



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER™

Tedd L. Mitchell, M.D.
President

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, my name is Dr. Tedd Mitchell. I am the President of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC), one of four component institutions within the Texas Tech University System. It is an honor to be a witness before your Subcommittee on the very important topic of best practices in veterans' education and transition to civilian life.

First, I would like to mention TTUHSC has had a long partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that started in 2006 with the medical academic affiliation agreement which has allowed our students to have rich invaluable clinical training opportunities within the VA Health Care Systems. TTUHSC's partnership with the VA will be enhanced with the building of the new and expanded Lubbock VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic on the TTUHSC campus. TTUHSC is honored to be the site of this new clinic which will provide improved and expanded care to South Plains veterans. On behalf of these veterans, TTUHSC is grateful for the VA Committee's willingness and foresight to authorize the creation of this new clinic.

TTUHSC prides itself in its commitment to veterans and their families and its recognition of their service to our country. Last week, TTUHSC held its annual Veterans Day ceremony honoring the men and women at TTUHSC who have served our country. As a member of the Council of College and Military Educators, TTUHSC strives to ensure veterans have a successful transition into the college setting and, once there, receive the support they need to be successful.

For the fall 2017 semester, TTUHSC has a total of 118 veterans enrolled in its programs. TTUHSC has student veterans in all five of our schools: Nursing, Health Professions, Medicine, Pharmacy and Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. These students are located throughout West Texas on our six regional campuses; Abilene, Amarillo, Dallas, Lubbock and the Permian Basin. The Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso has a total of 21 veterans enrolled in its programs. These students are in the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine and the Hunt School of Nursing.

TTUHSC has committed itself to the Department of Veterans Affairs Principles of Excellence program and has been identified as a Military Friendly University (Bronze Level) by G.I. Jobs Magazine. Our Veterans and Military Advising Office within TTUHSC Student Services assists and guides prospective and accepted students from initial contact going forward. This office assists students through the process of utilizing their VA Education Benefits and Hazelwood Exemption which is a state program.

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TTUHSC takes the stress off veterans by ensuring all necessary documents are submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs to certify student enrollments. Sarah Henly serves as TTUHSC's Veteran and Military Advisor and is a veteran herself. Our Veterans and Military Advising Office and Sarah's Dedication have produced phenomenal results for veterans interested in enrolling in TTUHSC but who may have found the experience to be too daunting.

The Veteran and Military Advising Office continues to be the primary point of contact and resource for veterans after they have enrolled and begin their degree program. TTUHSC hosts lunches each semester for our student veterans on all campuses. TTUHSC recognizes our student veterans all the way to the end. At commencement, graduating veterans receive military stoles with a red double T to recognize not only their recent accomplishment but service to our country as well.

One of TTUHSC's more innovative programs is the Accelerated Veteran to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (VBSN) track. VBSN is a nursing degree completed in **12 months** specifically designed for veterans with prior military medical training. This program allows veterans to receive competency based college credit and to earn their BSN in less time with less cost.

This program is unique in that TTUHSC faculty developed this curriculum with the Medical Education and Training Command (METC) located at the Joint Services Base in San Antonio, Texas. TTUHSC faculty collaborated with METC personnel to review the METC curriculum for medics. The medic curriculum was examined to determine which courses offered key elements similar to nursing courses. This program then created a competency based examination to award college credits by recognizing prior learning. Veterans have the opportunity to be given college credit for four courses (14 semester credit hours).

TTUHSC received support from the US Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to develop and implement the VBSN program. HRSA's Nurse Education, Practice, Quality and Retention (NEPQR) -Veterans in Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program awarded \$1.04 million. TTUHSC also received \$200,000 from the Texas Workforce Commission. Both grants have been great resources and we recommend Congress continue to fund this program.

The VBSN has had phenomenal success. The current 2017 VBSN class has 12 students. Seven students graduated in December 2016 and all passed the nurse licensing examination. The incoming cohort for 2018 has 22 students. For 2019, TTUHSC has 45 prospects. TTUHSC anticipates increasing our numbers annually by 50 percent. TTUHSC offers the VBSN program in seven locations: Lubbock, Amarillo, Odessa, Abilene, Dallas, Austin, and San Antonio. As a result of VBSN's success, TTUHSC's School of Pharmacy and School of Health Professions are considering offering competency-based education as well.

TTUHSC would like to offer recommendations for the Subcommittee to consider to improve the quality of education for student veterans.

Federal funding for education programmatic initiatives *Continue to approve federal funding for HRSA's*

NEPQR grants. HRSA's Nursing Education Practice, Quality and Retention (NEPQR) – VBSN Program Grant was critical to supporting new program development to serve veterans.

Military Housing Allowance (MHA) *To take into consideration the growth in distance education, determine the housing allowance based upon where the student does their clinical work. VBSN students do their clinical work at a "site," rather than on a campus.* TTUHSC is very grateful for the work of the Subcommittee on its passage of legislation to expand and extend the G.I. Bill. This Subcommittee recognized that students do not necessarily receive their training in the same location as where the school is headquartered, in TTUHSC's case Lubbock. TTUHSC is very grateful the Subcommittee clarified the Monthly House Allowance (MHA) to beneficiaries of the Post-9/11 G.I. bill, to allow veterans to receive MHA based on the location where the student attends the majority of his/her classes. This legislation will have a profound effect on our students at TTUHSC's six regional campuses. TTUHSC understands the Subcommittee's concerns about schools taking advantage of this new provision. We would ask the Subcommittee to consider the feasibility of having the VA pay MHA based on the site where the student is located since many programs are 100 percent online with only clinical experience required. Again, TTUHSC is grateful for the changes the Subcommittee has already made to the MHA.

VA 85/15 Rule *Eliminate the application of the VA 85/15 rule entirely for entities with regional and professional accreditation.* The 85/15 rule is not effective in maintaining educational quality in that it claims to use the market place to ensure quality of the educational offerings, requiring each course to include a minimum fifteen percent civilian population enrollment. It also does not address the unique needs of veterans transitioning to civilian life and education, precluding courses designed to help veterans in this transition being prevented from certification for VA education benefits. A solution is to allow the agencies with DOE deemed status – such as SACS/COC - to determine quality.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Subcommittee and to share TTUHSC's best practices in support of our student veterans. TTUHSC appreciates the service and sacrifice these students have made. Assisting them to reach their academic and career goals will continue be a priority for TTUHSC.

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