The American Legion

bulletin

NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION

1608 K STREET, N.W. ★ WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006

For God and Country

THOMAS P. CADMUS, *Chairman*
MICHIGAN

JAMES R. FISCHL, *Director*
VIRGINIA

No. 22-01 **August 6, 2001**

New VA Center Seeks Solutions For Differences in Health Care

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has created a new center to study disparities in health care that are based on social, economic, ethnic and gender factors.

Called the Center for the Study of Health Disparities, it is one of 12 VA "Centers of Excellence." It will be based at the Pittsburgh VA Medical Center, in partnership with the Philadelphia VA Medical Center.

"If some groups do not fare as well as others in health care, we have an obligation to address those gaps," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "Improving access to health care for all veterans, no matter where they come from or who they are, remains one of my top priorities."

Defining who may be vulnerable is a complex issue. Minority groups are potentially vulnerable to disparities because of a variety of issues related to income, education, race and gender.

Other vulnerable groups include patients participating in medical research trials, children, the elderly and patients with serious mental illness or substance abuse.

The first step the center will take is to increase VA's ability to document and understand health disparities. VA researchers must then determine why the disparities exist, develop ways to reduce those differences and share their findings with health professionals, patients, policy-makers and the public.

Center officials agree that all aspects of patients' lives must be examined, in addition to the care they receive. They note health care disparities are not necessarily evidence of hidden prejudices.

"If we're to have a culturally sensitive health care system within VA, we need to respect differences and preferences," said Under Secretary for Health Dr. Thomas L. Garthwaite. "The new center will allow researchers from VA and the collaborating universities to be leaders in the field of understanding and eliminating such disparities."

In addition to $3 million in initial funding, VA will provide more than $14 million in support over the next five years through its medical centers in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. The University of Pittsburgh and University of Pennsylvania will contribute more than $3 million during that time.

****

JAMES R. FISCHL, Director
National Veterans Affairs and
Rehabilitation Commission