



VA MID-ATLANTIC HEALTH CARE NETWORK - VISN 6

Vol. 3, No. 2

"Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here"

Voices of VISN 6

Official news from around *your* VISN

November 30, 2012

Medical Centers, Communities Celebrate Veterans Day

Veterans Day, observed Nov. 11, was first celebrated to mark the anniversary of the end of World War I. Today Veterans Day is a federal holiday that honors all of America's Veterans for their service. The original concept called for a day observed with parades, public meetings and a brief suspension of business at 11 a.m. Each year in addition to countless celebrations around nation, a Veterans Day National Ceremony is held Nov. 11 at Arlington National Cemetery. See Page 9 more photos of Veterans Day activities around VISN 6.

Right: Fayetteville VAMC Director Elizabeth Goolsby and Col. Randall M. Zeegers, Army Special Forces Command, Fort Bragg, N.C., place a commemorative wreath. **Brad Garner**



VA/DoD To Build Joint Rehabilitation Clinic

By Robin DeMark
Fayetteville VAMC
public affairs

VA and DOD are joining forces to bring a \$6.7 million state-of-the-art Community Rehabilitation Clinic to the Fayetteville area. The clinic will provide outpatient services for physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech pathology.

It is estimated that the new clinic will support about 62,000 visits per year. Fayetteville VAMC together with Womack Army Medical Center will work together on selecting a site for the new clinic.

Funding for the project came from the federal government's Health Executive Council which is co-chaired by VA's Under Secretary for Health and DOD's Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs.



Robin DeMark

A Fayetteville VAMC physician examines a Soldier's leg to evaluate damage to knee ligaments and determine range of motion. Fayetteville VA and Womack Army Medical Centers will soon share a Community Rehabilitation Clinic.

The council oversees the Joint Incentive Fund which came from a provision of the FY 2003 National Defense Authorization Act. The intent of the program is to identify, fund and evaluate creative

local, regional and national sharing initiatives.

The Joint Committee for Resource Sharing, comprised of Fayetteville VAMC and

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From the Director

In September, I shared that the VISN was working to develop goals that will help keep us focused on what it will take to ensure we can deliver high-quality health care to as many Veterans as possible, now, and in the future. Representatives, including the union, from all our medical centers met to share ideas, discuss possibilities and establish priorities.

As a team, we considered current and projected budgets, access for Veterans with regard to brick and mortar sites of care, as well as the rapidly developing use of Telehealth where in some cases, Veterans' homes actually become "sites of care."

We looked at the projected growth of new Veterans. As America transitions out of Afghanistan many service-members will soon be exchanging their Class "A's" and DCUs for business attire and we need to be ready to welcome them into their new medical homes.

After serious, well-developed discussion, we have focused on five overarching goals that touch every aspect of what we do. The specific implementations are still being worked, but as promised in September, I share them with you now as an introduction, or prologue for where we are headed.

As this is a work-in-progress, I hope that after reading this, employees will share their suggestions with supervisors and medical center leadership. Veterans receiving care are also welcome and encouraged to provide input and can do so via the web to most of our medical centers, or via letter addressed to the directors.

Goal No. 1: Promote the health and well-being of Veterans in a patient-centric partnership with healthcare and community support teams.

First and foremost, we are in the business of providing health care. As you know, we have been working our way toward full implementation of the PACT (Patient Aligned Care Team) model which focuses an interdisciplinary team on each Veteran's goals for care. At the center of this model are Veterans who will partner with their team to establish priorities for care and to work with the team toward achieving their individual desired outcomes. As many Veterans receive health care from multiple sources, the key will be to ensure all providers' care is well inte-



grated and optimized.

Goal No. 2: Make our workplaces a better place to work.

This is a rather broad statement. What does it mean? Well, only each person can determine what it means for them. For some it might mean working a compressed shift. For others, it may be as simple as a better chair or lighting in the office. Still for others, it may just mean that the work environment is as comfortable and pleasant as possible; after all, we typically spend more of our waking hours at work than we do at home with our families.

Most GIs remember and can identify with the statement "Take care of your people and they will take care of the mission." It's as true in VA as it is in the service. We must ensure that we invest in our no. 1 asset, our people. We need to work to help employees reach their full potential. In the long run, we will work to provide the right training and educational opportunities at the right time. But, right now, today, we can begin by working to heighten our courtesy, our sensitivity, our respect for not just those we care for, but for all of those we work with as well.

Let's commit to working through bothersome issues that may be easily remedied. We can all do better at communicating up, down and laterally in meaningful ways with the intent being to find solutions acceptable by all. We need to listen to each other and focus on the common good in our efforts. Employee satisfaction is tied to patient satisfaction and we need to work together to achieve higher scores in both these areas.

Goal No. 3: Create a healthcare environment that attracts and retains Veterans.

One might ask how a health care environment that attracts Veterans is different from any other health care environment. Good question. Anytime an organization can focus on who they serve, it becomes easier to design and develop an environment that caters to the clientele.

Our clientele are Veterans. They may be from different eras, listen to different music and have varying familiarity with the internet, but they all share one commonality: they all raised their right hand and took an oath to "Support and defend the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic." An equally important phrase comes to mind, "They all gave some. Some gave all."

We need to remember that regardless of age, gender, or health care needs, those we care for earned their care. As they took the oath to protect our country, we have a the responsibility of providing them care and we can do it best by remembering that each Veteran we serve has paid for admission to our care with their very body and spirit.

So, how do we create an environment of care that attracts and retains them? It begins with remembering who they are, paying respect for what they have done and demonstrating the very ideals of the VHA Core Values – Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, Excellence.

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



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Rehabilitation Clinic continued from Pg 1

WAMC staff, meets regularly to explore areas for improved beneficiary access and increased efficiencies in local health care operations. The JIF proposal for the clinic was jointly developed and forwarded for approval through this committee.

“The financial award will be shared between Fayetteville VAMC and WAMC and used as start-up funds to get the clinic up and running. Co-locating DOD/VA care to one familiar location for Soldiers and Veterans exemplifies how our medical centers work together to improve access to care, patient satisfaction and provide cost effective resource sharing,” said Fayetteville VAMC Director Elizabeth Goolsby.

Currently active duty Soldiers receive care at WAMC and when discharged, many transition into the VA system. The new jointly-operated outpatient clinic will increase local capabilities, offset purchased care services, and reduce total costs and will allow greater control of the quality of care delivered, an improved patient care process and improved efficiencies for both VA and DOD.

The clinic will employ eight physical therapists, three occupational therapists, one speech pathologist, and 13 therapy technicians.

“The new clinic will help meet the ever increasing demand for rehabilitative services due to increasing patient populations in both the VA and DOD. This will also enhance the continuity of care for Soldiers requiring rehabilitative services as they transition to Veteran status,” said WAMC Commander, COL Steven Brewster.

The expansion in rehabilitative services for Soldiers extends to Womack’s Active Duty Family Members and Retirees. Expanded capacities allow these beneficiaries to receive these services within the Womack direct care system so the primary care manager has the ability to manage their patient’s complete



Robin DeMark
Dr. Thurman Whitted, Fayetteville VAMC staff physiatrist, evaluates Army Veteran Tanjaneca Dixon’s reflexes to ensure she is neurologically sound.

Director’s Column continued from Pg 3

Goal No. 4:

Leverage VISN resources to become a leader in delivering timely, evidence-based outpatient medical and surgical sub-specialty care.

Everyone desires access to health care as close to home as possible. We know and understand that. The truth is that we cannot provide every service everywhere, but we can provide almost any service within the network. Many specialists are found in major metropolitan areas because that’s where it makes sense for them to work. So, how do we connect Veterans with care not available locally, and so do in a timely fashion?

I’m proud to say that within this network we have resources to provide most every type of care available in today’s medicine. Sometimes this means having patients associated with one medical center go to another for certain types of care. In some cases, technology now allows us to set up consults and follow-up appointments at local outpatient clinics through our Telehealth network. We review all options to provide care using network resources because doing so provides for better continuity of care, which in turn can lead to more successful outcomes.

Receiving care through VA, regardless of which facility, ensures every practitioner has access to the care provided, the care required, tests performed and already requested, as well as the full list of drugs to ensure no incompatibility exists.

medical needs with an electronic medical record system.

Womack provides healthcare to more than 117,000 beneficiaries and the Fayetteville VAMC and its Community Based Outpatient Clinics serve more than 90,000 Veterans residing in southeastern North Carolina and two counties in northeastern South Carolina.

Goal No. 5

Align mission and resources to provide recognized value to our Veterans.

For Goal #4, I told you we cannot provide every service everywhere, but we are continuously monitoring what equipment and services are being used where to determine if there is a greater need elsewhere.

Much like DoD works to ensure they have the right tools in the right theater of operation, we look at low-density, high-demand services and equipment like MRI machines, to ensure that they are in the most appropriate location to serve the greatest number of Veterans. Additionally, we need to ensure that our services are aligned to deal with the population at hand.

In some areas, the population we serve may be primarily males in certain age ranges, whereas in Hampton, we serve one of the largest populations of women Veterans in the nation. We need to have the right tools and providers in the right place at the right time and by doing this, we will be a true value to the Veterans we serve.

I appreciate your time and interest in what VISN 6 is doing to live up to our motto: Excellent service - Earned by Veterans - Delivered here.

Until next month, stay safe, stay warm. Enjoy the holiday season.

Sincerely, Dan Hoffmann

Nuclear Medicine Has Many Applications, Benefits For Vets

By Jeff Melvin
VISN 6 public affairs

Veterans and staff are generally aware of the more common medical tests and treatments VISN 6 employs to provide high quality health options to Veterans seeking care under our auspices. They're not as familiar with less well-known services or specialties like nuclear medicine.

Nuclear medicine refers to the specialty of medicine that uses small amounts of radioactive material called radiopharmaceuticals or radiotracers to image the body and diagnose or treat a variety of diseases including many types of cancers, infections, blood clots, heart disease and bone disease.

Depending on the type of nuclear medicine exam, the radiotracer is injected into the body, swallowed or inhaled as a gas and eventually accumulates in the organ or area of the body being examined. A special camera or imaging device detects the radioactive emissions from the radiotracer and produces pictures and detailed molecular information.

"Nuclear medicine looks at the physiology (functioning) of the body whereas the X-ray, CT, Ultrasound, and MRI look at the anatomy (structure) of the body in establishing diagnosis and treatment," said Dr. Tapan K. Chaudhuri, clinical director of nuclear medicine at Hampton VAMC. "Nuclear medicine is similar to X-ray

that is used to take a picture of the body – except that nuclear medicine uses gamma rays, which are a different type of energy." Hampton VAMC performs about 2,500 nuclear medicine procedures each year.

"Nuclear medicine procedures have a unique capability to detect diseases early in the developing phase because they detect diseases at the atomic level before any structural changes occur," Chaudhuri said.

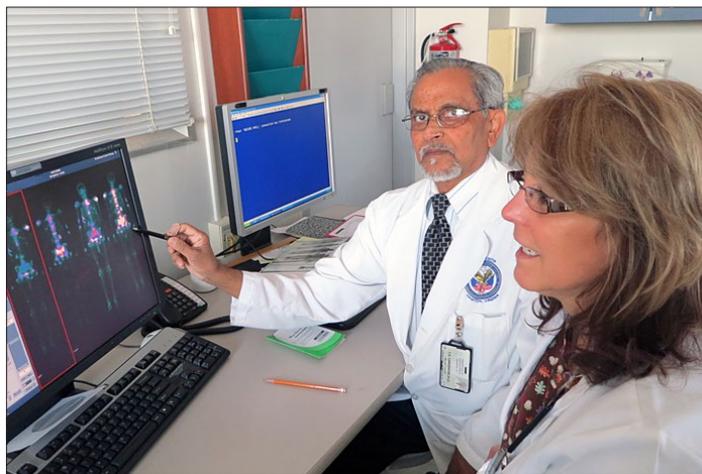
"The radioactive materials highlights broken bones or bone infection earlier than X-ray because they concentrate in areas of rapidly growing, healing, repairing, or decaying cells, tissues, or organs. The procedures 'lights up' the cancerous tissue more than the normal tissue, thus helping to differentiate between the two."

Born after the end of World War II, Chaudhuri says the nuclear medicine specialty has much to offer to Veterans.

Initially very basic and rudimentary, just like many other technologies; nuclear medicine has progressed and become more sophisticated.

One of the most common applications of nuclear medicine is the nuclear stress test of the heart to determine if there is blockage of arteries supplying blood to the heart muscle, which helps doctors to determine whether patients need to be sent for cardiac catheterization.

The next common applica-



Sheila Bailey

Dr. Tapan Chaudhuri and Sharon Dunn, nuclear medicine technician, review a patient's nuclear medicine bone scan.

tion of nuclear medicine is the whole body bone scan to assess if cancer of the prostate or lung has spread to the bone, which will determine what kind of treatment the Veteran will need.

One of the state-of-the-art applications of nuclear medicine is the use of Positron Emission Tomography or PET scans to detect cancer, detect the spread of cancer and after treatment, determine the effect of treatment.

The most recent application of PET scan is to diagnose and to assess the effect of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Diseases treatment.

Chaudhuri offered an example of how PET scans can be used to find tumors or cancer that couldn't be found in the past by other imaging methods.

"A patient has surgery or radiation treatment to remove a brain tumor, or a lung, colon or prostate cancer. The surgeon thinks the tumor has been completely removed. Six months later, the patient experiences headaches or seizures, or cough, or rise of tumor marker in the blood. A CT scan or MRI scan is administered. The tests reveal density in the surgical site or radiotherapy site. CT or MRI can't tell if this is scar tissue from previous surgery or radiotherapy or if it is a recurrence of the cancer. Currently, nuclear medicine is the only means to differentiate between scar tissue and recurring cancer."

He describes additional nuclear medicine uses such as "detecting infection, finding blood clots in the lungs (a common ailment among Veterans), diagnosing cirrhosis of the liver, assessing kidney and bladder function, and arthritis detection."

Regarding arthritis, nuclear medicine tests or procedures can be used to determine how many joints are affected as well as what state the joints are in – mild, moderate or severe.

Nuclear medicine also has applications associated with hip and knee replacements, another common ailment among Veterans.

"A year after hip or knee replacements later, a patient returns complaining of pain. The doctor wants to find out if it's an infection or if the prosthetic is loose – nuclear medicine can help determine that," Chaudhuri said.

Nuclear medicine scans can be used as to avoid surgeries or as alternatives to exploratory surgeries, particularly to differentiate a benign lung tumor from malignant lung cancer.

Not be discounted is the reduced costs associated with nuclear medicine scans and procedures versus surgery. The sum of "surgeon fees, anesthesiologist fees, operating room expenses, recovery costs, medicine, overhead, etc., is much higher than nuclear medicine costs," Dr. Chaudhuri said.



Sheila Bailey

Dr. Tapan Chaudhuri prepares a patient for a nuclear medicine scan.

Tax Information For Veterans With Disabilities

The Internal Revenue Service wants Veterans to know IRS is committed to providing assistance to Veterans and Veterans with disabilities. IRS works with community and government partners to provide timely federal tax-related information to Veterans about tax credits and benefits, free tax preparation, and asset-building opportunities available to them.

VA Disability Benefits

Do not include VA disability benefits in your gross income. In particular some of the payments which are considered disability benefits include:

- Disability compensation and pension payments for disabilities paid either to Veterans or their families,
- Grants for homes designed for wheelchair living,
- Grants for motor vehicles for veterans who lost their sight or the use of their limbs, or
- Benefits under a dependent-care assistance program.

The VA publishes an annual benefits booklet, a comprehensive guide for Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors. If you are a military retiree and receive your disability benefits from the VA, see "IRS Publication 525" for more information

Special Tax Considerations

Disabled Veterans may be eligible to claim a federal tax refund based on:

- An increase in the Veteran's percentage of disability from VA (which may include a retroactive determination) or
- The combat-disabled Veteran applying for, and being granted, Combat-Related Special Compensation, after an award for Concurrent Retirement and Disability.

To do so, the disabled Veteran will need to file the amended return, Form 1040X, Amended U.S. Individual Income Tax Return, to correct a previously filed Form 1040, 1040A or 1040EZ. An amended return cannot be e-filed. It must be filed as a paper return. Disabled Veterans should include all documents from the VA and any information received from Defense Finance and Accounting Services explaining proper tax treatment for the current year.

Please note: It is only in the year of the VA reassessment of disability percentage (including any impacted retroactive year) or the year that the CRSC is initially granted or adjusted that the

Veteran may need to file amended returns.

Under normal circumstances, the Form 1099-R issued to the Veteran by Defense Finance and Accounting Services correctly reflects the taxable portion of compensation received. No amended returns would be required, since it has already been adjusted for any non-taxable awards.

If needed, Veterans should seek assistance from a competent tax professional before filing amended returns based on a disability determination. Refund claims based on an incorrect interpretation of the tax law could subject the Veteran to interest and/or penalty charges.

Rehabilitative Program Payments

VA payments to hospital patients and resident veterans for their services under the VA's therapeutic or rehabilitative programs are no longer included in income. For more information, please see IRS Revenue Ruling 2007-198.

Tax Credits

Many disabled veterans are eligible for various tax credits including the Earned Income Tax Credit, a refundable federal income tax credit for low- to moderate-income, working individuals and families. The Work Opportunity Credit is available to employers as an incentive to hire veterans with disabilities. Those requiring free help in preparing their income tax returns should check out the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program.

Homeless Veterans

The VA and other organizations work together through neighborhood stand-downs to help disabled veterans who are homeless. This collaborative effort provides a variety of services such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, and benefits counseling.

Federal Employment

If you are a Veteran and have a VA disability rating of 30% or more, you may be hired non-competitively for any federal position for which you qualify. For more information, check out the U.S. Office of Personnel Management website at www.opm.gov.

IRS Help/Information

Veterans seeking tax information, forms, publication, etc., should visit the IRS website at www.irs.gov.

New State Veterans Nursing Home Set To Open In Kinston

The State of North Carolina, Division of Veterans Affairs will dedicate a new 100-bed Veterans nursing home Dec. 11, in Kinston. The facility provides long-term health care for military Veterans. Gov. Bev Purdue will lead the program that begins at 1 p.m. at the home located at 2150 Hull Road in Kinston. The event is open to the public.

The facility is North Carolina's fourth skilled nursing care facility for Veterans. The others are located in Fayetteville, Salisbury, and Black Mountain. According to NC Division of Veterans Affairs Director Tim Wipperman, the Kinston location was chosen based on an analysis of the needs of the state's Veterans and existing state Veterans homes and private facilities. Wipperman said about 765,900 veterans reside in North Carolina.

The facility will primarily serve Veterans who served honorably on active duty (other than for training) and can fill up to 25 percent of the beds for eligible family members and Gold Star Parents who have lost a child on active military service.

The facility will provide residents with single rooms with private bath and features "neighborhoods" of 12-14 clients who share a common area with large-screen TV, dining room and a courtyard.

Continued on Pg 7



Courtesy Photo
The new North Carolina State Veterans Nursing Home in Kinston will be dedicated Dec. 11.

Employee Veteran Badges Big Hit At Durham VAMC

By Jeff Melvin
VISN 6 public affairs

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a badge identifying a VA employee as Veteran must be worth, well who knows how many but it should certainly be a conversation starter.

Just such a badge worn by a VA employee at another VA facility, piqued Pete Tillman's, Durham VAMC public affairs officer's, curiosity and sparked an idea that's earning kudos from patients and Veteran employees alike, badges indicating the employees' branch of service.

About 29 percent of the Durham VA workforce is Veterans, according to Tillman. "To help us, and our patients, recognize the Veterans among us, we are offering each Veteran employee a badge that signifies their branch of military service (and also a Purple Heart) and can be easily attached to PIV badge holders," he said.

Tillman said he got the idea from a badge he saw at another VA. The badges, he reasoned, would be a simple but effective way to connect employees to clients by identifying their commonality of service at a glance. He said the project has received overwhelmingly positive feedback both from Veteran staff and outpatients since the mid-November rollout.

The badges have "gone like hot cakes, Veterans love them. Even elevators rides are

Continued on Pg 7



Pete Tillman

Stephen Perlman, Army Veteran and librarian at Durham VAMC, holds the Veterans identification cards for each branch of service.

U.S. Army Women's Foundation Legacy Scholarship Program

FORT LEE, Va. – Scholarships are available – to all Army women – active duty, retired, National Guard, Reserve and their children – for tuition assistance at the community college level or four year academic institution courtesy of the Army Women's Foundation Legacy Scholarship Program.



Community College/Certificate Program Legacy Scholarships will be awarded up to \$1,000; College/University Legacy Scholarships will be awarded up to \$2,500. Scholarships are based on merit, academic potential, community service and need. Applications must be postmarked by Feb. 1, 2013

AWF officials say they recognize the value of education and are committed to helping Army women and their children achieve their educational goals and aspirations. The Legacy Scholarships represent their way to thank them for their service.

"Whether one wants to participate in a certificate program, study on-line or attend classes on campus, we would like to support Army women in their educational endeavors," reads a release announcing the program for the Fort Lee, Va.-based organization.

Eligibility Requirements and the application form can be found online at www.awfdn.org/programs/legacyscholarships.shtml.

For more information or to ask questions, call the AWF at (804)734-3078, email them at info@awfdn.org or visit the AWF website at www.AWFDN.org.

Dec. 7 Is Pearl Harbor Day



Official U.S. Navy archival photograph

"Farewell to Thee."

Following Hawaiian tradition, Sailors honor those killed during the Dec. 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Naval Air Station Kaneohe, Oahu. Dec. 7 of each year is National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day. This observance honors the more than 2,400 military service personnel killed and more 1,100 wounded during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by Japanese forces on Dec. 7, 1941. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States entered World War II. On National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, we pay tribute to the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country, and we honor all those who selflessly served our nation at home and abroad during World War II. As a nation, we look to Dec. 7, 1941, to draw strength from the example set by these patriots and to honor all who have sacrificed for our freedoms.

The Christmas Shop A Long Standing Tradition in Hampton

By James Coty
Hampton VAMC public affairs

Holidays are filled with traditions that are passed from one generation to the next. For hospitalized Veterans, it is hard to maintain some of those traditions. Giving gifts to family and loved ones can be especially difficult for inpatient Veterans.

Each year, to help Veterans continue their holiday traditions, members of local American Legion Auxiliary units open The Christmas Shop at the Hampton VAMC. The shop has been an annual tradition for inpatient Veterans at the medical center for 43 years. Anna Gear, voluntary service representative from the American Legion Auxiliary has been coordinating the American Legion volunteers who run the shop since 1969.

American Legion Auxiliary units from the Hampton Roads area come together for several weeks to help Veterans with their gift giving tradition.

"The week before we open The Christmas Shop, we survey the inpatient Veterans," said Gear. "We go around to the community living center, domiciliary and inpatient wards ~ talk with Veterans so they can tell us what was on their holiday wish list."

Traditionally, holiday wish lists were sent to the North Pole so Santa Claus and his elves would know what children wanted under the tree. These holiday wish lists are different, they are a list of gifts that inpatient Veterans would like to give to their family members.

"It fills me with joy to be able to give something to my family," said Yvonne Washington. "Without The Christmas Shop, I couldn't give anything to my family this year."

The Christmas Shop is a way for Veterans to make sure their families are remembered during the holidays.

Gear explained that it takes about three days to get the shop



James Coty

Volunteers from American Legion Auxiliary units wrap presents to be mailed to the families of Hampton VAMC inpatient Veterans.

ready. All of the gifts are neatly placed on tables that are organized by age groups. All of the clothing is displayed on racks for the Veterans to select their gifts.

"After they finish picking their gifts, we wrap the presents and get them into the mail," said Gear. "There is absolutely no cost to the Veteran. Most families received their gifts the week before Thanksgiving all wrapped and labeled. It is a wonderful holiday tradition."

Kinston Home continued from Pg 5

The facility also provides skilled-nursing care and is outfitted with a state-of-the-art therapy center, including a therapy pool. In addition, this 111,000-square-foot center features a memory support unit for Alzheimer's patients, as well as comprehensive therapy services.

Wipperman said the project was funded by a combination of federal and state dollars, 65 percent coming from stimulus dollars and the remainder from the State Veterans Home trust fund. No North Carolina appropriated funds were used to construct the \$16

million facility, he said.

The state Veterans home program is a fully receipt-based operation. Homes operate on funds from private pay, Medicaid/Medicare, Veterans Affairs pensions and/or per diem, and other sources such as gifts and donations. The N.C. Division of Veterans Affairs employs a private provider to manage the facility.

For additional information about the State Veterans Home program, visit the N.C. Division of Veterans Affairs website at www.ncveterans.net.

Veteran Badges continued from Pg 6

more pleasant with observations of the badges," he said.

Commenting on new Veteran badges for staff, Navy Veteran Steven Walker, a Durham patient said, "This is a great idea. It makes me feel like the person behind the desk is one of my comrades, then I want to know more about them, like when did they serve, where did they serve, and all that other good stuff we share about military service."

Walker added that the branch of service didn't matter. "Even if the badge I see is not a Navy one, when I see a (Durham VA) staff member wearing any Veteran badge, I feel good. I mean, we are all Veterans who served and now I can recognize them."

Kathleen Logan, hospice nurse manager, said the Veteran badges are "like badges of honor. When fellow Air Force Veterans see my badge, they ask where and when I served and it creates an immediate connection. The Veteran badges showcase the number of Veteran Employees Durham has caring for our Veterans. This can really help our patients because they now know we are Veterans and we understand the unique needs they have."

She added that the Veteran badges have also helped in building camaraderie among fellow employees because they can now acknowledge each other's service. "My Fellow Airmen, often say

"Go Air Force" even if we don't know each other and it usually opens the door to getting to know others who I would not have the opportunity to otherwise. I feel very proud when I am recognized as an "Air Force Veteran" because of my badge!"

David Kuboushek, chief financial manager, Fiscal Service, agreed. He said when Veterans see that he served in the Marine Corps, they holler out, "Semper Fi."

He added that wearing the badge helps the Veterans being treated at the medical center understand that employees also served in the military. "It makes me feel good being a Veteran helping Veterans," Kuboushek said.

"This is just one way we can collectively say thank you for your service. After field tests, we realized the powerful impact of these badges and their ability to spark to conversations with Veterans and family members that build trust in the VA health care system," said Tillman. He added that the badges allow VA staff to make instant connections with Veterans and family members and offer a great starting point for discussions about common interests. "Veterans can quickly identify with providers and staff and it helps to create a more welcoming atmosphere in which Veterans know that we truly care for their health and wellbeing."

Virginia Wounded Warrior Pgm Supports State's Student Vets

By Jim Thur, Roger Schlimbach, and Kadetra Cooper
Virginia Wounded Warrior Program

In response to the growing number of Veterans enrolled in colleges and universities, the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program understands there is a great need to develop close working relationships on the campuses of Virginia colleges and universities.

The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, Northwestern Virginia, Region I has partnered with the University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College. Veteran peer specialists schedule regular meetings with admissions staff, academic counselors and GI Bill certifying staff. In honor of Veterans Day, the Charlottesville VWWP peer specialists participate in the annual Veterans' appreciation program at PVCC.

In an effort to expand this initiative throughout the region, the peer specialists from PVCC have connected with the Blue Ridge CC in Augusta County and Germanna CC in Fredericksburg. The specialists hold office hours at Blue Ridge CC twice a month and conduct multiple training sessions for admissions, student counselors, and GI Bill certifying staff. It is imperative to hold these sessions to ensure the staff members are well versed in the issues currently affecting Veterans.

At Germanna CC, extensive damage from last year's rare earthquake caused extensive damage to several campus buildings including one that houses the Veteran's center. This prompted a temporary halt to monthly campus visits by peer specialists to speak with veterans and connect them to needed resources. The program on the campus is now operating by appointment only. With the anticipated Veteran's Center reopening at its original capacity in early January, more regular connection with the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program will resume. "Having the Veteran Peer Specialists enabled them [student veterans] to have somebody here that they can relate to and correspond with when they have some issues to deal with," said Dianne Frausto, the Veteran Affairs education representative.

In Region II, veteran outreach and educational programs are now embedded on the campuses of the Northern Virginia Community College system. NOVA is the largest community college in Virginia and the second largest in the nation. It operates on six different campuses throughout Northern Virginia with an enrollment of more than 75,000 students.

Over a two-year period, VWWP worked closely with the director of the Office of Military Services and administrators at each major NOVA campus to identify the needs of student Veterans and the best ways to serve them. Initially, VWWP staff provided briefings and distributed informational material on Veterans' services to faculty, administrators and during special events for student Veterans. Although some student Veterans participated in off campus support groups, many indicated they did not have sufficient time to attend because of the competing demands imposed by course work, family responsibilities and employment.

This fall, with great support from NOVA staff, a VWWP peer specialist began conducting support groups on three NOVA campuses. Student Veterans are now able to conveniently participate while they are on campus. Upon request, a student Veteran can also meet individually with a VWWP counselor to provide personalized assistance and support.

VWWP staff also participated in suicide prevention educational forums conducted throughout the NOVA system during September and October. The forums took place following a showing of the new educational video about surviving suicide entitled, "Don't Change the Subject." At the forums, VWWP staff shared information about the prevalence of suicide among active duty personnel and Veterans and the actions being taken to address this

issue at both a national and state level. Further information about the educational video, can be obtained at www.dontchangethesubject.org.

Other notable Virginia Wounded Warrior Program initiatives include Central Virginia, Region IV's partnership with the Aurora Foundation to support Virginia Commonwealth University's "Green Zone" initiative and VWWP and Longwood University in Farmville's collaboration to provide peer based counseling services to university student Veterans.

The Green Zone supports student Veterans transitioning from military culture to the life of academia. Participating faculty and staff volunteers undergo specialized training to provide military Veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education. Once the faculty and staff complete this training, they become certified "Green Zone" members and receive special recognition as Veterans advocates.

Along with the provision of counseling services, the VWWP and Longwood University collaboration has sparked the formation of a Vet2Vet program. Vet2Vet trains Veterans to work as peer counselors for other Veterans. This initiative has proven to be an important service for Veterans and their families.

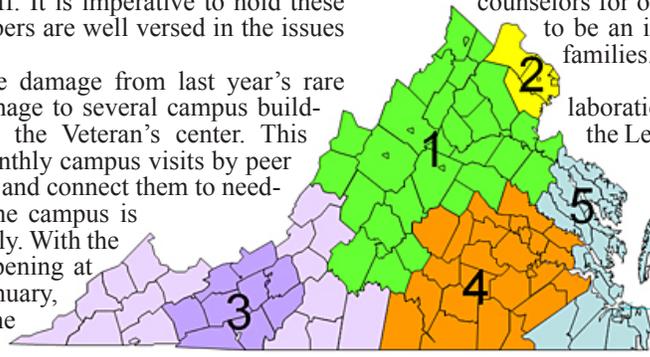
Another example of a successful collaboration lies in Region V where VWWP and the Lewis B. Puller Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic housed within William & Mary Law School have combined forces in an effort to better serve the needs of the Veteran population and enable law students' to apply learned practical skills. The program and clinic work on a referral basis regarding Veterans in need of representation for disability compensation.

As a result, the VBC may then refer the Veterans to additional services offered by William & Mary and VCU for diagnosis and assessments of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. The VWWP and VBC have also worked on community outreach activities in Hampton Roads such as Warrior Connect Day and workshops to advocate for Veterans.

Like similar programs at other Virginia colleges and universities, Norfolk State University's Strengthening Services for Veterans program is designed to provide specialized training programs and services for Veterans and international students to help them. Joining NSU during the launch of this initiative, VWWP provided the attendees an overview of the statewide program and set up a resource table during the kickoff event.

In the Veterans employment arena, Region V co-hosted a military resource fair alongside the Virginia Employment Commission and Tidewater CC. The resource fair presented a great opportunity for local Veterans to obtain information pertaining to benefits, education, and employment. The network of programs, organizations, and representatives in attendance provided a vast network to assist in the process of transitioning from the military to education and employment.

A component of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, VWWP was established in 2008 to assist Virginia Veterans with timely access to quality behavioral health, rehabilitative and support services with emphasis on those who have stress-related injuries (such as PTSD or depression) or traumatic brain injuries related to military service. VWWP serves Veterans of all eras and their families as well as members of the Guard and Reserve not in federal service. By establishing connection with Virginia's institutions of higher education, the VWWP is able to continue its emphasis on supporting Veterans transitioning from military life and assist them in pursuit of their educational and employment goals. For more information, visit <http://wearevirginiaveterans.org/>.



Honors Rendered Throughout VISN 6 On Veterans Day



Debbie Voloski
Beckley VAMC winning entry in the Beckley, W. Va. annual Veterans Day parade.



Ryan Pleasants
Miss. Virginia, Rosemary Willis, sings for Salem VAMC Veterans on Veterans Day.



Dennis Mehring
Aviation Ordnance Specialist Shawn Locklear, represents the U.S. Navy during the segment of the Asheville VAMC ceremony.



Dennis Mehring
Twenty-one white doves were released at the end of the Asheville VAMC observance.



Tracie Dickson
Salem VAMC Dialysis Unit Wall of Honor tribute featuring pictures of dialysis patients in uniform during their military service.



James Coty
Veterans Day Celebration Along the Bay at Hampton VAMC. Left: Red, white and blue banner presented to the Durham VAMC OEF/OIF/OND team from Duke University Hospital.
Pete Tillman

A Million Hearts: A Million Chances For A Longer, Healthier Life

By Robert A. Petzel, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health

Every day 2,200 people die from cardiovascular disease, making it responsible for one of every three deaths in this country.

That's probably not news for most of you, but our Veterans may not know the magnitude and that's where our role in VHA is taking a renewed focus. VHA, the Department of Health and Human Services and 12 other Federal agencies are combining efforts to promote the Million Hearts campaign — a national initiative that has set a goal of preventing one million heart attacks and strokes by 2017.

The goal of the Million Hearts campaign is to empower Americans to make healthy choices such as avoiding tobacco use, reducing sodium and trans fat consumption. The campaign also seeks to improve care for people who do need treatment by encouraging a targeted focus on the 'ABCS' — Aspirin for people at risk, Blood pressure control, Cholesterol management, and Smoking cessation — all of

which address the major risk factors for cardiovascular disease and can prevent heart attacks and strokes.

VA is proud to be a partner in this important campaign. We actively support Veterans in acquiring the skills and resources they need to succeed in making a number of sustainable changes to their health and life. We're developing new resources for Veterans, from a health library and a telephone lifestyle coaching program to an online health risk assessment tool. These proactive approaches to optimizing the health of our Veterans are fundamental to the transformation of health care.

Disease prevention and health promotion is not the responsibility of one employee or program. Every VHA employee has a responsibility to optimize the health and healing of each and every Veteran. As a VHA employee, I invite you to join me in embracing this opportunity to improve the health and wellbeing of Veterans, by providing the most personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care in America.

Thank you for your dedication to our Nation's Veterans.

Virginia Agencies Assist Hearing Or Speech-Impaired Veterans

Veterans in Virginia living with a hearing or speech loss are automatically eligible for telecommunications equipment through Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's Technology Assistance Program, according to a VDDHH TAP and Virginia Relay news release.

TAP provides telecommunication equipment to qualified applicants whose disabilities prevent them from using a standard telephone. Adaptive telecommunications equipment, including text telephones, captioned telephones and other devices, is available to individuals who meet the following qualifications:

- A Veteran with a hearing or speech loss and proof of an honorable discharge.
- A Veteran with a hearing or speech loss and documentation of a service-related disability rating from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- A surviving spouse or child of a Veteran who was killed in the line of duty and has a hearing or speech loss.
- An active member of the Virginia National Guard who has completed the required initial active-duty service.

Equipment is provided to qualified individuals on a Loan-to-Own (L2O) basis. This gives qualified recipients up to 30 days to decide whether to keep, exchange, or return the equipment. If following the 30-day period, the recipient feels the device enables him or her to successfully communicate over the phone, he or she retains ownership of the device.

Virtual 'Hope Box' Could Help Reduce Suicidal Thoughts

The VA Medical Center in Portland, Ore. has become the testing site for an interesting new approach to helping Veterans cope with thoughts of suicide: the "hope box."

"One tool we use in distress tolerance here as part of our Dialectical Behavior Therapy treatment is for Veterans to develop what we call a 'self-soothing box,'" explained Aysha Crain, a social worker and research coordinator at the Portland VA. "This physical 'hope box' is a means for Veterans with suicidal thoughts to remember better times through favorite photos, gifts and notes, and by using distraction tools or games like Sudoku or crossword puzzles.

"We encourage our Veterans to try to keep their physical hope box with them," she continued. "This way, they'll have an option for managing distressing thoughts when they become overwhelming. The hope box can be any kind of container...a shoe box, envelope, or plastic bag."

Of course, it's not necessarily private, convenient or easy to carry something like that around with you all the time. So technology has come to the rescue. A team led by Nigel Bush, a research psychologist at the Defense Department's National Center for Telehealth and Technology, has come up with a potential solution.

"They developed a virtual hope box smartphone application that we hope can serve the



same purpose as our physical hope box," explained Dr. Steven Dobscha, chief of psychiatry at the Portland VA Medical Center. "It can be used conveniently and discreetly on a smartphone."

When using the virtual hope box, the Veteran sets up the app with photos of friends and family, sound bites and videos of loved ones and special moments, music, relaxation exercises, games, and helpline phone numbers.

Now that initial development of the app has been completed, psychologists and social workers at the Portland VA are busy evaluating it. How? They're introducing the app to about 25 Veterans enrolled in a research project being conducted in collaboration with Portland's Dialectical Behavior Therapy Program.

"We're in the testing phase," Dobscha said. "We're hopeful this pilot study will tell us if this is likely to be a tool that Veterans will use when they are struggling with suicidal thoughts."

Development and testing of the app is being supported by a grant from the Department of Defense, through the Military Suicide Research Consortium.

Assistive devices available through TAP L2O include: TTY's (text telephones), amplified telephones, Voice Carry Over (VCO) phones, CapTel®, captioning telephones, outgoing speech amplifier phones, signalers for the phone and door, and Hearing Carry Over (HCO) phones. Other devices available by special request. Note: All devices through TAP carry a one-year manufacturer's warranty, and training on use of the equipment is available. TAP participants can apply for new equipment every four years.

To find out if you qualify, contact the VDDHH outreach office nearest you. For a list of office locations visit www.vddhh.org/ or call 1-800-552-7917 (voice/text).

Virginia Relay enables people who are deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or speech disabled to communicate by TTY (text telephone) or another assistive telephone device with anyone who uses a standard phone. To make a Virginia Relay call, just dial 7-1-1, and you automatically reach a communications assistant (CA) at Virginia Relay.

World AIDS Day 'Say Yes To The Test'

The Office of Public Health wants to remind everyone about World AIDS Day, Dec. 1, 2012. The illness now known as HIV was first identified 31 years ago, and since then, more than 25 million people worldwide have died of AIDS.

VA remains the largest provider of HIV care in the country and a national leader in high quality, comprehensive HIV care.

An estimated 1.2 million Americans are living with HIV, and yet one out of five don't know it. World AIDS Day is an opportunity to take action.

This year's theme for World AIDS Day is "Working Together for an AIDS-Free Generation".

Public health experts advise that every Veteran—not just those who think they are at risk—get tested for HIV at least once in their life. By diagnosing HIV infection as soon as possible, Veterans can receive excellent care and remain healthy for many years to come.

Join VA in recognizing World AIDS Day. Say yes to

the test. Make HIV testing a part of every Veteran's routine care.

An HIV test is the only way to be certain about your HIV status. A person with HIV could show no symptoms for years, but could still pass the virus on to others.

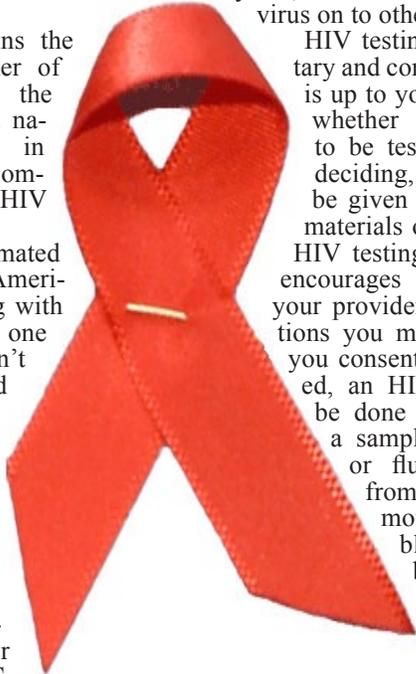
HIV testing is voluntary and confidential. It is up to you to decide whether you want to be tested. Before deciding, you will be given educational materials on HIV and HIV testing. VA also encourages you to ask your provider any questions you may have. If you consent to be tested, an HIV test will be done with either a sample of blood or fluid (saliva) from inside your mouth. For the blood test, blood is drawn either from an arm or from a finger with a

needle stick.

Facing AIDS

On World AIDS Day, VA also joins the AIDS community in their Facing AIDS initiative, a campaign to help reduce stigma and promote HIV testing by putting a face to those with HIV and the people who support them.

For more information, go to www.hiv.va.gov/.



VA's New PSA Targets Women Vets

WASHINGTON – VA has developed a new public service announcement to let women Veterans know they've come to "The Right Place" when seeking VA health care.

The number of women using VA health care has doubled in the past decade and that number is expected to double again soon.

The 30-second video PSA, produced by VA's Women's Health Services office, addresses key themes defined by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

Key messages in the PSA include: assuring women Veterans that VA is ready to serve them; encouraging viewers to rethink assumptions that all Veterans are male; and reminding Americans that women Veterans are coming home, separating from service, or returning to Guard or Reserve status.

The PSA was developed for nationwide release along with a new employee awareness video created as part of VA's ongoing efforts to change its culture to be more understanding and accommodating of women Veterans. It also promotes the recognition of women Veterans around Veterans Day, honoring their service to our country.

"Not all women who served their country identify as Veterans and many women Veterans are unaware that VA offers high quality women's health care," said Dr. Robert Petzel, Undersecretary for

Health, Veterans Health Administration. "One of the most important aspects of our efforts to serve women Veterans is to make sure each one of them knows we're here."

Women serve in every branch of the military, representing 15 percent of today's active duty military and nearly 18 percent of National Guard and Reserve forces. By 2020, VA estimates women Veterans will constitute 10 percent of the Veteran population.

VA is disseminating its culture-of-change message to employees and Veterans through a multi-faceted campaign, which includes a toolkit for outreach to women Veterans. To access additional campaign materials, visit www.womenshealth.va.gov/culture_change.asp. To access the toolkit, visit www.womenshealth.va.gov/toolkits.asp.

The PSA is available for viewing on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5FGIZ2uYIU and www.womenshealth.va.gov. Broadcast organizations interested in obtaining a broadcast-quality version of the PSA can download it by accessing the following link: https://downloads.va.gov/files/VA_OPIA/VDPDVAPSA/, then right clicking on "VDPDVAPSA5H.mov" and selecting "save target as."

Visit www.va.gov/womenvet and www.womenshealth.va.gov to learn more about VA programs and services for women Veterans.

Million Veteran Program Enrolls 100,000th Veteran On Way To 1 Million

This October a Veteran in Milwaukee became the 100,000th person nationwide to enroll in VA's Million Veteran Program, or MVP.

The study was launched in 2011. It expects to have enrolled up to a million Veterans within the next few years.

With its 100,000th enrollee so far, MVP already tops the enrollment of any single VA study or research program in the past.

MVP aims to build a huge database of health, military, and genetic information. The

goal is to help researchers learn more about how genes impact health.

Health information and DNA samples collected through MVP are stored securely and made available to authorized researchers. VA has put tight safeguards in place to protect Veterans' personal information.

As researchers delve into MVP data over the coming years, they will look for insights into new treatments and preventive measures. They will also seek to learn how

to use genetic tests to predict which patients will respond best to which therapies.

VA Chief Research and Development Officer Dr. Joel Kupersmith called MVP "an extremely important partnership that could not have been possible without our altruistic Veteran volunteers."

Local MVP milestones are also being marked. Air Force Veteran Robert Arrington, for instance, became the 5,000th MVP enrollee at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston on Oct. 31.

"I received a pamphlet about the Million Veteran Program from the Lufkin VA clinic [north of Houston] and decided to participate in the study because I thought it might be beneficial to other Veterans," said Arrington. "The more informed the doctors are, the better they can do their job."

For the latest information on MVP, including a list of the 40 VA medical centers that are now enrolling Veterans in the study, visit www.research.va.gov/mvp.

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
704-597-3500

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
130 Executive Center Pkwy
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 Drive
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 Louisburg 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