



**For Immediate Release**

May 7, 2008

Contact: Jane Howard

703/836-2272, ext. 3502

[jane@aapa.org](mailto:jane@aapa.org)

Janette Rodrigues

703/836-2272, ext. 3509

[jrodrigues@aapa.org](mailto:jrodrigues@aapa.org)

**House Panel Passes Bipartisan Bill to Create Director of Physician Assistant Services at Veterans Health Administration**

*AAPA supports passage to optimize patient care and use of PAs*

(Alexandria, VA) — The American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) welcomes the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs passage of bipartisan legislation to establish a position for a full-time Director of Physician Assistant (PA) Services within the office of the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health.

“As a veteran and a PA, I know this position is long overdue and will surely result in better utilization of the VA’s PA workforce and improved patient care for our nation’s veterans,” said AAPA President Gregor F. Bennett, M.A., PA-C.

Introduced by Representatives Phil Hare (D-Ill.) and Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) last June, HR 2790 is a bill to amend title 38, United States Code. The committee approved the bill on April 30, clearing the way for it to be considered by the full House of Representatives. A floor vote may take place before the end of May.

“We are extremely grateful to Representatives Hare and Moran, and their staffs, for working with us to make this bill a reality,” Bennett said.

With almost 2,000 PAs on staff, the VA system is the single largest employer of the nation’s nearly 70,000 PAs. About a quarter of all primary care patients treated by the VA are seen by a PA.

Currently, the VA has a part-time Advisor to PAs. While the PAs who have served in the position have made progress on how PAs are used within the agency, there continue to be inconsistencies in the way that local medical facilities utilize PAs.

AAPA urges the 110th Congress to establish the PA Director position so unnecessary restrictions on PAs will not limit the access of VA patients — veterans and their dependents — to quality medical care. The Academy believes that the absence of a knowledgeable resource on the PA profession in the Veterans Health Administration has inhibited PAs’ ability to do their jobs effectively, efficiently, and fully.



Getting a PA place in the VA Central Office has been a long struggle, said Bennett, a retired Navy officer, who worked in naval medical facilities in five states for about 22 years. He retired from active duty service in 1992.

“The efforts expended on this issue by members of the Veterans Affairs PA Association and the AAPA have been extraordinary, and I am truly proud of the perseverance all have shown to bring about this most needed change,” he said. “This will help the VA to make the most of the services provided to our veterans by physician assistants.”

If the House passes the bill, it will move to the Senate for consideration.

### ***About PAs***

*Physician assistants are licensed health professionals who practice medicine as members of a team with their supervising physicians. PAs deliver a broad range of medical and surgical services to diverse populations in rural and urban settings. As part of their comprehensive responsibilities, PAs conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventive health care, assist in surgery, and prescribe medications.*

### ***About AAPA***

*AAPA is the only national organization to represent physician assistants in all medical and surgical specialties. Founded in 1968, the Academy works to promote quality, cost-effective health care and the professional and personal growth of PAs. For more information about the Academy and the PA profession, visit AAPA’s Web site, [www.aapa.org](http://www.aapa.org).*

###