



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Lebanon VA Medical Center

www.lebanon.va.gov

**CONTACT:**

Douglas A. Etter  
Chief Communications Officer  
(717) 272-6621, ext. 6079  
douglas.etter@va.gov

**FOR  
IMMEDIATE  
RELEASE**

**Lebanon VAMC and Lebanon courts create first-in-nation guardianship program**

**For Immediate Release – October 9, 2019**

**LEBANON, Pa.** – [Lebanon VA Medical Center \(VAMC\)](#) partnered with the Lebanon County Court Administrator to develop a first in the nation process to improve guardianship for certain Veterans.

Guardianship is a legal process used when an individual is determined to be unable to care for their person or property. The courts appoint a guardian to assist an individual, known as a ward, with personal and medical needs. This issue may be encountered in a medical setting during chronic or long-term illnesses, according to Sarah Primak, a licensed clinical social worker with Lebanon VAMC. Generally, a Veteran's family or friends step forward to become the Veteran's guardian, but there are a few cases each year when a Veteran does not have those options.

In instances where a Veteran is unable to care for their person or property and does not have a family member or friend able to act as a guardian, Lebanon VAMC helps by working through the court system to get a guardian appointed. Typically, the office of aging assists with these matters, but due to its special federal status Lebanon VAMC must be directly involved. There are costs associated with the legal process, including attorney and filing fees.

"The challenge we faced was providing proper legal counsel," explained Primak. "We were not legally able to use our in-house counsel nor pay for external legal services to assist these Veterans, who were shouldering the financial burden. That's when we approached the Lebanon County Court Administrator to develop a better method."

Lebanon County Court System, under the leadership of President Judge John Tylwalk, is partnering to assist with this issue. Under the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between the Lebanon VAMC and the Lebanon County Court Administrator, the court will offer the following:

- Pro bono legal services to pursue court appointment of guardianship for Veterans who have been medically determined to lack decision making capacity to direct their own affairs, including the course of their medical care and who have no family or friends willing to petition for guardianship.
- Waive any filing fees associated with any guardianship petitions initiated by the Lebanon VAMC.

"In partnership with our County Bar Association, I am pleased that our Court can provide this type of service for our hospitalized veterans" said Tylwalk. "I hope other Courts across the nation will embrace this effort and provide the same service at their local VA."

Lebanon VAMC is one of 170 medical centers in the nation with the sole purpose of providing world-class medical care to America's Veterans. The facility serves a nine-county area in South Central Pennsylvania covering Adams, Berks, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry, Schuylkill and York counties and oversees community clinics located in Lancaster, Mechanicsburg, Pottsville, Wyomissing, York and Fort Indiantown Gap. If you are a Veteran, you may be eligible to receive care and benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. To learn more, call (717) 272-6621, ext. 6000.

For more information about the Lebanon VAMC, visit [www.lebanon.va.gov](http://www.lebanon.va.gov), like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/VALebanon](https://www.facebook.com/VALebanon), or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/VALebanon](https://www.twitter.com/VALebanon).

###