

## UPDATE FOR SPOUSES AND SURVIVING SPOUSES

July/August 2019

The kids are back in school (or just about) and I'm back writing our newsletter. Hopefully, all my readers are still enjoying a beautiful, fun-filled summer and relaxing a bit, too. If you find yourself with a small amount of extra time, please pitch in and volunteer to write this newsletter starting in the new year 2020. I've been writing the Update for well over 3 years and I believe it is time for a new perspective on what is relevant and important for MOAA's spouses and surviving spouses (and their families). Think about it, and volunteer to write it your way. Have a great Labor Day holiday, everyone!

**1. 9th Annual Congressional Luncheon.** We just had our Maryland Council meeting earlier today, and things are falling into place in the planning for our Capitol Hill Luncheon on the 18th of September. Please note that this will be a later-than-usual lunch, from 1:30 PM to 3:30 PM. The location of the gathering will be the Senate Dirksen Building Room 106 (SD-106). That is just about as close to Union Station as we can get a Capitol Hill meeting room, which makes it especially convenient for our Maryland members and spouses. We'll be focusing on two of our Spring 2019 Storming Issues: (1) Elimination of the Widow's Tax; the current status is we need to make certain that the House of Representatives and Senate conferees on the Conference Committee incorporate the House language into the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2020. The House opted to include the appropriate wording into the NDAA instead of passing a separate bill to wipe out the current and extremely unfair SBP-DIC offset. (2) Under the category of MOAA's priority to "stop erosion of compensation and non-pay and quality of life benefits," we also need to encourage the inclusion of House language into the final NDAA to direct the Department of Defense to provide an impact analysis to the Congress on the DoD plan to reduce medical billets by 18,000 (i.e., about 20%) prior to any final implementation. This was not in the original Senate NDAA wording. [See item 10, below, for additional discussion of this critical issue.] Kindly note that it appears we have achieved our 3rd objective from Storming the Hill: Both the House and Senate versions of the NDAA include the 3.1% pay raise that the Administration was proposing. [The MOAA Storming the Hill priority on that matter had been listed as "sustain military pay comparability with the private sector."] In any event, please join me at the Congressional Luncheon, and let's all hear what the 10 members of our Maryland Delegation have to tell us on the subjects of interest. **Make certain that your Chapter President gets you name in to the Council no later than August 31st.** The cost is \$37 per person, and the Chapters all have different methods for collecting your payments.

**2. Shingrix Vaccine Update.** The new Shingles vaccine, Shingrix, has become more available at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and other locations recently. Remember, you need a basic vaccination and a booster several months later, even if you had the older version of Shingles vaccine. According to Retired USAF Col. David Hrcir, an Allergist-Immunologist at Lackland AFB, TX, "Those who had the old vaccine will benefit from getting the new one,...[and] shingles can recur. So even if you've already had shingles, get the new vaccine." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has offered recommendations about people who should not get the new vaccine, so please check with your primary care provider! Further, the new type is regarded as much more powerful in preventing Shingles than the older version. It is recommended for healthy adults 50 and older to prevent the painful skin rash than can have debilitating long-term effects for older people. Based on all this, I'm pleased to report that my husband and I just had our booster shots. I hope that everyone will get a booster shot too..

**3. New Influenza Vaccine Coming.** Human trials for a universal flu vaccine are underway at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), headquartered near Walter Reed in Bethesda, MD. The ability of the virus to mutate makes some years' inoculations ineffective. [Over 57,000 people died of flu-related causes in the 2018-19 season.] A universal vaccine probably is five years away or more. If the ongoing research effort is successful, hopefully people won't have to get shots every year.

**4. BRAC Update on Medical Center Metro Station (Red Line of Metro).** Many Maryland MOAA members use Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) and the National Institutes of

Health (NIH). Construction work inside the Medical Center Metro Station will continue through mid-2020. Contractors are installing two new Metro entrance elevators on the Naval Support Activity (i.e., Walter Reed) side of Rockville Pike, MD-355, and a connecting passage from the mezzanine level to the new elevators for passengers to and from the Hospital. All construction will take place behind or within partitioned areas during non-service hours, so the Station will have pedestrian access when trains are running. A shallow pedestrian underpass will be completed in Fall of 2020 connecting WRNMMC and NIH. At about the same time, we expect elevator service from the street level (Navy side of Rockville Pike) to the Metrorail mezzanine. The NIH side of the street (West side of Rockville Pike) already has full escalator service. Intermittent lane closures can be expected on Connecticut Avenue (MD-185) and Jones Bridge Road. The Montgomery County Dept. of Transportation reminds everyone: For your safety, walk or bike only on designated crosswalks.

**5. Veterans Canteen Service.** MOAA members in Maryland frequently use facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs within the State and beyond. Please be aware that many VA facilities have Canteen Services that are available to medical patients and their guests. According to [va.gov](http://va.gov), "Revenue generated from VCS [Veterans Canteen Service] are used to support a variety of Veteran programs." It is part of the Department of Veterans Affairs and was established back in 1946. Its purpose today remains "to provide articles of merchandise and services at reasonable prices to Veterans enrolled in the VA Healthcare System, caregivers, and visitors...." The VCS is self-sustaining, and also supports VA employees and volunteers. The website states that VCS is honored to "give back to the VA through many programs established for the health and well-being of our nation's heroes." It may be worthwhile to check out the Canteen if and when you next visit one of the larger VA facilities in our area.

**6. DHA-DLA Agreement.** The Defense Health Agency and the Defense Logistics Agency signed an agreement which clarifies their complementary roles and responsibilities as they partner to improve logistics support to the military health care community. DHA will expand its mission and assume all administration and management responsibilities of military treatment facilities (MTF's) on October 1, 2019. One of our Maryland MOAA active duty members is moving from her role as Commander of Troop Command at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center to a new position in DHA. My husband and I were happy to attend the Change of Command Ceremony on August 12th at the USUHS Field at Naval Support Activity Bethesda (near Walter Reed) when COL Tonya F. Dickerson, U.S. Army Nurse Corps, relinquished her command of 1,500 soldiers. Her new role as a Director at DHA will be in the area of security and safety. Four photographs from COL Dickerson's ceremony are at the bottom of this newsletter. (The incoming Commander at Walter Reed is COL Marion Jefferson. The officiating officer and guest speaker at the ceremony was BG Michael L. Place, USA, Commander of Regional Health Command - Atlantic, headquartered at Fort Belvoir, VA.)

**7. Some Increases Expected in TRICARE Rates for 2020.** Many TRICARE beneficiaries can expect rate increases next year. Those affected are reservists, young adults, college-age dependents, and recently discharged members with temporary health insurance under the Continued Health Care Benefits Program (CHCBP). People under CHCBP will be affected with the most significant increases: (A) Single Coverage will rise from about \$363 to \$388 monthly; Family Coverage will go up from \$818 to \$875 monthly. Retired reservists actually may wind up with a rate decrease next year. For more information, MOAA has an on-line Fact Sheet (under the category Health Care) on this subject on-line. It is dated Jul 29, 2019.

**8. 12-Night Maryland Council-Sponsored Southern Caribbean Cruise from Baltimore on 11 January 2020.** [[The latest draft of the itinerary is available here in PDF format](#), for your information.] I covered the cruise in my last Update, two months ago. Now, only a limited amount of time is remaining for our members to get their first choices of cabins on board. The very reasonable prices for the next two weeks through MOAA Vacations remain in place. They start at \$699 per person with double occupancy. It was announced at yesterday's meeting of the MOAA Maryland Council that one of our Chapters already has earned an incentive payment of about \$380 for its members who have reserved cabins on this cruise. We have about 54 people coming (as of last week), and we still have room for more. Of course, our on-board events are free (including cocktail parties, social events, entertaining activities, prizes, etc.) to all with their reservations through MOAA Vacations. We also have some

interesting shore excursions listed for those who wish to take them. **Reminder:** Family and friends of MOAA members are eligible to join us without any change in pricing. Surviving spouses may choose to share cabins with each other. Contact MOAA Vacations if you want your choice of cabins at our great rates, and do it by the 12th of September. The direct number to MOAA Vacations is (800) 211-5107. Ask for Mike Tyrell or Jon Brenneman if you have any questions. MOAA Vacations also can be reached via email at [mail@MOAAVac.com](mailto:mail@MOAAVac.com).

**9. Requirements Affecting All Under the Federal REAL ID Act. REAL ID (frequently displayed in all capital letters) is a Federal security standard for ID's.** I recognize that this subject is somewhat complicated, but it is important to us right now. The relevant portions of H.R. 418, the "Real ID Act of 2005," are what I am discussing--even though there's a lot more to the law. In brief, after September 11, 2001, the law was adopted "to create security standards for driver's licenses and identification cards for all states." In Maryland, we all need to comply with the Federal regulations in order to bring our licenses and/or ID cards up to date. To comply with Federal law, you most likely still have to take some steps to bring your documentation up to date. You must do this in order to fly on airplanes and enter Federal Government facilities with the use of your Maryland-issued driver's license or identification card. Appropriate documents must be filed with the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), operated under the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT). MDOT has encouraged citizens to schedule appointments at local MVA offices to present the required REAL ID documents. It is suggested that you do this long before the final Federal deadline of October 1, 2020. That's when all Marylanders must have documents on file to be REAL ID compliant. Not all have had their documents reviewed when they last received or updated their licenses or ID cards. Consequently, some Maryland drivers with the REAL ID license (even with the star on the front next to your miniature photo) may now have to furnish the MVA with additional documentation.

- Delegate David Fraser-Hidalgo (a member of our Maryland General Assembly) has recommended that one check his/her REAL ID status to determine if documents are required either upon renewal or ahead of renewal, using MDOT MVA's REAL ID Look Up Tool (as follows): <http://www.mva.maryland.gov/realid/realidlookup.htm>
- If documents are required, make an appointment by navigating through the document guide: <http://www.mva.maryland.gov/odg>
- If you have any difficulty with the scheduling of an appointment, please call (410) 768-7000 [from 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM, Monday thru Friday) to speak to an MVA Customer Agent who will assist you. The main office of the MVA is located at 8601 Ritchie Highway NE, Glen Burnie, MD 21062. The TTY number there is (800) 492-4575.
- If you receive a separate notice from the MVA by mail, follow the specific instructions for your circumstances contained in that notice.
- **You must gather and then bring all of the documents** (either original or certified copies) when you visit an MVA office for your appointment. Here is a list of what typically is required:
  - ✓ **ONE (1) Proof of Age and Identity (in English or translated into English by an MVA-approved translator), such as (A) an original or certified copy of U.S. Birth Certificate or (B) a U.S. Passport that is valid or expired less than 5 years.**
  - ✓ **PLUS ONE (1) proof of Social Security, such as (A) an original Social Security Card; (B) W-2 Form; (C) SSA-1099; or (D) non SSA-1099 displaying your name and full Social Security number.**
  - ✓ **PLUS TWO (2) proofs of Maryland residency, such as (A) Insurance Card; (B) Vehicle Registration; (C) Credit Card; (D) Utility Bill; (E) Bank Statement; or (F) Mail from a Federal, State or Local government agency. Note: Those documents you present as proof of Maryland residency must display your name and Maryland residential address.**

**10. Promises to Military Families Regarding Medical Services.** During our week of Storming the Hill back in April, MOAA Staff updated members from around the Nation about a proposal to slash the military's medical force. MOAA's recent article on the subject, posted on the MOAA website on 6 August 2019, elaborated on the danger of a cut of about 18,000 medical billets--as was incorporated in the Defense Department's budget. One of our National Board Members from Maryland, Rear Adm. Tom Jurkowsky, USN (Ret.), made the emphatic statement that "when individuals agree to serve in the military, there is a promise made to provide medical [services] for them and their families...However, we see this commitment, and others, being nibbled at." As I shared in item 1 in this Update, we hope to learn more about this before and during our Congressional Luncheon on 18 September. When the Congress comes back from Summer Recess on the 9th of September, we expect that the House-Senate Conference Committee on the National Defense Authorization Act for 2020 (NDAA) will move to get its work done. MOAA wants the Congress to intervene by delaying any DoD-proposed cuts until a thorough review can be completed of the military's medical manpower requirements. Admiral Jurkowsky of our Annapolis Chapter asserted that "military medicine is a national treasure...[and] cutting the military's medical forces by 20 percent would constitute a qualitative change to the entire military health system, clearly impacting access to care for our service members and their families." Further, as **a separate action**, there is another effort to cut the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps, under the Department of Health and Human Services, by about 1/3--to around 4,000 personnel. Our Federal Government truly may not be thinking of the USPHS goal of protecting the American public in a wide variety of areas. The USPHS, by the way, has just assigned its first few officers to the Department of Veterans Affairs for new and important duty assignments. USPHS uniformed personnel, of course, also support Defense agencies, the Department of Justice's Bureau of Prisons, the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Agriculture, the Office of the Surgeon General of the United States, among other organizations in the USA and around the world. You all get the message!

**11. Social Security Number (SSN) Usage.** After calendar year 2020, employers will be permitted by the Internal Revenue Service to shorten the individual's SSN on W-2 Forms to the last four digits. This is part of an effort to combat both tax refund fraud and identity theft. (Of course, the full 9-digit SSN will be required to be transmitted to the Social Security Administration.) This change should remind all of us of the need to safeguard our Social Security Numbers.

**12. A Final Word or Two.** In regard to those items that could cost our Federal Government dollars in future years--like the elimination once and for all of the Widow's Tax (imposed by an earlier Congress), the retention of necessary military and USPHS medical and related billets, the continuation of VA services without degradation around the Nation, the continuation of the NOAA Commissioned Corps at current strength for a range of emerging support missions, facilities maintenance (including DoD housing and military infrastructure), resource and personnel expenses at our DoD facilities after DHA takes charge of more aspects in October, etc.--everyone always is concerned about how to pay the bill. We really need to make the point again and again to our elected officials: We've done our job. We represent the Veterans community and we clearly are among your constituents. We voted you into office. It's now your job to figure that out--how to pay the bill!

**I hope you all are enjoying the final weeks of the summer. I wish everyone a pleasant, healthy, and safe Labor Day Holiday! ...and I hope to see many of you at our 9th Annual Congressional Luncheon coming up on the 18th of September.**

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Spouse and Surviving Spouse Liaison  
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Change of Command at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center



COL Tonya Dickerson addressing the troops



COL Tonya Dickerson trooping the line at WRNMMC



Passing the Colors – 12 Aug 2019