

Spring 2014

VETERANS HEALTH CARE ADVANTAGE

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE FOR NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY VETERANS



HONORING SERVICE
EMPOWERING
HEALTH



VA
HEALTH
CARE

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century



Message from Network Director

HONORING SERVICE
EMPOWERING
HEALTH

Dear Veterans, Fellow Employees, Volunteers and Friends of the VA NY/NJ Healthcare Network,

I am pleased to share with you the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN 3) Spring 2014 online newsletter. The theme of this issue is “Honoring Service, Empowering Health”. The cornerstone to empowering health is providing personalized, proactive and patient driven care to our Veterans. We do this by listening to our Veterans, finding out what truly matters to them, and partnering with them to develop personalized health plans that emphasize the integration of medical care, self-care and skill building that will support wellbeing across the life span.

We know our Veterans are presented with a myriad of health care options every day, and we are committed to remaining their provider of choice. In order to accomplish this, we will embrace innovation and continue to cultivate a Veteran-centric culture through our people, our facilities, our research and through the use of technology. Building on the successes of traditional VA medical care, we are shifting our focus from solely treating illness, to now promoting health and well-being by considering the whole person; their strengths, values, needs and goals. This patient centered approach harnesses the power of a positive environment to support treatment and improve the healing process. It is what health providers need to do in order to stay relevant to patients, create better patient experiences and long term outcomes, and provide timely care at lower costs.

This newsletter highlights the VISN 3 health care initiatives that embrace the person centered approach found in each one of our VISN 3 medical centers. Some of the innovative programs highlighted in this issue are advanced rehabilitation methodologies for spinal cord injury, virtual technology to support Veterans on college campuses, partnerships with stakeholders to provide a safety net for homeless Veterans and recovery oriented services that promote independence for Veterans with mental illness.

I am very proud of the programs that you will learn about through this newsletter, and of the employees who are committed to providing a safe, high quality and outstanding health care experience for our Veterans. With your support, VISN 3 will continue to strive to be the benchmark of excellence and value in healthcare by providing exemplary services that are patient-centered, data driven, team based and continuously improving.

Michael A. Sabo, MBA, FACHE
Network Director

MyHealtheVet empowers you to manage your own health care



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Have questions?

Ask your VA healthcare providers about which of our services are available and right for you.

Video Telehealth • Home Telehealth • Secure Messaging

You Have a Choice. Technology has made healthcare accessible. You have many more tools available to help you manage your healthcare. Here you'll find information on how they work and how you can benefit from each one.

Meeting YOUR LIFESTYLE

Having choices means meeting your needs. Whether you prefer a more traditional in-office approach, or the use of video and other technologies, the VA is here to work with you. *Ask...You Have a Choice.*

MyHealtheVet is the VA's online personal health record. You can track personal health information, refill prescriptions, have access to portions of your medical record, and communicate with your healthcare provider. Instead of making a phone call, use Secure Messaging to send questions to your VA healthcare team. You will receive a response within three business days. Sign up at: www.myhealth.va.gov

Home Telehealth – Track important health information such as heart rate, blood pressure, weight and blood glucose from the comfort of your home. Information is transmitted through a phone, tablet or computer. This may be useful for a variety of medical or mental health conditions including diabetes, heart failure (HF), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), depression or post-traumatic stress

Video Telehealth - Instead of fighting traffic or mass transit to see a provider, the provider comes to you via secure video.

Your Healthcare, Your Way.
Where You Want It. When You Want It.

Home Telehealth



In Office Visits

Video Telehealth



Secure Messaging

For more information, contact your
VA Health Care Team.

Visit: www.nynj.va.gov/virtualhealth.asp



The same technology used to talk to one another via phone or webcam, may be used by your VA healthcare provider. Your VA healthcare provider can now see you via video webcam at your VA community based outpatient clinic (CBOC), VA facility, or from your home.

For more information go to: www.nynj.va.gov/virtualhealth.asp



EMPOWERING HEALTH THROUGH FITNESS



Veterans want to be strong and healthy while they are young and also as they age. Acknowledging this wish, one of VA's key strategic goals is to "Empower Veterans to Improve their well-being." To enhance delivery of preventive health care, JJ Peters Bronx VAMC recently launched a high-intensity fitness Boot Camp. This program aims to serve Veterans who previously had little contact with VA because they are younger and generally healthy, with few medical needs.

Bronx VA's Rehabilitation Medicine hopes to help instill a tradition of exercise, bridging the gap between active service and a successful and healthy life in the community.

The Boot Camp is designed to offer a very intense workout, appealing to strong individuals for whom traditional physical therapy programs are not sufficiently challenging. Many of the participants are recently discharged, dealing with the stress of job hunting, beginning school, and adapting to or starting families.

The proposal was enthusiastically embraced by Medical Center Director, Dr. Erik Langhoff and implemented by Dr. Klingbeil, Chief, Rehabilitation Medicine and staff. It is housed at the JJ Peters Bronx VA Medical Center in a motivating, Boot-Camp-like setting—a high-tech, climate-controlled, domed Army tent. "We are receiving positive comments from Veterans and staff," says Dr. Klingbeil. Our aim was to integrate VA into the lives of our Veterans, to give them a healthy workout, a healthy outlook, and a relationship with VA health professionals who will be there to sustain them, through the years."

EMPOWERING HEALTH BY IMPROVING ACCESS



*(l-r) Keith Robinson, NP, OEF/OIF, Program Nurse
Maritza Bati, RN*

It was staffed by Keith Robinson, NP, OEF/OIF; Program Nurse Maritza Bari, RN; Outreach Specialist, Marine Corps Veteran Lyn Johnson, and others.

“The vesting gets the Veteran up and running as a new patient,” explains Mr. Robinson. “Once in the VA system, Veterans have easy access to follow-up appointments and referrals for specialized clinics.” Mr. Robinson says he was also available in the Mobile Medical Unit to give flu shots and write prescriptions as needed.

The patient first up that morning was Welby Alcantara, Marine Corps Veteran and John Jay Coordinator of Military and Veteran Services. “I had a shot and a physical,” says Mr. Alcantara. “There’s less hassle than dealing with the train going to the hospital. Boom! And, it’s done and I’m off to work.”

Use of a well-equipped Mobile Medical Unit on college campuses is the latest thrust among outreach efforts already in place at Fordham University and CUNY’s John Jay and Baruch Colleges. Dr. Yvette Branson, VA New York Harbor Healthcare System’s Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) Initiative Coordinator, is stationed on several campuses weekly, enrolling and advising student Veterans and referring them for VA’s medical and social services.

Now, these services are being augmented by the Mobile Medical Unit and its clinical staff. One day in early spring, the Harbor’s Mobile Medical Unit was parked in front of John Jay’s North Hall.

Mr. Robinson was available to get the ball rolling on vesting Veterans by providing comprehensive physical exams in the privacy of the Mobile Medical Unit.

HONORING SERVICE THROUGH EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) provides services that both honor Veterans and assist them on a road to improved health. Acknowledging that sharing knowledge leads to empowerment, WRIISC has developed a number of tailored educational classes to educate and support Veterans.



Agent Orange: What you need to know

“Agent Orange: What you need to know,” is a popular class for Vietnam

Veterans held at the New Jersey WRIISC, VA New Jersey Health Care System’s East Orange campus. Vietnam Veterans continue to have questions about Agent Orange and its possible effects on health. Providing Veterans with the most up-to-date scientific information allows patients to address their concerns while honoring their service and sacrifice. Feedback from the class continues to be extremely positive and Veterans appreciate the time and attention they receive. The newest class is focused on understanding exposure to fuels and solvents for concerned Veterans of all eras. This class provides excellent information and in addition to the information provided during these exposure classes, Veterans are particularly impressed that an environmental medicine specialist is also available to answer any questions.

The “My Best Self” class is geared toward helping Gulf War Veterans effectively manage pain and sleeplessness and other chronic problems that can interfere with the quality of daily life. The class empowers Veterans to take charge of their health and live the best life possible, regardless of symptoms. For more information, contact the NJ WRIISC at 1-800-248-8005.

HONORING SERVICE BY PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE PAST

The Shadowbox Project started in 2012, when Vietnam Veterans at VA Hudson Valley Healthcare System created shadowboxes with Creative Arts Therapist Rosemarie Rogers, Ancillary Care, and Barbara Smith, PhD., Mental Health. Each Veteran produced a "shadowbox" as a metaphoric container in which they could safely place symbols of their Vietnam experience and the trauma it produced. For many of the Veterans, this simple, symbolic expression was the first time they were able to access critical aspects of their war experiences that had haunted them for decades.



Shadowbox

"The idea was to empower Vietnam Veterans in treatment for PTSD gain a deeper understanding of their combat experience through the expressive arts," says Ms. Rogers. "We conceived the work in three parts: A depiction of being 'In Country,' of coming 'Back to the World,' and 'A return to self and the present.' Liberated by the creation of the boxes, the Veterans were able to further their healing process by finally being able to voice and share in words their long-repressed feelings."

The Shadowboxes were exhibited at Rockland Community College and various Veterans' art events as a way of reengaging a community that more than 50 years ago turned their backs on the returning soldiers. The Veterans were invited by Ossining High School on Veterans Day, where students engaged with Veterans about their artwork. Profoundly moved by this experience, the students invited the Veterans back to collaborate on a commemorative video entitled, "The 1st Annual Living History Project." This innovative approach to healing trauma utilizing art therapy has been recognized by VA nationally as a "Best Practice" for Patient Centered Care.

Tai Chi 3 Staff from Northport experience a session of Tai Chi to understand how the therapy assists Veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and other combat stress related conditions and help them relax and sleep.



EMPOWERING HEALTH THROUGH STRESS RELIEF

Some people lie down in the evening and wake up in the morning refreshed and prepared to face a new day. But many Veterans can't get to sleep for hours because their anxiety and stress keeps them hyper-vigilant and unable to calm down.

"Sleep disorders are responsible for the symptoms of sleepiness, fatigue, headaches, body pain, irritable bowels, depression and anxiety," explains Dr. Avram R. Gold, a Northport VA Medical Center Sleep Medicine specialist.

With sleep disorders affecting as many as 30 percent of Veterans, VA has made treating sleep issues a high priority. Many different modalities of treatment are available to suit individual Veterans and their specific issues.

"The most common diagnosis made at VA's Northport Sleep Disorders Center is sleep disordered breathing," says Dr. Gold. "This condition is treated with nasal Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (nasal CPAP), which is a nasal mask that provides pressure to the throat, preventing snoring and complete upper airway obstruction (apnea) during sleep."

"I often speak to the Veterans about lifestyle behaviors that induce sleep, like getting exercise earlier in the day, eating dinner three hours before sleep, turning off the TV and bright lights and listening to restful music or guided imagery to quiet the mind. We always promote relaxation skills, like progressive relaxation, tai chi and meditation, and lavender essential oil in air diffusers or on a cotton ball near the bed," says Richelle Rapaport, RN, MSN AHN-BC, a board-certified clinical specialist in holistic nursing.

EMPOWERING HEALTH USING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

Veterans no longer have to worry about traffic delays, rain, sleet, or snow to see their health care providers for a traditional face-to-face visit. There is another option, “TeleResponse,” an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology.

TeleResponse provides a way to improve the care of patients who have low-risk, chronic conditions by allowing the Veteran to use a standard telephone to communicate about health-related issues. One particular type of TeleResponse system is Cardiocom. Optimized for patient ease-of-use, a clear, friendly voice prompts patients through their daily health check using simple instructions.

The Veteran uses the TeleResponse system on his/her phone to answer health-related questions. Because TeleResponse uses state-of-the-art voice recognition technology, patients can speak their responses directly into the phone. Patients who prefer not to do this, may also respond to health questions by using the buttons on their telephone.

The voice or button transmission allows the health care provider to monitor a Veteran’s response to health questions on a daily basis. The responses are then transmitted securely and privately through phone lines to a Care Coordinator Nurse.



Veteran Leonard Englebrook and Nurse Margaret Hogan, RN, review the use of a cell phone for Telehealth

Based on the transmission, the Care Coordinator Nurse may call the Veteran for further information. They can assist with the design of a personal plan of care to manage the health condition and provide referrals and further health education. This is all done in coordination with the Veteran’s Primary Care Patient Aligned Care Team. Currently, VA New Jersey Health Care System has approximately 1,000 Veterans enrolled in the Home Telehealth TeleResponse system.



Picture: (l-r) Veteran James Price, Veteran Duke Searles, Veteran Bryan Powell, Geoffrey Clarino, and Dennis Jobin

HONORING SERVICE BY GIVING BACK TO THOSE IN NEED

In 1996, the VA Hudson Valley Healthcare System initiated a Food Pantry at its Montrose Campus to serve low income outpatients and their families. Since then, a food pantry has also opened at the Castle Point Campus. Together, they represent the largest non-mandated food pantry at a VA facility. These food pantries were made possible through grants obtained from the New York State Department of Health and Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, the Food Bank of Westchester, contributions from community-based service organizations, and from numerous food drives in the community.

The food pantries significantly impact those they serve. During Fiscal Year 2013, the food pantry at Montrose and Castle Point served 3,905 households, consisting of 676 children, 4,638 adults and 1,815 elderly individuals. In addition, \$15,774 in funds and \$157,446 in nonperishable food items were donated for fiscal year 2013 for both campuses.

As a result of volunteers' diligence, the food pantries at VA Hudson Valley Healthcare System have consistently passed Food Bank annual inspections with excellent ratings. In June 2007, the Montrose Food Pantry and the volunteer supervisor were the recipients of the Food Bank of Westchester's Hunger Heroes Service Provider Award. In 2013, The Food Bank of Westchester presented Duke Searles, Volunteer, Montrose Campus, with the 2013 Hunger Heroes Award. In addition, VA Hudson Valley Healthcare System and its volunteers received the American Hospital Association's Hospital Awards For Volunteer Excellence for their Community Service Program.

HONORING SERVICE BY REMEMBERING THOSE WHO SERVED

When the Dignity Memorial replica of the Vietnam War Memorial was installed for one week in Fall 2011, hundreds of Veterans, students, community members and staff came to view it in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Garden Courtyard. Some made rubbings of their loved one's names inscribed on the Wall. Others took a quiet moment to remember the men and women who served and sacrificed in Vietnam. As the "Wall that Heals" moved on to its next location, the Vietnam Veterans of the Northport VAMC felt a void created by its absence.

"It was amazing to see how the Wall touched so many people," says Richard Kitson, President of the Suffolk County Vietnam Veterans of America and Chief of Voluntary Service at Northport VAMC. "So a group of us got together and decided to build our own monument, honoring all Veterans from all wars."

After almost two years of hard work and deliberation, four-ton black granite stones, laser etched with imagery from American wars, came together to form Northport VAMC's Wall of Wars monument. After seeing the beautiful imagery of the first stone placed, the Vietnam War panel, the others were quickly sponsored by generous and patriotic donors across Long Island.

In January 2014, the last of 12 stones were placed. Now the monument stands as a lasting tribute to the men and women who fought for our nation's independence and freedom.

The Revolutionary War panel is lifted into place, completing the Wall of Wars Monument at Northport VA Medical Center on January 17, 2014.



EMPOWERING HEALTH BY PROMOTING RESILIENCE

"I didn't want to die or go to prison," says Anthony Stamatouras, explaining what motivated him, along with a supportive family, to give up Acid/LSD. Now, a full-time Peer Specialist in VA' New York Harbor Healthcare System's Mental Health Outpatient Service, Mr. Stamatouras has been clean for 17 years.

Unlike many Veterans with a history of addiction, Mr. Stamatouras was never homeless. His family lives comfortably on Sutton Place. He first got into drugs while attending college. Since his recovery, Mr. Stamatouras has earned a Master's Degree in Psychology at Touro College and will soon earn a Bachelor's Degree in Health Services Management from Berkeley College in NYC. He is married and celebrating his 9th anniversary this year. Completely committed to the idea that "recovery works," Stamatouras is devoted to assisting people who have struggled with addiction, helping them give up their dependency on drugs and alcohol and lead productive lives.

Linda Kaplan, RN,PCTC, 17N, says, "Mr. Stamatouras has made a tremendous positive impact."

"Mr. Stamatouras is very candid about his clinical history, convinced that his openness will give hope of mental health recovery to others. He was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, a mental health illness he believes led to his struggle with substance abuse. Now, because of his own resilience, the help of his family and VA, he is not only doing well but helping individuals dealing with similar challenges," says John Tatarakis, RN, Clinical Nurse Specialist/Local Recovery Coordinator.



(l-r) Anthony Stamatouras, Peer Specialist and Marghuerita Turner, WW II AF Veteran



The group

EMPOWERING HEALTH BY SHARING RECOVERY

Diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), everyday routines like getting dressed can represent a monumental chore for Veteran Bill Crain. But, Mr. Crain forges ahead, inspiring others with his strength and self-deprecating humor.

Mr. Crain is the longest participating member of a very large and robust group of Veterans who have come to VA for many years, to discuss whatever is on their minds. When things get emotional, the group will remind one another, evoking his inspiration: "Dude, Chill Like Bill."

Psychologist Kris Martin leads the group. "We come together to discuss some pretty emotional things," says Dr. Martin, "from military experiences to issues at home or work. It can get intense. Bill participates and helps bring consensus."

The group members pooled their money and bought "Chill Like Bill" shirts, which they are selling to raise money for ALS research. To order a shirt, contact Dr. Kristopher Martin at the James J. Peters VA, 718-584-9000 ext. 3415.

MORE: <http://www.bronx.va.gov/BRONX/features/ChillLikeBill.asp>

WHERE YOU CAN FIND US



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

41 Castle Point Road,
Wappingers Falls,
NY 12590
(845) 831-2000

COMMUNITY CLINICS:

Carmel

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

Monticello

55 Sturgis Road
Monticello, NY 12701
(845) 791-4936

Port Jervis

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

New City

345 North Main Street
New City, NY 10956
(845) 634-8942

Pine Plains

Eastern Dutchess
Community Clinic
2881 Church Street, Rt. 199
Pine Plains, NY 12567
(518) 398-9240

Goshen

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

Poughkeepsie

Freedom Plains Executive Park
488 Freedom Plains Road
Suite 120
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603
(845) 452-5151



VA JAMES J. PETERS MEDICAL CENTER

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

COMMUNITY CLINICS:

White Plains

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

Yonkers

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

Queens (current)

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

Queens (soon to open)

47-01 Queens Blvd.
Sunnyside, NY 11104
(718) 741-4800



VA NORTHPORT (LONG ISLAND)

MEDICAL CENTER:

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

COMMUNITY CLINICS:

Bay Shore

132 East Main Street
Bay shore, NY 11706

East Meadow

2201 Hempstead
Turnpike, Building "Q"
East Meadow, NY 11554
(516) 282-0670

Patchogue

4 Phyllis Drive
Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 754-7978

Riverhead

300 Center Drive,
Griffing Building
Riverhead, NY 11901
(631) 722-4950



VA NEW JERSEY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM MEDICAL CENTERS:

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:

Brick

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

Elizabeth

654 East Jersey Street, 2A
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
(908) 994-0120
Hamilton University Off.

Hackensack

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

Hamilton

Plaza 1
3635 Quakerbridge Road
Hamilton, NJ 08619
(609) 570-6600

Jersey City

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

Morris Plains

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

Paterson

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

Piscataway

14 Wills Way
Piscataway, NJ 08854
(732)-981-8193

Tinton Falls

The Atrium
55 Gilbert Street, Bldg. 4
Tinton Falls, NJ 08854
(732) 842-4751



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:

Brooklyn

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

Staten Island

1150 South Avenue
3rd Floor, Suite 301
Staten Island, NY 10314
(718) 761-2973

Harlem

55 West 125th Street
11th Floor
New York, NY 10027
(646) 273-8125

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