

## San Bernardino County Veterans Fair

**Title:** Veterans Information Fair: Collaboration, Communication, and Community  
Bill J. Moseley, Director, San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs

### Summary Of Program:

In an effort spearheaded by the San Bernardino County (CA) Veterans Affairs Department a Collaboration Project was born among the San Bernardino County Veterans Affairs, VA Loma Linda Healthcare System, County of San Bernardino Department of Behavioral Health, and the County of San Bernardino Board of Supervisors. Recent surveys have revealed that many veterans are not aware of the wide array of benefits their selfless service to our country has earned them. A question posed by the Collaboration Project was: *How do we reach out to educate the 320,000 veterans, dependents, and survivors who make their home in San Bernardino County which encompasses a land mass equal the size of two Rhode Islands, three Delawares, Connecticut, and Hawaii?* The answer has come in the form of the Veterans Information Fair – Evening of Support for Our Heroes which was developed to educate veterans, their families, and community members regarding educational, medical/behavioral health, and monetary resources currently available. To date three Veterans Information Fairs have been held in three of the six county districts and three more are planned to reach the other districts, Using Department of Defense generated Welcome Home Lists for OEF/OIF veterans and VA mailing lists, personal invitations with an RSVP were mailed to the veterans. At the fair after a dinner is served, and welcoming of the veterans and their families, and recognizing the various veteran eras, the following topics are presented by VA Loma Linda staff, county service officers, veterans, and significant others: PTSD Overview, Traumatic Brain Injury, Veterans' Personal TBI and PTSD Experiences, Processing Grief, Healthcare Eligibility and Services, and VA Benefits. Before and after the program veterans and guests have the opportunity to visit community resource tables which include the Vet Center, Employment Development Department, County Department of Behavioral Health, Medi-Cal, Food Stamps, etc. Before departing the event, the veterans and guests are requested to complete a Veterans Information Fair Evaluation.

### Effectiveness:

1. Rather than having veterans come to Loma Linda VAMC for the Veterans Information Fairs, they have been conducted in the veterans' communities in such venues as a library/technology center and a community center. By moving outside the walls of the Medical Center, the VA Loma Linda Healthcare System has increased its visibility in the community and has reached a new population that for the most part has not previously utilized VHA healthcare services.
2. Veterans and guests attending the Veterans Information Fairs have shared information gained with other veterans in their community. For example, a Vietnam veteran and his wife who attended a fair presented the resources information packet to their daughter who is married to an OIF veteran. Subsequently, the OIF veteran sought treatment at Loma Linda VAMC. Through word of mouth, the participants have become *force multipliers* for VA Loma Linda Healthcare System outreach.

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3. Through brief, educational presentations and frank conversations, the Veterans Information Fairs have helped to alleviate the stigma associated with postwar adjustment issues and PTSD, and the “mystery” surrounding TBI.
4. By recognizing the various veteran eras attending the Veterans Information Fairs, there appears to be a sense of community developing particularly among the Vietnam and OEF/OIF veterans. Vietnam veterans have shown genuine concern for the well-being of their OEF/OIF brothers and sisters. In turn the OEF/OIF veterans are recognizing with gratitude the efforts of the Vietnam veterans to ensure that community support, treatment services, and benefits are available.
5. Secondary benefits have accrued for the Veterans Information Fairs and the Collaboration Project:
  - a. The OEF/OIF Team, and Trauma Recovery Services, Pain Management & Rehabilitation, and Neuropsychology staff have collaborated to present the fairs’ educational programs. By working together on the program, there has been improved communication among these services within the Medical Center.
  - b. Collaboration Project members have shared resources. For example, several weeks prior to the initial Veterans Information Fair, Trauma Recovery Services and the rehabilitation psychologist conducted a 7-hour training seminar on trauma (PTSD) and TBI for the County of San Bernardino behavioral health providers.

### **Lessons Learned:**

1. The Veterans Information Evaluation Form has provided beneficial feedback for the Collaboration Project in planning future fairs and outreach activities. On the form there is a place for the veteran to provide his/her name, phone number, and e-mail address if he/she has a desire to be contacted.
2. An invitation with an RSVP mailed to the veteran adds a personal touch of care that is not found in the typical VAMC manner of dispersing event information via flyers. A number of OEF/OIF veterans who had responded to the invitation failed to present for the event. This is congruent with the high “No Show” rates exhibited by this population for their clinical appointments. To help reduce the no show rate, a phone call could be placed or e-mail reminder sent 1-2 days before the Veterans Information Fair date.
3. Providing a meal attracts veterans, their families, and community members.
4. Childcare is essential to the success of the event.

### **Additional Information:**

Bill J. Moseley, County Veterans Service Officer  
175 W. 5th Street, 2nd Floor  
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0470  
Phone: 909-387-5516  
Fax: 909-387-6090