



Ronnie Smith, MSHA, MBA

**CHECK IT OUT-**  
[CHARLESTON VAMC](#)  
[VIRTUAL TOUR](#)

### UPCOMING EVENTS

All upcoming events have been cancelled. Reschedule dates will be released once available.

### 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



# LEADERSHIP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

## Moving Forward Together

VA is moving forward with reintroducing select services at facilities across the country. As part of VHA's effort, the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center was selected as a Lead Site for the nation and began its first phase of expanding in-person services on May 18.

Each VISN selected facilities as Lead Sites to be the first to implement a phased approach to reintroducing health care services while ensuring a safe environment this month. Lessons learned from lead sites will be shared with other facilities as they plan their expansions.

Our facility was chosen as a lead site because of the high-quality complex care we provide, the low number of COVID-positive patients and employees we have had, and our experience as a High Reliability Organization pilot site. All lead sites have met the criteria which align with the White House Guidelines for Opening Up America Again, VA guidance and federal, state and local guidance.

During COVID, Primary Care and Mental Health have been routinely available with an emphasis on more virtual video and telephone care, and other services available for urgent and emergent needs. We are following a five-phase expansion plan as we gradually re-open and expand in-person care. The plan begins with Phase 1 which includes an expansion of surgical cases, including some elective cases, and select specialty services based on clinical need of Veteran patients. Currently we are preparing to enter Phase 2, where almost all services are available with limits on capacity.

During Phase 3 we will continue to utilize virtual care while moderately accelerating face-to-face clinic visits and procedures. Phase 4 will expand face-to-face clinic visits, elective procedures and OR capacity to near normal operations and Phase 5 is return to full clinic operations to the greatest extent possible.

We are conducting ongoing assessments and a formal mid-point assessment at each phase to ensure it is safe and the VAMC is fully ready to move to the next phase before the decision to do so is made. Assessments review a number of factors including PPE usage and supplies, the safety of our care environment, and positive cases

amongst Veteran patients and in the community. Each of our locations will be considered separately, and we will only move to the next phase when our goals are met for the current phase and it is safe to do so.

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center continues to maximize personalized virtual care options like telehealth, phone consults and wellness checks, as we know these services have been a valuable link to our Veterans during this challenging time.

The safety of Veterans and staff is the highest priority as we expand services and procedures, initially to Veterans who have the greatest clinical need and, as we achieve appropriate milestones, to all Veterans down the road.

As we welcome patients back, we are:

- Seeing a limited number of patients in-person prioritized by clinical need.
- Continuing our No Visitor policy with some exceptions for end-of-life care patients; no visitors under age 18.
- Continuing to maximize virtual care options to promote physical distancing and provide increased access to care regardless of geographic location.
- We will continue to use telehealth for primary care and mental health services to the extent possible to help ensure everyone's safety.
- Telehealth continues to be expanded to include clinical care for all patients, unless it is necessary that care be performed face-to-face such as for procedures and surgery.
- Following physical distancing and environmental cleaning recommendations outlined by the CDC.
- Asking patients not to enter the building more than 15 minutes before their appointment and to exit as soon as their appointment is completed.

*(continued on next page)*



Choose **VA**



**1,856 FAMILIES SERVED**

# LEADERSHIP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

- Screening staff members and Veterans for fever and other signs of COVID-19 infection.
- Requiring 100% use of face covering and handwashing soon after entry into our facility.
- Safe care is our mission and our continuing commitment to you, as well as to our Veterans.

any physical distancing or protection barriers and for that we are all so very grateful. From meals donated to our health care workers to sidewalk chalk messages of caring to our volunteers establishing a no-touch curbside delivery service for Veterans in need, this pandemic has in ways brought us closer than ever.

As we slowly return to normal, the mask is a requirement for everyone who enters our VA facilities to protect us all from coronavirus. I challenge us all to see the person, the compassion and the care that lives [Behind the Mask](#) as we welcome our Veterans back to our VA.

## Behind the Mask

One of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic is living behind the mask.

That challenge is the same for our Veterans, our loved ones and our VA health care team because it can contribute to a sense of diminished connection with one another. At the same time, there has been such an outpouring of love and support for our VA team and our Veterans that has gone beyond

Sincerely,



Ronnie Smith, MHSA, MBA

### Announcements & Events

Due to concerns over coronavirus, and the importance of social distancing, all upcoming events are postponed indefinitely. We will announce events as they are rescheduled.

### COVID-19 Care & Testing

Veterans experiencing symptoms – fever, new or worsening chronic cough, new or worsening chronic shortness of breath – should call our Telephone Advice Program (TAP) line at (843) 789-6400 or 1-888-878-6884 to speak with a nurse. Staff are available 24/7 for nurse advice and triage. You may be referred from VA to MUSC Health or VA clinics in Savannah, Hinesville or Myrtle Beach for drive-through testing. Testing referral and appointments are required. Read VA's latest information on the new coronavirus at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/>.



**VA** | Ralph H. Johnson  
VA Medical Center

