



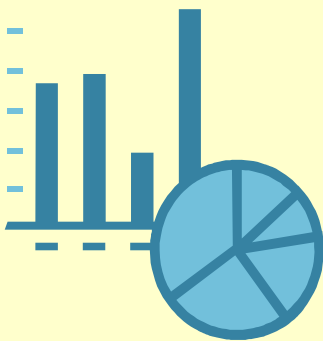
# Authorization Quality Call Notes

December 17, 2014

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## Authorization Accuracy

*Presented by Diana Williard, Quality Assurance Officer, Program Review*

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

The cumulative 12-month accuracy for authorization end products reviewed is down slightly to 92.35 percent (%) from 92.56%. As we continue to work through the first quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, we need to remain focused on providing quality customer service to our nations Veterans, their families, and survivors. Remember, production and quality go hand-in-hand and with your continued hard work and positive attitudes, we will achieve our goal of 98% accuracy.

## Reminders

*Presented by Cindy Windham, Senior Authorization Quality Review Specialist, Program Review*

Target Audience: All VSC employees and management

This month, we wanted to share a few reminders for things that we continue to see when conducting quality reviews.

### Dependency:

There is still confusion regarding the issue of developing for social security numbers (SSNs), particularly for children. SSNs must be furnished for all children regardless of the child's age. [38 CFR 3.216](#) requires disclosure of a claimant's and a dependent's SSN as a condition of receiving or continuing to receive any compensation or pension benefit. It is important to remember that the regulation does not require claimants or dependents to obtain SSNs to receive VA benefits if no SSN has been assigned.

If there is no evidence to the contrary, accept a claimant's certified statement (in writing with signature) that no SSN has been **assigned** for the claimed dependent, regardless of age. We cannot accept this statement over the phone, however. A signature is required when the claimant states that no SSN has been assigned. The Veteran can submit this signed statement electronically, in person, by mail, or by fax. Please refer to [M21-1MR, V.i.3.E](#) for more information.

The next topic concerns eligibility to school child benefits for periods preceding commencement of Chapter 35 benefits—usually during vacation periods. We've seen many cases where the Veteran should have, but did not receive benefits for a school child prior to the child's receipt of Chapter 35. We're seeing unnecessary development to the Veteran for a completed VA Form 21-674, "*Request for Approval of School Attendance*."

No additional evidence of school attendance is required and compensation, pension, or DIC may be awarded covering a vacation period without requiring completion of VA Form 21-674 if:

- the eligible dependent was attending school at the end of the preceding term, AND
- commencement of school attendance began under Chapter 35 in the month in which the next term would normally commence.

For example, the Veteran's child Sarah turns 18 on 3/25/14. The Veteran submitted a fully completed VA Form 21-674 around that time to notify VA of her school attendance at Westside High School. Her expected date of graduation is 5/15/14. An award is authorized that continues her on the Veteran's award as a school child from 4/1/14 until 6/1/14. In August 2014, the regional office receives notification from the Education Regional Processing Office that Sarah began college on 8/9/14 and Chapter 35 benefits are effective that date. Since there is evidence of record verifying Sarah's school attendance at the end of the preceding term, no additional evidence is required to continue Sarah as a school child from 6/1/14 until the date her Chapter 35 took effect (8/9/14).

[M21-1MR,III.iii.6.C.16.e](#)

### Incarceration

Shifting gears a bit to the topic of incarceration, when processing these cases, crucial pieces of information must be obtained prior to making any adjustments. The best method for obtaining this information is to contact the facility by phone to determine whether the Veteran was convicted of a felony or misdemeanor along with the date of incarceration *following conviction*. It is not enough to obtain only the sentencing date, as this can be different than the conviction date. Therefore, STAR errors will be cited if a Veteran's compensation is reduced without obtaining all of this information.

[38 CFR 3.665](#) and [M21-1MR,III.v.8.A.2.e](#)

One other reminder is regarding SSA Prison Match Worksheets. Per [M21-1MR,X.15.2.e](#), these worksheets do *not* provide all of the information VA requires to determine what adjustments should be made to a Veteran's award. If the prison website does not contain the information we need to determine if an adjustment is warranted, this **cannot** be considered confirmation that the person was not incarcerated. Further development is required.

As mentioned above, contact the facility by phone; however, it is acceptable to send VA Form 21-4193, *Notice to Department of Veterans Affairs or Veterans or Beneficiary Incarcerated in Penal Institution*, to the facility where the Veteran is incarcerated.

**Important:** Only if the facility does not respond to our request within 60 days can we assume the Veteran's award is subject to adjustment. STAR errors will be cited if actions are taken based solely on the SSA Prison Match Worksheet.

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## Clearing Multiple End Products

*Presented by Radine Mace, Consultant, Program Review*

Target Audience: All VSC employees and management

During the course of our quality reviews, we are noticing an increased trend of ROs taking inappropriate multiple EP credits for the same issue, clearing EPs without taking any action, or taking EP credit when not warranted. Some examples of this include:

- Clearing EP 290s established for multiple fiscal years of drill pay without taking any action on the issue/issues.
- Clearing an EP 130 for a dependency claim when the claimed dependents are already on the award and no action is needed.
- Clearing multiple EP 600s when only one EP 600 is warranted. For example, a predetermination notice is generated on 10/1/2013, which proposes to withhold drill pay for multiple FYs. When final action is taken, the RO clears multiple EP 600s when only one due process action was initiated. There is currently no guidance allowing for the clearing of separate EP 600s for each fiscal year of drill pay based on the issuance of a single due process action.

Guidance regarding proper EPs can be found in [M21-4, Appendix B](#), and throughout specific sections of the M21-1MR Manual.

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## Audit Error Worksheet Processing Reminders

*Presented by Radine Mace, Consultant, Program Review*

Target Audience: All VSC employees and management

Adjusting CRDP/CRSC Awards for Amounts Previously Paid by DFAS

During the course of quality reviews, it is noted that some field offices are not following the guidance issued in Fast Letter 08-40, [Combat-Related Special Compensation \(CRSC\) and Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay \(CRDP\) Audit Error Worksheet \(AEW\) Processing Procedures within the Veterans Service Network \(VETSNET\) \(Enclosure 4\)](#), regarding the proper procedures for withholding amounts of CRDP/CRSC previously paid by DFAS as indicated on the audit error worksheet (AEW). Some field offices are adjusting for these amounts through use of the “prior screens” or by adjusting withholding amounts on specific award lines in an attempt to force the award to generate the correct “net amount” of payment to the Veteran. In some cases, these methods are resulting in overpayments/or underpayments to the Veteran. These alternative methods of adjusting for amounts previously paid by DFAS should not be used. Please adhere to the guidance found in the fast letter.

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## Recent Manual Changes

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Presented by Robert Johnson, Senior Rating Quality Review Specialist, Program Review

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, QRSs, and management

### Kent v. Nicholson

The Office of Field Operations (OFO) released new information to ROs on December 3, 2014, regarding Subsequent Notice for Reopened Claims.

According to [Fast Letter 13-12, Section 5103 Notice Initiative](#), in the case of reopened claims, VA must comply with *Kent v. Nicholson*, 20 Vet.App. 1 (2006) and send a subsequent Section §5103 Notice containing specific new and material language.

Effective immediately, please discontinue this procedure. VSRs should no longer send a claimant subsequent notice containing the “claim specific” new and material language found in the fast letter.

The standard notice provided on the 526EZ and in the Automated 5103 is adequate notice per the OGC opinion located at <http://www.va.gov/OGC/docs/2014/VAOPGCPREC6-2014.pdf>.

This change in procedure has been published in [M21-1MR III.ii.2.E.20.c](#) and is being published shortly to [M21-1MR III.i.3.B.7.a](#).

In addition, no corrective action is required for any claim pending where claim specific notice was not properly provided. Standard notice should be considered adequate for rating purposes.

### Recent Manual Rewrite (MR) Changes – Authorization Related Issues

| Manual Reference   | Subject                           | Change   |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| <a href="#">M21-1MR III.iii.5.F.31.b</a><br>& <a href="#">III.iii.5.F.35.a</a><br>(change date: 9/23/14) | Telephone development             | All telephone attempts to contact the beneficiary must be documented on VA Form 21-0820, <i>Report of General Information</i> .  |
| <a href="#">M21-1MR III.iii.5.F.32.a</a><br>(change date: 9/23/14)                                       | SSNs and dependents               | To add SSN to the items that a claimant must provide to add a dependent child to an award.   |
| <a href="#">M21-1MR III.iii.5.F.35.b</a><br>(change date: 9/23/14)                                       | Establishing End Product (EP) 130 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>To add one exception that allows an EP 130 and an original rating EP to run concurrently after three criteria have been met</li><li>To incorporate guidance from the Dependency TIP Sheet website, <a href="#">“Processing Live Compensation Dependency Claims.”</a> regarding when to establish an EP 130, continue the EP 130, and administratively deny dependency claims</li></ul> |

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## VBMS-A Enhancements

*Presented by Jim Bachmann, Program Analyst, VBMS Program Management Office*

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, and QRSs

Enhancement highlights:

- The VBMS Program Management Office is in the process of automating the letters that are generated through VBMS-A. These automated letters will reduce errors and give consistent information across all ROs and PMCs. However, this automated system is not fully in place, so in the interim, the award interview process within VBMS-A should be utilized.
- A recent update to VBMS-A allows for a default to continue an end product at authorization.
- Requirement sessions are held every three weeks to gather ideas from VBMS-A users to continue to improve the system.
- There is no solid workflow process to get completed cases to the Quality Review Teams. This is being reviewed but feedback from the field is needed to ensure a well-designed workflow process.

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## Quality Review & Consistency Topics

*Presented by George Boyd, Alex Katinos & Jamie Smith, Consultants, Quality Review and Consistency*

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, and QRSs

### Benefit Entitlement Errors & S1-System Compliance Errors

When calling errors on an Individual Quality Review, any error that would warrant a Benefit Entitlement Error as well as an S1-System Compliance Error should be called **ONLY** as a Benefit Entitlement Error. For example, STRs are needed but no development is completed and a tracked item is not created. This error should be called as a Benefit Entitlement Error and **NOT** as a S1-System Compliance Error.

### Conducting New IPRs

The new IPRs have been released and should be utilized as deemed fit by each regional office.

### 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.

The November Consistency study results were released to the stations on November 26, 2014.

A consistency study was given on December 9, 2014, and results will be sent out as soon as they are ready. The next study is scheduled for January 13, 2015.

## AQRS Challenge

Our next AQRS Challenge residency portion is tentatively scheduled for February 2-6 in Baltimore, Maryland. Students will return to their home ROs and conduct IQRs with mentoring by QR&C members, February 9-13.

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.**

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## Reconsideration Discussion

*Presented by Cindy Windham, Senior Authorization Quality Review Specialist, Program Review*

Target Audience: VSRs, SVSRs, and QRSs

**SUBJECT:** Reconsideration of Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR) D2 error.

**BACKGROUND:** End product 130 was reviewed on May 22, 2014, and a D2 error was cited.

**CONTENTION:** The Regional Office (RO) requests reconsideration of the D2 error. The error was cited because the RO failed to add the Veteran's son, Samuel, as a school child on the award for the period July 1, 2013, through August 25, 2013.

The RO contends it was prohibited from adding Samuel as a school child. The RO states that adding Samuel back onto the Veteran's award would have constituted a prohibited action under the policy against simultaneous award actions because it removed the Veteran's ex-spouse from the award due to divorce thereby creating an overpayment of benefits, and if it had simultaneously adding Samuel as a school child on the same award, the result would have also created a retroactive payment of VA benefits. Under [M21-1MR III.vi.2.A.2.b](#), this multiple award adjustment must be processed separately.

The RO also contends that it had no authority to add Samuel as a school child because it lacked sufficient evidence to do so. The RO maintains the evidence of record was insufficient to add Samuel to the award without a VA Form 21-674, *Request for Approval of School Attendance*, showing his school attendance from July 1, 2013, through August 25, 2013, the day preceding the date Samuel began receiving Chapter 35 Dependents Educational Assistance (DEA) benefits.

**DISCUSSION:** The M21-1 Manual Rewrite ([M21-1MR III.vi.2.A.2.a](#)) indicates a simultaneous award adjustment is permitted if the adjustment is based on related factual circumstances resulting in a single transaction. In this particular case, both sets of facts (the removal of the ex-spouse due to divorce and adding Samuel as a school child) are related to the issue of dependency and result in a single legal transaction, which is adjustment of VA compensation based on a change in dependency. Therefore, the removal of the ex-spouse and the addition of Samuel may be processed simultaneously under a single transaction.

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With regard to the RO's claim that a completed VA Form 21-674 must be of record, the M21-1 Manual Rewrite ([M21-1MR III.iii.6.C.16.e](#)) states that for periods preceding commencement of DEA benefits, no additional evidence of school attendance is required, and compensation benefits may be awarded covering a vacation period without requiring completion of VA Form 21-674 if the eligible dependent was attending school at the end of the preceding term and the Benefits Delivery Network (BDN) shows the commencement of school attendance began under the DEA program in the month in which the next term would normally commence. Because this criterion pertains to this particular case, the RO should have added Samuel as a school child on the Veteran's award.

**DECISION:** We have reviewed your contentions and determined the D2 error is valid.

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## QRT Q-Tips

*Presented by David Hannigan, QRT Chief, Program Review*

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 AQRs 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](mailto:david.hannigan@va.gov). This month's Q-Tip comes from **Jannell Lloyd, SSVSR, Phoenix RO**.

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## December's Q-Tip

### Correct Effective Dates for Adding Dependents

[M21-1MR, III.iii.5.F.35.d](#)

- Court decision *Sharp v. Shinseki* changed VA's interpretation of 38 CFR 3.401(b) and effective dates for adding dependents. This decision affects ratings done on or after 10/15/09 granting any of the following:
  - SC for new disabilities or increases in the evaluation for existing SC disabilities, even when the combined SC evaluation does not change
  - Total disability for individual unemployability (TDIU)
  - Special monthly compensation
  - An earlier effective date for a combined SC evaluation of 30 percent or greater.
- If evidence of dependent(s) is received within one year of our notification to the Veteran of any above-listed rating decision, the dependent(s) should be added from the date granted in that rating decision (or event, if event was after).
- A Fast Letter 11-38, *Adding Dependents to a Retroactive Award*, wasn't issued until 12/19/11 providing instruction for processing claims based on the Sharp decision. (FL rescinded 7/9/12 and incorporated into the manual)
- Therefore, be sure to review ratings done between 10/15/09 and 12/19/11 to ensure that dependents were added from the earliest possible effective date based on the *Sharp* decision.
- For every award with dependents, double check they are added from the earliest possible dates. Backfill dependents, if necessary, and check if an earlier effective date is warranted.

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## Announcements

*Presented by David Hannigan*

### Upcoming Quality Calls

Our next Quality Calls will be

- a rating focused call on January 14, 2015, at 1:30 EST, and
- an authorization focused call on February 11, 2015, at 1:30 EST.

The website that houses the Quality Call Notes has been updated to include links for both Rating and Authorization Quality Calls for each fiscal year.



# Questions & Answers

## Reminders

1. If a SSN has not been assigned, isn't the real issue whether or not the Veteran has applied for an SSN? A number being assigned is under the control of the SSA but the application for that number would be under the control of the Veteran. What are we actually looking for in regards to dependency and SSNs?

*In order to pay benefits, we must have an SSN if one has been assigned. If one has not been assigned, the Veteran must submit a signed statement explaining such. If an SSN has been applied for, but not yet received, we must wait for the SSN to add the dependent.*

## Clearing Multiple End Products

2. What is the correct EP for reviewing writeouts and VA Form 21-8951 when no action is necessary? Would this be a one-time EP290, Drill Pay?

*This has been referred to Program Operations for clarification.*

## Using VA Form 27-0820

3. Does the requirement for using a VA Form 27-0820, *Report of General Information*, apply to all attempts of phone contact with the Veteran or claimant? Or is this specific to dependency claims?

*This has been referred to Procedures for clarification.*

## Quality Review & Consistency Topics

4. How can we call an S1 error for not uploading VA Form 27-0820 when it is not one of the situations listed that are applicable to S1 errors? (Reference: October VSCM Bulletin) Please specify the correct category for when the VAF 27-0820 isn't uploaded?

*Not uploading documents is not considered a system compliance error and therefore should not be marked as such. However, not uploading the VAF 27-0820 could fall under multiple other error categories depending on the purpose behind the telephone call for which the VAF 27-0820 should have been generated. For example, it could be considered a B2-Development error if there is no way to verify that the necessary development has been completed.*

5. It seems that you are saying we can no longer cascade errors with S1 errors. The consolidated questions from the S1 training field document (top of page 2) actually directed us to do this. Can you please clarify what is correct?

*The correct guidance is to not cascade Benefit Entitlement errors with System Compliance errors.*

6. After reviewing the answers provided in the S1 training document, we feel that some questions weren't completely answered. For example, why are VSRs not expected to make sure Participant Profile service dates are correct? Does this information still populate into the rating decision?

*We will review our S1 training FAQ document and update it as necessary to provide additional clarification.*

7. We wrote an error at our station for lack of notification letter in VVA and VBMS. The error was removed based on the S1 FAQ which states that "failure to upload letters is not an error." Can you please clarify what is the correct action for this situation?

*The caller was asked to submit this question/scenario via email so that QR&C staff could completely understand the question and provide the correct answer.*

*Our S1 FAQ was just that, an S1 FAQ. Failure to upload letters should not be considered an S1 but should be considered an error for not sending the notification letter. If the notification letter is not uploaded into the system then there is no proof that it was sent out and should be considered an error.*

8. Question about the B2 and the S1? I understand about cascading and you can't do that, but based on doing quality on VSRs we have to list each individual issue that the Veteran claims. If we fail to request the STRs and you need those for each individual issue, is that a B2 error on each one or is that considered cascading?

*No, you would not cite a B2 error for each claimed condition because it's one action. This would be cited for the first issue and then "N/A" the other issues. It would be cascading if you cited an error for each issue.*

9. We need clear guidance on the proper application of cascading for both VSRs and RVSRs. Guidance provided regarding the need for B2 errors when STRs aren't requested is different than what we have previously been instructed by your office.

*This is a question that cannot be answered through an FAQ and requires full explanation. We will address this issue on the next Authorization Quality Call on February 11, 2015.*

10. Because of the "no cascading" policy, are you going to update the October 2014 C&P bulletin to include this guidance?

*If that clarification is needed, then we will take the appropriate steps to ensure that it's clear in explaining the rules regarding no cascading.*

11. Clarification regarding S1s and document development attempts was requested. It has been stated that there will be an S1 error cited if the VSR or whoever is processing the claim has not clarified what has been done to include updating the number of attempts made.

*Per FL 12-03, we are required to include contact notes and development notes and if those aren't completed, then the systems are not being updated. These situations would warrant an S1 error.*

12. It would be helpful to have another updated list of what an S1 error is. We have several areas where notes would be helpful, or a subject line is needed on a document and we do not call those as S1 errors. Also, are S1 errors cited on supplemental development? For example, a VSR completes a JSRRC memo. Would we cite an S1 error if the POA is not properly updated?

*We will look into providing another updated list of what an S1 error is. At this time, S1 errors should be called on all supplemental development to maintain consistency.*

13. We are seeing issues of multiple service periods being VADS verified, however service documents of record contradict this information. S1 errors are being cited but are being contested, as it is presumed that VADS is always correct. Please advise.

*The issue needs to be addressed but errors should not be called on the VSR. This should be called as a comment.*

14. Should inaccurate VADS Verification Information identified on a Quality Review be cited as an Error or Comment?

*If VADS verification is incorrect, a VSR should not be held responsible for it. This should be called as a comment and not an error.*

15. There is a reference that says we can use the VADS "Y" as verification of service as long as specific criteria are met. In addition, the manual discusses the BIRLS screen and indicates that a "Y" should be entered to reflect verified service. Does this mean that we (field offices) do or do not need to mark a "Y" if VADS shows a "Y"?

In other words, can we use the VADS "Y" to mark our "Y", as the reference states? If the VSR doesn't insert the "Y," it doesn't translate to Participant Profile as verified and thus causes other problems.

*If I understand the question, the answer is, if the VADS "Y" is present, an error would not be called if there is not a "Y" present under verified service. A comment can be made but no error should be called because a VADS "Y" is sufficient.*

16. Can you clarify the IPR and the overall 10% requirement for the station? Is that a requirement for each—AQRS and RQRS or is that a combined number?

*It's a combined number. This gives the station the option to put a little bit more weight on one or the other or put it all on one side.*

17. Can an answer key to the Consistency Study be provided shortly after the study is completed?

*We will take a look at this suggestion and see if we can do this.*

18. Are Map-D notes required for day to day work?

*Map-D notes are not required but highly recommended.*

19. Is any additional information available regarding the AQRT Pulse?

*Additional information about the AQRT Pulse is forthcoming.*

### **VBMS-A Enhancements**

20. When developing for missing dependency information, there is no option for a 30-day time-frame in the Automated Development Letter (ADL). Can this 30-day time-frame option be added/included in the ADL?

*Yes. The 30-day time-frame option can be added using free-text in the ADL Letter Interview screen in VBMS-Awards.*

21. Is there any kind of fix for VBMS-A where we can go back to just clearing the C&C's and denials instead of running it through 2 different people to generate an award and then authorize it on something we used to call a "PCLR"?

*To get the benefit of the ADL, right now you need to generate and authorize the award in VBMS-A. We are working on new requirements to change VBMS-A to allow for single signature awards. This is still being approved by Policy and Procedures, but will ultimately result in one user being able to generate the award and letter, and do the authorization if there are no changes in payment.*

22. How do we provide feedback to the VBMS Program Management Office (PMO)?

*The VBMS PMO welcomes suggestions for system enhancements that will support VSOs in fulfilling their roles. If you have an enhancement request, please complete the Enhancement Form with detailed information about the specific functionality issue. Your input is valuable. VBMS PMO experts will review all requests and determine the feasibility of the ideas. For more information and to download the form, please access the VBMS Intranet site at: <http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS>.*

## General Questions

23. Where can we obtain the power point used during the call?

*The power point presentation will be provided via TMS.*

24. Can the Cost of Living (COLA) rates for December 1, 2013, be shifted over to the historical section (now that the 12-01-14 COLA rates have been posted)?

*The [Compensation Rate Tables](#) website was updated on December 10, 2014.*

25. For drill pay adjustments, what is the procedure when there are not enough days at the rate in effect at the end of the fiscal year in question from which to withhold?

*Per M21-1MR, III.v.4.C.14.e, follow these steps:*

| <b>Step</b> | <b>Action</b>   |
|-------------|---|
| 1           | <i>Identify the most recent award line that shows a monthly rate of payment equal to or exceeding the Veteran's rate of payment at the end of the fiscal year during which he/she earned drill pay.</i> |
| 2           | <i>Retroactively reduce the Veteran's award, effective the date of the award line identified in Step 1, by the Veteran's rate of payment at the end of the fiscal year in question.</i>                 |
| 3           | <i>Discontinue the reduction as soon as it has been in place for the same number of days the Veteran received drill pay.</i>  |

26. When dependency forms have conflicting information, is telephone contact appropriate? For example, the Veteran informs us he is married but then later says "not married"—not that he's divorced, but rather that he is not married.

*VA strongly encourages claims development by telephone. Changes in dependency or marital status affecting entitlement to benefits do not need to be submitted in writing. This includes obtaining clarification of information provided by the Veteran.*

*Keep in mind, however, that in some cases more evidence will be required. It is appropriate to request further evidence if there is substantial reason to challenge a Veteran's statement. A substantial reason is something beyond mere suspicion or doubt.*