

All State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Call Transcript

Thank you and good afternoon everybody. Thank you for joining our all VR Quarterly Call. First one in 2020. And I meant to say good afternoon and good morning to the folks that are on the West Coast. Thanks for joining us. This is a new time for us and we are hopeful that this new time can accommodate everyone's schedule. A couple of things I would like to open up with. Starting and — as you may have seen, the email that we sent out. A couple of weeks ago, I believe. Janelle Bratcher who was our VR team manager has left the agency. She has taken a new position external to government. In her place while we pursue a replacement, Patrice McLean, who is my deputy director, has graciously volunteered to fill in on the VR team. In addition, we are tapping into our expertise in-house with Regina Bowden, who will also provide assistance and policy advice and guidance. So, we are fortunate to have Regina's help and also to have Patrice step over and fill that spot while we are finding a replacement.

Additional notes— in terms of personnel — many of you are familiar with Nate Arnold. Nate also retired at the beginning of the new year. We wish him all the best. So, we are, you know, as a component — we are losing some of our expertise, but we will continue to move forward and tap into the wonderful skill set that we have within the VR team. We have some great folks who can fill those losses and keep us moving forward as we go into 2020. We want to hit 2020 with a full head of steam and continue to serve as many beneficiaries as we can. That's all I have, by means of announcement. With that said, I will go ahead and turn it over to Patrice.

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Patrice McLean. I have been on this call before, but it has been some time before I presented anything. I definitely have operated in this capacity. I am happy to join our VR team, our dream team. And also to work with each of you as we continue to, you know, fulfill our mission to the individuals we serve. Just to give you a little bit of background about myself, I have been with this agency 9.5 years. I started in the Office of Operations, processing work, continuing disability reviews. And some might be familiar with wages and earnings and the effects they may have on our operation. I also spent some time working in the office of Learning Operations. I have been here in the Office of Employment, at least in the office of Beneficiary Operations and Support prior to the Office of Employment Support since 2015. And again, like I said, I am very, very happy to be here and I look forward to working with each of you in a greater capacity.

I do have a few updates that I would like to start out with. I know that I have worked very closely with Janelle and she has kept me apprised of what a lot of what is going on in the VR world. We will miss her dearly. I know one of the things she has previously reported on in these calls is about our backlog. Our current backlog is 10,454 cases. Our team is working as much as they can and as hard as they can to keep processing work. But, we are getting a lot more than we can process so our backlog at times does increase. We are currently processing applications 150 days old. That is a high for us. So, we understand that in the past we had VRs to only reach out to the help desk if you had a case that was at least 90 days old. As we are at 150 days, we will ask that you not reach out from the status of the case to the VR desk until your case is at least 150 days old because our answer will be the same. We are not at the point where we are processing those cases just yet. We understand that you are awaiting reimbursement for the individuals who you are serving. And we also hope that you will bear with us as we are doing our very, very best to get these cases out as early as possible. So, the less time we can spend responding to emails and checking statuses for you, the more time we can spend processing cases. Please continue to bear with us.

In terms of a policy update, effective February 1, 2020, we are only going to accept and make a decision on one reconsideration request. Typically, in the past, we have received more than one reconsideration request and the decisions are the same over and over and over again. In an effort to slow down the number of cases that we were receiving, especially those that are going to yield the same decision over and over again, we are changing our policy to only accept decision one reconsideration request per claim. Again, please do not submit more than one reconsideration request per claim. If you have already received a decision on a reconsideration claim, that will be the final decision. Do not resubmit that case again in an effort to see if the decision will change. Of course, that brings our reconsideration process closer into alignment with other agencies, and other decisions that are made throughout the agency.

In terms of an update, we have gotten some questions about our record retention policy. We have become aware that supporting documentation for some VR cost reimbursement claims is being destroyed prematurely. And this is a question that has come up several times. To ensure the availability of claim documentation for auditing and quality control purposes, all claims cost reimbursement-related documentation should be retained for a minimum of 6 years after the close of the federal fiscal year in which the payment was made. This follows the general records schedule for federal records management. I'm going to repeat that just in case anyone missed a portion of it. All cost reimbursement payment related documentation should be retained for a minimum of 6 years after the close of the federal fiscal year in which the payment was made. Again, that is in line with the general records schedule for federal records management. We are going to add this

information to the VR providers handbook. Please direct any questions to the VR help desk. I know that I have given a lot of information, but we are going to send, with the exception of the backlog, we are going to send all this information in writing in case there are any follow-up questions. Thank you very much. And with that, I will turn over to Raquel.

Good afternoon everyone. Happy new year. Just a few quick updates. I have received several emails to the help desk regarding the cost formula. The spreadsheet on the worksheet had to be updated because we replaced the RSA 113. We have had several meetings in regard to that. We wanted to make sure we were distributing the correct information to you. Any type of events information or documentation like that that gets changed, we are required to send it through compliance. And that is basically where we are right now. We are waiting to hear, making sure that everything is all right. It's okay for us to, or for me to actually submit this information out to you. With that said, I can't give you a date as far as when I am going to be able to send out the information to you. My suggestion to you is, don't hold onto the claims. If you know you have fiscal year 20 claims that you want to submit, just note that the ACP information obviously is not going to be what you have now currently. Probably not. But I would not suggest holding onto the claims if you know there is a claim that you need to send. When we get it, we make note of it that we are still awaiting FY 20 cost information for it.

I'm sorry. Do I need to slow down? Thank you. Okay. Never mind. If you guys have any questions at the end, you have the opportunity to call in and asked me to repeat anything that you feel like you know if you did not catch the first time. Or, you can follow up with the, keep in mind all of this information goes on archives. So, you can always go in and I pose the archives. Maybe a week or so after the calls. Or contact the VR help desk. Claim upload errors. This is just a reminder. If you have errors in regard to our name that gets rejected, please email me at the help desk. When you email me, all I need is the full name that you show and then I am able to respond to you to let you know what SSA's records are showing. So, that is for any, I ask if you have a ton, email me all at once. If you just have one or two for your entire badge, email that as well.

For payments and denials, when I receive emails from the VR help desk, I know you guys -- some of you go in on a regular basis to see what's been paid what's been denied. I just ask if you would hold off on your questions until you actually receive the notice of your termination determination. Then if you have questions, go ahead and email the help desk. I just ask that you not email me prematurely before you can review the information for yourself. And then lastly, notices. So, starting to receive a lot of requests for notices. Find you are not receiving a notice of determination -- I know sometimes you may lose one or two -- but just know that it is a process for us; time-consuming for us to reprint a lot of

other notices for you, especially when they are going to the correct address. So, that is pretty much it. If you do have a notice or two that you do need reprinted, let us know. Just know that it is not going to be overnight that we get it to you. It is not considered a priority and especially if we get it to you the first time. That is all I had. I'm sorry. Reading one of the questions from Warren and wants to know for year 2020.

Warren, how are you? I don't think we can put in 0 for your ACP. I don't believe if you want to use your fiscal 19 numbers, go for that. But don't, I don't think you can do zero. I'm sorry. I was reading -- the problem of emailing the help desk with the questions is -- to hear the answer. Okay. That is fine. Definitely -- other than that if there is a specific VR that may contact you with the question, I strongly encourage that you have them contact the VR help desk to get answers. I am going to go ahead and turn it over to Katie Striebringer.

Good afternoon everyone. I have a brief update on VRCER. We are still evaluating the pilot and we will send out a notification prior to distributing the file nationally. We will include instructions and expectations for how the process is going to work once we roll it out nationally. And it does sound like we are ready for the Q and A section of our call. Unless you have anything else?

No, I don't have anything else. So, operator, if you want to go ahead and open up the line all the VRs, I would appreciate it.

Thank you. If you would like to ask a question, please signal by pressing *1 on your telephone keypad. If you're using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Again, press *1 to ask a question. Will pause for just a moment to allow everyone an opportunity to signal for questions. And we will take our first question from Eugenia Cox.

Hi. This is Eugenia from Oregon VR. My question that I put on the chat, and for some reason I was just taken off of the chat, so I am not sure if that's a technical difficulty or what. But, the question is, that when we do a reconsideration, we are tracking quarterly wages. So, we are doing our best to guess that they are reaching that monthly wage level. And we are tracking them from the day we start, we submit the claim on. So, I guess what Patrice was saying is that you only get a chance to guess once. And after that, you are done? Is that correct?

Hi Eugenia, it's Raquel. Shouldn't be a matter of guessing. You should have the information, the wage information there. And if you are receiving a 220 denial, then you

should be holding on to that claim until you showed all the earnings are there. And then once you receive all the earnings there, then you would submit.

Most of us use quarterly wage data. UI quarterly wage data. We don't have access to monthly wage information, like SSA does. SSA has a lot more wage data than we do. And I'm not sure if it's a safe thing, we have the same information to look at or what.

Hi, this is Katie. I will jump in. We receive the quarterly, data on a quarterly basis. I have said before and I will restate it. When you go into look at the -- you can see in real time what is available and what is there. But we only get it on a quarterly basis. So, we are just about to get the January data sometime this week. So, if you saw wages for January or December or November, like last week, we don't have the wages yet because the last file we got was October. So, we get files in January, April, July, and October. So, having that information helps you decide if you should submit something or not. Please know that we are on a quarterly schedule and we do not see things in real time.

I don't think it was a matter of timing. I think it was a matter of that quarterly wage data. Again, we are guessing that they had 9 months of SDA because we take a lump quarterly wage and divided by three. So, it is not a matter of timing. I believe that I sent you the schedule. I actually send it out to everybody when I did my cost reimbursement training of when you guys are able to see. So, I don't think that was the question. I think the question is that we are guessing on pretty much every claim that we send in unless we are physically going out and getting any paycheck from every individual that we are serving.

This is Patrice. I do want to leave time for other questions. I'm going to close that with this. We can only -- this isn't a case if we have that earning information. You should only submit the case once you are sure of the earning information. If that means you have to wait until the next quarter to ensure, that earnings are there, then that is what you are expected to do. So, I understand that you are getting information on a quarterly basis. That's the way we look at it when we review the claim as well. The issue is we are getting a lot of the same cases over and over again with no supporting wage evidence. So, we can no longer do that because our backlog is climbing and we don't have the staff in order to take in so many cases. So, I understand where you're coming from Eugenia, but the policy is now that effective February 1, 2020, you can submit a claim one time but no more than that. We are going to go ahead and move on to the next question.

Thank you. If you would like to ask a question you may do so by pressing *1 on your telephone keypad.

Again, *1 if you would like to ask a question straight over the phone. And we will take our next caller. Donna Osborne.

Hi there. I know you said you didn't want to talk about that question anymore, but I think there's a little more to it than that. Like, I just sent in first or one that had three quarters showing and I got the response that, no, it was denied. And I assumed that was because the records that the person, they had on the person submitting their wages were not at SGA. So, there is information that we definitely cannot see that Social Security is, has available to us. To them. We used to call reconsiderations resubmittals because we don't know when those quarters are actually three months of SGA work.

Resubmittals work slightly different. But we still can only receive one reconsideration claim per claim.

Okay. So, let me ask it this way. I just sent one and it was denied that had three quarters on the first or that were good. It was denied. So, how long should I wait before sending another one in?

We are hoping that you have some level of tracking on yours and to be able to look at the earnings that you are receiving from that beneficiary. But you should at least wait one quarter to be very sure. And it would probably be best if you wait one quarter in general, just to make sure that the earnings are there for enough time.

I tend to wait even longer than that. But still I end up sending more than one at times. Because I can tell what those are.

Right. We're not going to be able to accommodate more than one reconsideration. So, to look at your business classes and revisit how long you should wait to make sure that the earnings are there.

We will take the next call.

Thank you. We will take our next caller from Kyle Beeson.

I just want to ask a question about the ATD, the tracking. Since we don't have the grades yet because -- Raquel, you mentioned we should probably go ahead and submit those. Are you wanting to just hold those? If you see one that has 20, you know, FY 20 -- calculated. You going to just hold them until such time as we can provide it? Or, are they going to end up kinda getting kicked back to us and we resubmit? Just trying to figure out -- expect those to come through?

A, Eric. This is Raquel. They definitely will not be kicked back. Patrice mentioned at the beginning of the call, we are at 150-day backlog. So, our thought process is, by the time we get to the claims that you guys are submitting, January, February and on, the updated fiscal year 20 - will be there.

Okay.

They will not be kicked back to you, like I said, if we happen to have one where maybe a VR submits the cost late, all we do is replace it on hold with us and the note goes in the system just stating, still waiting for fiscal year 20 -- whatever were waiting for. When that happens I asked the technicians and analysts to email me. And that I reach out to the VR just to say hey, we're still waiting for this from you.

Okay. That sounds fine. Thank you.

You're welcome.

Thank you. And once again, if you would like to ask a question you may do so by hitting *1. We will take our next question from Brenda board.

Hi. Every time, will not every time. But a large percentage of the time that I am trying to log into the Portal, it will either come up with the Social Security Portal and I will be able to do my work I will come up with the personal information for my own Social Security. It is like I never know what is going to happen. Sometimes I have to try to login about five or six times a day just because of this problem, and this happens quite frequently.

Hi. This is Katie. What we would like you to do in the future is when this happens to you, is that you track it and send us an email so that we can try to check our logs in our system. You know, there's nothing I can do for you after the fact, that if you have a day where you really cannot get in and keep getting problems, please email the VR help desk so we can look at it in real time and have someone in our department take a look at it because unless we get complaints about something that's working correctly in the Portal, we assume it's working just fine. Because no one here at Social Security can get into the Ticket Portal, so we rely on you to let us know if there's a problem.

Okay.

I'm sorry. Who are we speaking with?

My name is Brenda.

Oh, hi, Brenda.

Do you have anything further?

No.

Thank you. And we have no further questions at this time.

All right. If there is no more questions, were going to go ahead and end the call. Just as a reminder, the next all VR call will be Tuesday, April 14, at 1 p.m. And just FYI, if there is anyone that is not receiving the agendas or the call information, I know the ones that I have spoken to today, I'm already aware of you guys. But anyone else who has to reach out to another VR or someone else in your office because you are not receiving the emails, if you just email me at the VR help desk. So we can get that matter resolved, I would greatly appreciate it. And that is all. You guys have a great day. Thank you for calling in.

Thank you. That does conclude today's teleconference. We do appreciate your participation. You may now disconnect.

[Event Concluded]