On the Beat
Minneapolis VA Health Care System
APRIL 2017

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VA Leaders Receive Input on Choice Program From Veterans, Politicos, Staff and Providers

For more than six hours on March 29, four staff from VA Central Office heard from Minneapolis VA employees, Veterans, county veteran service officers, aides to congressmen and senators, community providers and the Minnesota Hospital Association on the VA Choice program.

The VACO team included: Dr. Baligh Yehia, Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Community Care; Jake Leinenkugel, a former Marine and beer company executive and current Special Advisor to the White House on Veterans Affairs; Megan Parker, executive assistant to Dr. Yehia; and Susan Reed, Executive Director for Revenue Operations, in the Office of Community Care.

By the end of the day, the VA visitors had several pages of notes and a better understanding of the VA choice program from the perspective of its stakeholders.

The VACO team also attended a Veterans Town Hall at a VFW in North St. Paul for two hours in the evening.
4D ‘Super Clinic’ Officially Open to Veterans

Minneapolis VA Medical Center has opened its first “Super Clinic” on 4D.

So what is a “super clinic?”

The new primary care super clinics were designed to incorporate the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) Model where a medical team of primary care providers, RNs, LPNs, and MSAs work alongside mental health, pharmacists, dieticians, therapists and other team members within the same area.

“The Super Clinic concept promotes a team approach to support the veterans with an individualized plan of care unique to their needs, and to ensure the veteran can receive streamlined, timely care,” said Lori Pawelski, RN, 4D clinic nurse manager. “For example: A veteran may come for a medical visit with multiple diagnoses and problems. The veteran may need to see the pharmacist for medication adjustments, physical therapy for an exercise regimen, and a psychologist to help cope with mental health issues. These issues can all be dealt with in the 4D super clinic.”

The primary care super clinic was designed for primary care to provide care to veterans in various modalities such as group visits, same day visits, telephone care, and secure messaging through My HealtheVet.

Ms. Pawelski added, “The 4D primary care clinic promotes veterans to see alternative caregivers other than the primary care providers at times, such as seeing RNs, LPNs, pharmacists and psychologists. Veterans don’t have to go to multiple physical areas to receive their care. They can stay in the super clinic.”

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As part of a continuing effort to hear first-hand from Veterans, the Minneapolis VA held a Town hall on March 29 at VFW Post #1350 in North St. Paul. The Town Hall forum program launched in Fall 2014. Since then, VAMCs across the country have met veterans in the community to build relationships, gather input and respond to concerns. Questions ranged from waiting times in clinics, payments for ambulance service, publication of VA policies on the public website, to delivery of medications to apartment buildings. In addition to the Minneapolis VA leadership team (Director Patrick Kelly, Associate Director Kurt Thielen and Deputy Medical Director Dr. Kristin Nichol), two VA officials from VACO attended - Dr. Baligh Yehia, Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Community Care, and Jake Leinenkugel, Special Advisor to the White House – and VISN23 Director Janet Murphy. The two-hour forum also included a session by local VBA Regional Office and Fort Snelling National Cemetery leadership.
**Events**

**April 5** – MSA Hiring Event. 2-6 pm in auditorium. Onsite interviews for multiple positions! Attendees should bring a resume, VA Application and, if applicable, Veteran documentation. Call 612-467-2060 with questions or visit www.Minneapolis.va.gov for more information.

**April 12** – Adaptive Sports Expo, 11 am - 2 pm in auditorium.

**April 26** - Veterans Job Fair - 1:30 to 4 pm in the Auditorium and the Flag Atrium Balcony.

**April 29** – Get in Gear running events at Minnehaha Falls Park. Runners will be parking at the VA and taking shuttle bus. VA police will be on site to insure runners do not park in VA ramp or veterans parking areas.

**May 3** – Research Day. 12:30 to 1:30 pm, plenary session in the auditorium. Keynote Speaker: Erin Krebs, MD, MPH. Poster presentations in 2nd floor flag atrium balcony to follow. See flyer on Page 16.

**May 17** – VA2K walk around the medical center.

**May 29** – Memorial Day.

**June 7-10.** VFW State Convention.

**FARMER’S MARKET RETURNS FOR 11TH YEAR.** Every Tuesday, June 21 - October 31. Vendors will be located outside the Veterans Parking Ramp.

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**SW Minnesota Clears Waiting List for Homeless Veterans; State Houses 856 Vets Since 2014**

Eighteen southwest Minnesota counties have found housing for every known homeless veteran, according to the state’s Department of Veterans Affairs.

The state VA made the announcement on March 18.

The milestone is part of a statewide push to end veteran homelessness established in 2014 using a voluntary registry for homeless veterans. The registry helps staff members personalize housing plans in order to make them more likely to last. Once registered, veterans are typically housed within four months.

The VA and its partners, including the Minneapolis VAMC, have housed 856 people since December of that year, and are looking to find homes for about 200 more.

The 18 counties make up the country’s 40th region to clear its housing waiting list for homeless veterans. It is also the first area in Minnesota to do so. The counties include: Big Stone, Chippewa, Cottonwood, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Meeker, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, Rock, Swift and Yellow Medicine.

Officials said progress is the result of a joint statewide goal to end Veteran homelessness in Minnesota. The Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness – made up of Commissioners of 11 State agencies, the Chair of the Metropolitan Council, and Governor Mark Dayton’s office – have partnered with mayors from 10 Minnesota communities, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans, the United State Department of Veterans Affairs and private and public sector organizations as part of this commitment.
APRIL 2017 EMPLOYEES OF MONTH

ADMINISTRATIVE
Tamra Krech
Program Analyst, Education Service

From her nominator: I sent an email message to the CAC team to request several changes to a CPRS consult. Ms. Krech replied and explained that the process for requesting changes was to enter them through SharePoint, rather than via email message. She gave me very clear directions for accessing the SharePoint site. However, I was not immediately able to follow up and planned to enter the SharePoint request the following business day. Before I had a chance to do so, I received another message from Ms. Krech saying that she had already completed the changes in question AND had also entered the SharePoint request on my behalf so that I would not need to do so. I have had other occasions in which to work with Ms. Krech over the years, and she has always been helpful. However, this particular instance clearly highlighted her willingness to go above and beyond for a co-worker. Her simple act of kindness showed true team spirit, and her actions were very much appreciated, especially on a very busy work day. I suspect that this type of action is not unusual for her and that others have benefited from her kindness and excellent customer service as well. Thank you for considering her for the Employee of the Month designation.

CLINICAL
Jason Coleman, Pharmacist

Jason’s ethical work practices as well as visible support of Veterans and colleagues are best reflected by using the I CARE Core Values for his attitude, teamwork and customer service:

- Integrity - Jason helps pharmacy staff 'fix' computer and operational issues such as e-billing insurance copays, rejected claims, controlled substance order entry, compound medications and drug product file messaging. He does all of this as part of his Clinical Pharmacist workday.
- Commitment- Dr. Coleman comes to work prepared; he’s never seen to have a ‘bad day’. He picks up additional shifts with little or no notice. He is a ‘go-to’ subject matter expert for billing, compounding knowledge, compatibility; he never complains about work or work conditions. He always has a positive attitude.
- Advocacy – His work practices are ethical and caring in nature; he willingly assists coworkers, does what he can to fill the needs of the veteran; looks for ways insurance companies to pay co-pays, thus keeping financial strain to veterans at a minimum.
- Respect - Jason has earned the respect of co-workers (ex-pharmacy call center technicians often request to speak with him). He’s a source of operational and clinical knowledge, especially in times of trouble shooting a patient supply or even clinical care issue
- Excellence - Jason has a calm demeanor; late September he observed a colleague having difficulty working with an aggressive/upset veteran in the outpatient pharmacy counseling area. He politely asked if he could assist in helping the veteran get what was needed. Jason listened, used calm demeanor and was able to de-escalate the situation quickly while providing the level of attention and service the veteran felt was very helpful.
80 Minneapolis VA Nurses Complete Certification

Approximately 80 Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, and Advanced Practice Nurses came out for the annual Certified Nurses Day Recognition Event held on Monday, March 20. Nurse Managers sponsored a luncheon. Nursing certification formally recognizes specialized knowledge, skills, and experience that promote optimal health outcomes. It is a benchmark in over 100 specialties that is analogous to board certification in other disciplines. The completion of a national standardized certification exam and adherence to practice standards is required to obtain the certification. MVAHCS has 240 certified nursing staff and offers an award for nurses who have interest to pursue their certification. Contact Pam Snyder (4382) for details or see sharepoint site: vaww.visn23.portal.va.gov/min/SiteDirectory/MVAHCSNursing/certification/default.aspx


HONORS AND AWARDS

Minneapolis VA Earns GOLD Wellness Award - The Employee Health & Well-Being (EHWB) Program, within the Office of Occupational Health Services, Patient Care Services, announced the winners of the Veterans Health Administration EHWB Award of Excellence. The purpose of the award is to recognize those locations that have demonstrated achievement in the area of employee health promotion and well-being. Facilities were encouraged to apply for designation as a Site of Excellence. Selection of winners was based on demonstrated leadership support, infrastructure, and policies and programs dedicated to EHWB.

Gary Goldish, MD, Receives PVA Award – The Paralyzed Veterans of America Board of Directors and Executive Committee has named Gary Goldish, MD, medical director of the EC&R PSL, recipient of the prestigious PVA Speedy Award, Non-Member category. This special award is scheduled to be presented during PVA 71st Annual Convention, May 20, in National Harbor, Maryland.
Joane K. Anderson, Nursing Assistant, has worked at the VA for over 24 years. She teaches everyone - patients included about the use, application and care of everything Orthopedic. One of the truly remarkable things about her is her caring and compassionate nature for all of our veterans. She genuinely appreciates the sacrifices that our vets have made, for our freedoms. In turn, they know her and trust her. You will never hear her say to a patient, you cannot be seen today. She will say: "Have a seat and I will go get a doctor." This attitude is extremely valuable to our patients, and she has been a constant in many of their lives for many years. She makes a busy clinic run seamlessly.

Douglas S. Bergeson, Motor Vehicle Operator, ensures that the Visitor's Entrance is cleaned before patients arrive and ensures that the roads are cleared, sidewalks are shoveled and salted and flags placed on Veterans Drive. On his own time, he has tended to the pruning, fertilizing of roses on the Statue Circle. He assists with turf rejuvenation and planting shrubs throughout the campus. He has designed and implemented a repair that resolved a serious safety issue in the Mental Health Department secured ward that had existed for many years by converting an external window shade control with a flush mount control and received accolades from mental health safety inspectors.

Jerald G. Beyer, Property Disposal Technician, has taken Property Disposal and Re-Utilization to a new level. Jerry has processed nearly $20k in computer equipment as part of The Computers for Learning Program. This program supports local schools in adding monitors and CPU's at no cost to the school system. Jerry also recycles all our old electronic equipment through UNICOR Industries so our waste is being processed correctly and the precious metals are being recovered and not being dumped in our local landfills. He manages the Logistics Excess Property SharePoint Site and posts pictures of excess property for staff to re-utilize if needed. Due to his support and dedication, this has been very instrumental and saved Minneapolis thousands of dollars in new equipment requests.

Karen A. Doerfler, Registered Nurse, Home Based Primary Care, works with Veterans with chronic and complex diseases like diabetes, hypertension, CHF, COPD, dementia, and mental health diagnoses. She demonstrates excellent clinical reasoning while managing a panel of medically-complex HBPC patients. She provides valuable education, medication reconciliation, and med set up. It is evident that the assessments, interventions, and education provided during home visits positively affect the outcomes of the Veterans that she serves. She is a leader in incorporating integrative therapies into the care she provides in the home setting, for example aromatherapy for managing anxiety or chronic pain.

Christopher R. Erbes, PhD, Supervisory Research Psychologist/Clinical Investigation has contributed to our facility as a clinician, as a PTSD treatment researcher, as the outpatient PTSD team leader, and in the creation of the Clinician Investigator Team, which has cleared administrative barriers that reduced research productivity, and substantially increased our facility's ability to obtain extramural funding for research. Despite the roles of mentor and supervisor, Chris still manages to propose and execute impressive research projects, expand his research expertise, and collaborate with other researchers to continue ongoing longitudinal studies which have answered important questions that have improved care of veterans and understanding of their difficulties post-deployment.

Franklin E. Farnsworth, Diagnostic Radiologic Technician works in the Cardiology Department, performing his highly skilled duties in the Catheterization and Electrophysiology labs in an outstanding manner. He is equally skilled in the advanced coronary angioplasty procedures, and was an integral member of the team which implemented the Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement program. These procedures utilize very sophisticated cardiac mapping, intracardiac measurements, intracardiac ultrasound and ablation equipment. His warm and friendly demeanor helps to decrease patient anxiety. Due to his "can do" attitude and collaborative work style, Franklin is a coworker favorite and is very often personally requested by the Cardiologists to assist during challenging procedures.

B Patrice K. Garrity, Advance Medical Support Assistant, is an AMSA at the Northwest Metro Clinic in Ramsey. She is always very friendly and respectful to the veterans. She will go above and beyond to help out a veteran to make sure that the veteran is satisfied and any issues are resolved. Medical Support Assistants sometimes get the brunt of an unhappy or disgruntled veteran, but Patti always keeps her composure and has a calm and soothing voice. Patti is very involved in her Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) and does a lot of extra things for her team. Her positive attitude about everything helps boost morale among the employees. The little things that she does help the clinic run smoothly.

Jacqueline E. Goettl, Registered Nurse, is an Assistant Nurse Manager in the Hematology/Oncology Clinic, a busy procedure clinic which averages 140 patients per week. She is constantly collaborating with pharmacy, physicians, mental health, social work, interventional radiology, and many other disciplines to provide best patient care with optimal outcomes and is a strong advocate for veterans and her staff. Ms. Goettl’s initiatives, as well as her existing role on the Integrative Therapies Committee, prompted executive leadership to appoint her to the role of primary educator of the VAMC Staff Retreats in order to address the facility wide issues of staff burn out, staff retention, compassion fatigue, and increasing nursing shortages due to call ins.
Heidi A. Hoover, Supervisory Dietitian and Dietetic Internship Director, has served our veterans in one role or another at the Minneapolis VA for over 37 years! Her amazing dedication to our upcoming Dietetic professionals shines through with her commitment to working with them on a daily basis to provide advice, suggestions, feedback, and coordinate experiences that produce the best entry level dietitians. She takes on the role of teacher, preceptor, director, counselor, and a "mom figure" to interns. They absolutely love her! Heidi is also known for her work in obesity and metabolic management with numerous publications and her prominent leading roles and chair positions with many related local, state and national groups. She is very compassionate in what she does.

John R. Kilsdonk, Registered Nurse, brings his previous ICU training, experiences, and contacts to the Twin Ports Clinic setting to provide efficient, thorough, and knowledgeable care to not only his own patients but to any of our Veterans needing care. Several Veterans have written letters of appreciation and praise for the respectful, caring manner and expertise he consistently provides. He readily gives his direct contact number to patients so they can call with any concerns and he will always be an advocate for the Veteran. He anticipates provider needs with excellent triage skills. He is one of the first to respond to a call for help anywhere in the clinic and has been a great mentor for the nursing staff. It is amazing how this young man remains so calm and focused in any and all circumstances.

Robert M. Knight, Health Technician, prioritizes the patient’s care, and takes on new challenges with enthusiasm and commitment. He has the ability and skill to deliver care to a variety of patients in different age groups and gender. He is always mindful of patient’s needs medically and emotionally in all types of situations. Mr. Knight works well with coworkers and professionals on the health care team, as well as patients and their families. He interacts with customers and fellow veterans in a courteous, tactful, and helpful manner. Mr. Knight is recognized by all SCI/D team members as a hard-working, innovative and a caring team member. Being a veteran himself, he has gone the extra mile in his caring approach to our veteran patients. His caring manner and upbeat attitude is contagious.

Julia N. Perry, PhD, Psychologist serves as a Manager on the Mood Team. Over the years, she has provided education as well as consultative training to the Polytrauma Transitional Rehabilitation Program (PTRP) on ethics and boundaries. Dr. Perry has been very active in hospital-wide diversity trainings, education, and advocacy and is a role-model for the entire VA staff in this arena. Dr. Perry has provided Tai Chi classes for staff and veterans within the mental health service. She is directly and indirectly promoting the whole health, integrative therapies approach which is directly in line with the VA’s mission to offer whole person centered health care. Her positive attitude and willingness to give her time to promote staff self-care is refreshing. She creates a sense of calmness with her soothing and supportive demeanor.

Kellie J. Schoolmeesters, Nurse Educator, Her responsibilities include teaching New Employee Education (NEO). She shows professionalism, kindness and reassurance to our new arriving employees. This past year, while managing NEO, Kellie responded to a code and was the first person on the scene. She performed CPR, and was able to regain a pulse for an employee who fell to the ground. She then walked back into the auditorium, stayed calm and continued assisting the presenter. Neither the presenter nor the new employees where aware of the situation that just happened out of the auditorium. She remained calm, professional and never interrupted their focus on the education that was being presented. Kellie sets the tone for what makes the Minneapolis VA one of the best in the country.

Pam Snyder, Registered Nurse – Recruiter, has had notable challenges for both the VA and community nursing. Working with social media, Pam sponsored two hiring fairs at the Minneapolis VA resulting in an unprecedented 83 applicants for hard-to-fill positions. Pam keeps track of multiple vacancies, job postings, applicants and stays in contact with candidates and keeps them informed about what can be a lengthy hiring process. New nurse employees are always complimentary of Pam and her continued updates to reduce any anxiety over starting a new job. She assembles complex files to facilitate all of the new hire on boarding. Pam works hard to acknowledge nurses for accomplishments and works tirelessly behind the scenes to make the Minneapolis VA an employer of choice and a leader in nurse engagement.

Ravi J. Vanlanduyt, Lead Medical Supply Technician, works in Sterile Processing. He plays an integral role in the assembly 30 plus case carts each day. Reliability is one of his key attributes. Whether it’s a timely response to emergency add-on case cart needs or routine inquiries about instrumentation sets, Ravi consistently provides a high level of customer service. Ravi’s attitude is always exceptional. This is especially true when contacted about the changes, Ravi consistently demonstrates a positive attitude to a situation that could easily create extreme frustration. Ravi is also a "team player" who is willing to come up to the OR and assist staff with location of necessary supplies or instruments. As an essential part of the perioperative team, his level of knowledge and willingness to go the extra mile has a profound impact on patient care.

Laura L. Van Dam, Registered Nurse, above and beyond for her patients and has a thoughtful and genuine way of communicating which is admired by her patients. One Veteran wrote “Aside from her professional support, she also offered me empathy. I’ll never forget Ms. Laura’s encouraging words of support. She never criticized me which was important for my self-respect and dignity.” Ms. Van Dam is a strong patient advocate, especially with end of life issues. She appropriately consults with social work and the chaplains to provide patients and families with the needed resources. Many veterans, coworkers and other disciplines that encounter Ms. Van Dam are extremely pleased with her professionalism, efficiency, collaboration and advocacy.
Minneapolis Police Officers Bring Home Two Top Awards

By Sandra Roy
Public Affairs Specialist

Minneapolis VA has some of the “top cops” in all of the VA Health Care System.

Here’s proof:

Three Minneapolis VA officers graduated from the VA Basic Police Officer Course held at North Little Rock VA campus. Trainees are educated on Veteran Centric Policing and the ideology on why the VA Police exist.

Two officers received top awards!

Officer Brian Cody received the Top Gun Award for high score in VA Basic Police Officer Course Top Gun Competition with a score of 438 and Officer Gregory Stewart received the Leadership Award for motivation, teamwork and leadership.

Officer Cody served 4.5 years in the US Marine Corps with three combat deployments to Iraq. Cody’s VA career started in the PIV office until he transferred into the Minneapolis VA police department in October, 2016.

When asked what is the best part of winning this award? Cody responded, “I do not really brag or boast about awards. I just try and do the best that I can and try and improve.” He stated his aspirations for the future, “I’m hoping for a long career in the VA and will try to progress within the VA Police. Working at the VA has been the best job I’ve had. I enjoy talking with fellow Veterans and helping them out the best I can.” Officer Cody resides in Rosemount, MN. He enjoys hiking through State Parks, fishing and hunting in his spare time.

Officer Gregory Stewart began his career serving in the United States Army as an active duty Infantryman with the 1st Calvary Division. He experienced combat deployment to Baghdad, Iraq. In 2006 and was honorably discharged in 2007 after sustaining an injury during deployment. He joined the Minneapolis VA in October, 2016.

In response to what this award meant to him, Officer Stewart said, “I was presented with an award for leadership and the best part of it was knowing my fellow classmates recognized me by voting me in for it. I felt very humbled and proud on graduation day knowing my wife, Minneapolis VA leadership and classmates were all in attendance.”

When asked about working for the VA police and caring for Veterans, Gregory responded, “I am confident that this is home for me. I have a background as a combat Veteran and feel that I can relate to a lot of the people that work and receive care here. I enjoy the dynamic of working here at the VA along with the opportunity to serve others again in a civilian setting. My biggest aspiration in life is to be an expert in my career choices and eventually have the opportunity to teach and lead my own team.” Officer Stewart is a Minnesota native from Shakopee and also works part time as a firefighter for the Shakopee Fire Department.
Outcomes of Amputations in Combat Veterans Analyzed

Minneapolis VA surgeon Vernon Sechriest, MD, is a co-author of a study from the Naval Health Research Center (NHRC), "A Comparison of Four-Year Health Outcomes following Combat Amputation and Limb Salvage," which was published online January 25 in PLOS ONE -- a peer-reviewed, open access scientific journal published by the Public Library of Science.

Early amputation in combat-injured service members with severe lower extremity injuries is generally associated with lower or similar prevalence for physical and psychological disorders than those treated with late amputation or limb salvage, primarily during the first several years after injury.

In NHRC's study, researchers also found that early amputation was associated with the reduced likelihood for wound complications, osteomyelitis, musculoskeletal disorders, and some psychological disorders when compared with the other groups. An important exception was early amputation was associated with an increased likelihood of developing osteoporosis during the first year after injury.

Researchers conducted a retrospective analysis of health records for 625 individuals with lower extremity amputation or limb salvage which resulted from combat injuries sustained in the Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts from 2001 through 2008.

PATIENT COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS

A disabled United States Marine Corps Veteran wrote to VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin. The letter was distributed widely by the VHA Chief of Staff: The VA clinical nurse specialist stated that I have “one of my most complex cases” due to long-term chronic pain, severe depression from many life changing events, posttraumatic stress disorder, and a diagnosed traumatic brain injury. There have been at least 3 times she has gone over-and-above the ‘call of duty’ to help me during very tenuous situations; and I can say with honesty and sincerity that SHE is primarily one of the reasons I am still alive. Her continued engagement in my care, when others would have likely given up long ago, is a hallmark of her personal dedication to her patients. She provides PREMIER mental health care, and does whatever she can to help ease the burdens I am tasked to bear. When I started my treatment with her, I was laying on the floor on a padded mat, because I am physically unable to sit down. I know that she treats every one of her patients the same way.”

A Minnesota Veteran living at his winter home in Arizona wrote about his decision to return to the Minneapolis VA for care: We (my wife and I) talked about going to Phoenix VA, which would have been closer, or coming back to Minneapolis. Actually, the decision was pretty easy when we thought about it. On 8 February, we walked into the emergency department. As I lay there, I could feel the fear and stress dissipate from my mind and body. That’s when I was positive that we made the right decision coming back to Minnesota. The emergency room staff was very efficient and caring for me, and then we noticed a young man standing by my bed and with a big smile and with a reassuring and calming look, he said, “Hi, I’m Mike. Not, I’m Doctor Mike, Just Mike. I later found out his name: Dr. Michael Schnaus. He cared for me like we were family. He along with Dr. Adabag and Dr. Kristen were some of the finest doctors I have ever met.

An Edora, Iowa, Veteran wrote: Thanks to all of you who were there Feb. 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18. There is no way we can thank you enough for all you did and the way that we were treated at the hospital. You made us feel that you had known us all of our lives and were there to answer any questions that we may have had. On that Friday night, Dr. T and staff stayed late to put the pacemaker in. It was over and beyond duty. THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DID.

A Plymouth Veteran wrote a handwritten letter to the director: “I honestly believe that had I not come to the VA in early 2000 that I wouldn’t be talking to you right now. Actually, I’m writing a letter and that’s harder. My memory problem and aphasia are both alive in my world. And with the help of Dr. Rose Collins and others at at the Mpls VA, I’m able to write this letter and smile. Thank you so much for a great VA.
The Impact of Stress on Eating

By Jessica Mooney, MS, RD, Oregon VA

Emotions -- especially stress -- can have an impact on the types of foods we choose and how much we eat.

Stress can affect people in two different ways:

- Increasing food consumed: especially those that are high in salt, fat, or sugar.
- Decreasing food intake: losing one’s appetite because of stress.

If you find yourself emotionally eating, or not eating, you are not alone. There are many reasons people eat; and strong emotions can alter our eating patterns. However, our emotions do not have to alter our diets.

- Be mindful of your emotions. Know your triggers for certain emotions.
- Realize eating will not make the problem go away.
- Get active or distract yourself. Go for a walk either alone or with someone.
- Have a healthy meal or snack. Always have healthy snacks in the right portions at your desk.
- If you find you do not eat when you are stressed set an alarm on your phone to remind yourself when to eat.
- Consume meals in a relaxing environment. That means taking a step away from your desk and finding somewhere quiet and peaceful.

If you cannot handle a strong craving, try a healthier alternative or try a small amount of the food you are craving.

Easy Tips to Achieve Sound Sleep

Courtesy VHA Employee Health & Well-Being Program

Quality sleep habits improve your quality of life. A lack of sleep, on the other hand, inhibits productivity and increases your risk of various chronic diseases.

In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called insufficient sleep a public health epidemic after finding that 35 percent of American adults sleep less than seven hours a night.

In short, getting enough sleep is not luxury, but a necessity.

- Make sure you maintain your bedtime and wakeup schedule throughout the week—even on weekends -- so you get seven and a half to nine hours of sleep each night.
- Practice a low-key bedtime routine, such as listen to relaxing music and light stretching movements in a dimly-lit room. You’ll begin to associate the routine with bedtime, which can help you fall asleep more easily.
- Try not to eat heavy meals or do vigorous exercise within 2-3 hours of going to sleep.
- Keep work materials, computers, and televisions out of your bedroom to create a room that’s ideal for sleeping.
- Avoid caffeine and other stimulants at least six to eight hours before bedtime
- If you’re having trouble sleeping, dim the lights and try progressive relaxation or deep-breathing exercises to calm your body and mind.
- Our biological clock follows the 24-hour cycle of the sun, so it’s normal to start feeling drowsy after sundown. Stimulating bright lights from your television, laptop, or phone obstruct your body’s natural sleep rhythm. That’s why avoiding electronics before bed can help you fall asleep more easily.
- A simple technique is progressively relaxing your body by starting with your toes, then your feet, your lower legs, etc., until you reach your face. As you relax each area, just imagine all the stress melting away.

More information about improving your personal health at www.vapulse.net/groups/va-win
TAKE THE QUIZ: What do you know about the VA Call Center?

1. How many RNs currently work in the call center performing telephone triage?
   a. 6;  b. 12;  c. 21;  d. 45

2. True or False. The Minneapolis VA call center receives more calls than any other call center in our VISN.

3. True or False. Nurse Practitioners practice in the PCCC.

4. How many calls are received every month in the call center nurse line?
   a. 1,101 – 1,300;  b 1,327 – 2,255;  c. 3,106 – 3,999;  d. 4,710 – 5,997

5. True or False. The highest number of calls received in the call center general/scheduling line in one month last year was 42,276

ANSWERS (1. c; 2. True; 3. True; 4. d; 5. True)

Getting to Know the Minneapolis Primary Care Call Center

By Susan Waller, RN, BSN

The main point of entry for veterans into the Minneapolis VA Health Care System is the Primary Care Call Center (PCCC), located off Cedar at 66th St. in Richfield.

The PCCC is the first call most veterans make to the VA. Calls are answered by advanced medical support assistants (AMSAs). Currently there are 23 AMSAs, but will be expanding to a compliment of 21 FTE AMSAs with 7 FTE Lead AMSAs and 2 AMSA Supervisors.

The AMSA staff answers questions about many different topics; when people don’t know who to call, they call the PCCC. AMSAs direct calls appropriately to clinics and other resources in the hospital.

They schedule appointments for primary care clinics in the Minneapolis VA, most of the specialty care clinics in Minneapolis, and for outpatient clinics in Minnesota (Rochester, NW Metro in Ramsey and Maplewood) and in Wisconsin (Twin Ports, Hayward and Rice Lake). If the calls are regarding symptoms, the veteran is transferred to the PCCC nurse line so he/she can speak to an RN for triage. If the AMSA recognizes the patient is having an emergency situation, he/she will find the first available nurse for direct transfer of the caller; the veteran will not be transferred to wait in a queue.

There are currently 21 RNs from a wide variety of specialties in the PCCC (at a minimum, baccalaureate prepared, but there are also nurses with masters and doctoral degrees). This number includes the PCCC director and assistant nurse manager. The call center will eventually have 26 FTE RNs performing telephone triage.

The goal of the nursing staff is to triage quickly and efficiently and to get the veteran to the right level of care at the right time. This can mean the veteran will be advised to call 911 from home, he or she may get a clinic appointment, or the situation may be right for home care. In this instance, the triage nurse will perform patient education on self-care measures and answer any questions the patient may have, as well as instructing patient on when to seek medical attention if the condition changes.

There are also two nurse practitioners located in the PCCC. For certain medical conditions, the patient can be scheduled into a telephonic appointment with one of these providers. They will evaluate and treat the patient

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Minneapolis VA’s First Super Clinic Opens on 4D

Continued From Page 3

Nearby, 4E and 4F primary care super clinics are under construction. They will open around December 2017, which will bring all of the primary care clinics together in a common area within the medical center.

The new clinic has 33 exam rooms that are used for various caregivers to see patients. For example, an exam room may be used by physical therapy, or occupational therapy, so the veteran does not need to go down to rehab for their appointment.

Exam rooms may be used by pharmacy residents, social workers and dieticians intermittently. Integrative mental health providers have their offices within the clinics as they are a core part of the primary care pact teams. Pharmacy is embedded within the clinics as well and they see patients within the clinics.

4D also has large procedure rooms which make it possible for veterans who need an intervention such as from the surgery service line to provide consultative services.

The new clinic opened to veterans in December. An open house and ribbon cutting was held March 29.

Minneapolis VA Primary Care Call Center

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accordingly, in accordance with practice guidelines developed with providers in the primary care clinics.

In addition to AMSAs and RNs, the PCCC has added some LPN positions which will be more fully developed in the near future.

A pharmacist and 3 pharmacy techs are co-located with the PCCC, as well. This pharmacy contingent takes twice as many calls as the next largest pharmacy call center in the VISN.

The Minneapolis PCCC receives the most calls of all 10 call centers in VISN 23. The RNs now perform telephone triage for all of the St. Cloud VA outpatient clinics and are phasing in telephone triage for the remaining St. Cloud patients.

The staff is proud of that fact that 32% of the AMSA staff are veterans, and 17% of the RNs are veterans.
Keynote Speaker:
Erin Krebs, MD, MPH
Women’s Health Medical Director, Minneapolis VAHCS
“Research to Improve Chronic Pain Care”
12:30–1:30 PM, Main Auditorium

Poster Session and Demonstration Tables
1:30-3:30 PM, 2nd level Flag Atrium
Meet with VA research personnel to learn about current research on topics critical to Veteran’s health, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes, chronic pain, women’s health, mental health, prosthetics, post-traumatic stress disorder, Gulf War illness, and traumatic brain injury.

Research Day is an annual event that celebrates the accomplishments of the VA Research Program and recognizes the researchers, Veterans, and partners who support the program. Research Day provides an opportunity to honor Veterans and to highlight outstanding achievements in VA research.

Past participants and attendees include: executive leadership, physicians, fellows, trainees, and research staff from the Minneapolis VAHCS; University of Minnesota representatives and students; Congressional staff members; Veterans and active military members; and representatives from Veteran’s advocacy groups.