

RECORD OF DECISIONS

**NATIONAL UNION-MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION COMMITTEE (NUMCC)
VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA (VAC)
and
THE UNION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' EMPLOYEES (UVAE)**

Thursday, April 26, 2012

Chairperson:

Yvan Thauvette
UVAE National President

In attendance:

UVAE

Yvan Thauvette
Kim Coles
Debi Buell
Michelle Hachey
Magali Picard
Jayne Quinn
Bonnie Heidt
Pat Mason
Paul Short
Martha Johnson (Observer)
Ray Bailey

Management:

Suzanne Tining
Mary Chaput
Keith Hillier
Heather Parry
James Gilbert
Don Love
Graham Williams (for Krista Locke)
Charlotte Bastien
Gisèle Toupin
Rachel Gravel
David Robinson
Dale Sharkey (for John Larlee)
Deborah Bethell

1. Welcoming Remarks

After welcoming everyone to the meeting, Y. Thauvette, Chair, expressed his surprise over some of the recent management decisions, particularly the CSA decision.

The Deputy Minister recognized that the situation described by Y. Thauvette is difficult for all involved, and committed to provide an explanation at the meeting. The Deputy also took this opportunity to introduce Don Love as the new DG HR, Graham Williams, National Director, NCCN/TAC, representing Krista Locke, and to provide an overview of the recent organizational changes.

2. Approval of Minutes and Review of Follow-up Items from November 17, 2011

The Record of Decisions from the previous meeting were unanimously approved.

The DG HR advised that the Memorandum of Agreement concerning Union Leave and Time Off for Union Business has been signed by all parties.

Y. Thauvette requested that the CSA situation be addressed prior to moving forward on the agenda. The union raised the following issues with respect to this item:

- The letter to the PSAC President, John Gordon, from VAC advising of the WFA situation was the only letter received by PSAC that was not clear.
- The letters sent to the PSAC President and to the affected CSAs, and the use of the language "discontinuance of a function" suggests that the entire CSA function will be eventually eliminated.
- The functions being discontinued were not identified.
- People should be given the option to leave and be eligible for the Transition Support Measures (TSM).
- How the number 75 was calculated when there is no workload intensity tool?
- Would there be any office closures?
- When would employees be advised of the SERLO process?

Management explained that the entire CSA function was not being abolished, and that only certain functions of the job was being removed. These functions include:

- The bulk mailing of materials for VIP reassessment to PWGSC -15 positions.
- The government decided to change VIP contribution to a grant, resulting in less paper processing - 8 positions.

- The outsourcing of VIP annual reviews for follow-up to Medavie Blue Cross -50 positions.
- Elimination of overlap of programs between VAC and DND - 3 positions.

These numbers, while reviewed by Deloitte, are estimates only. Management also confirmed that no offices would be closing until Fall 2013 at the earliest.

Charlotte Bastien is responsible for running the Selection for Retention and Lay-off (SERLO) process, and would be contacting CSAs the following week (April 30th) to provide them with the process. Any employee who is due to retire and who provides a resignation letter with a resignation date that is within the next 18 months, will be exempt from the SERLO process.

Action Item: DG HR to provide explanation on why ADI was not used when affecting the CSAs.

Action Item: DG HR to send the WFA Q's & A's and minutes from the Joint WFA Committee meeting to Y. Thauvette.

Action Item: DG HR to consider union's request to provide an official correction letter to CSAs clarifying the "discontinuance of a function" and that explains what those functions are.

Action Item: DG HR to consider a process where people can opt to leave and be entitled to the Transitional Support Measures under the WFA Directive.

Action Item: RDG, Ontario/Québec Region to provide SERLO process to CSA employees the week of April 30th.

3. Ste. Anne's Hospital

Management provided the following update on the Ste. Anne's Hospital Transfer Project:

- The tentative agreement between VAC and the Province of Québec for the transfer of Ste. Anne's Hospital is set to be signed Friday, April 27, 2012.
- The ceremony will be broadcasted, and both Ministers will make the official announcement, after which, a press conference would follow.
- The Terms of Reference for the Joint WFA ADI Committee have been approved and the first meeting is scheduled for sometime in late May or early June.

The union advised that it is very interested in participating in the joint committee and cooperating with the Department, but that it will continue to be vocal about

what it wants and expects as conditions of the transfer, particularly with respect to a 'one-stop shop' and unreduced salaries for three years.

4. Transformation and Budget

The Deputy Minister lead this conversation and advised what both Transformation and Budget 2012 impacts meant specifically for the Department. These impacts include:

- Approximately 550 job reductions through Transformation, with approximately 250 more job reductions resulting from Budget 2012, for a total of 800 reductions.
- Spread over four years, we will see 195 reductions in 2012/13; 232 in 2013/14; 331 in 2014/15; and 45 in 2015/16.
- Attrition will be the first means used to reduce the workforce, followed by WFA, as required.

Workload would be reduced by the following transformation initiatives, that will take place over the next few years:

- E-business and automation (i.e., direct deposit, My VAC Account, auto-letter generation).
- Merging of functions (i.e., less steps in processes).
- Aligning with demographics (i.e., client-base).
- Changes to internal services (i.e., self-serve offerings).
- Partnerships and collaboration with other government departments.

It is anticipated that these changes will account for the 550 positions through Transformation.

Other changes include the closure of small offices, internal belt tightening and outsourcing of functions. Attrition was not an option in the CSA case given the demographic profile.

The DG, Transformation continued with the update, advising that we have just completed year one of a five-year plan, and that we are now moving from a very high-level of change to a much more detailed level. There are currently 28 projects underway that are being project managed. The challenge at this time is communication with staff, although increased communications is happening.

The DG, VRAB provided an overview of VRAB's current transformation efforts which focus significantly on Business Process Redesign.

The union requested an explanation of the budget figures and asked how much of the 36 M is salary. Management explained the numbers don't appear to add

up because it uses accrual accounting over a three-year period. It was further explained that our operating costs are about 10% of the 3.6B budget.

5. 2011 Public Survey Employee Survey Results

The union raised concerns with the latest PSES results and asked how the Department planned on addressing the issues raised.

The DG HR advised that a working group has been established, of which he is the Champion, and there are a number of initiatives identified, including an analysis of the results, consultations with unions (to be discussed with Y. Thauvette the level of involvement) and other stakeholders, and formulating an action plan for implementation in the fall.

6. Code of Conduct Update

The DG HR advised that VAC's Code of Conduct was launched on April 2, 2012, to coincide with the launch of TB's new Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector and its revised Policy on Conflict of Interest and Post-Employment. These instruments are terms and conditions of employment for all employees; however, for those who are members of bargaining agents currently in negotiation, the new policy and the Code of Conduct will only come into effect when negotiations are complete. In the meantime, chapters 2 and 3 of the current Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service will remain in effect.

7. Social Media Effects on Employees and Values and Ethics

The union brought forward the following concerns:

- There were VAC clients that had made false statements about VAC employees on Facebook and, when brought to the attention of management, were told that there was nothing management could do.
- How would the employer address it if something slanderous was posted on VAC Facebook page?
- Some employees are being told they can't list VAC as their employer on Facebook.
- What employees are being told they can and cannot say as civil servants.

The union advised that the employer has a responsibility to protect its employees from any type of harassment and that a PSAC lawyer successfully presented this case before an adjudicator. The employee's name was on the client's Facebook page. The union agreed to provide the DG HR with a copy of the decision.

With respect to the duty of loyalty, the union advised that it would provide to the DG HR a copy of a card that was created in Québec that, on one side says what

an employee can say, and on the other side, what an employee can't say, as a civil servant.

Management advised that it did meet with employees following the Facebook incident to provide support, but that we live in a different world today and that citizens have certain rights. Anything of a criminal nature would be a matter for the law.

As well, security advisories have been sent out to all staff advising them to be careful of what they post on Facebook; however, there is no direction that employees cannot post VAC as their employer.

If something slanderous was posted on a VAC Facebook page, it would be removed, and follow-up would only occur if it was of a criminal nature.

8. CanVet

The union advised that it had received a complaint from one of its members (through a client) that CanVet is not doing a good job in the Western region and wanted to know if other regions were experiencing the same issues, if management was aware of these issues, and would management consider creating a specialized case manager position.

Management advised that, overall, the contractor is meeting its requirements. There have been some bumps in the road; however, a lot of work has already occurred to resolve those issues and that it doesn't see the service delivery model changing to include a specialized case manager position.

9. Generic Work Descriptions and SD Work Descriptions

The DG HR provided an update on the current generic work description process. VAC currently has approximately 1,200 unique work descriptions in total (including Ste. Anne's, with a goal of reducing that number to about 200). The Program Management Division has been selected as the first group to undergo this change. Information sessions for employees started in February 2012 and will continue over the next several months. As well, a comprehensive Q's& A's is slated to be posted online by June 2012. Updates will also be provided on *VAC Today* at various intervals.

The ADM SD provided an update on the CSA work description. It is currently in draft format and he agreed to provide a copy to the union following the meeting. He indicated that he did not see it going back to the working group for review.

The union advised that they are directing CSAs to do only what is described in their work description and that if they are performing duties outside of that, to submit an acting grievance.

Action Item: ADM SD to provide draft CSA, CM and CSTM work descriptions to the union.

10. Service Delivery Updates - NCCN and Service Canada Partnership

Management provided an update on the NCCN and advised that the workforce management tool has enabled them to be more proactive rather than reactive, resulting in a decrease in wait times and an increase in response rates.

The Service Canada (SC) partnership has been met with some issues and there is still a high return rate even though the wording on the IVR was changed. Staff have been asked to provide suggestions to make the wording even more clear to clients. That said, while there are still some bumps to work out, SC is providing a professional service and is working better than it was when it was initially introduced in January. The change to the IVR message has resulted in a decrease of returned calls by 50%.

The union raised the following concerns:

- 85% of returned calls at a cost of \$600,000 per year is not a service that works.
- General calls that should be answered by SC are being returned.
- The statistics show that we are paying nine agents to answer 50 calls.
- Will SC have access to our systems?
- Are there any anticipated reductions to the NCCN/TACs?
- Primary and back-up CSAs to answer calls transferred from NCCN at all times and the geographical variances.

Management advised that all concerns with respect to the management of calls through SC should be forwarded to the Team Leader for resolution. There are no plans to give SC access to our systems.

In terms of NCCN/TAC reductions, there will be, as a result of the work that we are doing and the budget, a reduction of approximately 15 FTEs in the NCCNs. We have approximately 18 FTE terms and casuals right now to manage this. The basis for this reduction is that clients will be directed to contact Medavie rather than VAC when there is an issue with a claim paid by Medavie. The reductions will be dependant upon volumes and resources will be matched to maintain the service standard that 80% of calls be answered within two minutes.

Primary and back-up CSAs were identified to address the issue we were having with repeat calls. At one point in time 52% of calls were loop calls - in other words, people weren't getting the service and had to call back. Once all employees are on the ICE system it will make things much easier because the system will show if someone is in or not. Also, larger offices will provide back-up

to the smaller offices. The idea is to move to a first call resolution with maybe two transfers at the most. The role of the CSA will be to provide general information and next steps.

11. Forward Agenda

The ADM SD advised that there are many initiatives underway in the Department and clarified that while direction and objectives are set by senior management, projects and initiatives are developed to a certain level before they are presented to senior managers. For this reason, senior managers don't always know the fine details of every initiative, nor should they.

12. Other Items

The union commented that the CF Awareness presentation in the Atrium was a very good demonstration.

The union asked when the HRT unit would be going to Medavie and were advised that it would likely occur early fall and that people would be notified within the next week to ten days. Management also advised that the CCMC and centralized mail in Kirkland Lake would be extended.

13. Next Meeting

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for September 19, 2012.

The Deputy Minister, on behalf of the entire management team, took this opportunity to thank Magali Picard for her work on this committee and wished her well in her new position with PSAC.