



(October 15, 2015)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing: USH All Employee Message – Peer Specialists –  
October 15, 2015**

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Eight years ago, VHA’s Mental Health Services promoted the hiring of “peer specialists” to join our mental health treatment teams. What began as a small number of peers at a few facilities has grown to more than 1,000 peers, with peer support now available at every facility.

Peer specialists are Veterans in successful recovery from mental health conditions. These men and women work alongside other mental health providers, serving as role models by sharing their personal stories of recovery. They are living proof that recovery is possible, giving hope to Veterans who are struggling with mental illness.

Peer specialists make it possible for Veterans to take control of their recovery by teaching them the skills they need and supporting them on their journey. As system navigators, they are invaluable in linking Veterans with the services they need, since they once used those same services themselves. Peer specialists also help Veterans develop a sense of self-worth, while bringing a unique perspective to the treatment teams on which they work.

Kenneth Seabron has worked as a peer specialist at the Hampton VA Medical Center since 2013. He inspires the Veterans and colleagues he works with every day through his personal example of overcoming a number of significant life challenges, including PTSD, substance use, and incarceration.

VA is proud to join the international peer support community in recognizing peer specialists—especially those working in our health care system—on this first-ever Peer Specialist Global Recognition Day. As we celebrate this day around the country, I want to call attention to the great work these men and women in recovery are doing for their fellow Veterans.

I encourage you to look for opportunities to say “thank you” to this special group of people who not only served their nation in uniform, but fought and won their own battles against mental illness. Just as they did during their time in the military, these peer specialists are reaching out to their fellow Veterans to ensure that no Veteran with mental illness is left behind.

I want to salute our Veteran peer specialists for being a guiding light to those they serve. They show the world that recovery for individuals with mental illnesses is not only possible, it is expected.

Thank you for all you do every day to honor and care for Veterans.

DAVID J. SHULKIN, M.D.

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