

Veteran Updates

News and updates on Veterans issues from the San Francisco VA Medical Center • January 2014

Heart Team Performs New State-of-the-Art TAVR Procedure

A multidisciplinary Heart Team at the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) successfully performed its first transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) surgeries on November 25, 2013, for two Veteran patients who needed, but could not have, traditional open-heart surgery.

In the past, traditional surgery involved replacement of or rerouting of the aortic valve through heart surgery involving a large incision through the chest. For some patients, and the elderly or frail, the traditional surgery is too high-risk, and they wouldn't survive. Until TAVR was available, there weren't other options for treatment.

TAVR is a relatively new procedure used successfully in Europe and recently approved by the FDA for use in America. It's less invasive (the entry point is a small incision in the leg) and cardiopulmonary bypass is usually not needed. SFVAMC is one of the first VA Medical Centers, and the only VA on the West Coast, to have completed the rigorous VA approval process to be able to perform it.



Cardiologist Dr. Kendrick Shunk and Cardiac Surgeon Dr. Elaine Tseng speak with Veteran Dennis Born, the first patient to receive TAVR surgery at SFVAMC.

“For the right patient, this procedure is as good as the traditional surgery and recovery is much faster, said SFVAMC’s Chief of Interventional Cardiology Kendrick Shunk, MD.

Other benefits of TAVR are that within one year after the procedure, patients decreased their repeated hospitalizations by half, fewer needed a new pacemaker, fewer had kidney failure, and far fewer needed additional procedures on the operated valve.

“It’s a beautiful day and I feel great!” said Veteran Dennis Born, SFVAMC’s first patient to receive TAVR surgery on November 25.

Flu Guidance

In support of the San Francisco/Bay area-wide effort to reduce influenza transmission, we are restricting visitation to the Medical Center and Community Living Center to visitors ages 13 and older.

Please do not visit if you are sick or have a fever. If you have an appointment at the Medical Center, please help protect yourself by wearing a mask, which will be available in all check-in areas.

Veterans can be vaccinated in our Drop-in Flu Clinic (Medical Practice, Bldg. 200, 1st Floor) Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. and 1 – 3:30 p.m.

You can also receive a flu vaccine at a regularly scheduled appointment. Don't wait, please get your vaccine today!

Veterans Receive 1.5 Percent Cost-of-Living Increase

Veterans, their families, and survivors receiving disability compensation and pension benefits from the VA should have received a 1.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase in their monthly payments starting January 1.

For Veterans without dependents, the new compensation rates will range from \$130.94 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$2,858.24 monthly for 100 percent. The full rates are available at www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/rates-index.asp.

The COLA increase also applies to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving dependency and indemnity compensation, disabled Veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits.

For more information about VA benefits, visit VA's website at www.benefits.va.gov, or call 800-827-1000.

VA Expands Benefits for TBI

Starting January 16, some Veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI) who are diagnosed with any of five other ailments will have an easier path to receive additional disability pay under new regulations developed by VA. This will impact Veterans with TBI who also have Parkinson's disease, certain types of dementia, depression, unprovoked seizures, or certain diseases of the hypothalamus and pituitary glands.

The new regulations, printed in the Federal Register, say that if certain Veterans with service-connected TBI also have one of the five illnesses, then the second illness

will also be considered as service connected for the calculation of VA disability compensation.

Eligibility for expanded benefits will depend upon the severity of the TBI and the time between the injury causing the TBI and the onset of the second illness. Veterans can still file a claim to establish direct service-connection for these ailments even if they do not meet the time and severity standards in the new regulation. Veterans who have questions or who wish to file new disability claims may visit www.eBenefits.va.gov/ebenefits.

Resources

National VA Phone Numbers:

VA Benefits/Claims

(800) 827-1000

Education (GI Bill)

(888) 442-4551

Health Care Benefits

(877) 222-8387

Income Verification/Means Testing

(800) 929-8387

Veterans Crisis Line

(800) 273-8255 (Press #1)

SFVAMC Phone Numbers:

Billing Office

(866) 347-2353

Mental Health/Substance Abuse

(415) 750-6674

Pharmacy (Auto Refill)

(415) 750-2233

Veterans Crisis Line

(800) 273-8255

Telephone Linked Care

(800) 733-0502

