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News Release

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INTEGRATED DOD/VA DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM IMPROVES SUPPORT FOR WOUNDED WARRIORS AT MCGUIRE AFB

(MCGUIRE AIR FORCE BASE) – Service members referred for medical evaluation boards after June 30 will go through a new Disability Evaluation System that integrates the processes of the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs (VA).

The Integrated Disability Evaluation System, or IDES, provides a more seamless transition to Veteran disability benefits with fewer hurdles, faster results and more consistent ratings between Defense and VA than the previous system.

Under the previous system, service members completed the military Disability Evaluation System in an average of 10 months. This included a set of medical examinations by military physicians, a series of boards to determine if the member was still able to serve, and if not, assignment of a disability rating used by the Defense Department to calculate disability compensation. Service members could not begin to apply for disability compensation and benefits from VA until after receiving a discharge date from their service.

It was then up to the Veteran to complete an application to VA and provide all required documentation. If any documents were missing, it was the Veteran's responsibility to locate them. Then, the Veteran had to complete another set of medical exams in accordance with standards set by VA and wait for a panel at VA to provide another disability rating, this one used to calculate Veterans disability compensation and benefits. This second process took on average another eight months during which benefits were gapped.

Under the new IDES, there is only one set of medical exams, performed to the standards of VA, which provides all the information needed by both departments. A panel at VA issues disability ratings that will immediately be used once the service member is no longer active duty. The integrated process still takes just over eight months, but now when the service member is finished with the military process, a disability claim is already filed with VA so Veteran disability compensation and benefit can arrive after one month in Veteran status. That is the earliest allowable under current law.

In designing the IDES, the two departments examined the recommendations of several commissions and task forces established to improve the delivery of benefits to wounded, ill and injured service members and Veterans. The resulting integrated system was first introduced as a pilot program at three military treatment facilities in November 2007. It was further tested and improved as the pilot expanded to 24 additional locations over two years, bringing the integrated system to 47 percent of service members referred for disability evaluation.

In thousands of surveys, service members and their families in the pilot program consistently reported higher average satisfaction with fairness, customer service, and the overall DES experience than did participants in the legacy system.

Based on the proven performance of the pilot, the departments plan to extend these advantages to all remaining service members by the end of September 2011.

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