

Veterans Corner

Traumatic Brain Injury

In June 2016, USDVA announced it would send letters to more than 24,000 veterans who were potentially misdiagnosed regarding traumatic brain injury, offering new exams. It is unclear why the exams were conducted in violation of VA policy at a number of VA facilities.

VA officials decided to send letters rather than simply reschedule exams, because some veterans may have received a higher disability rating for TBI from their initial exam than they would have gotten from a specialist. According to sources, more than 14,000 affected veterans already are receiving disability compensation for service-connected TBI, "many at higher rates of evaluation." "It could be misleading to go out and tell them we are going to schedule an exam without their choice, might have a significant impact on their benefits," they said.

More than 327,000 troops were diagnosed with a brain injury from 2000 to 2015. Roughly 80 percent of those diagnoses were for mild TBI, or concussion. Roughly 170,000 veterans with TBI have filed disability compensation claims and 75,000 have been approved.

The Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs (May 2007), by consensus, have defined traumatic brain injury (TBI) as any traumatically induced structural injury and/or physiological disruption of brain function as a result of an external force that is indicated by new onset or worsening of at least one of the following clinical signs, immediately following the event:

1. Any period of loss of or a decreased level of consciousness;
2. Any loss of memory for events immediately before or after the injury;
3. Any alteration in mental state at the time of the injury (e.g., confusion, disorientation, slowed thinking);
4. Neurological deficits (e.g., weakness, balance disturbance, praxis, paresis/plegia, change in vision, other sensory alterations, aphasia.) that may or may not be transient;
5. Intracranial lesion.

Our office can provide additional assistance with claims regarding this issue and many others.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license and also issues Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Scott Holwell if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To determine if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com/vets.

Scott Holwell, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call (559)852-2669; or e-mail scott.holwell@co.kings.ca.us.