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JB PULSE



TO OUR HEROS



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dr. Clifford Smith
Director,
Jesse Brown VAMC

The Pulse is the Jesse Brown Monthly Employee newsletter designed to inform, celebrate, recognize, reflect, and sometimes just have fun.

As you all know, I am Dr. Clifford Smith, the Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center's Acting Medical Center Director. I am pleased to be at the helm at Jesse Brown. It is an honor to lead this wonderful group of employees and Veterans. Each day I encounter employees who have spoken to me in the hallways with a cheerful greeting. It has been a pleasant surprise to hear them talk about my bio and experiences while working in VA.

As many of you know, November is lung cancer awareness month. Jesse Brown has been at the forefront of cutting-edge technology, and I hope to continue that trend. The medical center has been the Center of Excellence for lung cancer and has participated in lung cancer screening since 2016. As a way of improving our Veteran care and advance our diagnostic technology, in the coming months the medical center will acquire a robotic bronchoscopy platform. This platform enables our doctors to reach anywhere in the lung and increase the probability of diagnosing small pulmonary nodules that are suspected of being cancer.

In October we extended our commitment to Veterans by being the only medical center in VISN 12 to have a Medical Mobile Unit. Having an MMU ensures we are extending our care to the homeless Veteran population. The services provided by the MMU continues to ensure Veterans throughout Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana receive support through the VA Core Values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence – I CARE. On Nov. 8, we celebrated Veterans

Day in the Prescription room with a poem and a JB employee who sang the national anthem. It's important that we remember the sacrifices made by those who raised their right hand and recited the oath to protect and defend the Constitution against foreign and domestic enemies. Less than 1/2 of 1% serve in the U.S. military and we must do our part to thank those who have nobly served and continue to serve this great nation.

As the holidays approach, we must look out for each other by continuing to check on one another and extending an invite to a co-worker who doesn't have family in the Chicago area. A simple invite makes a difference to those who are going to spend the holidays alone and away from their family members.

I look forward to working with the dedicated group of clinicians and nonclinicians at the medical center. I know our team brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in helping Veterans. Your hard work and dedication are key to making a difference in their lives.

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.



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This newsletter is for you, so if you have a story you want to share, please reach out to CHSPAO@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 Agei	Christina Chiu
Jessica Gardner	Catrina Francis
Tenena Soro	Vanita Williams
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JBVAMC | Bell ringing provides hope to Veterans undergoing cancer treatment

Catrina Francis – Public Affairs Officer

When a Veteran is given a cancer diagnosis, he or she is sometimes given the worst news of his or her life and seeing the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel isn't always possible. However, Spiro Encino, a Nurse Manager at Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center's Infusion Clinic, has started celebrating treatment completion by ringing a bell.

The idea of celebrating by ringing a bell was suggested a Veteran to one of Encino's staff members. The Veteran who thought of the idea donated the bell. Since receiving the bell, the Infusion Clinic has rung the bell twice for Veterans who completed their treatment.

Encino pointed out that infusion and chemotherapy are done in a regiment done in series. He added that infusion is medication given through an IV or IV therapy. It can be cancer or noncancer related drugs, which can be given in four to 12 treatments. However, he said that's difficult to predict because treatment is based on a Veteran's lab work.

"One that regiment is done there will be a celebration by ringing a bell, it's a Navy tradition by ringing a bell," he said. "The staff and the department will be providing a certificate with the doctors and nurses present."

Encino said doing this is important to Veterans because while they are undergoing treatment, they must be

strong and motivated because they are fighting for their life. That's why he said it's key to celebrate them once they complete treatments.

"You overcome a battle, so that's

Luke Ryczek, a Registered Nurse, agreed with Encino. He said it's a celebration with the staff who are assisting Veterans during their infusion and it's an opportunity for nurses to celebrate with their colleagues, with other Veterans who

are always there, and with the physician.

"It's a multidisciplinary team [who] is assisting the Veteran and the celebration being able to complete where there could be a chemo treatment," said Ryczek.

One of the joys of having the bell has been seeing the light and hope on the faces of the Veterans, said Encino.

"It's not just a sigh of relief that they're done, [it's] more like looking forward to a new life or a new lease on life," Encino said. "It's something that couldn't be described by words."

He pointed out that the bell is in the treatment room and when other Veterans hear the bell

ring, it gives them hope too.

important," said Encino.

He added that having the bell is important to the staff because if one of the patients are done with treatment and their health improves it's rewarding to Encino and his staff.

"They're also hoping that they would achieve the same achievement [as] ringing the bell," he said. "It is something to look forward to."



The bell in the JBVAMC's Infusion Clinic that rings when a Veteran completes his or her treatment.

Photo courtesy of Infusion Clinic

Jesse Brown to deploy MMUs to provide health care for Veterans

Catrina Francis – Public Affairs Officer

On Oct. 16, Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center received a medical mobile unit, which will be used to support at-risk homeless Veterans. The deployed MMU will provide health care to homeless Veterans, which includes mental health clinicians, social workers, and other staff. The medical center celebrated receiving the MMU during a ribbon cutting ceremony Nov. 6 near the employee entrance.

During the ceremony, Dr. B. Keith Taylor, the Health Care for Homeless Veteran Social Worker, said the medical center was fortunate enough to receive the medical mobile unit because having one provides a wonderful opportunity for JBVAMC to bring its services to Veterans and provide vaccines, level procedures, and wrap around services for Veterans who would otherwise not have access to them.

“It’s exciting times,” explained Taylor. “So, if you see us out there in streets honk your horn or wave.



(Middle with scissors) Dr. Sarah Unterman, Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center Chief of Staff, prepares to cut the ribbon of the medical mobile unit Nov. 6 while the rest of the Health Care for Homeless Veteran staff members prepare to assist with cutting the ribbon.

Photos by Kenny Jones

If you know a Veteran who is not coming to the VA to receive services, encourage them to link up with us. We have our providers, our social workers, our medical support assistant, our nurses, we have an entire team ready to service our Vets.”

Dr. Sarah Unterman, JBVAMC Chief of Staff, explained during the ceremony that most at the medical center are stuck in brick-and-mortar buildings where the expecta-

tion is patients coming to the medical centers because there are clinic rooms, staff members, and supplies in one place.

“But we know that there are large areas, mostly in the Southside of Chicago and Northwest Indiana, where we are not reaching our patients,” said Unterman. “It’s difficult for these patients to come to us [because] they don’t necessarily have a mailing address; they don’t necessarily have a phone number. So, it’s difficult for us to reach them as well. So, what better way to reach those patients and get them the care they need than to go to them. So, we are taking Jesse Brown on the road.”



The inside of the medical mobile unit. The Department of Veterans Affairs has deployed 25 MMUs across the country.

Unterman added that the MMU is fully stocked with everything that's needed for the first touch with Veterans. She said the MMU will provide some addiction and vaccine care in the community.

"Then we can discuss with them what other care they need and help them to obtain deeper, broader care that we have at our brick-and-mortar facility," she said. "They might not even realize what care we have available for them, and we can bring it directly to them and tell them, 'OK, this is a good start, but we got more. Let us help you get there.'

"This is the way we are going to be able to make greater inroads and help more people now than just waiting for them to come to us. Now they will see us coming to them. I'm really excited for us to get this started. It's a coup for us because we have so many Veterans in such a large area that we can't put a physical facility in every single place where we have a Veteran, but we can bring it on wheels and that's what we are going to do."

Although JBVAMC provides care to Veterans in the community, Taylor said there are a significant number of Veterans who simply will not come through the doors of the medical center.

"With a medical unit, we have the unique opportunity to expand our community reach and bolster our efforts in Chicago and Northwest Indiana to outreach our Veterans; provide support to our transitional housing sites, contract residential service facilities, and local community shelters; and enhance collaboration with other Veteran community organizations," explained Taylor."

Taylor added that with a Medical Mobile Unit, the medical center's Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team is empowered to eliminate multiple barriers to care relative to the following:

- Real time Veteran enrollment and registration with the support of JBVAMC's personal assistance service team
- Real time medical and social work visits, lab draws (centrifuge and fridge), prescribe medications (not dispense), administer vaccines (flu, COVID, pneumonia, shin-

- Provide donated items to homeless Veterans (floods, gloves, socks, hats, shoes, and hygiene kits) during the winter months and on-site registration for new Veteran (laptops to be provided)
- More aggressively supports stand downs and buttress point in time count efforts

Ending Veteran homelessness is a top priority for VA and President Joe Biden has made supporting Veterans a key pillar of his Unity Agenda for the nation, according to VA. The administration also has

goals of placing at least 38,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness into permanent housing, ensure that at least 95% of the Veterans housed this year do not return to homelessness during the year. And of those who return to homelessness, VA will ensure that at least 90%



The MMU vehicle that will be used to help Veterans.

Photo by Kenny Jones

- gles, Hep A and Hep B series), spirometry and blood pressure and blood glucose checks
- Address and/or better understand medication compliance concerns/issues (barrier identification- and decimation)
- Facilitate bridge supplies of medications and initiate other vital communications for Veterans having difficulty engaging with the medical center
- Identify the location of Veterans who have been considered lost or simply failed to follow up (e.g., taking the services to street homeless Veterans and Veterans located at shelters and other congregate living settings)

are rehoused or on a path to rehousing by the end of the year.

VA initially deployed 25 MMUs across the country. There are also Mobile Vet Centers throughout the country. MVCs are large mobile vehicles used to provide outreach to eligible Veterans in communities that are distant from existing services.

Jesse Brown VA Medical Center is the only medical center in VISN 12 to have an MMU. The services provided by this Mobile Medical Unit continues to ensure Veterans in local communities receive support through the VA Core Values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence – I CARE.

JESSE BROWN CELEBRATES HALLOWEEN

Compiled by Catrina Francis - Public Affairs Officer

On Oct. 31, Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center employees had a chance to celebrate Halloween.

Instead of the trick or treating, employees competed in a six-category costume contest that included fictional movie character, historical character, group costume, favorite animal, superhero, and

best pun.

The costumes ranged from Chucky to Adams Family and Cousin Itt.

The Best Overall Individual costume, Ryan Landi, Acting Associate Medical Center Director; Best Department Theme, Pharmacy Residents – OTC Medications; Best Animal, the ROACH,

Dr. Gambino; ; Best Historical Character, Tupac, Sean Murphy, Security Assistant; Best Animal, the ROACH, Dr. Gambino; and Best Pun, Taco Tuesday, Jeremy Jervis and Dr. Mariana Tokar. Workplace Violence Prevention was “The Addams Family” Brandon O’Connor, Caitlin Listro, Keri Nacker, and Edwin Labog as “Cousin Itt.”



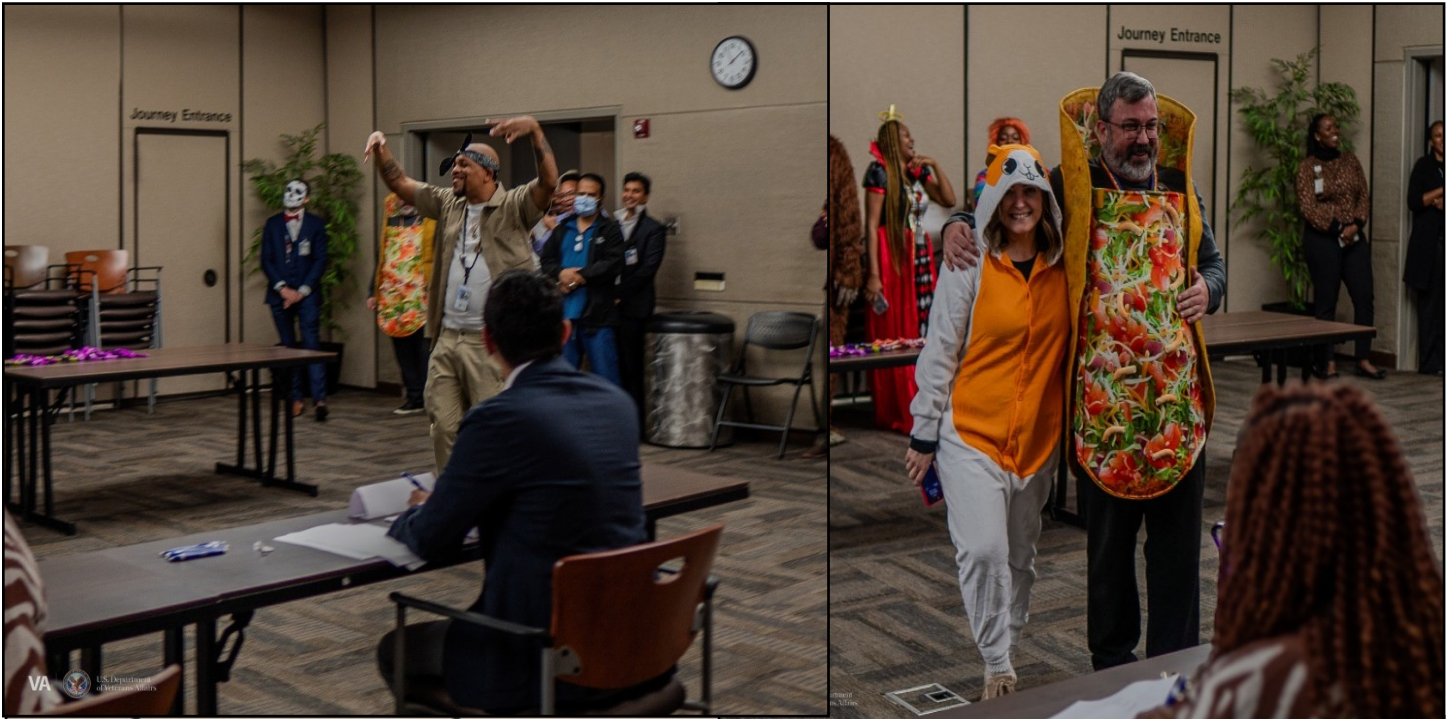
(Left) Workplace Violence Prevention costume was “The Addams Family” Brandon O’Connor, Caitlin Listro, Keri Nacker, and Edwin Labog as “Cousin Itt.”

(Bottom right) The Best Overall individual costume, Ryan Landi, Acting Associate Medical Center Director.

(Below) Dr. Gambino won for Best Animal as the ROACH.

Photos by Kenny Jones





(Above right) Best Pun, Taco Tuesday, Jeremy Jervis and Dr. Mariana Tokar.

(Above left) Best Historical Character was Sean Murphy, Security assistant as Tupac.

(Above) Pharmacy Residents were named Best Department Theme – OTC Medications.

Photos by Kenny Jones



IPVAP wrap on CTA train.

Photo by Kenny Jones

Support is available for Veterans who experience intimate partner violence

Vanita Williams - Caregiver Support Program Social Worker

Each year October is recognized as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. In October, the Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center's Intimate Partner Violence

Assistance Program team went into overdrive to raise awareness about intimate partner violence, its impact on daily life, and supportive services available to those experiencing IPV as well as those who are using IPV.

Jesse Brown's IPV Assistance Program initiated a mass awareness project which included a partnership with Chicago Transit Authority to place advertisements on the platforms and interiors of train cars

as well as wrapping of the exterior of various train lines.

According to an Intimate Partner Violence report released by the Department of Veterans Affairs: Health Services Research & Development Service, Veterans are twice as likely to be impacted by domestic violence when compared to the overall U.S. population.

Intimate partner violence affects all genders and per the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner. Intimate Partner Violence is not limited to physical violence and can look like a wide range of be-

haviors such as, but not limited to name calling, controlling of finances, isolating from friends and family, threatening harm, and sexual violence.

Promoting safety is paramount with those experiencing IPV. The Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence reported 57 lives were lost in 45 separate occurrences because of domestic violence in 2022.

If a person has an IPV Assistance Program need, please contact the IPV team at (312) 569-7003.

For more information, please visit [Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program \(IPVAP\) - VHA Social Work](#).

JB names Lowe Employee of the Month

Febin Mattathil – Nuclear Medicine Technologist

Each month Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center employees have an opportunity to be nominated as the medical center's Employee of the Month. In July, Shaunte Lowe was named JBVAMC's Employee of the Month.

In the nomination letter by her colleagues, Krishnaben Patel, Tanya Withers, and Nafisa Parvin Patel Shaunte Lowe was described as very professional, approachable, and kind to Veterans and staff. She always offers a helping hand and attends to new Veterans with an empathetic ear, and promptly. She has been excellent in her new role as admission nurse. This great team player works well with others and is very efficient and thorough when it comes to helping fellow nurses with admissions. I really appreciate and enjoy working with this her.

Shaunte is an excellent nurse who goes above and beyond not only to



Shaunte Lowe
Photo courtesy of Shaunte Lowe

help the patient but to also help floor nurses. Every time I receive a patient from her, I feel safe that all the required steps of admission assessment are done thoroughly. Shaunte also has great communication skills and her overall approach with patients and staff are a reflective collaboration of unmatched teamwork. This compassion is worthy of recognition, and she is greatly appreciated by all of us.

Lowe has been working at JBVAMC for the last two years as an admission nurse. She loves her team and the work she does here at JBVAMC. As the first RN from her family, her family is very proud of her achievements and service she does for Veterans. She appreciates the teamwork in her area of work and wouldn't change anything. She appreciates her co-workers and grateful to be part of the great team here at JBVAMC.

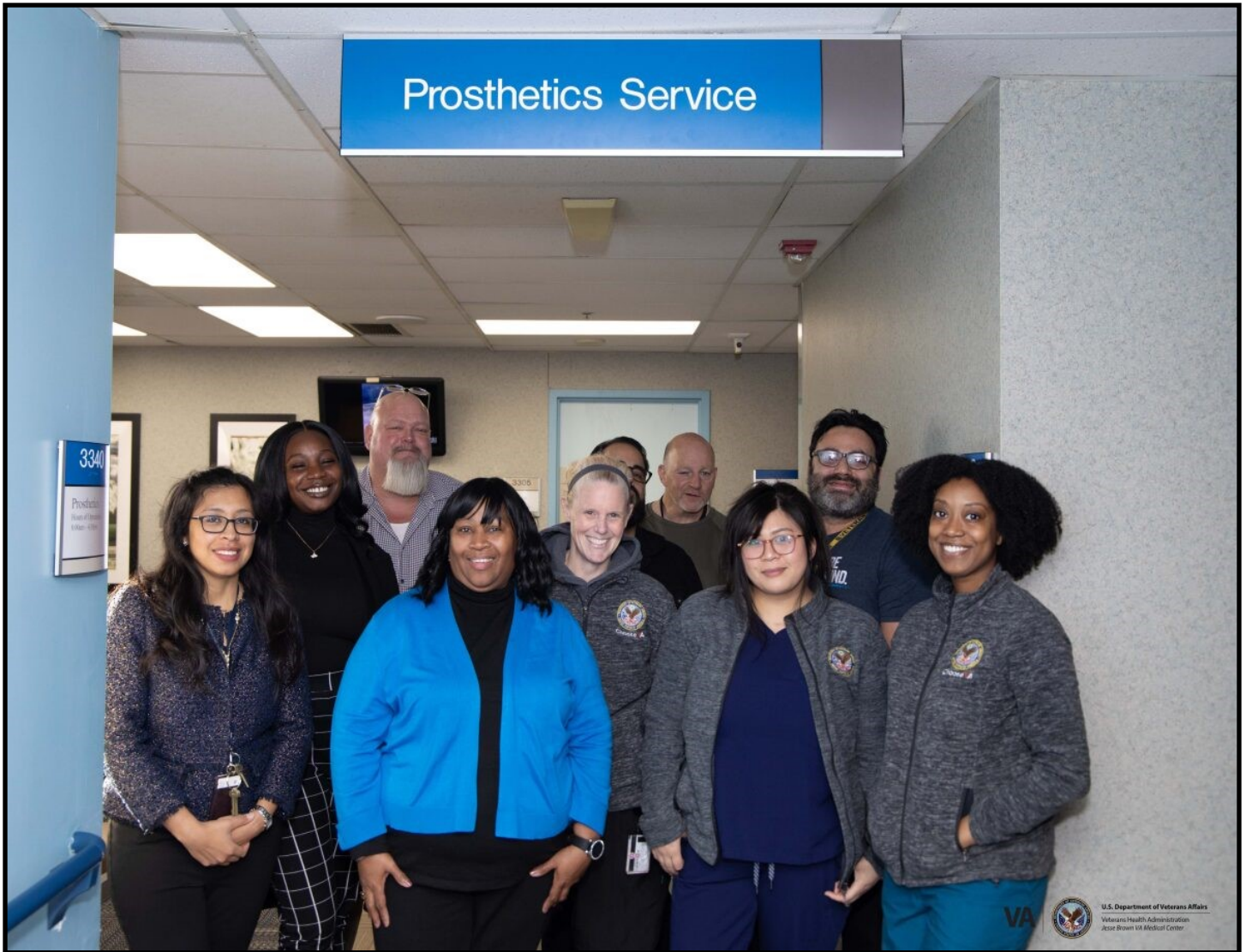
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VA Medical Center**

SCAN ME





At Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center, the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service team goes above and beyond to provide essential devices and services that enhance the lives of Veterans. From prosthetic limbs to hearing aids, they ensure heroes have the support they need for their well-being and independence.

Photo by Julian Calderon



Jesse Brown VA Medical Center has named Jeremy Jervis as the October Employee of the Month. Jervis doesn't just work for the Directors Office; he works for every employee in the hospital. Jervis is the true embodiment of all iCare values: treating those around him with respect; standing up for the mission with integrity; making sure there is follow-through in the facilities commitment to the vision and to patient care; advocating for patients and employees; and setting an overall example of Excellence. He goes above and beyond every day to make sure that things happen the way they are supposed to. His empathy and sense of humor can light up a room, improve morale, and bring people together even in difficult times. Jervis is an outstanding friend, colleague, and overall human.

Photo by Derrick Matthews

Pursue a Future As a Nurse
at
Jesse Brown VA Medical Center
Through the VA Student Trainee Experience Program-(VA-STEP)
Student Nurse Technician Position



Eligibility

- US Citizen
- Minimum GPA of 3.0 with no grade lower than a B in any nursing course.
- Currently enrolled in nursing school with an anticipated graduation of Winter 2024 or Spring 2025.
- Available to work 400 hours fulltime during Summer 2024, and intermittently throughout the school year.

Purpose

The VA Student Trainee Experience Program (VA-STEP) provides nursing students with an immersive learning opportunity. RN Preceptors work with the trainee to develop clinical skills and knowledge in providing competent care to Veterans.

Length of Program

The student *would be* required to work 400 hours total prior to the student's graduation date *starting in June 2024*. This is not a summer-only program, as funding is available for continued intermittent work opportunities throughout the remainder of your nursing program.

VA-STEP Pay

Trainees will be at a salary rate equal to 80% of the local VA facility's annual salary rate for a Nurse 1, Level 1, Step 1.

APPLICATION DUE: December 30, 2023

For questions on eligibility requirements and how to apply :

**EMAIL:
CHRISTINA MORROW, VA-STEP COORDINATOR
Christina.Morrow@va.gov**

APPLY directly to VA-STEP here:

VA AMS

<https://va-ams.intelliworxit.com/webapp/register/va-step/facility-applicant.view>

AFGE holds labor management forum

Francis Agyei- Medical Instrument Technician



Jennifer Cushman, AFGE, the forum serves as a platform where labor and management meet to not only exchange progressive ideas to move JBVAMC forward but also aim to improve work relationships between labor and management at JBVAMC – a cardinal factor in the smooth delivery of all the great services provided for the medical center’s Veterans.

“This is a work in progress,” said Aimee Porter, Vice President of AFGE Local 789, about the importance of LMF. “The forum was there not only to improve the relationship between labor and management, but among others, to address matters such as decreasing grievances/unfair labor practices by working collaboratively across the hospital to reduce predecisional involvement, obtain union representation during any formal investigations, reduce contract violations by discussing any change in working conditions,

The Jesse Brown Veterans Affairs Medical Center Labor Management Forum is a collaborative team of the executive leadership and the various labor unions – American Federation of Government Employees, National Nurses United, and Service Employees International Union to serve the needs and concerns of the workforce at JBVAMC.

Under the Co-Chairpersons of Ryan Landi, the JBVAMC Acting Associate Medical Center Director, and

especially policies that would impact the delivery of services prior to implementation, and above all, provide feedback and suggestions between labor and management to ensure maintenance and enhancement of healthy relationships.”

The union serves as the collective “voice” of labor in any unionized organization. When management and union sit together to collaborate on pertinent issues that impacts labor and provision of services in an organization, there is little disruption

in the flow of services to clients, which in the case of the union, are JB’s Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

“Federal employees and union representatives are an essential source of front-line ideas and information about how to deliver government services, [which is done through] Executive Order, 13522, hence the need for union and management to live and maintain a healthy ‘symbiotic’ relationship at all costs,” explained Porter.

The USA Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough in his cover letter accompanying the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access No Fear; and Whistleblower Rights and Protection Policy Statement, reemphasized the importance of the work of management and employees. He said, “To meet Veterans’ needs, VA employees must be able to contribute their talents, ideas, and perspectives freely and without fear of reprisal. All managers and supervisors shall provide all employees with opportunities to reach their full potential.

“When Veterans come to VA for benefits and services, we will ensure that they are all welcomed into fair and inclusive VA workplaces. The appreciation of diverse experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives, of both Veterans and VA employees, is critical to the success of our important mission.”

One very positive way JBVAMC is moving the “important mission” forward as a team is via the LMF. Kudos to Jesse Brown VA’s Labor Management Forum.