Veterans' Health®

FALL 2008

AMPUTEE COMPLETES CROSS-COUNTRY RUN

MORE FUNDING FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

SHINGLES VACCINE: GIVE GOOD HEALTH A SHOT!

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

www.va.gov/visn5

It's an **honor** to **serve you**

Each year, the medical center directors and I attend many annual conventions of state veterans' organizations. The experience is always rewarding. We have the privilege of addressing large groups of individuals who have not only served our country in the military, but also devoted much time toward bettering the lives of veterans. Also, veterans' organization members and their leadership are great VA supporters.

These gatherings give us the opportunity to talk about the wonderful things going on in our VA Medical Centers. It's important that you know about them, too.

Our Network leads VA in the quality of care provided, as shown in our performance measure scores. Two of our medical centers had unannounced visits by the Joint Commission, which accredits health care facilities across the nation. Both medical centers received high marks and full accreditation. Also, thanks to an increase in funding this year, we plan to open new community-based outpatient clinics. They're among many other construction projects being considered. The increase has allowed us to hire about 300 additional staff this year—many of them nurses.

Most importantly, we're glad for the opportunity to thank you for the great support that you give us as volunteers; for the support you give VA in letting Congress know that good VA funding is important to you; for the cash and in-kind donations that we receive from so many; and, perhaps most significantly, for the honor you give us by allowing us the privilege of serving you, our true American heroes.

Regards,

Sanford M. Garfunkel

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

▲ **Better treatments for PTSD will become available to more veterans. Read the story on page 6.**

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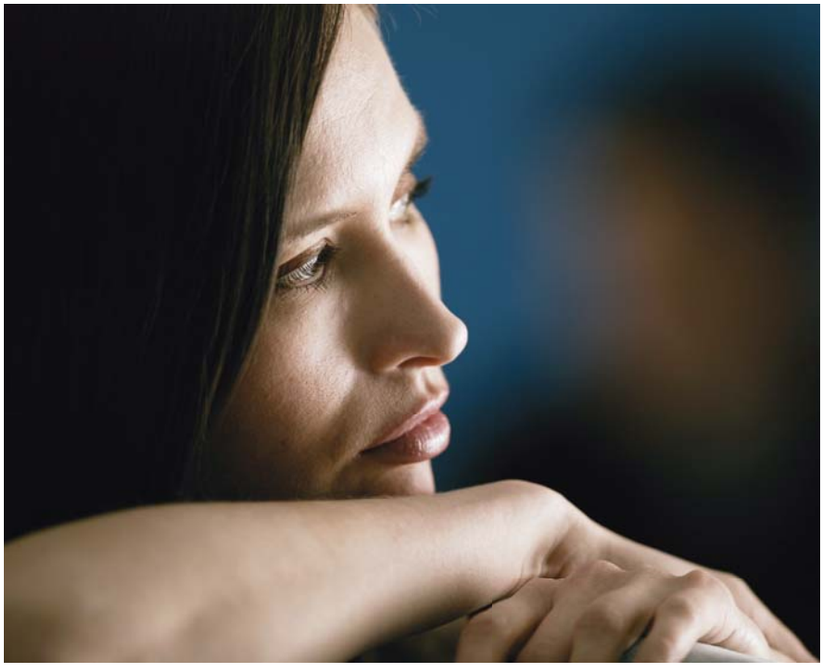


More help for the addicted

Funding targets programs for veterans who abuse drugs and alcohol

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is strengthening its programs for substance use disorders by adding counselors to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) teams at medical centers nationwide, increasing intensive outpatient treatment programs, and conducting specialized training for providers.

Under Secretary for Health, Michael J. Kussman, M.D., has approved augmenting PTSD teams with drug and alcohol treatment specialists so that both problems may be addressed more effectively.

"This integrated approach puts treatment for PTSD and substance use disorders under one roof and should improve mental health outcomes for patients who suffer from both," says John P. Allen, Ph.D., VHA's Associate Chief Consultant for Addictive Disorders.

Professionals will assess PTSD patients for substance use disorder and provide treatment in coordination with the PTSD intervention. Treatment will include continuing care and case management for patients suffering both problems, and will offer preventive education to veterans with PTSD who may be at risk for developing such problems later.

Adding substance use disorder clinicians to PTSD teams will cost about $13.3 million per year. The enhanced teams were scheduled to be available at all VA medical facilities by Oct. 1.

A second initiative allocates about $17 million per year to establish Intensive Outpatient Substance Use Disorder Programs at 28 additional medical centers, bringing the number of facilities with these programs to 105. The service provides a minimum of three hours of treatment per day at least three times a week to veterans who have substance use disorders that may be too severe to be successfully treated in less-intensive ambulatory care settings.

A third initiative will provide specialized training for a minimum of two physicians in each medical facility to deal with issues such as withdrawal, detoxification, and the use of medications in treatment.

Other steps being taken to bolster substance use disorder services include providing an additional 40 therapists to high-volume Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), and ensuring that each large mental health residential rehabilitation treatment program has at least one substance use disorder specialist on staff.

"These initiatives represent important efforts by VHA to more effectively address the needs of veterans who suffer substance use disorder problems and do so in a manner that is most convenient for them," says Dr. Kussman.

Caring for you

For health benefits eligibility or enrollment questions, call VA toll-free at **1-877-222-8387**.

Combat veterans welcomed back

Second annual celebration helps returning service members

More than 1,200 combat veterans and their families were honored at a Welcome Home celebration recently at the Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC).

The all-day event offered enrollment and eligibility services, health and mental health screenings, benefits, advice, and a wide variety of other services to military personnel and veterans residing in the metropolitan area who recently served in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Global War on Terror theaters of combat. Many attendees were combat veterans and active-duty service personnel receiving care at both Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda.

The June 14 celebration included a Marine Corps administrative muster, a 100th birthday observance for the U.S. Army Reserve, and family-friendly entertainment. It was designed to offer information, education, and support to combat veterans transitioning to civilian life, as well as their families. A wide range of community service agencies were represented, including those specializing in employment and housing assistance, vocational training, spiritual support, family counseling, and recreation. They included AmeriCorps, Troops for Teachers, University of the District of Columbia Upward Bound, Peoples Involvement Corps, Small Business Administration, Army Wounded Warrior, Access Housing, and Team River Runners.

Leaders from the military, veteran service organizations and community participated, including Gerald M. Cross, M.D., Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health; Wilbert Forbes, Deputy Secretary of Maryland Veteran Affairs; "Chick" Ciccolella, Assistant Secretary of Veterans Employment and Training at the U.S. Department of Labor; Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz, Chief of the Army Reserves; and Homer Townsend Jr., Acting Executive Director of the Paralyzed Veterans Association.

Local sponsors, veterans' organizations, and volunteers joined together to make the event a huge success, including the American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, AMVETS, Starbridge Media Group, radio stations Hot 99.5 FM and 98.7 FM WMZQ Country, WUSA Channel 9, Mamma Lucia, Deloitte, Corporate Sports, Domino's Pizza, Baltimore Best Party Entertainers, Atlanta Postal Workers Union, Quilts of Valor Foundation, and DC United.

This year's Welcome Home event follows the success of last year's inaugural celebration, when then-Secretary of Veterans Affairs, R. James Nicholson, directed VA hospitals nationwide to adopt the Welcome Home concept.

◀ DCVAMC Director Fernando O. Rivera (center) with Tammy Fisher, Fisher House Foundation Trustee, and David Coker, President of Fisher House Foundation, at the groundbreaking.
▼ Ceremonial shovels were used to break ground for the new Fisher House.

Almost home

New building will provide housing for patients' families

Dignitaries, veterans, employees, and volunteers gathered at the Washington DC VA Medical Center (DCVAMC) on May 21 for a ceremonial groundbreaking for Fisher House, a 21-suite facility that will provide free lodging for families of hospitalized veterans.

"Fisher House will be a home away from home for our veterans and their families who have served us so well," says Fernando O. Rivera, Medical Center Director. "No-cost lodging on the medical center's grounds, and a place to return to loved ones after a day of treatment, will help alleviate both family stress and the financial burden families often face when a loved one is hospitalized."

In 2007, the Fisher House Foundation estimated it saved military and veterans' families approximately $10 million in lodging, food, and transportation costs through its program. Since the foundation began in 1990, some 120,000 families have been provided with 2.5 million days of free or low-cost lodging.

When completed in the summer of 2009, the operation and maintenance of Fisher House will be the responsibility of DCVAMC. The house will accommodate up to 42 people and will be furnished with everything families will need while loved ones are hospitalized, including DVD players, video games, and toys for children.

The facility—one of the Fisher House Foundation's largest designs—will have a community kitchen, dining room, living room, library, elevator, and laundry room. Each suite will have its own bathroom.

The DCVAMC Fisher House will be the 50th facility the foundation has built since it was started by real estate developer Zachary Fisher.

Attendees at the groundbreaking included leaders of veterans service organizations and staff representatives from the offices of Senator Ben Cardin, Congressman Chris Van Hollen, Congressman Frank Wolf, and others. Also attending were David Coker, Fisher House Foundation President; Tammy Fisher, Trustee, Fisher House Foundation; Carol J. Sheets, VA Program Manager for Fisher Houses; Leah Gansler, Founder of Charity Works; and several officials from private sector firms, including PricewaterhouseCoopers, CSC, L-3 Communications, and the Freddie Mac Foundation. ✪

➡ Stay connected!

For more information about DCVAMC, visit **www.washingtondc.va.gov.**

Better help at hand for PTSD

VA training initiative makes latest treatments available to more veterans

Veterans struggling to overcome Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) will have the latest, most effective psychological treatments available to them as the result of a pioneering initiative by VA.

VA is providing training in state-of-the-art psychotherapies to its mental health clinicians, meaning more veterans than ever will be able to receive the newest evidence-based treatments. These treatments include Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Prolonged Exposure (PE) therapy, two psychotherapies developed specifically for patients who have PTSD.

"VA is strongly committed to making evidence-based psychological treatments available to all veterans," says Bradley Karlin, Ph.D., VA's Director of Psychotherapy Programs. "This intensive training will enable VA to become even more effective in treating patients who have PTSD and other mental illnesses."

> "VA is strongly committed to making evidence-based psychological treatment available to all veterans."
>
> —Bradley Karlin, Ph.D., VA Director of Psychotherapy Programs

Eliminating guilt and fear

According to Dr. Karlin, recent reviews and reports, including one by the Institute of Medicine, confirmed that psychotherapies such as CPT and PE are effective for treating PTSD. Also, these therapies were found to be at least as effective as using medication, if not more so.

CPT links a person's psychological well-being with his or her thoughts and beliefs. Patients who have PTSD, depression, or other mental health problems often engage in extreme, negative ways of thinking or interpreting situations, which affects their mood and behaviors.

"In CPT, the therapist helps the patient confront the symptoms of PTSD and thoughts and behaviors that contribute to and maintain them," Karlin says. "During the therapy, the patient comes to develop more realistic and balanced evaluations of the trauma and of oneself following the trauma."

For example, a veteran who develops PTSD after firing on a fast-approaching car at a checkpoint may feel guilty for causing the driver's death. During therapy, the patient may come to a more realistic evaluation of the situation, understanding that firing a weapon was done only as a last resort.

PE therapy is based on the idea that people learn to fear the thoughts, feelings, and situations that remind them of a traumatic event. Avoidance usually strengthens the patient's fear. By talking repeatedly with the therapist and overcoming avoidance of such reminders and their internal emotional experiences, patients can change the feelings they have about the trauma.

In PE, patients learn relaxation techniques to help them through imagined exposure exercises, in which they recall memories of the traumatic experience that were previously avoided. Following repeated imagined exposure, a patient will

expose himself or herself to situations that are reminders of the traumatic event, such as crowded places or particular locations or surroundings that may trigger trauma-related symptoms.

Using proven methods

VA is the first national health care system to undertake a broad national initiative to use evidence-based psychotherapies for PTSD. Evidence-based psychotherapies are those that have been scientifically evaluated and shown in randomized clinical trials to be more effective than other treatments or no treatment at all.

In 2007, VA began training VA mental health clinicians to use CPT through an intensive interactive program. So far, more than 1,100 mental health professionals have received this training. VA also began similar training for clinicians earlier this year in the use of PE. About 150 clinicians have been trained so far, and training will continue over the next few years.

"We are fortunate today to have treatments for PTSD that are proven to work, and VA is actively working to bring these state-of-the-art treatments from the laboratory to the therapy room," says Karlin. "The intensive training VA is providing to clinicians nationwide is revolutionary and will transform the way mental health care is delivered to veterans. The end result will be better treatment for our nation's heroes who have PTSD."

Do you have PTSD?

PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not happen until months or years later, according to VA's National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. There are four types of symptoms:

- **Reliving the event.** Bad memories can come back at any time. You may feel the same fear and horror you did when the traumatic event took place.
- **Avoidance.** You may try to avoid situations or people that trigger memories of the event.
- **Numbing.** You may find it hard to express your feelings. You may not have positive feelings toward other people and may stay away from relationships.
- **Feeling keyed up.** You may be jittery or always alert and on the lookout for danger. This is known as hyperarousal. You may have trouble sleeping.

Seek help if you experience these or other common problems related to PTSD, including substance abuse; feelings of hopelessness, shame, or despair; employment or relationship problems; or any physical symptoms. (See related article on page 3.) To learn more, visit **www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/index.jsp.**

Help is here

If you're in crisis, contact VA's suicide prevention hotline at **1-800-273-TALK** or go to **www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.**

An incredible journey

Veteran amputee completes cross-country run with VA's help

As Marine veteran Eugene Roberts Sr. turned from West Baltimore Street into the Baltimore VA Medical Center (VAMC), completing his more than 3,200-mile cross-country run, hundreds of VA employees, veterans, and onlookers cheered, waved U.S. flags, and shed tears of joy. Baltimore City police led the way for Roberts' final 5 miles to the medical center, clearing intersections to allow him to pass unimpeded. Members of the Maryland chapter of Patriot Guard Riders, a veterans' motorcycle group, provided an escort, with U.S. and POW flags mounted on their bikes. People on the streets watched in amazement as Roberts sprinted the final block.

While any cross-country run is a feat worthy of celebration, what made this Vietnam veteran's trek special was that he managed to accomplish it by running on two prosthetic legs. Inspired by his love of Jesus, and in the spirit of the Marine Corps' motto, "Semper Fidelis" (always faithful), Roberts began his journey in early July 2007 from Marine Corps base Camp Pendleton in California. He crossed nine southern states to Parris Island Marine Corps Depot, S.C., and then ran to the Baltimore VAMC, arriving on April 7, 2008.

Overcoming obstacles

Early on, Roberts faced 120-degree temperatures on the desert highways of southern California and Arizona, but he pressed on. Even torrential rainstorms didn't deter him.

"Running on these prosthetic legs wasn't easy," Roberts told the crowd of supporters after he crossed the finish line. "But my faith in Jesus kept me going each day." He credits Alicia, his wife of more than 40 years, and the VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) prosthetics team with helping him accomplish his goal.

VA goes the extra mile

Prosthetics specialist Charlene Grant supported Roberts by making sure he had the latest athletic prostheses that were up to the task. She also worked to coordinate health care "pit stops" at VAMCs along his route. VA medical staff quickly accommodated him, making regular adjustments to his legs and sockets, and replacing the soles on his prosthetic feet, worn from constant pounding on the pavement. As with any distance runner, Roberts also had his share of blisters and minor injuries.

"This is a great example of how VAMHCS and VA as a whole is going the 'extra mile' to provide world-class health care services to our nation's veterans," says Dennis H. Smith, Director of VAMHCS.

◀ Vietnam veteran Eugene Roberts Sr., wraps an arm around his wife, Alicia, while thanking VA for support through every stage of his cross-country run.

◀ Roberts and his grandson run the final stretch of his cross-country journey toward the finish line at Baltimore VAMC.

Back in the driver's seat

A program that helps disabled veterans get behind the wheel again is back in business.

The VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) driver rehabilitation program is now located in a new section of the Loch Raven VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic, in a suite larger than its former office at the Baltimore VA Rehabilitation & Extended Care Center. The new suite has contemporary furniture, meeting space for consultations, and a new projection screen used in driving simulations. The program also has a new vehicle for veterans who are ready to test their driving skills on the road.

The driver rehabilitation program helps veterans who have a variety of disabilities and age-related health conditions learn to drive again. The motor vehicle department requires drivers who have traumatic injuries or a neurological disorder to successfully complete a driver rehabilitation program in order to earn a driver's license.

When a veteran begins the program, a coordinator evaluates individual limitations and needs. This involves the use of adaptive driving equipment, driver simulator training, and a series of evaluations on the simulator and behind the wheel. "We first evaluate veterans to determine exactly what type of limitation they have and what equipment they'll need to be a safe driver again," says Lyonel Benjamin, Driver Rehabilitation Coordinator for the VAMHCS.

Chad Watson, a Marine Corps veteran who lost his right leg to a blast injury while serving in Fallujah, Iraq, last year, is shown how to use adaptive gas pedal controls by Lyonel Benjamin, Driver Rehabilitation Coordinator.

Veterans can experience the feel of a car using the driver simulator. Complete with a driver's seat, adapted accelerator and brake pedals, and a steering wheel, the simulator allows veterans to react to virtual driving situations projected on a large screen. Benjamin can then test reaction times and determine what adaptive equipment works best for each veteran.

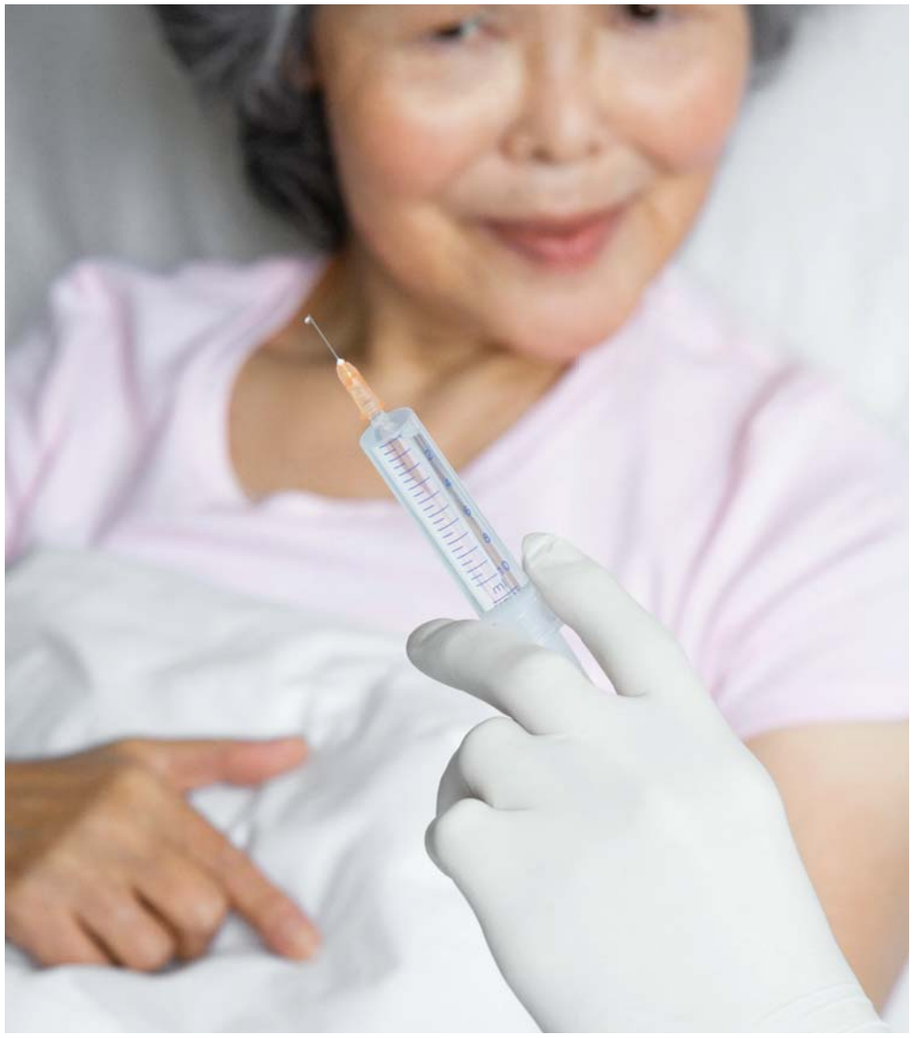
Through the program, a veteran's vehicle can be fitted with a variety of adaptive equipment, including strategically placed mirrors and digital steering devices for amputees. After veterans demonstrate they can safely drive using their adaptive equipment, they're a step closer to getting back on the road to a more independent lifestyle.

Going mobile

Veterans interested in the driver rehabilitation program should discuss it with their health care provider. Contact the program by calling **1-800-463-6295, ext. 5804.**

Giving good health a shot

Martinsburg VA Medical Center delivers new shingles vaccine



If you're 60 years old or older, speak to your primary care provider about getting vaccinated for shingles, a painful skin rash that often appears with blisters. Shingles, also called herpes zoster, is a disease caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox. You're more likely to get shingles as you get older, but the shingles vaccine, Zostavax, may help you avoid this painful condition.

Zostavax was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2006 for the prevention of shingles in older adults. The vaccination is a one-time injection under the skin. The vaccine has special handling and storage requirements, so same-day requests for vaccinations aren't accepted. If you alert the Martinsburg VA Medical Center (VAMC) a week in advance, we'll have the vaccine waiting for you at your next VAMC visit. (The vaccine is only available at the Martinsburg VAMC; Community Based Outpatient Clinic

patients are required to come to the medical center for shingles vaccination.)

Talk to your doctor

The shingles vaccine is advised only for patients ages 60 and older who have healthy immune systems. If you're less able to fight infection or have conditions such as HIV/AIDS, certain kinds of cancer, or active, untreated tuberculosis, you shouldn't get the vaccine. It's also not advised if you're taking certain steroid drugs or being treated with radiation or chemotherapy. That's why it's important to talk with your health care provider about it first.

Consider the risks

A vaccine, like any medicine, carries some risk. Patients may experience common side effects including redness, pain, swelling, itching, and warmth at the injection site. It's also possible to develop shingles even though you were vaccinated. The risk of serious harm or death is rare; however, a small number of patients who received this vaccine had a serious reaction. Like all vaccines, the shingles vaccine is being closely monitored for unusual or severe problems.

➡ Is the shingles vaccine for you?

To find out more about the shingles vaccine, contact your primary care provider or the Martinsburg VAMC Medical Advice Line at **1-800-817-3807**.

What causes shingles?

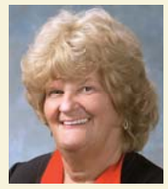
When a child's body battles the chicken pox virus, called varicella zoster, his or her immune system may not destroy all of it. What's left of the virus can hibernate inside nerve cells only to be reactivated many years later by such factors as age, illness, medications, and stress. The resulting illness is called herpes zoster, commonly referred to as shingles.

Shingles causes a localized, blistery rash. The rash may occur on the chest, trunk, or back. Less commonly, it can appear on the face, in the mouth, or down an arm or a leg. The shingles rash always appears on just one side of the body. Some people notice a burning, tingling, or itching feeling even before the rash forms.

Shingles is treated with antiviral drugs, which can reduce the severity of the infection if taken within three days of developing the rash. Anti-inflammatory drugs may be prescribed to reduce swelling. Shingles is painful because the reactivated virus travels along nerve fibers that extend to your skin. For that reason, prescription pain relievers are part of the treatment.

About one in five older adults will experience shingles. Early treatment is important to reduce the length and severity of symptoms. In addition, prompt treatment helps to reduce the length and severity of postherpetic neuralgia (PHN), the most common complication of shingles, should it occur. PHN is chronic nerve pain that lasts long after the rash has gone. Shingles itself usually heals within a month.

Meet our new CBOC administrator



Jeanie Henderson, R.N., M.S.N., is the new administrator for Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). She's responsible for VA-staffed CBOCs in Stephens City, Va., and Cumberland and Hagerstown, Md., as well as three contracted CBOCs in Harrisonburg, Va., and Franklin and Petersburg, W.Va. Henderson has 31 years of VA experience and will be working to help deliver quality patient care.

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

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