



VA MID-ATLANTIC HEALTH CARE NETWORK • VISN SIX

Vol. 2, No. 9

“Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here”

Voices of VISN 6

Official news from around *your* VISN

July 3, 2012

Richmond Hosts National Wheelchair Games

Six of seven athletes dubbed the “Original Seven” lead the Virginia delegation during the parade of athletes, part of the official opening ceremony for the 2012 National Veterans Wheelchair Games June 25. The “Original Seven” competed in the first Wheelchair Games in 1981. Those Games were thought to be a one-time occurrence. Fast forward 32 years and the Games, now the world’s largest wheelchair sporting event, returned to Richmond where it all began. Pictured, from left, are: Charlie Hayden, Mike Skelton, Jimmy May with torch, Chris Bacon, Wannie “Ike” Cooke, and Clarence Sumner. Not pictured is “Original Seven” member Chuck Willis. Go to Pages 5-8 for story and photos from the 2012 Wheelchair Games.



Steve Saxton

Amputee Gets Latest Bionic Technology

By Tom Cramer
VA writer/editor

VA now has the technology to enable Veterans with above-the-knee amputations to walk with a healthy, natural gait.

“The BiOM is a unique piece of technology that actually mimics the human body and allows an amputee to walk with the same, natural gait as a non-amputee,” said John Fox, supervisor of the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center Orthotic & Prosthetic Services Lab in Richmond, Va. “The system even contains a battery and a motor that provide you with a ‘power push-off,’ propelling you as well as the weight of the device. It literally mimics what our feet do when we walk.”

He added, “With a traditional prosthetic, you get tired because you’re using so much additional energy to move. With the BiOM, no additional effort is needed, so you don’t get tired.”

Several hundred people with below-the-knee amputations currently wear the BiOM ankle, developed by a company called iWalk. Made possible by funding from VA and the Department of Defense, iWalk’s BiOM ankle is the world’s first bionic ankle system that uses robotics to restore the function of missing anatomy in the calf muscle and Achilles tendon.

Recently, however, VA has begun mating the bionic ankle with a microprocessor knee to allow Veterans with above-the-knee amputations to walk normally. iWalk refers to this ankle-knee combo as the BiOM ‘AK.’

“This device is literally a miracle,” said William Gadsby, a 34-year-old Veteran who has been outfitted with both the BiOM ankle and a microprocessor knee known as the ‘X2,’ made by a company called Otto-bock. “A few months ago I was

Continued on Pg 5



Steve Wilkins

William Gadsby, a 34-year-old wounded Veteran, walks with both a BiOM ankle and an X2 microprocessor knee, while holding a chair above his head. Gadsby has described the bionic components as “a miracle.”

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From the Director

VISN 6 had the great privilege to host the 2012 National Veterans Wheelchair Games that ended in Richmond June 30. More than 500 Veterans turned out for this event, some coming from as far as Hawaii, Alaska and Great Britain. They made the trek to participate in a variety of events ranging from archery, basketball and bowling, to rugby, softball and soccer. Supporting them was an army of more than 3,000 volunteers ranging in age from 14 to 90 years old. Like the Veterans, they also came from near and far to assist. Of special note is that Richmond was home to the first Games back in 1981, and not only were we pleased to bring the Games back to where they began, but we were equally as excited to have seven of the original athletes join in this year's event.



Each day, VA cares for many who are confined to chairs, yet our most inclusive rehabilitation efforts could never provide as much opportunity for them to expand their horizons in the way these Games do. Just hearing their stories and watching them compete has truly broadened mine. Throughout the week, hundreds of Veterans put the world on notice that disabled does not mean unable. I am humbled by what I saw. Humbled...but not necessarily surprised.

While in uniform, servicemen and women are taught to overcome obstacles. These athletes did it then, and as Veterans, they're still doing it today.

It was obvious from the kickoff slalom on the steps of the Virginia State Capitol, to all the events and activities throughout the week, that regardless of the injury that brought them to this point in life they proved what Veterans can do. They demonstrated the same courage, drive, desire and sheer willpower that servicemen and women have brought to bear for more than two centuries to ensure America remains the home of the brave and the land of the free.

Regardless of age or circumstance, all have endured tough, life-changing challenges from the moment their way of life became tied to a wheelchair. But they did not quit. They did not give up. They did not surrender. Instead, they are meeting their challenges head-on. And through programs like these Games, where all get to see and learn from so many others who have met their challenges, our Veterans learn to be even more positive about what they can do.

My sincere thanks go out to all the families, friends and support staff, as well as to our Paralyzed Veterans of America partners, the City of Richmond, the wonderful sponsors and volunteers. I salute Chuck Sepich and his super crew at the McGuire VA Medical Center, and especially want to thank Alison Faulk, who has spent the entire last year overseeing the 52 committees who worked so hard to make these games a reality.

Most importantly, I want to say thanks to every athlete. Your presence provided inspiration to all of us. We have newfound respect and admiration for what it really means to persevere.

Voices of VISN 6 is published monthly by VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network.

Questions or comments about the newsletter, e-mail Bruce. Sprecher@va.gov or call 919-956-5541.

Excellent Care — Earned by Veterans — Delivered Here
Voices of VISN 6
Official news from around your VISN

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Once again, you demonstrated to the world that life does not stop because you are in a wheelchair. I hope that each of you will continue pursuing new and broader horizons throughout the year, and don't forget, we're hoping to see you all at the 2013 Games in Tampa.

We are all better people for having had this opportunity to be with you, to learn your stories and to watch you challenge yourselves in ways you probably once thought impossible.

I wish you all well and please, have a safe Fourth of July.
Sincerely,
Dan Hoffmann



Network Seeks Health Care Providers

The VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network is looking for highly qualified health care providers. If you or someone you know is looking for a challenging and rewarding opportunity, please contact Harold "Keith" Liles Jr., Mid-Atlantic Region's National Healthcare Recruitment Consultant, for additional information. Liles can be reached via email at Harold.Liles@va.gov or by phone at 919-408-4741.

Current Vacancies

Psychologist - Salisbury, N.C.

Clinical Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Primary Care Provider - Fayetteville, Wilmington, Hamlet, and Brunswick County N.C.

Pharmacist - Hampton, Va.

Dermatologist, Gastroenterologist, Urologist - Salem, Va.

Psychologist, Gastroenterologist - Beckley, W. Va.

Go Red For Women®
VA and the American Heart Association's Go Red movement are raising awareness of heart disease as the #1 killer of women Veterans. Connect with other military women in the Go Red Heart Match program.
LEARN MORE: www.womenshealth.va.gov
VA Health Care | American Heart Association | Go Red For Women

VA and the American Heart Association's Go Red For Women (@GoRed) movement are raising awareness of heart disease as the No. 1 killer of women and women Veterans. To connect via Facebook, create a profile, identify yourself as having served in the military and connect with other female Veterans and military women with similar experiences of heart disease in the Go Red Heart Match program. Sign up: www.GoRedForWomen.org/heart-match/Default.aspx OR bit.ly/tWC3j2

Learn more about the collaboration: www.womenshealth.va.gov



Brad Garner
Elizabeth Goolsby and Fayetteville VAMC employees, surrounded by Veterans and distinguished guests, cut the ribbon on a new \$3 million state-of-the-art emergency department.

New Emergency Department Improves Access/Services

Fayetteville VAMC hosted a ribbon cutting for its new \$3 million state-of-the-art emergency department, June 18.

“The medical center will continue to provide our Veterans with access to enhanced emergency care services and exceptional health care and specialty services they deserve,” said Fayetteville VAMC Director Elizabeth Goolsby at the event. “Our Veterans are the center of a collaborative health care team designed to meet the patient’s urgent and continuing care needs.”

The new emergency department is conveniently located at the C-wing emergency entrance on the basement floor of the medical center. The functional, integrated design improves access to patient care and locates medical center physicians and nurses together for immediate communication and access to laboratory, radiology and specialty services to meet the Veterans’ needs.

ED improvements include: laptop workstations in each bay to provide real-time documentation and access to patient records while interfacing throughout the medical center and the VA network system; new patient lifts to provide safe access and movement of patients while decreasing risk of injury to staff; and telemetry monitors providing real-time patient information, ensuring any change in a patient’s vital signs is immediately sent to the nurse/physician communications center for immediate care.

Among the enhanced emergency care services now available are: tele-consultation with specialty physicians at Durham VA for neurosurgery, cardiac catheterization; social worker support for a Veteran’s social needs, total women’s health care services in a private setting and mental health emergency services located within the emergency department.



Independence Day 2012

Celebrating the birth of the United States of America



Ryan Pleasants
Physician’s Assistant Laura Hart assists Mr. Shreeve with the “It’s Never 2 Late” computer at Salem VAMC.

Computer Technology Improving Veterans Lives

By Ryan Pleasants
Salem VAMC voluntary services

The Salem VAMC received three “It’s Never 2 Late,” computers on June 6. This computer is an interactive tool that engages Veteran residents by allowing them to play games, sing karaoke, and watch movies and television shows.

Last year, Dottie Rizzo and Laura Hart, from Salem VAMC, visited the Salisbury VAMC, where iN2L was already in use. They instantly fell in love with the computers.

Salisbury has a program, “Lunch Buddies,” that allows for staff members in other areas of the medical center to interact with Community Living Center residents.

Sometimes the residents are coherent, other times they are not; especially if the residents are suffering from severe dementia. The iN2L was used to interact with residents who were unable to converse, but could still interact.

Ms. Rizzo and Ms. Hart presented the idea to Salem VAMC and were able to get funding from the Comprehensive End of Life Care Initiative to purchase three computers. Using these computers will provide a more modern way for nursing staff to interact with

residents, assist with diversional activities, and allow unique interactions between residents and visiting family members. These computers will also engage some of the younger staff to spend more non-hygiene/personal care time with the residents.

The iN2L also has a relaxation program that plays soothing music and shows beautiful outdoor scenes like oceans, rivers, and sunsets. These features allow residents that are delirious, that have agitated dementia, and who are actively dying to relax and focus on the visuals and music. The iN2L may someday be used on psychiatric wards and intensive care units as an adjunct to medications for delirium or agitated dementia.

Currently the palliative aide is using the iN2L daily to involve residents in team games like Name That Tune, The Price Is Right, and Family Feud on the large screen television. Hospice Volunteers were also trained to use the equipment and are using the iN2L to interact with residents during their visits.

The iN2L is a great interactive tool for the Salem VAMC. In the future, the nursing staff hopes to have the capability for residents to be able to Skype with their families.

Hampton To Launch Medical Records Sharing Project

By Jennifer Askey
Hampton VAMC public affairs

The Hampton VAMC will serve as one of two launch sites for a VA and Department of Defense medical records-sharing program, the integrated electronic health record or iEHR. The other location for the iEHR pilot site is the San Antonio, Texas, VA facility.

The joint initiative aims to create a single electronic health record from the time of a service member's active duty to transition into the VA health care system, and onward. Information sharing between the two departments would allow doctors to make better-informed decisions about treatment.

During a recent visit to the Hampton facility, Dr. Barclay Butler, director of the DOD-VA Interagency Program Office, which manages the iEHR development, congratulated leadership and staff on being selected as one of the facilities serving as a pilot for what will become the world's largest electronic health record system.

Hampton VAMC Acting Medical Center Director Benita Stoddard said the physicians are definitely excited about the pilot program and recognize the importance of sharing in-

formation.

"We are honored to be chosen and have the right team in place to make it happen," Stoddard said. "We see this program as being especially timely with the number of service members returning from Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn in the future."

The plan calls for Hampton to begin implementing the iEHR program beginning in 2014 and then continue to build over three years. During the pilot, the first shared records will include lab and immunizations.

The visiting IPO team also noted that in addition to large Veteran population in the Hampton Roads area, the Hampton VA already had experience as a pilot site for another records-sharing initiative. In 2010, the federal government chose Hampton VAMC as the second pilot site for the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record

The VLER program, which launched in April 2011, is a data sharing initiative among VA and DOD clinics and several local private sector medical centers from which the military purchases healthcare services. Through VLER, clinicians from participating organizations can electronically, securely, and privately share



authorized patient data, ensuring around-the-clock access to critical health information.

The iEHR will be open in architecture and non-proprietary in design to expand information sharing and bridge gaps between the VA and DOD healthcare systems, said VA Secretary Eric Shinseki.

"This is key to seamless, critical to enhancing quality of health care, and essential to controlling costs," Shinseki said during a joint announcement May 21 with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta affirming the two departments would field test initial capabilities of their integrated electronic health record in 2014. By 2017, the agencies will replace their

separate department EHRs with the iEHR.

Panetta said that VA and DOD "must break down the barriers between our departments that prevent us from partnering to deliver the highest-quality health care to those who need it."

The secretaries made the announcement at the James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, the nation's first fully integrated DOD-VA medical facility. The center has served as a proving ground for the DOD-VA joint operating concept. It incorporates facilities, services and resources from the North Chicago VA Medical Center and the Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes.

Couples Improve Chemistry

by James Coty
Hampton VAMC public affairs

Saving a marriage is more than saving two lives ~ it is about touching the lives of family members, coworkers, colleagues and members of the community. Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills is a new VA program offered to Veterans, spouses and significant others to improve family relationships.

The Hampton VAMC Chaplain Service hosted its first PAIRS retreat, May 4-6, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Hampton, Va.

"The belief is that healthy relationships and bonding are as important as any other life sustaining ingredient, as essen-

tial as the air we breathe and the food we consume," said Susan Cross, chaplain at the Hampton VAMC.

The 27 couples who attended the retreat spent their time filled with moving stories, laughter, wonderful connections and skill development.

"The commitment to work at relationships contributes to the well-being of communities," said Cross. "The retreat was every bit as fulfilling for the facilitators as it was for the couples."

The Patient Centered Care and Cultural Initiative sponsored the PAIRS retreat. The initiative's goal is to offer support for Veterans, active duty, and their families by providing participants the necessary tools



Susan Cross

Couples participate in the PAIRS retreat, May 4-6, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Hampton, Va.

needed to build healthy relationships.

The next PAIRS retreat will be held September 21-23.

Please contact the Hampton VAMC Chaplain Service if you are interested in learning more about the retreat.



Steve Wilkins

William Gadsby traverses a wheelchair ramp in an unusual way while demonstrating the increased range of motion and stability with his new bionic prosthetic limb.

Bionics continued from Pg 1

walking at nighttime and had my hands in my pockets. For the first time in four years, I was able to look up at the stars without stopping to balance myself. I've been able to walk up steep hills and stairs. I can walk down steep grades, and have been able to do some Yoga stances. Just walking — in and of itself — is awesome.

"I recently took my family to the Outer Banks in North Carolina," he continued. "I was able to walk up the sand dunes with no problem. In fact, I kept shouting to my wife and my three-year-old son to keep up with me! I also went hiking in the Shenandoah Val-

ley area of Virginia with a 50-pound pack. I was going up some pretty steep trails, and I wasn't getting tired."

Gadsby is a former Marine who was badly injured by an IED while on a foot patrol in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. He said his iWalk equipment has not only allowed him to walk as fast or faster than 'organic' people, but has also made a big difference for him emotionally.

"I am a cranky guy normally," he admitted, "but my wife has noticed a major psychological change in me. Before the BiOM my body was more worn out with pain and I was always dead tired when going somewhere. Now I have zero back pain. I'm active from the time I wake up until the time I fall asleep. My depression has largely receded. I'm more confident and feel closer to how I felt before I was wounded. I feel like a normal person again."

Along with providing state-of-the-art bionics, VA also makes sure the equipment is 'fine tuned' to each individual wearer.

"Personal Bionic Tuning is a proprietary process where a computer first overlays an accepted range of natural motion for the gait cycle," explained iWalk representative Ryan Hixenbaugh. "The BiOM is then adjusted for that individual to perform within 'normal' parameters. The device is then further adjusted to fit the preferences of the wearer. It's an incredible level of personalization."

Cezette Leopold, a VA prosthetics representative based at the Richmond VAMC, said VA's target point, its goal, is to transform Veterans who have lost limbs into completely able-bodied human beings who do everything they want to do without thinking about their mobility.

"The real payoff is better health," Leopold said, noting amputees outfitted with this technology will be healthier, because they can lead much more active lives.

"Healthier amputees equates to a significant reduction in health care costs," she continued. "Amputees who have less exhaustion and less pain tend to move around a lot more. They lose weight. They reduce their reliance on pain medications. They even return to work."

Dr. Douglas Murphy, a Richmond VAMC staff physician at the Richmond VA, agreed. "The BiOM ankle," he said, "when coupled with the microprocessor knee, significantly improves the physical health of above-the-knee amputees by normalizing metabolic and walking speeds. This, in turn, enables reductions in energy consumption and also alleviates things like lower back pain and knee osteoarthritis."

Dr. Murphy added, "This technology is going to mean the difference between night and day for many of our amputee Veterans. Here at VA we're very proud to have helped pioneer this incredible breakthrough in bionics."

Wheelchair Athletes Compete, Apply Life Lessons

By Jeff Melvin
VISN 6 public affairs

About 70 VISN 6 Veterans were among the more than 500 disabled U.S. military Veterans who competed in the 32nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games June 25-30 in Richmond, Va.

"Throughout the week, hundreds of Veterans put the world on notice that disabled does not mean unable," said Daniel Hoffman, network director, VISN 6. "They demonstrated the same courage, drive, desire and sheer willpower that servicemen and women have

brought to bear for more than two centuries to ensure America remains the home of the brave and the land of the free."

VA and the Paralyzed Veterans of America present the games each year. The 'Games' are games in name only. They are a multi-event sports rehabilitation program open to U.S. military Veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, amputations or certain neurological problems, and who receive care at VA medical facilities or military treatment centers.

This year's Games marked

a return to where they began. The first National Veterans Wheelchair Games were held in Richmond in 1981 on the grounds of the VA medical center. That year, 74 Veterans from 14 states competed in seven events. This year, athletes from nearly all 50 states as well as delegations from Puerto Rico and Great Britain competed in 17 medal events, including air guns, archery, basketball, bowling, field, handcycling, nine ball, a motorized wheelchair relay, power soccer, quad rugby, softball, swimming, table tennis, track and field, trapshooting, weightlifting and wheel-

chair slalom

The 2012 Wheelchair Games took on added meaning for VISN 6 as Richmond's McGuire VAMC served as local co-host along with PVA's Mid-Atlantic Chapter. Nearly a year's worth of planning, organizing and coordinating by medical center staff laid the foundation for the weeklong spectacular that has grown to become the world's largest wheelchair sporting event and a virtual can't miss date for novice and Veteran wheelchair athletes alike.

[Continued on Pg 6](#)

Activities Abound At National Veterans Wheelchair Games

continued from Pg 5

Amidst the competition and camaraderie, athletes, organizers and VA officials stressed the power of adaptive sports to change lives -- and inspire others to do the same.

"Many people think adaptive sports are fun and games," said Dr. Ken Lee, head of spinal cord medicine at VA Medical Center in Milwaukee and a member of the Games' national physician team since 1999. "They don't realize it is all about rehab. Adaptive sports keep the rehab in motion -- and keep the injured moving forward."

His sentiments were echoed by original Richmond Games participants Wannie "Ike" Cook and Charles "Chuck" Willis.

"Open your eyes and open your mind," said Cook. "Try to take as much in as possible. After the Games, get a DVD and keep and look at it often ... what you learn you will keep with you for a lifetime."

Willis, president PVA's Mid-Atlantic Chapter, has managed to compete in more than one-half of the Games over the past three decades despite fulltime employment and extensive civic and volunteer contributions.

"Activity is what keeps us going, keeps us living," the 71-year-old Marine Veteran said. "I wasn't supposed to live 10 years. I always thought what I've done with my life I would never have done on my feet. I've enjoyed life in the chair, the people I have helped, the things I have done."

PVA national president Bill Lawson, who attended many events throughout the week, encouraged the athletes to continue to apply the lessons learned during the Games year round.

The 2013 National Veterans Wheelchair Games are set to take place in Tampa next year. The James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital and the Florida Gulf Coast Chapter of PVA will serve as local co-sponsors of the 2013 Games.

More information about the 2012 Games can be found on the VA and PVA web sites at www.va.gov/ and www.pva.org/ respectively.



Gus Davila

Greater Richmond Convention Center, the primary site for many NVWG events, was a beehive of activity.



Mike Lynaugh

Above: Go 'Speedracer.' Btm left: Marine Veteran Corey Petersen bowls. Below: Hampton VAMC Veteran Joe Lewis negotiates the slalom course.



Linnie Skidmore



Brad Garner



Jeff Melvin

Beckley VAMC Veteran Stephen Hudson, a first-time NVWG participant, shoots a free throw.



Gus Davila

'Fred Flintstone' leads the cheers at Kids Day activities, part of NVWG.



Mark Cowan

Handcycling is another of the activities available to NVWG participants.



Brad Garner

PVA Mid-Atlantic Chapter member and Richmond VAMC Veteran John Jackson competes in Nine ball.



Gus Davila

Fayetteville VAMC Director Betty Goolsby, left, and Asheville VAMC Director Cynthia Breyfogle, far right, present medals to competitors.





Mark Cowan

A Veteran competes in the javelin throw. More than 500 disabled U.S. military Veterans participated in the 32nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games.



Steve Wilkins

Fayetteville VAMC Veteran Wilton Locklear pitches the softball.



Steve Saxton

Kids Day participants do the 'wave.'



Salem VAMC Veteran James Stone competes in archery.

Courtesy Photo



Mark Cowan

Capping a successful 32nd National Veterans Wheelchair Games (left), Chuck Sepich, director; McGuire VAMC, and Chuck Willis, president, Mid-Atlantic Chapter; PVA, pass the torch symbolizing transfer of responsibility for the world's largest wheelchair sporting event to 2013 hosts Tampa, Fla.'s Haley Veterans Hospital Director Kathleen Fogarty and Davis Celestine, president-elect, Florida Gulf Coast Chapter, PVA.

NASCAR Driver Hosts Wounded Veterans At Speedway

By Geoffrey Holliday, Durham VAMC public affairs volunteer

NASCAR's All-Star Weekend at Charlotte Motor Speedway featured the motor-sports' top drivers. It also provided a once in a lifetime opportunity for Veterans of the Durham and Salisbury VAMCs to see the action up close and personal when Brad Keselowski, driver of the No. 22 car, invited Veterans and their families to experience the event through his organization, the Checkered Flag Foundation, May 19.

CFF was created in July of 2010 to support individuals who have made life altering sacrifices for our country, our beloved Veterans. Veterans returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan that incurred significant injury received invitations to the All-Star event. Since its inception, CFF has hosted events with the Wounded Warrior Project, the Armed Forces Foundation, and now in coordination with VA medical centers.

This event offered Veterans, escorted by Durham VA staff Amy Skiff and Ronni Miller, the opportunity to access parts of the speedway most spectators have never seen. The Veterans and their escorts said the outing was rewarding and exciting. Commenting that she especially appreciated the opportunity that Brad Keselowski gave to Veterans and family members, Skiff remarked, "I plan to follow Brad's every race now."

Susan Watkins, OEF/OIF Program Manager followed with "and Amy is not the only one," referring to Keselowski's new fan base of Veterans and their families.

CFF generously offered 64 box seats to the Durham and Salisbury VAMCs for Veterans and their guests to participate. VA visitors watched the race from a private box and interacted with drivers in the pit areas and garages. The following day, Veterans got a chance to ride around the famed 1.5 mile track in real NASCAR vehicles. At the end of the day, Veterans received autographed cars, photos and shirts. Many personal photos filled the cameras of



Amy Skiff

Robert Mason, a Persian Gulf War Veteran from the Durham VAMC, takes a look under the hood of a NASCAR vehicle at the All-Star Weekend event held at the Charlotte Motor Speedway.

family members who enjoyed every minute of seeing their loved ones sporting huge smiles.

For some Veterans, this trip was the first outing in a long time. They were able to feel independent again and participate in something they found truly enjoyable. "The weekend was very therapeutic, and just what these heroes needed," Skiff said.

For more information about the Checkered Flag Foundation please visit www.checkeredflagfoundation.org and to see more pictures of the event, visit www.facebook.com/VADurham.



Pete Tillman

Military Cultural Awareness Training Continues

Lisa Markley, Speech Pathologist at the Durham VAMC, smiles as she takes the reins of a CH-47 Chinook Flight Simulator during a visit by Durham VAMC staff to Fort Bragg, N.C. in May to learn about Army culture firsthand. The trip also included a visit to the 82nd Airborne as well as the Army's Golden Knights parachute demonstration team. The visit is part of the Durham VAMC's Military Cultural Awareness training to better understand those we serve. The cultural awareness initiative combines online training with familiarization field trips, and roundtable discussions with Veterans. An exchange of field trips with the Airmen of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, N.C. in February preceded the Fort Bragg trip.



Bruce Sprecher

VISN 6 Addresses The American Legion

Network Director Dan Hoffmann addresses the American Legion, Department of North Carolina's annual convention, June 21 in Raleigh. Representatives from all four VA medical centers in the state briefed the latest developments for their facility. The VISN regularly supports the statewide conventions of the Legion, the VFW and the DAV.

EXCELLENT SERVICE

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VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network VISN 6

VA Increases Mental Health Access

WASHINGTON- In a continuing effort to increase Veterans' access to mental health care, VA has set a goal to conduct more than 200,000 clinic-based, telemental health consultations for all mental health specialties in fiscal year 2012. This follows VA's announcement last month that it would no longer charge Veterans a copayment when they receive care in their homes from VA health professionals using video conferencing.

"Telemental health provides Veterans quicker and more efficient access to the types of care they seek," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We are leveraging technology to reduce the distance they have to travel, increase the flexibility of the system they use, and improve their overall quality of life. We are expanding the reach of our mental health services beyond our major medical centers and treating Veterans closer to their homes."

The clinic-based telehealth program involves the more than 800 VA community-based outpatient clinics where many Veterans receive primary care. If the CBOCs do not have a mental health care provider available, secure video teleconferencing technology is used to connect the Veteran to a provider within VA's nationwide system of care.

As a result, Veterans can arrange appointments at times more in synch with their schedules. The program improves access to general and specialty services in geographically remote areas where it can be difficult to recruit mental health professionals.

"As technology is improving people's lives in many areas, telemental health is making access to health care and support easier for Veterans with mental health conditions," said Dr. Robert A. Petzel, Under Secretary for Health. "For example, one combat Veteran from Iraq cites telemental health as a critical factor in rebuilding her life and coping with the aftermath of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and military sexual trauma. Telemental health offered her a safe and convenient setting to

receive gender sensitive services that helped her fit back into civilian life after three months of therapy."

Since the start of the Telemental Health Program, VA has completed over 550,000 patient encounters. In Fiscal Year 2011 alone, more than 140,000 encounters were conducted with 55,000 Veterans via CBOCs, where providers at 150 hospitals delivered care to veterans at more than 500 clinics.

The Telehealth Expansion Initiative launched in May 2011 called for an additional 21 regional leads, 144 facility coordinators and 1,150 clinical technicians to VA's workforce. When fully implemented, the expansion will provide a potential capacity of 1.2 million consultations annually.

Video to the home is currently projected to grow to 2,000 patients by the end of fiscal year 2012, with 1,500 using innovative new Internet Protocol video connected to Veterans' personal computers.

In addition to supporting these current programs, the VHA National Telemental Health Center in West Haven, Conn., has pioneered additional new programs that delivered 1,000 specialized patient encounters from mental health experts at multiple VA sites to Veterans throughout the nation. These include over 100 compensation and pension exams, 700 clinical encounters to over 165 Veterans enrolled in behavioral pain treatment programs, and 200 clinical-video and telephone encounters to over 70 Veterans enrolled in a bipolar disorder treatment program.

This campaign is part of VA's overall mental health program. Last year, VA provided quality, specialty mental health services to 1.3 million Veterans. Since 2009, VA has increased the mental health care budget by 39 percent. Since 2007, VA has seen a 35 percent increase in the number of Veterans receiving mental health services, and a 41 percent increase in mental health staff.

For more information, on VA's telemental health, visit the Office of Telehealth Services at www.telehealth.va.gov/.

Mental Health Services Encouraged

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs recently completed a media campaign for its "Coaching Into Care" call center, a telephone service which provides assistance to family members and friends trying to encourage their Veteran to seek health care for possible readjustment and mental health issues.

The "Coaching Into Care" service offers free coaching to callers, with no limit to the number of calls they can make. The goal of these sessions is to connect a Veteran with VA care in his or her community with the help and encouragement of family members or friends.

Callers will be coached on solving specific logistical problems and ways to encourage the Veteran to seek care while respecting his or her right to make personal decisions.

The service is available toll-free at 888-823-7458, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday, and online at www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching/. If a Veteran is ex-

periencing an acute crisis, callers should contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 for immediate help. "Coaching Into Care" works directly with the Veterans Crisis Line and the Caregiver Support Line to provide guidance and referrals.

This campaign is part of VA's overall mental health program. Last year, VA provided quality, specialty mental health services to 1.3 million Veterans. Since 2009, VA has increased the mental health care budget by 39 percent. Since 2007, VA has seen a 35 percent increase in the number of Veterans receiving mental health services, and a 41 percent increase in mental health staff.

In April, as part of an ongoing review of mental health operations, Secretary Shinseki announced VA would add approximately 1,600 mental health clinicians as well as nearly 300 support staff to its existing workforce of 20,590 mental health staff to help meet the increased demand for mental health services.

States' Attorneys General Action A Victory For Veterans & GI Bill

WASHINGTON – VA applauded a decision by the attorneys general of several states to give VA the rights to use the GIBill.Com website, after the website's original owners QuinStreet Inc. agreed to give up the internet site to settle a lawsuit by the states.

"This action is a victory for Veterans and a victory for the GI Bill," said W. Scott Gould, Deputy Secretary for Veterans Affairs.

The attorneys general of several states had sued QuinStreet Inc., the owner of the GI Bill.com domain, charging it with deceptive practices by directing Veterans and service members on its website exclusively to for-profit schools that were clients of QuinStreet.

The announcement comes as VA is seeking legal authority to trademark the term GI Bill. An executive order by President Obama on April 26 directed VA and DoD to undertake a number of measures to "stop

deceptive and misleading" promotional efforts that target the GI Bill educational benefits.

All of VA's education benefits are designed to be flexible and give Veterans the power of choice by enabling them to pursue college degrees, technical certifications, or vocational training according to their preferences and needs, at public, private non-profit and private for-profit schools.

For-profit schools are held to the same approval standards as all other schools, and VA education programs at for-profit institutions are approved by the State Approving Agencies, which act independently on behalf of the federal government to ensure quality education and training is provided to Veterans within each state.

For more information on GI Bill programs, please visit www.GIBILL.va.gov or call 888-GI-Bill-1 (888-442-4551) to speak with a GI Bill representative.

PTSD Testimonials Videotaped

WASHINGTON — In observance of June as PTSD Awareness Month, the Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder has begun a new online initiative, AboutFace, focused on helping Veterans recognize PTSD symptoms and motivating them to seek treatment.

The AboutFace campaign introduces viewers to Veterans from all eras who have experienced PTSD and turned their lives around with treatment. Through personal videos, viewers will meet Veterans and hear how PTSD has affected them and their loved ones. Visitors will also learn the steps to take to gain control of their lives.

AboutFace, which is PTSD specific, was designed as a complementary campaign to VA's current Make the Connection (www.MakeTheCon-

www.MakeTheConnection.net) campaign. Make the Connection uses personal testimonials to illustrate true stories of Veterans who faced life events, experiences, physical ailments, or psychological symptoms; reached out for support; and found ways to overcome their challenges.

In April, as part of an ongoing review of mental health operations, Secretary Shinseki announced VA would add approximately 1,600 mental health clinicians as well as nearly 300 support staff to its existing workforce of 20,590 to help meet the increased demand for mental health services. The additional staff would include nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers.

For more information on AboutFace, visit www.ptsd.va.gov/aboutface/ or contact the National Center for PTSD at 802-296-5132.

AO Processing Nearly Complete

WASHINGTON — VA announced that nearly 230,000 claims have been processed for the three newest Agent-Orange related conditions through June 2012, including over 150,000 claims required to be adjudicated under the order of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in *Nehmer v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*. The near completion of these complex *Nehmer* claims enables VA to redirect 1,200 employees who were dedicated to reviewing the Agent Orange cases toward addressing the current backlog of disability claims.

"I am proud of our VA employees who worked hard to complete these Agent Orange claims, putting over \$3.6 billion into the hands of our Vietnam Veterans and their survivors," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We completed all of the Agent Orange *Nehmer* claims for living Veterans, and are now focusing on the fewer than 500 remaining that will benefit survivors."

The Agent Orange claims stemmed from VA's 2010 amendment of its regulations to add ischemic heart disease,

hair cell and other chronic B-cell leukemias, and Parkinson's disease to the list of diseases presumed to be related to exposure to the herbicide used in Southeast Asia.

Given the complexity of the historical casework, the Veterans Benefits Administration allocated its most experienced decision makers, about 37 percent of its rating staff, to processing Agent Orange claims. VA's 13 resource centers were exclusively dedicated to re-adjudicating these claims.

In addition to redirecting its rating staff, VA has developed a plan to achieve in 2015 Secretary Shinseki's goal of completing claims within 125 days at 98 percent accuracy. VA is beginning the nationwide rollout of its new operating model and electronic processing system, known as the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). All regional offices will be operating under the new model and using the new processing system by the end of 2013. VA has established a website, www.fas-track.va.gov, to assist Veterans filing claims for the three new conditions related to the effects of Agent Orange exposure.

Parkinsons Symptoms Can Improve

WASHINGTON — Patients with Parkinson's disease who undergo deep brain stimulation can expect stable improvement in muscle symptoms for at least three years, according to a VA study appearing in the most recent issue of the journal *Neurology*.

In deep brain stimulation or DBS, surgeons implant electrodes in the brain and run thin wires under the skin to a pacemaker-like device placed at one of two locations in the brain. Electrical pulses from the battery-operated device jam the brain signals that cause muscle-related symptoms. Thousands of Americans have seen successful results from the procedure since it was first introduced in the late 1990s. But questions have remained about which stimulation site in the brain yields better outcomes, and over how many years the gains persist.

Initial results from the study appeared in 2009 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Based on the six-month outcomes of 255 patients, the researchers concluded that DBS is riskier than

carefully managed drug therapy — because of the possibility of surgery complications — but may hold significant benefits for those with Parkinson's who no longer respond well to medication alone.

A follow-up report in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2010, using data from 24 months of follow-up, showed that similar results could be obtained from either of the two brain sites targeted in DBS.

The new report is based on 36 months of follow-up on 159 patients from the original group. It extends the previous findings: DBS produced marked improvements in motor (movement-related) function. The gains lasted over three years and did not differ by brain site.

Patients, on average, gained four to five hours a day free of troubling motor symptoms such as shaking, slowed movement, or stiffness. The effects were greatest at six months and leveled off slightly by three years.

For more information on VA research, visit www.research.va.gov.

Veterans Receive Employment Help

WASHINGTON — U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and U.S. Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki unveiled a new portal on their departments' websites June 21 designed to help military Veterans find jobs in the transportation industry.

"Our transportation industry needs pilots, controllers, mechanics and drivers — the very kinds of skills that our military is known for developing," Secretary LaHood said. "This new web link will help repay the debt we owe our Veterans for their service to our country."

"Veterans have the skills, knowledge and attributes that American businesses need to help rebuild an economy that will last," said Secretary Shinseki. "These men and women bring exceptional leadership to any position. They are uniquely qualified for jobs as pilots, mechanics, air traffic controllers, commercial drivers and

emergency medical technicians because many of them have performed these roles in combat."

The portal on the U.S. Department of Transportation and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs websites will link to the Veterans Transportation Career Center, where former members of the armed forces can enter their specific military work experience and see how it translates to jobs in the civilian working world.

The site will guide Veterans to jobs in five categories: aviation pilot, aviation maintenance technician, air traffic controller, commercial motor vehicle driver and emergency medical services. Job seekers can find what training and certification is needed for civilian jobs, determine what career fits best with their background, and search for available jobs in their field. The portals are available at www.dot.gov and www.va.gov.

VISN 6 Sites of Care

Albemarle POC
1845 W City Drive
Elizabeth City, NC
252-331-2191

Asheville VAMC
1100 Tunnel Road
Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7911, 800-932-6408
www.asheville.va.gov/

Beckley VAMC
200 Veterans Avenue
Beckley, WV 25801
304-255-2121, 877-902-5142
www.beckley.va.gov/

Beckley Vet Center
1000 Johnstown Road
Beckley, WV 25801
304-252-8220

Brunswick Outreach Clinic
20 Medical Campus Drive
Supply, NC 28462
910-754-6141

Charlotte Vet Center
2114 Ben Craig Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28262
704-549-8025

Charlotte CBOC
8601 University East Drive
Charlotte, NC 28213

Charlottesville CBOC
650 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-293-3890

Danville CBOC
705 Piney Forest Rd.
Danville, VA 24540
434-710-4210

Durham VAMC
508 Fulton St.
Durham, NC 27705
919-286-0411, 888-878-6890
www.durham.va.gov/

Emporia CBOC
1746 East Atlantic Street
Emporia, VA 23847
434-348-1500

Fayetteville VAMC
2300 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910-488-2120, 800-771-6106
www.fayettevillenc.va.gov

Fayetteville Vet Center
4140 Ramsey St.
Fayetteville, NC 28311
910-488-6252

Franklin CBOC
647 Wayah St.
Franklin, NC 28734-3390
828-369-1781

Fredricksburg CBOC
1965 Jefferson Davis Highway
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-370-4468

Greensboro Vet Center
2009 S. Elm-Eugene St.
Greensboro, NC 27406
336-333-5366

Greenbrier County CBOC
804 Industrial Park Rd.
Maxwelton, WV 24957
304-497-3900

Greenville CBOC
800 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27858
252-830-2149

Greenville Vet Center
1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-355-7920

Hamlet CBOC
100 Jefferson Street
Hamlet, NC 28345
910-582-3536

Hampton VAMC
100 Emancipation Dr.
Hampton, VA 23667
757-722-9961, 866-544-9961
www.hampton.va.gov/

Hickory CBOC
2440 Century Place, SE
Hickory, NC 28602
828-431-5600

Hillandale Rd. Annex
1824 Hillandale Road
Durham, North Carolina 27705
919-383-6107

Jacksonville CBOC
241 Freedom Way
Midway Park, NC 28544
910-353-6406, 910-353-6406

Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center
110-A Branchwood Driv
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-577-1100

Lynchburg CBOC
1600 Lakeside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24501
434-316-5000

Morehead City CBOC
5420 U.S. 70
Morehead City, NC 28557
252-240-2349

Norfolk Vet Center
1711 Church Street
Norfolk, VA 23504
757-623-7584

Princeton Vet Center
905 Mercer Street
Princeton, WV 24740
304-425-5653

Raleigh CBOC
3305 Sungate Blvd.
Raleigh, NC 27610
919-212-0129

Raleigh II Annex
3040 Hammond Business Place
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-899-6259

Raleigh Vet Center
1649 Old Louisville Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-856-4616

Richmond VAMC
1201 Broad Rock Blvd.
Richmond, VA 23249
804-675-5000, 800-784-8381
www.richmond.va.gov/

Roanoke Vet Center
350 Albemarle Ave., SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
540-342-9726

Robeson County CBOC
139 Three Hunts Drive
Pembroke, NC 28372
910-521-8452

Rutherford County CBOC
374 Charlotte Rd.
Rutherfordton, NC 28139
828-288-2780

Salem VAMC
1970 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153
540-982-2463, 888-982-2463
www.salem.va.gov/

Salisbury VAMC
1601 Brenner Ave.
Salisbury, NC 28144
704-638-9000, 800-469-8262
www.salisbury.va.gov/

Staunton CBOC
102 Business Way
Staunton, VA 24401
540-886-5777

Tazewell CBOC
123 Ben Bolt Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651
276-988-2526

Virginia Beach CBOC
244 Clearfield Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA
757-722-9961, ext. 1900

Virginia Beach Vet Center
324 Southport Circle, Suite 102
Virginia Beach, VA, 23452
757-248-3665

Wilmington CBOC
736 Medical Center Drive
Wilmington, NC 28401
910-763-5979

Winston-Salem CBOC
190 Kimel Park Drive
Winston-Salem, NC 27103
336-768-3296

Winston-Salem Annex
2101 Peters Creek Parkway
Winston-Salem, NC 27127
336-761-5300

Wytheville CBOC
165 Peppers Ferry Rd.
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363
276-223-5400