apr 07 1945 - WWII: The Japanese battleship Yamato, the largest battleship ever constructed, is sunk 200 miles north of Okinawa while en-route to a suicide mission in Operation Ten-Go.

Apr 07 2003 - Gulf War: U.S. troops capture Baghdad; Saddam Hussein's regime falls two days later.

Apr 09 1865 - Civil War: Robert E. Lee surrenders the Army of Northern Virginia (26,765 troops) to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, effectively ending the war.

Apr 09 1916 - WWI: The Battle of Verdun - German forces launch their third offensive of the battle.

Apr 09 1917 - WW I: The Battle of Arras - the battle begins with Canadian forces executing a massive assault on Vimy Ridge.

Apr 09 1942 - WWII: The Battle of Bataan/Bataan Death March - United States forces surrender on the Bataan Peninsula

Apr 09 2003 - Invasion of Iraq: Baghdad falls to American forces.

Apr 10 1972 - Vietnam: For the first time since NOV 67, American B-52 bombers reportedly begin bombing North Vietnam.

Apr 11 1951 - Korea: President Truman fires General Douglas MacArthur as head of United Nations forces in Korea.

Apr 12 1966 - Vietnam: 1st B-52 bombing on North Vietnam

Apr 13 1861 - Civil War: Fort Sumter surrenders to Confederate forces.

Apr 14 1918 - WWI: Douglas Campbell is 1st US ace pilot (shooting down 5th German plane)

Apr 14 1945 - WWII: US 7th Army & allies forces captured Nuremberg & Stuttgart in Germany

[Source: Various Mar 2010 ++]