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# Authorization Accuracy

*Presented by David Hannigan*

Target Audience: All

As of October 1, 2014, the 12-month cumulative national accuracy rate for authorization claims is 92.56%

# Common Findings

*Presented by Gabrielle Mancuso*

Target Audience: All Veteran Service Center (VSC) employees and management

Our best practice this month comes from the Boston RO who is streamlining a process to best utilize their quality review specialist. In an effort to assist in answering questions expeditiously and minimize disruptions to the entire QRT the RO utilizes a Rating QRS or an Authorization QRS on a rotating basis to be what Boston calls the Quality Training Officer. The Quality Training Officer is available to answer any questions regarding the claims process from any member of the RO. Both RVSRs and VSRs expressed that this position has become a valuable resource to them. We have noted this as a best practice because Boston is making the best use of the QRT.

During site visits we have found that there is still confusion regarding total disability based on IU. [Fast Letter 13-13](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/publicat/Letters/FL13/FL13-013.doc), *Claims for Total Disability Based on Individual Unemployability (TDIU)* (June 2013) provided procedures for administratively denying total disability based on IU claims when the Veteran failed to return [VA Form 21-8940](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-8940-ARE.pdf). However, due to systems issues, guidance was provided via the Office of Field Operations (OFO) following the release of the FL to stop administratively denying these claims. [FL 13-13](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/publicat/Letters/FL13/FL13-013.doc) is currently being revised to reflect the updated procedures. Until the FL is revised, ROs are reminded not to administratively deny claims for IU. The issue of IU must be denied by a rating decision.

Authorization Quality Call Notes

 October 2014



# Reminders

*Presented by Isabelle Brisendine*

Target Audience: All Veteran Service Center (VSC) employees and management

If the reduction of an evaluation will not change the combined or payment rate, then no due process is needed. The reduction can be taken and contemporaneous notice provided. For example, a Veteran rated at 80% has a reduction for a scar from 10% to 0%; however, the overall evaluation remains 80%. No due process is necessary in this case, as the Veteran’s payment did not change. [38 CFR 3.105(e)](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/publicat/Regs/Part3/3_105.htm)

The integrity of our data is very important. One area that is reviewed on a local and national level is the date of the claim.

For EP 600s, the date of claim is the date of the due process letter. If the letter is returned as undeliverable, follow the steps in [M21-1 MR I.2.B.6.b](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part1/ch02/M21-1MRI_2_B.docx). Once a new letter is mailed, the original EP 600 should be canceled and re-established with a date of claim to match the new letter.

For EPs established as a result of an electronic work item (or write out), the date of claim is the date of the electronic work item. The electronic work items can be found on the Corporate Claim tab, or MAP-D notes at the bottom of the page.

# Uploading Documents for Paperless Claims

# Presented by Melanie Coleman

Target Audience: All VSC employees and management

Uploading documents to the electronic file prior to submitting claims for STAR review

If, during review of a case, Quality Assurance (QA) determines no documented basis for the end product action subject to review is found, the case will be deselected from the database, marked as invalid and a formal review will not conducted.To maintain sample size, the deselection of a case will result in the addition of a replacement case on the next month’s call-up list. Prior to submitting a case for review by the Quality Assurance staff, each regional office should thoroughly examine the contents of the file (paper and/or electronic) to make sure that documents with evidentiary, legal, and/or administrative value pertinent to the end product under review are available for review by QA staff. The focus of the RO’s review should be on ensuring that the source document (i.e. claims, write outs, ch.35 emails etc.), pertinent development-related documents, and award/notification letters have been properly uploaded to the electronic record. By completing this preliminary review before sending the file to Quality Assurance, the RO may prevent the deselection of the case because there is “no documented basis for the end product (EP)” due to the source document being unavailable. Guidance on uploading documents into VBMS can be found in the following Job Aids: [Adding Documents Into VBMS eFolders Job Aid](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS/docs/VBMS_Job_Aid_Adding_Documents_to_the_eFolder_Job_Aid_20140811.pdf) and [Uploading Documents into VBMS Job Aid](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS/docs/VBMS_Job_Aid_Uploading_Documents_into_VBMS_06022013_V_5_0.pdf).

It is also important to note, that if all contents of the paper file have been scanned into the electronic record in VBMS/VVA, it is not necessary to send the paper file to the Quality Assurance office for completion of the STAR review. In this instance, the review will be completed on the basis of the documents that exist within the electronic record.

# Recent Manual Changes

# Presented by Radine Mace

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, QRSs, and management

Highlights from Recent Manual Rewrite (MR) Changes – Authorization Related Issues

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Manual Reference | Subject | Change |
| [M21-1MR I.3.C.17.a](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part1/ch03/M21-1MRI_3_SecC.docx)(change date: 9/15/14) | Attorney Fee Payments – Waiver of Appeal period | The appeal period cannot be waived by a claimant |
| [M21-1MR III.v.9.B.5&6](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part3/subptv/ch09/M21-1MRIII_v_9_SecB.docx)(change date: 9/16/14) | Hearing Requests for Issue of Incompetency | * Time limit for hearing requests related to incompetency proposals changed from 30 days to 60 days
* New sample language for proposed rating of incompetency provided
* If a beneficiary requests a hearing at any time before VA makes a final decision on the beneficiary’s competency, VA will postpone making final decision until after the hearing is held.
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| [M21-1MR III.iii.5.F.31.a](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part3/subptiii/ch05/pt3_sp3_ch5_secF.doc)(change date: 8/21/14) | Development when child does not live with claimant | If required information cannot be obtained by telephone, then request through a development letter. |
| [M21-1MR III.iii.5.F.32.a](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part3/subptiii/ch05/pt3_sp3_ch5_secF.doc)(change date: 8/21/14) | Information claimant must provide to VA for a child | * Must provide the day of birth as well as the month and year
* Must provide the city and state; or city and country (for foreign births). However, state is not required if the city is well known (i.e. Chicago).
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| [M21-1MR III.iii.5.F.35.a](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part3/subptiii/ch05/pt3_sp3_ch5_secF.doc)(change date: 8/21/14) | Notification requirements when VA assigns a disability rating of 30% or more | * Decision notices are no longer required to contain the names of dependents for which VA is paying additional benefits
* VA Form 21-686c is not required to be included with a notification letter if action is being taken to add the Veteran’s dependents to his/her award concurrently with the promulgation of a rating decision.
* Telephone development is to be attempted for missing dependency information when promulgating a rating decision granting a combined disability rating of 30% or more
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| [M21-1MR III.iii.5.F.36.e](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part3/subptiii/ch05/pt3_sp3_ch5_secF.doc)(change date: 8/21/14) | Action to take when beneficiary fails to provide date of event resulting in loss of a dependent | * If attempts to obtain by telephone are unsuccessful, reduce/terminate DLP; and
* Send letter advising that unless information is provided within 60 days, VA will reduce/terminate his/her benefits the first of the month following the date dependents were last verified.
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New Automobile Allowance Rate

38 U.S.C. §4303 allows for annual increases to the automobile allowance for Veterans. Effective October 1, 2014, the new rate is $20,114.34, and any awards processed after that date will receive the new rate. The rate tables will be updated to reflect the new rate.

This item will also be addressed in an upcoming VSCM call.

# Counting Active Duty Days Demo

Presented by Bonnie Rosado

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, and AQRSs

Counting Active Duty Days When Processing Drill Pay Waivers Using the Date Calculator

During our reviews, we’ve encountered cases that contain adjustments of drill pay during the same fiscal year that the Veteran has returned to active duty service. In these cases, if the amount of drill pay days is more than the amount of days the Veteran was on active duty service, we can only withhold VA benefits for the difference in days between the two total amounts. However, we have discovered that sometimes the amount of days for active duty service is miscalculated. When counting the days the Veteran was on active duty, we must include the last day of service.

There is a “Date to Date Calculator” commonly used to determine the exact amount of days included in a specific period of time. This calculator will help you count actual calendar days. The calculator can be found in the following website: [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com).

When you access the site, hover over the “Calculators” tab located on a bar shown at the top of the page. Click on the first choice seen, which is the “Date to Date Calculator (duration)”. You will see several fields to input the dates that cover the time frame you are counting. In the Start Date, you will enter the date the Veteran entered active duty and in the End Date fields you will enter the date he was released. As mentioned previously, we must include the last day in the calculation. We will do that by clicking on the box titled “Include end date in calculation (1 day is added)”; this box is shown below the Start Date fields. Finally, we click on the green button marked as “Calculate duration”.

As a result, the site provides you with the total amount of days for the period you entered. It will also show you alternative ways to express that time frame, which is kind of interesting. The amount of days the site calculated is the amount of days you will subtract from the total drill pay days shown on the [VA Form 21-8951](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-8951-2-ARE.pdf).

Here’s an example: We received a [VA Form 21-8951](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-8951-2-ARE.pdf) which shows the Veteran participated in 229 drill days during FY 2011. We also have a DD Form 214 that shows the Veteran returned to active duty on December 1, 2010 and was released on May 28, 2011. After entering these dates in the Date to Date Calculator, we mark the “Include end date in calculation” box and the result provided is 179 days. Hence, we will subtract 179 days from the 229 days shown on the VA Form 21-8951 and the difference is 50 days. Our drill pay adjustment for FY 2011 will consist of 50 days.

Please refer to [M21-1MR III.v.4.C.16.j. (WARMS)](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part3/subptv/ch04/M21-1MRIII_v_4_secB.doc)

Quality Review & Consistency Topics

*Presented by Jamie Smith & George Boyd*

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, and QRSs

VSR/AQRS Consistency Study

The purpose of the consistency study is to identify inconsistencies throughout the field. It provides a way to narrow down specific misunderstandings and provide clarification. The topics for our studies are determined by reoccurring errors based on our National quality data.

In general, our studies and quality reviews have identified concerns with effective date versus payment dates for dependency claims.

The August Consistency study results were released to the stations on September 4, 2014. Currently, we are working on an online course for Military Pay adjustment to address and provide post training for the results of the August study.

The next study is scheduled for October 21st and the topic is Service record development. We will conduct a consistency in November and December with the topics being Due process and MST development respectively. The specific dates for the November and December study are forth coming.

AQRS Challenge

Our next AQRS Challenge residency portion will be October 27-31 in Baltimore, MD and students will return to their home RO’s and conduct IQRs with mentoring by QR&C members, November 3-7.

If a regional office has new employees on their Quality Review Team that wish to attend a future QRT Challenge, please provide the information to the QRT mailbox. An email was recently sent out to all QRT Mailboxes requesting that the QRT Contact list on the QRT SharePoint site be updated. This information is used to determine QRT Challenge attendees and the needs of each Regional Office. Please ensure that these lists are updated to include each QRT member’s start date.

# Reconsideration Discussion

*Presented by Cindy Windham*

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, and QRSs

**SUBJECT:** Reconsideration of Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR) B2 error.

**BACKGROUND:** End product 130 was reviewed on June 13, 2014, and a B2 error was cited.

**CONTENTION:** The Regional Office (RO) requests reconsideration of the B2 error. The error was cited because the RO improperly denied the dependency claim when the Veteran did not return a VA Form 21-686c, *Declaration of Status of Dependents*. The Veteran was mailed, and asked to submit, a VA Form 21-686c by the National Call Center (NCC) when he called the VA on October 22, 2013, and claimed his spouse as a dependent. However, the RO should have developed for another VA Form 21-686c in writing, and requested that the Veteran return the information within 30 days before making a final determination. The cited reference is M21-1MR III.iii.1.B.2.

The RO contends the Veteran was given written notice of his denied claim in a notification letter dated April 4, 2014. The letter met the manual requirements as it informed him of the decision, gave him the time limit to submit the evidence, and included due process rights.

**DISCUSSION:** The RO indicates it properly developed the dependency claim. However, the M21-1 Manual Rewrite and 38 CFR 3.109 clearly state that initial development action must be in writing. This is necessary to establish the 30-day time limit for submitting the evidence and the overall one year time limit from the date of VA’s request to submit evidence to substantiate the claim. Merely establishing an end product 130 from the date the Veteran notifies the NCC of his request to add dependents does not fulfill VA’s duty to assist the Veteran with his claim.

**DECISION:** We have reviewed your contentions and determined the B2 error is valid.

# QRT Q-Tips

*Presented by David Hannigan*

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, and QRSs

“Q-tips,” or quality tips, are provided as great reminders and something we hope folks find to be a useful tool to share information. Everyone is encouraged to share any helpful reminders as we strive to get to 98%. These tips are reminders used to jog the memory. If we eliminate the simple mistakes, we will be on our way to ensuring premium Veteran service. If we use your tip in a quality call, you will get credit for it and we will put your name on the big screen!

You know as you work cases, sometimes those simple reminders can be the difference between an error or not. It is our goal to help provide those little reminders that might help you with your day to day work. Please know we welcome any tips you have in the field that you would like to share with other folks doing similar work that may help them in the performance of their duties. Our goal should be and is to strive to achieve top notch service to our Veterans.

One big caveat to note is that the tip provided needs to be solid. It must be something that is a **current** VBA Policy or Procedure. Also, it really needs to be just a tip. If it gets too long or complicated we may not be able to use it as this is not really the intent for this specific format. It needs to be a quick reminder. Basically, those things as AQRSs or Authorizers out in the field, that you see as common mistakes that can be easily rectified if someone had taken an extra minute to review their work. Again, much of what we see for errors at a national level can often be attributed to simple mistakes.

Ideas for tips can be sent to david.hannigan@va.gov. This month’s Q-tip comes from **Joe Pollock, QRS, Boise RO:**

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| **October’s Q-Tip****65 Days for Adverse Action Proposal Period**[M21-1MR I.2.C.9](http://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/docs/admin21/m21_1/mr/part1/ch02/M21-1MRI_2_SecC.doc) * The *adverse action proposal period* is the control period between the *date the notice of proposed adverse action is mailed* to the beneficiary and the date that the final notice is sent. The minimum period for the proposed adverse action is 60 days.
* *Important*: Legally, the beneficiary has 60 days to respond. However*, adverse action should not be taken until the 65th day* to allow time for evidence to reach the Veteran Service Representative’s (VSR) desk.
* Basic Rule = 65-day Limit: Take no adverse action; e.g., *do not complete the Final rating decision until the 65th day* following the date of the notice of proposed adverse action, unlessthe beneficiary:
	+ specifically asks that the award be reduced or suspended to minimize any possible overpayment, OR
	+ submits documentary evidence confirming earlier oral information, which is sufficient to justify the proposed adverse action.
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# Announcements

*Presented by David Hannigan*

Upcoming Quality Calls

Our next Quality Calls will be

* a rating focused call on November 19, 2014, at 1:30 EST, and
* an authorization focused call on December 17, 2014, at 1:30 EST.