

VETERANS' ADVANTAGE

WINTER 2005

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR NEW YORK /
NEW JERSEY VETERANS

3 Reaching out to former POWs

6 VA helps vets cope with post-traumatic stress disorder





When service members come home

We in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have taken many steps over the last year to reach out to America's newest veterans. While we're working very hard, we know from other campaigns that veterans take care of each other, too, whether on the battlefield or back home. We will work to make information available and eliminate barriers but we ask our patients, volunteers and staff to also reach out to these brave men and women who will have many questions upon returning from the theaters of operation as they readjust to civilian life. We have appointed Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Points of Contact/Advocates to ensure returning veterans have the services and support they need. See page 7 for a list of these contacts.

Here are some important OEF/OIF VA facts:

- More than 4,300 OEF/OIF service members have returned and received services at the New York/New Jersey Veterans Healthcare Network medical centers and clinics.
- Our Network Prosthetics staff has visited Walter Reed and Bethesda Medical Centers many times and has counseled, advised and interviewed more than 50 amputees.
- VISN 3 has one of the two VA War-Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISCs) at VA New Jersey Health Care System in East Orange, N.J. The centers focus on diagnosing, managing and understanding deployment-related persistent fatigue, pain, cognitive and sleep problems. You can contact the centers by calling 1 (800) 248-8005 or (973) 676-1000, ext. 1-2500, or by visiting www.wri.med.va.gov.

In VISN 3, we know the sacrifices of war and were sadly reminded of them when one of our VA family members died while on duty in Baghdad on December 4, 2004. Joseph Behnke, an engineer at VA New York Harbor Health Care System (New York Campus), supported the Army 248th Field Artillery Regiment. We are honored to have worked side by side with him and are proud of his service and sacrifice to a grateful nation.

James J. Farsetta
Network Director

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>

We're just a phone call away

Veterans, do you need information about medication dosages or prescription interactions, or do you have questions about your general health? Day or night, get answers to all your healthcare questions by calling the VA Nurses Helpline, 24 hours a day, at 1-800-877-6976.

Editor: Gerald Culliton

Joseph Sledge, Northport VA

John Mazzulla, NY Harbor HCS

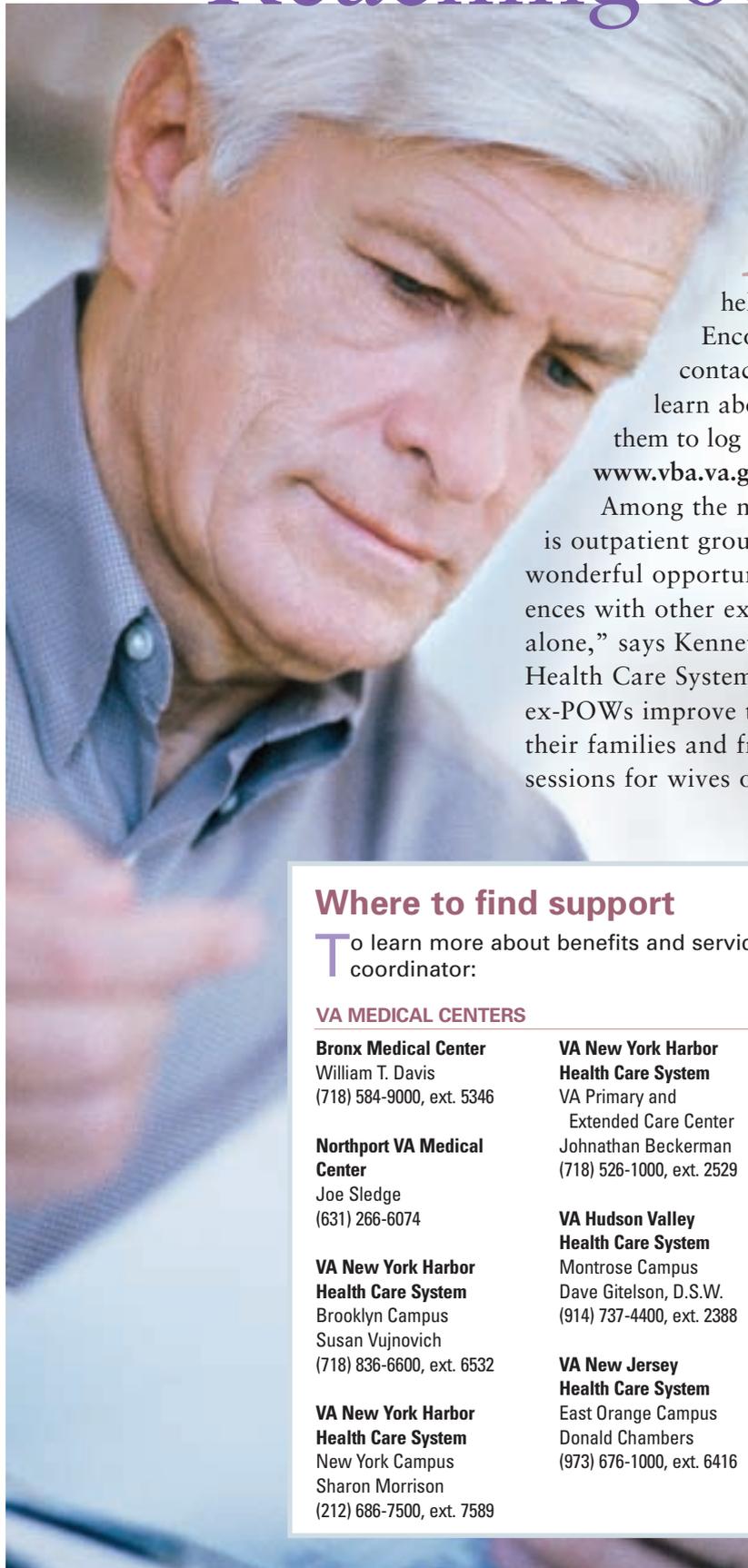
Peter Juliano, NY Harbor HCS

Al Hong, Bronx VA

Sandra Warren, NJ HCS

Nancy Winter, Hudson Valley VA

Reaching out to ex-POWs



Almost 11,000 American ex-POWs (prisoners of war) aren't receiving the entitled benefits they deserve. Please

help us locate our surviving former POWs.

Encourage all former POWs you know to contact their closest VA medical centers to

learn about VA benefits and services. Or, tell

them to log on to VA's POW Web site at

www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/index.htm.

Among the many benefits that can help former POWs is outpatient group counseling. "Group counseling is a wonderful opportunity for ex-POWs to share their experiences with other ex-POWs and understand they aren't alone," says Kenneth Reinhard, Ph.D., VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, session leader. "The sessions also help ex-POWs improve their quality of life and relationships with their families and friends." Dr. Reinhard conducts counseling sessions for wives of ex-POWs, too. ■

Where to find support

To learn more about benefits and services for ex-POWs, contact your nearest ex-POW coordinator:

VA MEDICAL CENTERS

Bronx Medical Center

William T. Davis
(718) 584-9000, ext. 5346

Northport VA Medical Center

Joe Sledge
(631) 266-6074

VA New York Harbor Health Care System

Brooklyn Campus
Susan Vujnovich
(718) 836-6600, ext. 6532

VA New York Harbor Health Care System

New York Campus
Sharon Morrison
(212) 686-7500, ext. 7589

VA New York Harbor Health Care System

VA Primary and
Extended Care Center
Johnathan Beckerman
(718) 526-1000, ext. 2529

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System

Montrose Campus
Dave Gitelson, D.S.W.
(914) 737-4400, ext. 2388

VA New Jersey Health Care System

East Orange Campus
Donald Chambers
(973) 676-1000, ext. 6416

VET CENTERS

Babylon Vet Center

Gaspar Falzone, M.S.W.
(631) 661-3930

Bronx Vet Center

Walter Sampson, C.S.W.
(718) 367-3500

Brooklyn Vet Center

Kevin O'Brien, M.S.W.,
C.A.S.A.C.
(718) 624-3323

Harlem Vet Center

Walter Bridges, M.S.W.
(212) 426-2200

Queens Vet Center

Paulette Peterson, Ph.D.
(718) 296-2871

White Plains Vet Center

Vincent Matthews, M.S.
(914) 682-6250

Manhattan Vet Center

Jack Maloney, C.S.W.,
C.A.S.A.C.
(212) 742-9591

Jersey City Vet Center

Le Roy Adison, M.S.W.
(201) 748-4467

Newark Vet Center

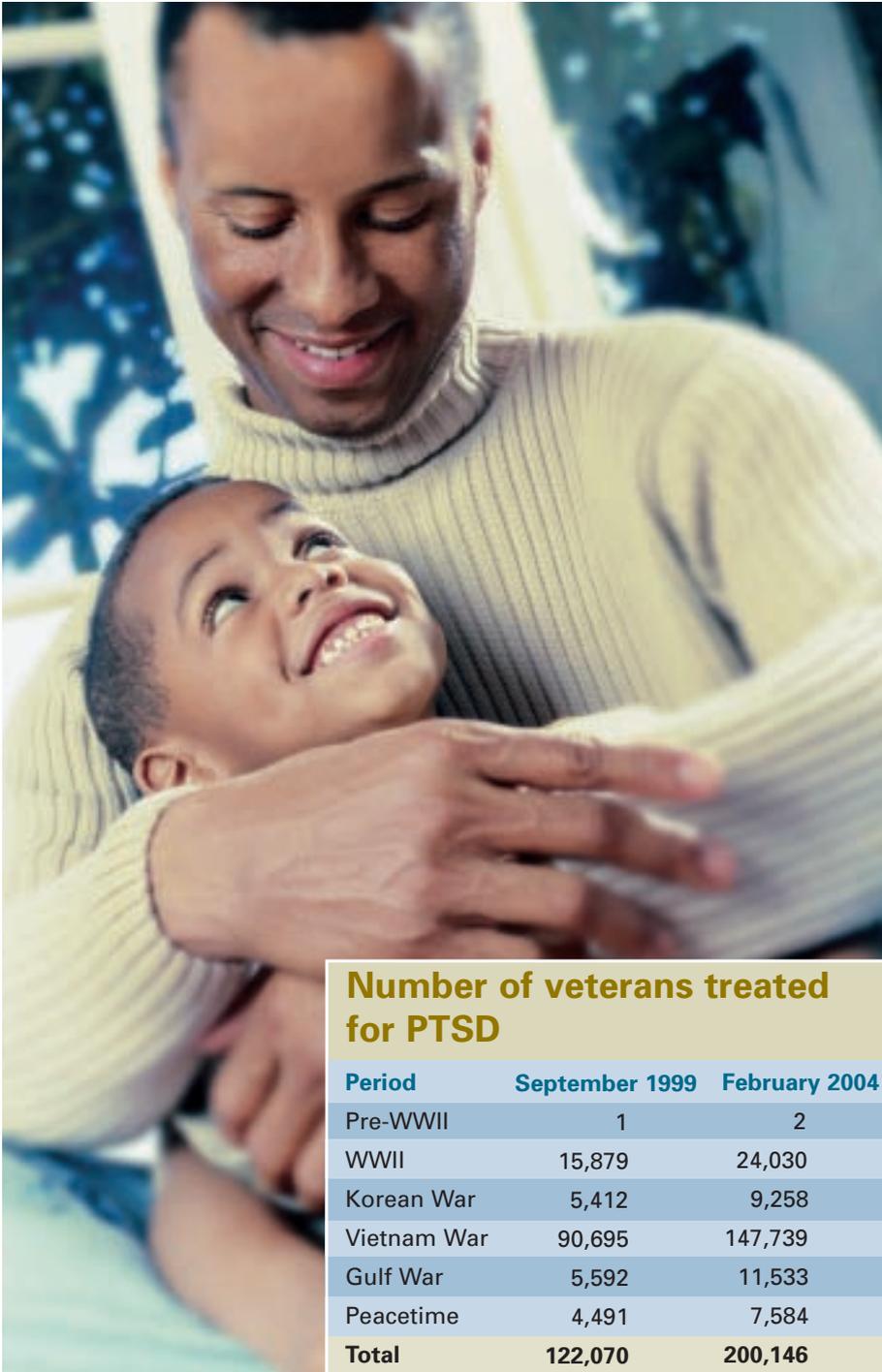
Ann Talmage, M.S.W.
(973) 645-5954

Trenton Vet Center

James Gordon, M.A.
(609) 989-2260

Looking at a brighter future

VA helps veterans cope with post-traumatic



Many of our brave men and women who have returned from combat need help readjusting to civilian life. More than 185,000 veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to a 2003 report by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

What is PTSD?

PTSD is a condition caused by exposure to extreme stress. It involves direct or indirect threat of death or serious physical or emotional harm.

Events that can cause PTSD, called stressors, include natural disasters (floods and earthquakes), accidents (car accidents, airplane crashes and large fires) and deliberate man-made disasters (combat, rape, assault, torture and death camps).

Veterans suffering from PTSD often experience these symptoms:

- trauma-related nightmares
- recurrent thoughts of a traumatic event
- an inability to remember parts of a traumatic event
- withdrawal from loved ones
- a loss of interest in work or hobbies
- sleep problems
- difficulty concentrating
- hyperalertness
- anxiety

Number of veterans treated for PTSD

Period	September 1999	February 2004
Pre-WWII	1	2
WWII	15,879	24,030
Korean War	5,412	9,258
Vietnam War	90,695	147,739
Gulf War	5,592	11,533
Peacetime	4,491	7,584
Total	122,070	200,146

stress disorder

- irritability
- angry outbursts

The severity of symptoms varies depending on each veteran's experience. Untreated, symptoms may last a lifetime.

VA medical center programs

Through its medical centers and community clinics, VA provides an internationally recognized network of more than 140 specialized PTSD treatment programs. More than 77,800 veterans received PTSD treatment by VA specialists in 2003.

VA offers first-rate PTSD treatment programs in the New York and New Jersey areas. Call your local VA medical center or community clinic for more information (*see this issue's back page*).

National PTSD center

VA established the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in 1989 to promote research about the disorder, train healthcare and related staff and serve as a resource for professionals across the United States and, eventually, around the world.

The center has come to be viewed as a world leader in PTSD research. Its current research includes large-scale clinical trials and studies on PTSD diagnosis and treatment. ■

Support for returning vets

To help returning veterans get the support and services they need, Points of Contact/Advocates are available at these locations:

Bronx VA Medical Center

Carol Allen, M.D., primary, (718) 584-9000, ext. 3777/3779
Lawrence Deweil, D.O., alternate, (718) 584-9000, ext. 3777/3738
Faina Smekuna, M.D., alternate, (718) 584-9000, ext. 3777/5275
Mark Benson, M.S.W., case manager, (718) 584-9000, ext. 5223

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System (Castle Point and Montrose Campuses)

Gertrude O'Dell, primary, (914) 737-4400, ext. 2413/5413
Amy Prato, alternate, (845) 831-2000, ext. 5536
Sharon Thomas, R.N., case manager, (845) 831-2000, ext. 5539
Altrude Lewis-Thorpe, alternate and case manager, (914) 737-4400, ext. 2738; (914) 957-0005 (pager)

VA New Jersey Health Care System (East Orange and Lyons Campuses)

Michelle Stefanelli, M.S.W., primary and case manager, (973) 676-1000, ext. 1727
Spring Chen-Strickland, administrative support, (973) 676-1000, ext. 1266
Mary Jo McNulty, administrative support, CBOCs, (973) 676-1000, ext. 6105
Terri Jackson, administrative support, (973) 676-1000, ext. 2333

VA New York Harbor Health Care System (Brooklyn, New York and St. Albans Campuses)

Robert Greene, M.S.W., primary and case manager, (212) 951-5422/6838
Allan Chernikoff, alternate and case manager, (718) 836-6600, ext. 3111

Northport (Long Island) VA Medical Center

Thomas Ross, primary, (631) 261-4400, ext. 5569
Miriam Velazquez, alternate, (631) 261-4400, ext. 7037/7039
Ray Zbikowski, M.S.W., case manager, (631) 271-4400, ext. 7029

Secretary Principi resigns

Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, recently announced his resignation after serving four years in the Bush Cabinet as the VA leader. As Secretary he visited New York and New Jersey many times and worked closely with veterans organizations across this region. Born in the Bronx and raised in New Jersey, Principi truly had a special place in his heart for the veterans and VA staff in this area.



Where YOU CAN FIND US—ANYTIME

Bronx

Medical Center:

130 West Kingsbridge Road
Bronx, NY 10468
(718) 584-9000

Community Clinics:

23 South Broadway
White Plains, NY 10601
(914) 421-1951

124 New Main Street
Yonkers, NY 10701
(914) 375-8055

41-03 Queens Boulevard
Sunnyside, NY 11104
(718) 741-4800

953 Southern Boulevard
Bronx, NY 10459
(718) 741-4900

VA New York Harbor Health Care System

Medical Centers:

Brooklyn Campus
800 Poly Place
Brooklyn, NY 11209
(718) 836-6600

New York Campus
423 East 23rd Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 686-7500

VA Primary and Extended
Care Center
179th Street & Linden Boulevard
St. Albans, NY 11425
(718) 526-1000

Community Clinics:

40 Flatbush Extension—8th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 439-4300

1150 South Avenue
3rd Floor—Suite 301
Staten Island, NY 10314
(718) 761-2963

55 West 125th Street—11th Floor
New York, NY 10027
(212) 828-5265

245 West Houston Street
New York, NY 10014
(212) 337-2569

VA New Jersey Health Care System

Medical Centers:

East Orange Campus
385 Tremont Avenue
East Orange, NJ 07018-1095
(973) 676-1000

Lyons Campus
151 Knollcroft Road
Lyons, NJ 07939
(908) 647-0180

Community Clinics:

970 Route 70
Brick, NJ 08724
(732) 206-8900

654 East Jersey Street—Suite 2A
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
(908) 994-0120

171 Jersey Street—Building 36
Trenton, NJ 08611-2425
(609) 989-2355

385 Prospect Avenue
Hackensack, NJ 07601
(201) 487-1390

115 Christopher Columbus Drive
Jersey City, NJ 07302
(201) 435-3055

317 George Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
(732) 729-0646

340 West Hanover Avenue
Morristown, NJ 07960
(973) 539-9791
(973) 539-9794

20 Washington Place
Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 645-1441

Patterson Army Health Clinic
Stephenson Avenue—Building 1075
Fort Monmouth, NJ 07703
(732) 532-4500

275 Getty Avenue
Paterson, NJ 07503
(973) 247-1666

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System

Medical Centers:

Montrose Campus
Route 9A/P.O. Box 100
Montrose, NY 10548-0100
(914) 737-4400

Castle Point Campus
Castle Point, NY 12511
(845) 831-2000

Community Clinics:

461 Broadway
Monticello, NY 12701
(845) 791-4936

150 Pike Street
Port Jervis, NY 12771
(845) 856-5396

20 Squadron Boulevard—
Suite 400
New City, NY 10956
(845) 634-8942

30 Hatfield Lane—
Suite 204
Goshen, NY 10924
(845) 294-6927

488 Freedom Plains Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603
(845) 452-5151

1875 Route 6
Warwick Savings Bank—
2nd Floor
Carmel, NY 10512
(845) 228-5291

VA Mobile Clinic
(845) 452-5151

Northport (Long Island)

Medical Center:

79 Middleville Road
Northport, NY 11768
(631) 261-4400

Mental Health Clinics:

235 Merrick Road
Lynbrook, NY 11563
(516) 887-3666
(Mon. & Thurs. only)

89 Hubbard Avenue
Riverhead, NY 11901
(631) 727-7171 (Thurs. only)

560 N. Delaware Avenue
Lindenhurst, NY 11757
(631) 884-1133 (Tues. only)

39 Nassau Avenue
Islip, NY 11751
(631) 581-5330 (Wed. only)

4 Phyllis Drive
Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 475-6610
(Tues., Wed. & Fri. only)

1425 Old Country Road
Plainview, NY 11803
(516) 572-8567
(Tues., Wed. & Fri. only)

Primary Care Clinics:

4 Phyllis Drive
Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 758-4419

1425 Old Country Road
Plainview, NY 11803
(516) 694-6008

Westhampton Air Base
(by appointment only)
150 Old Riverhead Road
Westhampton, NY 11978
(631) 898-0599

NY/NJ Veterans Integrated Service
Network 3
130 W. Kingsbridge Road
VISN Office
Bronx, NY 10468

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LEBANON JUNCTION, KY
PERMIT NO. 19



Care for the caregiver— volunteer!

Retired and looking for something rewarding to do?

Consider becoming a volunteer driver with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Transportation Program at Northport VAMC. Volunteer drivers use DAV vans to transport outpatients who have difficulty getting to and from medical appointments. Your support will make a positive difference in your fellow veterans' lives. To get involved, call (631) 261-4400, ext. 7183.

About 25 million caregivers in the United States provide round-the-clock support to loved ones. At Northport VA Medical Center, we want to make sure these dedicated individuals care for their own physical and emotional needs, too.

Our Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC) Program team—which helps veterans receive healthcare services in the comfort of their homes—created the Home Respite Program in response to feedback from patients, caregivers and other healthcare providers. After training VA volunteers, the Home

Respite Program staff places them in HBPC patients' homes a few hours a day, one or two days a week. The volunteers offer caregivers much-needed time away while helping patients improve function and quality of life. The staff matches volunteers with patients in the same or neighboring towns, making it convenient for volunteers—particularly seniors—to stay involved in their communities.

Program volunteers find their experiences rewarding. Many listen to music, watch movies, play cards or share common interests with their patients. If you're interested in volunteering for this worthwhile program, call Mary O'Sullivan, Chief of Voluntary Services, at (631) 261-4400, ext. 7183. ■

Recognizing stroke

5 signs you need to know



You have the best chance of surviving stroke and suffering the least amount of disability from it when you get immediate medical care. That's because doctors need to begin some treatments within three hours of the time you suffered the stroke. But to act promptly, you've got to know the following signs of stroke:

- 1 sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arms or legs, especially on one side of the body
- 2 sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- 3 sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- 4 sudden trouble walking, dizziness or loss of coordination
- 5 sudden, severe headache with no known cause

It's also possible for you to experience a mini-stroke,

or a transient ischemic attack (TIA), which produces similar symptoms. While its symptoms may last for only a few minutes, a TIA can be a predictor of severe stroke and needs to be treated immediately.

Stroke is the third-leading cause of death in the United States. Anyone at any age can have a stroke, but you can fight it by being aware of your risk factors, which include:

- age (75 percent of strokes strike adults over 55)
- gender (more men than women suffer stroke until their risks even out at age 55)
- race (African-Americans face a greater risk of stroke than other ethnic groups)

- a previous stroke or TIA
 - a family history of stroke or TIA
 - smoking
 - excess alcohol consumption
 - overweight or obesity
 - high blood sugar
 - high blood pressure
 - undesirable cholesterol levels
 - cardiovascular disease
- Being informed and prepared can make a critical difference in how you survive a stroke. It pays to educate your loved ones so they can make the right decisions, too. ■

Kids talk to Northport VA vets

Dear veteran,
Thank you for fighting for our country. Because you fought in the war, my life is now a good and happy one. I do not have to get food from shelters. I have a lot of freedom and I can basically do anything I want because you took the time to fight for our country. Thank you for your abilities that helped save our country.
Sincerely,
Brianna

Dear veteran,

Hi. My name is Nicole. I am 13 years old and in the 8th grade. I just wanted to take a minute to thank you for everything you have done for our country. I really appreciate it. Without you, our country would not be what it is today. Thank you for taking time to read this letter.

Nicole

Dear veteran,

Our world is constantly changing. We, the citizens of America, have something special. We have freedom. We thank all the brave men and women who risk their lives for us. I want to thank you all for your contributions to our country. Thank you for keeping America FREE!

Sincerely,
Eric B.

The gift of giving



Are you aware of the many volunteer opportunities available in your local community? The Department of Veterans Affairs New Jersey Health Care System's Lyons and East Orange Campuses offer several rewarding programs aimed at helping patients and nonpatients.

Ken Mizrach, Director of the VANJHCS, said, "I have witnessed firsthand the commitment and compassion that our volunteers demonstrate. And although people today devote less time to community service, our health care system continues to attract those who give their time and talents generously."

Mary Beth Hynoski, Lyons Voluntary Service Program Manager, added, "The success of our program is shown by the many volunteers who remain with us. Some have lent their support for more than 20 years. We're

fortunate so many volunteers from local communities help, and we're always searching for more."

Something for everyone

Not sure where to direct your talents? Choose from any of these support programs:

- **Escort:** Escorts offer comfort and companionship by attending medical appointments with veterans.
- **Ambassador:** Volunteers in this program greet veterans and visitors who come to the campuses and answer any questions they have.
- **Recreation:** Recreational volunteers socialize and play table games with veterans. They also assist with large-scale programs.
- **Driver:** Drivers transport veterans to the campuses for appointments using government vehicles.
- **Clerical:** These volunteers assist with data entry, filing, photocopying, mailings and other administrative tasks.



As a new volunteer, you'll receive an orientation before you begin your first assignment, plus a complimentary lunch for every day you donate at least four hours. If you're a regularly scheduled volunteer at the Lyons Campus, you may be eligible to join its golf course.

Learn more

For more information about the Lyons volunteer program, call Mary Beth Hynoski at (908) 604-5814. To learn more about the East Orange volunteer program, call Tyrone Steed, Voluntary Service Program Manager, at (973) 676-1000, ext. 1597. ■

Paterson CBOC opens

The new Paterson Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) at 275 Getty Avenue in Paterson, N.J., opened with a celebratory ribbon-cutting ceremony on August 12. Congressman Bill Pascrell Jr. of the 8th District, N.J., gave the keynote address.

The CBOC offers primary care, social work, dietary and mental health services to eligible veterans.

Primary care includes physical examinations, preventive health screenings and health education for acute and chronic medical conditions. The staff coordinates care for veterans who need rehabilitation and diagnostic, specialty, inpatient and long-term support.

The Paterson CBOC is open Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. To learn more



From left: Timothy P. Barr, Vice President for Development, St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center; Arthur Joseph Serratelli, Bishop of the Diocese of Paterson, N.J.; James J. Farsetta, Network Director, VISN 3; Kenneth H. Mizrach, Director, VANJHCS; and Bill Pascrell Jr., Congressman, 8th District, N.J., celebrate the Paterson CBOC's opening.

or to make an appointment, call (973) 247-1666. ■



Take charge of diabetes

Our awarded self-management program shows you how

If you're one of the 18.2 million Americans currently living with diabetes, rest assured the right care is close to home. The VA New Jersey Health Care System's Diabetes Self-Management Education Program received continued recognition from the American Diabetes Association (ADA). We were the first VA medical center in the nation to earn such an honor in 1988. The ADA's voluntary review assures that approved education programs meet the National Standards for Diabetes Self-Management Programs.

Self-management education teaches you skills to control your condition. With a health care

team's support, you can live actively and decrease your risk for chronic complications.

Our self-management program offers individual and group instruction at the East Orange and Lyons Campuses as well as the James J. Howard, Trenton and Hackensack Community-Based Outpatient Clinics. To learn more, contact any of our program's staff members:

- Carmen Lou, M.S.N., N.P.-C., C.D.E. (908) 647-0180, ext. 4987
- Joyce Lovas, M.S.N., A.P.R.N., B.C., C.D.E. (973) 676-1000, ext. 2141
- Susan Strahs, M.S., R.D., C.D.E. (908) 647-0180, ext. 4719 ■



A medical pioneer

Mark Zimring, M.D., Chief of the Endocrinology Section and Assistant Chief of Medical Service at the VA New Jersey Health Care System, received the prestigious 2003 Arthur S. Flemming Award. The award honors professionals who have three to 15 years public service experience for extraordinary federal government contributions in three categories: Scientific, Administrative and Applied Science. Dr. Zimring was one of four employees chosen in the Scientific category.

Dr. Zimring discovered how a protein in the body called basic fibroblast growth factor (bFGF) contributes to pituitary tumors, diabetes mellitus and bone disease. He also linked elevated prolactin, a pituitary hormone that stimulates and maintains milk secretions, to antibodies mimicking the growth effects of bFGF in patients with pituitary tumors and breast cancer. ■

Meet 5 top employees

Five staff members from the VA New Jersey Health Care System were named 2004 Employees of the Year by the Federal Executive Board of Metropolitan Northern New Jersey on October 7. Congratulations to these employees for jobs well done!



Equal Employment Opportunity Employee of the Year

Manuel F. Espique, Asian American/Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program Manager, Environmental Management Service



Secretary of the Year

Yvonne Fowler, Dental Service

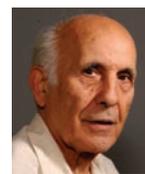
Professional of the Year

Chae Im, M.D., Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service
(no photo available)



Administrative/Clerical of the Year

Mary T. Middleton, Fiscal Service



Craftsman/Tradesman of the Year

Michael Mungiello, Facilities Management Service

Getting to know you

The Montrose Nursing Home bridges the generation gap

At the Montrose Nursing Home, age doesn't matter, say veteran residents and volunteer students from the nearby Westchester Middle School who participate in the nursing home's Intergenerational Program. The program offers a chance for children and veterans to come together to socialize, share experiences and learn from each other.

A win-win program

The program eases loneliness for many veterans whose families aren't actively involved in their lives or who are ill, have limited mobility or live far away. It also provides a rewarding chance for veterans to serve as teachers as they draw on their acquired knowledge to offer valuable life lessons to children.

In turn, the program benefits many children who may have little or no experience visiting nursing homes. By volunteering their time, children learn about and become more comfortable with the psychiatric and medical conditions that bring people to nursing home settings. The children visit the home once every other



week during most of the school year and several days a week during the summer. Many stay involved in the program throughout their middle-school years.

Fun for all

During visits, veterans and children take part in a variety of activities together such as checkers, card games, drawing and gardening. The program encourages veterans to share their interests with children. One veteran who enjoys solitaire, for example, plays card games with the young volunteers. Another veteran, formerly a cartoonist, spends his afternoons helping children

draw. Veterans who prefer gardening enjoy the outdoors with the children as they pot plants and grow vegetables.

Staff members remain nearby to lend support during the activities. They also guide veterans and children into the program, offering an orientation to the nursing home followed by regular meetings with the nursing home's social worker and nurse manager as well as the school's social worker. During the meetings, students get to share their experiences and ask questions such as, Why do some of the residents behave

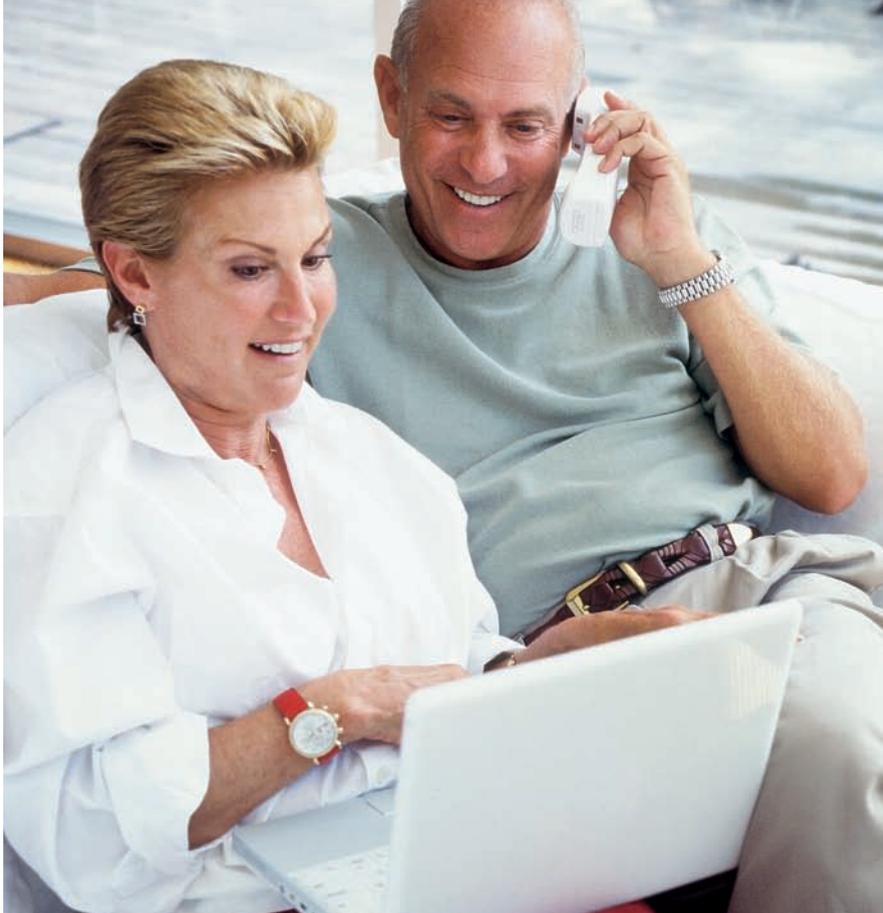
the way they do? How should I respond?

What's dementia? This ongoing education and support help ensure the program's success.

Feedback from the veterans, children and staff members has been positive, with everyone noting the rewards gained by all. ■



Students from the Westchester Middle School join Mr. and Mrs. Karl Kullberg for a day of fun.



Better health at your fingertips

Last Veterans' Day, computers across the country connected to My Health_{Vet}, the Veteran Health Administration's (VHA's) newest Web-based application. My Health_{Vet} is a Web site designed for you, your family and your healthcare provider to help you better understand and manage your health.

The site offers three important benefits:

- a single source of objective, clinically sound health education information

- one-stop shopping for benefits, special programs and health information and services

- a chance for you to partner with your healthcare provider by sharing important health information

Visit www.myhealthvet.va.gov for a wealth of online health benefits and services.

Up to speed on care

At the click of a mouse, you can visit numerous Web sites providing health and services information for veterans or view information from other VHA-approved sites. You can locate VHA medical centers, Veterans

Service Organizations and State Veterans Affairs Offices. You can also access Congressional Subcommittees on Veteran Affairs Web pages and read about the latest topics that affect veterans.

And that's not all. Soon, during the next phase of My Health_{Vet}, you'll be able to refill prescriptions online and view co-pay balances and pending appointments. You'll also be able to enter personal health data such as blood pressure readings, daily weight or blood sugar readings. It's a good way for you to keep track of and monitor your health conditions and share any questions or concerns you may have with your healthcare provider.

Register today

If you register now for My Health_{Vet}, in 2005 you'll gain access to portions of your medical record, which you can secure in your own "eVault." You'll be able to review instructions from past appointments or follow-up information, which you can share with your non-VA physician or a veterans service officer if you need help processing compensation and pension claims. You'll also be able to designate a surrogate. By doing so, you'll give an advocate, a close friend or a family member full or limited access to your medical information contained in your eVault.

You can access My Health_{Vet} from any computer that offers Internet services. If you don't have a computer at home or in your local library, head to your nearest VA medical center. Every VA medical center across the country has a computer designated to help you get to this valuable site. ■

Greetings from the director, the Bronx VAMC



Maryann Musumeci
Director, the Bronx
VAMC

Once again, like a bad penny, the flu season is upon us. Each year, about 114,000 people are hospitalized for flu-related complications and 36,000 Americans die.

Recently, a great deal of news has been focused on the flu vaccine shortage. I want our Bronx VA community to know where we stand: First, there is no need to panic.

The VA has received the entire amount ordered—about 2 million doses. We expect a greater demand than last year for the vaccine by veterans enrolled in the VA system and VA employees. The Bronx VA (as well as others in our Network) will target our vaccination program generally to the following groups: enrolled veterans who have chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, kidney disease, cancer or

immunosuppression, regardless of age; pregnant women; nursing home patients; spinal cord injury residents; and employees who have direct patient contact.

As a registered nurse, I can tell you that all of you—whether or not you get a flu shot—can take these practical steps to avoid or help prevent the flu's spread:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Influenza viruses are spread through respiratory droplets when you cough and sneeze.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.
- When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then throw out the tissue and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.



- If you get the flu, stay home from work or school so others won't catch your illness.

- Clean your hands frequently with alcohol-based hand rubs or soap and water.

If you develop the flu despite taking these precautions, get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids and avoid using alcohol and tobacco. Consider taking medication to help relieve symptoms. You can also call our 24-hour, seven-days-a-week, Nurse Helpline at 1 (800) 877-6976.

If your flu symptoms are unusually severe (for example, if you are having trouble breathing) or if you are at special risk for complications from flu, consult your primary care provider here at the Bronx VA Medical Center or at one of our easily accessible community-based outpatient clinics.

Warmest wishes for a safe and happy holiday season.

Sincerely,
Maryann Musumeci
Director, the Bronx VAMC

The first SCI dental clinic opens



It's tough to provide proper dental care to patients with spinal cord injuries (SCIs), particularly to those who use respirators or are on complex therapies. Just getting these patients to a dental clinic can be extremely difficult, requiring a team of specialists—nurses and respiratory and physical therapists. At the same time, bringing dental care to an SCI patient's bedside poses its own set of challenges, such as moving the X-ray machine, air compressor and other specialized equipment.

At the Bronx VA Medical Center, staff from the dental unit and the SCI ward decided enough was enough. "We felt it was imperative that we improve this process," says Dentist Daniel MacDonald, M.D. Their solution was to open a dental clinic right in the SCI ward to provide emergency and routine care to the 60 veteran patients who live there.

Glen Marrow, a quadriplegic ventilator-dependent patient, receives care in the new SCI dental clinic by Brian Jeon, M.D., Resident (left), and John Piro, M.D., Prosthodontist.

SCI patients have many special needs. But providers shouldn't overlook the importance of proper dental hygiene, advises Lynda Olender, R.N., the Bronx VAMC's Chief Nurse Executive. "Proper dental care goes hand in hand with good nutrition and general health," she says.

The new clinic offers a full range of dental services, mobile equipment, high-intensity lighting, an X-ray machine and vacuum suction. It even has its own respirator for ventilator-dependent patients.

The clinic is a welcome addition for patients and staff. "This has really made a difference for our patients and has added a new, positive dimension to our department," says Vivienne Barton, R.N., Clinical Manager of the dental unit. ■



Healthcare Happenings

Information for Veteran Patients of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System

VANYHHS welcomes home new vets



program that airs weekly on 20 cable-access systems throughout Long Island, New York City, metropolitan and coastal New Jersey, the Hudson Valley and Westchester County.

A Veterans Information Day for returned Iraqi and Afghanistan service members, held at the New York Campus on

July 24, provided these combat veterans and their families valuable information about VA benefits and healthcare, employment and job-seeking assistance. More than 75 veterans and their families attended, and many enrolled for healthcare at VANYHHS.

VANYHHS and the New York VA Regional Office staff are

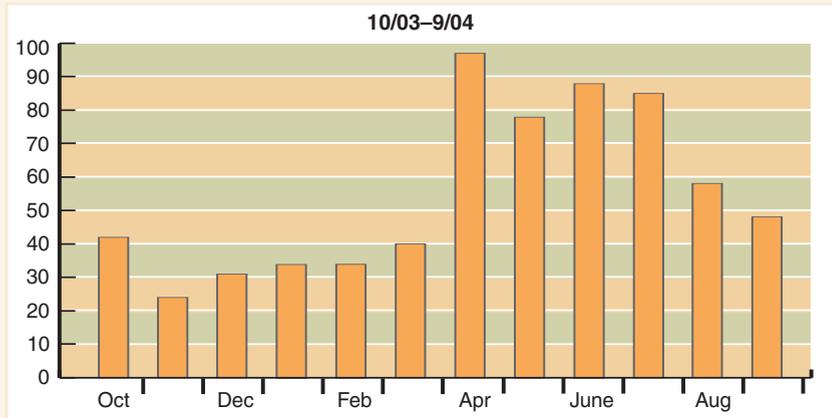
visiting local military reserve and guard units to provide important information about accessing healthcare under VA Tri Care or as veterans, and to present an overview of benefits and entitlements offered through the New York VA Regional Office. VA staff also distribute information from the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service about employment and reemployment rights and provide contact information for other agencies that help veterans reenter civilian life.

This information is new to the “citizen soldier” and even to reservists and guard members who were on active duty before this most recent call-up. Readjusting to civilian life can be stressful, but timely information and professional guidance and support can relieve the normal stresses of postwar adjustment.

VA New York Harbor Healthcare System staff have been working for more than a year to reach military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Our goal is to help them make seamless transitions from active duty to civilian life, from soldier to citizen—particularly in the healthcare area.

When servicemen and women are discharged or transferred from military hospitals like Walter Reed and Bethesda and enter the VA healthcare system, we want to ensure them of continuous ambulatory and inpatient care. To do this, VA has been making special outreach efforts to contact them, such as sending letters and making phone calls. In addition, public service announcements run on every episode of “VA Insights,” VA’s award-winning cable-access TV

Number of enrolled combat vets by month



Total number of combat veterans enrolled: 657

Vladimir Santos, M.D., Chief E.N.T.; Warren A. Sweeney, M.S.; and Milena Ippolito-Micek, M.S. (standing from left to right), tell a patient the results of his swallow study.

VANYHHS's leading Audiology and Speech Pathology Service helps you communicate

Do you suffer from hearing loss, a speech impediment or a swallowing difficulty? Rest assured that, as a veteran enrolled at VA New York Harbor Healthcare System, you'll receive the most advanced diagnostic and rehabilitative care from our Audiology and Speech Pathology Service.

Our service features highly trained, dedicated professionals sensitive to veterans' communication needs, with departments on the New York, Brooklyn and St. Albans campuses.

A speech pathologist will work closely with you if a stroke, a head injury, surgery for larynx cancer or another debilitating condition has affected your ability to speak. He or she will also help

you improve your swallowing function so you can regain your quality of life—and enjoy a home-cooked meal again.

VA is the nation's leader in providing hearing aids and assistive devices to veterans eligible for assistance. Veterans are at particular risk for hearing loss, often because of long-term noise exposure produced by weapons and loud machinery. Because the degree and type of hearing loss vary from patient to patient, our audiologist will provide a thorough examination to ensure you receive the right treatment plan.

If you're experiencing any of these communication challenges, ask your primary care provider for a referral so you can start receiving specialized care.



Janine D. Henrickson, Au.D. (right), performs a middle-ear exam before completing an audiological assessment.

Type 2 diabetes research study

If you have type 2 diabetes, you may be eligible to participate in a National Institutes of Health study seeking ways to reduce risk of heart attack, stroke and other serious blood vessel problems. People with type 2 diabetes have twice the risk of these events, compared to people without diabetes. If you participate in the study called ACCORD (Action to Control Cardiovascular Risk in Diabetes), you may help improve diabetes care for yourself and future generations.

If eligible, you will receive:

- free blood sugar, blood pressure or cholesterol medications
- free blood sugar testing supplies
- free regular medical follow up
- free counseling for healthy lifestyle choices

To be considered for this important study, you must have type 2 diabetes and be either:

- age 55 or older
- age 40 or older with previous heart attack, stroke or serious blood vessel problems

For information about the **ACCORD study**, contact Elizabeth Richardson at (212) 951-5957.