



Advocate



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Calling DFAS: *Secrets to Help Cut Down the Wait On Line*

Military retirees who have questions and problems about their retirement pay know they must call DFAS – the Defense Finance and Accounting Service – to get the answers they need. But many dread making that call because they’ve learned by experience that calling DFAS most likely means being put on hold and waiting an outrageously long time before being able to speak with anyone.

However, AMS has learned from DFAS that there are things you can do that may eliminate part, or all, of that wait. The calls to DFAS are heaviest during the first four working days of each month. That means that if you wait to call until the middle or the end of the month, you should experience a much easier time getting through.

In addition, if you call between 7:00 and 8:00 in the morning Eastern time, or between 6:00 and 7:30 in the evening Eastern time, you may have an easier time getting your question answered, since those are the times of the day they experience the fewest number of calls.

While DFAS can’t guarantee a short wait, they have told us your chances for a speedy response are much better if you follow these guidelines. 

Report from the Hill



Key Issues Remain in 109th Congress

Congress reconvened from a two week Easter recess in late April. There will be other recesses, including Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and the August Summer recess lasting until after Labor Day. Most members of Congress, especially in election years, return to their states and districts during these periods to meet with their constituents in a variety of forums. This is a good time to contact them and their staffs, attend town hall meetings and other events they host or attend and express your opinion. Take a camera and if you get a picture of you and the member, send it in with a summary of the meeting and we’ll make every effort to publish it in the *Advocate*. Some of the issues that all Active Duty, Reserve, National Guard, retirees, their families and survivors need help on are outlined below.

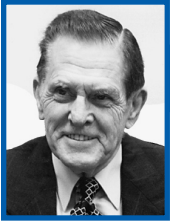
TRICARE Fee Increases

The issue of raising TRICARE Prime fees and imposing a premium on TRICARE Standard and other TRICARE fee increases are still front burner issues with AMS and other

military and veterans organizations. HR4949, The Military Retirees’ Health Care Protection Act, introduced in March, has 148 official cosponsors as this is written and many other members of Congress have expressed support and are expected to sign on. This bill would prohibit any fee increases in the TRICARE Program. Over in the Senate, S2617 was introduced with the support of eight Senators shortly before the two week Easter recess and would limit any increases in fees to a percentage equal to the percentage of the COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) applied to retired pay. In addition, the bill would prohibit imposition of a premium on TRICARE Standard for retirees. S2617 would also tie increases to TRICARE Reserve Select premiums for Reserve/NG personnel to their pay raises.

AMS does not expect either bill to pass individually. However, each bill can influence what is finally passed in the Defense Authorization Bill for FY2007 or in other high priority legislation. That is why we ask for your support for HR4949. The more cosponsors the bill has, the more seriously Congress and the Administration will take its provisions. The Senate bill is better than the current Administration proposals.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Doug Russell

One of the most upsetting things about DoD's proposals to impose enrollment fees and increase deductibles, co-payments and pharmacy co-payments on retirees under age 65 who use TRICARE is their strategy of trying to divide military retirees from each other and from active duty personnel. For over a year, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness David Chu has taken many opportunities to blame retirees for some of the shortfalls in readiness that have been experienced by those on active duty.

He continued his blame game during his testimony before the subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee in April when he warned that active duty personnel could be hurt by cuts that he would make if the increases on retirees do not take effect. "If there are cuts, active-duty people would be hurt. We would start to cut corners," is his exact quote.

Interestingly, if the increases are imposed, DoD projects a savings of \$11.2 billion over five years, but the fee increases would only account for about one-third of that savings. DoD estimates the other two-thirds would come

from retirees who would drop out of TRICARE because it would become too expensive.

So here's what's going on: DoD is blaming retirees for readiness shortfalls currently being experienced by active duty personnel. DoD also will blame retirees on cutbacks that will be made if the proposed increases do not take effect. And DoD is trying to force retirees out of TRICARE by making it too expensive.

I think there are some valuable lessons in all of this.

First, military personnel – Active Duty, Guard and Reserve, and Retirees – must stick together and support each other.

And second, you simply cannot trust DoD to look out for your best interests.

That's why associations like AMS are so important to you.

House Subcommittee Recommends a 2.7 Percent Pay Hike

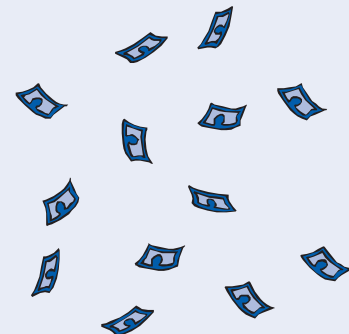


In late April, the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee recommended that all active duty servicemembers receive a 2.7 percent base pay increase for FY 2007. This was a significant increase over the 2.2 percent raise the White House had recommended.

In addition, Warrant Officers and mid-grade Enlisted personnel would receive targeted increases for hard-to-fill specialties.

Before the raise can take effect, the subcommittee recommendation needs to be approved by the full House Armed Services Committee, and then by the entire House of Representatives. Then the Senate

must approve the same pay increase and the final bill must be signed into law by the President. The subcommittee's action is a good first effort, but there are still many hurdles that must be overcome. AMS will keep you posted on what the final result is. ✨



Report from the Hill

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However, we should focus on HR4949 because it opposes any increase and that is what we want - no increase in fees. AMS urges you to continue to contact your member of Congress and let him/her know you support HR4949 and ask your representative to do so. If they already have signed on then thank them for their support.

Also let your Senators know that you oppose any fee increase. Let them know how you feel about S2617 - that it is better than the Administration proposal, but that you want them to support no fee increase. Let them know that reducing benefits by increasing fees in wartime is outrageous. It will have a major impact on retention and recruiting. The most serious impact will be on keeping good mid-career military professionals in the Armed Forces.

Committee Action on TRICARE Fee Increases

As we go to press, work is being completed by the House and Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittees on the Defense Authorization Bill for FY2007, which begins on 1 October 2006. The House Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel has finished work on their proposal dealing with TRICARE fee increases. The subcommittee flatly rejected the fee increases for this year. Chairman John McHugh stated that this was not the time nor place to impose fees on retirees and reserve component personnel. The panel called for independent reviews of the proposal by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Congressional Budget Office and a final review by an independent task force. The reviews would be completed by 31 December 2007. Congressional supporters of fee increases will oppose this date because it would push a decision on fee increases to a presidential election year.

News is not as good over in the Senate Armed Services Committee. However, action has not yet been completed. A serious effort has been launched to impose fee increases beginning in October of this year. The increases would be tied to the percentage increase of the retired pay COLA. This would be a small amount but it would establish a precedent and weaken future efforts by retirees and others to oppose increases.

Fortunately, the provisions being proposed in HR4949 and S2617 are being reflected in the pending Defense Authorization Bills in the House and Senate. Even if the Senate Defense Authorization bill proposed by the Armed Services Committee includes fee increases, it must pass the full Senate. Therefore, we must keep up the pressure on Senators and Representatives to oppose any fee increase.

Other Objectives

While the attack on the military medical system is a top priority, AMS and other military and veterans associations are pursuing other objectives as well.

Medical BRAC

DoD is moving ahead with implementation of the Medical BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) recommendations that were adopted last year by the Administration and Congress. AMS remains concerned that failure to fully fund the proposals will leave the Military Health System more vulnerable to medical inflation and force more beneficiaries into the higher cost private sector for treatment. This will also increase medical inflation and it will badly damage the military's ability to support combat operations.

Closing the Pay Gap

The Administration and Congress have made progress in closing the pay gap with the civilian private sector. However, the law requiring this improvement has expired. We know that some in the Administration oppose closing the gap. We urge Congress to make sure that funds are authorized to do this and to see that DoD continues the effort. Every military professional - active and retired - knows that military duties are far more strenuous and dangerous than most civilian jobs. Pay comparability should be the floor, not the ceiling, of military compensation.

Additional Issues

Other issues include increasing end strength to meet mission requirements and reduce stress on military families, improve the Montgomery GI Bill, and end the SBP/DIC offset for military widow(er)s of military members/retirees who are killed in action or die of service connected disabilities. Improvements are also needed in housing allowances and PCS move reimbursement including mileage allowance increases.

Short Time to Act

It is very important that you establish contact with your members of Congress right now. If you are in contact, let them know about the issues you want them to support. We have a busy few months left. All members of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate are up for election/re-election. Now is the time to get their attention. ✍

*Chuck Partridge
Government Relations*

TRICARE Uniform Formulary Update

Dr. William Winkenwerder Jr., director, TRICARE Management Activity, made the decision to place additional medications on the TRICARE Uniform Formulary and to designate others as nonformulary (or third tier) on April 26, 2006. The following chart shows the medications, their status as formulary (tier-one generics or tier-two brand name) or third tier and the date the decision will be implemented.

Medication	Tier	Implementation Date of Nonformulary Status
Overactive Bladder Agents		
Detrol®	3	July 26, 2006
Detrol LA®	2	**
Ditropan XL®	2	**
Enablex®	2	**
Oxytrol®	3	July 26, 2006
Oxybutin generic only	1	**
Sanctura®	3	July 26, 2006
Vesicare®	2	**
Miscellaneous Antihypertensive Agents		
Catapres TTS®	2	**
Clonidine/chlorthalidone generic only	1	**
Clonidine generic only	1	**
Guanabenz generic only	1	**
Guanadrel generic only	1	**
Guanethidine generic only	1	**
Guanfacine generic only	1	**
Hydralazine generic only	1	**
Hydralazine/HCTZ generic only	1	**
Inversine®	2	**
Lexxel®	3	July 26, 2006
Lotrel®	2	**
Methyldopa generic only	1	**
Metyrosine generic only	1	**
Minizide®	2	**
Minoxidil generic only	1	**
Prazosin generic only	1	**
Reserpine generic only	1	**
Tarka®	3	July 26, 2006
Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA)-Analog Agents		
Gabapentin generic only	1	**
Gabitril®	2	**
Lyrica®	3	June 28, 2006

** Doesn't apply

Beneficiary Input

The Military Health System encourages TRICARE beneficiaries to be part of the process by communicating their concerns to the Beneficiary Advisory Panel. Information on such communication may be found in the *Federal Register* announcement of the BAP meeting, which is posted on the BAP Website at www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy/BAP/ two to six weeks before the public BAP meeting along with the agenda outline for the meeting.

Beneficiary Cost Shares

Medications on the first tier (formulary generics) are

available through TRRx for \$3 for up to a 30-day supply and through TMOP for \$3 for up to a 90-day supply. Medications on the second tier (formulary brand name) may be purchased for the same number of days for \$9. Medications on the third tier (nonformulary) require a \$22 co-payment in both venues. Beneficiary co-payments are higher at non-network retail pharmacies.

Beneficiaries currently on third-tier medications may wish to consult their health care providers about changing to a first- or second-tier alternative. They may also ask their provider if establishing medical necessity for the

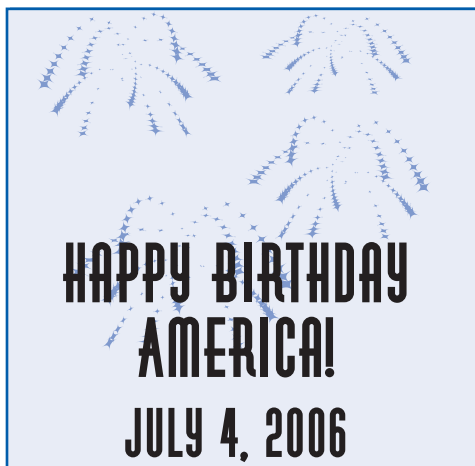
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TRICARE Uniform Formulary Update

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third-tier medication is appropriate for them. If medical necessity for a third-tier medication can be established, copayments revert to \$9. Third-tier medications will not be available at military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacies unless medical necessity has been established and the prescription is written by an MTF provider. Not all tier-one and tier-two drugs are available at MTF pharmacies. For a list of medications, their formulary status and where they are available, interested parties may go to www.tricareformularysearch.org/dod/medicationcenter/default.aspx. Medical necessity forms and criteria are available at www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy/medical-nonformulary.cfm.

Additional information on both TRRx and TMOP and the location of the nearest TRICARE retail pharmacy may be accessed at www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE or by calling 866-363-8667 for TMOP or 866-363-8779 for TRRx. ✍



Personal Information Stolen from TRICARE

Although the use of computers has brought amazing changes to the way we live, all of the changes are not positive. About 14,000 active duty and retired military personnel learned that hard lesson earlier this year when TRICARE Management Activity informed them that computer hackers had broken into their computer files and stolen their names, Social Security numbers, personal health information, private employer information, and partial credit card numbers.

Those persons affected were notified as soon as the theft was discovered, according to a Pentagon news release.

We are well into the computer age and there is no turning back. And, as in the case of TRICARE, certain information is required in order to be enrolled in many insurance and other vital programs. Since that information is stored in computers, there is always the chance some creative hacker will break in and steal it.

That's why it is important to know there are services you can purchase for a modest monthly fee that monitor your name, your Social Security number, and other personal information and can inform you when there is unauthorized activity involving your accounts. Each individual has to decide whether to purchase that type of service, but when even the government can't protect your vital personal information, subscribing to such a service may be a wise investment. ✍

VA Set to Announce Shrinking, Closing of Facilities

While the BRAC Commission has received a great deal of attention from military personnel, the VA CARES process has been a little less visible. But it is about to grab headlines of its own.

The VA CARES initiative, which stands for VA Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services, began in May of 2004. Its purpose is to evaluate VA facilities and determine which, if any, are inefficient.

The announcement about which facilities to close or modify services is scheduled for sometime in the early summer. The facilities being looked at are:

- Montgomery, Ala.
- Livermore and West Los Angeles, Calif.
- Lexington and Louisville, Ky.
- Perry Point, Md.
- Boston, Mass.
- Gulfport, Miss.
- Poplar Bluff, Mo.
- Brooklyn, Canandaigua, Montrose/Castle Point, and St. Albans, N.Y.
- Muskogee, Okla.
- White City, Or.
- Big Spring, Waco, Texas
- Walla Walla, Wash. ✍

Reunion Announcement

There will be a reunion of the AE Sailors Association on October 4-8 at the Hanalei Red Lion Hotel, 2270 Hotel Circle North in San Diego. For more information, you can contact Jerry King at 626-339-9793 or send him an email at: [dd694 @ aidelphia.net](mailto:dd694@aidelphia.net).

Membership in the AE Sailors Association includes: USS PYRO; USS NITRO; USS LASSEN; USS MT. BAKER; USS RAINIER; USS SHASTA; USS MAUNA

LOA; USS MAZAMA; USS SANGAY; USS MT. HOOD; USS WRANGELL; USS AKUTAN; USS FIREDRAKE; USS VESUVIUS; USS KITMAI; USS GREAT SITKIN; USS PARICUTIN; USS DIAMOND-HEAD; USS SURIBACHI; USS MAUNA KEA; USS HAEAKALA; USS KILAUEA; USS BUTTE; USS SANTA BARBARA; USS VIRGO; USS CHARA; USS FLINT; USS MOUNT KISKA' USS SACRAMENTO; USS CAMDEN; USS SEATTLE; USS DETROIT; USS SUPPLY; USS RAINIER; USS ARCTIC ✍

Bills of Interest to Active and Retired Military Personnel

Several bills that may be of interest to members of the military retiree community have been introduced this year and are currently being considered.

Following is a recap of the bills:

H.R. 4949 - Reps. Chet Edwards (D-TX) and Walter Jones (R-NC) - would remove the Secretary of Defense's current authority to increase TRICARE Prime enrollment fees, TRICARE Reserve Select premiums, pharmacy copays, and TRICARE Standard inpatient copays.

S. 2617 - Sens. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Chuck Hagel (R-NE) - would significantly restrict the Secretary of Defense's current authority to impose increases in TRICARE Prime enrollment fees, TRICARE Reserve Select premiums, and pharmacy copayments, and bar any TRICARE Standard enrollment fee or increases in TRICARE Standard inpatient copays.

H.R. 5081 - Rep. John Carter (R-TX) - would expand the Workforce Opportunity Tax Credit to include

military spouses, providing employers a tax incentive to hire qualified military spouses.

H.R. 4727 - Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA) - would allow disabled military retirees to file amended federal income tax returns for more than three tax years in cases to secure refund of back taxes on military retired pay when the VA disability compensation approval is retroactive for more than three years.

S. 2503 - Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) - identical to the retroactive tax refund provisions of H.R. 4727 for disabled retirees.

H.R. 1366 - Rep. Mike Bilirakis (R-FL) - would extend eligibility for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) to service members who are medically retired for combat- or operations-related conditions before attaining 20 years of service.

S. 2385 - Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) - identical to the Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) eligibility adjustments of H.R. 1366. ✍

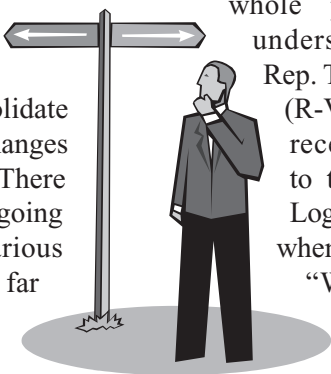
Plans to Consolidate Military Exchanges Still Uncertain

AMS has been reporting for the last few years about the desire of DoD and some members of Congress to consolidate the military exchanges into one system. There has been an on-going analysis of various proposals but so far no agreement has been reached on a final one.

According to recent reports, any final proposal is now in the hands of the military services themselves and AAFES officials, together with outside consultants will conduct a six-month study about possible sharing of certain

functions. The uncertainty of the whole project was underscored by Rep. Thelma Drake (R-Va) during a recent speech to the American Logistics Assoc. when she stated, "We didn't get a clear answer that [the consolidation proposal] is over, but we did not get a clear signal that it's moving ahead."

AMS will keep you informed of any new proposal that comes out of this next study. ✍



Commissaries to Expand Online Options

According to recent reports, commissary officials hope to greatly expand the number and kinds of items that customers will be able to purchase online by this coming fall. Patrick Nixon, acting director of the Defense Commissary Agency, stated that the items would be sold at commissary prices, which would include the 5 percent surcharge. Shipping and handling costs would also be added.

Items available in a broad number of categories, perhaps even including some perishable items. It has yet to be determined whether there will be a flat fee for locally managed delivery or whether a freight service will be used.

The web address is www.commissaries.com, so keep checking for the expected expansion. ✍



It is estimated there could be from 300 to 500

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