

VA PITTSBURGH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

VETERANS CONNECT

{ ISSUE 8 | 2019 }



Choose VA or Choose MISSION Act

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System



Dear Veterans,

I Choose VA.

Recently, I gave myself a choice: Do I retire, or do I take on a new challenge as director of VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System? I chose VA. Why?

I chose VA because I am a Veteran, with 13 years' service as a Naval JAG officer. I am also the son of a Korean War-era enlisted communications specialist, and my father-in-law drove a tank from the beaches of Normandy on D-Day to the Czech border by the end of World War II. Service is in my blood.

Under the MISSION Act, you also now have a choice. You can choose VA health care, or you can choose to see a community provider when eligible. To help you make an informed choice, this issue of Veterans Connect details new options under the act, but also presents reasons to choose VA.

Should you need care outside of VA Pittsburgh, we'll work to find the best VA or community care for you. As always, our goal is to support your individual health care needs with the respect, ease and quality you expect and deserve.

Sincerely,

Donald E. Koenig
Director, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Front cover: From right, VAPHS staff display their "I Choose VA" badges: Kari Stanny, radiologic technologist (RT); Jennifer Capets, BSN, OCN, RN; Christine Matthews, speech pathologist; Lynsey Stettmier, RT; and A.J. George, physician assistant.

PHYSICIAN RESEARCHER RECOGNIZED



In July, VA Pittsburgh physician researcher Dr. Walid Gellad received a 2019 Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE). It is the federal government's highest honor recognizing science and engineering professionals in the early stages of their careers.

A VA Pittsburgh staff physician, Dr. Gellad is a nationally recognized expert on prescription drug pricing and patient medication adherence. His research focuses on safer, more effective prescribing practices, including for Veterans who see VA and non-VA providers.

Gellad this year presented his research on dual opioid use to Congress during the annual VA Research Event in Washington. His research led VA and non-VA providers to strengthen data sharing for medication safety.

Primary Care, Urgent Care or ER?

Where to go for care



PRIMARY CARE

Contact primary care for:

- Cold, flu, sinus infection, sore throat, migraine
- Diarrhea, nausea, vomiting
- Sprains and cuts
- Exams, tests or shots
- Chronic conditions
- Scheduled follow-up care



URGENT CARE

Visit urgent care for:

- Minor illnesses or injuries when primary care is unavailable
- To request a tele-urgent care visit at VAPHS:
 - » Call 412-822-2222, choose option 3, and ask for a same-day or virtual care visit.



EMERGENCY ROOM

Go to the ER if you experience:

- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe fracture or burn
- Head injury or blurry vision
- Slurred speech or sudden paralysis

Why call your VA primary care team?

- VA can provide you with better care because they know you.
- VA has access to your medical records and knows your medical history.
- VA is always a call away to direct you to the right place for care.
- VA can offer care to help prevent you from getting sick.

Feeling sick? Have a health care question?

To speak to a nurse, call 412-822-2222 and choose option #3.



Choose VA

IF YOU ARE HAVING A MEDICAL EMERGENCY:

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

If it is not a VA facility:

- Request transfer to a VA facility when medically stable.
- Report the non-VA visit to your primary care VA facility **within 72 hours of admission.**

Your Health is Our Mission

Effective health care is more than just mending broken bones. It's also about earning your trust and working toward your best overall health. We work non-stop to meet those goals.

Dr. Edward Garay, VA
Pittsburgh pain
medicine specialist



92% of Patients

Trust VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System for their health care needs.

Patients who responded with "agree" or "strongly agree."

Our providers rank near the top in ensuring your good mental health and helping you kick unhealthy habits.



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH*

92.60% Screened annually for depression

98.68% Screened for PTSD at required intervals

90.65% Screened annually for alcohol misuse



TOBACCO CESSATION*

86.96% Offered medication to assist with cessation
National average 50.40%

90.98% Provided with brief counseling for cessation
National average 74.52%

91.16% Offered referral for cessation
National average 44.37%

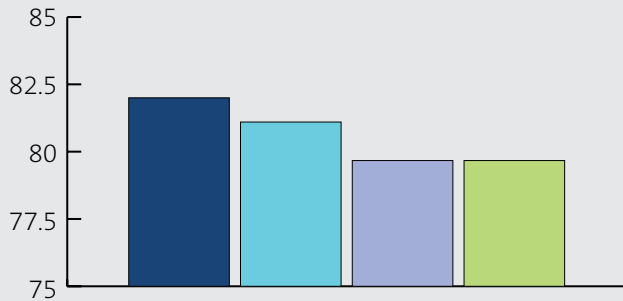
**Data presented from VHA Support Service Center (VSSC) is based on outpatient surveys from April 2018 through February 2019.*

COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE**

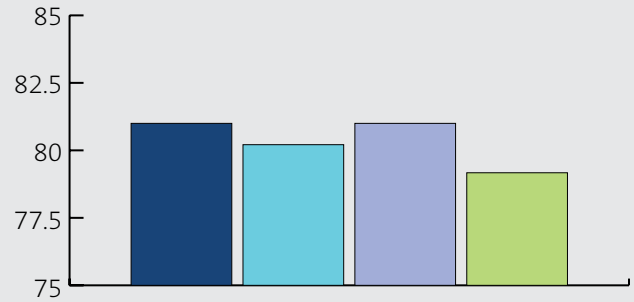
You have the right to receive accurate, easily understood health information to help you make informed decisions about your health care. At VA Pittsburgh, you've told us we are among the best in the nation at providing you with the information you need to improve your health, longevity and quality of life.

Veterans who receive inpatient care at VAPHS report:

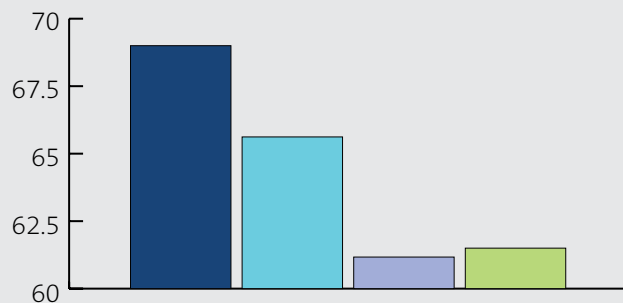
Doctors "Always" communicated well



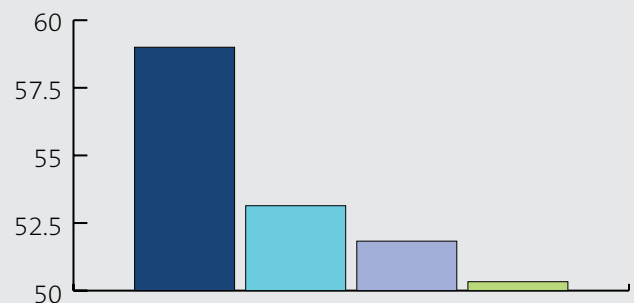
Nurses "Always" communicated well



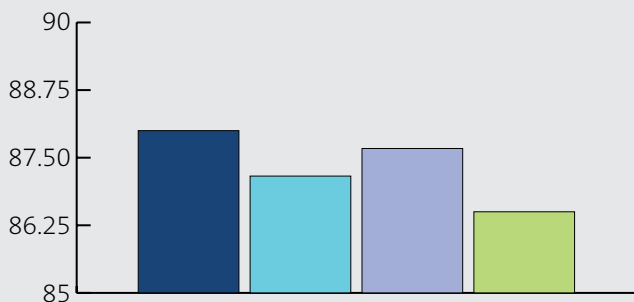
Staff "Always" explained about medicines before giving it to them



"Strongly Agree" they understood their care when they left the hospital



Reported that "Yes," they were given information about what to do during their recovery at home



■ VAPHS ■ National average
■ UPMC average ■ Allegheny Health Network average

** Data presented from VHA Support Service Center (VSSC) is based on inpatient surveys from July 2017 through June 2018 (most recent available). This national survey compares available Pittsburgh-area hospitals.



Focus on Improvement

You told us you want VA health care when and where it's convenient to you. We've made great strides toward meeting your needs, but our goal is to exceed your expectations. Areas we constantly work to improve include:

1. Same-day appointments
2. Online scheduling
3. Telehealth expansion

{ PROGRAM Spotlight }

Choose VA or Choose MISSION Act

Either way, VA has you covered.

Whether you choose trusted, high-quality VA health care or choose to explore your choices under the MISSION Act, we have your health care needs covered. The MISSION Act strengthens our ability to provide you with the care and services you need, when and where you need them. Our physicians and providers at our two main medical facilities and five outpatient clinics are honored to serve you on-site or through telehealth, but we can also help you decide whether health care through approved, non-VA community providers is for you.



COMMUNITY CARE

You may be eligible for community care if you meet any of the following:

- You need a service VA doesn't provide.
- Your U.S. state or territory does not have a full-service VA.
- You are grandfathered in to community care under the Choice program's distance criteria.

- Your average drive time is 30+ minutes for VA primary/mental health/non-institutional extended care or 60+ minutes for specialty care.
- Your wait time is 20+ days for VA primary/mental health/non-institutional extended care or 28+ days for specialty care.*
- It's in your best medical interest.
- Available VA care does not meet certain quality standards.

VA approval is required prior to seeing a community provider. If you think community care is for you, talk with your VA provider.

For more information, visit www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/General_Care.asp#Eligibility

**Unless you agree to a later date in consultation with your VA health care provider.*



URGENT CARE BENEFIT

When you have a minor illness or injury or need a prescription, you can receive VA care either through a same-day appointment, over the phone or via telehealth. Under the MISSION Act, you can now also visit non-VA urgent care and retail clinics in your community without VA preapproval.

- Urgent locations include MedExpress, UPMC and Concentra urgent care clinics whose primary purpose is to diagnose and treat walk-in patients with non-life-

threatening illnesses and injuries (excludes emergency rooms).

- Retail locations include walk-in health clinics located within retail outlets such as CVS, Giant Eagle and Rite Aid whose primary purpose is to treat uncomplicated illnesses such as sore throats and earaches.

You are eligible for the urgent care benefit if you are enrolled in VA health care and received care from a VA or community provider in the past 24 months. You may be charged a copay depending on

your priority group and number of visits to an urgent care provider each calendar year.

For more details or to search for an approved urgent care provider, visit www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/Urgent_Care.asp

Please note: Urgent care is not a substitute for emergency care for life-threatening conditions. If you have a medical emergency, visit the nearest emergency department.



ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

If you rely on a family caregiver, you might soon be eligible for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. The program currently is open only to eligible post-9/11 Veterans. Under the MISSION Act, VA is working to open the program to family caregivers of Veterans of all eras. Once the technology is in

place to support the program, VA will expand it in two phases:

- Family caregivers of Veterans who were seriously injured in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975, will be the first to become eligible for this program.
- Two years later, family caregivers of Veterans who

were seriously injured in the line of duty between May 7, 1975, and Sept. 10, 2001, will become eligible.

For updates, please check missionact.va.gov or call:

- VA Pittsburgh Caregiver Support – 412-822-2364
- VA's Caregiver Support Line – 855-260-3274

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

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www.pittsburgh.va.gov

412-822-2222 | 866-482-7488

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VETERANS CREATIVE ARTS COMPETITION

Calling all artists! Enter our Veterans Creative Arts Competition to showcase your creative and performing arts talents on **Jan. 29-30 at our H.J. Heinz III campus**. Entries accepted Dec. 1 to Jan. 15. Open to all Veterans enrolled in VA health care. Details: 412-822-3083 or 412-822-3091.

Don't Miss a Thing!



VAPHS



VAPittsburgh



FREE FLU SHOTS

A flu shot is a simple, safe and effective way to keep you and your loved ones healthy during this flu season.

We offer three ways to get your free flu shot:

1. During your regularly scheduled VA Pittsburgh appointments, including those at our outpatient clinics.
2. Walk-in clinics available weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at both campuses—no appointment necessary.
3. After hours and weekends in our Emergency Department at our University Drive campus.



SAVE THE DATE

Veterans Town Hall

Veterans Town Hall
Dec. 16 at 10 a.m.

H.J. Heinz III Learning eXchange

Visit www.pittsburgh.va.gov/calendar.asp for details.

Can't make the Veterans Town Hall but have a question for leadership?

1. Send your question to VAPHSEditor@va.gov.
2. We'll answer your question during the event.
3. Watch for your answer when we post a link to a video of the entire Town Hall on our Facebook and Twitter pages after Dec. 16.



Editor's note: This is a special edition for the MISSION Act. Future issues will publish on a regular schedule and include the Connect to Your Care phone directory.