



# VISN 5 EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER



November 2007

## Welcome

It is a privilege and an honor for me to say "Hello" to each and every employee in VISN 5. This is the inaugural issue of our new electronic VISN 5 Employee Newsletter. We hope to be able to publish this newsletter each month and give you as much information as possible about what is going on in our VISN and what our plans are for the future.

With this newsletter being a major form of communication within our VISN, I thought I would start out by talking about the importance that I put on communication. I have always believed that one of the main reasons that an organization is successful or not successful is their ability to communicate effectively. Certainly in times of crisis we know that communication is a key. That is why at all levels of government during a flood or an earthquake or a terror attack, the President, Governors, Senators, and Mayors go to the scene and try to talk to as many people as possible, to calm their fears and to make sure people know that their leadership is there for them. Communication is every bit as important on a routine basis. It is vital that you,

the employees of VISN 5, know what your leadership is thinking and what our plans are. By the way, it is just as vital that we hear from you. That is why I plan on spending as much time as I can at each of the medical centers talking to employees at every level, and having an active exchange of ideas and thoughts about what direction VISN 5 is going in and how we are doing. I am extremely hopeful that as many employees as possible will read this newsletter on a monthly basis, and I plan to contribute an article to virtually every issue. So once again, welcome to the first edition of the VISN 5 Employee Newsletter. I look forward to communicating with you on a regular basis and thank each and every one of you for your willingness to share your thoughts and ideas with me.

Thank you,

*Sandy*

SANFORD M. GARFUNKEL, FACHE  
Director, VA Capitol Health Care  
Network

### Special points of interest:

[Mr. Garfunkel's Thoughts](#)

[Question, Comments, and  
Suggestions](#)

### *News From Around the Network*

[VAMHCS](#)

[Washington DC VAMC](#)

[Martinsburg VAMC](#)

[In Search of Excellence](#)

[VISN 5 Service Area](#)

---

## Name the Network Employees' Newsletter

We need your help, we are starting a new VISN 5 Network Employee Newsletter and we need a new name. Please help us and the winner of the naming contest will win \$ 250 dollars, just in time for those holiday bills. Send in your suggestion in on Outlook by entering "VISN 5 Employee Newsletter" on the address line, type in your entry along with contact information and hit send. The contest will run during the month of November, November 30 will be the deadline. A panel will judge the entries and select the winner by December 14, 2007. In case of a duplicate entry the first entry of the name will be deemed official. Get those entries in and WIN.

## I THOUGHT YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—Mr. Garfunkel

This being the first monthly article of “I thought you would like to know”, I am going to try to go through a fair number of issues in a relative short space. In an effort to bring everybody up to date on some of the things that are going on in our VISN and nationally, many of which you may be aware of but some you may not be aware of.

Perhaps I will start out with your favorite topic, and mine, Performance Measures. I want to give a big “Congratulations” to each and every employee of VISN 5. We have done fantastically well in our Performance Measures for FY '07. All of the final numbers are not in yet, but I am sure that in the end we will find that we certainly are among the top performing VISNs. At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, our VISN was number 6 on a formula used by VA Central Office to rank VISNs as to how we do in Performance Measures. At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter we ranked nationally at number 5. We had a big finish on our Performance Measures at all three of our medical centers, and I fully expect that we will do better than number 5 when the final numbers are in. We will keep you posted, but no matter how we did, I sincerely thank all of you. Performance Measures are truly an indication of the high quality of care that we give, and I can say from reviewing the data thoroughly at the VISN level, that our VISN delivers very high-quality care. Probably second on everybody's mind, besides Performance Measures, is the budget. As you read in the papers and heard from your leadership, the VA expects to have a good budget year in FY '08. In FY '07 we also had a very good budget year with lots of dollars flowing into the medical centers to do Non-Recurring Maintenance (NRM) projects, enhance staffing, and meet increased workload demands. In fact, to be honest and to give you some insight into what goes on at the higher levels of VA, the big issue that many medical centers faced was how we were really going to spend some of the money that came in. This is not to say that the

money was not needed, but that some of it came in relatively late in the year and the money had to be obligated by September 30<sup>th</sup>. For example, a fair amount of money was sent to our VISN for NRM projects, these projects take care of everything from re-doing halls and walls to fixing some heating and air conditioning issues throughout the medical centers. There are long lists of critical projects that virtually every VAMC in the country needs to accomplish; however, when money comes in late in the year and the project needs to be developed, worked up, put out for bid, and awarded by our contracting staff, it often becomes a race to get all of these items accomplished before the deadline of September 30<sup>th</sup>. I am very pleased to say that our VISN did a great job obligating this money and all of our NRM projects planned to be obligated in FY '07, were in fact obligated. For FY '08, we already have a listing of projects in priority order and are beginning the process of design and contract work even before the budget is approved. All of our medical centers in FY '08 are looking to enhance staffing levels in necessary areas, purchase pieces of equipment that are necessary for continued high-quality care, address building maintenance, and there are other individual initiatives at each facility. We will keep you posted as to what happens to our VA budget allocations from Congress.

We are no more than a year away from an unannounced visit by the Joint Commission at all three of our facilities. Although we like to be in a state of continued readiness, we know that lots of work still needs to be accomplished to make sure we are completely ready and in compliance with all Joint Commission standards. This all out effort has begun and I think you will find lots of educational sessions and other activities taking place to make sure that each and everyone of us is prepared to answer questions that might be asked by Joint Commission surveyors and make sure we are fully aware of all Joint

Commission guidelines and certainly 2008 Patient Safety Goals which are of primary importance. By now there should be posters throughout your medical center on the 2008 Patient Safety Goals, and I would urge each of you to carefully look at those goals and learn them. They are a key to success on our upcoming Joint Commission surveys.

Finally, as I am quickly running out of space, I wanted to mention the importance of making sure that all of our veterans are treated with the dignity and respect that they have earned. There is lots of emphasis in the VA on many special groups, all of whom deserve special attention that includes our mental health patients, OIF/OEF patients, ex-prisoners of war, etc. I think the way that we can best meet the needs of all our veterans is to see that every veteran that walks through our door is treated with dignity and respect. That every veteran leaves our medical center saying to themselves, “this is where I want to come back to be treated for any illness or injury I have and this is where I would recommend my friends and family come for their treatment.” The quality of care we provide in the VA is second to none, and we need to make sure that the service we provide remains second to none. How we can improve service, how we can move veterans through our system more quickly, how we can exceed the expectations of our veteran patients is something we should be discussing and striving for. I know that you all feel the same way and I would ask you to work at ensuring that we meet this very important goal.

Those are some of the things I thought you might want to know, and I look forward to communicating with all of you in future issues of our VISN 5 Employee Newsletter.

# Questions, Comments, and Suggestions

This space is dedicated to “Questions, Comments and Suggestions” from VISN wide employees to the leadership and program leaders throughout the network area.

Please e-mail your letters on VA Microsoft Outlook to the

[VISN 5 Employee Newsletter](#)

The editor will distribute your question, comments, or suggestions to the Network Director or responsible Program Leader for reply or follow-through.

---

## News from the VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS)



### Clipper City Brewing, LP, Pledges Donations for Returning

Hugh Sisson (left), the founder of Clipper City Brewing, presents their first check totaling \$2,000 to Christopher Buser, the Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom Program Coordinator for the VA Maryland Health Care System, to support the rehabilitation efforts for returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

By R. David Edwards

In a show of community support for returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, Clipper City Brewing, LP, is donating a portion of their proceeds to the VA Maryland Health Care System to support the rehabilitation efforts for returning veterans throughout the state. The program, which will be an ongoing donor project for Clipper City over the next 12 months, will directly benefit returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who receive their care throughout the health care system. Dennis H. Smith, Director of the VA Maryland Health Care System, was pleased to learn of Clipper City's interest in supporting the needs of Maryland's returning veterans. "This is a great example of local businesses giving back

to their communities," said Smith. "We applaud their support and hope that other companies will consider following their lead."

About 24 million living Americans have served in the armed forces, with nearly 18 million wearing the uniforms of the U.S. military during times of war and conflict. In Maryland alone, over 3,200 returning veterans have already enrolled for care throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System. The funds generated from Clipper City's efforts will be used to support transportation, emergency lodging, outreach efforts and child care costs associated with the health care needs of returning veterans throughout the state.

"We are making this our primary charitable initiative for the next twelve months," said Hugh Sisson, founder of Clipper City. "Our injured young people

returning from war should be a major priority for all American citizens and we feel compelled to do what we can as a small business to assist in their recovery and their return to a productive lifestyle."

To date, Clipper City has contributed over \$6,000 to support the needs of returning veterans throughout Maryland.

## News from the Washington DC VAMC

### President Bush Visits and Speaks with Veterans and Staff

By Michelle Spivak

President George W. Bush visited the Washington DC VA Medical Center on August 13. The President was joined by former Senator, Robert Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, chairs of the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors. Accompanied by VISN 5 Director, Sanford M. Garfunkel, and Medical Center Director, Fernando O. Rivera, the President toured the Rehabilitation area of the medical center and met with OIF/OEF service personnel receiving care at the hospital. They visited a group of veterans undergoing a unique therapy in the Wellness Center pool – kayaking. Kayaking assists veterans rehabilitate through developing hand and eye coordination and upper body strength, in addition to encouraging organization skills such as preparation of equipment, scheduling therapeutic appointments, etc. President Bush received a demonstration of VA's highly regarded electronic health records (EHR) system from Chief of Staff, Dr. Ross D. Fletcher. The presentation emphasized the current EHR coordination between VA and DoD, a priority goal of the Dole/Shalala commission. The President said, "There's a lot of amazing things taking place at this facility. We saw information technology and healthcare records that are being passed seamlessly from DoD to VA."



(L-R) Former Senator Robert Dole, former HHS Secretary, Donna Shalala, chairs of the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors join President George W. Bush, VA Secretary James Nicholson, and Medical Center Director, Fernando O. Rivera at the Washington DC VA Medical Center.



President Bush greets OIF/OEF veterans participating in "kayak therapy" in the DCVAMC Wellness Center swimming pool. Offered in conjunction with Team River Runners, this therapy assists in improving upper body strength and hand and eye coordination among other skills.

## News from the Martinsburg VAMC

### VAMC 106-YEAR OLD WWI VETERAN HONORED

By Barbara Corbin

On Saturday, September 22, the Patriot Guard Riders traveled from various states to assemble at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center. Nearly 200 motorcycle and riders were on a mission to recognize and honor 106-year old WWI and WWII veteran and former POW Frank Buckles. Arrangements had been made in advance with Mr. Buckles' family. The Riders developed their own program and invited news media from WFAA-TV in Dallas, TX; ABC Good Morning America, and VA's American Veteran.

A large number of Riders positioned themselves with their American flags along each side of the entranceway to the Buckles' residence. Mr. Buckles entered his farm in the handicap accessible sidecar of a BMW motorcycle. The Patriot Guard Riders honored Mr. Buckles, the last-living U.S. Army veteran to serve in France in WWI, with a short recognition program.

The Nation's only traveling working Liberty Bell, which travels over the country to honor veterans, was positioned in the front yard of the farm. Tolling of the Liberty Bell was breathtaking and a very special part of the Buckles' tribute.

The Patriot Guard Riders is a diverse group of riders from across the Nation who have one thing in common besides motorcycles...they have an unwavering respect for those who risk their lives for America's freedom and security.



Mr. Buckles was honored at his farm house with enactment of a colonial soldier in recognition of his service in the Army during WWI in France.



The Patriot Guard Riders positioned themselves with their American flags along each side of the entranceway to the Buckles' residence.

## In search of excellence

### *Overnight Success in Thirty Years: One VA Doctor's Quest for Electronic Health Records*

In the early 1970's, clinicians held fast to their traditions - be it deadly long shifts for medical students or methods for recording patient histories. But, there were some independent, forward thinking doctors, administrators and "techies" who were quietly breaking ranks and tossing tradition out with the paperwork.

Among this small group of risk-takers, was a cardiologist from Washington, DC, Dr. Ross D. Fletcher. High energy, Fletcher was and remains an "out of the box" thinker. He is known for exuberance in his work, passion for his patients, and pride in VA. He was not, in those days, a "techie". He did have a vision for improving health delivery through real-time access to a patient's record - the entire record. And, he felt certain the more information about a patient that was available - available simultaneously to the entire care team - the better health outcomes.

In those days, EKG's were digitized, but not much else was available in an electronic format. Fletcher had a vision for an entirely electronic patient record that would be comprehensive, accessible 24/7, and assist the provider by reminding the provider of allergies, timeframes for routine tests, and other essential care data.

Around the country, other VA visionaries were, independently, working toward a similar goal. By the 1980's, computers were everywhere and the idea was catching on. VA was digitizing lab data and it was accessible via desktops and many hospitals nationwide. Then in 1994, VHA got a new leader who was exactly in-step with the renegade computer geeks trying to get rid of paper records. Ken Kizer took charge as VA's Under Secretary for Health. He quickly moved to transfer patient records to a system-wide computer network.

In the meantime, working with an

interdisciplinary team at the Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC), an alpha testing site for the new Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS), Fletcher worked tirelessly to expand the patient records to include notes, discharge summaries, graphing capabilities, clinical reminders and to integrate images - such as x-rays.

Using a carrot and stick approach, each time Fletcher gave doctors what they wanted in the system at DCVAMC, he twinned it with a feature perceived as less desirable (more typing or more sign-offs). This game plan, along with a team that consisted of real life end-users got buy-in from clinical staff and administrators.

Fletcher used every opportunity to hype the system, speaking across the nation to groups large and small about the innovation and its potential for improving veterans' health.

By 1995, the system was nearly paperless and within a few years, the benefits of this fully electronic record could be seen in the bottom line (fewer admissions, shorter hospital stays, no lost tests or need for repeat tests, etc.) and in health outcomes.

Now it's 2007, and the data shows that clinical reminders in areas such as hypertension have lead VA to superior performance in maintaining health blood pressure levels for patients, among other achievements that put VA way ahead of the private sector.

Medications are dispensed through the use of Bar Code Medication Administration, a system using a scanner much like that used in supermarkets. A VA nurse from Kansas City had the idea when she saw it used at a car rental company. In the new atmosphere of encouraging technological improvements, the nurse spoke up and now the system is used throughout VA.

It's soon to be expanded to include bar codes on specimens.

Fletcher, in the meantime, has become the major spokesperson for CPRS, now dubbed EHR - for Electronic Health Records. He has given demonstrations to President George W. Bush, the President's Cabinet, members of Congress, the head of GAO and the Joint Commission, as well as international government and health leaders and the national media.

He's a champion of electronic health records - in addition to his other duties and Chief of Staff of the medical center and a leading researcher. He is responsible for much of the great publicity VA has garnered over the past five years and has inspired thousands about the benefits of the VA system.

Fletcher, still a national cheerleader for EHR, is always looking for ways to improve electronic health records. His most recent efforts relate to DoD/VA sharing of patient records. Knowing, Dr. Fletcher, he'll be successful at delivering that message, too.

## VISN 5 Employee Newsletter

**Editor-Ken Sliker**

**Contributing Editors**

**Barbara Corbin-Martinsburg VAMC**

**Michelle Spivak-Washington DC VAMC**

**David Edwards-VAMHCS**

## VA Capitol Health Care Network VISN 5

**849 International Drive, Suite 275**

**Linthicum, MD 21090**

**Phone: 410-691-1131**

**Fax: 410-684-3189**

**E-mail: [VISN 5 Employee Newsletter](#)**

# 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**  
(301) 884-7102

**Glen Burnie, MD**  
(410) 590-4140

**Loch Raven, MD**  
(410) 605-7650

**Harrisonburg, VA**  
(540) 442-1773

**Petersburg, WV**  
(304) 257-5817

**Cumberland, MD**  
(301) 724-0061

**Greenbelt, MD**  
(301) 345-2463

**Pocomoke City, MD**  
(410) 957-6718

**Stephens City, VA**  
(540) 869-0600

**Washington, DC**  
(202) 745-8685

Visit us on our website at [www.va.gov/VISN5](http://www.va.gov/VISN5)