



Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Medical Center Director

UPCOMING EVENTS

Independence Day
July 4

Opioid Safety Symposium
featuring VA Panelists,
July 18, 7:00 p.m.
USS Yorktown's Smokey
Stover Theater

SUICIDE PREVENTION TAKES EVERYONE!

#BeThere

Veterans Crisis Line:
1-800-273-8255 and Press 1

Online chat at:
www.veteranscrisisline.net

Text: 838255



VA | Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center



**1,150 FAMILIES
SERVED**

MONTHLY REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR



When I first came to the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center nine years ago, I immediately realized this was so much more than a hospital. It was apparent our VA went beyond health care in so many ways to make sure the whole Veteran – not just his or her injury or medical condition – was taken care of by an incredibly devoted team. I saw our staff helping coordinate with other agencies to meet non-medical needs, figuring out the best ways to provide transportation for those who needed assistance getting to appointments, and finding ways to honor our Veterans like working with a local artist to create our Hall of Heroes.

Today, our team is working hard to address even more concerns for our Veterans. And we're increasingly focused on improving each day to better serve our Veterans in all aspects of their lives.

Over the past three years, our Chief of Nutrition & Food Service Margaret Bradbury has led a mighty band of employees to address hunger and food insecurity among area Veterans. Although Charleston VAMC was not selected as one of the original 20 medical centers to participate in a VA pilot program in partnership with Feeding America in 2016, Margaret and her team were not about to take no for an answer. Her vision of creating a free food pantry here at our VA led to a successful partnership with the Lowcountry Food Bank and other community organizations as part of our commitment to improving Veterans' health by providing nutrition education and healthy foods. Opened in 2017, our VA Emergency Food Pantry is a tangible way to assist our most vulnerable Veterans who are struggling with hunger or the lack of consistent, ongoing access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The Emergency Food Pantry is a collaboration between Charleston VA's Nutrition and Food Service, Voluntary Service, Logistics Service, the Lowcountry Food Bank and the Tri-County Veterans Support Network. The Lowcountry Food Bank supplies low cost food, while the Tri-County Veterans Support helps manage the administrative functions of the food pantry. VA provides staffing and volunteer support. Veterans are referred by a VA mental health provider, social worker or clinical dietitian.

While the Emergency Food Pantry has made a significant impact for many, Margaret and her team knew there was more to be done. So, they partnered again with Lowcountry Food Bank and Clemson University to begin a Veteran garden, teaching patients to grow some of their own food. And we have partnered with Soldiers' Angels to offer food distribution to Veterans at the VA since 2017 reaching approximately 200 Veteran families each month providing 50 pounds of food at each distribution event.

Most recently, our VA team hosted a free Farmer's Market for Veterans at the medical center. Five pallets of healthy produce including zucchini, carrots, lettuce and cabbage totaling 3,590 pounds of food were distributed to 352 Veteran households on May 21 at our VA. Studies have shown that addressing food insecurity at the point of health care is both efficient and effective. The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center will continue its effort to ensure that no Lowcountry Veteran goes hungry.

I want to point out that doing things like hosting Farmer's Markets or setting up an Emergency Food Pantry is not a part of their job for all the employees involved in addressing hunger and a number of other Veteran needs at our VA. These are devoted members of our team who are determined to go above and beyond simply because they care about our Veterans, and I am incredibly proud of each of them.

Our team is why, when I am asked about things like the potential of privatizing VA, my response is our Veterans continue to choose us. They know that we will do everything in our power to coordinate their care, make sure every issue and need is addressed, and go above and beyond every day to honor them for the sacrifices they have made. That's the commitment we all will continue to keep. That's the commitment that will keep VA strong for generations to come.

Respectfully,

Scott R. Isaacks Director & CEO