

Horizons

A NEWSLETTER OF WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER // SEPTEMBER 2023

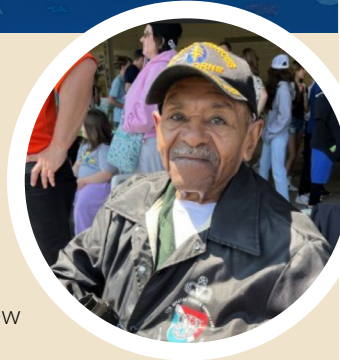


WILKES-BARRE VA'S CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM RECENTLY HONORED

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center's Caregiver Support Program was recently honored by the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Railriders AAA baseball team as the Community Organization of the Game. The Caregiver Support Program had an opportunity to spread its message to every guest entering the gates. As the Community Organization of the Game, our program participated in a pregame on-field interview, threw out the ceremonial first pitch, had a table display in the concourse, and had an in-game radio broadcast promotion. Veteran and Caregiver participants were invited to attend the game free of charge or at a discounted rate.

Army Veteran, Mr. Leonard Pope, threw out the ceremonial first pitch. Leonard is a lifetime member of the Special Forces Association Chapter IX, Isaac Camacho Chapter, El Paso, Texas and has completed over 60 jumps with the 82nd Airborne Division and the 11th Special Forces Group - Airborne. He and his wife, Arlette, live in the Stroudsburg area and participate in the Wilkes-Barre VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC).

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Caregiver Support Program offers clinical services to caregivers of eligible and covered Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system. The program's mission is to promote the health and well-being of family caregivers who care for our Nation's Veterans, through education, resources, support, and services.



Pictured in the bubble: Leonard Pope enrolled in the Army at the age of 36 and was considered an "old soldier" at the time. He joined the 82nd Airborne Division, Ft. Bragg, NC. and the 11th Special Forces Group Airborne, Tappan, NY.

A Message from the Director



Socialization plays an important role in keeping anyone – including our Veterans – mentally healthy. As we age, staying connected to family, friends and activities plays a very important

role. However, sometimes our connections diminish to the point where we have very few people to talk to. Recognizing that this occurs, the VA has implemented the Compassionate Contact Corps (CCC). The CCC program provides Veterans with companionship and socialization through telephone conversations or video calls with trained volunteers. These volunteers provide support in the way of empathetic listening and communication with the Veteran.

Virtual visits can be scheduled one or two times per week and usually last between 15 and 60 minutes. Visits are scheduled based on the needs of the Veteran along with the availability of the volunteers. Call frequency can increase or decrease as mutually agreed upon between Veteran and volunteer. Having this volunteer link to the VA allows Veterans to express their needs and concerns so they can easily be communicated to the appropriate department.

Veterans often live in a wide variety of settings and having this VA program gives Veterans a unique opportunity to expand their support system and increase social interactions, which can enhance their quality of life.

To participate in the Compassionate Contact Corps, Veterans are asked to contact their VA Primary Care Provider or Social Worker for a referral to the program. To become a CCC volunteer, please contact the Center for Development and Civic Engagement at (570) 821-7237, or vhawbpcdce@va.gov.

Sincerely,

Russell E Lloyd, Director



MARY BOSEK, DNP, RN-BC Has Found Her True Calling

It's no secret that the VA in general has some challenges retaining good young health care professionals, but that is a topic for another day. So, when you find one that feels that this is the place they need to be, it's refreshing.

Mary Bosek's journey to where she is today is anything but typical. Mary grew up in Wilkes-Barre's north end, one of four children to loving parents Stanley & Theresa Buckley, who are both masters prepared nurses. They wanted to encourage each of their children to find their passion in life.

"When I was in high school, I wanted to go into the Air Force. My Grandparents were Veterans. I remember they came to Coughlin High School to recruit, and I remember signing up to serve that's what I wanted to do." —Mary Bosek DNP, RN-BC

During the Air Force recruitment process, they looked at Mary's health history and asked her if she had any past surgeries. Mary said yes and explained what it was. Unfortunately, the Air Force ended up denying her enlistment on those grounds. Mary was devastated!

Knowing she wouldn't get into the service, she thought she knew what she wanted to do as a career. Mary's dad, Stan, sparked her interest in photography when she was 12 years old when he built a darkroom to develop photos in their basement. So, after high school, Mary decided to go to Luzerne County Community College (LCCC) to pursue a degree in commercial art and photography and eventually graphic design. By 2011, she had her degrees and started working in a portrait studio.

"I was working in the portrait studio inside of Walmart and there was a little boy who clearly was sick. He looked like he had cancer. He had no hair; no eyelashes and you could tell he was a very sick guy. I remember he came up to the studio area, I said, 'how are you doing?' It was right after Christmas and I asked him, 'what did you get from Santa?' 'What did Santa bring you?' He said, oh nothing. I didn't get anything from Santa for Christmas. It broke my heart; I don't know if the family was poor or what the situation was. When I think about it, I still get emotional. I remember going to the back of the studio, where we used to use little bears to make the kids laugh. I grabbed a little bear, and

I gave it to him, and I said, 'this is for you, this is from Santa', and he put it on his shoulders and walked away. At that moment, something clicked., It was like a light switch went on, and I said to myself, I'm going back to school to be a nurse. I want to work with children with cancer." —Mary Bosek DNP, RN-BC

Mary's parents suggested that she become a nurse's aide before making the decision to pursue a nursing career, just to be sure.

Mary went back to LCCC to become a certified nurse's assistant. Soon after completing the program, she started working in a local nursing home. Two good things came out of her nursing aid experience: One, it strengthened her desire to pursue her nursing degree, and two, she met her future husband, Matt.

In 2014, Mary graduated from the LCCC nursing program and started her nursing career at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, on a telemetry floor. She was only there a short time when she applied and was hired to work with open heart surgery patients.

"When working with open heart patients, you are responsible for that life. I loved it, I loved critical care, but there were tremendous highs when a patient goes home and tremendous lows when you do everything you can, and the patient doesn't make it." —Mary Bosek DNP, RN-BC

While working in a hospital setting, Mary continually looked for scholarships and multiple educational opportunities, which lead her to earn her bachelor's degree in nursing from Misericordia University in 2016. Followed by her master's degree from Wilkes University in 2019.

"My parents and I had kind of a running joke. I said to them, I'm going to catch up to you guys. I said I'm going to get my master's degree and we're going to be tied. Then I remember there was a moment when I just graduated that was very moving. My Dad said congratulations. Now what? I looked at him and said, I'm not done yet. You see that hat over there, the one the doctoral students are wearing? I want that hat. So, the joke was always, oh you did it for the hat, which is not true, of course. He said OK. If you get through it, I will be proud to call you doctor Bosek."
—Mary Bosek DNP, RN-BC

During Mary's medical career, she has been blessed to work with both her parents in a clinical setting. She accepted an opening in Wilkes-Barre General's Cardiac Cath Lab and had a chance to work with her dad in the same unit. Mary remembers when she was younger, being at the dinner table when her dad's pager would go off, and he would have to leave to help save someone's life. Now both their pagers were going off to help save the same patient. Mary has also had a chance to work with her mom, Theresa, who currently is a nurse here at the Wilkes-Barre VA.

"Working with both my parents has most certainly been one of the highest honors in my life." —Mary Bosek DNP, RN-BC

Mary treated VA patients in the ICU during the pandemic, while also pursuing her doctorate in nursing. She has such admiration for our Veteran population and was very passionate about making their lives better. Mary was fortunate to be able to complete her doctorate dissertation, here at the Wilkes-Barre VA. Her project focus was to start an oral care initiative for Veterans to decrease hospital acquired pneumonia. She created a Standardized Oral Care Kit or SOCK. She initially started her project in the VA's intensive care unit; however, the initiative was such a success that the Wilkes-Barre VA decided to implement it in other parts of the hospital.

In October 2021, Mary officially finished her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree from Wilkes University and is currently Specialty Clinic nurse manager on 3 west. Less than two months after earning her doctorate, she and her husband Matt welcomed their first child into the world. Their second child is due this Fall.

As far as what the future holds, Mary would prefer to have a long career here at the VA, which is great news for our local Veterans. She feels a connection to her Veteran grandparents here and is honored to care for such a unique population. There's nowhere else she'd rather be.

PACT Act Advertising Having Positive Effect on Eligibility

As Americans, we owe a great deal of thanks to our Veterans. Whether they have served in combat or out of harm's way, they were committed to serving this country, so we all can continue to enjoy its freedoms. There are many reasons Veterans give for having never applied or re-applied for VA Healthcare. That's a story for another day, but the passing of the PACT act has definitely had some influence in bringing un-enrolled Veterans into VA health care system. That was certainly one of the factors that brought Donald (Don) Parry into the eligibility office at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center.



"I have a brother who's also a Veteran, and he has been enrolled in VA healthcare for the last few years. Seeing the PACT Act information out there, and with the price of everything, including healthcare, on the rise, I figured I should stop in and apply myself."

—Don Parry -Vietnam Veteran

Don served in Vietnam with the US Army from 1968 to 1971, where he received 5 medals, including the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross medal with two stars, for his deeds of Valor and Heroic Conduct.

Don said he spent 18 years at the Tobyhanna Army Depot and later worked in the private sector and always had private health insurance. Since retirement, Don said his income has changed and prices for everything, including health care, have gone up. So now he was ready to apply.

Don's story is not unlike many other Veterans who have been motivated to apply by seeing stories about the PACT Act and how it has expanded eligibility for Veterans. Now, Don is glad he took the next step and enrolled.

If you or someone you know is a Veteran who has not applied for VA healthcare. Give Wilkes-Barre VA eligibility a call at 570-824-3521, select option 4 or contact Wilkes-Barre eligibility by email at WilkesBarreEligibilityGroup@va.gov.

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center Offering Pharmacogenomic Testing for Veterans

Wilkes-Barre Veterans Affairs Medical Center (WBVAMC) is now offering Pharmacogenomic (PGx) Testing for Veterans. It is a onetime blood draw that uses the genes extracted from your blood to look at how you breakdown medication to help find the right prescription and dose for you.

Genes are part of our DNA, which provides instructions on how your body develops and functions. Each person has small differences in their genes, and because of this, people respond differently to medications.

Pharmacogenomic Testing helps your provider better understand how your body processes or responds to many common medicines, including medications prescribed for pain, cholesterol, upset stomach, depression, and many more. PGx testing can help your provider determine if there is a better dose or type of medicine for you, which may help reduce medication trial and error, reduce hospitalizations caused by adverse reactions, and reduce opioid exposure.

One warning is that Pharmacogenomic Testing is not recommended for patients who have had a liver transplant or bone marrow transplant.

The Wilkes-Barre VA offers Pharmacogenomic Testing to Veterans at NO COST through December 2024, which is a great savings, as this test could cost several hundred dollars in the community sector!

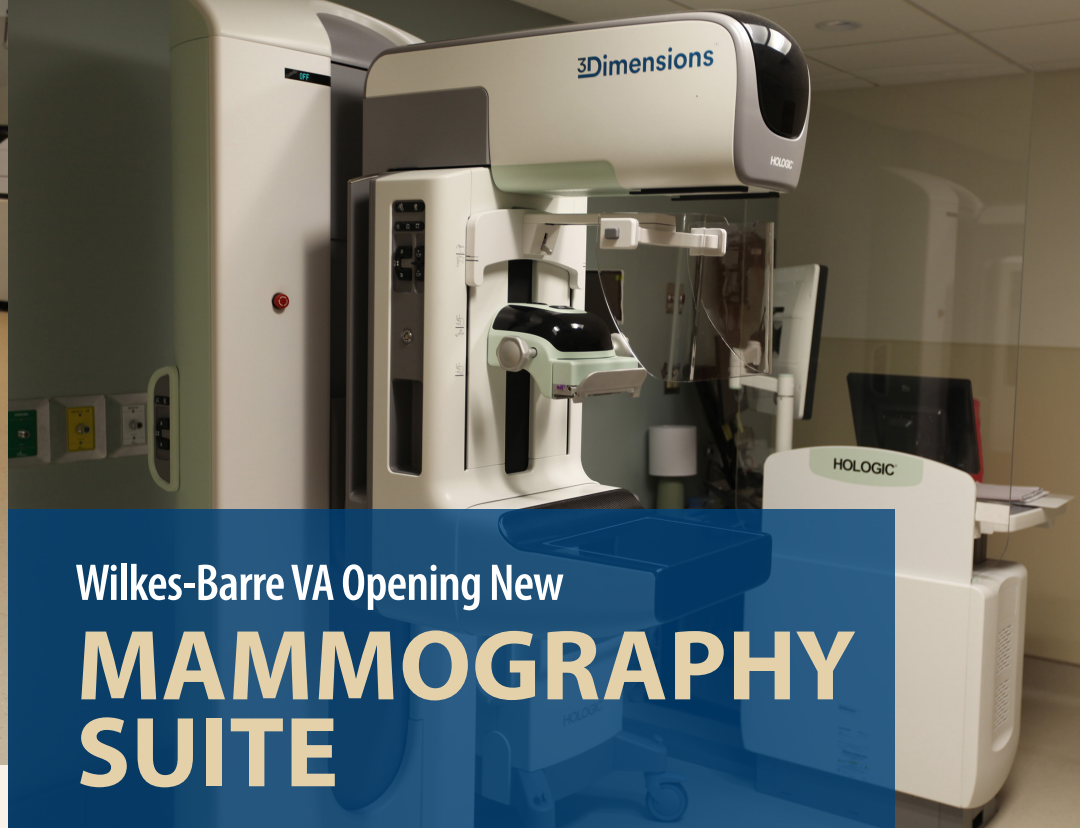
Results are typically available to you and your doctor within two weeks. Veterans interested in receiving the blood test should reach out to their VA primary care provider. To learn more, view a brief video explaining pharmacogenomic testing.

<https://youtu.be/OlapmrjW1wQ>

**You may also visit our website and get answers
to frequently asked questions.**

[https://www.cancer.va.gov/oncology-services-and-tools.
html#pharmacogenomics](https://www.cancer.va.gov/oncology-services-and-tools.html#pharmacogenomics)





Wilkes-Barre VA Opening New **MAMMOGRAPHY SUITE**

NINE CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

1111 East End Blvd., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
507-824-3521 / 877-928-2621

Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic

3110 Hamilton Blvd., Allentown, PA 18103
610-599-0127

Cedar Crest Boulevard VA Clinic

1605 North Cedar Crest Boulevard
Roma Corporate Center, Suite 410
Allentown, PA 18104
610-599-0127

Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

226 Columbia Mall Drive, Bloomsburg, PA 17815
570-316-4116

Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

701 Slate Belt Blvd., Bangor, PA 18013-9341
610-599-0127

Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1537 Elmira Street, Sayre, PA 18840
570-888-6803

Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic

Tobyhanna Army Depot, Bldg. 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
570-615-8341

Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

600 Maple Avenue, Honesdale, PA 18431
570-251-6543

Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1705 Warren Avenue, 3rd Fl., Ste. 304
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-322-4791

Women Veterans are the fastest growing population in all of VA healthcare. The Wilkes-Barre VA has been expanding women Veteran's health services for years, and now we are proud to announce that we are opening a new Mammography suite on the second floor at the medical center.

"Having a mammography suite on site allows Women Veterans an opportunity to get all-inclusive care here in one place instead of traveling outside the VA System."
—Dr. Joseph Rienzi – Chief of Radiology,
Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

One thing that is unique about the placement of the new Mammography suite is that it sits adjacent to the ultrasound room. So, if they see an area of concern, the patient doesn't even have to get out of the same gown. They could just go over to the adjoining room and have the ultrasound performed immediately.

The new mammography suite can also accommodate someone who is wheelchair or stretcher bound. At 4 feet in width, the entry doors allow easy access, and the suite also features a special chair for patients if they have limited or no ability to stand.

The brand-new state-of-the-art unit, in addition to mammograms, also has an attachment that will do stereotactic breast biopsies. If an abnormality is detected during the mammogram and a stereotactic biopsy is needed, it can be done right then and there with this new attachment. The attachment gives the doctor two different angles to pinpoint the best area to take a tissue sample.

"The nice part about having this new suite is that it is really accommodating for Veterans with disabilities. The modernization of this suite, along with it having its own private corridor to our ultrasound room, allows us to offer the use of two complementary studies, as soon as possible, and you get your answer right then, instead of having to wait 2 or 3 days for a determination."
—Dr. Gisele Lafond, Radiologist

The new mammography suite is scheduled to open on October 19th during breast cancer awareness month. It gives Veterans a chance to get all your tests and exams done in one place on the same day. If there are concerns, they could be addressed asap on the same visit. That is a big Win moving forward for the Veterans that this will serve.

Call Center

1-877-928-2621

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wilkes-barre.va.gov



FACEBOOK
facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre