

18 February 2009

Eric,

You wrote a superb article ! <http://www.truthout.org/021809A>

Using the Freedom of Information Act, VCS obtained VA documents that show healthcare use by Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans is climbing fast. Very fast.

VA is already treating 400,000 new combat veterans, including 178,000 diagnosed with a mental health condition. VA treated 10,000 new, first-time patients per month for the past five months, a very sharp increase in healthcare use. In 60 months, that would add 600,000, for a total of 1,000,000 by 2013. Of those, 45 percent are diagnosed with mental health conditions. That means VA may be treating up to 450,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans for mental health conditions in just five years.

And that means VA needs better monitoring of healthcare use, better budget planning, and faster hiring.

Also attached for your review is our letter to VA Secretary Shinseki. Our top effort for our returning veterans this year is streamlining PTSD disability benefits. With a stroke of a pen, VA can issue new regulations to automatically approve PTSD claims. There are as many as 60,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans' claims than can be instantly approved by Shinseki based on science and existing law. Imagine what this would do to reduce the claims backlog and allow VA staff to focus on other claims!

Best, Paul.

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