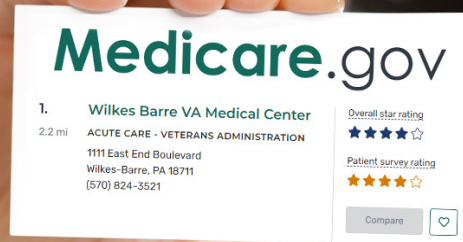


Horizons

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



WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER RECEIVES 4 & 5-STAR RATINGS

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center has received a 4-star rating in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) annual hospital quality star ratings review. The overall star rating is based on how well a hospital performs across different areas of quality, such as treating heart attacks, pneumonia, readmission rates and safety of care. The more stars (out of 5), the better a hospital performs. In fact, 67% of VA hospitals nationwide received either a 4 or 5-star rating from the CMS. This was the first time VA hospitals were included in the CMS Star Ratings.

The Wilkes-Barre VA also garnered a 4-star CMS quality rating for patient satisfaction. The Patient survey rating measures patient experiences of their hospital care. Recently discharged patients were asked about important topics like how well nurses and doctors communicated, how responsive hospital staff were to their needs, and the cleanliness and quietness of the hospital environment.

"Our caring and knowledgeable staff here at the Wilkes-Barre VA prides itself on delivering world-class care for our Veterans. We are proud of this accomplishment as we continue to strive to be even better in the future."

—Russell Lloyd - Director, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

Additionally, The Community Living Center (CLC) at the Wilkes-Barre VA continues to secure a 5-Star CMS benchmark rating for care of our resident Veterans for the 4th quarter of Fiscal Year 2023. As a tribute to its workers, the CLC has successfully maintained a 5-Star rating every quarter for over 5 years.

The hospital star rating is designed for consumers to use along with their healthcare provider to make decisions on where to receive care. These findings are the latest in a series of recent evaluations, showing the effectiveness of VA health care compared to non-VA health care.

Visit the CMS hospital quality star rating on the Medicare.gov website at www.medicare.gov/care-compare.

A Message from the Director



The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center prides itself on following a set of core values when caring for our Veterans. "I CARE" - Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence serves as our guide.

One of the areas I would like to advocate for is preventative testing and screening.

Over the last six months or so, the VA has given Veterans an opportunity to take part in several preventative testing and screening programs. The first of which is broad spectrum cancer screenings, which can detect over 50 different types of cancer. Another is pharmacogenomic testing that 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. A third and most recent VA offering is lung cancer screening. The test is recommended for Veterans who are between the ages of 50-80 with a smoking history of 20 pack-years (1 pack per day for 20 years or 2 packs a day for 10 years).

These types of preventative testing and screening programs that the Wilkes-Barre VA offers, give Veterans a chance to be proactive in preventing adverse medication reactions and health problems down the road.

Our hope, as the area's largest health care provider for Veterans, is that more and more of them will take advantage of the many preventative options available to them at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. Please call your VA provider to learn more.

Sincerely,

Russell E Lloyd, Director

LUNG CANCER SCREENING EDUCATION

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Health Administration
1000 Wilkes-Barre Road
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18706

Wilkes-Barre VA Offering Lung Cancer Screening

As you may know, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. What you may not know, is that lung cancer does not always cause outward symptoms until it has spread to other parts of the body. However, the most common type of lung cancer, non-small cell lung cancer, can many times be cured if it is found early enough.

The Wilkes-Barre VA is offering Veterans who think they may be at risk of lung cancer a chance to get screened. Wilkes-Barre VA uses a Low-Dose "cat" (CT) scan to find lung cancer when it is small and can be treated more effectively.

You may be asking yourself, should I be screened? Well, if you think you have all three of these risk factors, schedule an appointment.

1. 50-80 years old and
2. Currently, smoke cigarettes, or formerly smoked cigarettes and quit within the past 15 years, and
3. If you have a smoking history of at least 20 pack-years (this means 1 pack per day for 20 years or 2 packs a day for 10 years, etc.).

During the screening process, doctors look for a disease before the Veteran has any symptoms. Screening helps find lung cancer at an early, more treatable stage.

Of course, avoiding cigarettes is the most important thing you can do to lower your chance of dying from a variety of diseases, not just lung cancer. Quitting smoking helps with emphysema and heart and vascular diseases as well.

Regardless, if you choose to get screened or not, here are some symptoms of lung cancer you should look out for. A new cough that doesn't go away or a change in a chronic cough. If you cough up blood, even in a small amount. If you develop shortness of breath or chest pain or if you are losing weight without trying.

Choosing to get screened before symptoms arise can save your life. We have all heard, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. So, talk to your primary care doctor to see if lung cancer screening is right for you.

If you are still smoking and need help quitting, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/how-to-quit.asp or call 1-855-QUIT-VET to learn more about smoking cessation at the VA.



Wilkes-Barre VA Police Deploying New Tool to Help Protect All

Wilkes-Barre VA police department is deploying a new tool to help deter and stop crime, keep order, and protect the integrity of what each officer experiences. A few months ago, the whole Wilkes-Barre VA police department started to wear Axon body cameras.

VA Police are responsible for the protection of VA Medical Centers and other facilities operated by the VA as well as protecting those who served, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Having body cameras at their disposal helps protect the officer and all those involved in an incident.

The way the body cameras work is, once the officer pushes the button and activates the camera, it automatically starts recording video and sound. The recording will also take the previous 60 seconds and put it in as well. Video being recorded at the VA is not anything new, there are cameras all over the place, but what their usage does, is supply sound with the body cam video from the officers' point of view.

"If an individual has a complaint against an officer, that the officer did something, well that's on camera. If the individual does something, that's also on camera, so everything's being recorded."

—Captain John Parsons- WBVA Police

With the body cams, you can see what the officer sees at that moment. You're able to see the movements that people are making, you're seeing the movements that the other individuals that they're talking to are making.

Using this technology also comes into play when no other camera is around. The mobility of the body cams at traffic stops or when responding to an incident on the grounds is a big plus.

"Another nice feature of wearing the body cam is that it'll pick up actions in the heat of the moment when you're dealing with this, or dealing with that, trying to break things up and talk to a person. It's going to catch details that you might have missed."

—Captain John Parsons- WBVA Police

The use of body cameras is just another tool to let people know the VA police department is doing their job 100%. It also goes both ways. If a citizen makes a complaint against an officer, you would be able to see that and take some administrative action. It shows both sides. You have the truth, it keeps everybody honest, there is no lying because it's on the recording.



STATE-OF-THE-ART KNEE AND HIP SURGERY Being Performed at the VA in Wilkes-Barre

Over the past 20 years or so, advances in technology have made joint surgery less evasive to the point where patients can usually go home the same day.

One such advance is being used daily for hip and knee replacement surgery here at the Wilkes-Barre VA. The Mako SmartRobotics system is an advanced robotic arm that is used to assist surgeons with accurate and precise bone cutting that can shorten the Veteran's hospital stay and leave them less dependent on pain medication.

"When performing knee surgery, the Mako gives us super accurate bone cuts that come out perfect every time. When doing the hip, the robotic assist enables us to get the exact anteversion (forward tilt) & offset needed so that the hip can perform as expected long into the future."

—Dr David Ball — Surgeon, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

With the accuracy and precision this unit brings, the replacement joints fit together exceptionally well, which can cut down on the surgical time and leave the patient with less pain and less recovery time.



"I just saw a Veteran for a follow-up who had a Mako hip replacement at the Wilkes-Barre VA. He stopped taking his pain pills in 3 days and at just under 3 weeks, he was able to get rid of his walker. He also stated that he walked 4 miles the day before I saw him to take out his staples from his hip."

—Dr David Ball — Surgeon, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

To date, three Wilkes-Barre VA surgeons have gone through the Mako certification process and are performing advanced robotic arm surgery.

The Wilkes-Barre VA is the first VA hospital in the state to deploy the Mako SmartRobotics system. The system requires the patient to get a full cat scan on the joint area prior to surgery, instead of the traditional x-rays done in the past. This allows the surgeon to see all angles of the replacement area prior to starting.

The use of state-of-the-art robotic technology at the Wilkes-Barre VA is just another way we're making VA healthcare better for Veterans. Less pain, a more accurate fit, less recovery time and less dependence on pain meds means the Veteran patient is getting the very best that the Wilkes-Barre VA has to offer.

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



Wilkes-Barre VA MOVE! Program Partnering with the WILKES-BARRE YMCA

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VA), Wilkes-Barre has provided Veterans who are involved in their MOVE! (Motivating Overweight/ Obese Veterans Everywhere) Program an opportunity to exercise at the YMCA. MOVE!, the Veteran's Administrations National Lifestyle Weight Management Program incorporates nutrition, activity and behavior change into a group class of 16 sessions.

The partnership was established with the assistance of the VA's Center of Development and Civic Engagement. It's a natural fit because both the MOVE! Program and the YMCA stress increasing physical activity to reduce health risks, prevent chronic disease, and improve quality of life. The partnership also allows Veterans enrolled in the program to participate in the VA's national MOVE lifestyle intervention program at the YMCA. Participants can utilize the YMCA facilities and participate in a variety of classes. The new MOVE YMCA group will take place at the Wilkes-Barre YMCA for 16 weeks.

The initial MOVE YMCA group started classes in November 2023, and has been very well received. The first group who took part in the program saw an average weight loss of approximately 5% of their starting weight, 50% of participants had a reduction in percent of body fat, along with improved strength and mobility.

"This is one of the most enjoyable and productive classes, very fun."

—Veteran participant in the VA Move! Program

Through the partnership program, enrolled Veterans can also use any of the following regional YMCA facilities: Allentown, Berwick, Bethlehem, Carbondale, Catasauqua, Easton, Freeland, Honesdale, Jersey Shore, Lewisburg, Scranton, Dunmore, Sunbury, Towanda, Milton, Muncy, Nazareth, Pocono, Pittston, and Williamsport.

"Statistics show that 80% of Veterans are overweight or obese, increasing the risk for preventable chronic diseases. Research demonstrates that a reduction of 5% to 7% of body weight can be beneficial for overall health. The support and education provided by the MOVE! Program can help Veterans lead healthier and more active lives."

—Debra Waite – Dietitian, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

If you are a Veteran interested in joining the Wilkes-Barre VA's MOVE! Program, please call Debra Waite at 570-824-3521 ext. 27817 or by email at Debra.Waite2@va.gov.

Call Center

1-877-928-2621

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wilkes-barre.va.gov



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facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre