



Federal Health Matters

Job Assistance for Injured Service Members

On June 6, VA Secretary R. James Nicholson and Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) Commander Major General Kenneth L. Farmer Jr. signed an agreement that provides severely injured service members with assistance in acquiring civilian jobs. Through an information technology (IT) program, called "Vet IT," the VA will offer vocational training and temporary jobs at its Washington, DC headquarters to service members recovering from traumatic injuries at WRAMC. Since a test of the program began in September 2004, over 30 WRAMC patients have received on-the-job experience at VA headquarters. Of these patients, the VA has hired 15 permanently. Nicholson expressed pride that the "Vet IT program continues [the VA's] long tradition of helping disabled veterans through vocational training and educational benefits."

Rumsfeld's Latest BRAC Recommendations

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's recommendations for the latest round of base realignment and closure (BRAC), delivered in early May to the BRAC

Commission, included changes that would affect some of the most prominent DoD health care facilities.

Among these is Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC), located in Washington, DC. Together, WRAMC and National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD receive the majority of casualties from Iraq and Afghanistan. The recommendations call for the closure of WRAMC and the establishment of a new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on the Bethesda campus—which also houses the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and is located near the National Institutes of Health. The new medical center would be staffed by all three service branches, as would a new, 165-bed community hospital proposed for construction in Fort Belvoir, VA. The current Malcolm Grow Hospital at Andrews Air Force Base (AFB) in Maryland would close its inpatient facilities and become a large, same-day surgery center.

In the key hub of San Antonio, TX, the BRAC recommendations propose transforming the current Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston into a 425-bed, joint service San Antonio Regional Medical Center and closing the trauma center at the 59th Medical Wing's Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB. San Antonio would become the center for training enlisted medical technicians of all services, replacing the current

single-service training programs located across the country.

The recommendations call for the creation of six new centers of excellence for biomedical research, which would combine assets from Navy, Air Force, and Army. These plans would establish a center on battlefield health and trauma at the new San Antonio Regional Medical Center; an aerospace medicine research center at Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio, and four centers in Maryland—an infectious disease research center at the Forest Glen Complex; a regulated medical product development and acquisition center and a biomedical defense research center, both at Fort Detrick; and a chemical, biological defense research, development, and acquisition center at Aberdeen Proving Ground. In addition, the Navy's Aeromedical Research Lab would move from Pensacola, FL to Wright-Patterson AFB, making this location the new hub of aerospace medicine research.

Overall, implementation of the recommendations would cost an estimated \$2.4 billion. Once in place, however, officials say the DoD would save \$400 million per year. William Winkenwerder Jr., MD, assistant defense secretary for health affairs, praised the plans, saying they would allow the DoD to "invest in and modernize key flagship facilities," while simultaneously enhancing the efficiency of the military health system. ●