

# Jesse Brown Pulse



VOL. 1 ISSUE 5 • SEPTEMBER 2023 • JESSE BROWN VA MEDICAL CENTER • CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

# MEDICAL CENTER TURNS 70!

VA Hospital  
Chicago (West Side), Ill.  
January 25, 1953

Supt. of Construction

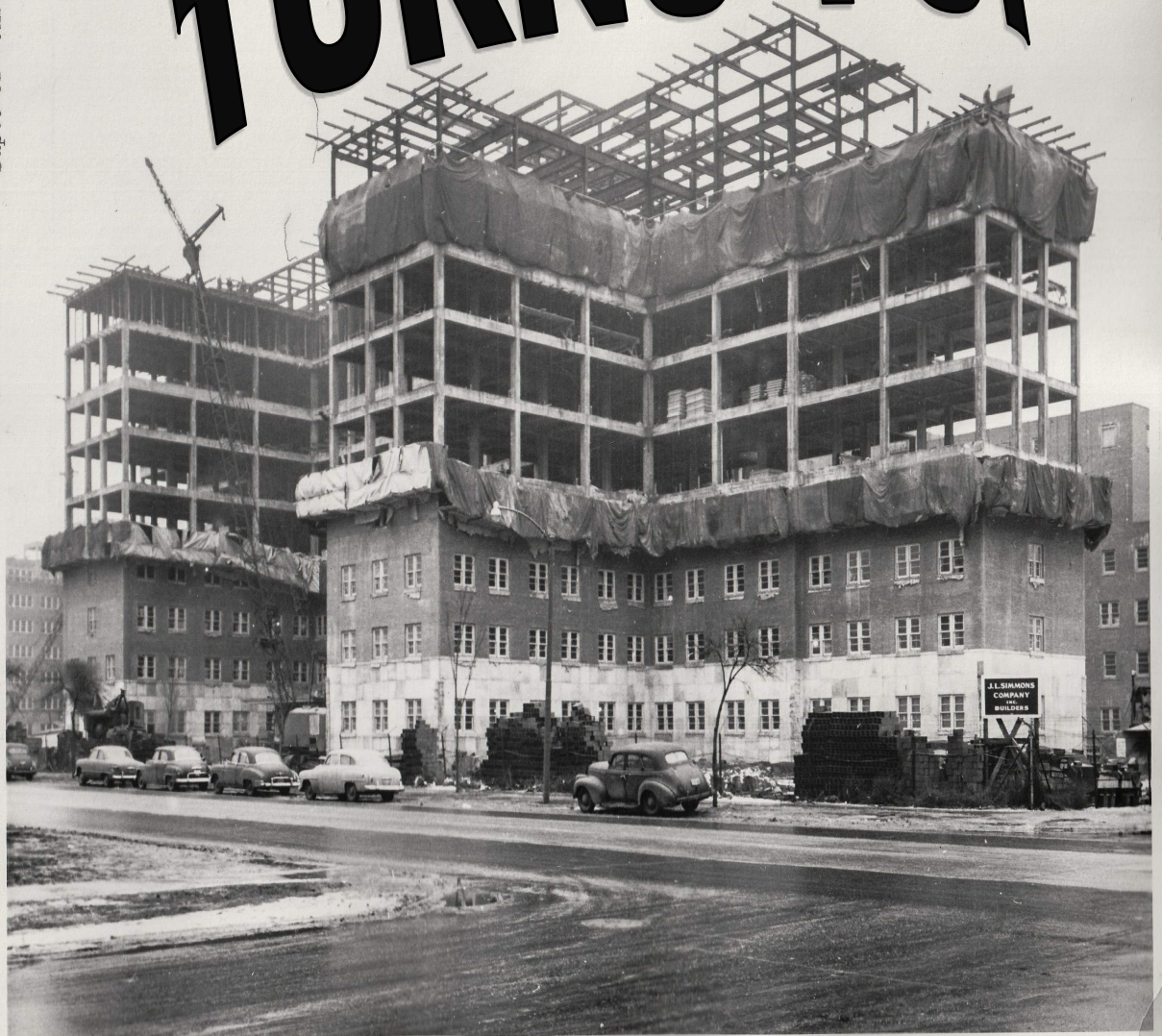
Photo #505

BUILDING NO. 1

VIEW LOOKING SOUTHWEST

SHOWING STRUCTURAL STEEL, FIREPROOFING  
AND MASONRY

J. L. Simmons Company, Inc.  
V1001C-80  
Project 7-4126





# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



**Rick A. Ament, MSA, FACHE**  
Director Jesse Brown Veteran  
Affairs Medical Center

The purpose of this correspondence is to confirm rumors you may have heard regarding my impending retirement. I recently decided to retire effective Sept. 29. If you know me, you realize, “while I’m old enough to retire from the federal government, I will continue to work in health care”.

It is with very mixed emotions that I leave, But I want to take this opportunity to thank the employees of Jesse Brown. You have impacted me professionally and personally, and I will never forget my experi-

ence here. You are a very special team with a very special mission. Our Veterans deserve the best health care available, and you provide them with the best care, each day. These aren’t just hollow words from “guy in a suit, exiting stage right.” The accolades and national recognition you have earned are a testament to your exceptional service, passion, and quality. No other organization can claim:

- The top provider in the nation,
- The top Chief of police and four of the top five law enforcement professionals in the VA,
- Consistently the best mortality rating across the VA,
- The No. 1 VHA facility with respect to providers’ “Trust in Leadership,”
- Most improved AES scores,
- Inaugural Four-Star Rating from CMS,
- And many more accomplishments (too many to name here).

Not only are you special employees with a special mission, but the leadership team I will be leaving is the most talented with whom I have had the privilege to work. Your clinical service chiefs are exceptionally gifted and committed pro-

viders. This current nursing leadership team leads with passion, and conviction. They are, collectively, the strongest nursing leadership team I have seen at Jesse Brown. Your support department, leaders are strong professionals that have brought their departments (of committed employees) a long way as they serve our Veterans with pride.

The single most significant reason, however, I leave with a good feeling in my heart is your ELT. As an organization, you are in great hands because you have committed leaders who are talented and passionate about the mission and about you, the employees of Jesse Brown. Your leaders are not only gifted, but they also work extremely well as a team. In my 35 years of leadership experience in health care, this is the best team I have seen.

So, yes, I am retiring at the end of the week (Sept. 29). I will be continuing my career back in the private sector from where I originally came. But I will be doing so with warm memories of you, the exceptional employees of the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center.

Thanks for everything.

## MISSION

The Jesse Brown Pulse seeks to celebrate all the amazing things our employees do, in and out of work, as well as highlight resources across the medical center for our Veterans.



820 South Damen Ave. Chicago, IL 60612-3728  
312-569-8387 [va.gov/Chicago-health-care](http://va.gov/Chicago-health-care)

## NEWSLETTER STAFF

### Publisher

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### Editor-in-Chief

Catrina Francis, Public Affairs Officer

## CONTACT

This newsletter is for you, so if you have a story you want to share, please reach out to [CHSPA0@va.gov](mailto:CHSPA0@va.gov).

## COMMUNICATIONS TASKFORCE

The Communications Taskforce is a group of your peers who volunteered to search out and tell the stories of our medical center and the Veterans we are honored to serve.

## COMMUNICATION TASKFORCE MEMBERS

Francis Agyei  
Jessica Gardner  
Tenena Soro  
Requiya Jones

Febin Mattahil  
Cynthia Robertson

Christina Chiu  
Catrina Francis  
Vanita Williams  
Lacretia Henderson  
Kristen Lake  
Helen Morrison

# ABJ holds active shooter training event

Catrina Francis – Public Affairs Officer

Jesse Brown VA Medical Center recently held an active shooter training event at the Adam Benjamin Jr. Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Crown Point, Indiana.

The active shooter training allows Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center to collaborate with local law enforcement agencies, which included the Lake County Sheriff's Department, Crown Point Police Department, emergency medical services and Lake County Coroner's Office to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response.

Ryan Landi, the JBVAMC Acting Associate Medical Center Director, said the training went well.

"It's a sad reality that we have to prepare for these types of events," said Landi. "But is something that we must be ready for. A lot of hard work went into the coordination of

this event. Thank you to Jesse Brown Emergency Management team and the Lake County Sheriff's department for support this effort."

Nick Countouris, a JBVAMC Emergency Management Specialist, agreed with Landi by saying he is also saddened that these types of training events must be conducted. However, he added that by doing so provided an opportunity to test the capabilities of the VA, and surrounding community partners.

"This was a first ever test of a fully operational response, and the use of exterior resources," explained Countouris.

"This was a great exercise, and I want to thank everyone who was involved in planning and execution of the exercise. Also, to all the VA employees who volunteered their time on a Saturday to making this possible. I truly appreciate your dedication; you have all done a wonderful job."

After "shooting" began, employees and Veterans ran throughout the clinic to find a safe hiding place away from the "shooter." Once law enforcement was on the scene, they



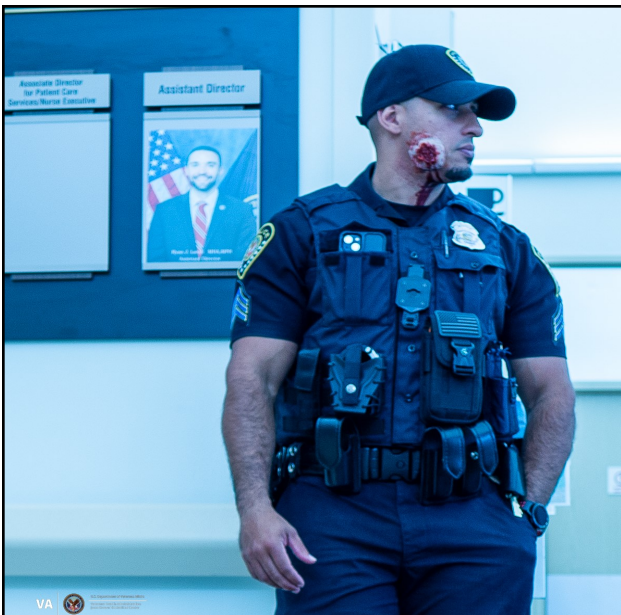
An employee is shown "injured" during the active shooter training at ABJ CBOC Sept. 16. This training allows JBVAMC to work with local law enforcement and EMS agencies.

*Photos by Kenny Jones*

asked employees and Veterans to raise their hands while being guided to safety. SWAT officers were also on hand to assist local law enforcement with guiding people to safety, search for the "shooter," and clear rooms in the clinic.

When law enforcement was able to subdue the "active shooter" and guide employees and Veterans to safety, they realized that five individuals were "killed," which included a Veteran Affairs police officer, Veteran, and three employees, while seven were "injured" and transported to local hospitals.

Overall, the event was a success and provided opportunities for Jesse Brown leadership, VA Police, and local law enforcement to collaborate and learn how to support each other strategically in case an event like this ever occurs.



A Police officer is "injured" during the active shooter training Sept. 16 at the Adam Benjamin Jr. Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Crown Point, Indiana.



# JBVAMC | 9/11 tribute, remembering heroes

*Catrina Francis – Public Affairs Officer*

On Sept. 11, the Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center held a 9/11 memorial event in the medical center’s Prescription Room. The event was held to pay homage and remember the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil and the lives lost that day.

The event began with Chaplain Hippolytus Njoku’s invocation. He said God changes all things, and he is the hope and the healing, and the courage of those who people depend on for loss and tragedies.

“We will reflect today on American experience of that Sept. 11 ... the lives

of nearly 3,000 Americans,” he said during the invocation. “Today we will remember and pray fellow Americans who were on those planes, those who were inside those towers, and those who were on land experienced the fear ... and cried for their safety.”

Dr. Sarah Unterman, the JBVAMC Chief of Staff, said when she thinks of Sept. 11, it brings her back to medical school. Unterman was in her second year of medical school, and this was before smartphones, so she wasn’t aware of the events that were unfolding that day. It wasn’t until she arrived at school that she

received the news of an airplane hitting the World Trade Center.

Like most parents who have children who were born after 2001, Unterman said when trying to describe how the country was feeling that day has been interesting because her children don’t have a concept of what happened that day.

“When I was trying to explain to them how we felt and some of the stories that came out of Sept. 11, I came upon one of the most uplifting stories,” explained Unterman. “We have all heard stories of bravery and stories of people working together who

would have never known each other before [and] lifelong friendships that were built off this tragedy that came from it.”

“One of the stories that has gotten short shrift that I find uplifting is the story of the boat lift that day. If you remember, anybody in southern Manhattan was cut off, they couldn’t go anywhere all the tunnels and bridges were closed. They had hundreds of thousands of people who couldn’t get home or just out of Manhattan.”

Unterman added that the Coast Guard saw what was happening, and that people were starting to amass at the southern tip of Manhattan, and they called for all available boats to help move people from southern Manhattan to wherever they needed to go. That day every boat that was within reasonable distance came. None of this was official it was just everybody working together for the good of hundreds of thousands of strangers.

“People would get on and they would fill [the boats] as much as they could and the Coast Guard decided they weren’t going to be too stressed out about limits on how many



On Sept. 11, the Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center held a 9/11 memorial event in the medical center’s Prescription Room. The event was held to pay homage and remember the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil and the lives lost that day.

*Photo by Julian Calderon*



people could go on the boat,” she said. “That day through the goodness of random strangers, this boat lift moved 500,000 people from southern Manhattan to places up and down the coast. That’s the largest boat lift in history.”

She pointed out that the Coast Guard saw that there was a problem and people said, “We are going to help.”

Unterman stressed the importance of helping others when they are in need. She also encouraged individuals to listen to other stories from that day.

“Some of us probably knew people who were lost in the attacks or who survived but lost a piece of themselves in the attacks,” Unterman said. “This is a very somber and life changing event for many of us. The kind of thing where everybody knows exactly where they were when they first found out and sitting in



(Left to right) Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center police officers Sgt. Josue Almanza and Lt. Shela Grant are shown before the start of the Sept. 11 event in the JBVAMC’s Prescription Room. The 9/11 event honored those who were lost on that fateful day.

*Photo by Julian Calderon*

front of the television as things changed in real time.

“So, today we can remember the unity that resulted

from that time and how we all, for at least a little while, realized that America needs to stand together — all Americans, we’re all our neighbors. If we

don’t work together, we are not going to be able to do great things as we saw that we can do when we did work together.”



On Sept. 27 and 28, Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center nurses conducted professional competency, which is a fundamental concept in nursing that has a direct relationship with quality improvement of patient care and public health. Organizational commitment as a kind of affective attachment or sense of loyalty to the organization is an effective factor for professional competency.



# Jesse Brown celebrates 70th anniversary

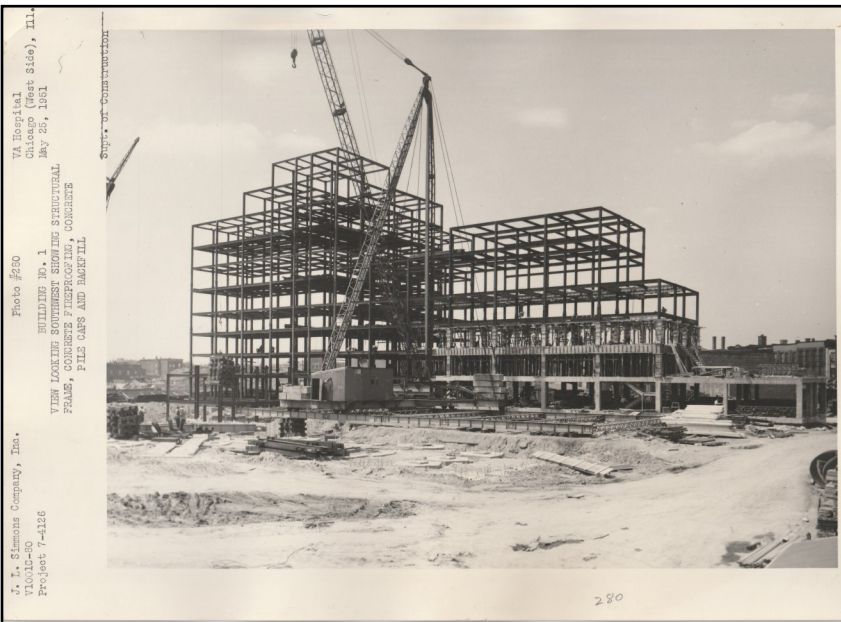
*Catrina Francis – Public Affairs Officer*

Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center, formerly Westside VA Hospital, celebrated its 70th anniversary in September. The hospital was officially activated Sept. 1, 1953, when the first patient was admitted, and officially dedicated Sept. 27, 1953. In 2004, the facility was renamed for the Honorable Jesse Brown, who served as Secretary for Veteran Affairs from 1993 to 1997.

there are a few who have been here since the days when it was the Westside VA Hospital. In 1993, Norma Dorsey, a Nurse Manager, said she started working at the hospital after working in the private sector, which she said was quite different when she started here.

Over the years, employees have come and gone at the medical facility. However,

“The first [difference] was [being] responsible



(Above) The beginning stages of the construction on what would first be named Westside VA Hospital in 1951. The hospital was officially activated in September 1953 and dedicated later that month. In 2004, it was renamed Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center. (Right) When Westside VA Hospital opened, the rooms were 16 to an open room with four beds in each area of the room.

for taking doctor’s orders,” she explained. “Each registered nurse was responsible for taking off their own orders, so that was a shock to me because I was used to taking off my own orders.”

Dorsey added that she remembers the days of a Veterans saying, “Don’t go to the VA.” However, once one of her friends went to the VA hospital,

he said that was the best care he had received.

“Some of them have told me even now as a manager, ‘you know what, your nursing staff is great,’” she said.

One of the changes Dorsey has seen is the increase in the number of women Veterans who are using the VA. She said she recently assisted a 19-year-old female Veteran, which was extremely surprising.

“[I was wondering] what age did she go into the service, you know, and some of them have issues and they are younger,” Dorsey said. “We have to make sure that we’re

taking care of their needs because they are younger and not [always] older.”

Tammy Ostrowsky, a Nurse Manager, has been working at the medical center for the last 34 years and she’s seen quite a few changes. The main change was how much nurses are paid. In the first year Ostrowsky started working at the medical center, the pay for registered nurses was low and she wasn’t sure if she would remain. But, after a year, Congress changed things because it took an act of Congress for nurses working at VA to receive a raise.

“We were paid so low, and we could not get locality pay,” said Ostrowsky. “After the first year, the salary went up and I said, I guess I will stay one more year.”

For Ostrowsky, one year turned into two, then five, 10, 15, and now it’s been

34 years.

She pointed out that there has also been a change in how Veterans are treated when they enter the medical center. In the past, Ostrowsky said clerks were sometimes rude to Veterans and that has changed because customer service is now compassionate, and clerks are nice to Veterans. The number of beds in a room has also changed.

“They used to have big medical wards with 16 patients and [was] only separated by a curtain,” she said.

Ostrowsky has also seen a change in how VA handles homeless Veterans. She said in the past VA didn’t house homeless Veterans.

“[Homeless Veterans] would hang out with [other] Veterans during

the day or hang out in the emergency room,” said Ostrowsky.

Although Ostrowsky has worked at the medical center for 34 years, she said there were two times in the past when she contemplated leaving. However, it was the pride in the institution that made her stay. It was VA’s innovation that made her stay.

“I hope VA continues to be a leader in providing new and innovative care,” she said. “Bar code scanning for meds ... we were the leaders doing that. VA led that; the private sector didn’t have that. I like to see us continue to be leaders in medicine.”

Sometimes medical professionals stay, sometimes they leave, and sometimes they do both. Dr. Margaret Baumann was a fourth-year medical student on a one-month sub internship in internal medicine at the medical center. She said she loved working here and that influenced her decision on where she would do her residency — the Westside VA Hospital.

After Baumann completed her residency, she worked at hospital in the private sector and returned to Westside VA in 1990 as the chief of geriatrics. She then began working at Edward Hines Jr. Veteran Affairs Medical Center from 1997 to 2015. By



then the name had changed to Jesse Brown. Baumann has also seen a few changes from her residency days.

“The only Veterans [who] were entitled to outpatient care were Veterans [who] were service connected or if they had been in the hospital,” Baumann said. “After they came out of the hospital, they could have outpatient care.”

Baumann added that changed when the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act was passed in 2000, which provided care for all eligible Veterans.

Even though Baumann has not served in the military, she enjoys working at the VA.

“I really feel patriotic; I love this country and caring for them is one of my ways to express my patriotism by supporting those Veterans who have served,” said Baumann. “These individuals have chosen to serve our country, they have put their lives on the line, frequently putting their lives on hold to serve the country. That makes them different from other citizens, and they really deserve the best that we can give them.”



(Above) an aerial view of the finished VA hospital.

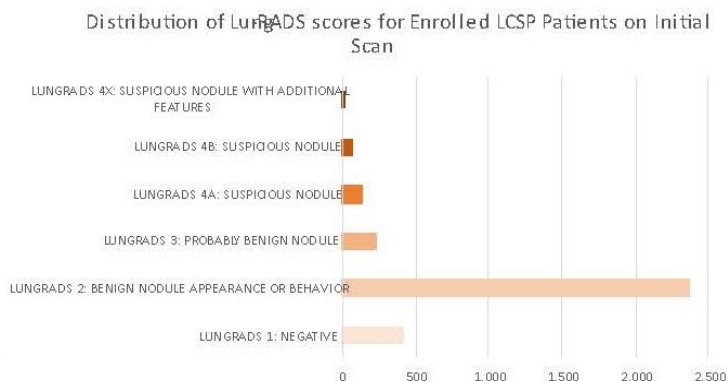
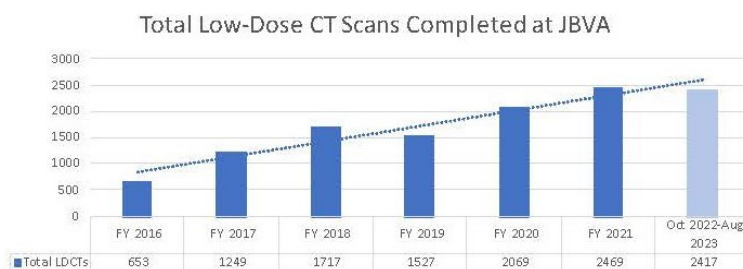
(Right) The groundbreaking at the VA hospital.



# Lung Cancer Screening and Robotic Bronchoscopy

- Lung cancer screening efforts have steadily increased at JBVA
- With increase rates of screening among JBVA Veterans, more suspicious lung nodules are detected. Many may benefit from robotic-guided biopsy.
  - JBVA patients have been found to have higher than expected Lung -RADS 4B/4X

[Promoting lung cancer screening of high-risk patients by primary care providers \(wiley.com\)](#)



Lung cancer screening at Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center has increased in the last six years. JBVAMC will be purchasing a robotic bronchoscopy equipment, which will detect lung cancer in stages one and two.

*Photo courtesy of Catherine Dell*

## Robotic bronchoscopy detecting lung cancer in early stages

**Catrina Francis** – Public Affairs Officer

The Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center is a Center of Excellence for lung cancer and has participated in lung cancer screening since 2016.

Lung cancer screening involves identifying high-risk patients, such as tobacco users, and having them obtain a CT scan of their chest to potentially identify spots (called nodules) that may be lung cancer.

Catherine Dell, the JBVAMC Lung Cancer Screening Coordinator, said lung cancer screening should be done for individuals who are 50 to 80 years old, have at least 20 pack years of smoking cigarettes, a current smoker, or quit less than 15 years ago.

Dr. Kevin Haas, director of interventional pulmonary at JBVAMC and an associate professor of clinical medicine at the University of Illinois College of Medicine,

said the primary goal of lung cancer screening is to catch cancer in the earliest stage, before it has spread anywhere outside the lung.

“As part of the lung nodule team, we want to catch the cancer as early as possible when the prognosis is the best,” explained Haas. “Ideally in stage one lung cancer we are not just talking about treatment, we are talking about a curative intent.”



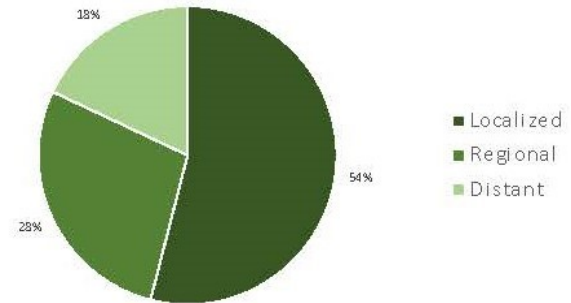
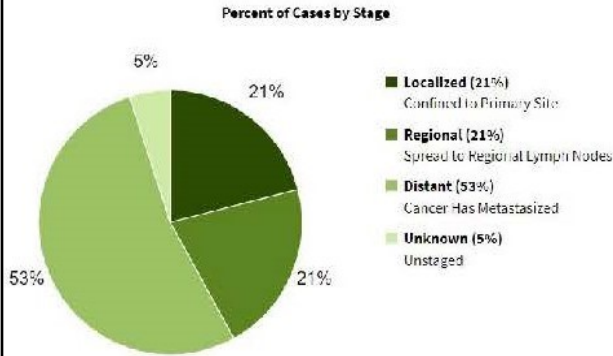
# Screening finds cancer at earlier, curable stages

National Institute of Health

<https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/lungb.html>

JBVA LCS Diagnosed Cancer

Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer by Stage Diagnosed by JBVA Screening



The robotic bronchoscopy, which Jesse Brown Veteran Affairs Medical Center will be purchasing, will help the medical center diagnose lung cancer in curable stages.

*Photo courtesy of Catherine Dell*

Unfortunately, most of lung cancer screening we diagnose now is in the more advanced stages.”

To improve veteran care, the JBVAMC has obtained approval to advance our diagnostic technology by acquiring a robotic bronchoscopy platform. If a suspicious lung nodule or abnormality is found on the screening CT, a patient may require sampling of the nodule. These lung nodules can be small though and difficult to diagnose with our current conventional

sampling methods.

Haas pointed out that the addition of the robotic bronchoscopy platform enables us to reach anywhere in the lung and increase the probability of diagnosing small pulmonary nodules that are suspicious of being cancer.

“The robotic bronchoscopy platform consists of a very thin catheter and camera and a built in ‘GPS system’ to guide the doctor to

the pulmonary nodule for sampling. Robotic bronchoscopy is the most promising technology we have seen in terms of trying to diagnose pulmonary nodules in the last 20 years,” Haas said.

Because of this technology, the JBVAMC will be able to accurately diagnose smaller lung nodules than previous sampling methods and improve cancer outcomes to Veterans.

**It's never too late to start breathing easier.**

So, what are you waiting for? Ask your VA provider today about treatment options to quit smoking.



There is a long history of smoking and other tobacco use in the military. Many Veterans used tobacco while they served, particularly during deployment. Now seven out of every 10 Veterans who smoke would like to quit — for the physical benefits and their mental health. VA offers resources for making a quit plan and sticking to it. do.”

GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT | NOV 16

# Department Spotlight | Employee whole health

Jessica Gardner – Research Health Science Specialist

Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center offer programs for Veterans; however, there are programs available for employees such as Whole Health.

The Employee Whole Health program offers a variety of services and resources to empower and equip individuals to take charge of their health and well-being and live their life to the fullest. Offerings include fitness classes like high-intensity interval training and early morning boot camp, Qigong, daily mindfulness breaks, an organic farm share program, team challenges, self-care workshops, nutrition webinars, peer support in response to adverse events, and employee massage.

While 63% of Veteran Health Administration facilities now have a dedicated EWH coordinator (at 0.5 full-time equivalent or higher), JBVAMC has been ahead of the curve, having established a robust Employee Wellness program with a full-time program coordinator in 2014. Shari Pollack, MPH, RDN, LDN, started at JBVAMC as a clinical

dietitian in 2002. Pollack has been at the helm of JBVAMC's EWH program for the last nine years. She offers one-on-one nutrition counseling, health coaching, and



Departments and services are using the new Rejuvenation. *Go!*<sup>TM</sup> This portable kiosk, designed for health care facilities, provides an immersive relaxation experience.

*Courtesy photo*

helping employees identify what matters most to them and partnering with them to establish and achieve health goals.

“Employee Whole health has offered me the skills

and support to improve my health and life,” said Teresa Luna, a JBVAMC system specialist. “Shari educated me about nutrition, food choices, and portion sizes. I started us-

ing several EWH offering such as the Wellness Center, boot camp, and mindfulness programs. I’ve lost 30 pounds and still counting. I encourage others to join these programs.”

There are some exciting

new offerings are on the horizon for JBVAMC employees. In September, departments and services began using the new Rejuvenation *Go!*<sup>TM</sup>. This portable kiosk, designed for health care facilities, provides an immersive relaxation experience. Users simply sit-down, put-on headphones, and touch the screen to start a guided sonic and visual experience, which provides easily accessible opportunities to recharge during the workday. It is one way that EWH is trying to help employees alleviate the stress that may lead to burnout. In addition, EWH is also hoping to install meditation pods soon where employees can access a private space and relax during the day.

For more information about Employee Whole Health services or to make an individual appointment, contact Pollack at [shari.pollack2@va.gov](mailto:shari.pollack2@va.gov) or by calling (312) 569-5361.

**As a reminder, below is the schedule of weekly offerings from EWH:**  
**In-person:**  
Early a.m. Bootcamp  
[Monday through Friday,



- 5 to 6 a.m. at the Wellness Center Open to all fitness levels – bring water and wear comfortable shoes.
- Mondays at 4:45 to 5 p.m. Open to all fitness levels – bring water and wear comfortable shoes.
- Break, Monday through Friday from noon to 12:15 p.m. [Teams meeting](#)
- Qigong | Monday through Friday | 12:30 to 1 p.m. | [Zoom meeting](#)
- to 4:15 p.m. | [Teams meeting](#)
- Thoughtful Thursdays | Thursdays | 11:30 a.m. to noon | [Teams Meeting](#)
- *Shari Pollack contributed to this story.*
- High Intensity Interval Training /Bootcamp |
- **Virtual:** VISN 12 Mindfulness
- iRest | Wednesdays | 3:30

# August DAISY Award

## Lacretia Henderson - Administrative Officer

Shasha Jiang, a Registered Nurse, was recognized as the August Daisy Award winner at the Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center’s Nursing Service Aug. 11. The ceremony was attended by Anita Bor-Brown, the Acting Associate Director of Patient Care Services, the Daisy Award Committee members, and the Employee Recognition Taskforce.

It was an honor to witness Jiang’s achievement, and we extend our warmest congratulations to her. This Daisy Award nomination was submitted to nursing service May 22.

“I highly recommend Shasha for her exceptional work as a nurse during my recent hospitalization,” said a nominating individual.

Another Veteran wrote, “Shasha was my primary nurse during my recovery, and I am incredibly grateful for her assistance and positive attitude throughout my stay. She went above and

beyond her duties to ensure I was comfortable and well cared for. Shasha was always available to answer any questions and promptly met all my needs. Her kind and compassionate nature made me feel at ease during a

professionalism, and positive attitude. She is an asset to any health care team, and I highly recommend her without Hesitation.”

The esteemed Daisy winners are selected bimonthly, and bestowed with a one-of-a-kind 7-inch trophy, professional picture displayed in the Jesse Brown, Atrium Daisy display case, “A Healer’s Touch” sculpture, Daisy certificate, and other significant keepsakes.



challenging time, and her positivity played a role in my recovery. In addition to her excellent patient care, Shasha demonstrated exceptional teamwork and communication skills.

She worked closely with the other medical professionals involved in my care to ensure everyone was on the same page and that my treatment was coordinated effectively. I cannot recommend Shasha enough for her dedication,

During the ceremony, Jiang was presented with the coveted Daisy Pin to wear as a symbol of her achievement by Bor-Brown.

Jiang’s success at Jesse Brown is worthy of celebration. Her name has also been put forward to the international Daisy Award board, guaranteeing that her remarkable feat will be forever remembered. To honor her achievement, the Nursing Service will showcase the facility’s Daisy Award banner at its entrance.

# JBVAMC employee, Veteran honors his Hispanic heritage

*Tenena Soro – Medical Support Assistant*

In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, Victor Garcia, an Information Technology Specialist in the Office of Information Technology at Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center, talks about his Hispanic Heritage.

## **How important is it for you that VA recognizes Hispanic Heritage Month?**

**Garcia:** Military Veterans include all nationalities and like a loving family we should acknowledge individual/group strengths, accomplishments, and struggles. VA encourages all nationalities and recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month is a great way to support diversity and inclusion.

## **What are some of the things you want people to take away from your culture and history?**

**Garcia:** As a second-generation Mexican American Hispanic, I was raised to recognize principles of family, respect, work ethics, honor, and celebration.

## **How important is representation to you in the armed forces?**

**Garcia:** The United States Air Force opened its arms in welcome, invested 11 months of electronic training prior to on the job continued education at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland. Most of the Chicago Little Village young men were drafted into the Army or joined the Marines during the Vietnam era and prior to my enlistment. I was a proud young man who represented our Hispanic neighborhood as one of the few to brave an opportunity with the U.S.

Air Force. The decision and experience as an Airman resulted in an excellent career in telecommunication with carriers like MCI, Sprint, and Teleport.

## **Who has been a Hispanic role model to you?**

**Garcia:** My parents Ines and Carmen Garcia were the most influential people in my life. They walked the life of a couple whose principles of family, respect, work ethics, honor, and celebration continue with their seven children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. My father was born in Chicago but raised in Mexico due to the depression. As a young man, he joined the U.S. Army, and my mother was able to join him in the United States on completion of his tour.

## **What are some of the misconceptions or stereotypes you have encountered?**

**Garcia:** Mexicans are poor. There was some truth to the poor because raising a family of seven children on a single paycheck was tasking. The blessing was in our parents' love. We never missed a meal and my mother baked and cooked to our hearth's contentment. My siblings and I raised our children with that same love and joy of cooking meals. Through this hard work, my parents became owners of a three flat where years later would sometimes house the beginning of my sibling family, including mine.

Mexicans are dirty. On cleanliness my mother taught all the children to



Air Force Veteran Victor Garcia.

*Photo courtesy of Victor Garcia*

clean house, wash dishes, wash, iron, and sew. Back in those days going to grammar school dressed in sharp pressed pants and shirt contributed to morning chaos, imagine seven kids getting ready for school. Our father ensured that we mowed the lawn and kept the area spotless. We had a great childhood that included responsibility and family support.