



**Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE**  
Medical Center Director

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**RiverDogs Military  
Appreciation Night at The Joe**  
Aug. 2

**Blood Drive at Charleston VAMC**  
Main Auditorium  
Aug. 14, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**Mental Health Summit**  
American Red Cross,  
2424-A City Hall Lane,  
North Charleston,  
Aug. 30, 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

## SUICIDE PREVENTION TAKES EVERYONE!

*#BeThere*

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

**Online chat at:**  
[www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net)

**Text:** 838255



**VA**

Ralph H. Johnson  
VA Medical Center



**1,232 FAMILIES  
SERVED**

# MONTHLY REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR



In health care we are always focused on three things: effectively treating our patient's illness or injury; minimizing pain to allow healing; and patient safety. Pain medications are often an important part of treatment but their use – particularly for opioids – must be managed properly to keep our Veterans safe from the risks of addiction.

That is why we radically changed our approach to pain management at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center several years ago, establishing an interdisciplinary Pain Management team comprised of doctors, pharmacists, mental health professionals and other specialists to provide effective pain relief through alternative therapies. Earlier this month, three of them shared their work – work that led to greater than 50% reduction in the number of patients prescribed an opioid over the past five years – and two Veterans shared their journey to manage pain without the pills in an ABC News 4 special broadcast "Attacking Pain: Alternatives to Opioids." Here is a [feature segment](#) from the broadcast.

While our team's work that has also brought down the number of patients prescribed an opioid in our Emergency Department by approximately 50% over the last three years is impressive, it is really the stories of Veterans like panelist [Rae Carlers](#) that prove alternative therapies work. Rae suffered a painful, debilitating back injury. Initially, she was prescribed opioids that only masked the pain and left her feeling sluggish and unlike herself.

Cracking a smile, she recalled walking into Pain Management Director Dr. Robert Friedman's office at the VA the first time and looking around to make sure he had all his certificates as he was telling her to stop taking several medications and try acupuncture and lavender scented Vaseline instead. Despite her doubts, she followed his guidance and found rapid relief from the pain. She went on to learn self-acupuncture techniques, changed her diet, increased her physical activity and even started using a weighted blanket to help her sleep better. Each strategy was tailored to her specific type of pain and her life goals. Today, she is an avid pickle ball player and recently won a gold medal in that sport at the National Veterans Golden Age Games.

While there are cases where opioids are necessary for pain management, research and our Veterans are proving there are many effective alternatives and our VA offers a host of them to reduce and manage pain. Tai Chi, Yoga, mindfulness, acupuncture, aroma therapy and more are available here so if you or a Veteran you know is suffering with chronic pain we encourage them to make an appointment with our Pain Management team. Relief that is both effective and safe is possible.

## Caring About Life

Army Veteran Joyce Letellier shared her struggles with depression and suicide attempts earlier this month with [The Post and Courier](#). Battling anxiety, depression, post traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse for decades, she has tried to take her own life four times.

VA and our medical center work daily to prevent Veteran suicide, Joyce says she found hope when she realized she was eligible for VA health care and began seeing her psychiatrist here. Over the last 13 years, she's engaged in inpatient and outpatient treatment at our VA building a toolbox of skills that help her work through her anxiety, stress and emotions on her own. And all the while she knows there is a full team just one phone call away to help when needed.

"The VA helped me and is teaching me to save my own life," she says. Now she's determined to do the same for other Veterans. She sponsors two women through Alcoholics Anonymous and offers hope to everyone along the way.

For more information on suicide prevention or the Veterans Crisis Line [click here](#). If you know a Veteran in need of help, call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.

## Veterans Health Identification Card

All veterans enrolled in our health care system are encouraged to get their Veterans Health Identification Card (VHIC). While the VHIC is not a requirement, it does help with a quick check-in for your VA appointments and it is a readily recognizable form of ID that val-

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updates your Veteran status. Getting the card is simple – visit our Welcome Center at the front entrance of our medical center or inquire at the front desk in our off-site outpatient clinics. Please be aware that this card is different than the Veterans Identification Card (VIC) – the card you can apply for and use to get discounts offered to Veterans at many restaurants, hotels, stores, and other businesses. The VHIC is related to your health care within the VA and is just one more way we are partnering with you to ensure a smooth flow through our health care system and improve your patient experience.

### VA MISSION Act Update

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is committed to ensuring the 80,000 Veterans we are privileged to serve have the care they need when and where they need it. Since the implementation of the VA MISSION Act on June 6,

we have seen the overwhelming majority of our Veteran patients continue to choose our VA for their care which is a testament to the trust they place in us and our community partners to provide the highest-quality care for their needs. Our team works very hard and I'm proud to report we are providing access within the MISSION Act required timeframes of 20 days for Primary and Mental Health care and 28 days for Specialty care in 99% of our clinics. We are committed to providing the right care in the right place at the right time for our Veterans and we thank them and you for continuing to choose our VA.

Respectfully,



Scott R. Isaacks | Director & CEO



Choose **VA**



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