



THE UNDER SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR BENEFITS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20420

MAR 2 2012

Dr. Charles H. Roadman, II, Lt. Gen., USAF (Ret.)
Chairman
Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction
801 N. Quincy St., Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the recommendations of the Veterans' Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (VBDR) from the March 11, 2011, meeting in Arlington, Virginia. The responses of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are below.

Recommendation 1: Update the current VA Fast Letter 06-20 dated October 16, 2006, and provide guidance to clearly indicate radiation claims are to be expedited to the VA Regional Office (VARO) in Jackson, Mississippi, with minimum specific claim development (medical diagnosis of the disease and consolidation letter sent to the veteran). The Fast Letter is outdated and the Veterans Service Center Manager training is not as effective as it could be. A point of contact, e-mail address, and telephone number for a Jackson VARO radiation team member should be clearly listed in this updated Fast Letter. Additionally, an individual at each VARO should be identified as the radiation claim files specialist.

Response: VA revised Fast Letter 06-20 and notified the field on January 23, 2007, of the revision. The revision instructed each VARO to designate an individual to act as the point of contact for radiation issues. On May 3, 2011, the Jackson VARO elevated the direct supervision of radiation claims to an Assistant Veterans Service Center Manager (AVSCM). In addition, the VSCM conference call of August 2010 reminded each VARO to help expedite radiation claims by permanently transferring claims folders to Jackson VARO promptly following a confirmed diagnosis of a radiogenic disease.

Recommendation 2: Effective participation by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) in the claims process and an appropriate representative should be available at all VBDR meetings.

Response: VHA is committed to active participation in the claims process and has significantly reduced medical opinion backlogs during calendar year 2011. Currently, all medical opinions are returned to the Veterans Benefits Administration within one week of receipt. VHA's Office of Public Health will make every effort possible to maximize in-person participation in the VBDR meetings.

Dr. Paul Ciminera, Director, Environmental Agents Service; and Dr. Dan McClung, Health Physicist, VHA, are scheduled to attend the VBDR meeting in San Antonio in March 2012.

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Recommendation 3: Complete a Tier 3 ad hoc quality review of the radiation claims process at the end of calendar year 2011. The review should include an assessment of the timeliness of the entire process, and identify any unnecessary delays from initial receipt of the claim at original VARO to the end product and notification to the veteran.

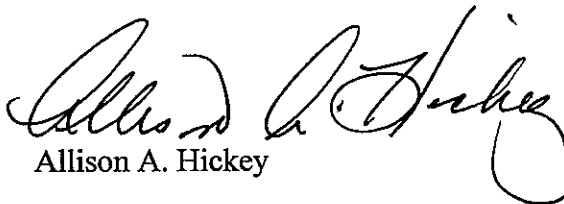
Response: The Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR) staff completed a review of radiation cases in December 2010. The average number of days to complete the claim was 476 days, decreasing 326 days from May 2008. The accuracy of the claims decisions was 86 percent. The STAR staff currently reviews radiation cases in the monthly quality sample of the Jackson VARO. We will consider a future quality review as circumstances warrant.

Recommendation 4: Resolve issues in completing medical examinations with VHA. We suggest providing Jackson VARO with a listing of VHA medical facilities that are staffed to conduct specific examinations required and can provide medical opinions in radiation claims, and ensuring that if qualified staff is not available at any particular facility, the requestor is notified that the service can be done on a fee basis.

Response: VHA is currently considering this recommendation and will respond in the future.

Thank you for VBDR's continued efforts on behalf of Atomic Veterans.

Sincerely,



Allison A. Hickey