

**From the President of the Austin TAVV  
Chapter - Don Dorsey** (April/May 2014 newsletter)

*"To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan..."*

**W**ith those immortal words, President Abraham Lincoln on March 4, 1865, in his second inaugural address, affirmed the government's obligation to care for those injured during the Civil War and for the families of those who perished on the battlefield. In 1959, those same words became the official motto for the Department of Veterans Affairs, the federal agency responsible for serving the needs of veterans.

By now, most of you are aware of the recent news concerning the appalling treatment of veterans at the Phoenix VA Medical Center, whereby two separate patient lists were created to allow the facility to give the appearance of compliance with the federal guidelines set for serving veterans. While the facility was feigning compliance, administrators were allegedly receiving bonuses. But even worse, over 40 veteran patients who trusted in the health care promise of their government died while awaiting appointments that would never have come. Such treatment is inexcusable and criminal.

Folks, consider this incident just one more warning. Systems are created and regulated by people, and people, sadly, don't always have your best interest in mind. As a veteran, you should know that by now. If you're fortunate enough to have health care outside of the VA system, good for you. For many of us, that isn't the case. But regardless of the source of your health care, it's incumbent that you, as an individual, participate in your own well-being. If you aren't happy with your VA service, tell the Patient Representative at the facility. If you're still not satisfied, complain to a VSO. If you don't like your doctor, get another one. The VA was created to serve you, not themselves. And if they're not serving you, they're likely not serving others as well. When you demand excellence, you're clearing a minefield for those who'll come along behind you.

As for the Phoenix debacle, I fault the local VSOs for not paying attention. In my opinion, most Veteran Service Organizations are little more than social clubs. That too is inexcusable. The purpose of a VSO is to not only care for those members within its charge, but to care for veterans at large. It's their job to police the veteran community, to make sure that veterans are informed and cared for.

Locally, we in the Austin area are very fortunate. We have an excellent

VA facility, staffed by mostly caring individuals. But just as important, we have competent VSOs looking out for us. And though it may seem to be a shameful boast, TAVV is among the best. It's in our history.

In 1985, TAVV was created as a working organization, an answer to the "good ol' boy" national network of veterans groups that in the years following the Vietnam War chose to deny membership to Vietnam veterans. Not to be deterred, six of us chartered a new organization with the State, and with the explicit intent to serve veterans, we set our own course. TAVV was one of the first local groups to adopt a VA hospital. We were among the first to promote Vietnam awareness through middle and high school living history programs. We became involved with Agent Orange exposure and with the POW issue. We were there when the first Vet Center opened in Austin. And when the local VA Clinic decided to create a VA Communication Council, TAVV was among the first to join. Most recently, we've combined with other groups to assist homeless veterans. We monitor our community, folks, especially issues that pertain to veterans. Even veteran scams come under the watchful eye of TAVV. And not limited by physical boundaries, we're also connected to the Texas Veterans Commission and the veteran service offices of both Travis and Williamson counties. Serving the veteran community is what we do. That's all we do. And because most of us also belong to VFW 856 and VVA 915, we combine all of our efforts to even better serve our brother and sister veterans.

Each of you has access to the vast network that we've created, but only if you're willing to bring issues to our attention. TAVV is proactive. We'll do what we can to help you, but only if your re-quests are reasonable and warranted. Veteran scammers aren't tolerated and will receive no quarter from this organization. But if your needs are legitimate, you'll have the full strength of TAVV behind you. We know the individuals within the local chain of command, from the patient representative to the Chief Medical Officer to Congressmen and Representatives, and we know how to access them. We even have VA connections in Temple and Waco. The help is there, but you must show up. If you do your part to make the system work, TAVV and other groups like us will continue to police the playing field. We're here to help you, but we re-quire your participation. Get involved. And when you protect your-self, you'll be protecting others.

Semper fi!