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SWAN Attends the *Veterans Administration Forum on Women Veterans*, Calls for Fair Compensation Standards for Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Benefit Claims



SWAN's table at the *Veterans Administration Forum on Women's Veteran*
Anuradha Bhagwati (left), Marlisa Grogan (right)

Staff members from [SWAN](#) attended the *Veterans Administration Forum on Women's Veterans* this week held at The Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. The Forum was attended by Secretary Eric Shinseki and other members of the Veterans Administration (VA), the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

During Q&A, SWAN Executive Director, Anu Bhagwati, dispelled some myths about the new PTSD claims regulations and asked a pointed question to the panel:

"The VA's new PTSD regulations do NOT help veterans whose source of PTSD is MST. The regulations exclusively help veterans whose source of PTSD is combat trauma. It seems to me that the VA's compensation standard is much higher for survivors of MST than for combat veterans." Anu continued, "There also seems to be an enormous disconnect between VBA and VHA, to the detriment of veterans with PTSD and other diagnosed clinical disorders. Why is it that VBA is allowed to disregard the expert diagnoses of VHA's own psychologists and psychiatrists?"

Anu's question was met with immediate and extended applause from *The Forum* audience.

Diana Rubens, the Associate Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations,



representing the VBA, acknowledged there were issues with regard to MST claims processing and that the VA was addressing them, but she was unable to answer why the VBA consistently denies claims from MST survivors who have a verified PTSD diagnosis from the VHA's own staff physicians.



"This is an issue that defies all logic," said Greg Jacob, Policy Director for SWAN. "There are only two reasonable conclusions that one can draw from the VBA's continued denial of VHA diagnosed claims: The VBA is calling the VHA doctors incompetent, or the VBA is saying that service members who file MST claims are liars. Both are untrue and both are beyond the pale."

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The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) supports, defends, and empowers today's servicewomen and women veterans of all eras, through groundbreaking advocacy initiatives and innovative, healing community programs.

SWAN's vision is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without threat of harassment, discrimination, intimidation or assault. SWAN also seeks to reform veterans' services on a national scale to guarantee equal access to quality health care, benefits and resources for women veterans and their families.

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