

Vets Views

This is the first of a series of articles that I plan to write in an attempt to "get the word out" to vets about what's happening in the world of VA benefits. I have started out with the following info for those of you who have recently come home or will be coming home, from the Gulf.

Do you know that military personnel who recently served in a combat theater of ops are now eligible for 2 years of free medical care from VA for conditions possibly related to wartime deployment? Well, it's true.

In the past, veterans had to prove that a medical problem was connected to their military service to receive free VA care for that condition, or they must have had relatively low incomes. However, since November 11, 1998, the VA has been authorized to provide free medical care for veterans serving in a designated theater of combat ops for **2 years** after they leave active duty. They don't have to prove either a service connection for their health care problems or that they have low incomes.

I should point out, however, that the benefits **do not** cover treatment for medical problems clearly unrelated to military service, such as care for common colds, injuries from accidents that happened after discharge from active duty, or disorders that existed before the person joined the military.

Like all veterans, Gulf War veterans are also eligible for monthly payments, called disability compensation, if they are suffering from service-connected illnesses or injuries. The disability must have been incurred or aggravated during active military service. Furthermore, the veteran must have been terminated from military service through separation or discharge under conditions that were other than dishonorable.

Disability compensation varies according to the degree of disability and the number of dependents. Benefits are not subject to Federal or state income tax. The receipt of military retirement pay, disability severance pay, and separation incentive payments known as SSB and VSI (Special Separation Benefits and Voluntary Separation Incentives) also affect the amount of VA compensation paid.

How do you know if you qualify? Drop by my office in the courthouse, or call 463-3308 to set up an appointment. **My job is to help veterans!** You have earned many benefits, so let's see which ones you're eligible to receive. To learn more on your own about the VA's Gulf War programs, visit the VA home page www.va.gov/healtheligibility or call **1-800-827-1000**.

Stay tuned to this freq in the coming weeks for more veteran benefits info and other nice to know things from the VA.

Over and out.

