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AANP, AMVETS Team Up to Promote Non-Pharmacological Approaches to Treating Veterans with Chronic Pain

Washington DC, September 16, 2015 – AMVETS, one of the nation’s largest veterans service organizations, has joined with the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP) in seeking to promote natural, non-pharmacological approaches to treating veterans suffering from chronic pain.

The organizations have collaborated via a “Dear Colleague” letter in the US House of Representatives calling on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to take steps to employ licensed naturopathic physicians, who are specially trained in natural, non-invasive methods of healing. A “Dear Colleague” letter to that effect has begun circulating in the US House of Representatives. Leading the charge is Congressman Mark Pocan (D-WI), who – like many of his colleagues – is concerned about the dangers of overmedicating veterans, especially with painkilling opioids. Rep. Pocan is joined by Representatives Julia Brownley (D-CA), Suzan DelBene (D-WA), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), and Walter Jones as the letter’s initial signators.

“After incidents across the country of veterans overdosing on or abusing opioids associated with chronic pain, it is clear we need a new approach to veterans’ pain management,” Rep. Pocan stated. “Our veterans deserve access to all possible forms of care when making their healthcare decisions, including the services provided by naturopathic doctors (NDs).”



The VA serves 8.76 million veterans each year, and chronic pain is known to disproportionately affect those who are serving or have served in the military, affecting nearly half of all active-duty military personnel and veterans.

The letter urges VA Secretary Robert McDonald to assign an employment code to licensed NDs so that they can be brought into the agency's healthcare system. Signators will be on record as supporting the inclusion of "licensed naturopathic doctors, who are trained in the use of safe and effective natural and conventional therapies, in the spectrum of healthcare professionals employed within the agency." Citizens can quickly and easily urge their Representative to sign the letter by clicking [here](#).

Before its collaboration with AMVETS to support the House Dear Colleague letter, AANP commissioned a nationwide survey of a representative sample of America's veterans, finding that nearly two-thirds of veterans (64%) would prefer a doctor who prescribes natural therapies *before* considering drugs or surgery, and that nearly three-quarters of veterans (73%) would consider seeing a ND if he or she were on staff at a nearby VA facility.

For military veterans, chronic pain often coexists with other health problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances. NDs are well suited to help, since they are specially trained in natural, non-pharmacological approaches that facilitate the body's self-healing ability.

Approximately 4,400 NDs are licensed to practice naturopathic medicine, having earned their degree from 4-year postgraduate naturopathic medical schools accredited through the US Department of Education. The approaches studied include nutritional counseling and stress reduction, botanical medicine, therapeutic manipulation, and oriental medicine. A strong emphasis is placed on disease prevention and educating patients on proactive self-care to maintain wellness. Resolutions passed by the US Senate have urged Americans to learn more about this "safe, effective, and affordable form of health care."

The seeds for the VA initiative were planted at this spring's AANP legislative conference, when NDs and naturopathic medical students swarmed Capitol Hill expressing the need for the VA to bring NDs into its employment mix. The agency has the ability to assign NDs an existing employment code; Congress' letter is intended to encourage the VA to take the next steps. Ultimately, the letter will be delivered to the VA, with the agency asked to respond to this "clear and present need."



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AMVETS (American Veterans), a leader since 1944 in preserving the freedoms secured by America's Armed Forces, has supported Veterans, Active & Reserve Component Service Members, their families and survivors, for more than a half a century. As a leading advocate for Veterans rights and benefits, AMVETS serves as one of the preeminent voices of Veterans on Capitol Hill. AMVETS seeks to enhance and defend the earned benefits of all Veterans & Service Members through leadership, advocacy and service. Learn more at www.amvets.org.

The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP) is the professional association that represents licensed naturopathic physicians. AANP strives to make naturopathic medicine available to every American, and to increase recognition of naturopathic physicians as the identified authorities on natural medicine. Learn more at www.naturopathic.org.