

OVERVIEW OF SURVIVING SPOUSE VIRTUAL CHAPTER MEETING

21 MAY 2024

The guest speaker was Dr. John W. Ellis MD, world renowned physician and a leading authority on the medical and legal aspects of Federal Work Comp and VA disability. Dr. Ellis was an Army Flight Surgeon in Vietnam and specializes in VA disability claims. He discussed what a NEXUS letter is and some of the challenges in applying for compensation claims such as DIC.

<https://ellisclinic.com/va.html> - Website offers many resources including handouts and webinars. Several members attending the virtual meeting mentioned the website contained many helpful resources.

The sooner a claim is filed, the better. If your spouse filed a claim in the past and was denied benefits, that doesn't mean you aren't entitled to benefits after your spouse's death. The passage of the PACT Act in 2022 added more presumptive diagnoses to the list of those that make veterans/surviving spouses eligible for disability benefits. More information is available at: <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>. You don't want to file a new claim but update the initial claim. If your updated claim is approved, the benefits are backdated to the date of the initial claim!

Dr Ellis stated that many Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) are not as helpful as they should be when helping you enter a claim. They may take a short cut entering a new claim as it is easier than updating a previous claim. Dr Ellis stated he helps many people that were denied claims in the past. He does charge a fee and mentioned \$500. Dr Ellis noted that his clinic is located in Oklahoma City but that he could still help with your claim. The office phone number is 405-917-5336.

Dr Ellis discussed the NEXUS letter and the errors made by health care providers. Per his website: "A nexus report is a medical causation report where your physician provides the medical explanation of how your injuries or conditions are service connected. Unfortunately for our Vets, we have observed that many VA physicians, Physician Assistants and Nurse Assistants are not knowledgeable that the VA Disability law is supposed to be fair to vets." Dr Ellis is a professor of Legal Medicine and said he tries to educate physicians throughout the U.S. since legal medicine is not taught in medical schools. He also discussed his expertise in testifying in court as needed.

Additional information from MAJ Ferki: Veterans Service Officers (VSO) receive special training to be able to initiate and update disability claims. Several of the veteran service organizations that have VSOs are DAV, American Legion, and Fleet Reserve Association. They do not charge for their services.

Submitted by Sherry Ferki, MAJ, USA (Ret)
VCOC Surviving Spouse Liaison