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Voices of VISN 6

Official news from around your VISN

Vol. 6, No. 6

March 31, 2016

VA Commemorates 50th Anniversary Of Vietnam War

By Steve Wilkins
VISN 6 Public Affairs

More than 100 Vietnam and Vietnam Era Veterans and their family members stood on the lawn in front of Hampton VAMC's historic entrance, on a gorgeous, if initially chilly Tuesday morning, March 29, to be welcomed home and thanked for their sacrifice in one of our nation's longest conflicts.

The ceremony, which was hosted in concert with the Hampton National Cemetery, paid tribute to

Vietnam Veterans, many of whom were visibly moved by the honor.

The Department of Veterans Affairs conducted hundreds of similar events at VA facilities across the nation March 29 to recognize, honor and thank U.S. Vietnam Veterans and their families for their service and sacrifices as part of the national Vietnam War Commemoration.

VA Secretary Robert McDonald hosted a wreath-laying ceremony

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Brian Sipp

Heads were bowed and hearts raised at Salem VAMC and other facilities across the nation as VA and other DoD partners joined to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War.

Fayetteville VAMC Hosts Native American Forum

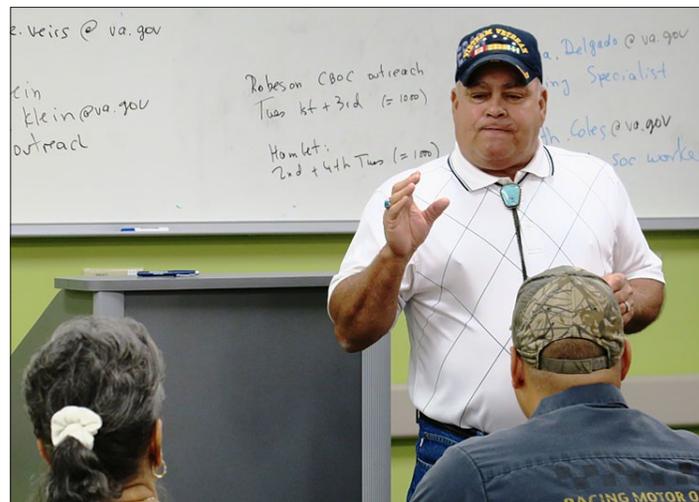
By Jeff Melvin
Fayetteville VAMC
Public Affairs

Fayetteville VAMC hosted a Native American Indian Forum/Roundtable Feb. 25 at its new VA Health Care Center at 7300 South Raeford Road.

Attendees received updates and information on services and programs available through the Fayetteville VAMC and its subordinate units.

In addition, a representative from each Tribe shared information about their respective tribe/organization and the status of its current relationship to VA health care.

"This is also an oppor-



Jeff Melvin

Gene Jacobs, Chief of the Coharie Tribe, share remarks during Fayetteville VAMC's Native American Indian Forum/Roundtable.

tunity for Fayetteville's staff to gain a better understanding about our Na-

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From The Director

This year, 2016 is one of transformation. This time next year as Veterans enter our facilities they should feel part of a radically different environment and health care experience. Since 2014 Secretary McDonald has been developing plans to change the culture of VA care in a way that enhances how Veterans are engaged in their care; from the moment they first hear from us to the moment they arrive back home from their appointments.



The change is called MyVA. Through it, Veterans should discover a more open, comfortable and secure environment that allows them to feel in control of their care. VA is becoming leaner, through organizational integration and departmental collaboration, allowing us to improve customer service training and capabilities across the agency. This will make the department more seamless to Veterans, who we hope will begin to perceive their interactions with one VA rather than individual organizations. It is a change we hope will be invisible to Veterans, but one that affects the way they feel about doing business with VA.

Other changes will affect Veterans two dimensionally. The number one priority for VA and every staff member is to enhance the Veteran experience. Supporting that concept are initiatives that support and supplement staff efforts to accomplish their jobs, so that they engage Veterans from a set of experiences that has lifted them up, making it easier for them to offer a better experience for Veterans by feeling better about whatever it is they do from day to day. Staff will receive training to help them understand how wanting to perform their jobs better and looking to improve on what they accomplished the day before, striving for continuous improvement can improve Veteran's health. VA is also on a mission to make the most of community partnerships, that enable VA to do what it does best, caring for Veterans through a core of primary care and support services, while allowing the community to offer Veterans the best of what is available locally when specialized or high demand services are required to treat Veteran health issues.

While I can't say that planning is complete, what I can tell you is that implementation has begun and you should recognize some of the dynamic changes occurring in VA over the coming months. Many will be small and subtle, like the number of smiles that greet Veterans as they make their way through our hallways. Others will be slightly more than that, as our efficiency should help Veterans get to and through their appointments with greater ease and less time. Still other changes may be as subtle as a smile but as obvious as a billboard, as wayfinding, PACT Team engagement, telephone protocol and other service enhancements come to life.

You have already witnessed the transition to a more responsive VA, in our dealings with Congress and the rapid deployment and correction of Veteran Care programs, like Choice, the expansion of benefits to Camp Lejeune Veterans or more direct services for Veterans affected by Agent Orange. As we continue to make corrections to Choice, helping Veterans receive the care they need more quickly, VA will continue to work toward providing all Veterans the best care, closest to home, when they need it.

Sincerely,

Dan Hoffmann

Lombardo Appointed Richmond Associate Director

Mr. Alan Lombardo has been appointed Associate Director of the Richmond VAMC, effective March 20. In this role, Mr. Lombardo is responsible for the major administrative functions of the medical center to include facility management, finance, human resources, EMS and healthcare administrative services. Previously, Lombardo served as an Assistant Director at the medical center, among



Alan Lombardo

a variety of other roles during his tenure. Lombardo completed his Master of Science degree in Physical Therapy at Shenandoah University and earned Master of Healthcare Administration and Master of Business Administration degrees from Baylor University. Early in 2014, he achieved the Fellow status for the American College of Healthcare Executives.

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



Questions or comments about the newsletter, e-mail stephen.wilkins2@va.gov or call 919-956-5541.

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Charlotte Health Care Center Grand Opening April 8

By Marlous Black
Salisbury VAMC Public Affairs

The Salisbury VAMC will hold a grand opening and ribbon-cutting event for the Charlotte VA Health Care Center at 3506 West Tyvola Road Friday, April 8, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Tours of the HCC will be available to the public following the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The new VA outpatient center located at the intersection of Cascade Pointe Blvd and W. Tyvola Rd, will offer specialty care services not available at the Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Northern Charlotte, will provide a wide variety of outpatient services, with even greater capacity for expansion in the future.

The Charlotte HCC is designed to serve up to 35,000 veteran patients a year, with 295,000 net usable square feet of space, and more than 1,900 parking spaces.

Salisbury VAMC Director Kaye Green says she's proud of the strides Salisbury VA is making to provide the best healthcare and access for local Veterans.

"Increasing access to quality medical care through the Salisbury VA Health Care System has been one of our highest priorities over the past three years, and the opening of the Charlotte Health Care Center is a major milestone in that effort," she said. "We are dedicated to providing the best care anywhere. The Charlotte Health Care Center will no doubt help us deliver on that promise through state-of-the-art equipment and dedicated, caring staff in a convenient location for our Veterans. Our nation's Veterans deserve nothing less."

Questions about the ceremony or the Charlotte Health Care Center can be directed to the Salisbury VAMC Public Affairs Office by email at VHASBYPublicAffairs@va.gov.

Cultural Trip Brings Taiwanese Students To Richmond VAMC

By David Hodge
Richmond VAMC Public Affairs

Each year, students from a foreign medical university located halfway around the earth visit Richmond VAMC and other medical facilities as part of a field trip to experience American medicine and medical practices.

Approximately 32 students from the Kaohsiung Medical University in Taiwan visited Richmond VAMC to tour several programs and gain a better understanding of Veteran-centric health care.

This year marks the fourth year students from KMU have visited, according to Dr. Yazar Ozcan, who organizes the KMU trip. Ozcan serves as the Charles P. Cardwell, Jr. Professor Vice Chair and Director of Master of Science in Health Administration at nearby Virginia Commonwealth University, which shares an affiliation with the medical center.

"In many countries, including Taiwan, the hospital care is provided by public/government, and private ownership," Ozcan wrote in an email. "To reflect how the ownership and hospitals provide care, we choose VA as public/government representative."

During the visit to McGuire, the students toured several programs including Polytrauma, Spinal Cord Injury & Disorder Research, and Prosthetics.

Dr. Hon-Yi Shi, who serves as the chair of the Graduate Institute of Healthcare Administration and Medical Informatics of KMU, attended this year's trip along with the students. Shi said he, and the students, are greatly appreciative for the opportunity to visit the



David Hodge

Approximately 32 students from the Kaohsiung Medical University in Taiwan visited Richmond VAMC, March 10. The medical students toured several programs at McGuire, including Polytrauma, Spinal Cord Injury and Disorder Research, and Prosthetics.

city of Richmond and the medical center.

"During the stay [in Virginia], our graduated students not only expressed their thoughts to advance their studies but also explored to enhance their knowledge and abilities in the field," Shi explained via email.

Ozcan says the relationship between VCU and KMU began approximately 16 years ago. Since then the event has expanded to include several central Virginia medical facilities.

Asheville VA Nurse Wins Coveted Daisy Award

By Paul Waldrop
Asheville VAMC

The Asheville VAMC congratulates Paul Adams, LPN, in the Community Living Center, for receiving the DAISY Award for outstanding nurses for the month of January. Established in 1999 by the DAISY Foundation, the award honors nurses who go “above and beyond” and make extraordinary differences in patients and their families’ experiences in healthcare.

Ashely Sitton, the Asheville VAMC Chairperson for the Nursing Recognition Council said, “The award recognizes the extraordinary efforts nurses perform day in and day out to meet the needs of patients. Paul goes the extra mile to make our Veteran’s in the Community Living Center feel at home, whether it is helping them to relive their past, or being their friend in a time of need. We are proud of the integrity, compassion, and care he delivers to his patients every day.

Adams said he was honored to receive the award and strives to exceed the expectations of the Veterans he serves.

“My job here is to create an atmosphere pleasant to the Veteran every day. I have heard hundreds of testimonies of heroism, bravery, and selfless acts all for our country. This makes me so privileged to care for these incredible heroes.”

Dave Przestrzelski, the Associate Director, Patient Care Services/Chief Nurse Executive, says the award gives staff the opportunity to be recognized among their peers both internally and externally.

“The Daisy Award is special not only because it recognizes a member of our staff for those special moments of caring that are so much a part of who we are as nurses but also because our Daisy winners are pub-



Diana Hixenbaugh

Paul Adams, an LPN at the Asheville VAMC, is the recipient of the 2016 DAISY Award for Outstanding Nurses for his work to make a difference in the lives of patients and their families at the medical center

lished to the international web site to position our Daisy recipients alongside their peers from prestigious health care organizations around the world.”

Asheville VAMC would also like to congratulate all of the previous Daisy Award honorees:

- Gabriel Inton, Hospice Unit
- Patrick Hefner, Emergency Room
- Lola Powell, Cardiac/Oncology Unit
- Kim Evans, Medical ICU
- Cynthia Phillips, Cardiac/Oncology Unit
- Sabrina Reed, Cardiac/Oncology Unit
- George Romero, Medical ICU
- Chris Morrow, Cardiac/Oncology Unit
- Michael Evans, SWAT

Fayetteville continued from Pg 1

and their needs,” wrote Fayetteville Medical Center Director Elizabeth “Betty” Goolsby in a letter announcing the event.

“Our goal is to continue the partnership with the NC Commission of Indian Affairs and Tribal leaders in an effort to continue providing better services to meet the needs of our Native American Veterans,” she said.

Goolsby urged the representatives to “take this opportunity to learn more about the current services the medical center staff provides. We are continually working to be the provider of choice to meet our Veteran’s health care needs.”

This is the third year in a row the medical center has hosted the forum.

Credit Issues With Choice Pgm?

VA will help you resolve adverse credit reporting and debt collection issues caused by use of the Choice Program. The Community Care Call Center, at 877-881-7618, is set up to let Veterans work directly with the VA to resolve such issues. Visit www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2764 to see the complete VA news release.

For more about the Veterans Choice Program and VA’s progress, visit www.va.gov/opa/choiceact Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program can call 866-606-8198, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern Time, to find out more about the program, confirm their eligibility and schedule an appointment. See full article on page 10.

Reflections Of A Durham VA Hospice Volunteer

By Alan T. Makhoul
Durham VAMC Volunteer Services

I write this to personally thank all of the great men and women, employees and volunteers, of the Durham Veteran Affairs Hospital. My experience with the Durham VAMC has been nothing short of life-altering – and I mean that in the literal sense – volunteering here has actually had an impact on where my life is headed.

I began volunteering in the Hospice Unit in February 2014 because I wanted a first-hand experience with patients and the gravity of the medical environment. What I received in return were countless memories, stories, and emotions that will forever color my perception of medicine and the VA.

I have had the amazing honor of being with a Veteran during his last few hours of life. With my hand atop his, I watched him breathe his numbered breaths and I felt a surreal sense of peace and happiness. After I left that day, I had one of those moments when it feels like the sky is bigger than it normally is and the sun is shining just a little bit brighter.

I have listened to a great many stories – stories that were likely told for the last time. My favorite conversation was with a World War II Veteran who remembered the construction of the Duke Chapel. Even on an ordinary day, I've had the pleasure of talking with Veterans and helping them eat lunch, an opportunity that I am so lucky to have had. These past two years, I have looked forward to going to the VA; it has been my chance to give back to the Durham community that has given me so much. For that, I am ever grateful.

When I first began volunteering in the VA, I knew my experience would ultimately play a role in my decision of whether or not I wanted to enter medicine. I sought an experience that would expose me to the seriousness of medicine, to the gravity of the environment. For this reason, I chose the Hospice Unit. At the time, I was still considering medicine, but now, after two years of volunteering in the VA, I am more confident than ever that medicine is the career for me. I have grown to love the VA and the people in it. I wake up looking forward to coming to the VA.

Last year, I had the opportunity to sit with a Veteran who was actively dying. This was my first experience of this kind, and it was an absolutely amazing experience. As meditative piano music played in the background, I watched his chest slowly move up and down. It meant so much to me to be there for this Veteran during his final hours, and I'm sure it meant something to him as well. The experience was humbling – I considered questions I had never had before; I thought about



Linnie Skidmore
Durham VAMC volunteer Alan Makhoul visits with Army Veteran Joe Bradford in Durham's Hero's Way Hospice Unit.

myself in that same position someday. It was a remarkable experience and one that I will always cherish.

I have had the pleasure of taking many Veterans out in their wheelchairs to different parts of the VA. The excitement they have of being able to leave their rooms makes this one of my favorite ways of helping. The smiles on their faces are worth the world to me. I often take them out to the patio area on sunny days and it provides a great atmosphere for us to just talk about life. It makes me so happy to be able to provide them with conversation - the stories they have to tell are priceless.

Other times, I help them eat lunch or keep them company so their family members don't worry about them being alone. I remember one instance where a man's daughter felt okay going home after several days of being with her father, for fear of him falling. By being there, I allowed her to take a break. It was a rewarding feeling knowing that I had helped her during this difficult time.

Ultimately, it was through my experiences in the VA – where I felt firsthand the warmth and compassion that patient interaction has to offer – that I dedicated myself to medicine. It has been an absolutely transformative experience and I look forward to many more years of serving the Veterans of the VA. I will forever credit the Durham VA as being the place that led me to choose a life as a physician.

Alan Makhoul, a Junior at Duke University, has been volunteering with the Durham VAMC for two years. Alan has a passion for helping others and hopes to one day work in the healthcare field.

Asheville Hosts Recommitment Ceremony As Vet's Final Wish

By Sharonda Pearson
Asheville VAMC Public Affairs

Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. William Ernest Hands! The married couple of 30 years renewed their vows March 18 at Asheville VAMC in a recommitment ceremony officiated by VA Chaplain Jeremiah Richards. The event was facilitated as part of the medical center's Butterfly Wish program, which uses donations to grant wishes to Veterans receiving hospice or palliative care.

William Hands, an Army Veteran who served from 1972-1980, thanked the Asheville VA staff for making his final wish come true. "This is so much more than I expected or could have hoped for," he said. "I thank all of you from the bottom of my heart."

Brenda Hands thanked the staff for the quality of care provided to her husband during his time at Valor Hospice. "The team has been amazing. He's been treated excellent and we couldn't ask for better care. They've also helped me deal with the situation," she said. "This ceremony was special for both of us and more than what I expected for his last wish."



Rod Doty

Army Veteran William Hands, an Asheville VAMC hospice patient, and his wife Brenda renew their vows at a recommitment ceremony organized by the Asheville VAMC Butterfly Wish program.

Asheville Doctor Recognized For Heroic Efforts

By Steve Wilkins
VISN 6 Public Affairs

An Asheville doctor on his way to a funeral was thrust into the national spotlight recently when he became more than a witness to what may have been an extreme case of distracted driving.

According to reports, a school bus carrying a basketball coach and 26 members of his north Indiana Griffith High School basketball team rolled over after being side-swiped by a passing car. Shortly, Dr. Mark Kadowaki, a Navy Veteran who was traveling to Wisconsin, said he arrived on the scene after the accident and found the bus "upside-down," as he immediately pulled over. Recognizing the potential gravity of the situation, the surgeon from Asheville VAMC leapt into action, helping to extract victims and treat them until help arrived.

Dominique Small, of Terre Haute, Ind., was southbound in the left lane when she spilled her drink, then tried to grab it, losing control of her 2001 Kia and

sideswiping the bus, which was southbound in the right lane, said Indiana State Police Sgt. Ann Wojas.

According to a report by ABC News, Kadowaki said, "There frankly is a moment of panic and fear. But I think fairly quickly you flip into the mode of 'there could be patients who could be hurt here,' which enabled him to react instantaneously.

Reports claim that all 27 people on board the bus survived the crash that left the bus upside-down in a ditch with part of its roof smashed in. By this writing, All 20 of the students had been treated and released as well as three coaches, the team trainer, a ball boy and the bus driver. Once help and media arrived on the scene, Kadowaki continued his trip, ultimately returning to Asheville.



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at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial – “The Wall” to initiate VA’s contribution to the Commemoration.

VA, along with more than 9,000 organizations across the country, has joined with the Department of Defense as a Commemorative Partner to help Americans honor our nation’s Vietnam Veterans.

Authorized by Congress, established under the Secretary of Defense, and launched by the President in May 2012, the Vietnam War Commemoration recognizes all men and women who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces from Nov. 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975.

Special ceremonies offering tribute to Vietnam Veterans, distinctive to each location, were held in each of the VA facilities spanning the Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network. But common to all was the reverence offered every Veteran as they stepped forward to receive a commemorative pin, signifying the nation’s gratitude for their service and sacrifice.

Nine million Americans, approximately 7 million living today, served during that period, and the commemoration makes no distinction between Veterans who served in-country, in-theater, or were stationed elsewhere. All answered the call of duty. “This commemoration has special significance for those of us at VA because of our honored mission to serve those who have “borne the battle,” said McDonald. “It’s also an opportunity to remember our VA colleagues who served in this generation of Veterans, to extend our heartfelt appreciation to them and to their families who shared the burden of their loved one’s service.”

More than 329 VA medical centers, regional benefit offices and national cemeteries will host events, many



Kenita Gordon

Virginia Patriot Guard riders were among celebrants during the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War at Hampton VAMC.



Kenita Gordon

US Army CSM Michael Gragg addresses the audience during the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War at Hampton VAMC.

in partnership with local Veteran service organizations and volunteers.

In VA’s Kernersville HCC where the Salisbury VAMC and VBA Winston Salem Regional Office partnered to co-host the Vietnam War Commemoration Ceremony, more than 300 Veterans along with family members were treated by a performance of the musical group, Letters from Home, who performed the National Anthem and provided additional entertainment by singing The Ballad of the Green Berets. The words of the song evoked deep emotions, evident on the faces of many attendees. Local Veteran organizations including Coffee with Veterans and Daughters of the American Revolution provided support for the event.

Following a successful event in the Richmond VAMC’s Rotunda Entrance near its POW/MIA memorial, Public Affairs Officer Darlene Edwards said, “It is heartwarming to watch these proud men with their backs straight and chests out to receive the honor they’ve waited so long for.” Approximately 150 Veterans were pinned there.

Salem VAMC also held a collaborative event that included the Roanoke Regional Office of the Veterans Benefit Administration, and the Stonewall Jackson Chapter of the Association of the United States Army. Lasting a bit more than one hour, the event had a capacity crowd of 350 people. It was covered by local media, and attended by Congressman Bob Goodlatte (R- 6th Dist. Va) and Roanoke City Councilman Bill Bepitch.

In other ceremonies around the VISN, Congressman Mark Meadows attended the Asheville ceremony that featured a local Vietnam Veteran delivering the keynote address and the unveiling of a national proc-

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April Is National Stress Awareness Month

Stress happens. Sometimes it's unavoidable, at times it's unbearable. That's why taking time for yourself is invaluable. It's healthy to relax, renew, and rejuvenate.

Stress does not merely afflict your mind; it can also affect you on a cellular level. In fact, long-term stress can lead to a wide range of illnesses—from headaches to stomach disorders to depression—and can even increase the risk of serious conditions like stroke and heart disease. Understanding the mind/stress/health connection can help you better manage stress and improve your health and well-being.

The sympathetic stress response is a survival mechanism that is hardwired into our nervous systems. This automatic response is necessary for mobilizing quick reflexes when there is imminent danger, such as swerving to avoid a car crash.

When you perceive a threat, stress hormones rush into your bloodstream—increasing heart rate, blood pressure, and glucose levels. Other hormones also suppress functions like digestion and the immune system, which is one of the reasons why chronic stress can leave you more vulnerable to illness.

Danger triggers the stress response. Unfortunately, so can work conflicts, concerns over debt, bad memories, or anxiety in general. Although one bad day at work won't compromise your health, weeks or months of stress can dampen your immune response and raise your risk for disease.

Meditation is a way to relax and renew the mind, body, and spirit. Meditation is not necessarily about having no thoughts; it's about having no reactions to your thoughts, so allow the thoughts to come and go. Be gentle and patient with the process.

www.foh.hhs.gov/calendar/stress.html

If you suffer from chronic stress and can't influence or change the situation, then you'll need to change your approach. Be willing to be flexible. Remember, you have the ability to choose your response to stressors,

and you may have to try various options. Recognize when you don't have control, and let it go. Don't get anxious about situations that you cannot change. Take control of your own reactions and focus your mind on something that makes you feel calm and in control.

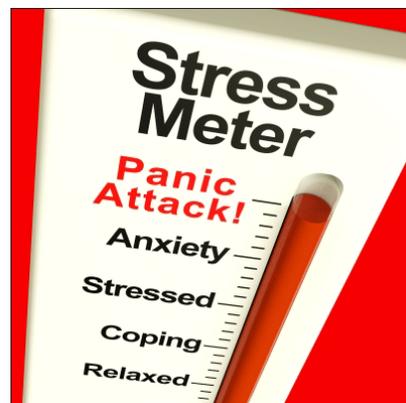
This may take some practice, but it pays off in peace of mind. Develop a vision for healthy living, wellness, and personal growth, and set realistic goals to help you realize your vision.

Be sure to carve out some time to relax and take care of yourself each day—even just 10 to 15 minutes per day can improve your ability to handle life's stressors. Also, remember that exercise is an excellent stress reliever.

Everyone has different ways they like to relax and unwind. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Take a walk;
- Read a book;
- Go for a run;
- Have a cup of tea;
- Play a sport;
- Spend time with a friend or loved one;
- Meditate (learn how in the sidebar);
- Do yoga.

While you can't avoid stress, you can minimize it by changing how you choose to respond to it. The ultimate reward for your efforts is a healthy, balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun.



**Veterans
Crisis Line** 1-800-273-8255
PRESS 1

**Earth
day**
April 22

Combat Veterans Get Telephonic Health Care Application Option

VA announced today that it has amended its enrollment regulations to allow Veterans to complete applications for enrollment in VA health care by telephone without the need for a signed paper application. The change is effective immediately for combat Veterans and will be effective July 5 for all Veterans.

This phased implementation accelerates VA's effort to enroll allcombat Veterans with pending applications as part of its ongoing Veterans Enrollment Rework Project. VA is working to complete the review and rework of all pending health enrollment records for living and deceased Veterans this summer. Veterans can view the amended regulation on the Federal Register website.

"This improvement to our Veterans' experience is one we can implement now, and it's the right thing to do for Veterans," said VA Deputy Secretary Sloan D. Gibson, "Enrolling all 31,000 Combat Veterans with pending applications is the top priority in our effort to fix our enrollment system. Our analysis of our current application process convinced me we could enroll

Veterans more quickly using this method, particularly Combat Veterans and those who are transitioning from active duty to Veteran status," Gibson said.

By adding this telephone application option to VA's regulations, VA will now offer three ways to enroll. This change provides Veterans an even more convenient way to apply for enrollment, in addition to the paper VA Form 10-10 EZ and online enrollment application process. With publication in the Federal Register today, Combat Veterans may now apply by phone. All other Veterans may apply by phone starting on July 5.

When Veterans choose to enroll, VA offers an enhancement to their enrollment experience through "Welcome to VA" (W2VA). Veterans enrolled since July 1, 2015 have received a personal introduction to VA health care services, programs and resources to help them become more familiar with VA's services.

For more information, Veterans can contact the Health Eligibility Center Enrollment and Eligibility Division toll free at 855-488-8440.

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lamation; a Town Hall meeting that included a special note of appreciation from Durham VAMC Director DeAnne Seekins for each pinned Veteran; and a special event in Fayetteville VAMC's Community Living Center where Director Betty Goolsby and retired Army Brig. Gen. Ferdinand Irizarry pinned 29 CLC Vietnam-era residents.

By presidential proclamation issued on May 25, 2012, the commemoration extends from its inaugural event on Memorial Day 2012 through Veterans Day 2025. Commemorative partners – local, state and national organizations, businesses, corporations and governmental agencies – have committed to publicly thank and honor Vietnam Veterans and their families on behalf of the nation and have pledged to host a minimum of two events annually.



Linnie Skidmore

To learn more about the Vietnam War Commemoration, visit www.vietnamwar50th.com.

Larry Rozier hugs Cajun Comeau, a MyVA Veteran's experience Field Officer during the Durham VAMC's Town Hall.



Photograph © ACHE/ICDA 2016

Hoffmann Receives Distinction

Adam Walms, FACHE, Regent for Veterans Affairs, presents VISN 6 Director Dan Hoffmann with the American College of Healthcare Executives Lifetime Achievement Regent's Award March 17 in recognition of significant contributions toward the achievement of the goals of the American College of Healthcare Executives and the advancement of healthcare management excellence. The Award was presented at the VA Symposium held in conjunction with the Congress on Healthcare Leadership.

Community Care Call Center Helps Choice Pgm Billing Issues

Veterans can now work directly with VA to resolve debt collection issues resulting from inappropriate or delayed Choice Program billing.

In step with MyVA's efforts to modernize VA's customer-focused, Veteran-centered services capabilities, a Community Care Call Center has been set up for Veterans experiencing adverse credit reporting or debt collection resulting from inappropriately billed Choice Program claims.

Veterans experiencing these problems can call 877-881-7618, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern Time for assistance.

"As a result of the Veterans Choice Program, community providers have seen thousands of Veterans. We continue to work to make the program more Veteran-friendly," said Dr. David Shulkin, Under Secretary for Health. "There should be no bureaucratic burden that stands in the way of Veterans getting care."

The new call center will work to resolve instances of improper Veteran billing and assist community care medical providers with delayed payments.

VA staff members are also trained and ready to work

with the medical providers to expunge adverse credit reporting on Veterans resulting from delayed payments to providers.

VA is urging Veterans to continue working with their VA primary care team to obtain necessary health care services regardless of adverse credit reporting or debt collection activity.

VA acknowledges that delayed payments and inappropriately billed claims are unacceptable and have caused stress for Veterans and providers alike.

The new call center is the first step in addressing these issues. VA presented The Plan to Consolidate Community Care in October of 2015 that outlines additional solutions to streamline processes and improve timely provider payment.

For more about the Veterans Choice Program and VA's progress, visit www.va.gov/opa/choiceact Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program can call 866-606-8198, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern Time, to find out more about the program, confirm their eligibility and schedule an appointment.

Disabled Veteran Automobile Allowance Eligibility Rules

Service members and Veterans may be eligible for a one-time payment of not more than \$20,114.34 toward the purchase of an automobile or other conveyance if you have certain service-connected disabilities. The grant is paid directly to the seller of the automobile and the service member or Veteran may only receive the automobile grant once in his/her lifetime.

Certain Service members and Veterans may also be eligible for adaptive equipment. Adaptive equipment includes, but is not limited to, power steering, power brakes, power windows, power seats, and special equipment necessary to assist the eligible person into and out of the vehicle.

VA may provide financial assistance in purchasing adaptive equipment more than once. This benefit is payable to either the seller or the Veteran or service member. Service members and Veterans must receive prior VA approval before purchasing an automobile, or adaptive equipment.

To qualify for adaptive equipment, you must be either a service member who is still on active duty or a Veteran, and have one of the following disabilities that are either rated as service-connected or treated as if service-connected under 38 U.S.C 1151: Loss, or permanent loss of use, of one or both feet, loss, or permanent loss of use, of one or both hands, permanent impairment of vision in both eyes to a certain degree, severe burn injury, or Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

To support a claim for automobile allowance, the evidence must show that you are service-connected or are treated as if service-connected under 38 U.S.C 1151 or, for a service member, the result of disease incurred or injury contracted in or aggravated by active duty, for a disability resulting in: the loss, or permanent loss of use, of one or both feet, one or both hands, permanent impairment of vision in both eyes, resulting in Central Visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with glasses, or Central Visual acuity that is greater than 20/200, if there is a visual field defect in which your peripheral field has contracted to such an extent that the widest diameter of visual fields subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees in the better eye, or a severe burn injury: Deep partial thickness or full thickness burns resulting in scar formation that cause contractures and limit motion of one or more extremities or the trunk and preclude the effective operation of an automobile, or Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

To support a claim for adaptive equipment, the evidence must show that you have a disability as shown above, or you have ankylosis of at least one knee or one hip due to service-connected disability.

To apply, Complete VA Form 21-4502, "Application for Automobile or Other Conveyance and Adaptive Equipment" and mail to your regional office, contact an accredited representative or agent or go to a VA regional office to have a VA employee assist you.

Veterans, Families May Get Free Assistance Filing Tax Returns

Please note that VA does not endorse any of these sites. This information is intended only to inform Veterans and their families of free resources they may wish to utilize.

A number of resources are available at no charge to help Veterans and their families file their 2015 tax returns. The filing deadline will be Monday, April 18, three days later than normal due to the Emancipation Day holiday in Washington, D.C. falling on April 15.

Shown below are several ways Veterans and their families have access to free tax preparation and electronic filing services.

- IRS' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) programs are available to taxpayers that earned less than \$54,000 in 2015. More than 3.7 million tax returns were prepared using these services in 2014. All tax returns completed through VITA are prepared by IRS certified volunteers, so you can feel confident your tax return is accurate. Even better, there are over 12,000 convenient locations across the country. To find the VITA location nearest you, enter your zip code into the easy-to-use VITA/TCE Locator.

- MyFreeTaxes, operating the only free online tax preparation and filing assistance platform available in all 50 states and Washington D.C., who earned \$62,000 or less in 2015, allows qualified Veterans, active-duty military, their families and all other qualifying taxpayers to file both a federal and state tax return absolutely free. In addition to e-filing, MyFreeTaxes also provides in-person help to individuals and families earning \$20,000 or less in 2015. For more information, please visit: www.myfreetaxes.com. The MyFreeTaxes initiative is managed by United Way, with the assistance from legacy partners, National Disability Institute and Goodwill Industries International, and is sponsored by the Wal-Mart Foundation.

In addition to free tax preparation and assistance services like VITA, TCE and MyFreeTaxes, there are several other free options qualifying Veterans and military families may utilize. However, please make note of additional eligibility requirements, and be advised not all may be available in a particular location. Read more about each for information on eligibility and availability of services.

- IRS.gov/FreeFile serves as a central hub where taxpayers can choose from a variety of industry-leading tax software options in order to prepare and e-file their federal tax returns at no cost. If you earned \$62,000 or less last year, you are eligible to choose from among 13 software products. If you earned more, you are still eligible for Free File Fillable Forms, the electronic ver-

sion of IRS paper forms. In fact, more than 70 percent of all taxpayers – 100 million people – are eligible for the software products. Each of the 13 providers has its own special offers, generally based on age, income or state residency. Taxpayers can review each offer or can use the “Help Me” tool to find the tax-filing software they are eligible to use.

- TurboTax Freedom Edition - is available to taxpayers with an income of \$31,000 or less, or those eligible to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

- Second Story TaxAct - to qualify for free tax preparation, a taxpayer's income must be \$50,000 or less, and the filer must be 58 years old or younger.

- H&R Block's Free File - offers free online assistance for taxpayers who earned \$62,000 or less, between 18 and 50 years old as of December 31, 2015.

- Online Taxes (OLT) - offers free tax preparation services to taxpayers with an income between \$13,000 and \$62,000 in 2015.

Those who have already filed their taxes and want to know when they will receive refunds may download the IRS app, IRS2Go!



**MAY
27-30
2016
SAVE THE DATE**

**2016 FREEDOM
BALLOON FEST**

Fleming Loop Park | Fuquay-Varina, NC

Festival Food - Merchant, Arts & Crafts Village - Military Displays & Exhibits - Field Games - Music - Chef's Challenge - Children & Family Friendly - Tethered Balloon Rides - Competition Flying Demonstrations - Nightly Balloon Glow

WWW.WRALFREEDOMBALLOONFEST.COM

VISN 6 Sites Of Care & VA Vet Centers

MEDICAL CENTERS

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

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

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

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

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

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/

OUTPATIENT CLINICS

Albemarle CBOC
1845 W City Drive
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
252-331-2191

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

Charlotte CBOC
8601 University East Drive
Charlotte, NC 28213
704-597-3500

Charlotte HCC
3506 W. Tyvola Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28208
704-329-1300

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

Chesapeake CBOC
1987 S. Military Highway
Chesapeake, Va 23320
757-722-9961

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

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

Fayetteville HCC
7300 So. Raeford Rd
Fayetteville NC 28304
910-488-2120
800-771-6106

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

Fredericksburg CBOC
130 Executive Center Pkwy
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-370-4468

Goldsboro CBOC
2610 Hospital Road
Goldsboro, NC 27909
919-731-4809

Greenville HCC
401 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-830-2149

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

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
4006 Henderson Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Kernersville HCC
1695 Kernersville Medical Pkwy
Kernersville, NC 27284
336-515-5000

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

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

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

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

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

Staunton CBOC
102 Lacy B. King 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

Wilmington HCC
1705 Gardner Rd.
Wilmington, NC 28405
910-343-5300

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

DIALYSIS CENTERS

VA Dialysis and Blind Rehabilitation Clinics at Brier Creek
8081 Arco Corporate Drive
Raleigh, NC 27617
919-286-5220

VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville
2301 Robeson Street, Ste. 101
Fayetteville, NC 28305
910-483-9727

VET CENTERS

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

Fayetteville Vet Center
2301 Robeson Street
Fayetteville, NC 28305
910-488-6252

Greensboro Vet Center
3515 W Market Street, Suite 120
Greensboro, NC 27403
336-333-5366

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

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

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

Raleigh Vet Center
8851 Ellstree Lane
Raleigh, NC 27617
919-856-4616

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

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