THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING YOUR ACTIVE DUTY MEDICAL RECORDS

Many Veterans underestimate the importance of preserving their active duty medical records. However, as explained below, preserving active duty medical records can substantially expedite and simplify the benefits claims-filing process.

What Are Active Duty Medical Records?

Active duty medical records are divided into two categories:

1) Active duty health records - cover outpatient, dental, and mental health treatment that a Veteran receives while on active duty service. Important documents include induction and separation physical examinations, and routine medical care (doctor/dental visits, lab tests, etc.) when the patient was not admitted to a hospital.

2) Clinical (inpatient) records - compiled when members are actually hospitalized while in the service. Normally, this covers any overnight stays at or admissions to the hospital.

Three Good Reasons to Preserve Your Active Duty Medical Records

There are three very good reasons to preserve your active duty medical records: to prove service connection and/or an in-service event, save time, and ensure the safety of your records.

Proving Service Connection and In-Service Event

In order to establish entitlement for VA benefits, a Veteran must show three things: 1) evidence of current disability 2) an in-service event, and 3) a nexus between the in-service event and the current disability, also known as service connection. In-service medical records are one of the best means of proving an in-service event. Active duty medical records will often contain first-hand information about any disabilities that that were treated as well as any symptoms of a then-current condition that was noted during service. This first-hand evidence from medical professionals may be used to prove that a Veteran did suffer from an injury or disease on active duty.

Time Savings
According to the National Archives, the National Personnel Records Center ("NPRC") has a pending workload of 73,000 requests and is receiving approximately 5,100 requests per day for records. This means that it can take up to six months or longer to receive a copy of your service medical records.

Adding up to six months or longer to the time that it takes to successfully adjudicate a claim adds even more of a waiting period before a Veteran begins receiving disability benefits. Considering it takes over six months on average to adjudicate a claim (and in many instances much longer), that is six months extra a Veteran doesn’t want to have to wait.

**Only The Veteran Can Guarantee the Safety of His Active Duty Medical Records**

Although the government tries very hard to preserve all military personnel records, many of the records repositories are swamped and records are oftentimes misplaced or lost entirely. Records can also be destroyed—one famous example of this in the 1973 fire at the NPRC that destroyed a substantial number of Army and Air Force Personnel Records. The Veteran is always in the best position to ensure the safety of his or her records and, despite the government’s best effort, the Veteran is the only person who can guarantee that they are preserved to help build a VA benefits claim.

Useful Sources:

http://www.archives.gov/Veterans/military-service-records/get-service-records.html
