

## Information for chiropractors interested in Veterans Health Administration positions

The Veterans Health Administration (VA) administers a network of 21 geographic regions called Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs).

<http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isFlash=1>

Public Law 107-135, the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001, required VA to provide chiropractic care to all Veterans. This was required to be on-site at a minimum of one facility in each VISN, and by using private DCs in other regions. In June 2004 openings at an initial 26 sites were announced, and by late 2004 the first chiropractic clinics were established.

As of January 2012 there are 45 VA facilities providing chiropractic care: each of the 21 VISNs has at least one site, and some VISNs have multiple sites. This represents an expansion of over 73% since the program's inception. It appears to be consistent with the natural expansion of any new clinical service added to a large healthcare system, and suggests successful program implementation.

This expansion has occurred without VA receiving any additional legislative requirement to do so. Although over the past few years both the Senate and the House have passed *bills* requiring further VA chiropractic program expansion, none of these efforts have moved on to become *law*.

VA continues to monitor chiropractic use and adds resources accordingly to improve patient care. Decisions on adding new chiropractic clinics are currently made at the facility level. Since 2007 VA has added approximately 3 new sites per year. There is no central office coordination of such decisions. There is no central office contact to which interested parties may submit applications or CVs.

A given facility that wishes to start a chiropractic clinic may bring on a DC as a staff appointment (employee) or contractor, full or part-time. This decision is made at the facility level based on local needs and resources. Facilities wishing to hire DCs may solicit applicants through various means, most commonly by posting openings on the VA Careers website:

<http://www.vacareers.va.gov/job-search/index.asp>

Although opportunities continue to emerge, there is no standing process for a chiropractor to plan for and obtain a VA position. DCs interested in such future positions are advised to consider this as requiring an intersection of two processes:

### **1. An opportunity to open up at a VA facility**

- This will happen as a result of decisions made inside VA. It is extremely unlikely that an individual DC could contact a VA facility and convince that facility to start a chiropractic clinic. Many have tried this and so far none have been successful.
- It is not recommended that you cold-call a given VA facility or attempt to send a CV when no job is posted. This makes one appear naive and does not lead to good results.
- It is not recommended that you cold-call or attempt to send a CV to VA Central Office. This makes one appear naive and does not lead to good results.

### **2. Developing your professional competencies so that you are an attractive candidate when a position opens**

- This aspect is in your control. You can consider this preparation for future opportunity. Following are attributes that many would look for when hiring a DC to work in a hospital setting.
  - Practice experience in a hospital or another integrated setting; a track record of working with other providers

- Training experience in a hospital, which can also include attending CME presentations at medical facilities.
- Commitment to professional growth as seen by attending high quality conferences such as: Association of Chiropractic Colleges-Research Agenda Conference (ACC-RAC), American Public Health Association (APHA), North American Spine Society (NASS), etc.
- Firm grasp of evidence-based medicine and patient-centered care
- Peer-reviewed publications in indexed journals.
- Academic experience
- Exceptional clinical skills
- Professional appearance/demeanor
- Excellent communication skills (written, spoken, PowerPoint, etc)

It is difficult (and indeed very rare) for a DC to obtain experience in all of those areas. However these are the types of features that make one stand out as an applicant, and also make one best suited to be successful within a medical system.

There appears to be strong interest in VA positions among the chiropractic profession, and we have seen that new job openings are extremely competitive. It would be very unlikely for a new graduate to be chosen for a position at a facility that is starting a new chiropractic clinic (that is, a facility with no other chiropractors on board). A DC with an established track record would likely be better suited for such a situation. However a new graduate may be suited for a position at an existing chiropractic clinic that is expanding, where he/she would be part of an established department.