



THE VISN VOICE



January 2008

I THOUGHT YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—Mr. Garfunkel

I want to take this opportunity to welcome all the great employees of the VA Capitol Health Care Network to 2008, and to wish you all a very happy and healthy new year! There are lots of positive things going on in our VISN so far this year, and I would like to take a few minutes of your time to share some of them with you.

First of all, on the budget front, as I think you probably know by now, Congress has passed and the President has signed a new budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The only piece in doubt at this point is whether the President will declare a funding emergency which would give us additional funding for this year. We actually expect that this will happen, although we don't know for sure yet. In either case, our funding is good and we have money at all of our sites for additional staff, equipment, and projects. In addition, our MCCF collections for this year are all going well, and although our goals for collection have been raised, we do not anticipate any problem in meeting our collection goals at any of the VISN 5 facilities.

We do have a new Secretary as you know, Dr. James B. Peake. I had the pleasure of meeting him several years ago when he visited the Washington DC VAMC in his previous capacity and again in more recent weeks at another site visit. He certainly leaves me with a very positive impression – someone who cares about veterans and wants to do the right thing for the VA. We wish Secretary Peake the best of luck and look forward to working with him.

Some of the important issues that we faced in previous years we continue to face in 2008. Performance Measures remain high on the agenda, and we have gotten off to a good start so far this year. By now we have good systems in place throughout the VISN, and we are looking forward to doing even better in 2008 than we did in 2007 when our VISN finished 3rd among all 21 VISNs. Other issues that we continue to work on include updating our EILs (that is our equipment listings) to make sure that we can account for all

equipment at our medical centers. This is a high priority item for Congress and we need to make sure that we do this in as efficient method as possible. In addition, our Employee Screening (that is our fingerprinting, background checks, etc.) for all employees, contractors, and volunteers, is again being reviewed by VA Central Office and the General Accounting Office, and we need to make sure that we are in good shape with these issues.

Environment of care continues to be a focus of lots of attention throughout the VA. If you believe there are environment of care issues in your area, please don't hesitate to report it to your supervisor. We want everyone to be proud of the environment you work in, and we will do everything we can to have a beautiful and safe environment in all our medical centers.

The final issue I will mention is the well-known fact that we are expecting Joint Commission visits during this year. That means we all have to be familiar with Joint Commission standards, national patient safety goals, etc., and be on our toes everyday for the possibility the Joint Commission is going to show up unannounced. The only way to do this is to be in a "state of continuous readiness." If you don't feel you are there, I would urge you to get there as quickly as possible. Despite all the other issues the VA faces, or that any health care organization faces, there is no doubt that a survey by the Joint Commission somehow always takes on a life of its own and is critically important to the success of a health care organization. So please, be ready for a Joint Commission visit.

These are just some of the things that are on my mind, and maybe even some of the things that keep me up at night, but as I said early in the newsletter, the good news is that things are going very well in VISN 5. I continue to be very proud to be the VISN Director and very proud to have the privilege of working with so many of you. I look forward to seeing you at my frequent visits to the medical centers and to getting to know many of you better throughout 2008.

Editors Note: How to contribute to the VISN VOICE NEWSLETTER

The VISN Voice is a monthly network publication, a source of educational and informational articles for employees, volunteers, and veterans of the VA Capitol Health Care Network.

Submit your information via e-mail to [VISN 5 Employee Newsletter](#) on Outlook by the end of the month for the following months publication. Please do not send Power Point or Published documents—use Word. Please include the following information: name, title, service, facility and reason for submission. Submissions should not exceed 350 words. All submissions might not be included in the newsletter. The editor reserves the right to make edits to any submission chosen for publication.

Ken Sliker—Editor

Special points of interest:

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CONGRATULATIONS CARE COORDINATION/ HOME TELEHEALTH (CCHT) PROGRAM

By

Mickey Burns

Overview

CCHT is a service of highly trained caring professionals armed with technology to assist qualifying veterans to navigate the VA System. Using simple appliances that plug into the home in-line telephone and electrical outlet, CCHT Staff ensure the Right Care is provided at the Right Place at the Right Time. An enrollee can take vital signs, such as blood pressure, weight, blood oxygen, and blood sugar and answer simple questions about current health status and receive educational reminders. It only takes a few minutes each day and done in the comfort of the home. The information is then delivered from the enrollee's home to the CCHT Staff by a toll-free number. The CCHT Staff assesses each enrollee's information and, when necessary, communicates abnormal results to the referring provider. The CCHT Program has demonstrated a reduction in Bed Days of Care and Hospitalizations for enrollees.

Level 2 Designation Site Visit

Recently the Quality Management Officer from the National Care Coordination Services Program conducted a three-day Care Coordination/ Home Telehealth (CCHT) Program Designation Site Visit. Similar to a JCAHO Survey, CCHT Program staff provided documentation and demonstrated how they continuously meet 48 Conditions of Participation. Using the Tracer Methodology, the reviewer interviewed CCHT staff at all three medical centers to assess the program's compliance with national guidelines regarding enrollment, monitoring, intervention, disenrollment, and overall equipment management.

Congratulations

Your facility CCHT staff were extremely well-prepared. Documentation to support compliance with national guidelines was exceptional. There were **no discrepancies** identified and the reviewer was extremely complementary of all CCHT Staff. Led by Facility Directors, Susan Jackson, Pat Davis, Judy Siddle, and John Goldizen,

CCHT Staff who participated were:

VAMHCS: Sheryl Batten, Lois Freeman, Demetrius Jones, John Wilkinson, E. Mae Meekins, Sarajane Brown, Beverly Nairns, Sharon Dennis, Philip Mitchell; **Martinsburg:** Joann Ashworth, Jason Hall, Debbie Joliff, Mary Jane Redden; **Washington DC:** Anab Ali, Stephanie Mathis, Donna King, Heidi Maloni, Angela Fleming, Jean Welch, and VISN 5 Program Manager, Mickey Burns. Thanks also to Helen Johnson and Vivian Mathews, VISN 5 Network Office RN staff, who worked with the medical center staff in preparation for this site visit.

Did you Know?

The CCHT Program added Medication Reconciliation as a quality indicator to ensure enrollees are monitored every 90 days. Observing that an enrollee's blood pressure was unusually low following discharge from a civilian hospital, Jason Hall, CCHT RN at Martinsburg VAMC, questioned the enrollee and identified that he was inadvertently taking both his VA and civilian doctor prescribed hypertensive medication. This is just one example how the CCHT Staff has intervened to save a veteran's life.

MARTINSBURG VAMC NEWS

By Barbara Corbin

PATIENT SAFETY INITIATIVE

The Martinsburg VAMC is pleased to have received funding in 2007 from the National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) for both of their project requests: smoke detectors and fire extinguishers for home oxygen patients to reduce the risk of injury and loss of property and Perioperative Sliderboards for each OR suite to improve communication among surgical teams. Kent Wagoner, Martinsburg Patient Safety Manager, is pleased to have received NCPS funding for both projects submitted.



Wanda Young, RN, Operating Room Nurse, communicates with surgical staff the Sliderboard patient safety check list.

HOLIDAY FUN...

At last, a reason to play with frosting and candy! Fifteen Martinsburg VAMC employees entered their unique creations in the first Gingerbread House Contest during the Winter Holidays Around the World All-Employee Holiday Party on December 12 and 13. Employees competed their favorite Gingerbread Houses in four categories...People's Choice & Honorable Mention; Most Artistic; and Most Fun. Through combined efforts of the EEO Office, Nutrition and Food Service, and Canteen, there were cultural exhibits on holiday celebrations around the world, a snowflake cutout demonstration to illustrate diversity, a healthy menu served to employees by Service Chiefs and Supervisors, a Wellness Program exhibit on tips for healthy holidays, a special visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus, and festive music played by Kim Hawkins on the piano. More than 1000 employees attended the Holiday activities held in different time frames to accommodate all shifts.



Gingerbread House Contest

VAMHCS News Press Conference Announces Historic Veterans Spending Increase

By Michael Dukes

Public Affairs Specialist, VAMHCS

On December 20, Senator Benjamin Cardin and Congressman Elijah Cummings applauded the care provided throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System during a press conference held at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. Senator Cardin and Congressman Cummings visited the medical center to announce that the historic omnibus appropriations bill was passed by the house and senate to provide approximately \$43.1 billion for veterans' programs. The bill, which provides the largest veterans spending increase in U.S. history, was signed by President George W. Bush on December 26.

"Our experiences at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center showed us that we weren't meeting the needs of our veterans," Cardin said during the press conference. He went on to talk about how the spending increase for veterans' programs will directly benefit VA health care and the services provided to returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

During the press conference, Senator Cardin and Congressman Cummings heralded the VA Maryland Health Care System as a model of excellence in serving the needs of



Senator Benjamin Cardin, D-Maryland, greets a veteran patient in the Physical Therapy Clinic at the Baltimore VA Medical Center after a press conference at the facility to announce a historic increase in funding for veterans programs. Lori Rosenzweig, a VAMHCS physical therapist, provides assistance while the veteran patient tells the senator how pleased he is with the care he has received from the VA

our nation's veterans and they recognized all VA employees for their outstanding commitment and dedication to a noble mission. Following the press conference, Senator Cardin and Congressman Cummings

presented a commemorative coin to four returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan as a symbol of appreciation for their service in the armed forces.

VAMHCS Researcher Receives Scientific American 50 Award

By Michael Dukes

Public Affairs Specialist, VAMHCS

Scientific American Magazine announced in its January 2008 issue that Dr. Robert Rohwer, a researcher at the Baltimore VA Medical Center, will receive the prestigious Scientific America 50 Award. Dr. Rohwer is receiving the award for his ground breaking research to develop a "filter" that might be able to purge red blood cells of disease-causing prions.

"This year's SciAm 50 awards are replete with instances of new machines or chemicals that come close to the true meaning of innovation as something entirely new," states the Scientific

American article. Rohwer worked with a group of researchers looking for a protective mechanism against variant-Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (the human form of mad cow disease). Rohwer's research identified a chemical compound, L13, that sticks to prions causing an illness called scrapie. Scrapie-containing blood filtered through beads coated with L13 and then injected into hamsters did not cause disease in the animals, unlike tainted, unfiltered blood.

For the past 30 years, Rohwer has conducted research on the transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) diseases, including: Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease; scrapie, which infects sheep and

goats; and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), a newly emergent disease that infects both cattle and humans. The Scientific American article described Rohwer as "another visionary paving the way for treating mysterious and deadly prion diseases such as mad cow."

Award winners highlighted by the Scientific American 50 Awards "have the potential to contribute much more to human health, consumer electronics and numerous other fields than if they were simply offering another antidepressant that tweaked serotonin levels or ratcheting up the speed of a microprocessor. What they have done is decidedly new," the article adds.

VAMHCS News

VA Maryland Health Care System gives back to local children during the holidays

By Michael Dukes

VAMHCS Public Affairs Specialist

The VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) and the Agape Chapter of Blacks in Government (BIG) brightened the holidays for hundreds of Baltimore elementary school children on December 20 as part of an annual toy drive.

VAMHCS employees donated over \$20,000 in gifts, including bicycles, iPods, laptop computers, winter

clothing, games, and much more to over 320 students at Baltimore's James McHenry Elementary School.

"We are dedicated to assisting the youth in Baltimore," said Regina Kennedy, Chief of the VAMHCS Prosthetic Treatment Center and a member of the Agape Chapter of BIG. "A project such as this sends the message that there are people that truly care about the children and are interested in their well-being, and the

VAMHCS family demonstrated that commitment."

"We hear so many negative things about our citizens, but this is a genuine example of what we are all about here in the VAMHCS," said Charlene Grant, Program and Planning Chairperson for the Agape Chapter of BIG at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. "We truly care about these children, their present and their future."



Regina Kennedy, the Chief of the Prosthetic Treatment Center for the VA Maryland Health Care System, stands with some of the children who received Christmas gifts donated by employees from the VA Maryland Health Care System and the Agape Chapter of Blacks in Government. Over \$20,000 in gifts, including bicycles, iPods, laptop computers and more were given to students at James McHenry Elementary School, which is located a few blocks from the Baltimore VA Medical Center.

WASHINGTON DC VAMC NEWS

Winterhaven Homeless Stand Down

Washington DC VA Medical Center Sponsors

Major Event for Homeless Veterans

The Washington DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center (DCVAMC) proudly hosted one of the Nation's largest health and job fairs for homeless veterans on Saturday, January 12. The full-day event (9 a.m. to 3 p.m.) attracted over 300 area veterans and reflects a 20-plus year tradition of dedicating a day of service to the homeless. It is an unfortunate reality that a large number of military veterans are homeless. The DCVAMC Winterhaven Homeless Stand Down responds to this needy community.

Throughout the year, DCVAMC staff is proactive in its programming and outreach for homeless veterans. Services of the Medical Center's Health Care for Homeless Veterans department include outreach on the streets and in shelters. An Outreach Social Worker, whose name is appropriately enough Jim Street, knows the popular havens and hang-out spots for homeless veterans and visits them regularly. Medical Center Outreach programs engage veterans in medical and mental health services and support them with referrals to treatment, housing, education, and employment services.

Health Care for Homeless Veterans also provides VA Case Management based on individual need. This comprehensive program forms the basis of trusting relationships with veterans and assists them by developing individualized plans to end their homeless status, with the goal of

returning them to the community with secure income and housing.

Once a year, the Winterhaven Homeless Stand Down focuses on providing a wide range of resources, all in one central location, in a welcoming and supportive environment. Transportation is provided from shelters and metro stops and hundreds of veterans arrive early at the doors, eager to get their annual health screenings, learn about job opportunities, improve their housing situations, enjoy a warm meal and a hair cut.

The event provides the convenience "one-stop shopping" – with nearly 60 Stand Down Stations open for business. Medical screenings include Hepatitis C, prostate, cholesterol, nutrition, ophthalmology, podiatry, and dental. Flu shots and pneumonia shots were available, too.

This year, the DC Department of Health joined the event offering HIV screening kits. The kits use new non-invasive swab tests that give results within one hour. Trained educators and counselors were on hand to provide support to those participating in HIV screening.

Clinicians and social workers volunteered their time to help homeless veterans seeking substance abuse treatment, mental health and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) counseling. Narcotics Anonymous and Alcohol Anonymous group sessions were held throughout the day. Suicide prevention hotline information was available, and for those in need, Suicide Prevention counselors were present.

Many homeless veterans do have modest incomes. A new Internal Revenue Service (IRS) station gave free income tax guidance and tax preparation.

Although Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) homeless veterans are very few in number, Ms. Jean Langbein, the Medical Center's OIF/OEF Program Manager and social work staff were on-hand to offer guidance, as needed.

There were many employment support and housing agencies represented. They included; the Veterans Benefits

Administration, Social Security Administration, DC Vocational Rehabilitation, DC Coalition for the Homeless, Access Housing, Diane's House Ministries, Alexandria Homeless Continuum, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the US Department of Labor. Juggling services for hundreds of veterans and placing more than 600 volunteers at duty stations was the job of our outstanding event coordinator, Paula Gorman, Assistant Medical Center Director.

Among the volunteers and sponsors were corporate donors such as, ZIPS Dry Cleaning, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, DAV Charitable Trust and Corporate Sports – donors of the beautiful volunteer shirts. Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) and community non-profits were also represented offering continental breakfast and snacks throughout the day, comfort kits (toiletries), warm clothing, and financial support.

The medical center was honored to host a tour of the Winterhaven stations for newly appointed Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. James Peake, along with leaders of VSOs, and government agencies.

Unique to the event this year was a My HealthVet station. Manned by Kay Craddock, Medical Service, and staff of the Business Office, this station was dedicated to enrolling as many veteran attendees as possible in My HealthVet, a web-based personal health management record. Enrollees to the system can better monitor their appointments and medication regimen and improve their overall health and fitness. My HealthVet allows veterans to be better informed users of health care services.

"Through this event, the medical center has demonstrated its commitment to helping homeless veterans improve their health, well-being, and living conditions. We respect and honor their service to the Nation and they deserve no less," said Fernando O. Rivera, Medical Center Director.

IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE

SYSTEMS REDESIGN (previously Advanced Clinic Access/ACA)

The ultimate goal of Systems Redesign (SR) is to improve access to care, reduce waiting times and provide quality care when veterans want and need it. Systems Redesign has been tested across VHA and pilot programs continue. Initially at Martinsburg VAMC and the community based outpatient clinics, Systems Redesign principles and efforts focused on improvement to access care in Primary Care. Martinsburg has spread these SR principles, implementing and measuring improvements in specialized clinical practice areas. These principles are being implemented in administrative areas...Human Resources, Facility Management Service, Information Management Service, Nutrition & Food Service, and Business Office Operations.

Based on national measures, significant improvements in access to care have been made during the last several years. Martinsburg has set high standards, with goals of exceeding targeted measures. Measures have been exceeded for New Patient Waiting Times in Cardiology, Dermatology, Eye Care, Podiatry, Primary Care, Gastroenterology, and Urology. Martinsburg is exceeding measures for Established Patient Waiting times in Audiology, Cardiology, Dermatology, Eye Care, Gastroenterology, Mental Health,

Podiatry, Primary Care, and Urology. Primary Care patients perceive they are all to be seen by their provider when desired and that has significantly and positively affected patient satisfaction scores.

Efforts to decrease clinic “no show” rates have been especially successful at Martinsburg. Goals are being exceeded in nearly all clinics. Patients understand that a “no show” means another veteran loses an opportunity for care! Martinsburg staff continue to educate veterans on the importance of calling the medical center if they are unable to keep appointments...”no shows” affect everyone! The medical center emphasizes the VHA goal of ensuring veterans will have access to care when they want and need it.

Linda Morris, MD, Chief of Staff, has led initiatives at Martinsburg and VISN 5 as the co-chair of the VISN Systems Redesign Leadership Committee. Included in those are the *No Veteran Left Behind* initiative, the *C-4 Colorectal Cancer* initiative, the *FIX Inpatient Flow* initiative, and *Scheduler Training*. Dr. Morris also participates in the National Systems Redesign Coaches College.

VISN 5 Employee Newsletter

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VISN 5 Service Area



Facility Numbers

Baltimore VAMC

1-800-463-6295

VAMHCS Telephone Care Line

1-800-865-2441

Perry Point VAMC

1-800-949-1003

Prescription Refill & Clinic Appointment

1-800-463-6295, ext 7395

Baltimore Rehab & Extended Care Center

1-800-463-6295

Martinsburg VAMC

(304) 263-0811

Medical Advice Line

1-800-817-3807 or (304) 262-4855

Patient Eligibility

(304) 263-0811, ext 3758/3757

Monday—Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Or ext. 3050 after 4:30 p.m.

Prescription Refill

(304) 263-0811, ext. 4870 (all hours)

Washington DC VAMC

(202) 745-8000

Patient Service Center

(202) 745-8247

VETS Information

(202) 745-4046

PTSD Clinic Number

(202) 745-8591

Cambridge, MD

(410) 228-6243

Fort Howard, MD

(410) 477-1800

Hagerstown, MD

(301) 665-1462

Alexandria, VA

(703) 313-0694

Franklin, WV

(304) 358-2355

Charlotte Hall, MD

(310) 884-7102

Glen Burnie, MD

(410) 590-4140

Loch Raven, MD

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(540) 442-1773

Petersburg, WV

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Cumberland, MD

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Greenbelt, MD

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Pocomoke City, MD

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