



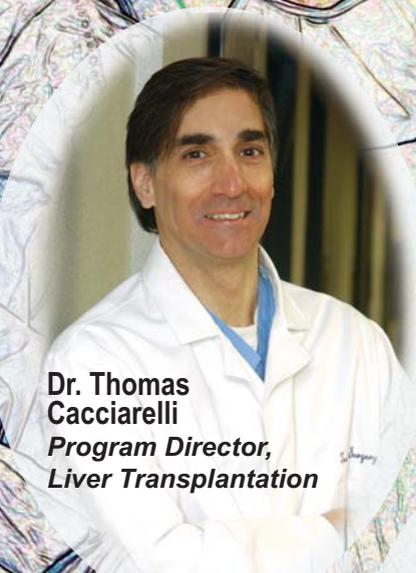
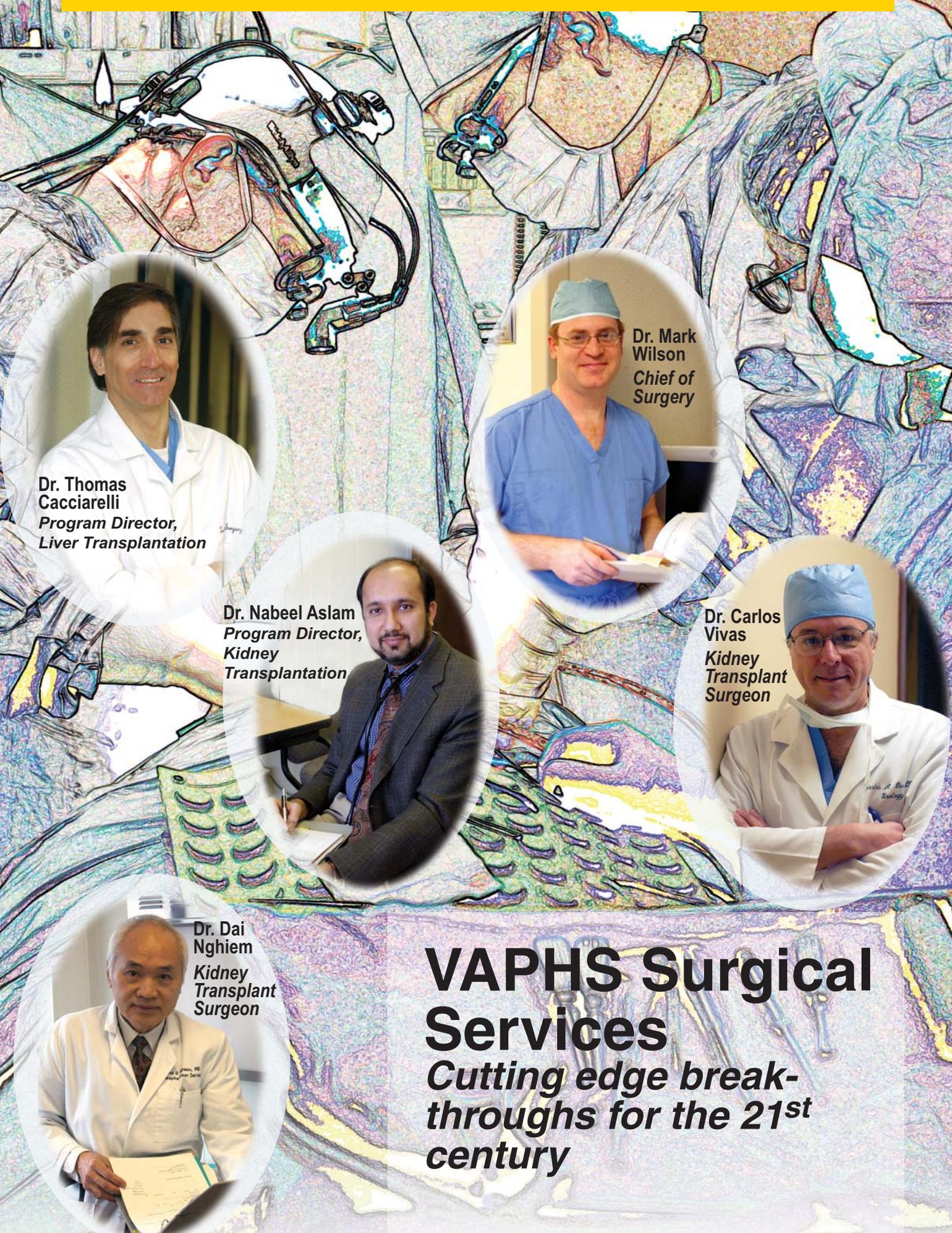
# Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Heinz ★ Highland Drive ★ University Drive

# Working Together

Issue Fifteen

Winter 2004



**Dr. Thomas Cacciarelli**  
Program Director,  
Liver Transplantation



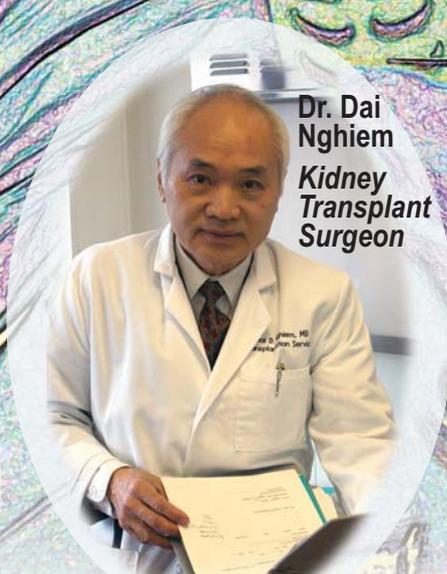
**Dr. Mark Wilson**  
Chief of  
Surgery



**Dr. Nabeel Aslam**  
Program Director,  
Kidney  
Transplantation



**Dr. Carlos Vivas**  
Kidney  
Transplant  
Surgeon



**Dr. Dai Nghiem**  
Kidney  
Transplant  
Surgeon

## VAPHS Surgical Services

*Cutting edge break-  
throughs for the 21<sup>st</sup>  
century*

# A Message from the Director

## Dear Fellow Employees, Volunteers, Veterans and Friends of the VAPHS,

I want to express how proud I am of the VAPHS workforce of 2,900 employees who have devoted their careers to meeting the health care needs of veterans with the highest level of quality possible. Our dedicated employees also play a vital role in the Pittsburgh community. Through Red Cross blood drives, savings bond campaigns, volunteering in churches and schools, and special endeavors, the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and its employees have a huge impact on the Pittsburgh and regional community. In addition to serving veterans, our employees strive to serve their community.

federal agencies, private companies and government agencies representing the State of Pennsylvania, Allegheny County, the City of Pittsburgh, universities and colleges, hospitals, and more were considered for this prestigious award.

On Mother's Day, the Healthy Women's Clinic at the VAPHS will sponsor a VA team in the Race for the Cure. Employees will be joining the team or sponsoring fellow employees to help fight breast cancer.

These are just a few of the many examples of the positive role our VAPHS staff plays in the community.

I would like to commend all employees involved in these and other community service events for their outstanding contributions as citizens as well as for serving our Nation's veterans.

This Winter issue of Working Together features a profile on our Surgical Service, implementation of our Palliative Care Unit at Heinz, addition of Behavioral Health Services in our CBOC's, appointment of our Chief of Canteen Ser-

vice and our "Performance Vital Signs." It also spotlights the many outstanding achievements and awards that our staff has received in the past quarter.

Last September approximately 30 VAPHS employees volunteered their time to renovate Sheraden Park in Sheraden, PA. These employees cleaned up debris, completed some gardening, planting, and weeding tasks, and even tore down and rebuilt a brick wall to make the area more enjoyable for community members.

VAPHS employees displayed their dedication to the community through generous commitments to the United Way's Combined Federal Campaign. The VAPHS was selected as one of the Top 10 fundraising organizations during the 2003 campaign. Various



*Michael E. Moreland*  
Director

*Rajiv Jain, MD*  
Chief of Staff

*Patricia Nealon*  
Acting Associate Director

*Ira Richmond*  
Associate Director for  
Patient Care Services

**The VA Pittsburgh  
Working Together**  
is published for the employees, volunteers, patients and friends of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. To submit articles, editorials, letters or story ideas for possible inclusion, please contact *David Cowgill* at **412-688-6224** or via e-mail: [david.cowgill@med.va.gov](mailto:david.cowgill@med.va.gov)

Editor  
*David E. Cowgill*  
Public & Community  
Relations Coordinator

Design & Layout  
*Jean Reiland*

Photography  
*Warren Park*  
*Glenn Hangard*

Cover photos by :  
*Warren Park*

Photo on this page by:  
*Warren Park*

# Performance Vital Signs

## Unique Patients



## Outpatient Visits



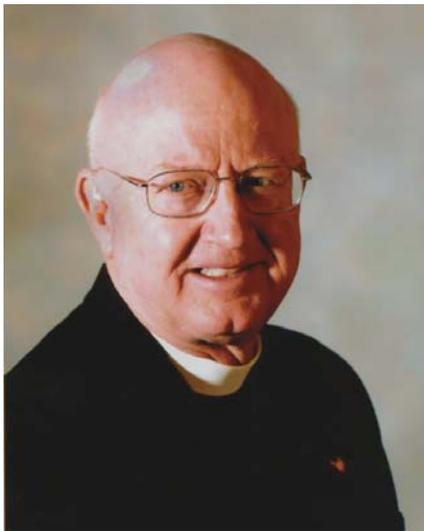
## Medical Care Cost Recovery



## Obligations/Unique Patient



# National Awards Winners



Glenn Hangard

Barbara Becker, Manager of Health Information Management at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, was selected as the VA HIM Professional of the Year. This is the highest recognition given for Health Information in VHA, and recognizes consummate professionals in Health Information Management who serve as role models for all in the profession. The award was announced at an awards luncheon at the VHA HIM Annual Conference on October 23, 2003, in Minneapolis MN.

Ms. Becker oversees the record keeping for patients here at the VAPHS. She reorganized much of her office and eliminated a 25,000-case backlog she inherited when she was hired a year and a half ago.

## Chaplain Eugene Reddel

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System's Chief of Chaplain Service, Eugene Reddel, received the Secretary's Award for Excellence in Chaplaincy for 2003. This is the highest honor and recognition that can be given to a VA Chaplain. Chaplain Reddel has used his creative and innovative management to assure consistent high quality pastoral care in his work as a supervisory chaplain and a Certified Clinical Pastoral Education Supervisor. He was also recognized for his work in developing an interdisciplinary Program of Care template to be used by chaplains to meet JCAHO requirements.

Chaplain Reddel was presented with this award by Secretary Principi on February 17, 2004, at a special ceremony at VA Central Office in Washington D.C.



Warren Park

## Barbara Becker

# VAPHS Surgical Service

## Using innovation and technological

The Surgical Specialty Service Line at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System provides an interactive, collaborative, and award-winning line of patient care, innovation, and education. The talented nursing staff is compiled of many caring Advanced Practice Nurses, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists, Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses, Licensed Practice Nurses, and Nursing Assistants. All VAPHS Surgeons also have a faculty appointment at the University of Pittsburgh. The VAPHS' strong commitment to education can be seen in the many fellows and residents who also work in the Surgical Specialty Service Line.

The VAPHS Surgical Specialty Service Line has the distinction of performing many state-of-the-art surgical procedures.

Many of these surgeries are performed using **minimally invasive laparoscopic procedures**. Laparoscopic procedures provide patients with



a shorter recovery time and an earlier return to normal activity. Instead of a large incision, key-hole size incisions are made. These incisions are between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in size. Using laparoscopy, complications and

death rates are lowered. Some of these procedures include hiatal hernia and reflux procedures, hernia surgeries, colon surgeries, kidney procedures, and adrenal and spleen splenectomies. The VAPHS has been using laparoscopy since 2000.

The Surgical Specialty Service Line works closely with Cardiology and Critical Care Medicine in a multi-disciplinary approach to completing successful **cardiac surgeries**. As the only cardiac program in VISN 4, the VAPHS completes procedures such as coronary artery bypass grafting, valve replacements, and even new techniques used to avoid valve replacements, such as valve repair.



In 2001 Dr. Marco Zenati had the distinction of performing the United States' first minimally invasive cardiac bypass surgery on a patient who was awake with the aid of an Epidural, a local anesthetic.

The VAPHS is currently participating in a national VA cooperative trial concerning

off-bypass procedures and a standard heart/lung machine.

In 2003 a **bariatric surgery program** was initiated. Bariatric surgery is a minimally invasive weight reduction surgery. The VA population has seen a dramatic increase in morbid obesity (obesity restricting normal activity and potentially causing other health ailments) in the past ten years. The VA has seen dramatic improvements in patients after this surgery, including requiring fewer medications and having better general health.

Dr. George Eid came to the VAPHS to join the surgical specialty service team after performing over 600 bariatric surgeries.

So far five bariatric surgeries have been performed at the VAPHS. All patients were home within three days of their surgery. Eighty patients from within VISN 4 have been referred to the VAPHS for evaluation, and soon the program

will be opened up for patients outside of this VISN. There are only a few VA hospitals with a bariatric surgery program.

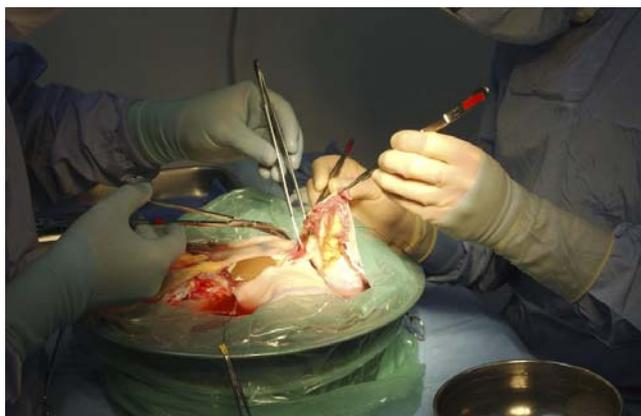
Last year 24 liver transplants were performed as well as seven kidney transplants (two from living



# es

## advances to improve health care for veterans

donors). In 2003, the VAPHS established an independent charter for a **liver and kidney transplant program** with the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS). With the finalization of recruitment of



additional surgeons, the Surgical Service expects to perform at least 35 liver transplants this year. Dr. Thomas Cacciarelli, a nationally respected liver transplant surgeon, has been the director of the liver transplant program since 2002. Currently Dr. Carlos Vivas and Dr. Dai Nghiem, who are both currently affiliated with Allegheny General Hospital, are providing kidney transplant services on-site.

The VAPHS is one of only four VA hospitals to perform liver or kidney transplants, and is the only VA hospital to have an independent charter and perform transplants in-house.

Over the past three and a half years, the number of **same-day surgeries** performed at the VAPHS has increased dramatically. Some of these procedures include plastic reconstructive surgery, hand surgery, orthopedic surgery, podiatry procedures (which is not common in VA hospitals), gynecology procedures and urology procedures.

Another scarcity in VA hospitals is **neurosurgery procedures**, including back and spinal procedures. Dr. John Moossy is the section chief of neuro-surgery at the VAPHS. Almost all neuro-surgical



patients are released after an overnight stay.

The VAPHS has been performing **cochlear implants** for a few years, but the program grew and developed when neuro-otologist, Dr. Elizabeth Toh arrived. This is her third year



Photos by Warren Park

here. There are only 10 official cochlear implant sites at VA hospitals in the country. Last year a total of 52 cochlear implants were performed at these sites. Ten of these procedures were performed here at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System.

A cochlear implant is an electronic device that overcomes damage to inner ear hair cells by providing electrical stimulation to the remaining auditory nerve fibers. It provides useful hearing and improved communication abilities to the implant user. Results vary among individuals. Nearly all implant users can detect sound. Most can understand some speech, and many can hear well enough to understand speech over the phone. The spectrum of care is begun and continued here at the VAPHS in the audiology department.

Dr. Mark Wilson, Chief of Surgery and Vice-President of Surgical Specialty Service, advises that a vital element to the success of all surgical procedures is the cooperation of several subdivisions of the Surgical Service Line as well as other service lines, including Anesthesia, Critical Care Medicine, Primary Care, and others.

There are many exciting breakthroughs constantly occurring in the VAPHS Surgical Specialty Service Line. The OR is currently being renovated for the installation of two state-of-the-art minimally invasive surgical suites to enhance patient care. A computerized patient record system for anesthesia is being initiated to improve patient care while under anesthesia. They are also working on developing new programs and improving the current ones.

Director: Mr. Moreland

Recently my husband, P.S., was experiencing symptoms that were very disturbing. We had no idea what was causing his blurred vision, need for a gallon of water each day, weakness, and sleeping most of the day. I called the VA on Highland Drive to make an appointment with Dr. Pazan.

I wanted to tell you how fortunate for P., that a nurse, Susan Rose RN, BSN took the call. She asked many questions, and then checked P's records. She told me he was borderline diabetic and wanted to know if P was taking his medication. We were unaware of him being diabetic. Nurse Rose told me what kind of diet to keep P. on until we could see the doctor. She told me what signs to look for, to determine if P. should go to the emergency room. Nurse Rose spoke with Dr. Pazan on P's behalf just to be on the safe side. She phoned me several times to check on P.

Nurse Rose is to be commended for her professionalism as well as her kindness and concern. She truly cares about the welfare of the patients, and showed a concern you do not see often these days. She did not know us personally, yet took the time at that end of what must have been a long day to return my call. The following morning she called to see how P. was doing and set up an appointment for P. as soon as possible.

I wanted to let you know that P and I appreciate Nurse Rose, and hope you value her as an employee.

Thank you,  
P.R.S. and D. I.-S.

Dear Mr. Moreland,

This is to commend 2 members of your staff for their unwavering professionalism and dedication to duty during the periods of January to April of this year. The selfless commitment to myself and my health needs displayed by Dr. Jason Brown (LID Gold Clinic) and Pharmacist George Walker (LID Coumadin Clinic) was nothing short of outstanding.

Suffering from a heart problem in Milwaukee, they quickly followed up on my care there, assessed the situation and coordinated my treatment not just in Pittsburgh (my home), but in Milwaukee (my work location), and with two different clinics in Florida, where I reside now. Not only were my physical needs seen to, but my mental well being was also a major concern due to my relatively young age (42) for a problem like this and being laid off from my previous employer. The care I received from them and their supporting staff has no doubt been a major contributor to my recovery and in effect the success of my current life. I now hold a critical position with NASA's space program here in Florida, that I know I would not be capable of achieving if it were not for your outstanding staff.

It infuriates me when I hear people (civilians) comment about the VA healthcare system, that it's sub-standard or that I have to settle for "that" type of care. If they really knew, they'd be jealous. I can tell you right now that I would not have the same amount of care, speed, coordination and attention that I received in the VA healthcare system, in a civilian hospital unless I was extremely wealthy.

I urge you, if possible, please do something commendable for Dr. Brown and Pharmacist Walker and convey my gratitude and many thanks to them and your entire staff.

Gratefully Submitted,  
JHP.

# Mail Bag



Dear Director:

I'm writing this letter to let you know how pleased I am with the excellent care my husband, A.A., is receiving at the John Heinz Progressive Care Facility located in Aspinwall. While all the doctors, nurses and even the cleaning staff are to be commended there is one individual who stands out above all the others.

Mr. Eugene Lewis, CPN, does a wonderful job with all his patients and I especially appreciate what he has meant to my husband's care. In simple terms Mr. Lewis has patience, he cares and has a bed side manner second to none. My sentiments are echoed by other veterans and some have even suggested Eugene is really a doctor.

My husband has been in the nursing home, 1 South, for over three years where I visit him frequently and see the good people working there. Thanks to their efforts I know A. is getting the best care possible and I am grateful.

Sincerely yours,  
J.A.

Dear Mr. Moreland

It had been a very difficult year for B. and I. It had been exactly one year to the date that B. was operated on and through misfortune became a quadriplegia and passed away on December 17, 2003. We could not have enjoyed our last year together if it had not been for your staff. Their attentive concerns for his pain and sufferings can never be forgotten.

I want to thank you and your staff. Their professional skills, kindness, support and friendship brought much dignity to B's last days at Aspinwall. I want to personally thank Dr. David L Swenson second floor 2A unit, for his dedication and meticulous care in treating B., also his nursing staff and associates for their dedication in caring for B's comfort. They were always willing to go that 100%. I was so happy that they were there during my absence and at his bedside before he took his last breath. I know that their friendship and kind words brought peace to B.

I would also like to thank the following departments and their staff, for their professionalism and support in caring for B.: Spinal Cord Injury Department—Mr. Bob Bowden, Director, Ann Tragesar RN, Dr. Flood, and staff; Home Based Primary Care Department—Dr. Judith Plowman, Walter Walczak RN, and staff. And a special Thank You to the Oakland VA Hospital, including the ECC department, Matthew Kruszewski, Pharmacy department and the 5<sup>th</sup> floor doctors and staff.

No other hospital or doctors could ever match the care that was given to B.

Sincerely,  
Mrs. P.W.

# Spotlight On New Chief of Canteen Service

# Janet Shawkey



Warren Park

Janet Shawkey began working with VCS on November 27, 1978, as a food service worker at the Highland Drive VA. Throughout the years she held various positions there, including receiving clerk, office clerk, and administrative assistant. In November 1993 she was accepted into the VCS management training program in Philadelphia.

In April 1994 she became chief of the VCS in Lebanon, PA. She was also chief of VCS in Butler, PA, and East Orange, NJ. She was chief of the Philadelphia VCS before returning to the VAPHS on August 28, 2003.

She is married and the proud grandmother of a six-year-old granddaughter.

## ***Congratulations*** ***Employees with 20 years or more of service!***

The employees listed have reached a benchmark in their years of government service during the period **October 1, 2003- January 1, 2004.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Service Line</b>	<b>Years</b>
Jack E. Black	Business Service Line	35
Angelo Baiocchi	Information Management	30
Raymond Rounds	VISN	30
Keith H. Watson	Facilities Management	30
Theresa D. Valotta	Nutrition and Food	30
Ruth J. Gates	Business Service	25
Timothy S. McCullough	Patient Care Service	25
Glenn E. McNees	Clinical Support	25
Johnny P. Moon	Facilities Management	25
Charles R. Olesnevich	Surgical Specialty	25
Joan C. Polczynski	Facilities Management	25
Janet Shawkey	Veterans Canteen Service	25
Martin Betters	Facilities Management	20
Norma J. Dupire	Information Management	20
Edward A. Feth	Facilities Management	20
David H. Gerginske	Business Service	20
Richard E. Harvey	Nutrition and Food Program	20
Darrell Johnson	Facilities Management	20
Dorothy Lopes	Primary Care	20
Paul Malice	Facilities Management	20
Carol Parkin	Clinical Support	20
Maureen Puskar	Primary Care	20
Richard H. Weiland	Facilities Management	20

# Where is Terry Gerigk?

If you've been wondering why you haven't seen VAPHS Associate Director Terry Gerigk around one of our divisions lately, the explanation is this:

Ms. Gerigk was appointed to be the Acting Director at the Butler VA Medical Center on September 7, 2003. In her place, Patricia Nealon is serving as the Acting Associate Director of the VAPHS.



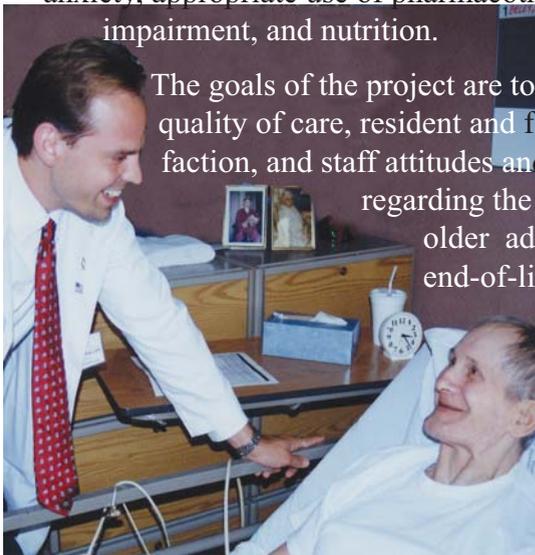
Warren Park

## Palliative Care Unit

The Geriatric Palliative Care floor is opening at the Heinz Division. The unit was designed in an effort to better meet the needs of our older veterans, and emphasizes care around the physical, spiritual and emotional issues of aging to improve quality of life and care. The unit is dedicated to providing outstanding care to chronically ill and frail older adults.

Using a team approach, the unit is staffed by representatives from behavioral health, chaplain services, education, geriatric medicine, nursing, nutrition, oncology, pharmacy, physical medicine and rehabilitation, quality improvement, recreation therapy, social work, and speech pathology. The mission of the staff is to understand the unique needs of each veteran on the unit and to develop goals of care consistent with their wishes. A major component is recognizing frailty and irreversible chronic conditions, developing new goals with the patient and families, and creating care plans consistent with their wishes. These may include cure of disease, prolongation of life, maintenance of function, relief of suffering, quality of life, preservation of control, and at the appropriate time planning for end-of-life.

In addition to defining long-term goals, a tremendous effort is made to recognize and focus on treatable conditions. The staff is very attentive to pain management, preservation and/or improvement of function, recognition and treatment of delirium, depression and anxiety, appropriate use of pharmacotherapy, sensory impairment, and nutrition.



The goals of the project are to improve quality of care, resident and family satisfaction, and staff attitudes and knowledge regarding the care of frail older adults nearing the end-of-life.

## Behavioral Health Services Now Offered at CBOC's

The four Community Based Outpatient Clinics of the VAPHS now offer behavioral health services on site. A social worker with extensive experience in mental health works with the CBOC's primary care physicians to evaluate the psychosocial needs of the veteran patients. They also work in conjunction with the staff here at the VAPHS to evaluate veterans and determine where their behavioral health needs would be best served. They also consult with VAPHS staff when they have questions regarding patient treatment and refer to them when a veteran's condition requires more care than they are able to manage on an outpatient basis.

## Winners of the Holiday Raffle

On December 17, 18, and 19, Holiday Open Houses for employees were held at each division. A holiday raffle was also held. Either by attending an open house or through e-mail, 857 VAPHS employees participated in the raffle. The VAPHS extends their congratulations to these lucky winners!

Winners of a 14" Samsung flat screen TV:  
**Richard Essaf**, Facilities Management Service – Heinz Division  
**Marian Ropelewski**, Business Service Line – Highland Drive Division  
**Linda Knight**, Critical Care Service Line – University Drive Division

Winners of a Samsung DVD Player:  
**Lauren Poindexter**, Nutrition & Food Program – Heinz Division  
**Michael Jackson**, Facilities Management Services – Highland Drive Division  
**Debbie Monosky**, Surgical Specialty Service Line – University Drive Division



Pittsburgh, PA 15240  
1-866-4VAPITT  
(1-866-482-7488)

A member of the  
VA Stars & Stripes  
Healthcare Network

[www.va.gov/pittsburgh](http://www.va.gov/pittsburgh)