

VETERANS CORNER

2015

Many of you may have received a white card, called the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA) or Choice Card in the mail from the Department of Veterans Affairs at some point in the last few months. If you're currently enrolled in VA healthcare, the card was sent to you automatically. Many questions have arisen over when and how to use the card.

The card is a result of problems being experienced by some VA medical facilities with regard to scheduling. The program temporarily provides veterans the ability to receive medical care in the community; if the VA cannot schedule an appointment within 30 days of the Veteran's preferred date, or the date determined medically necessary by their provider, or the Veteran resides more than 40 miles from the closest VA medical facility (either a Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC), or VA Clinic). When the program first started, the 40 mile calculation was direct miles, also commonly called "as the crow flies," but recently, the VA changed the calculation used to determine the distance between a Veteran's residence and the nearest facility from a straight line distance to driving distance. The program is scheduled to end either when the allocated funds of ten billion dollars are used or August 7, 2017 – whichever occurs first.

The cards do not give Veterans permission to go wherever and whenever they want for health care. It is not designed to be a fee basis card for emergency treatment. Before using the Choice Card, you must call the VA at 1-866-606-8198 to get permission to use it. If you fail to get the permission before using the card, you will most likely be held responsible for the charges that were incurred for treatment.

If you are not currently enrolled in the VA healthcare system, and would like to enroll, we can assist you in completing the application here in the office. After you have a completed application, you can both go to the VAMC Fresno or the VA South Valley Clinic to see if you are able to enroll. If you need assistance in completing your claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs, we are here to assist with that as well.

I would like to let you know of an upcoming event here in Tulare County. The 15th Annual Veterans Opportunity Day is scheduled for Wednesday, April 22, 2015 from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at the Veterans Memorial Building located at 1771 E. Tulare Ave. in Tulare. The event will have a wide array of vendors available for general assistance information, employment opportunity and Veteran-specific assistance. My office will be there to answer any questions that you may have.

Ken Cruickshank, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Services Officer for Tulare County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 205 N. L St., in Tulare, by calling 684-4960 or emailing kcruicks@tularehhsa.org.