



THE VISN VOICE



September 2008

I THOUGHT YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW

Mr. Garfunkel

Perhaps the most important thing that we do in the VA is interact with our stakeholders. A stakeholder is defined in Webster's Dictionary as "one who is involved in or affected by a course of action."

If you are involved in direct patient care, your main stakeholder is the veteran patient that you are treating, testing, examining, etc. If you are more indirectly involved with patient care (which, in case you are not aware, describes everyone else working for the VA that is not directly involved) your stakeholders include the direct caregivers, other indirect caregivers, and of course includes our veteran patients whom we all serve. It is really our primary mission to satisfy our stakeholders; that is why we are here.

The VA is moving rapidly to ensure that we have a more patient centered system, and a health care system where decisions are made with the input of, and the primary focus on, the patient.

As we go through our daily routines, everything we do (from interacting with patients and fellow employees to planning for the future) should be done with our main stakeholder, the patient, in mind.

As you go through your day today, try it. Think of how every interaction you have, and everything you do, impacts the veteran patient and other stakeholders.

If we keep in mind, that satisfying our stakeholders will make us a better organization, we will be a better organization. Over the coming weeks and months, VISN 5 will be putting a lot of emphasis on this important subject. I look forward to speaking to you about it as I visit your medical center.

Special points of interest:

*News From Around
the Network*

Washington DC VAMC

VAMHCS

Martinsburg VAMC

VISN 5 Service Area

Editors Note: How to contribute to THE VISN VOICE NEWSLETTER

The VISN Voice is a monthly Network publication, and a source of educational and informational articles for employees, volunteers, and veterans of the VA Capitol Health Care Network. Submit your information via outlook e-mail to [VISN5 Employee Newsletter](mailto:VISN5EmployeeNewsletter) by the end of the month for the following month's publication. Please do not send PowerPoint or Published documents—use Word. Please include the following information: name, title, service, facility, and reason for submission. Submissions should not exceed 350 words. The editor reserves the right to make edits to any submission chosen for publication, and not all submissions will be chosen for publication. Ken Sliker—Editor

WASHINGTON DC VAMC NEWS

Washington DC VAMC Director Wins Top Communications Award



Washington DC VAMC Director Fernando O. Rivera (left) was recently named VHA Visionary for Communicators at the recent annual Public and Intergovernmental Affairs conference in New Orleans. David E. Cowgill (Public Affairs Officer, Pittsburgh HCS) was named VHA Communicator of the Year.

VISN 5 Employee Newsletter

Editor-Ken Sliker
VISN 5

Contributing Editors

Dawn Miller
VISN 5

Michelle Spivak
Washington DC VAMC

David Edwards
VAMHCS

Michael Dukes
VAMHCS

Margaret Hornberger
VAMHCS

Barbara Corbin
Martinsburg VAMC

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:

[VISN5 Employee Newsletter](#)

WASHINGTON DC VAMC NEWS

VAMC OFFERS PATIENTS Wii THERAPY



Two OEF/OIF veterans try out the Nintendo Wii as a form of occupational and recreational therapy at the DCVAMC.

Air Force veteran Arthur Cunningham suffers from degenerative joint disease. But today, working with occupational therapists at the DC VAMC, Cunningham is getting the better of his affliction, thanks to an unusual therapeutic instrument – the Nintendo Wii game station.

Nintendo introduced Wii (pronounced like the English pronoun ‘We’) back in 2006, and it has turned out to be a huge success for the firm. The scope of its appeal and creative uses have caught many by surprise...including some at VA Medical Centers around the country.

Cunningham says it’s hard to get exercise when your hips are hurting and your knees are hurting all at the same time, but he has been able to regain some of the range of motion he had lost by playing Wii games of

tennis and bowling.

Just two years after Wii games first became available, an ever increasing number of them are finding their way into occupational therapy clinics, where they are helping wounded and injured Veterans regain lost function in an atmosphere that is both playful and challenging.

The games simulate real-life activities, but – in this case – do it in the controlled environment of a clinic, under the supervision of a trained therapist.

Occupational therapist Stephen Smith says Wii games provide a variety of benefits that traditional therapy techniques cannot, including motivating patients.

The same features that have made Wii so popular with the general population

help explain its appeal in the clinic as well. The competitive aspects of the games can be so engaging that users become immersed in the challenges presented, whether they be physical or analytical.

Therapist Andrea Meehan has been working with Army Specialist Eric Rich, one of several patients here whose cognitive skills have been impaired by traumatic brain injury. She says patients like Rich often have trouble with memory, attention, concentration, and things like organization and planning. So she uses Wii games in her therapy sessions to try to improve her patient’s memory and attention to detail.

Rich has been playing a game called “Covered Cages,” which gives him a quick glimpse of half a dozen bird cages, some occupied – some not, before a cover comes down and the cages are shuffled across the screen. Rich needs to track the movement and remember which covered cage contains a bird, and which not. He says he enjoys the immersive aspect of the game, and likes the fact that its scoring system gives him feed back on his progress. Over time he has advanced to more difficult levels of the game, drawn in by the challenge of bettering his previous scores.

For additional information about Washington DC VAMC visit <http://www.washingtondc.va.gov> or call the Public Affairs Office at 202-745-4037.

WASHINGTON DC VAMC NEWS

Washington DC VAMC Honored with Olin E. Teague Award



OEF/OIF Veteran Brian Isenhour speaks with his OEF/OIF case manager Elise Moore. DC VAMC assigns every OEF/OIF patient with a case manager in one of four areas: Polytrauma, Social Work Service, Trauma Services, or the OEF/OIF Severely Injured and Seriously Ill program.

This year has been a great year of accolades for the DC VAMC. The medical center passed its Joint Commission inspection with flying colors, was recognized as the “100 Most Wired” hospitals by Hospital and Health Networks magazine, received a Carey site visit, and now the medical center is being honored for the development of a dashboard (site plan) to improve case management of OEF/OIF (Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom) veterans.

The OEF/OIF site plan team is recognized for the Olin E. Teague for its development of the Case

Management Site Plan. The plan has helped veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq, many of whom had difficulty coordinating VA care and managing multiple appointments with different specialists.

“This plan is a concerted effort to make sure that every one of our returning OEF/OIF heroes has a safety net and does not fall through the cracks,” said Heather Malecki, VISN 5 Polytrauma Coordinator.

The team that developed the site plan consists of clinicians with expertise in OEF/OIF health issues and includes: Heather Malecki; Jean Langbein, OEF/OIF Program Supervisor; Stacey

Pollack, PhD., Director Trauma Services program; Sevena Boughton, Chief Social Worker; Sheree Gordon, RN, Medical Service; and Katharine Bloeser, team leader for the returning veterans outreach and education clinic.

The site plan ensures case managers are assigned to all returning OEF/OIF veterans in one of four areas: Polytrauma, Social Work Service, Trauma Services, and the OEF/OIF Severely Injured and Seriously Ill program.

The case management site plan has been so successful in improving the coordination of care, it is projected to be used as a basis for “Best Practice” throughout the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

“The core of the site plan is inherent to the vision and mission of the VA, and why we all come to work everyday at the VA,” says Malecki.

This is the 28th year the VA has presented the Olin E. Teague award to the team or person making major contributions in the area of rehabilitation and improvement in the quality of life for war-injured veterans. The recognition is given to only one team or individual per year.

Olin (Tiger) E. Teague was a World War II veteran whose life-long work improved the quality of life for the American veteran. The award recognizes those who follow in Teague’s footsteps.

VA MARYLAND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM (VAMHCS) NEWS

VA Study Supports Rehabilitative Impact of Treadmill Exercise on the Brain for Stroke Patients

Treadmill Exercise After Stroke Improves Walking and Fitness

By Kenya N. Griffin

Researchers at the Baltimore VA Medical Center (VAMC), University of Maryland School of Medicine, and Johns Hopkins University have shown that progressive treadmill exercise improves the fitness and walking ability in stroke survivors with long term mobility impairment. The study results appear in the September issue of *Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

This randomized controlled study examines the hypothesis that progressive task-repetitive treadmill exercise improves fitness and walking function in subjects with chronic stroke by stimulating rewiring in the brain, even years after the stroke has occurred.

Stroke is the leading cause of disability in older Americans, and the most common neurological cause for hospitalization in veterans. Current health care models for stroke rehabilitation are “frontloaded into the few months immediately following stroke,” says Richard Macko, MD, principal investigator of the study and Director of the VA Maryland Exercise and Robotics Center of Excellence (MERCE) at the Baltimore VAMC, Professor of Neurology, and Academic Director for Rehabilitation Medicine at University of Maryland School of Medicine. This is based on the belief that recovery of neurological function is mostly restricted to this very short time frame. Unfortunately, most stroke survivors are left with significant walking and balance problems after completing usual rehabilitation. Clinicians are increasingly aware that these mobility deficits limit physical activity leading to severe physical

deconditioning, which worsens disability and cardiovascular health.

The study conducted at the Baltimore VAMC and University of Maryland School of Medicine compared the impact of a six-month treadmill exercise training program on patients with long term disability after stroke to that of a standardized stretching program of equal time and exposure. The study revealed that the treadmill program significantly improved treadmill walking velocity by 51 percent, cardiovascular fitness by 18 percent, and resulted in a 72 percent increase in activation in certain areas of the brain. This is compared to 11 percent increase in velocity and 3 percent decrease in cardiovascular fitness for those in the stretching group.

Researchers compared functional Magnetic Resonance Images (fMRI) at Johns Hopkins University’s Kirby Center for Functional Brain Imaging of participants’ brains while participants did knee-flexing exercises that mimic walking. The fMRIs showed increased blood oxygenation and flow in the brainstem and cerebellum of the stroke survivors who had used the treadmill, but not in the control group that did the stretching exercises. Furthermore, the tests showed the increased blood oxygenation and flow only when the stroke survivors who had used the treadmill flexed their partially paralyzed knees and not when they flexed their non-paralyzed knees.

The conclusion is that treadmill exercise improves walking capacity in chronically disabled stroke survivors, and that this is linked to

increased activation in deep subcortical areas of the brain that are usually left intact in human stroke survivors. “It is promising that treadmill exercise can stimulate new or underused brain circuits and improve ambulation in stroke survivors even after completion of conventional rehabilitation therapy,” says Andreas Luft, M.D., one of the study’s lead authors and a Professor of Clinical Neurorehabilitation in the Department of Neurology of the University at Zürich in Switzerland. This is the first randomized trial to examine the brain mechanisms underlying locomotor adaptations to task-repetitive lower extremity treadmill exercise training in a disabled population with chronic neurological impairments caused by stroke.

Researchers said the increases in blood oxygenation and flow indicated that the cerebellum and brainstem had been “recruited” to replace some of the walking functions of cortical regions of the brain that had been damaged by the stroke.

The implications are that stroke survivors can fight back against the disability of stroke using structured exercise, even decades after conventional therapy has ended. Other findings by the VA MERCE investigators are that treadmill aerobic exercise improves glucose tolerance, potentially preventing and even reversing diabetes in older stroke patients.

“Ultimately, the goal of this type of research is to improve functional independence and quality of life for individuals aging with chronic

VA MARYLAND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM (VAMHCS) NEWS

(Treadmill Exercise from page 5)

disability from stroke,” explains Dr. Macko, whose research is also supported by the National Institute on Aging-Functional Independence in Older Americans Center, and VA Geriatrics Research, Education, and Clinical Center. While these research findings provide strong evidence for a public health benefit of sustained structured exercise after stroke, Dr. Macko and his collaborators are expanding their research into other areas. Ongoing studies to determine the optimal quantity and intensity of exercise to improve cardiovascular health and walking function after stroke are being conducted at the Baltimore VAMC and the University of Maryland-Kernan Rehabilitation Hospital. Exercise classes for stroke survivors are now being established at senior centers and at Veterans of Foreign War posts in Howard County in collaboration with the County Office on Aging. Partnerships with Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Newman Laboratory for Biomechanics, and Human Rehabilitation are also testing programmable ankle, arm, wrist, and hand robotics modules to help produce joint-specific motor learning. In the long-term, these studies will pioneer new exercise and robotics therapies to improve health and function for Veterans and all Americans that are living with the disability of stroke.

Funding for this study was provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. National Institutes of Aging Health, Claude D. Pepper Older American Independence Center, University of Maryland, France-Merrick Foundation, Johns Hopkins University, and the Eleanor Naylor Dana Charitable Trust.

Perry Point VA Medical Center Food Service Worker Achieves 60 Years of Federal Government Service



Lorraine Malloy is recognized for achieving 60 years of federal government service by Sanford Garfunkel, Director, VA Capitol Health Care Network.

By Margaret Hornberger

Lorraine Malloy, food service worker at the Perry Point VA Medical Center, has reached a milestone that few people can claim having achieved. Malloy is celebrating six decades of federal government service, which have all been spent in Nutrition and Food Service at the Perry Point facility.

“Since joining VA in 1948, I have seen many changes, but one thing hasn’t changed and that is the warm feelings I have about my coworkers and the veteran patients we serve,” says Malloy. “I feel like a member of one big happy family, and my connection with them is what keeps me going every day.”

Malloy can often be seen throughout the Perry Point VAMC delivering meal trays via retherm food carts to patient care units or in the main kitchen preparing meal trays to be served to hospitalized veteran patients.

During a recent reception held at the

Perry Point VAMC, Malloy was recognized for her outstanding achievement by top managers of the VA Capitol Health Care Network (which includes Maryland, portions of Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware and the District of Columbia) and her fellow coworkers. “I applaud Ms. Malloy for her devotion to duty and positive approach to her work,” says Sanford Garfunkel, Director, VA Capitol Health Care Network. “She has made VA her employer of choice for sixty years and is a shining example of dedication to serving the needs of our nation’s veterans.”

Malloy has no immediate plans to retire and hopes to continue working as long as she is in good health. According to Malloy’s supervisor, Walter Herpick, “Lorraine’s outlook on life keeps her young, and her warm and gentle spirit has touched so many of us here at Perry Point who have the privilege to work with her.”

VA MARYLAND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM (VAMHCS) NEWS

Quick Thinking Employees Save the Day

VAMHCS Director Dennis Smith recognized several employees for their actions beyond the call of duty when a fire broke out on Aug. 27 in an elevator shaft under construction. During morning report on Aug. 29, Smith thanked three members of Facilities and Engineering Service for taking quick action to squelch flames before they could spread.

VAMHCS engineers Paul Rutledge, Eddie Leimbach, and Carlos Thomas were instrumental in the early moments of the fire.

“There are hundreds of heroes in this situation, but these three in particular were first to respond,” Smith said.

After locating the fire in the elevator construction area, these three and other medical center employees used fire extinguishers to quickly contain the fire and put it out.

“This could have been a different situation, but their quick reaction helped prevent what could have been an even worse situation for patients, visitors, and employees,” Smith added.

The fire resulted from construction work by a contractor in the elevator construction area on the 3rd floor of the medical center.

Shortly after the code red was called, the Baltimore City Fire Department arrived at the facility and took command of the situation. After determining that the fire had been extinguished and after the smoke had been cleared from the lobby area of the medical center, the



(From left), VAMHCS Director Dennis Smith recognizes Facilities and Engineering Service workers Carlos Thomas and Eddie Leimbach for their heroic actions during an Aug. 27 fire at the Baltimore VAMC. Facilities and Engineering Chief Ed Litvin joins Smith in thanking them. Paul Rutledge was not available for the photograph.

fire chief gave the “all clear” to end the code red.

No inpatient care was disrupted during the code red thanks to the quick and professional response of VA employees and the Baltimore City Fire Department.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Baltimore VAMC employees and volunteers who provided their support during Wednesday’s code red by locating and providing fire extinguishers to contain the fire, directing patient flow, cooperating with the Baltimore City Fire Department, and attending to the needs of our veteran patients and visitors throughout this emergency situation. I would also

like to thank our patients and visitors who were so cooperative and understanding during today’s code red,” said Dr. Dorothy Snow, VAMHCS Chief of Staff.

“As an organization, this was an outstanding learning experience for all of us. Even though it was a stressful situation, it did allow us to test our ability to respond to a potential disaster. I am very proud of our employees and volunteers for their professional response during today’s code red and for their continued commitment to serving the needs of our veteran patients,” Snow added. ■

MARTINSBURG VAMC NEWS

Recognize Achievement and Welcome New Staff



Quality Management Coordinator Mrs. O'Dell recently received certification from the Center for Improvement in Healthcare Quality (CIHQ) and The Healthcare Accreditation Certification Program (HACP). HACP is a new, fully credentialed certification program for health care professionals and is the only nationally recognized professional certification program available that specializes in the field of hospital accreditation and certification.

Summer Youth Volunteers

Martinsburg VAMC had 36 active Youth Volunteers who served over 2,000 hours this summer. Staff and patients appreciate the help they provide. We hope the youth receive more than "hours." We hope they receive an understanding of the true blessings of being a volunteer – the enjoyment of helping others without expectation of repayment.



Martinsburg's New Veterans Service Representative Philip Garvey is primary contact for veterans and their representatives for information regarding...compensation & pension claims, general benefits information, benefit forms, veterans' benefits and health information, survivor benefits, and catastrophic disability.



In August 2008, David Loy became the Human Resources Officer. Recently transferring from the Department of Defense, he has 35 years of service between the U.S. Army and Civil Service. Mr. Loy has a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.



MARTINSBURG VAMC NEWS

Martinsburg's Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability, Development (LEAD) Graduates

The VA LEAD Program is a developmental program for employees who are competitively selected as “high potential” employees. “High Potential” is defined as the employee who (1) clearly has the desire to learn, work hard, and move into a leadership role; (2) is a high performer in their current position; and (3) shows evidence of the eight core competencies of the High Performance Development Model (HPDM).



(L-R) Susan George, Associate Director for Education/Nursing; Megan Hoover, Business Programs & Operations; Rachel Agbi, Nursing Service; Leanne Millay-McDonald, Physical Med. & Rehab.; Todd Griffith, Police Service; Amie Speer, Nursing Service; Kevin Sullivan, Facility Management Service; Nanette Kelly, Nursing Service; Jennifer Marino-Fouch, Pharmacy Service; Ronald Duncan, Facility Management Service and Veterans Minority Coordinator; Mary C. Quaglio, Business Programs & Operations; and Neville Leonard, Education Section.

VISN 5 Service Area



Facility Numbers

VA Maryland HCS

1-800-865-2441

Baltimore VAMC Medical Care Line

1-800-463-6295

Perry Point VAMC Medical Care Line

1-800-949-1003

Baltimore Rehab & Extended Care Center

1-800-463-6295

Prescription Refill

1-800-463-6295, ext 7395

Martinsburg VAMC

(304) 263-0811

Medical Advice Line

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

VETS Information

(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

1-800-817-3807, prompt # 2

Washington DC VAMC

(202) 745-8000

Medical Advice Line

(202) 745-8247

VETS Information

(202) 745-4046

PTSD Clinic Number

(202) 745-8591

Prescription Refill

1-888-553-0242

Cambridge, MD

(410) 228-6243

Fort Howard, MD

(410) 477-1800

Hagerstown, MD

(301) 665-1462

Alexandria, VA

(703) 313-0694

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(410) 590-4140

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