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February Board Meeting is a **Zoom** - February 12th 10:30 AM

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Mission Statement

Paralyzed Veterans of America Central Florida, is a congressionally chartered veteran’s service organization that provides a platform of advocacy, education and research, communication, adaptive sports and recreation for veterans paralyzed as a result of spinal cord injury or dysfunction, in an effort to afford them with the highest quality of healthcare and life experiences.



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Chapter President

Steve Kirk

Spinal Cord Injury or Disorder, Annual Evaluations

An SCI/D Annual Evaluation covers much more than a standard checkup. It provides a comprehensive SCI/D-related evaluation and helps you make plans for staying healthy in the future. Healthy living is important for everyone. Living with a spinal cord injury or disorder could change the strategies you use to stay healthy.

All Veterans with a spinal cord injury or disorder (SCI/D) should have an SCI/D Annual Evaluation at their VA SCI/D Center. The SCI/D Annual Evaluation is important because it helps you maintain a healthy lifestyle and maximizes your independence. It is conducted by multidisciplinary teams (Doctors, Nurses, Therapists, Psychologists, Social workers, Pharmacists). Dieticians focusing on long-term health, independence, and preventing complications through detailed exams, equipment checks, and personalized health planning, with options for in-person or telehealth visits to ensure ongoing care, even if remote. If you do not live near an SCI/D Center, your local SCI/D team can help make a referral to a Center.

What is covered in an SCI/D Annual Evaluation?

SCI/D Annual Evaluations include:

A Comprehensive medical and physical examination, including a thorough neurological exam, vaccinations, blood pressure monitoring, blood glucose monitoring, lipid monitoring, and lab and diagnostic tests.

Health maintenance and disease prevention.

Example: 1. UTI symptoms (Urinary Tract Infections) increased spasticity, new or worse incontinence/leakage, autonomic dysreflexia (if injury is T6 or above), fever, malaise, fatigue, cloudy/foul-smelling urine, or pain/discomfort in the bladder/kidney area.

Increased muscle spasms (spasticity) in legs, abdomen, or bladder.

Autonomic Dysreflexia (AD): A dangerous rise in blood pressure with symptoms like pounding headache, sweating, flushed skin, or slowed heart rate (for injuries at T6 or above).

Pain/Discomfort: Lower back pain (if sensation present), suprapubic (bladder area) pain, or generalized malaise/lethargy.

Urine Appearance/Smell:

Cloudy or dark urine.

Urine with mucus or sediment.

Strong or foul-smelling urine.

Systemic Symptoms (More Common in General Population, but Still Relevant):

Fever (usually 100°F/38°C or higher).

Chills.

Feeling tired or sluggish.

Nausea or headache.

2. Neurogenic Bowel:

Constipation, fecal incontinence (accidents), abdominal pain/bloating, difficulty emptying the bowels (dyschezia), loss of sensation when full, and spasticity causing involuntary spasms.

Common Symptoms:

Constipation: Difficulty passing stools, hard stools, or infrequent bowel movements.

Fecal Incontinence: Unintended leakage of stool due to sphincter issues.

Loss of Sensation: Inability to feel when the bowel is full or needs emptying.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

Abdominal Discomfort: Bloating, pain, or cramping.

Dyschezia: Painful or difficult bowel movements.

Spasticity: Tightness in anal sphincter muscles (upper motor neuron injury) causing incomplete emptying.

Tenesmus: Feeling like you need to pass stool but can't.

Associated Issues:

Autonomic Dysreflexia (AD): In severe cases (T6 and above), bowel issues can trigger sudden high blood pressure, headaches, sweating, and flushing.

Psychological Impact: Depression, anxiety, and fear of accidents affecting social participation.

3: Pressure ulcers (bedsores) are a major risk for spinal cord injury (SCI) patients due to immobility, sensory loss, and poor circulation, causing tissue death from prolonged pressure on bony areas like hips, tailbone, heels, and elbows, which can severely impact recovery, increase costs, and lead to serious complications like infection, requiring diligent daily pressure relief, proper seating/bedding, and meticulous skin care to prevent.

Why are SCI patients at risk from Pressure Ulcers (bedsores)?

Why SCI Patients Are at Risk?

Immobility & Sensation Loss: Paralysis prevents shifting weight, and lack of feeling means pain isn't felt to signal the need to move.

Reduced Blood Flow: Pressure restricts blood to the skin and tissue, especially over bony areas.

Tissue Changes: Muscle atrophy and poor circulation reduce tissue tolerance to pressure.

Shearing Forces: Friction and sliding (e.g., during transfers, slouching) can tear skin and vessels.

Common Pressure Points

Sitting: Sitting bones (ischial tuberosities), tailbone, shoulder blades, back of knees, feet.

Lying: Heels, tailbone, elbows, shoulder blades, head, ankles, hips, ears.

Consequences & Impact

Worse Recovery: Can significantly hinder neurological and functional recovery.

Health Complications: Trigger autonomic dysreflexia (dangerous blood pressure spike), infection, prolonged hospitalization, and depression.

High Costs: Significant medical and financial burden.

Prevention is Key (Daily Routine)

Repositioning: Relieve pressure every 15-30 mins when sitting, every 2 hours when lying.

Specialized Equipment: Use pressure-reducing cushions and mattresses.

Skin Checks: Inspect skin daily for redness or breakdown.

Moisture Control: Keep skin clean and dry.

Proper Transfers: Minimize friction and shear.

Management if a Sore Develops

Total Pressure Relief: Keep all pressure off the area.

Wound Care: Follow specific instructions for cleaning and dressings.

Monitor: Watch for signs of infection (redness, swelling, odor) and worsening.

Medical Team: Work with healthcare providers for a comprehensive plan.

The above-mentioned symptoms can significantly impact on daily life, but a tailored bowel management program, diet, fluids, and sometimes medication can help achieve more predictable and regular bowel movements, improving overall health and quality of life.

Going through a good physical check-up prosthetic equipment can be issued to the patient if the physical condition changes.

If you need any further information about the Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) services, you can contact your local PVA National Service Officer.

Steve Kirk

Executive Director

John DeMauro



February is the month where we are encouraged to reach out to the people we love and share our feelings with them. Valentine's Day is set aside for that very reason. Remember when we were children, we would give little Valentine's cards to our friends or someone we really liked. Remember the little heart shaped candies with messages written on them that we would share (but mostly eat ourselves). Every February 14, across the United States and in many places around the world, loved ones exchange candy, flowers and gifts, all in the name of St. Valentine. But who is this mysterious saint, and where did our present-day traditions come from? The history of Valentine's Day—and the story of its patron saint—is shrouded in mystery. We do know that February has long been celebrated as a month of romance, and that St. Valentine's Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. But who was Saint Valentine, and how did he become associated with this ancient rite? The legends are numerous. The most commonly accepted story begins in Rome, during the third century, at a time when persecution of Christians was running rampant. Emperor Claudius II declared young men could not marry because single men made better soldiers. A priest named Valentine thought this was unfair and married young lovers in secret. This did not go unnoticed by Claudius, who ordered the priest to be imprisoned and executed. While in prison, Valentine helped his jailer's daughter with her sickness. Before his execution, he sent her a note signed "From your Valentine," an expression still in use today. It is said his sentence was carried out on February 14, 270 AD. Father Valentine, the friend of sweethearts, became a martyr to love and the sanctity of marriage. Another legend is that Valentine, whose ministry was to help Christians escape persecution, was killed for helping Christians escape from Roman prisons. To "remind them of God's love and to encourage them to remain faithful Christians," Saint Valentine is said to have cut hearts from parchment, giving them to soldiers and persecuted Christians, a possible origin of the widespread use of hearts on Saint Valentine's Day.

What we do know for certain is that people across the country will be celebrating on February 14th the love they share with others. Scripture says that Jesus gave a command to "love one another as I have loved you". The Beatles sang "All You Need is Love". Love is the catalyst to all good in humanity. When we express love through our words or our actions, we bring peace and harmony. When we each make love the defining characteristic of ourselves, we communicate to everyone around us that we care and we seek positive fellowship with one another. February reminds us that we need each other and when we recognize that we live life with liberty. Or nation's mandate is Liberty and Justice for All! Happy February!

John DeMauro

Post-Acute Programs for Catastrophic Injuries

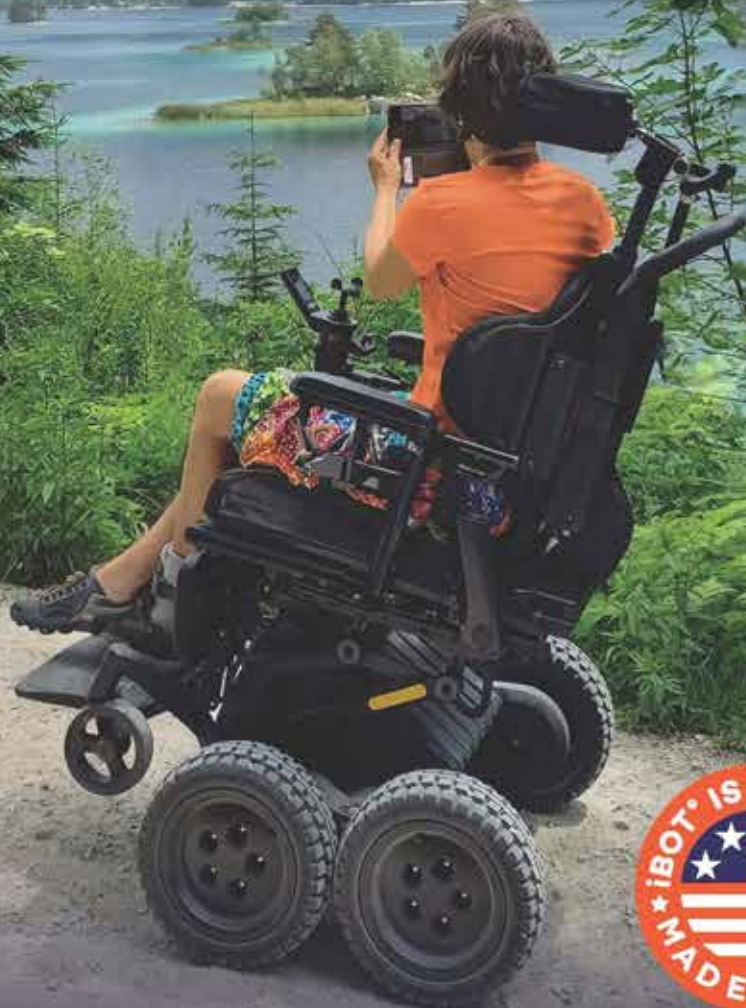
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Government Relations

Tim Wolfe

Key Takeaways:

- PVA's 2026 priorities will be announced next week, focusing on VA specialized healthcare, long-term services, financial security, and equality for catastrophically disabled veterans.
- PVA will not participate in the Independent Budget this year due to its limited influence on policy.
- The Benefits Bill (H.R. 6047) will be marked up next week, maintaining the SMC rate increase, though the DIC rate might be reduced.
- Several webinars are planned, including the President's Testimony and the ABA webinar, plus new "happy hour" Q&A sessions.
- The VA announced a VHA reorganization plan, with impacts on SCI care still unclear.

Discussed Topics:

- Heather Ansley detailed PVA's 2026 priorities, including strengthening VA healthcare, maximizing long-term supports, and ensuring equal opportunities for disabled veterans.
- Legislative updates highlighted the Benefits Bill markup and recent veteran-related laws.
- Lisa Elijah introduced new resources and upcoming events, like the GVR chapter toolkit and "happy hour" sessions.
- Anthonya James discussed a proposed rule from the HHS Office of Civil Rights and its implications for disability protections.

Challenges:

- Ongoing transportation accessibility issues and potential budget reallocations.
- Limited legislative time in 2026 due to midterm elections.
- Uncertainty around the VA reorganization's impact on specialized care.

Action Items:

- All chapters should review the 2026 priorities when released.
- Report any local VA facility realignments that could affect care.

Tim Wolfe

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Roger D. Sack

VP/Sports Director

How Following basic Fundamentals and Focus will help you succeed in your sport.

Yes, **mastering fundamentals builds** the essential base for long-term athletic success, while **focused training**—using techniques like visualization, cue words, and routines—channels attention to execute those skills effectively, preventing distraction and improving performance in your sport. Elite athletes combine solid basics with sharp mental focus, using processes to achieve peak performance.

Why Fundamentals & Focus Matter

- **Fundamentals are the bedrock:** Basic skills (dribbling, shooting, balance, etc.) are the foundation for advanced techniques, leading to consistent, elite performance, not just flashy plays.
- **Focus directs effort:** Focus helps you concentrate on relevant cues (e.g., “quick feet,” “watch the ball”) during practice and competition, making your physical skills more effective.

How to Improve Focus During Training

1. **Set Clear Goals:** Define specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals for each session.
2. **Use Cue Words:** Simple words like “relax,” “breathe,” or “attack” bring your attention back to the present moment.
3. **Create Routines:** Develop pre-performance rituals (music, stretching, specific warm-ups) to channel your mind and block distractions.
4. **Visualize Success:** Mentally rehearse perfect execution of skills and plays to train your brain.
5. **Practice Mindfulness:** Deep, controlled breathing calms nerves and refocuses you.
6. **Identify Your Focus:** Know what to focus on (e.g., your body position, the opponent’s hips) and when, using triggers to shift attention appropriately.

By consistently applying these strategies, you train your mind to stay on task, ensuring your physical training translates directly into improved results on game day.

Roger Sack





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A WORD FROM OUR MEMBERS

Attention PVA Members:

I have been experiencing safety issues with installed Sure Grip- Featherlight, ELECTRONIC HAND CONTROLS in my 2020 Chevrolet Suburban. My hand controls have caused my vehicle to abruptly go into SAFE MODE while driving and an isolated incident where right after the initial hand control installation the vehicle battery exploded. The hand controls are causing my vehicle to significantly slow down while driving (from highway speed to no more than 25 miles an hour abruptly, and with no warning) which is a huge safety concern. I have been informed that Chevrolet, Toyota, and several other brands are experiencing these same safety issues. The manufacturer of the hand controls provided me with a new set but the same issues occurred within a year after the second installation. I will be getting a third iteration of the same hand controls installed later this month and have been assured that these issues have been resolved. I am reaching out to make the membership aware, and also would like to know if this is happening to anyone else. If it is please contact Joanne at the PVA Central FL office so that this issue can be tracked and potentially reported to the VA for further investigation.

Thank you,

Amy Patterson, National Director
PVA Central FL 407 328 7041

Good Afternoon,

I went to Gatorland a couple of weeks ago, I would like to share a bit about my experience with the chapter:

Gatorland has an accessible zip line experience! This attraction is accessible to people with mobility challenges or other disabilities. The ride, which is wheelchair accessible, allows participants to travel 350 feet down a zip line, soaring over the park and a lake of giant alligators. Gatorland worked closely with the FDOA, which provided consultation on the design and construction of the Gator Gauntlet. Admission to the park is free for active and retired military.

I visited Gatorland and was pleased with the overall accessibility and the ease of navigating through the park in my wheelchair. All levels of disability will be able to comfortably enjoy the park. Since being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis I have to sometimes miss out on certain experiences due to my limited mobility. Although I am not wheelchair bound, I still have trouble walking on uneven surfaces, walking up or down inclines, and climbing more than a few stairs. When I realized Gatorland has a way for me to join my friends to experience ziplining over a lake of alligators I was super excited! The Gator Gauntlet was pretty cool, it cost me \$20. They have a wheelchair you transfer into where they then get you all strapped into a harness for the zipline. A staff member will push you up the ramp to the top to be clipped in. The harness feels very secure and sturdy. Once I was all clipped in and checked over twice I was ready to take off. The ride was awesome and I would definitely do it again. The views from the top were great as well. I definitely would not have been able to climb several flights of stairs to reach the top.

All of the staff members were very nice and answered all of my questions. If you would like to use your own wheelchair just speak to the staff and they will do their best to accommodate you. It was such a cool experience being able to participate with my friend on a zipline, this is an activity that I thought I would not be able to participate in. It was a fun experience, I recommend anyone interested in zip lining to contact Gatorland and check it out.

Sharona Young

Meanwhile in Tampa ... Boccia Ball Tournament



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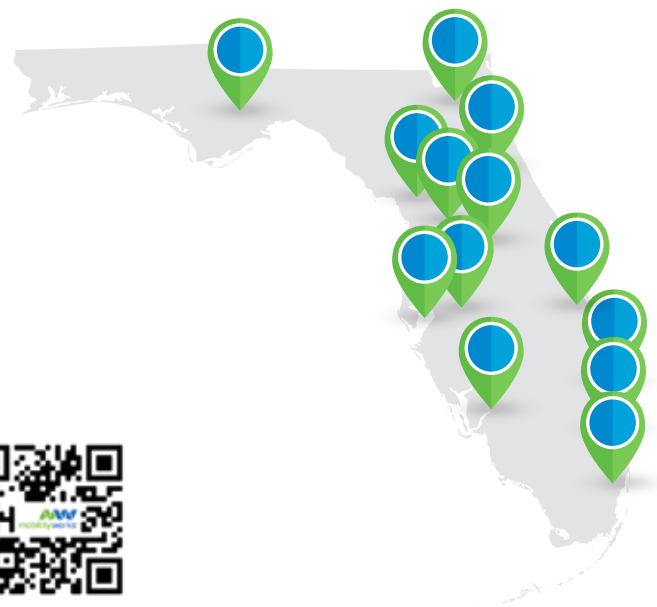


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