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Hometown: W&M Law School's Puller Clinic Leads Nation in Serving Veterans

April 17, 2014 By Hannah S. Ostroff

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A College of William & Mary program has become a national model for those serving veterans.

The Puller Clinic, started as part of the university's law school about five years ago, takes an interprofessional approach to assisting current and former military members seeking disability benefits related to their service.

Law students interview clients, compile information and do research to present a comprehensive report to supervising attorneys. Their goal is to put together a package that would be persuasive to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The students also work in tandem with faculty and students at Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Psychological Services and Development, which provides counseling, assessment and referrals to these veterans.

"We feel it's just the beginning of the proliferation of these types of initiatives across the country," Patricia Roberts said.

Roberts is the director of clinical programs at William & Mary Law School, and also chaired a national conference April 3 and 4 in Washington, D.C. The event brought together more than 130 participants from more than 40 different schools across the country who were already involved or interested in bringing a similar program to their institution.

William & Mary wanted to show its accomplishments, but also what a powerful learning tool the clinic can be for students, Roberts said. The conference showcased a variety of presentations to demonstrate the different ways a program could be carried out, with few start-up costs, at schools or law firms across the nation.

The conference came on the heels of a distinction from the Department of Veteran Affairs in August that invited the Puller Clinic to join its Fully Developed Claims Community of Practice. The FDC Community of Practice is designed to speed the processing of disability claims for veterans, where FDCs are certified to have all the necessary supporting information and evidence included for quick turnaround. The Puller Clinic first law school program in the U.S. to be included.

U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, who has long supported the program and encouraged them to share their model nationally, made the keynote address at the conference.

In addition to the physical event, Roberts said the Puller Clinic is working on an online space where members across the country can share best practices and helpful tools.

"Our hope is that now we've created a community of people who are already providing services to veterans in high education and the legal service field who will inspire others to do the same," Roberts said.

For more information about the Puller Clinic, [visit its website](#).



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