Compensation Service Quality Call January 2022

 If you have two monitors we suggest having the quality call bulletin open on one screen while watching the recording on the other. If you experience any problems watching the recording or opening documents in TMS please check with your local training manager for help after completing this training and evaluation it will immediately show up on your learning history however it will appear in 15 minutes or more so you do not have to take the evaluation more than once. Thank you. Welcome to the first compensation service quality call of 2022. This is Bonnie Kirby senior quality review specialist with internal team quality assurance in Nashville. We have a short but impactful agenda this month, policy and procedures will start us off by talking about changes to the manual and then a representative from the compensation service leadership development program will outline some changes to the compensation service intranet. Staff will then provide an update on current character of discharge reviews and go over another helpful calculation tool for a drill pay. So I would like to introduce Melissa, thank you.

 Hello everyone. As Bonnie mentioned I will be going over a couple of M21-1 updates regarding PTSD changes. So, first I'm going to cover a general overview of the organization of PTSD content within the M21-1. As most of you have probably already seen the entire M21-1 was reorganized by staff this past year. To help you locate the guidance for PTSD with a couple slides that are going to go over where the content is currently located and where it used to be located. So the first slide is going to show for development and evidence gathering guidance. We have three separate sections now and the first one listed here is part eight subpart four chapter 1 section A and that will continue her general PTSD development and evidence gathering guidance. That topic was or excuse me the content was previously located in the old M21-1 421 D topics one through four. One of the major differences with the current organization you will see is that we have taken all the guidance related to personal trauma and removed it into its own sections sober development and evidence gathering guidance for personal trauma claims you want to refer to the new part eight subpart four chapter 1 section B and that used to be located in-year-old 421 D topic five. The other new thing about the organizational structure as we have taken examination guidance for PTSD claims and moved it into its own section here that is 814 C and that guidance used to be sprinkled in both the development section and the reading section so we moved it all into one section to help you access that a little more easily. So the next set of organizational guidance that we have is regarding the rating PTSD claims and as I mentioned we have personal trauma separate from general PTSD reading guidance so the general PTSD guidance is 814 D and you are probably familiar with that being in the 34402 as well as a new section for personal trauma 841 E and that used to be in 444 02 those working personal trauma claims can access it a little more easily. As you will see on the slides here we have a resource for you within CP KM there is a reorganization guide and matrix and within that link, you will find the matrix helps you with your new finding a new location for historical reference. So if you're wondering where your old M21-1 guidance that you knew used to be in a specific place where it got moved to the reorganization matrix will help you find the new location. So moving on to our next topic, this is a court decision from this past July that had a pretty significant impact on fear-based PTSD claims. In this court decision the court held the July 2010 regulation update which created the fear-based stress criteria in -- was a liberalizing regulatory change under 38 CFR 3.114 A prior to this court decision be a policy stated that regulation change was not a liberalizing rule so again this is a pretty significant change. To assist with implementing this change we have made a couple of updates in the manual, the first one is to the development section in 841 A and within the block that defines fear-based stressors three F we added an effective date for July 2010 amendment where the fear-based stressor criteria was created and we do this because we think it is important for claims processors to understand why claims prior to the date did not see stressor using the fear standard. So the next set of changes that we made. Based on the court decision can be found in the reading section 841 D specifically in the block and how to concede a fear-based stressor we added guidance on how to apply the court holding. As with other presidential court decisions the holding only applies to claims that were not final on the date of the court decision so in this case this only applies to claims pending on or after July 28th, 2021. If you have questions as to whether a claim is considered pending you can refer to the definition of a pending claim in 38 CFR three point 160. The second key point is the court holding only applies if the stressor is conceded based on fear standard of 3.304 F3. If you're conceding a stressor on another basis you would not apply the liberalizing effective date provisions, the last important point is this court decision is not a basis for beautification of claims that were final prior to July 28, 2021. If you see a claim decided in 2019 for example, and the decision to not apply 3.114 A to the effective date even though it was granting the claim based on fear-based PTSD, you're not going back to call on a decision because at that time, excuse me. Pardon me. At the time the decision was made, it was correctly decided based on the VA interpretation of regulations. So for more information on that topic you can refer to M 21 one subpart two chapter 5 section A 10, two, five, A and the Georgia versus McDonough court decision that thoroughly discusses the interpretation of its own regulations and the court later changing that interpretation. Just a reminder in order to qualify for the retroactive effective date provisions, the veteran must have met all eligibility criteria for the liberalizing change at the time that it took affect. In this case was July 2010 3.304 regulation change. To assist you with understanding this court decision we have included an example in the new 21 one guidance in the rating section. So the last PTSD topic I will be covering is a change to M 21 one 814 A block 30 we are making updates based on military research excuse me military records research Center or MRR C they have requested some clarification. What details that are required to research stressors related to casualties. There are two important elements the evidence can provide in these cases so the first is the name and unit of assignment for the casualty the second is a full description of the event. What MRR C would like you to know is the name of the casualty is known even if the veteran is unsure of the spelling or only has the last name of the person you must provide it in the request. Secondly if there is a description of the event, the date or location and the circumstance in which the person was killed that must also be provided in the request to MRRC to research that stressor. On the next slide we have included an example to help illustrate this point. If you have a veteran claiming PTSD and stressors that someone fell overboard from a specific ship in this case in June or July 1995 again if they have a timeframe even if it's not exact you need to provide it and the stressor description is after hours of searching they were not able to recover the sailor, the veteran did not have a name for the casualty or maybe just the last name or they were not sure of the spelling in the request to MRRC you need to give the name of the ship, the type of the event the circumstances of the event so in this case someone fell overboard and was never covered. As many details as you can provide should be provided in the stressor research request. What is important here is that as many details as provided by the veteran or other evidence is given because I have a couple different avenues of research available to them so the more information you provide the better chances they will have in successfully researching the stressor. So that is it for me and I'm not going to turn it over to --

 Thank you Melissa. I am the lead analyst of the program limitation policy and procedure staff and was also a member of the 2021 competition service leadership development program. This morning I'm going to be talking to you all about the compensation service intranet redesign project. The competition service redesign project was a part of the 2021 competition service leadership development program. During the 2021 competition service leadership development program a project team was assigned using members of the cohort. The members of the project team consisted of myself, Molly [ Indiscernible Name ] , Ryan [ Indiscernible Name ], Ellie Sullivan from the training staff, Lori [ Indiscernible Name ] from the business management staff and we worked in close partnership with the compensation service web master. The project status, the project began April 27th, 2021 when the compensation service leadership development program was tasked with redesigning the Internet page. The project team worked to identify a better way to serve veterans benefits administration workforce by streamlining tools and resources available to the field that is available on the compensation service intranet page. The overall goal was to make the page more effective, more efficient and more user-friendly to field employees. As many of you may know the compensation service homepage has not been redesigned in a little over 10 years so this was a project that we took on and as part of the CSLD program this year. During the project, we identified a number of issues with the compensation service intranet page and I will talk a little bit about them now. So, we bulk them into three categories. Outdated information, staff pages with layout and design. With outdated information to the compensation service intranet page to include the job aids there were links to outdated information so if you were to try to go to a link it may show information from 2010 so that would be considered historic and doesn't need to be on the forward facing home page. Also, multiple links would either go to the same content or similar content so we didn't feel the need to have the same link in three or four places on one page. And then finally some of the links were broken, we discovered when you tried to enter the links on a webpage, it would take you to a broken webpage that was no longer there. Staff pages, for the staff pages existing pages that were already there needed updates and some of those consisted of having the correct descriptions of the staff functions so that the field or other members within the VA can come to the CS intranet and have an understanding of what each staff does add some general descriptions of that staff. There are also two missing staff web pages, the current compensation service intranet page does not have a staff page for the program implementation office, the 210 staff. Nor does it have the 216 budget staff so we added both of those as well. Finally there is incorrect or missing mailboxes so what we have done is we have added all current mailboxes to all the staff pages so that if there is a need to reach out to staff, the field will have current links to do so. Finally layout and design, the current webpage is unorganized and efficient in terms of layout, there is inconsistent design among pages as you navigate through. The current format is more of a listing where everything is listed out whereas the new format you will see is going to be more of a dashboard format using or utilizing boxes and then having things under the boxes. Another big change you will see is going to be on the job aids page. Right now the page just list everything together with tools and calculators and references. There is no rhyme or reason and it's not in alphabetical order, the new job aids page will be categorized by three different boxes. We will have tools, calculators and references and then you have those links under that so it is easier for the field to find things as they are looking for those tools or categories or calculators or references. Our timeline for this we will be going live with the new site around the end of January 2022 or the beginning of February 2022. Somewhere in that timeframe. So what will happen is, typically the way trying to change works with the calendar blast this will be similar. There will be a calendar blast that goes on with general information about the changes we have made. The other key thing we have done is that we wanted to make sure we included change documents to show what we have done, links we have added, things we have removed, things we have put in new places so what you'll see is when the calendar blast goes out there will be a link to the change documents. Also on the new page once it goes live there will be the change document for the homepage at the top of the homepage and the change document for the job aids page will be listed on the top of the job aids page. We will be monitoring feedback through the mailbox link that is provided at the bottom of the compensation service intranet homepage. We will be working with the web master to go through concerns or feedback, questions or suggestions to continue to monitor that and make sure we get any updates added in that we need. We will also be continuing to meet as a project team over the next six months to continue to identify anything that may need to be added or changed also talking about lessons learned during the program. Like I said, be looking out for that change at the end of January or early February at the latest and at this time that's all that I have this morning so I appreciate the time and now I'm going to turn it over to Erin Hawkins to talk about the FY 22 character discharge reviews.

 Thank you. The page redesign sounds really wonderful. Good morning to everyone, my name is Erin Hawkins a consultant on the authorization and non-rating review team in quality assurance and I'm going to be discussing the status of the fiscal year 2022 character discharge pre-decision reviews. All character of discharge determinations prepared in fiscal year 2022 which concluded the individual service is dishonorable for VA purposes must be routed to central office for approval prior to finalizing decision. As of this date quality assurance has received a total of 635 draft administrative decisions. 179 reviews have been completed and of those quality assurance found for 77 cases the determination to find the service to be dishonorable was correct however 30 cases incorrectly determined the character of discharge to be dishonorable. A particular note is the 72 draft decisions that had to be returned to the regional office or site for corrections prior to quality assurance being able to render a formal decision to approve or disapprove the draft. One of the reasons the draft decisions were returned for correction was the administrative decision was prepared prior to expiration of the due process period the main reason was due to the printing delay issue. As a result of the printing delay VA must extend the response period for up to 90 days please refer to the November 19th 2021 updated interim guidance issued via email from the office of field operations which explains VA cannot take action on a claim if no response was received until the full 90 days has passed. Additionally draft decisions have been returned to correct service information to include the branch of service and also we return them to complete development for essential records or evidence needed to complete a full character of discharge review. One of the main reasons draft decisions were returned is because the administered decision lacked essential language, many drafts did not list relevant evidence pertinent to the character of discharge by the reasons for basis in the draft were inadequate. It was found the exact language of the statutory or regulatory bar was not directly quoted oftentimes the bars were paraphrased however it is required to directly quote the language for these administrative decisions. Additionally quality assurance noted incorrect bars were used or extra references were included in the decision however the references were not applicable to the case. The manual reference on the bottom of the slide is for the character of discharge administrative decision template claims processors should adhere closely to the template as it provides specific details on what should be included in each character of discharge administrative decision. After quality assurance complaints the review and identifies corrections needed that will upload a memo outlining a specific corrective action required. Claims assessors should review the memo and revised the draft decision accordingly or if the memo indicates additional is needed complete the development and at the conclusion prepare a new draft administrative decision. After the new draft is written the individuals that prepare the decision should electronically sign VA form 21-29 61, but the draft and the 29 61 should be uploaded, add the compensation service COD special issue indicator on the claim and this will allow the claim to be routed to quality assurance for a second review. As a reminder quality assurance does not, even after quality assurance approves the character of discharge administrative decision regional office or pesticide employees are the ones responsible for signing the form. The final point I would like to make regarding the fiscal year 2022 COD reviews is to date quality assurance has only been able to review 28% of the cases received. This is because the volume of receipt is a lot higher than projected quality assurance does not have the capability or resources currently to complete the reviews within the previous indicated four day turnaround so I know compensation service is working on a plan to find a way to increase the out put a reviews and to get these claims back to the field as soon as possible. Thank you, I will not pass the presentation to my colleague Misty.

 Thank you Erin. My name is Misty and I'm a consultant on the authorization and non-rating review team at quality assurance. I will be presenting the drill pay non-award is kept a letter describing how to use it. This past year revisions were made to the process for calculating the number of training days when a veteran received drill pay. The new procedure subtracts drill and training days in months in which there were non-award days. The computer system has been programmed to make the calculations beginning with fiscal year 2020 there will be times when manual adjustments are necessary. To ensure consistency in the manual calculation of countable days of drill a uniform drill pay non-award a calculator has been designed for use. The calculator is accessible via job aids and the authorization and non-rating review team homepage. The manual will be revised at a later date to include a link to the calculator as well as a mandatory requirement to upload the Calcutta result to the veteran folder for all cases requiring manual calculations. We would like to acknowledge the St. Paul team for developing the calculator and a special thank you to Thomas Barlow of the Winston-Salem site for his enhancements to the calculator and submittal of the tool to compensation service, the contributions were pivotal in the creation and release of the standardized calculator. To show you how the calculator works we will go over an example case. In our example it is noted a total of 107 training days were reported for fiscal year 2020. A review of records shows during fiscal year 2020 the veteran benefits were terminated May 1st, 2020 resuming June 25th, 2020 due to a period of active service. When making the calculations it's important to review the record to determine if there any non-award days during the fiscal year under review, non-award days for today's for which the veteran received no compensation or pension, this could be because VA stopped the award because he or she returned active duty or the VA was not paying the veteran disability compensation because he or she had no compensable service related to disability. The number of non-or days for each month in the year must be determined to accurately compute the accountable number of days for drill. There are rules specific to the calculation involving non-award days described in M21-1 part six subpart two Chapter 3 section A topic one G2 the calculator includes a tool to account for the various roles and assist in the computation of non-award days for each month. In our example the veteran benefits were stopped May 1st 2020 and resumed June 25th 2020. There were no other months showing non-award days. When you open the calculator select the tab labeled non-award days to display the non-award days calculation tool. Put the dates for which the veteran received no pay into the role of the worksheet the start date is the first date for which the veteran received no benefits and the stop date is the last date of the non-award period. The number of days in the month may not exceed 30 and as you can see after inputting the dates the calculation shows a total of 30 non-award days for May and 24 for June. To determine the number of drill days subject to recoupment selected drill pay calculation tab to display the manual drill pay adjustment? A letter when using the calculator figure for the drill days and active duty training days columns are obtained from veterans information solution. After opening the veteran's record select the military history tab and scroll to the section titled drill pay days. From the section select fiscal year under review to display a summary of days the veteran received drill pay during each month of the fiscal year. The summary will look like the image on the screen. Use the figures under the columns titled drill days and active duty training days. You will insert the figures for the drill days, active duty training days and the non-award days that you computed into the appropriate column on the calculator to compute the number of days subject to recoupment. In the example the number of countable days computes to 53 days which is 107 reported training days minus the 54 non-award days. This is the end of my presentation so I would now pass it on to the next presenter Bonnie Kirby.

 Thank you so much Misty and thank you to all presenters today. A lot of good information. Since we have reached the end of the presentations let's talk about how to suggest topics how to be a presenter on future calls as well as when the next one will be recorded. If you have a topic you would like to present on a future quality call please run it by your coach and then send us an email at the internal QRS box listed here we love having guest present her's and we can help you prepare. If you have a suggestion for a topic please send an email to the same mailbox with the information shown and cc your coach almost the recall include suggestions received from the field so if you notice a trend or have an idea please tell us. You can find bulletins from past calls on the compensation service intranet and the full training with audio recording in the PowerPoint is available in both CMS and the learning catalog. Thank you for joining us today, the next call will be recorded the second week of February. Happy new year and we will see you next month.

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