

# Veterans' Health<sup>®</sup>

VA Capitol  
Health Care  
Network  
VISN 5  
FIVE STAR SERVICE FOR THOSE WHO SERVED



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blood pressure**  
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# We've gone electronic!



Sanford M.  
Garfunkel, FACHE

**H**ello, and welcome to the first electronic edition of our VISN 5 health care newsletter, *Veterans' Health*. It's a pleasure and an honor for me to write a few words of greeting to our VISN 5 veterans and to tell you what's going on in our VISN.

For those of you who don't know what a VISN is, I'll explain. Since taking this position in April, I've found that when I address veterans groups, the person introducing me as the VISN director, will say something like, "I'm sure he'll tell us what a VISN is." So here goes: VISN (pronounced vision) stands for Veterans Integrated Service Network. It's a concept started by Kenneth Kizer, M.D., M.P.H., when he was the Under Secretary for Health. The Veterans Health Administration (a system of hospitals and clinics) is divided into 21 VISNs, or networks. Each network has a director who coordinates and oversees the operation of all the facilities in his or her VISN. The idea is to have a well-coordinated health care system providing a full range of services in any particular geographic area.

Perhaps one bit of trivia before I go on ... I was working for Dr. Kizer when this concept was developed and was actually with him the morning he came to work and announced that he'd come up with a name for his new organization. He went on to say they would be called Veterans Integrated Service Networks. He then smiled and said shyly, "We'll call them 'Visions.' I just couldn't come up with a good word for the letter O."

As I said above, I became the VISN 5 director in April after spending 12 years as the director of the Washington DC VA Medical Center. I've already learned a great many things that I didn't know about the other medical centers in our VISN—the VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) and the Martinsburg VA Medical Center. I'm pleased to say that all our medical centers and clinics deliver outstanding, state-of-the-art care and terrific patient care services. I've quickly become very proud of the care delivered in our network, and I'll be telling you more about it in future issues of our *Veterans' Health* newsletter.

Regards,

*Sanford M. Garfunkel*

Sanford M. Garfunkel, FACHE  
Director, VA Capitol Health Care Network, VISN 5



## Treating high blood pressure— a priority at DCVAMC

By Pamela Rachal, Performance Measure Coordinator

**H**igh blood pressure, or hypertension, affects about 50 million Americans. According to recent estimates, one in four American adults has high blood pressure. Unfortunately, because hypertension usually has no symptoms, nearly one-third of people with the disease don't know they have it. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure.

The only way to know if you have hypertension is to

have your blood pressure checked. Tighter control of high blood pressure may drastically reduce the number of people who experience life-threatening hypertension-related illnesses.

### Monitoring the threat

The staff at the Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC) takes hypertension-associated health threats very seriously. Physicians and nurses have a mission to lower blood pressures to less than or equal

to 140/90—and they've been very successful, with a record exceeding that of the private sector. According to an external review, 83 percent of veterans with hypertension examined at DCVAMC during fiscal year 2007 achieved blood pressures lower than or equal to 140/90, surpassing VA's 75 percent target goal.

We want to do even better, so we take blood pressure readings more often. We ask patients with pressures that don't meet the mark to return in two weeks or sooner to have their blood pressure remeasured. You may find it a bit of an annoyance, but in the long run, working together to keep your blood pressure in the safe range will help keep you well.

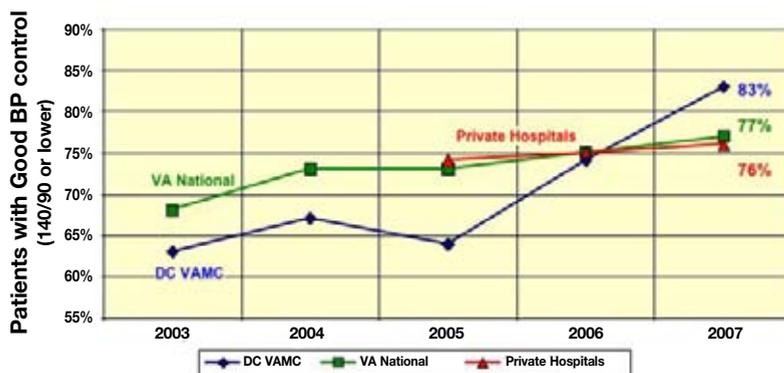
### Help yourself

Be smart: Pay attention to your blood pressure before it becomes elevated. Eat a healthy diet and try to get some exercise most days of the week. Contact your primary care provider if you need guidance.

VA health care providers at DCVAMC are committed to providing excellent services, including blood pressure monitoring, for the veterans we serve. ★

### Blood Pressure (BP) Control in Hypertension Patients

DC VAMC Patients Compared with VA National and Private Hospitals  
BP < 140/90 mmHg



VAMC Washington provides EXCELLENT treatment for high blood pressure.

In 2007, 83 percent or 83 out of every 100 patients treated for hypertension have blood pressure under control at 140/90 or lower. This is higher than the VA national average at 77 percent and those in the private sector at 76 percent.





## Blood bank initiative equals big savings for DCVAMC

**T**he American Red Cross is and has been the primary supplier of blood for the Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC). However, the nationwide shortage of blood prompted three savvy DCVAMC employees to explore other sources for blood to ensure supplies at the medical center are adequate to meet patient needs.

Dedicated and conscientious blood bank employees, Supervisor Vilma Yapana and Medical Technologists Aida Baldonado and Allan Akehurst, began contacting military hospitals seeking excess supplies. They knew military hospitals generally

have good supplies of blood as a result of the generosity of service members who donate frequently.

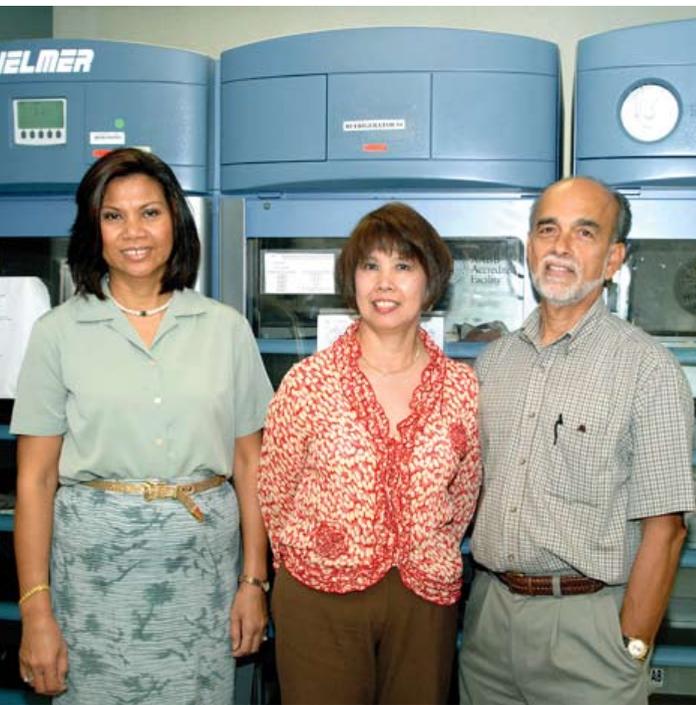
After making many, many calls, word was out in the community that DCVAMC was in need of blood. McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey came to the rescue and offered to provide its excess stock—at no charge.

DCVAMC began receiving blood from McGuire at the end of June 2006. Through July 2007, the medical center had used 444 units of blood received from McGuire's military personnel.

These donations saved the medical center an estimated \$110,000, and the donations

are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. The blood bank staff who implemented this cost-savings initiative received financial incentive awards for their outstanding efforts. ★

DCVAMC is very proud of outstanding blood bank employees (from left) Vilma Yapana, Supervisor; Aida Baldonado, Medical Technologist; and Allan Akehurst, Medical Technologist.



## The Alexandria Community Based Clinic has relocated



**T**he Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Alexandria, Va., has moved to a larger, more accessible location—one that's convenient to Metro and bus lines. The new location—6940 South Kings Highway, Suite 208, Alexandria—is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and beautiful furnishings. The new location will accommodate an additional health care provider to serve the growing number of northern Virginia veterans who appreciate receiving their primary care closer to home. Julie Kroviak, M.D., the CBOC's primary care provider, will be joined by Jill Spencer-Garcia, Nurse Practitioner.

The CBOC is open from 7:30 a.m. until 4 p.m. Available specialty services include mental health and nutrition. The clinic will continue to be co-located with the Alexandria Vet Center. For more information or to make an appointment, call (703) 360-1442. ★

## Driver Rehabilitation Program helps veterans get back on the road



Sheila J. Jackson, Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist, helps Bernard L. Leish get back behind the wheel using the DCVAMC's new driving simulator.

**T**he Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC) is now offering a driver rehabilitation program on its specialized state-of-the-art vehicle simulator. DCVAMC has hired Sheila J. Jackson, Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist, who's experienced in providing this specific type of rehabilitation.

Most people participating in this therapy are amputees or suffer from spinal cord injury and neurological and psychiatric disorders. Geriatric drivers also take advantage of this service.

Nationwide, the Department of Veterans Affairs has more than 40 driver rehabilitation centers.

Eligible veterans and active duty personnel are provided a clinical program of primary services that includes:

**Driving assessment.** This initial evaluation includes a review of your medical history and perceptual cognitive, vision, reaction time, strength and range-of-motion testing.

**Patient and family education.** This program includes classroom instruction in defensive-driving techniques and road sign and marking identification, all in accordance with state Department of Motor Vehicles licensing processes.

**Safe passenger.** These consultations provide input about what vehicles and modifications are

needed for you to travel safely as a passenger—with family members or attendants who provide the driving service.

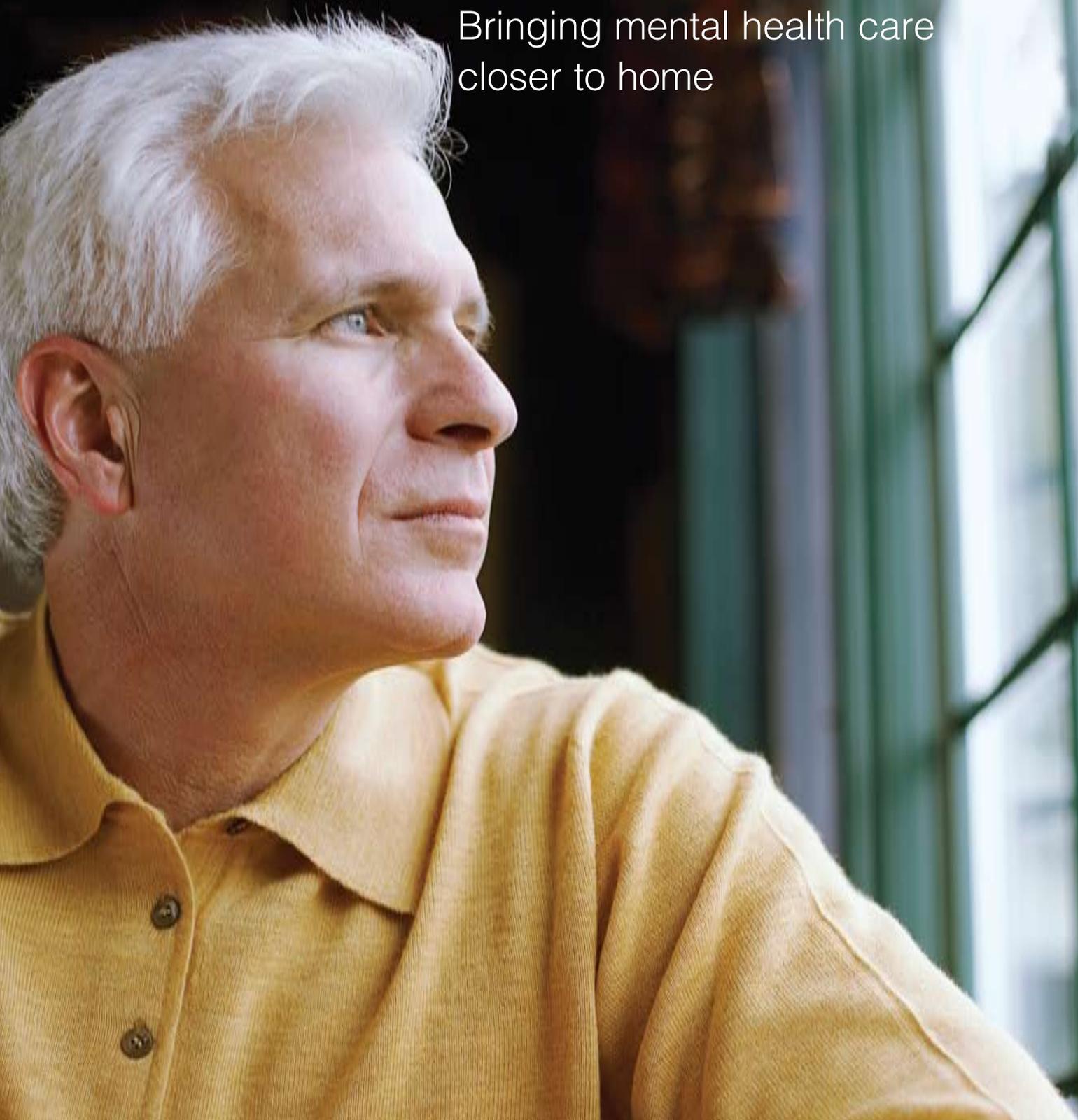
**Behind-the-wheel road instruction.** You'll operate a vehicle in a number of traffic settings using adaptive controls and equipment, if necessary.

**Vehicle and equipment evaluation/prescription.** You'll receive assistance in making decisions about vehicle selection and modification as well as any adaptive driving equipment necessary to meet your particular needs.

For more information about this therapy, call Sheila J. Jackson at (202) 745-8000, ext. 7623. ★

# Transforming mental health Promoting recovery

Bringing mental health care  
closer to home



# care: and integrated care

**M**ore than 700 mental health professionals, researchers, educators and clinicians met in Washington, DC, for the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Office of Mental Health Services first comprehensive mental health conference.

The Honorable R. James Nicholson, former Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA), keynote speaker at the opening summit of the four-day conference, emphasized that VA is increasing its focus on mental health. "We are well prepared," Nicholson said. "With an annual budget of nearly \$3 billion for mental health services alone, VA is the largest provider of mental health care in the nation."

## Expanding mental health care services

Nicholson outlined several VA mental health enhancements, including:

- Employing more than 9,000 front-line mental health professionals, a 15 percent increase from four years ago
- Providing mental health services at each of VA's 153 medical centers and 900 outpatient clinics. Now, every VA hospital has special capabilities for treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Increasing funding for readjustment counseling for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), including hiring 100 additional OIF/OEF veterans to enhance outreach to all veterans and those on active duty in the National Guard and Reserves
- Hiring Suicide Prevention Coordinators for each of VA's

medical centers and establishing an around-the-clock Suicide Prevention Hotline Center

- Increasing availability of tele-mental health programs, which treated about 20,000 patients last year
- Integrating mental health services into geriatric programs
- Adding psychologists and social workers to VA polytrauma centers
- Increasing the number of Vet Centers from 209 to 232 and adding 100 new combat veterans to run outreach programs for their former comrades

## A commitment to veterans

Key improvements VA has implemented include a commitment to evaluate a veteran within 24 hours of his or her request or referral for mental health or substance abuse treatment. In case of an emergency, VHA will conduct an immediate assessment and provide appropriate intervention. VHA is also working to ensure emergency departments have mental health professionals available around the clock, seven days a week.

"We are committed to bringing to the fore a full complement of services and programs that will improve the mental health and quality of life of the men and women who protect and defend this great country," Nicholson said.

Ira Katz, M.D., Deputy Chief Patient Care Services Officer for Mental Health, told attendees that VA is in the midst of successfully implementing its five-year Mental Health Strategic Plan, which includes four primary areas:

- Expanding access and capacity to

mental health care for all veterans

- Integrating mental health and primary care
- Transforming the system to focus on recovery and rehabilitation
- Implementing evidence-based care

## Refining care

The conference focused on transforming the VA system into a recovery-oriented practice; integrating care between mental health and primary care for better access and treatment rates; and promoting a national model for suicide risk identification and prevention, which requires ready access to high quality mental health services supplemented by programs that directly address the risk of suicide.

According to Dr. Katz, the conference was an overwhelming success, and VA plans to hold a similar event every year. In addition, the conference enhanced collaboration with Vet Centers and other community partners in promoting a more veteran- and family-focused mental health care program.

Michael J. Kussman, M.D., M.S., M.A.C.P., Under Secretary for Health, another prominent speaker, said he's proud of VHA's work in mental health, adding that VHA providers continue to learn and improve programs. "Good mental health care can improve veterans' emotional well-being and change the everyday realities of their lives," he said. "It can improve productivity in the workplace, and it can improve the way our patients function in their families and in society." ★





## Clipper City Brewing presents donation for returning veterans

**C**lipper City Brewing recently announced their plan to donate a portion of one year's proceeds to support the rehabilitation efforts of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans receiving care throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System. In keeping with this pledge, Clipper City recently bestowed their first donation of \$2,000 during a check presentation ceremony at the Baltimore VA Medical Center.

"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," said Hugh Sisson, founder of Clipper City Brewing.



Hugh Sisson (left), founder of Clipper City Brewing, presents a \$2,000 check to Christopher Buser, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom Program Coordinator for the VA Maryland Health Care System.

"This is the first of many donations we hope to make throughout the year."

### The power of a pledge

The funds from Clipper City's efforts will be used to support transportation, emergency lodging, outreach efforts and child-care costs for the more than 3,500 returning veterans already enrolled to receive their health care throughout the VA Mary-

land Health Care System.

"We're grateful to Clipper City for pledging their support for the rehabilitation needs of our returning veterans, and we hope other companies throughout the state will consider following their lead," said Christopher Buser, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom Program Coordinator for the VA Maryland Health Care System. ★

## Van donation supports patient transportation program

**T**he VA Maryland Health Care System now has five new eight-seat passenger vans, thanks to the generosity of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Department of Maryland.

The vans were donated to support the DAV Transportation Program, which uses VA volunteers to transport veteran patients to and from their clinic appointments throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System.

The program, a unique partnership between the DAV and VA, provides free transportation to veterans with limited transportation resources, enabling them to keep clinic appointments at VA Medical Centers and outpatient clinics throughout the state.

Two vans are being used for the Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic; one van is for the Fort Howard VA Outpatient Clinic; another is for the Perry Point

VA Medical Center; and the last is for the Westminster area to transport veterans to their clinic appointments at the Baltimore VA Medical Center.

For more information or to schedule a ride, call your local DAV Transportation Program:

Baltimore VA Medical Center, (410) 605-7000, ext. 6733

Fort Howard VA Outpatient Clinic, (410) 477-1800, ext. 7019

Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic, (410) 590-4140, ext. 4221

Perry Point VA Medical Center, (410) 642-2411, ext. 5384 ★

## Program Focus **Serving the needs of returning combat veterans -**

**T**he VA Maryland Health Care System is committed to supporting veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and to making sure they have the health care services and benefits they need and deserve. Since the war on terror began, more than 3,500 veterans have successfully transitioned from the military to the VA Maryland Health Care System. None of these veterans has experienced a long wait for care, thanks to a coordinated effort by the services and staff members throughout our health care system.

Programs developed to address the needs of this era's combat veterans include the Seamless Transition and the Returning Veterans Outreach, Education and Care (RVOEC) programs. The VA Maryland Health Care System has also identified key staff to bring these programs together and to act as champions for returning veterans.

Christopher Buser is VA Maryland Health Care System's OIF/OEF Program Manager. Reach him by phone at **(410) 605-7259** or page him at **(410) 447-3592**.



### Receiving quality care at home

The Seamless Transition Program was created to meet the specific needs of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The program's goal is to ensure returning veterans receive the highest quality care in a timely manner and that no veteran is left behind in the transition from the military health care system to the VA.

### Special emphasis on special needs

The Returning Veterans Outreach, Education and Care (RVOEC) Program places a special emphasis on the mental health needs of veterans return-

ing from Iraq and Afghanistan. Preventive maintenance is the program's goal, and it's accomplished by dealing with problems early on, before they get worse. A variety of outpatient and inpatient services are available to assist returning veterans as they readjust. A life enrichment center was created earlier this year at the Perry Point VA Medical Center to help bring veterans and their families together with social workers, nurses, chaplains and other staff members.

### Dedicated staff can ease the transition

Key staff positions were created by the VA Maryland Health Care System to help provide consistent quality care for returning veterans. Christopher Buser, OIF/OEF program manager for the VA Maryland Health Care System, oversees all services for returning combat veterans, including any physical and mental concerns they may have.

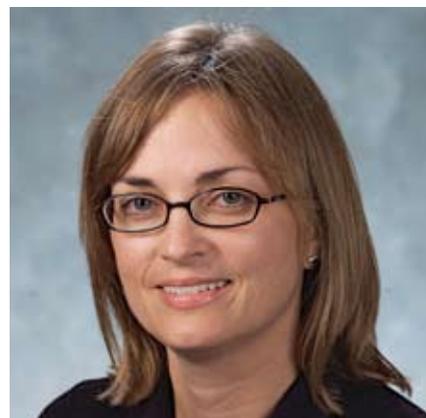
Thanks to these new programs and positions, the VA Maryland Health Care System is able to serve the needs of our returning veterans with pride and compassion. If you're a returning veteran and you need assistance receiving health care or navigating the services available to you, contact Chris Buser at **1-800-463-6295, ext. 7259**. ★

## Women's Health Clinic open house

**A** new Women's Health Clinic has opened on Ward 5B at the Martinsburg VA Medical Center to improve access to health care and privacy by consolidating clinics into one location. Preventive services include Pap tests, mammography, osteoporosis screening,

contraceptive management, heart disease screening and weight management. Other general medical, surgical, mental health and support services are available.

If you have questions, call Angela Hoffman at **(304) 263-0811, ext. 4699**, or Primary Care Team #2 at **ext. 3964**. ★



Angela Hoffman, Women Veterans Program Coordinator, Martinsburg VAMC

## An easier check for colorectal cancer

**W**hen it comes to fighting cancer, knowledge is power. Take colorectal cancer, for example. It's the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States, but it's one of the most preventable cancers—when caught in its earliest stages.

It's critical to identify colorectal cancer before any symptoms appear. People over age 50 and those who have a family history of colorectal cancer or colon polyps are at higher risk for the disease.

### A simple test

Your primary care provider has a simple method for you to check for colorectal cancer. Called a fecal occult blood test (FOBT), it detects blood in the stool. Your primary care provider can show you how to take a stool sample as well as

give you a FOBT kit to take home.

A traditional FOBT kit provides a large plastic container and a stick, which you use to collect a stool sample. If you find this test unappealing, take heart.

The Martinsburg VA Medical Center offers a simpler, more comfortable collection method. The Martinsburg FOBT kit is about the size of a credit card, with a biodegradable, flushable tissue liner. After the sample is placed onto the test panel, the cardboard kit is folded to create a sealed, odor-free specimen container. After repeating the process for three consecutive days, the samples are mailed back to the Martinsburg VAMC lab for analysis. You must complete the test within a week and mail the specimens with the collection date on the return envelope.

### Preparing for your test

Before starting your FOBT collection, you need to follow these guidelines.

Avoid the following for three days before you collect your first sample:

- red meat, including beef, lamb and liver
- processed meat, such as hot dogs
- raw fruits and vegetables, including melons, radishes, turnips, broccoli and cauliflower
- rectal suppositories

Instead, enjoy these healthy foods at least two days before you collect your first sample:

- well-cooked pork, poultry and fish
- all cooked fruits and vegetables
- high-fiber foods such as whole-wheat bread, bran cereal
- popcorn

An FOBT can help you stop colorectal cancer before it starts. Don't miss the chance to add more years to your life. For more information, contact your primary care provider. ★

## Share your care with the Joint Commission -

**A**t the Martinsburg VA Medical Center, we strive to give you the best health care possible. To be successful, however, we need your feedback: Tell us if you have any safety concerns.

The Joint Commission conducts ongoing unannounced accreditation surveys of VA Medical Centers. The surveys evaluate how well each medical center complies with nationally established Joint Commission standards. The Joint Commission then determines if the medical center receives accreditation and, if so, under what conditions.

The Joint Commission standards focus on safety of patient care and the environment in which care is provided. If you have feedback regarding safety areas that we have not addressed, contact Joint Commission at:

**Office of Quality Monitoring  
The Joint Commission  
One Renaissance Blvd.  
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181**

You can also fax the information to the Office of Quality



Monitoring at (630) 792-5636 or send e-mail to [complaint@jointcommission.org](mailto:complaint@jointcommission.org).

If you have questions about how to file a complaint, contact The Joint Commission toll-free at 1-800-994-6610, weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Central Time. The Joint Commission's Office of Quality Monitoring will acknowledge receipt of your complaint in writing or by telephone 10 days before the on-site survey begins. If additional information is needed, an account representative will contact you to let you know the interview's time, location and name of the surveyor who'll meet with you. The information you share is confidential and will

be evaluated carefully for relevance to the accreditation process.

### Benefits of Joint Commission accreditation

The Joint Commission is the leader in accreditation of health care organizations. A facility that achieves accreditation makes a strong statement to the community about its effort and ability to provide

the highest quality services. Accredited organizations provide opportunities for staff to develop their skills and knowledge, and having accreditation can attract quality personnel who prefer to serve in an accredited organization.

Joint Commission standards focus on state-of-the-art performance improvement strategies that help health care organizations continuously improve the quality of care they provide. Placing special emphasis on safety and quality-of-care issues, the Joint Commission requires that organizations comply with the latest standards and helps guide facilities' quality improvement efforts. ★



# VA Capitol Health Care Network Veterans Integrated Service Network 5 (VISN 5)

## Important Telephone Numbers

### VA Maryland Health Care System

**Baltimore VAMC**  
1-800-463-6295

**VAMHCS Medical Advice Line**  
1-800-865-2441

**Perry Point VAMC**  
1-800-949-1003

**Automated Prescription Refill and  
Clinic Appointment System**  
1-800-463-6295, ext. 7395

**Baltimore VA Rehabilitation  
& Extended Care Center**  
1-800-463-6295

### Martinsburg VA Medical Center

**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.

**Automated Prescription Refill System**  
(304) 263-0811, ext. 4870 (all hours)

**Outreach Coordinator**  
(301) 665-1462

### Washington DC VA Medical Center

**General Information**  
(202) 745-8000

**Patient Service Center and  
Medical Advice Line**  
(202) 745-8577

**VETS Information**  
(202) 745-4046

**PTSD Clinic Number**  
(202) 745-8591

**For Toll-Free Service**  
1-877-DCVAMC1

### Outpatient Clinics

**Cambridge, MD**  
(410) 228-6243

**Charlotte Hall, MD**  
(301) 884-7102

**Cumberland, MD**  
1-866-712-8084

**Fort Howard, MD**  
(410) 477-1800

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

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

**Hagerstown, MD**  
1-866-399-0117

**Loch Raven, MD**  
(410) 957-7651

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

**Alexandria, VA**  
(703) 313-0694

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

**Stephens City, VA**  
1-866-463-8532

**Franklin, WV**  
(304) 358-2355

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

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

### Vet Centers

**Baltimore, MD**  
(410) 764-9400

**Cambridge, MD**  
(410) 228-6305, ext. 4123

**Elkton, MD**  
(410) 392-4485

**Silver Spring, MD**  
(301) 589-1073

**Washington, DC**  
(202) 543-8821

**Martinsburg, WV**  
(304) 263-6776

**Alexandria, VA**  
(703) 360-1442

### Veterans Benefit Administration

**1-800-827-1000**

### Education Information Hotline

**1-800-442-4551**

Visit us on our website at [www.va.gov/visn5](http://www.va.gov/visn5)

### Veterans' Health

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