

2023

VA TENNESSEE VALLEY
HEALTHCARE SYSTEM
ANNUAL REPORT

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Tennessee Valley Healthcare System



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VA HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES

In September 2022, the Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal, announced VA's health care priorities, identifying key areas to focus our resources, time and attention going forward for the next couple years.

These six VA health care priorities are the top-level strategic and operational advancements of the greatest importance that must be achieved by VA. They are intended to be clear and actionable achievements that deserve our top performance, our focused commitment, and the best use of our available resources. The six priorities are:

- 1. Hire faster and more competitively**
- 2. Connect Veterans to the soonest and best care**
- 3. Serve Veterans with military environmental exposures**
- 4. Accelerate VA's journey to a High Reliability Organization**
- 5. Support Veterans' whole health, their caregivers, and survivors**
- 6. Prevent Veteran suicide**

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Veterans, stakeholders, and employees,

It is the Executive Leadership Team's privilege to present the annual report for VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS), reflecting our unwavering commitment to providing world-class health care services to the brave men and women who have served our country.

In fiscal year 2023, TVHS experienced tremendous growth and accomplishments. We hired more talented health care professionals to provide world-class health care for our Veterans. We served more than 141,000 unique Veteran patients in 2023, conducted critical research and development and expanded our care in our catchment area. Our staff and facilities earned multiple awards, accreditations, and for the first time, TVHS received a 4-Star Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Quality Rating.

In fiscal year 2023, TVHS expanded vital academic affiliations and residencies. We strengthened and reestablished partnerships with area colleges and schools of nursing – primarily Vanderbilt University, Belmont University, Austin Peay State University and Middle Tennessee State University – bringing clinical students back into the facility following the Covid-19 Pandemic.

TVHS also supported The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act – historic legislation passed in 2022. 73,507 unique TVHS Veterans completed toxic exposure screenings in fiscal year 2023. We conducted multiple PACT Act Outreach events designed to educate Veterans about the expanded benefits related to exposure to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances.

As we embrace the start of fiscal year 2024, we anticipate many exciting and promising milestones as well as growing and learning from any challenges we face together.

The TVHS footprint is continually growing, and we open a new VA Clinic at Fort Campbell's Blanchfield Army Community Hospital in February 2024. Additionally, we anticipate opening new VA Clinics in Clarksville, Cookeville, and Nashville in fiscal year 2027, building upon our infrastructure to provide care to more than 94,000 Veterans in those respective communities.

Data gathered from our annual All Employee Survey demonstrates TVHS is a preferred employer in the region and our workforce is prepared to continue providing compassionate, quality and streamlined care for Veterans.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to our mission of serving those who served. We will continue to prioritize the needs of our veteran community, striving for excellence in all aspects of our healthcare delivery. By fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement, we will build upon our successes and overcome any challenges that may arise.

The work we accomplished in 2023 – outlined in this report – provided a framework for TVHS to significantly grow, increase positive health outcomes and lead the nation in Veteran care and innovation.

Stronger Together!



Sincerely,

Dan Dücker
Executive Director

VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System

WHO WE SERVE



VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System is a 1A facility. We provide Veterans with health care services at 22 locations serving middle Tennessee, southern Kentucky, and northern Georgia. Facilities include our Nashville VA Medical Center and Alvin C. York VA Medical Center in Murfreesboro. We also have 20 community-based outpatient clinics in Bowling Green and Hopkinsville, Kentucky; and Dover, Clarksville, Chattanooga, Cookeville, McMinnville, Harriman, Tullahoma, Columbia, Athens, Nashville, Gallatin, and Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Total number of Veterans TVHS serves:

141,945

Male Veterans enrolled: 126,877

Women Veterans enrolled: 15,068

(This number increased 5.4% from 2022)

LGBTQ+ Veterans enrolled: 928

Race/ethnicity of Veterans

Declined to answer – 2,676

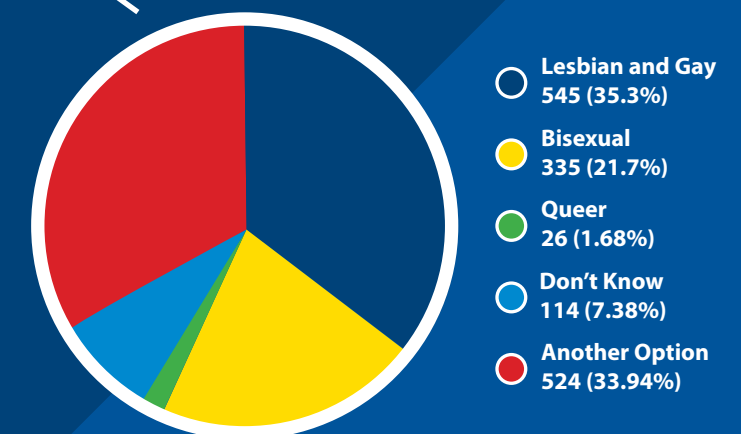
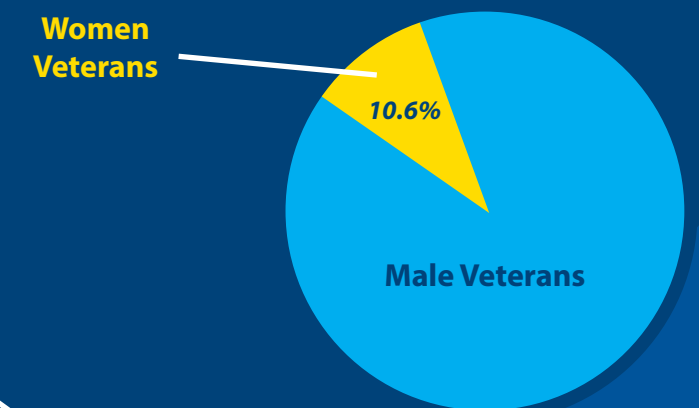
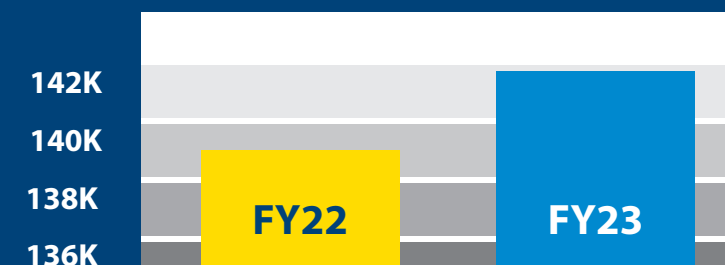
Hispanic or Latino – 3,546

Not Hispanic or Latino – 117,126

Unknown – 18,597

Total enrollments in FY23

2% increase from 139,620 in FY22 to 141,945 in FY23



LEADERSHIP



Dan Dücker
Executive Director



Michael Renfrow
Deputy Executive Director



Dr. John Nadeau
Chief of Staff



Dr. Bridget Brozyna
Associate Director for
Patient Care Services



Edward Payton
Associate Director for
Resources

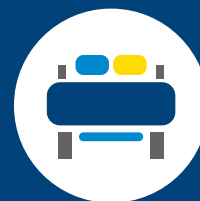


Aaron Grobengieser
Associate Director for
Operations



Dr. Erin Coomes
Assistant Director

STATISTICS



BEDS

217 hospital beds
144 Community Living Center beds
377 total operating beds



ADMISSIONS

6,592 total admissions
TVHS treated 114,637 unique patients



APPOINTMENTS

242,641 Primary Care appointments completed
162,754 Mental Health appointments completed
479,557 Specialty Care appointments completed
286,562 Telehealth Care appointments completed



FY2023 OPERATING BUDGET

\$1,800,000,000*

With Community Care



EMPLOYEES

4,973 *(Full-time and part-time)*

OUR FACILITIES



Nashville
VA Medical Center
1310 24th Avenue South
Nashville, TN 37212

Alvin C. York
VA Medical Center
3400 Lebanon Pike
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

Chattanooga VA Clinic
6401 Shallowford Road
Chattanooga, TN 37421

Clarksville VA Clinic
782 Weatherly Drive
Clarksville, TN 37043

Albion Street VA Clinic
1818 Albion Street, Suite 114
Nashville, TN 37208

Athens VA Clinic
1320 Decatur Pike
Athens, TN 37303

Charlotte Avenue VA Clinic
1919 Charlotte Ave., Suite 100
Nashville, TN 37203

Cookeville VA Clinic
851 South Willow Ave. Suite 108
Cookeville, TN 38501

Dalton Drive VA Clinic
2292 Dalton Dr., Suite F
Clarksville, TN 37043

Dover VA Clinic
1406 Donelson Parkway
Dover, TN 37058

Gallatin VA Clinic
419 Steam Plant Road
Gallatin, TN 37066

Glenis Drive VA Clinic
250 Glenis Drive, Liberty Square
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

Glenis Drive 2 VA Clinic
260 Glenis Drive, Liberty Square
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

Hopkinsville VA Clinic
4000 Fort Campbell Blvd., Suite G4
Hopkinsville, KY 42240

Roane County VA Clinic
2305 North Gateway Ave., Suite 2
Harriman, TN 37748

Tullahoma VA Clinic
225 Von Karman Road
Arnold Air Force Base, TN 37389

Bowling Green VA Clinic
600 US 31 West Bypass
Fairview Plaza, Suite 12
Bowling Green, KY 42101

Columbia VA Clinic
800 South James Campbell Blvd.
Shady Brook Mall, Suite 100
Columbia, TN 38401

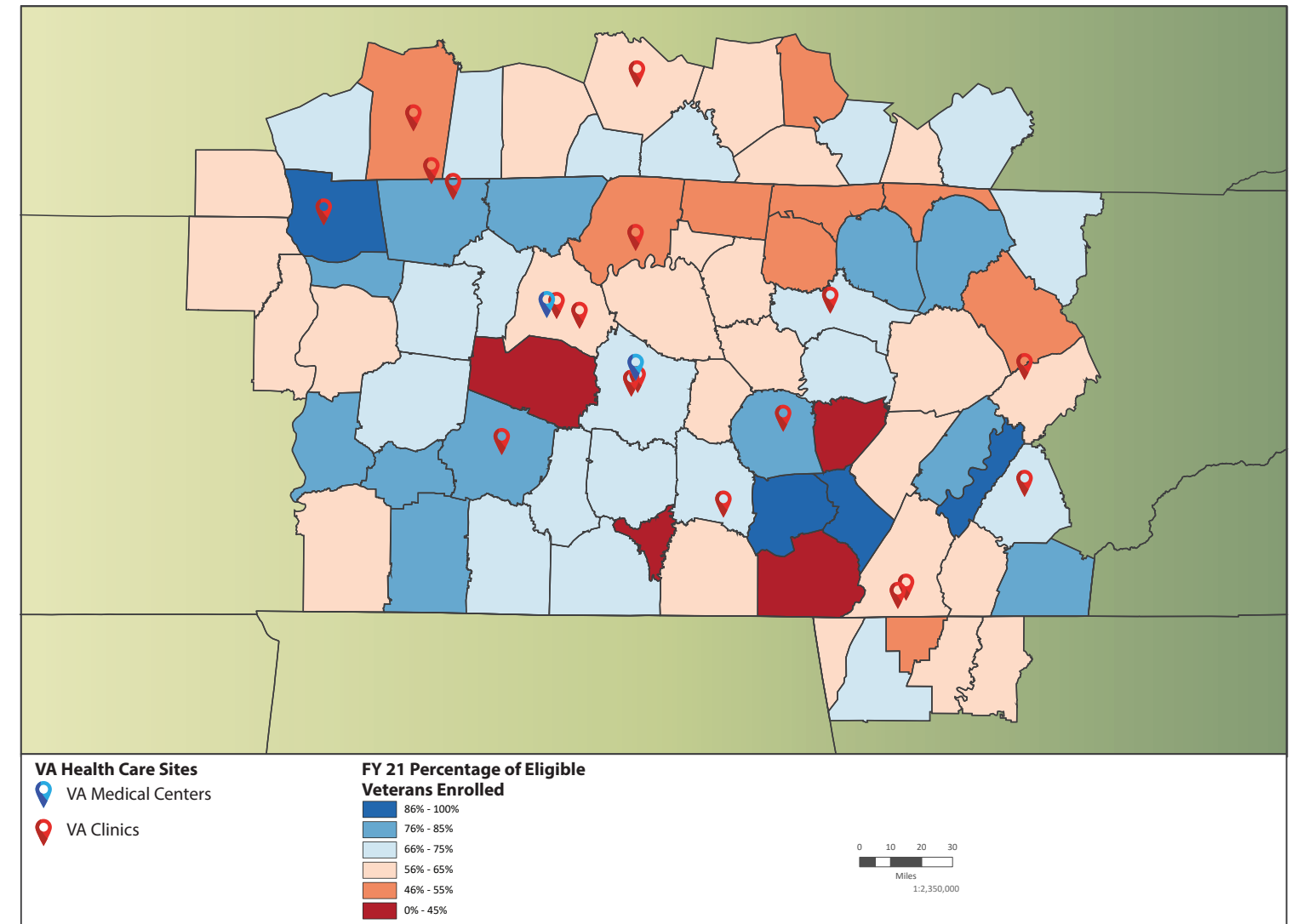
International Plaza VA Clinic
2 International Plaza Drive
International Plaza, Suite 300
Nashville, TN 37217

McMinnville VA Clinic
1410 Sparta Street
Three Star Mall, Suite 6
McMinnville, TN 37110

Pointe Centre VA Clinic
1208 Pointe Centre
Pointe Centre Properties, Suite 100
Chattanooga, TN 37421

Fort Campbell VA Clinic
3rd Floor in the C Building
650 Joel Drive
Fort Campbell, KY 42223

OUR CATCHMENT AREA



VA HEALTH CARE PRIORITY NO. 1

HIRE FASTER AND MORE COMPETITIVELY

NURSING SERVICE

RN (non-APRN) onboarding and growth rate increased from **0.3%** in FY22 to **16.9%** in FY23. RN (non-APRN) turnover decreased by **38%** from FY22 to FY23.

8% increase in overall inpatient satisfaction.
402 new employees onboarded in FY23.

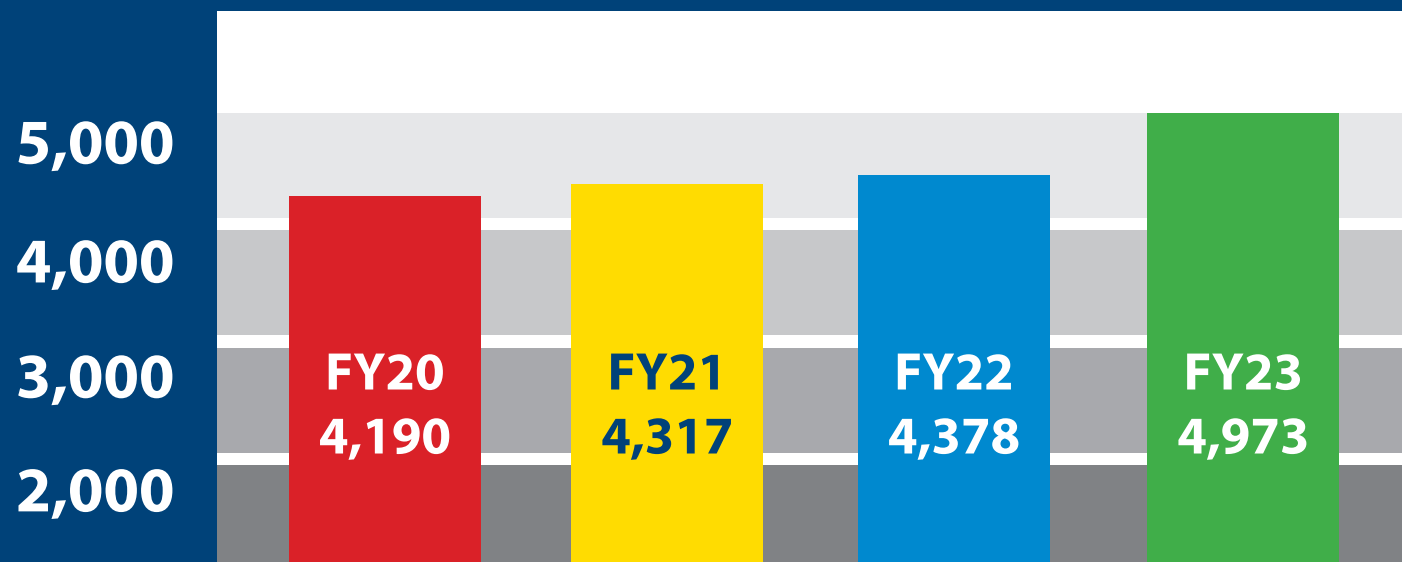
224 staff members hired through monthly recruitment fairs.



TVHS Employees Hired

In fiscal year 2023, TVHS experienced tremendous growth and we hired more talented health care professionals to provide world-class health care for our Veterans. FY22 ended with 4,378 employees with TVHS, while FY23 ended with 4,973 employees. **From FY20 to FY23, the number of employees increased by 18.6%.**

TVHS EMPLOYEES



TVHS reaches highest AES Score in the past decade

By Nicholas Carranza
Public Affairs Specialist

On August 28, 2023 the All Employee Survey (AES) scores were released and Tennessee Valley Healthcare System did not disappoint. All Employee Survey is designed to evaluate morale, engagement, achievement, and overall employee satisfaction. It is used to gauge the productivity and motivation of employees. AES occurs annually and is distributed to all employees within the organization. This an opportunity for employees to voice their experience, share how they feel in their workplace, and to be heard by their leaders.

TVHS scored 72/100 on Best Places to Work (BPTW) in FY23, which is an eight-point increase from FY22. This is the highest BPTW score TVHS has seen in the past decade, and it is a true testament on how leadership has prioritized using AES data and employee feedback from previous years in driving change within the organization.

Improving the employee experience remains a top priority for TVHS executive leadership. Tennessee Valley Healthcare System Deputy Executive Director, Michael Renfrow, MPS, MA, states he is “very pleased in seeing the eight-point increase for this year’s AES scores.” He further explains that the improvements reflect four main priorities established within Tennessee Valley, “First, this

reflects leadership commitment in making TVHS the best place to work and to deliver patient care.”TVHS is invested in creating a culture of safety for Veterans and staff by implementing high reliability best practices within daily operations. “Secondly, this reflects the investment within the organization’s fiscal responsibility in being good stewards of our resources.”TVHS had nearly 1,300 new employees complete the onboarding process in FY23 with numbers continuing to rise. This endeavor mitigates employee burnout while also addressing employee retention. The third priority reflected, “the organization’s investment in retention strategy...trying to keep employees here at TVHS.” Lastly, this year’s AES scores “reflect leadership’s investment in the growth and opportunity for current employees.”TVHS has expanded and established programs such as Leadership Development Institute (LDI), Leadership Effectiveness Accountability and Development (LEAD) program, and many more.

“90% of TVHS employees indicate that coming to work is more than just a paycheck to them” Renfrow states, “Moving forward leadership will continue prioritizing their employees by listening to their feedback, creating more growth opportunities, and instilling accountability across all management.” As TVHS continues to expand and change, they remain steadfast in their pursuit on making Tennessee Valley Healthcare System the best place to work and the best place for Veterans to receive patient care services.

VA HEALTH CARE PRIORITY NO. 2

CONNECT VETERANS TO THE SOONEST AND BEST CARE

CAPITAL PLANNING

Anticipating three new clinics in Fiscal Year 2027: Clarksville, Cookeville, and Nashville VA clinics

Early planning stages of two additional clinics

Opened new Fort Campbell VA Clinic in early 2024

Seventh fastest growing VA health care system in the nation



DR. ALVIN POWERS (ENDOCRINOLOGY) AWARDED THE 2023 VA WILLIAM S. MIDDLETON AWARD

Dr. Alvin Powers was awarded the 2023 Middleton Award in recognition of his research on pancreatic islet function and dysfunction. His work has provided critical insight into pancreatic islet development, vascularization, and innervation, the biology of islet cell growth and regeneration, and the islet response to stressors such as insulin resistance. He defined both similarities and differences between human islets and rodent islet model systems and in doing so greatly advanced the understanding of human islet morphology, function, and dysfunction. Using interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches, his laboratory defined molecular islet mechanisms of islet dysfunction in human type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes, cystic fibrosis-related diabetes, and other forms of diabetes. These findings, described in more than 200 peer-reviewed publications, have transformed our understanding of diabetes.

This award is Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development's (BLR&D) highest honor for outstanding achievement in biomedical research. The award recognizes Dr. Powers' exemplary record of involvement in, and service to, the VA and to the biomedical profession, as well as for his seminal contributions to diabetes research.

STEM CELL TRANSPLANT (SCT) PROGRAM

One of only two SCTs within the VA system – TVHS is the only VA medical center with four transplant programs (liver, heart, kidney, and stem cell). TVHS is the only Stem Cell Transplant unit in the VA offering cell-based immunotherapies (CAR-T cell) for refractory malignancies.

HEMATOLOGY/ONCOLOGY

Hematology/Oncology development of new functional T-cell engager (BiTE) program. T-cell engagers are antibodies engineered to redirect the immune system's T cells to recognize and kill cancer cells.

CARDIOLOGY

Cardiology added WATCHMAN Procedure for atrial appendage exclusion to provide alternative to anticoagulation in the setting of atrial fibrillation. VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) became the first VA hospital in the mid-south region to offer Veterans the WATCHMAN FLX heart implant, a device that reduces stroke risk in individuals with atrial fibrillation and helps patients quit blood thinners. TVHS is the only VA hospital in Tennessee and Kentucky and just one of 22 VA medical centers in the nation to offer the same-day procedure.

"Getting this procedure offered at the Nashville VA is a tremendous win for Veterans and their health care," Dr. Francis Miller, chief of cardiology at TVHS said. "This device reduces the risks of blood clots, strokes, and internal bleeding and helps improve quality of life by eliminating the need for blood thinners. Veterans can now get their health care locally without going outside of VA."

PULMONARY

Pulmonary started new Robotic Bronchoscopy program which will improve diagnostic accuracy and reduce need for additional procedures.

DERMATOLOGY

Dermatology in development of Mohs Surgery unit to provide advanced surgical treatment for skin cancers to Veterans within the VA system.



TVHS ranks 20th nationally out of 104 VA research stations and is poised for further growth as evidenced by a record number of applications that will be submitted in the spring 2024 cycle. The number of CDA and Merit applications submitted by TVHS investigators has more than doubled over the last 3 years.

ACCESS

Expansion of surgical clinics at ACY, Charlotte Avenue, and Chattanooga CBOCs. Improved access in Nashville, as a result of clinic and grid restructuring.

EDUCATION

Educational affiliation in 11 of 12 sections of Surgery; primary teaching hospital for Vanderbilt University Medical Center students and residents.

INNOVATION

Continue to be the premiere complex surgical referral site for VISN 9. Performed the first fully robotic esophagectomy—a procedure typically done only at quaternary referral centers.

VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System Receives 4-Star Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Quality Ratings

VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) received a 4-star rating from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on July 26 for the first time.

TVHS is one of 19 hospitals in Tennessee to earn a 4-star rating based on key performance metrics between July 2018 through March 2022. Typically, CMS reviews three years of data before releasing star ratings.

“This is a testament to the exceptional work and passion our frontline staff provide every day,” said Deputy Executive Director Michael Renfrow. “We’ve still got room to grow and make strides toward a 5-star rating. We’re proud of this achievement and so should our Veterans because they deserve world-class health care.”

The CMS uses five categories — mortality, safety of care, readmission, patient experience, and timely and effective care — to award a quality rating for each hospital. The more stars, the better a hospital performed on the available quality measures.

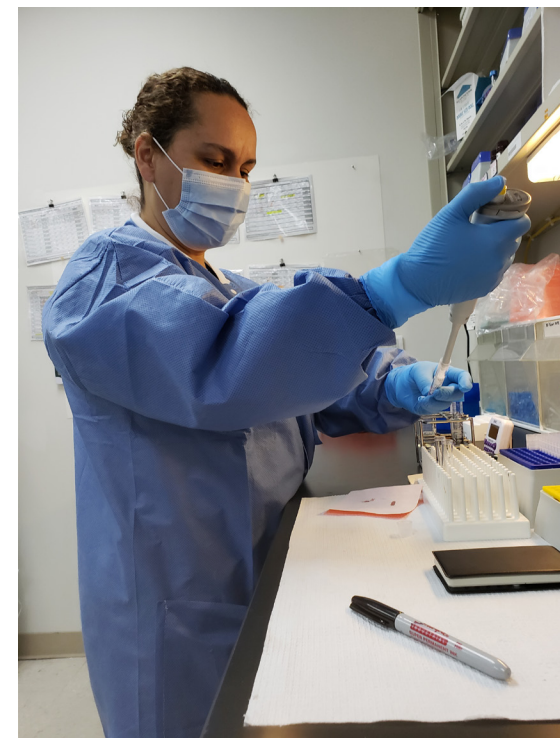
Overall, 67% of VA hospitals included in the CMS annual Overall Hospital Quality Star Ratings received either 4 or 5 stars, compared to only 41% of non-VA hospitals.

Furthermore, VA hospitals outperformed non-VA

hospitals on all 10 core patient satisfaction metrics in the recent Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems Star Ratings, and a recent systematic review of more than 40 peer-reviewed studies found that VA health care is consistently as good as — or better than — non-VA health care.

“Our job at VA is to deliver the best possible care to every Veteran who walks through our doors,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal. “While we’re very proud of these findings, there is still work to do. We will study these results, learn from them, and continue to improve until we’re delivering world-class care to every Veteran, every time.”

VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System is an integrated tertiary health care system comprised of two hospitals, the Alvin C. York campus in Murfreesboro and the Nashville campus, as well as 19 community-based outpatient clinics located in Tennessee and Kentucky. TVHS provides ambulatory care, primary care, and secondary care in acute medicine and surgery, specialized tertiary care, transplant services, spinal cord injury outpatient care, and a full range of extended care and mental health services.

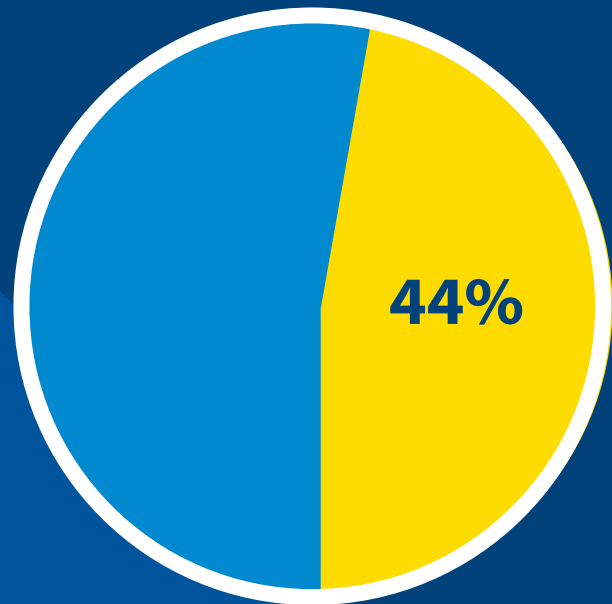


VA HEALTH CARE PRIORITY NO. 3

SERVE VETERANS WITH MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURES

In fiscal year 2023, **73,507** unique Veterans completed their toxic exposure screenings. **44%**, or **32,112**, TVHS Veterans reported at least one toxic exposure. TVHS ranked in the top 10 VA medical centers for the most toxic exposure screenings completed in fiscal year 2023 and had the highest number of screenings in the mid-south region.

TVHS is one of a few VA facilities performing research supported by the PACT Act and is in the process of becoming a Post-Deployment Cardiopulmonary Evaluation Network (PDCEN) site. In addition, TVHS is the first facility nationally granted approval for research funding under the PACT Act. The TVHS PACT Act project is led by Dr. Bradley Richmond, a Pulmonary/Critical Care physician at TVHS, who is investigating environmental exposures and their effects on lung disease in Veterans.



32,112 of 73,507 Veterans, or 44% of those screened, reported a toxic exposure



The PACT Act in 2024

Beginning March 5, 2024, millions of Veterans will be eligible for VA health care years earlier than called for by the PACT Act.

Specifically, all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving our country — at home or abroad — will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits.



Veterans seek benefits at Clarksville VA PACT Act VetFest

By Lee Erwin
Clarksville Now

VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System held its Clarksville VA PACT Act Summer VetFest for veterans, their families and service members on Thursday. The event is part of a nationwide campaign to encourage veterans and families to apply for benefits.

The event at the Wilma Rudolph Event Center, which drew more than 350 veterans, recognized the one-year anniversary of the PACT Act which was signed into law by President Joe Biden on August 10, 2022. The PACT Act law expands health care and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.

Veterans who attended the event had the opportunity to enroll in VA health care, get screened for toxic exposures and file disability claims. Hannah McDuffie, Department of Veterans Affairs Acting Public Affairs Officer said over 700 people stopped by the event, with 190 veterans completing a toxic exposure screening, 119 vets filing claims, and 25 vets enrolling in VA health care.

McDuffie added that the event featured a mix of federal, state and community partners. The Montgomery County Veterans Service Organization, Montgomery County Veterans Coalition, Operation Stand Down Tennessee



and Team RWB-Red, White, & Blue, were some of the local veteran support groups on site.

VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System Executive Director Dan Dücker called the event an opportunity to serve those who have served.

"We're here with VBA, the benefits side of VA and VHA, the healthcare side of VA, for the approval of the PACT Act which opened up benefits for veterans related to toxic exposures and things of that nature. We're here today to interact with veterans and their families to help them get the benefits that they have already earned," Dücker said.

VA HEALTH CARE PRIORITY NO. 4

ACCELERATE VA'S JOURNEY TO A HIGH RELIABILITY ORGANIZATION

TVHS continues its journey to maintain as a high reliability organization (HRO). A high reliability organization is one that consistently achieves exceptional performance in safety, quality, and efficiency, even in high-risk and complex environments. In health care, the application of HRO principles helps reduce the incidence of medical errors, improve patient outcomes, and increase patient satisfaction.



In fiscal year 2023, our patient safety indicators improved in the annual All Employee Survey, such as perception of patient safety, risk mitigation, transparency in errors, identify and report errors, and staff education. This data tells us that TVHS staff continue to understand their role and Commitment to Zero Harm.

One of the fundamental principles of HRO in health care is a culture of safety. Health care organizations that embrace a culture of safety prioritize patient well-being above all else, fostering an environment where every team member feels comfortable reporting errors or near misses without fear of retribution. This open communication and reporting culture enable health care providers to identify system vulnerabilities and implement necessary changes to prevent future errors.

In January 2023, The Joint Commission (TJC) announced TVHS had earned full accreditation. TJC is the nation's oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. TJC Accreditation is awarded upon successful completion of a survey conducted by a specially trained team of surveyors who assess compliance to TJC's standards. TJC Accreditation is nationally recognized as a symbol of quality and makes a strong statement to the community about an organization's efforts to provide the highest quality of services.

TVHS maintained accreditation with The Joint Commission (TJC), Ascension, Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) for RRTP, Homeless, and CWT/PRRC/MHICM.

TVHS earns accreditation for mammography services

By Hannah McDuffie
Public Affairs Officer

For the third consecutive year, the Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) Women's Health mammography team passed its annual Food and Drug Administration (FDA) mammography inspection and accreditation.

"The inspector said all quality control features were in compliance with no recommendations for improvements," Deanna Cunningham, TVHS diagnostic mammographer said. "That's as good as you can get. All of the mammographers and staff are thrilled to have had a fully successful inspection for the third year."

Any facility that offers mammography services must be accredited, certified, and inspected by the FDA to legally provide mammography services in the United States per the Mammography Quality Standards Act, which was signed into law in 1994. The law ensures mammogram services are safe, high-quality, and effective when it comes to breast cancer detection in men and women.

The sooner breast cancer cells are identified the better. Early detection helps identify effective treatment plans and can lead to an increased chance of survival.

During the inspection, the FDA checks the mammogram machines are operating correctly, that all patient records are properly labeled and filed, and all mammogram data is communicated timely with patients.

"They check all of our records for the year," Cunningham said. "They're looking at when we notify patients of mammogram results, how our personnel records are stored, image quality of the mammogram and other medical records and documents."

Cunningham explained breast cancer screening is a very sensitive and detail-oriented modality.

The inspection can be tedious because of the amount of paperwork and technical review involved, but the TVHS mammographers are no stranger to the process.

The preparation is a joint effort between the medical imaging team who performs the mammogram services and the TVHS Women's Health team. Cunningham said the team constantly reviews records and credentials throughout the year to stay up-to-date and within compliance. Being thorough and meticulous with the information is crucial.

"This may seem like a typical routine thing to non-health care personnel, but to us it's a huge deal," Elizabeth Heath,



TVHS acting women Veterans program manager said. "Veterans using mammography services here will receive the best comprehensive breast imaging tailored to their specific needs. We are very proud."

TVHS Deputy Executive Director Michael Renfrow stated women Veterans strongly trust TVHS with their health care needs. Based on VA's Veteran Trust Scores - a survey sent to patients after their health care visit - TVHS is rated the No. 1 VA hospital for women's health care in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

"As a whole, women Veterans have a lower trust in VA by eight to 10% when compared to male patients," Renfrow said. "For TVHS, we're rated No. 1 in the nation, and women Veterans trust us 96% of the time. We still have a lot of work to do to bridge the gap between women and men's trust in VA."

TVHS is one of two VA medical centers within the central southeastern area to offer in-house mammography, and the only VA in the area to offer diagnostic imaging services. Veterans can expect 3D mammograms, breast ultrasounds, biopsies, and breast magnetic resonance imaging.

"The medical personnel in the imaging department are very professional and understanding," Cynthia Cox, TVHS Veteran wrote in a Veteran Trust Score survey. "I always have a good experience with the mammogram tech team as well as ultrasound and echo cardiogram professionals. I appreciate their dedication and hard work."

"We are constantly striving to improve and provide great quality imaging and our inspection is a reflection of our hard work," Cunningham said. "The mammographers and radiologists take pride in providing top-notch patient care to all of our Veterans who deserve the best."

VA HEALTH CARE PRIORITY NO. 5

SUPPORT VETERANS' WHOLE HEALTH, THEIR CAREGIVERS, AND SURVIVORS

Military 2 VA Outreach events:

46,289 individuals (Public 40,082; Teams 12; Veterans 5,491; Family Members 704)

- a. Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program: 1,452 Active Duty
- b. Community Outreach: 43,584 individuals
- c. Military Outreach: 1,143 individuals
- d. Reverse SRP: 110 individuals

FAST FACT:

28% of TVHS Veteran population received Whole Health Services

Health Care for Homeless Veterans

VA Goal 1: Permanently housed at least 38,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness.
Targeted TVHS Goal — 639 Veterans

GOAL EXCEEDED: 661 Veterans housed, or 103%

VA Goal 2: Ensure that at least 95% of the Veterans housed in 2023 do not return to homelessness during the year. And of those who return to homelessness, VA will ensure that at least 90% are rehoused or on a path to rehousing by the end of 2023.

GOAL MET

VA Goal 3: Engage with at least 28,000 unsheltered Veterans to help them obtain housing and other wraparound services. This represents a more than 10% increase in the number of unsheltered Veterans reached during CY 2022.

- We have doubled the size of our HCHV Outreach Program
- Expanded GPD program to include a new 10-bed facility with We are Building Lives
- We were able to collaborate with Built for Zero to house Veterans at Glastonbury Woods Apartments (a low barrier housing option for HUD-VASH Veterans with housing barriers); 72 apartment units were set aside for HUD-VASH Veterans and approximately half of these apartments have been leased by Veterans with HUD-VASH vouchers.

One Veteran's Journey to Achieve and Never Give Up

By Hannah McDuffie

Public Affairs Officer

If the past few years have taught Army Veteran Charles McReynolds anything, it's to surround yourself with positive people and never give up.

After serving and getting out of the Army, McReynolds felt like his life took a wrong turn and didn't know what to do next. He moved back home to Chattanooga and was subsequently arrested leading to a 15-year incarceration.

After his incarceration, McReynolds knew it was time to get his priorities in order but being homeless impeded his plans. It wasn't until the Homeless Veteran Program at VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) met him and his life journey swiftly changed.

Through the Homeless Veteran Program, McReynolds was able to find housing and get connected with VA health care. During one of his visits, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

"I had no idea what I wanted to do," the Chattanooga native said. "I knew I needed to get care, but I felt I had nothing going for me. Scared was the only thing I could think of."

Miraculously, through his treatments at the Nashville VA Medical Center, McReynolds was cancer free one year later.

He felt his sense of hope was renewed and began to look for possible job opportunities. After dozens of applications and interviews, McReynolds never heard anything back. He soon realized his previous incarceration impacted his ability to find a stable job.

That's when the Homeless Veteran Program told him about Compensated Work Therapy (CWT). CWT is a program designed to help Veterans who have mental, physical or emotion barriers find and retain meaningful employment.

"The program helps Veterans with barriers and challenges that have impacted their ability to obtain work but have not allowed those challenges to define them," Connie Gallon, CWT Program Manager said. "Our team helps each Veteran find employment that best meets their skillset while also ensuring the stay focused on their recovery journey."

While incarcerated, the Army Veteran learned how to operate tractors and other types of heavy machinery and



equipment. Little did he know, his experience operating this equipment prepared him for the next chapter on his journey for stable employment at the Chattanooga National Cemetery.

A seasonal position at the VA National Cemetery in Chattanooga opened up and McReynolds' CWT peer support specialist encouraged him to apply. To McReynolds' delight, he was hired.

"It was like my hope was restored. I finally felt I was getting my life in order," he said.

Eventually, the Army Veteran worked his way up from a seasonal position to a full-time role caring for the legacies of the Veterans who have passed before him. McReynolds plans to retire after seven years of federal service.

Looking back on his journey to success, McReynolds hopes his story will inspire other Veterans to never give up, surround themselves with positive people, and use VA services they've earned.

"I had no idea VA had so much to offer," McReynolds said. "I did not quit. I could have quit long time ago, but it paid off. I saw positive changes in myself. I am a productive citizen. I volunteer. I am a deacon and a trustee in my church and engaged in the community, and I now have a home sitting on two acres."

To learn more about the TVHS Compensated Work Therapy Program, contact Connie.Gallon@va.gov. For more information on the Homeless Veteran Program, contact Daniel.Heim@va.gov.

VA HEALTH CARE PRIORITY NO. 6

PREVENT VETERAN SUICIDE

Suicide Prevention completed a total of 120 community outreach events and trainings during FY23 in order to engage communities, provide education, and create partnerships that better support our Veterans.

Firearm Safety Day held at each of the main campuses, the Chattanooga CBOC, and the Clarksville CBOC. The TVHS Suicide Prevention Team (SPT) partnered with pharmacy and gave out gunlocks, medication disposal bags, Naloxone kits, and lethal means safety literature to Veterans, family, and visitors.

The SPT has expanded services beyond case management by providing evidence-based treatment through dialectical behavior therapy groups for Veterans at high risk for suicide.

The Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators Team (CEPC) developed a coalition with community partners in and around Fort Campbell to support individuals transitioning out of the military.

The CEPC Team also partnered with the TVHS LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinator and created an LGBTQ+ coalition in support of the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

We responded to more than 2,300 Veterans Crisis Line consults in FY23.



CALL Dial 988 then Press 1



CHAT VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat



TEXT 838255



Tennessee Valley Healthcare System's Caleb Mancuyas Saves Veteran's Life, Wins National Award

By Nicholas Carranza
Public Affairs Specialist

When Caleb Mancuyas found out he was the recipient of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) National HeRO Award, the top award for patient safety, he was speechless. What was a normal work routine of his turned into a life-saving interaction for a Veteran in need.

Mancuyas works as an ambassador at the Nashville VA Medical Center and noticed a Veteran who appeared lost. Mancuyas approached the gentleman and asked if he needed assistance to his appointment.

"He told me he didn't need help, but something in me felt like I needed to ask if he was okay," Mancuyas said. "I asked if he was okay, and he replied with, 'between me and you I was on my way to kill myself, but I ended up here.'"

Mancuyas saw the signs, did not panic, and responded to the Veteran with kindness. His ability to empathize and discern the Veteran's body language ultimately saved the life of the Veteran.

"Hearing that was hard but I took time to talk with the guy and he shared what was going on. I really felt for him, and I talked to him for about 15 minutes, and I eventually asked him if I could get him some help," Mancuyas said.

The Veteran was reluctant at first to visit the emergency room, but he trusted Mancuyas and followed his lead.

The National HeRO Award is the highest level of high



reliability organization (HRO) recognition available within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and is reserved to honor employees who advance VHA's journey to high reliability through demonstration of HRO principles in action.

Suicide prevention is one of VHA's six priorities, and TVHS continues to align with this priority by emphasizing that employees do not have to be a mental health provider to help a Veteran in crisis, said Michael Renfrow, TVHS Deputy Executive Director.

"I'm thankful that I was at the right place at the right time, and I would do it any other day," Mancuyas said. "Always know that someone is battling something that you know nothing about, so always be kind."

"He told me he didn't need help, but something in me felt like I needed to ask if he was okay."

Caleb Mancuyas

Tennessee Valley Healthcare System Ambassador

ACHIEVEMENTS

A Lifetime of Service: TVHS Volunteer Awarded President's Volunteer Service Award

By Bailey Breving
Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Trainee)

In the heart of Nashville, Tennessee, there exists a remarkable volunteer at VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) whose dedication has recently earned him the prestigious President's Volunteer Service Award.

William Pinkleton, a Vietnam Veteran with more than 15 years of service, embodies the spirit of selfless commitment to his fellow Veterans.

Pinkleton's journey into volunteering began in 2008, a few months after his retirement from the U.S. Air Force. His motivation was deeply rooted in his Veteran status, and he chose to contribute his time and skills at the TVHS Business Office. Over the years, he became an integral part of the TVHS team. Stationed at the information desk, where he directed Veterans and family members, he provided assistance with various business office functions, and offered crucial information to those seeking guidance.

Reflecting on his service, Pinkleton shared, "Being a Veteran myself, I felt a deep desire to volunteer at the VA hospital in Nashville."

His commitment to service, shaped by his military background, has made him not just a volunteer but a cornerstone of support for the Veteran community.

One of the defining moments of Pinkleton's volunteer experience occurred when a distressed Veteran approached him at the front desk. The Veteran, accompanied by his ailing father, was unsure of his next move to get his father immediate medical attention. Pinkleton swiftly facilitated the transfer of records to Nashville on a temporary basis, ensuring the Veteran's father received the urgent care he needed. Months later, the same Veteran returned, expressing gratitude for the support during his hour of need.

"If I can help them in some small way, it will have been a GOOD DAY!" said Pinkleton, and his words encapsulate the essence of his service.

Tom Gallagher, TVHS Chief of Center for Development and Civic Engagement, acknowledged Pinkleton's crucial role in providing the best care possible.



"Pinkleton's ability to calmly and professionally assist Veterans and their caregivers provides a very positive impact on the Veterans and caregiver's experience," said Gallagher.

The President's Volunteer Service Award, presented by AmeriCorps and Points of Light, two non-profit organizations focused on bridging volunteers with organizations, was awarded to Pinkleton for his outstanding service. This prestigious accolade is divided into categories based on hours of service. For adults age 26 and above, volunteers can achieve the following awards: Bronze (100–249 hours), Silver (250–499 hours), Gold (500+ hours), and Lifetime Achievement (4,000+ hours).

Pinkleton was nominated for the Lifetime Achievement by members of the TVHS Center for Development and Civic Engagement for surpassing the eligibility criteria by completing an impressive 4,319 hours of volunteer time.

"Pinkleton's unwavering commitment to providing his time and talents to serve Veteran patients makes him more than deserving of this esteemed award," said Gallagher.

As Pinkleton looks ahead, there are no plans to slow down. His commitment to volunteering is not just a duty, it's a calling. In a world where selfless service is often the unsung hero, Pinkleton stands as a beacon of compassion, exemplifying the transformative power of lending a helping hand. His story is not just one of personal commitment but a testament to the profound impact that a dedicated

volunteer can have on the well-being of those who have served our nation.

Consider volunteering your time and skills to support Veterans and their families. Contact Thomas.Gallagher3@va.gov

[va.gov](https://www.va.gov) to inquire about volunteer opportunities. Your commitment, no matter how small, can create a positive impact and contribute to the well-being of those who have served the nation.

"You are motivating me to keep going"

By Nicholas Carranza
Public Affairs Specialist

On Sept. 13, 2023, Melvin Gatewood was named the recipient of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) National Peer Support Specialist Award.

Out of nearly 1,400 peer support staff members who currently work in VHA, Gatewood was selected as the 2023 National Peer Specialist of the Year. It was clear to the VHA National Peer Specialist of the Year Award selection committee how deserving Gatewood was for this prestigious national award.

Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations, RimaAnn Nelson, praised Gatewood for his accomplishments and dedication to VHA and presented him with the award. In addition to his award, VHA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention adorned Gatewood with a plaque recognizing his exemplary service.

Gatewood has worked as a peer support specialist for six years; three years within primary care mental health integration (PCHMI) and three years in the Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) Homeless Veteran Program, and every day he wakes up thankful for the opportunity to serve his fellow Veterans.

Peer support specialists provide Veterans with one-on-one peer counseling and support groups. They are trained to help others achieve specific life and recovery goals. Peer support specialists are those who are actively engaged in their own recovery who are passionate about aiding Veterans to fulfill their personal missions.

Gatewood earnestly professed, "I use my personal experience to encourage and motivate Veterans on how recovery is real and attainable." Through his actions, Gatewood pursues to uphold the mission and vision of VA while tactfully uses his personal story to relate with Veterans who receive their care at VA TVHS.

A Veteran who Gatewood worked with approached him



during the last leg of his VA Recovery Ruck and told him, "Even though I cannot walk with you I will follow you in my car because you are motivating me to keep going."

"That moment was powerful and gave me strength to keep walking even when I was tired," Gatewood said.

"I have been working for VA since 2008," Gatewood said during his acceptance speech. "I started off at Tuscaloosa, Alabama, went to Jackson, Mississippi, and came to Tennessee Valley in 2013. I put a lot of sweat and tears in this organization not for my own pat on the back but for the love I have for my fellow Veterans. To receive this award and to be honored in this way shows confirmation that I am here for a true purpose although there were times, I wanted to change my path and move on. This is a true honor."

"Working with Melvin has been a true joy not only for the Veterans he serves, but also for the PCHMI staff and primary care nurses," Dr. Chelsea Rothschild said, Gatewood's supervisor. "To meet Melvin is to truly know Melvin. He walks, eats, breathes, sleeps, and dreams recovery and is living proof of it! We are so very proud of him."

Veterans can ask for a referral for peer support services from their VA mental health care provider. If peer support services for a certain mental health problem is not available at a local VA, a Veteran may be referred to a peer support service organization in their community.

Alvin C. York VA Saves Millions through Conservation

By Hannah McDuffie

Public Affairs Officer

The Alvin C. York VA Medical Center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee earned the ENERGY STAR Certification this summer with a score of 93 out of 100 saving the facility over \$1 million in energy savings in 2023.

The medical center is the only VA in Tennessee and Kentucky to achieve this certification from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and ranks in the top 25% of buildings nationwide based on energy performance data.

"The EPA uses a score from one to 100 to determine a building's efficiency," Brian Garven, Assistant Chief of Engineering at Murfreesboro said. "Our score was a 93 meaning that we are 93% more energy efficient than properties similar to ours in the nation."

The Alvin C. York VA Medical Center was built in 1936 and opened in January 1940 as a neuropsychiatric hospital for WWI and WWII Veterans. The engineering team, led by George Yousef, completed extensive upgrades and enhancements to improve the hospital's energy performance in electrical, mechanical and water usage.

The team installed new piping to fix steam and condensation leaks, implemented tracking methods to improve the chiller and boiler plants thus conserving more water and electric energy, and installed energy-efficient LED light bulbs to curb overall usage.

Yousef was recognized by VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal July 27 for his efforts and leadership.

In the nomination letter, it was stated, "Mr. Yousef led the engineering department at the York campus in



achieving the ENERGY STAR Certification. This was a two-year endeavor leading the team to focus on improving efficiencies, increased preventive maintenance, and correcting issues the right way every time."

ENERGY STAR certified buildings save energy, save money, and help protect the environment by generating fewer greenhouse gas emissions than typical buildings. To be certified as ENERGY STAR, a building must meet strict energy performance standards set by EPA and must earn a score of 75 or higher.

Certifications are awarded annually, so buildings must maintain its energy performance year-to-year to be re-certified.

"This was a complete team effort to get to this point. We had tons of project management meetings and discussions amongst the team, which proved to be the key to achieve this milestone," Garven said.

"I own every moment"

By Nicholas Carranza

Public Affairs Specialist

Murfreesboro, TN native and Audiologist for Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS), Dr. Erika Knox, was awarded the National Veterans Health Administration Own the Moment Award in September 2023.

Knox has been working for the VA for nearly 17 years. She continues to choose the VA to live out her mother's legacy, who dedicated her life to serving Veterans for nearly 37 years as a nurse at the exact hospital she works in today.

"I come into the clinic every day listening to incredible Veteran stories. Serving those who chose to sacrifice their lives and serve the nation is the biggest reward," said Knox.

Knox was nominated for this prestigious award because of a particular interaction she had with one of her patients named Mr. Browning.

Knox met Browning in February 2015 for a cochlear implant candidacy evaluation. During his appointment, Browning expressed that he had suffered hearing loss since 1945 due to his deployment and time in the military.

His hearing loss made it nearly impossible for Browning to communicate with anyone, which led to him isolating himself. He wanted to know what could be done since he was profoundly deaf.

During that appointment, the two could only communicate with a dry-erase board and a computer.

Two months after his consultation, Browning had a successful cochlear surgery and became Knox's oldest cochlear implant patient at age 89.

From his first appointment with understanding zero percent of speech fast forwarding 12 months later, Browning passed with understanding 96% of speech.

Every six months, Browning had his routine audiology checkup. "As time passed, these appointments became less about programming the implant as his hearing was exemplary but became more about catching up and connecting," Knox stated.

After some time, a newfound bond began to form. Browning started confiding in Knox about his son, who was battling cancer. In return, Knox was able to empathize and continued to share how her mother was battling breast cancer and suffered from a stroke.

Knox continued to share, "after that, we became the best of friends; my team and I would celebrate his birthday during his visits and would even buy him his favorite cake!



We wanted to remind him how special and loved he was."

Browning cherished these moments and documented these celebrations to show off to his friends and family back home. "This became our tradition, and it will always hold a special place in my heart," Knox exclaims.

"To be honest, at first, Browning was apprehensive and wasn't so keen on receiving care from me due to the color of my skin," Knox said.

As their relationship grew and emotions were shared, previous barriers broke to create a solid foundation of trust. Knox states, "I love my job, it's almost second nature to me. This story with Browning is just one moment out of the countless interactions I have with so many Veterans."

She continues to say, "I own every moment. My goal is to not only take care of the patient clinically but to connect with them emotionally — that's where it changes them".

The national Own the Moment Award recognizes an employee or a team of employees who have gone above and beyond to "own the moment" with a Veteran or Veteran's family, and Knox did just that.

Knox demonstrated all three Own the Moment guiding principles, which include connection and care, understanding and responding to Veteran needs and guiding the Veteran's journey.

"I share my story not to boast, but to encourage other providers to own every moment with their patients and their families," Knox explained.

Empowering VA employees to improve customer experience is enhanced by Own the Moment training. This training enables a cultural change to encourage employees to become more aware and empowered to "own the moment," and to be intentional with every interaction they have with a Veteran.

Every employee can make the experience for the Veteran and their family members the best they can.

Own the Moment training covers the effectiveness, ease and emotion involved with Veteran customer interaction to help staff connect their personal motivation in working at the VA and how they consistently deliver the best experience for Veterans and their families.

2023

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