The best way to protect a Veteran from COVID-19 is vaccination, which provides active immunity by helping the body make its own antibodies to protect itself. The Dole VA has been administering the Moderna® and Johnson & Johnson® vaccines since December.

However, once a Veteran tests positive for the virus, the goal is to prevent the virus from wreaking havoc and landing the patient in the hospital on a ventilator.

Thankfully, the Dole VA has a powerful weapon in its arsenal: Antibody Infusion Therapy.

Chief of Medicine Dr. Zubair Hassan said the hour-long outpatient procedure intravenously introduces laboratory-made antibodies to prevent the Covid-19 virus from infecting human cells.

“If we get the patient into the Dole VA infusion clinic within ten days of the onset of symptoms or three days after testing positive,” he said, “these infusions can significantly reduce the likelihood of hospitalization.”

Dr. Hassan said high-risk patients suffering from ailments such as kidney disease, heart disease, and diabetes can avoid a lengthy hospital stay if the antibody infusion therapy is given soon enough.

“Since 2020, we’ve treated 39 Veterans with these infusions, and none of them required a hospital admission,” he said.
MEDICAL CENTER DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE
VA SECRETARY DENIS MCDONOUGH VISITS THE DOLE VA

Welcome to the second issue of the Dole Insider, your inside look at the Robert J. Dole VAMC!

We recently had the honor and pleasure of hosting the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Secretary Denis McDonough visited VA facilities in Montana, Eastern Kansas and Wichita to learn about the impact of national-level decisions on local VA operations and services and how the VA can improve the lives of all Veterans.

In addition to the Secretary, we also hosted Senator Jerry Moran, Dr. Tom Klobucar, Executive Director of Rural Health for the VA, Representative Ron Estes, and Sedgwick County Commissioner David Dennis. We briefed everyone on the wonderful work we are doing at the Dole VA and led a tour of the hospital before they held a press conference to conclude the visit.

While here, Secretary McDonough recognized staff for going above and beyond in supporting our Veterans. Congratulations to Nikki Lind, Vincent Hodgdon, Misty Lester, Jacklyn Bantam, Dr. Christopher Fox, Kimberly Gillette, Alexandria Hames, Gary Kramer, Jonathan Chastine and DeManuel Fedd. All received a coin from the Secretary.

Secretary McDonough said he was very impressed with our medical center and the care we provide to Veterans. He was particularly struck by the measures we took both at the hospital and CBOCs to ensure our Veterans were being screened for health issues and receiving care when we curtailed face-to-face appointments during the pandemic.

He also said each Veteran he spoke with (over a dozen people) thought very highly of our staff and the wonderful care they receive.

Thank you all so much for the glowing reviews, and please continue telling us what you think!
Operation Refresh was started in August 2020 to assist Veterans who have home maintenance issues and not enough finances to fix them.

The program relies on volunteers to perform occasional odd jobs and light handyman work and is part of the Dole VA’s Whole Health service, which feels that a healthy lifestyle starts in the home.

A great example of this program in action was spurred by a phone call this January. The Voluntary Service office received a message that one of our Veterans was having some plumbing problems and could not afford the repairs. He also needed some painting done.

We got on the phone and started contacting our community partners, and the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association (CVMA) answered the call for help. The CVMA members, led by Russ “Highway” Childs, arrived at the Veteran’s home, and in just a few hours, they were able to remove rotted wood trim, touch up areas with paint, and fix the broken plumbing connectors in the bathroom.

The Veteran was overjoyed! Providing basic handyman services such as this can make a huge difference in the mental state of our Veterans. Knowing we’ve got their backs and are going to take care of some basic maintenance in their homes allows them to relax and focus on their own physical and mental health.

The Veterans are always so appreciative of the volunteers who come to their homes and do the work they can’t, and seeing the grateful smiles is the only reward the volunteers need.

As the world opens up a little more each day, Voluntary Services looks forward to fully engaging in Operation Refresh to ensure our Veterans have more functional and safe homes.

Until that day finally comes, Dole VA Voluntary Services will continue to help one Veteran at a time.

Voluntary Services works with community partners to do household repair jobs for Veterans.
A common reason Veterans come to the Dole VA is pain management. Pain is an essential part of life, but it doesn’t have to be debilitating. Physician Assistant Micah Van Nover said a common misconception about pain treatment is that doctors can make the pain disappear. She stressed it’s more complicated than that.

“Our job in Pain Management is not to erase pain, but to give Veterans the tools needed to make pain tolerable and to improve quality of life,” Van Nover said.

One of the most important things for Veterans to understand is that no pill can magically take away pain. Plus, because of changing policies due to the widespread epidemic of opioid abuse, strong painkillers are less likely to be used to treat pain.

Rather than masking the pain, Van Nover said, the preferred course of action is to treat the issues causing the pain in the first place.

“More often than not, pain can have underlying causes,” she said. “There is a time and a place for meds – whether it be opioids or nerve medications or anti-inflammatory agents – but we really focus on trying to fix the problem instead of trying to mask it.”

The arsenal used to manage pain includes physical therapy, chiropractic care, and electrical stimulation using an Alpha-Stim device. The VA has led the way in the use of alternative therapies such as biofeedback, battlefield acupuncture, mindfulness exercises and meditation. Even yoga and tai chi are in the mix.

“We are utilizing our therapy departments more than ever for pain complaints,” Van Nover said. “It’s all about getting people up and moving, because movement helps pain. Anything we can do to avoid a sedentary life helps tremendously.”
Cardiologist Dr. Freidy Eid recently installed a state-of-the-art pacemaker in a Dole VA Veteran, and the tiny device is nothing less than amazing.

Unlike traditional pacemakers, the Medtronic Micra has no electrical leads and requires no incisions. Instead of being implanted into a pocket formed beneath the skin just below the collarbone, the Micra is inserted through the femoral vein in the patient’s leg and is attached to the muscle tissue of the heart with four tines that look similar to a grappling hook at the end of a rope used in the movies to climb walls.

Because there are no cumbersome leads or incisions, there are no bumps under the skin or chest scars, plus the incidence of device-related complications and infection is reduced dramatically.

“Infections with traditional pacemakers can happen,” Dr. Eid said, “especially if the insulation on the leads erodes or the wire breaks. Once any part of the system is infected, the whole thing must be removed. It can be serious.”

A few months after implantation of the cutting-edge Micra device, the heart muscle will grow around the pacemaker and secure it, much like a tree would grow around a fencepost or park bench over time.

The Micra is 93% smaller than conventional pacemakers — about the size of a vitamin capsule — yet contains everything necessary to control the rhythms of the patient’s heart for 13 years.

This new design has been used successfully across the country since 2016 and represents the state of the art in pacemaker technology.

“I’m proud our Veterans get the best treatments available, and the Micra is definitely at the forefront of medical technology,” Dr. Eid said.
The Dole VA offers a variety of Telehealth options to connect patients with their care providers using devices such as iPads, laptops, cell phones, tablet, and computers. Telehealth allows Veterans to save time spent traveling, parking, and sitting in waiting rooms, and it ensures housebound patients can continue receiving high-quality care without leaving their homes.

However, what happens when a Veteran can’t access high-speed internet or doesn’t have a smartphone or a tablet? VA Telehealth had the same question and are proud to introduce the Digital Divide program!

Telehealth Coordinator Jennifer Andrews said Veterans without access to technology can be provided everything they need to communicate virtually with their health care team.

“We can issue iPads and iPhones that use cellular telephone signals and allow the Veteran to access email, the My HealtheVet website, and Veteran Video Connect (VVC),” Andrews said. “Veterans can also utilize a variety of peripherals that allow the provider to remotely measure vital signs like pulse, blood pressure, and weight.”

Veterans unfamiliar with this type of technology can take advantage of the white glove service team, which will guide the Veteran through the easy set-up process. After that, all they need to do is open an email and click on a link to start a virtual meeting with their care provider. The device takes care of the rest.

“We’ll work closely with the Veteran and do additional test calls if needed to make sure the Veteran is comfortable using the technology,” Andrews said. “Plus, we’re always happy to give a refresher to Providers any time!”

To take part in the Digital Divide program, interested Veterans need only contact their health care team to get the process started.

In the program’s first seven months, it has issued nearly 200 devices to Dole VA Veterans.
Whole Health is a term to describe a holistic approach to health care empowering and equipping both Veterans and DoLe VA staff members to take charge of their health and well-being, living their lives to the fullest.

This health care approach encourages every person to create their own personal M.A.P. – Mission, Aspiration, and Purpose – to navigate their life and establish a preventative plan for their health that is focused quality of life.

**Whole Health services** for Veteran include traditional and complementary care to help Veterans reach their goals:

**Pathway Courses** assisting Veterans in learning about the components of health and wellness and working on developing a sense of their M.A.P.

**Wellness Programs** such as Tai Chi and Yoga, plus Recreation and Art Therapy such as Creative Arts and Fly Fishing, are currently offered to expand and enhance the Veteran’s life.

**Clinical Care** that includes collaborating with providers throughout the Veteran’s entire lifespan to establish personalized health plans that consider their individualized goals and MAP.

**Health Coaching** is offered to Veterans needing additional one-on-one support to establish and make progress in reaching their health goals.

**Additional Services** such as Biofeedback, Chiropractic Care, and Battlefield Acupuncture can help improve overall functioning.

For more info on Whole Health services, contact your health team.
When a Veteran seeks services at the Dole VA, they typically must first set up an appointment with their primary care provider.

Once the physician assesses the patient’s needs, treatment can take place within Primary Care or a referral can be initiated.

For example, if a Veteran is experiencing back pain and wants to see a Chiropractor, they must first consult their main doctor for an examination to see if the services of a Chiropractor are warranted. If so, a referral can be arranged, or, if not, there may be more appropriate options the Primary Care provider can explore with the patient.

**There are three clinics that can be contacted directly by Veterans without first getting a referral: Audiology, Podiatry, and Optometry.**

Alicia McClure is the Nurse Manager for the Ambulatory Care Medicine and Surgery Clinics, and she said the direct scheduling option is for Veterans with routine follow-ups who are experiencing no concerning complications.

“If the patient is having an issue — like they’re experiencing pain or discomfort — they should definitely call their primary care provider first to have the issue triaged just to make sure,” McClure said.

Direct Scheduling is perfect for Veterans, say, refilling an eyeglass prescription, wanting their feet checked due to diabetes, or making sure their hearing aids are working.

**Optometry**
(316) 685-2221, Ext. 57100
*Eye exams, new eyeglasses, etc.*

**Audiology**
(316) 685-2221, Ext. 53041
*Testing, hearing aid repairs, etc.*

**Podiatry**
(316) 685-2221, Ext. 52315
*Exams, care plans, toe nails, etc.*