

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL



September 2011

The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

THE 2011 VERSION OF THE BOOKLET *FEDERAL BENEFITS FOR VETERANS, DEPENDENTS, AND SURVIVORS* is available on-line at

http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp.
Paper copies may be ordered for \$5.00 per copy from the U. S. Government Bookstore at
<http://bookstore.gpo.gov/actions/GetPublication.do?stocknumber=051-000-00240-7>.

GROUND BROKEN FOR JACKSONVILLE

REPLACEMENT CLINIC On August 11, 2011, ground was broken on the replacement Jacksonville VA Outpatient Clinic. The two-story replacement clinic will have 133,500 square feet of space and 488 on-site parking spaces. This is an overall increase of 84,148 gross square feet of space from the current clinic. The replacement clinic will feature state-of-the-art technology and increased specialty services including diagnostics (CT, MRI, PET CT, and nuclear cameras), improved laboratory facilities, expansion of women's health care, minor ambulatory surgical procedures, and expanded mental health and telehealth services. The replacement Jacksonville VA Outpatient Clinic will serve 35,000 veterans when it opens in late 2012.

UPCOMING CHANGES TO THE POST-9/11 GI-BILL AND OTHER VA EDUCATION PROGRAMS

(http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/post_911_gibill/Post911_changes.html) The Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2010 was recently signed into law. The changes to the GI Bill made by this law include:

Effective August 1, 2009, but not payable until October 1, 2011: Expands the Post-9/11 GI Bill to include Active Service performed by National Guard members under title 32 U.S.C. for the purpose of organizing, administering, recruiting, instructing, or training the National Guard; or under section 502(f) for the purpose of responding to a national emergency.

Effective March 5, 2011: Limits active duty members to the net cost for tuition and fees prorated based on the

eligibility tiers (40%-100%) previously established for veterans. The same limitations apply to transferee spouses of active duty servicemembers

Effective August 1, 2011: For veterans and their transferees - simplifies the tuition and fee rates for those attending a public school and creates a national maximum for those enrolled in a private or foreign school. Pays all public school in-state tuition and fees; private and foreign school costs are capped at \$17,500 annually; and the Yellow Ribbon Program still exists for out-of-state fees and costs above the cap.

For Active Duty Members and their transferees - creates a national rate for those active duty members enrolled in a private or foreign school pursuing a degree. Pays all public school in-state tuition and fees; private and foreign school costs are capped at \$17,500 per academic year (an academic year begins August 1).

Allows VA to pay MGIB (chapter 30) and MGIB-SR (chapter 1606) 'kickers', or college fund payments, on a monthly basis instead of a lump sum at the beginning of the term.

Prorates housing allowance by the student's rate of pursuit (rounded to the nearest tenth). A student training at a rate of pursuit of 75% would receive 80% of the BAH rate.

Break or interval pay is no longer payable under any VA education benefit program.

For example, if a semester ends on December 15 and the next semester begins on January 10, the housing allowance is paid for the first 15 days of December only. It begins again on January 10th and is paid for the remaining days of January. Students using other VA education programs are included in this change. Monthly benefits will be pro-rated in the same manner. Entitlement that previously would have been used for break pay will be available for use during a future enrollment.

Allows reimbursement for more than one "license or certification" test (previously only one test was allowed). However, entitlement is now charged

Allows reimbursement of fees paid to take national exams used for admission to an institution of higher learning (e.g., SAT, ACT, GMAT, LSAT)

Allows those who are eligible for both Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (chapter 31) benefits and Post-9/11 GI Bill (chapter 33) benefits to choose the Post-9/11 GI Bill's monthly housing allowance instead of the chapter 31 subsistence allowance.

NOAA and PHS personnel are now eligible to transfer their entitlement to eligible dependents

Effective October 1, 2011: Allows students to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill for -

Non-college degree (NCD) programs: Non-college degree (NCD) programs offered at non-degree granting schools: Pays the actual net costs for in-state tuition and fees or \$17,500, whichever is less. Also pays up to \$83 per month for books and supplies.

On-the-job and apprenticeship training: Pays a monthly benefit amount prorated based on time in program and up to \$83 per month for books and supplies.

Flight programs: Per academic year, pays the actual net costs for in-state tuition and fees assessed by the school or \$10,000, whichever is less.

Correspondence training: Per academic year, pays the actual net costs for in-state tuition and fees assessed by the school or \$8,500, whichever is less.

Housing allowance is now payable to students (other than those on active duty) enrolled solely in distance learning. The housing allowance payable is equal to ½ the national average BAH for an E-5 with dependents. The full-time rate for an individual eligible at the 100% eligibility tier would be \$673.50 for 2011.

Allows students on active duty to receive a books and supplies stipend.

PRESUMED SERVICE CONNECTION – FUNCTIONAL GASTROINTESTINAL DISORDERS VA published a final rulemaking in the Federal Register to amend its adjudication regulation concerning presumptive service connection for diseases associated with service in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations During the Persian Gulf War: Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders. This implements a decision that there is a positive association between service in Southwest Asia during certain periods and the subsequent development of functional gastrointestinal disorders (FGIDs) and clarifies that FGIDs fall within the scope of the existing presumptions of service connection for medically unexplained chronic multi-symptom illnesses. This amendment is effective on August 15, 2011, and its provisions apply to all applications for benefits pending before VA on or received by VA on or after August 15, 2011.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): <http://va.reotrans.com/>

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans' Affairs: www.FloridaVets.org

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov