



09/12/2017

Association of VA Audiologists

4th Quarter

Special points of interest:

- VACO
- FAC
- GRC AAA
- GRC ASHA
- AVAA

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Who's on first.... A helpful guide to understanding the various roles

As VA Audiologists we are well aware of the numerous acronyms we are encounter on a daily basis; VACO, FAC, AVAA, GRC to name just a few. Each acronym represents an important piece of the VA Audiology puzzle and it is very easy to misinterpret the role that each one plays. This issue of LISTEN UP is dedicated to helping understand what each one is and how it fits into VA Audiology.



VA Central Office AKA VACO - The Program Office

Audiology and Speech Pathology Program Office is part of the Office of Rehabilitation & Prosthetics. This office also includes the national program offices for Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Recreation & Creative Arts Theraoy, Chiropractic Medicine, Prosthetics & Sensory Aids; and Special Programs for Polytrauma/Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) System of Care, Amputation System of Care, and the Blind Rehabilitation Care Continuum.

Rehabilitation & Prosthetics is part of the Office of Patient Care Services headed by the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services, which in turn is part of the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services. These services fall under the purview of the Under Secretary for Health.

Program Office Leadership:

-Deputy Chief Patient Care Services Officer for Rehabilitation and Prosthetics Services: Dr. Lucille Beck

-Deputy Chief Consultant, Rehabilitation and Prosthetics: Dr. David Chandler

-National Director, Audiology & Speech Pathology Service: Dr. Rachel McArdle

-ASPS Program Office Staff:

-Dr. Chad Gladden, Audiology Telehealth Coordinator

-Nan Musson, Speech Pathology Discipline Lead

-Dr. Judy Schafer, Rehab Planning Specialist

-Dr. Lynn Henselman, Deputy Director, HCE



Program Office Continued...

The roles of the program office:

-Policy: ensure all VHA audiology and speech staff members are aware of the information provided in VHA Handbook 1170.02: Audiology and Speech Service for compliance

-Guidance: ex. Productivity Standards, Staffing Models, Problem solve with field staff, coding

-Support: answer questions from field staff; gather information from other offices

-Strategic Direction: Looking ahead to align our programs in the best position for growth and improvement; keeping up with the private sector and other professional organizations; identifying necessary tools, programs, resources to provide the highest level of quality, evidence based care.

How to contact the program office: vhaaspsprogramoffice@va.gov

The Field Advisory Council AKA The FAC

The Audiology and Speech Pathology FAC is a group of field-based clinical leaders in Audiology and Speech Pathology who advise the National Director of ASP in areas of strategic planning, national objectives and professional trends relevant to Audiology and Speech Pathology services within VHA. Additionally, the FAC provides guidance to the field and shapes VHA policy and procedures on matters relevant to audiology and speech pathology.

A primary charge of the FAC is to ensure close collaboration between the National Program Office and Audiology and Speech Pathology providers. As this bridge between VACO and providers, the FAC members are asked to advise the Program Office with information and feedback they receive from you and vice versa. Knowing who the FAC members are and how to contact them is an important piece in maintaining good communication.

FAC members:

Chair: Christine Matthews, Pittsburgh

Audiology Members:

Nancy Duran, Miami

Stacey Matson, Phoenix

Pam Mishler, Dayton

Colleen Noe, Mountain Home

Speech Pathology Members:

Don MacLennan, Minneapolis

Cindy Ochipa, Tampa

Kathy Walker, Denver

The Government Relations Committee AKA The GRC —AAA

The American Academy of Audiology's Government Relations Committee (GRC) works to advocate for the profession of audiology on Capitol Hill and provides government relations leadership on legislative and regulatory public policies impacting hearing health care. A representative from the AVAA serves as a liaison to the GRC to bring the VA perspective to policy discussions. Our current liaison is R. Hope Gillison, AVAA President.

Most recently, the AVAA has partnered with the GRC, and other audiology stakeholders, to address recent comments made David Shulkin, MD, Secretary of Veterans Affairs which suggested the need to eliminate "routine care" from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to better address access to care for wounded Veterans. Secretary Shulkin listed audiology services, specifically hearing aids, as falling under the category of "routine." These comments were of great concern to many audiologists and Veterans who understand the immense value and tremendous need to provide high quality audiologic care within the VA. The GRC initiated a letter writing campaign to Congress that has generated hundreds of letters thus far. The GRC and Academy staff has also been actively meeting with members of both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee in Congress to further address these comments. We would encourage everyone to [take action today](#) to address this issue!

The GRC—ASHA

ASHA has 21 professionals working within the Government Relations and Public Policy Cluster. The Cluster consists of 4 teams – Administration and Communication, State Advocacy, Health Care Economics Advocacy and Federal and Political Advocacy. ASHA's public policy agenda <http://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/2017-Public-Policy-Agenda.pdf> is developed through input from the membership and is approved by ASHA's Board of Directors. Our current liaison is R. Hope Gillison, AVAA President.

ASHA has taken an active role in advocacy efforts related to Veterans Affairs issues. Last session of Congress ASHA – in collaboration with the American Academy of Audiology and the Academy of Doctors of Audiology – worked to contain the International Hearing Society's "Fit to Serve" legislation. The original legislation would have recognized hearing aid dispensers to work independently within the VA. Advocacy efforts led to legislative language that require hearing aid specialists to work under the direction of an audiologist and only for the purposes of dispensing hearing aids.

Recently ASHA was alerted by a member that David Shulkin, MD, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, has suggested the need to eliminate routine care from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) in order to better address access to care for wounded veterans. Secretary Shulkin listed audiology services, specifically services for hearing aids, as falling under the category of "routine" health care. As a result, ASHA requested its members to take action and let Congress know the importance of VA Audiologists. ASHA will continue to monitor this issue and work collaboratively with AAA to address this issue.

<http://takeaction.asha.org/app/write-a-letter?10&engagementId=353113>

ADA's Advocacy Public Policy committee AKA APCC-ADA

The Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA) is dedicated to best clinical and business practices in the delivery of audiologic care. ADA's Advocacy Public Policy committee concentrates efforts on the advancement of audiology as a clinical doctoring profession, and the recognition of audiologists as autonomous practitioners, recognized as an entry point for hearing and balance health care. A representative from AVAA serves as a liaison to that committee to bring VA perspective to policy discussions. Our current liaison is Christine Ulinski, AVAA President-Elect.

ADA worked extensively on containing International Hearing Society's "Fit to Serve" legislation in collaboration with ASHA and AAA. The original legislation would have recognized hearing aid dispensers to work independently within the VA. Advocacy efforts led to legislative language that requires hearing aid specialists to work under the direction of an audiologist and only for the purposes of dispensing hearing aids. ADA is committed to collaborating with allied organizations to achieve mutual public policy objectives, including those related to Veterans Affairs issues.

The Association of VA Audiologists AKA AVAA

AVAA is an employee organization started in 2001 to address the profession needs of VA Audiologist's. AVAA does not represent the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Central Office (VACO), or the Department of Defense. AVAA's primary focus has been educational in nature. In collaboration with the Military Association of Audiologists (MAA), AVAA works to put on the annual JDVAC conference. AVAA does not make or influence policy for the VA (hiring directives, pay scales, etc); those are things that are done by VACO. AVAA cannot directly lobby VACO.

AVAA constantly monitors legislative issues and has responded multiple times to issues that impact VA audiologists (Fit to Serve, Veterans Safety and Mobility Act, Department of Labor standards for Hearing Instrument Specialists, and the recent comments by Secretary Shulkin regarding VA Audiology). However, AVAA is not allowed to discuss legislative issues over VA email as it would be in violation of the Hatch Act.

AVAA is allowed to send a VA email directing employees to the AVAA website for updates; the website is where we can make statements regarding legislative issues and encourage action. We are not allowed to discuss legislative issues on VA email or we risk losing the ability to discuss educational events like JDVAC on VA email. AVAA can send emails that directly discuss legislative or action items over the AVAA list,. We encourage you to sign up for AVAA email updates; Please remember you must use your personal email addresses in order to be added to the list.

AVAA is not allowed to formally lobby or hire lobbyists (unlike AAA, ADA, ASHA), although individual AVAA members can contact their representatives about issues. AVAA does not have the resources necessary to maintain the type of legislative action alert databases available on AAA, ADA, and ASHA website. We have close and active relationships with our sister organizations and they regularly allow us to use their websites to generate action alerts of particular interest to audiologists within the VA.

The board of AVAA is made up of the president, past president, president-elect, secretary, treasurer, and member at large. The member at large position is a one year term; the other positions are three year terms. AVAA holds yearly elections to fill the member at large and president elect positions. The secretary and treasurer positions are up for election every three years. These two positions were most recently filled in 2017 which means they will be open for reelection in 2020. The call for nominations typically occurs in the fall.

The board of AVAA also serves on the board for the Joint Defense Veteran's Audiology Association (JDVAA). This board is comprised of both the AVAA board and the Military Audiology Association (MAA) members. JDVAA meets at least once a quarter. The purpose of the board is to manage and oversee JDVAC and the JDVAC committee.

Tribute to Robert Pluta by Angela Pond, AuD, LtCol, USAF (ret)

People cross our paths and enter and exit our lives, most without leaving a significant impression. Rob Pluta didn't fit into that category. Maj (USAF, Ret) Robert Pluta left an impression on people across the military, the VA, and in the communities where he lived, yet many had no idea of his impact. He generally operated behind the scenes. He left an impact on me personally, as he did for so many others who were fortunate enough to know him.

It is hard to imagine now, but in the mid-90s, sharing, saving, and posting digital information was in its infancy. Rob was an early adopter of IT, and he really had a knack and an interest in computers and all that they can offer. For those involved with Military Audiology Association, I challenge you to remember a time that Rob (until his retirement in 2009) wasn't our "webmaster", spending hours of his free time updating, archiving, modernizing, and streamlining our MAA website. He took on the task willingly, and kept it for at least 18 years, by my recollection. Rob was a Geek before we knew what a Geek was and we loved him for it! As one looks around the current MAA website, it is possible to find archives that date to 1996 showing early meeting summaries from the Air Force Audiology Association, then later merged with Military Audiology Association, then finally linked to Association of VA Audiologists and JDVAC. Rob worked with the MAA Board at the time of the creation of the Association of VA Audiologists and helped the organizations coalesce in the internet world. Rob meticulously archived our history online. I don't recall Rob ever serving in an elected capacity in any of these organizations as that wasn't his style...I believe he shunned the spotlight and didn't relish public speaking. However, he used his talents where they were most needed, keeping all of us, our leadership, and the American public informed on the proceedings of the MAA and JDVAC.

I never had the opportunity to work with Rob on a daily basis in the clinic. Others have commented on his "willingness to take another chart at the end of a long day" and that he was a "kind and great audiologist". He spent several years specializing in hearing conservation while assigned to Brooks AFB in San Antonio as the Director of the USAF Hearing Conservation Data Registry, and again at Tinker, AFB in Oklahoma City where he provided oversight for 30,000 civilian employees.

Rob had many interests in addition to techy gadgets, chiefly, all things music. Prior to earning his Master's Degree in Audiology, he played clarinet in the USAF Band of the Reserve at Warner Robins, GA. He said he realized he couldn't easily support a family in that capacity, so returned to school, and ultimately was accepted as an officer in the USAF. His love for music never left him. He was involved with community chorale groups both in San Antonio, Oklahoma City, and Corpus Christi. He listened to all types of music, and I never knew what he'd recommend - a classical piece or some undiscovered indie performer. His tastes were wide-ranging. His Facebook posts document his varied interests, and allowed his friends to enjoy the musical ride along with him.

Rob had two sons, one with special needs. I adopted a child with special needs and perhaps that was the basis of our deep friendship, at least at the beginning. I was struck, year after year, when Rob and I saw each other at MASC (later JDVAC) how he would always remember my daughter's name and ask me to tell him how she was doing, things difficult to discuss over email. His care, concern, and empathy were evident and much appreciated in a world where so many ask "how are you?" but don't wait for the answer. Rob truly cared.

We retired within a month of each other, and both went on to work for the VA, me in Portland and him in Corpus Christi. Rob worked in a solo clinic and provided outstanding clinical services to countless veterans in South Texas. We shared stories about "life after AF retirement" but our regular meetings at JDVAC fell away. Though I hadn't seen him in several years, we had planned to coordinate attendance at a meeting or training in the future. We shared texts and messages just a few weeks before his death, and he was very excited to move to a new position, still serving veterans but in a different capacity.

Rob loved the outdoors. Many photos he shared were of his family together, outdoors. He loved hiking, and had spent many days hiking and camping at Big Bend National Park in TX. Rob was originally from NJ but adopted TX as his new home. Another friend, LtCol Craig Jordan recalls Rob enjoyed riding in the "Hotter'NHell Hundred" multiple times, where the motto is "if you are going to ride a hundred, it might as well be "Hotter'NHell!".

2017/2018 AVAA Board

President: R. Hope Gillison
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President Elect: Christine Ulinski
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COMMUNICATION
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K V C O M M U N I C A T I O N S
P E V O A X W V T V A Z A X B A
Q R C Z V E R C L O H C H M B U
V T A F A S A O Q A F O D A A D
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Rob Pluta Tribute continued...

Rob will be missed by so many people. His Air Force audiology colleagues have taken his death very hard. His quirky sense of humor, his smile, his kindness, his love of music, his deep love for his family and his fellow man, his dedication to audiology and the patients we serve were just parts of the man. Even in death, I believe he is serving others. The horrible news of his and his son's death was picked up by national news, The Weather Channel, major newspapers in Dallas and the southwest, USA Today, as well as local papers in TX and NM have reported on the heat danger. Their deaths educated and warned others. Their deaths serve as a stark reminder to how quickly things can go bad due to weather, how tenuous life is, and how quickly our lives can be changed forever.

"Our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them." George Eliot

Robert Pluta will live on in countless hearts and minds across the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Dept of Veterans Affairs.

To read more tributes to Major Pluta from his former colleagues, please visit militaryaudiology.org

Special thank you to Dr. Rachel McArdle, Dr. Nancy Duran, Kate Thomas, Ingrida Lusic, and Stephanie Czuhajewski for providing information regarding VACO, FAC, GRC-AAA, GRC-ASHA, and APPC-ADA

Thank you to Dr. Nancy Duran and Dr. Rose White for your AVAA Board Service. Your knowledge, participation and dedication of your time has been invaluable and you will be missed.