

VA and HACC Partner Together for Veterans Cooperation Provides On and Off-Campus Support to Student Veterans

LEBANON – February 11, 2014

Lebanon VA Medical Center and Harrisburg (PA) Area Community College (HACC) announced new efforts to ensure Veterans seeking higher education have all the VA benefits and clinical support they need to be successful. The partnership between the two respected institutions promotes the well-being of student Veterans by leveraging the expertise and resources of both agencies for the benefit of these students. The partnership came about from a meeting between Robert W. Callahan Jr., Medical Center Director of the Lebanon VA and John J. Sygielski, Ed.D., president of HACC. Both leaders share a common passion in caring for America's Veterans and the importance a quality education can play in transitioning Veterans from military service to civilian careers.

The partnership promotes academic success by ensuring that Veterans who are enrolled in any one of HACC's five campus locations (Harrisburg, Gettysburg, Lancaster, Lebanon and York) and online will receive all benefits they are entitled to from both institutions. VA's VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) targets colleges and universities which have more than 800 Veterans enrolled within a 25 minute drive of a VA medical facility. In 2013, VA placed a trained counselor within HACC's five campuses to provide awareness outreach, VA benefit assistance, vocational assessments, benefits counseling and local job placement to Veterans attending central Pennsylvania's community college. HACC is not only the largest and oldest community college in the Commonwealth; HACC is the first and only campus in Pennsylvania with a VetSuccess on Campus Counselor. HACC provides office space for the VSOC counselor and access to work jointly with Veteran students, campus support and academic staff. In addition, outreach specialists from the Lebanon VA Medical Center conduct routine briefings with academic and student support staff about soldiers transitioning from military to civilian life. Topics include military culture, combat stress, traumatic brain injury, post traumatic stress and other challenges which are common among many returning combat Veterans. This team effort streamlines Federal benefits for Veterans and provides education and assistance to campus staff about Veteran students and their experiences. VA also assigns a personal clinical care manager to assist Veteran students in coordinating their medical, behavioral health care and any other clinical services. Additionally, Veterans may receive care from the Vet Centers in Harrisburg and Lancaster which are part of the national VA system.

"This is an innovative approach to help Veterans in the often difficult transition from military service to academic life," said Robert W. Callahan, Jr. "Placing experienced VA counselors directly on HACC's campuses supported by VA clinical care managers demonstrates our commitment to personalized, proactive, and patient driven care. Our 'community of care' reaches Veterans where they are now, not expecting them to seek out services in that moment of need." John J. "Ski" Sygielski put it this way, "We believe in our students and the quality education they receive at any of our locations and online. As a nation, we owe a great debt to Veterans; therefore, HACC is committed to provide our Veteran students the services and programs they need to succeed and thrive. Our professors and our support staff are committed to equipping our Veteran students meet the challenges ahead of them just as they did while in uniform." HACC currently has more than nearly 1,000 Veterans attending classes and ranks only second in Veteran enrollment within the Commonwealth to Pennsylvania State University.

For more information, please contact the HACC Military and Veterans Affairs Office at 717-736-4149 or 717-736-4148. If you are a Veteran, you may be eligible for health care benefits. Please contact the

Lebanon VA Medical Center at 717-272-6621 extension 6000. The Lebanon VA Medical Center provides comprehensive health care at its main campus in Lebanon and also through six community based outpatient clinics located in Camp Hill, Frackville, Lancaster, Reading, Pottsville, and York.