



Benefits And Treatment For Veterans With PPS

By [Richard L. Bruno, HD, PhD](#)

Director, International Centre for Polio Education

In the early 2000's not one but six polio survivors, all of whom were veterans, came to The Post-Polio Institute with PPS symptoms. It never occurred to me that the military inducted polio survivors. There was even a box on the military induction medical form that you could "check" if you had had polio. One patient explained it to me clearly: "Contrary to popular belief that childhood polio would keep you from being drafted or accepted as a volunteer is not true. If you could pass the physical you were 'in the Army now'."

These polio survivor veterans had two problems:

- New PPS symptoms;
- The Veterans Administration refusing to provide pension benefits or treatment for PPS.

During the early 2000's, I was working on Capitol Hill with a number of members of Congress, including Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter who forced the release of the [Social Security Ruling for Post-Polio Sequelae](#) in 2003. Specter was a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and I was given the go-ahead to negotiate for polio survivor veterans to get treatment for PPS in the VA system and receive VA disability benefits for PPS.

Working with the federal government I realized that speed was not to be expected:

- It took a year for the VA Under Secretary for Health (VHA) to release a letter about PPS symptoms and covering treatment by VA and private hospitals ([IL10-2004-018](#))
- It took an additional two and one half years for the Chief of Regulations Staff at the VA Benefits (VBA) division sent me this: "Based on your suggestion, we have updated our medical reference materials to include basic information on PPS. This will ensure that current info is available to our benefits adjudicators in our regional offices nationwide."

The [VBA](#) medical information is basically the same as in the VHA letter. The question that took more than two years to answer was the following: How do veterans who are polio survivors and today have PPS become eligible for *benefits* when they were in service decades ago?

Obviously it's difficult to attribute symptoms, that can take 40 plus years after discharge to develop, to the physical rigors of military service. The agreement permitting benefits to be provided was the following:

- A preexisting disease (like polio) will be considered to have been "aggravated" by service where there is an increase in disability during service (not shown by "clear and unmistakable evidence" to be due to the natural progress of the "disease"), or when,
- A 10% or greater disability from a nervous system condition develops within one year from the date of discharge, even if there is no record of symptoms or disability during service.

So, to receive benefits, veterans need documentation from their time in service or during the year after discharge to prove that military service "aggravated" polio and caused PPS symptoms. Fortunately, VBA is biased in veteran's favor and accepts not just medical records, but also evidence from other sources, including letters written to family or friends about symptoms during or after service.

Although it was a long slog, the VHA and VBA did ultimately agree to help polio survivor veterans who developed PPS. What's sad is that polio survivors never should have served in the first place.