

New veterans home looks to hire 100 staff

By Phil Kabler
Staff writer

There will be no lack of job opportunities at the West Virginia Veterans Nursing Home in the coming months, the executive director of the \$26 million, 120-bed Clarksburg facility told legislators Monday.

Kevin Crickard told an interim committee on veterans issues that the home — which began accepting residents late last year after three years of construction and licensing delays — will need to hire 100 new staffers between now and July 2009.

That's when the facility is expected to reach capacity, at the current rate of an average of two admissions per week.

Crickard said one of the difficulties getting the home up and running was hiring nurse administrators at an initial starting

salary of \$34,600. "That was not — by any way, shape or form — a good salary," he said.

However, Crickard said he has been able to hire nurse administrators in recent weeks, after the governor's office signed off on increasing the salary to the "\$40,000-to-\$45,000 range."

He said more than 200 veterans have expressed interest in moving into the home, and noted that the home is a good value for veterans and their families.

Residents pay 65 percent of their monthly income, up to a maximum of \$2,300, with the average cost running about \$1,200 a month, he said.

That's compared to \$5,000 to \$7,000 a month for privately operated nursing homes — which often forces residents to spend down their assets, including their residences, in order to qualify for Medicaid.

Also Monday, Dr. Jean Meade of Morgantown discussed a grant proposal pending with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health for a pilot project to provide service dogs for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Meade said she believes service dogs could help veterans deal with physical and psychological aspects of PTSD, which often includes high blood pressure, anxiety, pain and sleep disorders.

Delegate Barbara Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, said the state's interest in the study would be to determine whether the costs of providing service dogs to veterans would be offset by cost savings from reducing veterans' dependence on prescription drugs and other medical services.

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