

## **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR SEEKING VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION**

1. **Keep excellent records** – Maintain a file of everything sent to and received from the VA.
2. **Keep track of deadlines** – Understand the important deadlines and track them on a calendar.
3. **Use lay witness statements** – These can be very helpful especially if there are any gaps in available medical evidence. Good lay witness statements are based on personal observation and describe: 1) how the witness saw the injury took place in service; and/or 2) the disability.
4. **Proof of Service** – When sending important documents to the VA (especially ones that must comply with deadlines), always ask for receipt of service.
5. **Don't duplicate** – If you are submitting private (non-federal) treatment records, and are also completing VA Form 21-4142 (authorization for release of records), don't duplicate. If you send complete records from one doctor's care, it unnecessarily burdens the VA if you also complete VA Form 21-4142 because the VA ends up with double records.
6. **Don't Unnecessarily Complicate** – If you have been treated by any doctor for a condition (or conditions) that you are not claiming, don't send those records or fill out a VA Form 21-4142 unless you feel the records may be relevant to your claimed conditions.
7. **Attend Scheduled Examinations** – Make all possible efforts to attend scheduled VA examinations and do not schedule unless you have an unavoidable conflict. The VA will unfavorably view a failure to attend a scheduled examination, and it may take a long time for an examination to be rescheduled.
8. **Label Documentation** – With any documentation you submit, make sure your full name and VA file number (generally your social security number) are visible at the top of the first page. This allows the VA to associate match the documents with your file much quicker.
9. **Don't Approach Elected Officials** – Don't bother writing to the U.S. President or your Congressman. This won't make your Regional Office move any faster, and they'll likely only provide you with a status report (generally detailing what you already know).