

# VETERANS BENEFITS & BEYOND



## VA to Provide Fertility Counseling and Treatment for Certain Veterans and Spouses

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced recently that it is amending its regulation regarding fertility counseling and treatment available to eligible Veterans and spouses. VA currently provides certain infertility services other than in vitro fertilization (IVF) services to Veterans as part of the medical benefits package. This interim final rule authorizes IVF for a Veteran with a service-connected disability that results in the inability of the Veteran to procreate without the use of fertility treatment. It also states that VA may provide fertility counseling and treatment using assisted reproductive technologies (ART), including IVF, to a spouse of a Veteran with a service-connected disability that results in the inability of the Veteran to procreate without the use of fertility treatment.

“I have always believed that one of the main responsibilities of a grateful nation is to make whole the men and women who have made sacrifices on our behalf,” said VA Secretary Bob McDonald. “It is important that we fully understand the needs of our Veteran population, and incorporate the major scientific advances available today that can allow them to live a full life. Providing fertility counseling and treatment, including in vitro fertilization, is consistent with VA’s goal of restoring reproductive capabilities of Veterans and improving the quality of their lives.”

As part of the medical benefits package, VA provides many different types of fertility treatments and procedures to Veterans. These include infertility counseling, laboratory blood testing, surgical correction of structural pathology, reversal of a vasectomy or tubal ligation, medication, and various other diagnostic studies or treatments and procedures.

Full implementation of this regulation requires that VA utilize and optimize existing capabilities for care in the community and develop internal processes that will provide Veterans with a seamless path to receiving ART services. Veterans can immediately schedule appointments with their local health care system for eligibility determinations, clinical evaluation and consultation, and initial treatment as VA works to build this structure.

Source: [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2854](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2854)

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Bob McDonald, VA Secretary

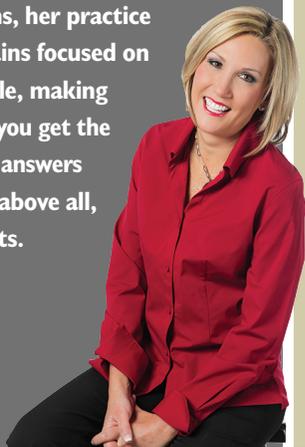
*Jan Dils*





# JAN'S Letter

Jan Dils brings her expertise to issues that affect you and millions of other Americans every day. While her knowledge spans the critical areas pertaining to Personal Injury, Veterans' benefits, Social Security disability benefits and related appeals and claims, her practice remains focused on people, making sure you get the right answers and, above all, results.



Even though I know that we almost always have a late cold snap or two, the first few warm days of spring never fail to convince me that beautiful weather is here to stay. I start off each new case with that same sense of optimism—regardless of occasional setbacks, I've been doing this long enough to know that a good, solid case and my team's persistence almost always prevail in the end. And nothing makes me happier than being able to share good news with our clients.

Speaking of sharing good news, we have included three articles in our latest newsletter that contain good news. For instance, VA will now provide fertility counseling and treatment for certain Veterans and their spouses. Also, a new study by VA has found a non-invasive way to help distinguish PTSD from mild Traumatic

Brain Injury (mTBI). Be sure to read up on these important topics, along with some other great info we have in store for you.

If you have any questions on the topics we cover here or any aspect of Veterans benefits, please let us know. Also, I want to remind you that we are happy to help with any questions about potential Social Security Disability or Personal Injury claims. Our experienced, caring team is always glad to hear from you, and happy to help you understand what it takes to build a solid case to win the benefits you deserve.

Sincerely,  
Jan Dils



**STAY PLUGGED INTO THE PRACTICE**  
Want the scoop on what's new with our business and the team? You can find it right here, so stay plugged into the practice.

We are excited to welcome several new employees to the firm! **Megan Hutchinson** is new to our team as a Medical Records Requester; **Devon Burnfield** has joined us as a VA Support Specialist; **Carrie Flinn** is our newest Appeals Specialist; and **Lauren Clarkson** joins the team as a Hearing Clerk.

Our VA C-file Team welcomed two new members, too: **Josh Williams** and **Kalina Jones**. Please join us in welcoming all of our new team members!

## COMMUNITY CORNER

The December Jan Dils, Attorneys at Law Golden Apple Award for the month of December went to teacher **Morgan Trout** of Waverly Elementary School in Waverly, WV.

While this wasn't the first time a Golden Apple Award has been presented to a teacher from Waverly Elementary school, we haven't visited the small school in several years. Waverly may be one of the smaller schools in the area but, when it comes to having heart, they are anything but small.

One benefit of a smaller school is the sense of community everyone has, and how teachers really impact all the students. A perfect example is the fact that Ms. Trout wasn't just praised by students of her own grade. Instead, the entire student body stopped to congratulate her. Ms. Trout is new to the area, but this is her fourth year teaching. She also recently started an after-school tutoring program, which is a first for the school. Even though it's a very demanding job, Ms. Trout told us that she loves teaching. Parents love her, too, and many of her colleagues say that she often goes above and beyond for her students.

We are sure you'll agree that Ms. Trout is a very deserving teacher—please join us in thanking her for her dedication to her students and the leaders of tomorrow!



## SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE

### Carrie Flinn

A Parkersburg, WV native and longtime resident, our teammate Carrie Flinn has a unique understanding of the Veterans she helps on a daily basis. Her father was in the Army Reserves and spent time in Honduras, and her paternal grandfather was a cook in the Navy.

"As an appeals clerk, my favorite part of my job is calling a client about a major favorable decision and hearing the joy and relief in their voice over finally receiving the much-deserved compensation," said Carrie. "It's amazing having a job that is actually rewarding emotionally for me."

When she's not busy working hard to help Veterans receive their benefits, Carrie enjoys reading, cooking, crocheting, cross-stitching, and spending time with her family—especially her mom and sister. Please join us in thanking Carrie for her dedication and the amazing commitment she shows in helping our Veterans!

# VA Study Finds EEG Can Help Tell Apart PTSD & Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

A recent VA study points to a possible breakthrough in differentiating between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), otherwise known as a concussion. The two disorders often carry similar symptoms, such as irritability, restlessness, hypersensitivity to stimulation, memory loss, fatigue and dizziness. Scientists have tried to distinguish between mTBI and PTSD in hopes of improving treatment options for Veterans, but many symptom-based studies have been inconclusive because the chronic effects of the two conditions are so similar. If someone is rating high on an mTBI scale, for example, that person may also rate high for PTSD symptoms.

The researchers used electroencephalogram, or EEG, a test that measures electrical activity in the brain. The size and direction of the brain waves can signal abnormalities. Analyzing a large set of EEGs given to military personnel from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the researchers saw patterns of activity at different locations on the scalp for mTBI and PTSD. They saw brain waves moving slowly in opposite directions, likely coming from separate places in the brain.

The researchers emphasize that these effects don't pinpoint a region in the brain where the disorders differ. Rather, they show a pattern that distinguishes the disorders when the EEG results are averaged among a large group.

"When you're looking at an EEG, you can't easily tell where in the brain signals associated with TBI and PTSD are coming from," said Laura Manning Franke, Ph.D., the study's lead researcher and research psychologist at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia.

"You get kind of a coarse measure – left, right, anterior, posterior. We had a different distribution, which suggests that different parts of the brain are involved. In order to determine what patterns are tracking their TBI and PTSD, you need an average to do that," Franke added.

The study linked mTBI with increases in low-frequency waves, especially in the prefrontal and right temporal regions of the brain, and PTSD with decreases in low-frequency waves, notably in the right temporoparietal region.

The differences in the levels of the waves may explain some of the symptoms of the two disorders, suggesting a decline in responsiveness for someone with mTBI, for example, and more anxiety for someone with PTSD.

Franke also noted that more low-frequency power has also been linked to cognitive disorders such as Alzheimer's disease and less low-frequency power to problems such as drug addiction. Additionally, spotting distinct patterns of mTBI and PTSD in separate parts of the brain is key for two reasons: the possibility these conditions can be confused with each other is reduced. That can help improve

diagnosis and treatment and the patterns show that electrical activity appears to be affected long after combat-related mTBI, suggesting long-term changes in neural communication, the signaling between cells in the nervous system. "That could help, in part, explain the reason for persistent problems."

The study included 147 active-duty service members or Veterans who had been exposed to blasts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of those, 115 had mTBI, which accounts for nearly 80 percent of all traumatic brain injuries. Forty of the participants had PTSD, and 35 had both conditions.

Despite the new findings, Franke and her team believe more work is needed to better explain the differences in the patterns of both conditions in the brain's electrical activity. Researchers need to analyze the differences in scans from larger numbers of patients.

Meanwhile, though, she said she hopes the research will play a role in helping medical professionals better diagnose someone's condition through an individual EEG—whether that person has PTSD, a brain injury, or a combination of the two.

"That's the holy grail," said Franke. "We want to use the EEG to differentiate the problems, but also to predict recovery and be able to measure how people are doing in a more biological way than just measuring symptoms, although those are still relevant. But symptoms are also problematic because they're influenced by so many things that aren't the disease that we're interested in."

For more information about VA research on PTSD and TBI, visit Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury. Information about Franke's study may be found at the International Journal of Psychophysiology.

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**Laura Manning Franke, Ph.D.**

*Lead researcher and research psychologist at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, VA*

Source: [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2849](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2849)

Indulge in the taste of summer a little, with this delicious recipe for **Strawberry Shortcake with fresh whipped cream**, from VA Case Manager Jolene Reeder!



**Strawberry Shortcake Ingredients:**

- 1 1/2 pounds strawberries, stemmed and quartered
- 5 Tablespoons sugar
- 2 Cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 Tablespoons sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 Cups heavy cream

**Whipped Cream Ingredients:**

- 1 1/2 Cups heavy cream, chilled
- 3 Tablespoons sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest

**Strawberry Shortcake Directions:** Mix strawberries with 3 Tablespoons sugar and refrigerate while juices develop, at least 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, remaining 2 Tablespoons sugar, and salt in a medium bowl. Add heavy cream and mix until just combined. Place mixture in an ungreased 8-inch square pan and bake until golden, 18 to 20 minutes. Remove shortcake from pan and place on a rack to cool slightly. Cut into 6 pieces and split each piece in half horizontally. Spoon some of the strawberries with their juice onto each shortcake bottom. Top with a generous dollop of whipped cream and then the shortcake top. Spoon more strawberries over the top and serve and enjoy!

**Whipped Cream Directions:** Using a mixer, beat the heavy cream, sugar, vanilla, and lemon zest until soft peaks form, about 1 1/2 to 2 minutes.

## WORD GAME

A mumbo jumbo is a list of words/hints for you to unscramble. You then take designated letters from each word/hint to come up with the final message that is associated with each hint you have unscrambled.

LYLHO     

DICER     

SESRPNET

SOTLEIMET

A

Final answer: CHRISTMAS  
Answers: Holly, Cider, Presents, Mistletoe



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## Artists Selected for Nationwide Women Veterans Art Exhibit

**T**en women Veteran artists have been selected to showcase their work at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers around the country in March, to coincide with Women's History Month.

"It is our hope that this exhibit will provide insight into the diverse experiences of women who serve our country, through their respective lenses," said Director of VA's Center for Women Veterans Kayla Williams. "This effort to enhance the awareness of those who serve women Veterans — in VA and in the public — will contribute to improving how they are regarded when they come to VA for care and benefits, and how they are treated in their communities."

The call for artwork resulted in over 400 submissions from women Veterans around the country. Storyboards featuring images of their art, along with photos of the women in and out of uniform and brief biographies, will be displayed at:

Beckley VA Medical Center, Beckley, WV  
W.G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center, Salisbury, NC

Atlanta VA Medical Center, Atlanta, GA  
James H. Quillen VA Medical Center, Mountain Home, TN  
Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center, Topeka, KS  
Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, Chicago, IL  
Southeast Louisiana Healthcare System, New Orleans, LA  
Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, Houston, TX  
Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center, Spokane, WA  
North Las Vegas VA Medical Center, Las Vegas, NV

The 10 women Veteran artists selected to display their works and autobiographical storyboards in the exhibit are:

Victoria R. Bryers, United States Coast Guard  
Pamela Corwin, United States Army  
Amy Forsythe, United States Marine Corps  
Natalie Lopez, United States Air Force  
Cara Myhre, United States Army  
Debra Russell, United States Navy  
Deveon Sudduth, United States Army  
Laura Taylor, United States Navy  
Stacey Thompson, United States Marine Corps and  
Lindsay Zike, United States Navy

The Women Veterans Art Exhibit initiative is the result of a collaboration between the Center for Women Veterans, Veteran Artist Program, First Data, and the Veterans Canteen Service. These partnerships allow for the temporary displays to be shown in these facilities at no cost to VA. For more information about VA's benefits and services for women Veterans and this initiative, visit [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet).

“It is our hope that this exhibit will provide insight into the diverse experiences of women who serve our country, through their respective lenses.”

**Kayla Williams**  
Director of VA's Center for Women Veterans