

# VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here —



## Hampton VA Medical Center Announces New Director



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Hampton, Va. — The Department of Veterans Affairs is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Taquisa K. Simmons as the new director of the Hampton VA Medical Center.

Dr. Simmons will oversee delivery of health care to more than 59,050 Veterans at the medical center, which is currently experiencing a 16.82 percent growth rate (more than 5 times the national average) and an operating budget exceeding \$500 million.

"I am proud to announce the selection of Dr. Simmons as the new Medical Center Director for Hampton VA," said Stephanie Young, Acting Director of the Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network (VISN 6). "She is a results-driven leader with incredible experience managing health care operations in the community as well as her work in VA, developing patient-centered policy and inspiring quality performance. We look forward to her steady leadership."

Dr. Simmons joined VA as a Supervisory Social Worker in 2013 and has held administrative leadership roles since appointed assistant director of the McGuire VA

**TOP PHOTO:** VISN 6 Acting Network Director Stephanie Young (left) with new Hampton VAMC Director Dr. Taquisa Simmons on the morning Simmons was sworn in to her new position. Simmons had been Associate Director at the facility since 2017.

*(Continued on page 3)*



## MESSAGE FROM OUR ACTING NETWORK DIRECTOR

Greetings,

Here we are transitioning into February, and though the road is long, there is light at the end of it. As much as we have been fighting COVID, I don't want to forget the other life-threatening diseases our Veterans continue to combat daily.

February is National Cancer Prevention Month and American Heart Month. Like COVID, both of these diseases have no borders, and have better survival rates with prevention and whole health strategies.

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), one in three people will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, and in 2021, the U.S. estimates to have almost 1.9 million new cancer cases.

There is hope, though — ACS's 2021 report shows that the death rate from cancer in the U.S. has continued to decline. From 1991 to 2018, the cancer death rate has fallen 31 percent. This includes a 2.4-percent decline from 2017 to 2018 — a new record for the most significant one-year drop in the cancer death rate.

Declines in cancer death are mainly due to fewer people smoking, and early detection and treatment. But even with the drop, cancer is still the second-most-common death of men and women, with heart disease being number one. According to the American Heart Association, cardiovascular disease is the no. 1 killer in America and the no. 1 killer of women. In most cases, heart disease and cancer death can be preventable.

**Now is the perfect time to love your body and your heart!**

- Stay away from tobacco.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Control your blood sugar, cholesterol and treat it if it becomes a problem.
- Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week.
- And get a check-up for your heart and cancer health! Even if it's virtual!
- Be safe from the sun!

To learn more, go to [cancer.org](http://cancer.org) and [heart.org](http://heart.org).

We continue to make tremendous strides as we continue delivering the

Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccine. As I write this, we have administered more than 66,587 in less than six weeks.

I want to express appreciation to the VISN team, especially Dr. Brett Norem, Dr. Charles de Comarmond, Dr. Mary Parker, Dr. Brian Hayes, and Dr. William Grunow. Of course, sincere thanks to the Facility Leadership and staff who created the site plans and executed so well. They have led primary facets of the COVID-19 response, testing and vaccination efforts for the VISN.

All of our sites are using every resource they have to get our employees and Veterans vaccinated, all going on 11 months of endless work and exhaustion to ensure that our Veterans get the protection they deserve. I could not be prouder! And we won't stop until every Veteran who wants a shot receives it.

We know that teamwork makes the dream work, and in this case, our Veterans are protected because of it.

**Stephanie Young**  
*Acting VA Mid Atlantic Health Care Network Director, VISN 6*

## Fayetteville VA NC Coastal Health Care System police sergeant honored for stopping an active shooter

Fayetteville, NC — VA Police Sergeant Allen Tolentino recently was recognized with The Department of Veterans Affairs National Heroism Award for his courageous actions on Feb. 7, 2020, when he single-handedly stopped a female shooter who shot and injured a Veteran waiting for a ride outside Fayetteville's VA Urgent Care.

Sgt. Tolentino is an outstanding police sergeant who, if you asked him, would say he was "just doing his job," said Dan Dücker, executive director of Fayetteville VA NC Coastal Health Care System. "He is a hero in every sense of the word, and because of his willingness to take bold action, he saved countless people from being harmed. He placed his own life in disregard and is more than deserving of the heroism award."

Sgt. Tolentino raced outside the UCC

after hearing the first shot fire. He immediately ordered the woman to drop her gun; he then took her into custody, called for help for the injured Veteran, and then waited for reinforcement to arrive. Within minutes, the Fayetteville Police Department and FBI arrived to help neutralize the situation.

"He has been a beacon of stability, trust, and reliability for the VA Police Service, and we are grateful for his service to our Veterans and staff," said Chief of Police Stephen Oliver for Fayetteville VA NC Coastal Health Care System.

The National Heroism Award is a prestigious award recognized by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and reserved for very few recipients.

Sgt. Tolentino's attention to detail, quick reaction to the situation, while maintaining



Executive Director for the Fayetteville VA NC Coastal Health Care System, Daniel Dücker (left) and Chief of Police (far right), Stephen Oliver, present VA Police Sergeant (center), Allen Tolentino with The Department of Veterans Affairs National Heroism Award for his courageous actions on Feb. 7, 2020, during an active shooter incident at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center. (Photo: Brad Garner, visual information specialist, Jan. 2021)

his composure during such a critical time is what it takes to be a Veterans Affairs Police Officer," said William Dale Hendley, VISN 6 Lead Police Chief. "I commend Sgt. Tolentino for his outstanding performance to duty on that date, and living up to the VA Police's motto of 'Protecting Those Who Served.'"



Medical Center in Richmond, Va. in 2014. While assigned to the Richmond VA Dr. Simmons also served as interim Associate Director for a time in 2017. In October 2017 She was appointed interim Associate Director at the Hampton VA and assumed the role permanently in March 2018. Dr. Simmons also spent 6 months in 2019 serving as interim medical center director at Hampton. As a leader, Dr. Simmons has revitalized worker performance in some areas where she was assigned, improved the level of customer service, and while at Hampton, led the safe evacuation of hundreds of patients during

Hurricane Florence.

Dr. Simmons is a licensed Clinical Social Worker and earned a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision from Regent University in 2014.

With more than 2,400 employees, the Hampton VA Medical Center is a 382-bed teaching facility serving Veterans in eastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. The medical center, 4th oldest in the nation, is located on 85 acres overlooking the Chesapeake Bay, and includes outpatient clinics in Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Va. and Elizabeth City, N.C.

## Richmond VA Simulation Center Staff Critical to Facility's Simulation-Based Training Advances

By Megan Kon | CVHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

It's only been a year and a half since Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) opened its Simulation Center. The facility was recognized at an intermediate level certification, bypassing basic level certification as of Nov. 18, 2020. CVHCS earned the certification from the [Simulation Learning, Education and Research Network \(SimLEARN\)](#), the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) program for simulation in health care training.

The certification not only provides "proof" that participants receive great training while at the Simulation Center, it also carries weight to prospective employees and Veterans seeking exceptional care. As the Simulation Center grows in its accreditations, so will access to standardized, simulation-based training with improved local delivery. The staff within the CVHCS Simulation Center serve as a resource for health care professionals, educators, researchers, corporations and organizations from across agencies and institutions.

Each year, VHA's SimLEARN program performs external reviews of VA medical

centers' facilities, faculty, staff, equipment and training programs. According to Jonathan Nguyen, simulation operations specialist with the CVHCS Simulation Center, certification from SimLEARN shows the community that CVHCS has demonstrated excellence in simulation-based quality standards.

"The fact that our simulation program has grown so quickly is telling of the care we provide for our Veterans," Nguyen said. He joined the VA in 2019 after serving in the Army for 10 years and the Department of Defense for five years. "This certification helps distinguish us as a leader in simulation-based training within the region, VHA and nationally."

On a typical day, the Simulation Center offers staff real-life practice scenarios to refine their techniques to improve health care outcomes for Veterans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been a vital location for CVHCS COVID-19 response efforts. Staff use the Simulation Center to train in proper donning and doffing of personal protective equipment, addressing new challenges when

responding to emergent codes and the coordination of COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

Dr. Michael S. Czekajlo, medical director of the CVHCS Simulation Center, is looking forward to the future. He spent the last few years collaborating with the American Medical Student Association and hosted four national simulation competitions for medical students. Czekajlo developed six national curriculums last year alone focused on the Coronavirus pandemic.

"One of our goals as a Simulation Center in 2021 is to become a national leader using simulation to make the VA health care system a High Reliability Organization and to serve as a regional and national center of excellence."

Czekajlo spent the last 25 years in the simulation realm and became a [Fulbright Scholar](#). Through the Fulbright project, he developed the first multidisciplinary simulation center in the Republic of Poland. To commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the project, the Department of Veterans Affairs, leaders from the Republic of Poland and Fulbright will host a senior level roundtable in 2021 regarding simulation for High Reliability Organizations.

"I'm looking forward to Richmond leading the charge as a positive disruptor on how we implement simulation for better health care outcomes," Czekajlo said.

**(Left-Photo)** Jonathan Nguyen, simulation operations specialist for the CVHCS Simulation Center, shows participants how to use the patient monitor during their simulation training with the patient manikin, April 16, 2020. **(CVHCS Photo by Mary Beatty/Released)** **(Right-Photo)** Richmond-area high school students practice operating room procedures inside the Central Virginia VA Health Care System's (CVHCS) Simulation Center, May 3, 2019. CVHCS's Simulation Center recently was accredited by the Simulation Learning, Education and Research Network (SimLEARN). **(Official CVHCS Photo by Jason Miller/Released)**





Talking out his PTSD and having a hobby to focus on have made a big difference in the life of Vietnam Veteran John Barbazon.

## Vietnam Vet Finds Calm in Wood, Urges Others to Talk, Find a Hobby

By Rosaire Bushey | PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER, SALEM VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The U.S. Government sent John Barbazon's next of kin two separate telegraphs in 1966. The first regretted to inform them that their son had been killed in action. The second said he was improving.

A member of the 101st Airborne Recon unit, Barbazon, who now sports a "Sr." after his name, was part of a squad that spent most of its time on the move, up and down mountains, and rarely in the company of other units.

"We just got orders and kept going from one place to another," he said from behind a workbench in a shop at the back of his four-acre property. In front of him there is a raised rotating table that holds an intricate, under-construction dome clock that stands more than three feet high. Even sitting here Barbazon isn't entirely still — he continues to move from one place to the next as he recalls his experience in Vietnam.

"We were ordered to go back, which we didn't like to do, when we were attacked."

Getting hit seven times, Barbazon believes he was the only one of his company to survive.

"I got shot and I was lying on the ground,

my right arm mostly gone, and my right leg and I stick this finger in a sucking chest wound right here to stop the bleeding." Barbazon holds up a thick index finger and jams it into a space just below his right shoulder. Each time he repeats the motion, the finger hits the same spot as if there is a muscle memory leading it back.

"I was on the ground and my cousin called out to me, told me to crawl to him. I crawled thirty to forty feet to a medic. I found out later my cousin had died in a car wreck — he wasn't even there, but if I hadn't seen him call to me, I would have died right there — bled to death."

Soon after reaching the medic he was placed in a body bag being mistaken as having been killed in action, but the medics dropped him. Later, one of the medics would visit Barbazon in the field hospital.

"He said that if I would have died, I'd have to go to hell because I called him things he'd never heard of, in Cajun. I was cussing him out for dropping me."

Barbazon laughs at the memory now, but he spent a month in the field hospital before being shipped to California where surgeries

saved his arm and leg. Now he walks with a slight limp, but he doesn't let it do more than slow his walking speed.

Unasked, Barbazon launches into what has brought him here — to a place where he is happy and busy.

"I haven't talked about it [Vietnam] until oh, eight or 10 years ago. I was in Ocala [Florida] at the VA hospital, and I was talking to a doctor I'd been seeing when she said, 'John, I need you to talk to a friend of mine.'" Barbazon laughs again and continues, "she takes me to a psychiatrist. And I'm glad. A lot of Veterans need to do this. I found out things I was doing that I was doing in Vietnam — carrying a knife in my pocket for protection; going to the top row in a movie theater with my back against the wall. I was on guard too much and need to relax. I think [talking to the psychiatrist] was the best thing I've done. Veterans today, they need to get out and find out — they need to talk to somebody, and they have to listen.

"He told me, 'You're not cured, I'm not going to cure you, I'm just going to make you aware of what you're doing so you can be more relaxed.' That's why I enjoy doing this [woodworking] now, and that's why I say Veterans need to talk to somebody and they need to get a hobby. If they are sitting home disabled, there's something they can do — I don't care if it's going fishing — you've got to do something."

Today, Barbazon's sister has the telegrams, and he has a house full of delicately cut artwork that will soon include a dome clock that he's spent the last six months working on for six hours a day.

"I'm very lucky. I've been a lucky person."



Veteran John Barbazon spends about six hours a day on his woodworking hobby.

# Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

By Martha (Marti) Chick-Ebey, LCSW | COORDINATED ENTRY SPECIALIST, HOMELESS PROGRAMS



The National Coalition for the Homeless, the National Consumer Advisory Board and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council encourage communities to host public events on or near Dec. 21 remembering your neighbors who have died homeless in the past year. National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day takes place each year on the longest night of the year, the winter solstice (usually Dec. 21st). (<https://nationalhomeless.org/about-us/projects/memorial-day>)

I've been working with Homeless Veterans throughout the region for more than 20 years, and I see my vocation as not just a job, but a calling — a calling that ideally saves lives. Too often though, during all phases of the housing process (homeless, in shelter or transitional program, or recently housed), the Veterans we serve in VA Homeless programs pass away — there are a variety of reasons and causes for these deaths, but the research has clearly shown that homeless Veterans are more vulnerable than their housed counterparts; per the article linked below, Veterans over age 50 who have been homeless, on average, show the physical health problems of Veterans 20 years their seniors.

As VA Homeless programs cover the whole Hampton Roads region, in the past, attending any Homeless Memorial Day Vigil in December has presented an ethical challenge

as there are usually four such ceremonies in our region all occurring on the same date at the same time; invariably, I know of at least one Veteran being mentioned at more than one of these ceremonies. Instead of having to make such a decision, in the past I chose to honor all deceased Homeless Veterans by visiting their graves or markers at the local Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk each Memorial Day in May; two-thirds to three-quarters of the deceased Veterans I've worked with are buried or interred at that location. My time spent at the Veterans Cemetery grows longer each year as the number of names I recognize on the markers has steadily increased.

Given the high mortality rate of Homeless Veterans, over time it seems my usual ritual for honoring Veterans that have passed, falls short. Traditional Memorial Day is not enough of a remembrance for those of us that work with Homeless Veterans. In addition to bearing the costs of serving their country, the Veterans honored this date likely had shortened lives due to conditions compounded by their homelessness. I reflected on these Veterans again Dec. 21st, appropriately, the darkest day of the year, a day that is often one of the coldest. Ironically, Dec. 21 is also a time when many of us are in a celebratory mindset, gearing up for the Christmas holiday in a society that celebrates with ever increasing

commercial largesse. It is hard not to consider the irony of these celebrations while working daily with Veterans showing the physical and emotional toll of chronic conditions, residential instability or survival in the elements.

If there is any upside to this sad contrast, it is the steady progress made over the past 10 years, effectively ending Veteran homelessness in Virginia and improving the access of Veterans experiencing homelessness to a wide variety of healthcare resources. This ongoing work to more efficiently and effectively house Homeless Veterans helps me to maintain and strengthen my resolve: May the Homeless Veterans I serve today live to soon see their own warm, comfortable housing, and may they have access to the healthcare they deserve, so that they outlast those who came before them.

For those Veterans who did not make it past this year, you are not forgotten. Thank you.

[https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/nchav/docs/Schinka\\_Byrne\\_AgingLifeExpectancy-HomelessVeterans\\_Sept2018.pdf](https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/nchav/docs/Schinka_Byrne_AgingLifeExpectancy-HomelessVeterans_Sept2018.pdf)

## WNC VA Health Care System Gets Innovative About Tracking Prescriptions

By Vance Janes | PWNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

ASHEVILLE, NC — Beginning Jan. 21, 2021, Veterans looking to find out where their prescriptions are need only look at their cell phones.

That's because the Western North Carolina VA Health Care System (WNCVAHCS) Pharmacy has teamed up with VEText, VA's text messaging notification service, to bring pharmacy related text notifications to its enrolled Veterans.

*And, they're the first in the VA to offer the service.*

Every enrolled Veteran with a cell phone number listed in their health record is automatically enrolled in the VEText program, so it's very important that Veterans ensure that the WNCVAHCS has their current cell phone number.

The Health Care System is comprised of

Charles George VA Medical Center (CG-VAMC) in Asheville, and Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) in Rutherford County, Franklin, and Hickory, N.C.

The pharmacy notification enhancements to the VEText program are part of a Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Innovators Network project led by Dr. Ronald Major, Pharm.D., Associate Chief of Pharmacy at the Charles George VA Medical Center.

Prescription shipment notifications are the first of several planned message types which also include delivery notification, refill reminders, and interactive messaging to allow refilling of prescriptions by replying to a refill reminder message. If you've let your personal information updates lapse. If you move or change phone numbers, it's imperative that Veterans have current addresses and phone



The Western NC VA Healthcare System is proud to be the first in VA to offer locally mailed prescription shipping notifications via text message.

Available to VEText enrolled patients starting January 21.

numbers on file with their health care facility. To make updates, Veterans may visit Enrollment and Eligibility located on the first floor of the Charles George VA Medical Center.

Outdated information can slow down medication delivery or health care notifications. It's also important to ensure that Veterans keep their Emergency Contact and Next of Kin information up to date. Information can also be updated in MyHealthVet (<https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home>).

WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

# Resiliency Programs for employees



## WNC VA Health Care System Offers Employees Programs to Build Resiliency

By Vance Janes | WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System is offering resiliency programs to enable employees to practice self-care.

ASHEVILLE, NC — Many people have heard the old saying, “To take care of others, you must start by taking care of yourself.”

Well, at the Western North Carolina VA Health Care System, there are a couple of programs being offered to employees so that they can do just that.

### Mindful Moments

Mindful Moments was first introduced at the beginning of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many employees began working longer than usual hours, teleworking and dealing with a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the risks of working in a health care environment.

“The Mindful Moments series (and all of the programs in our COVID Operational Stress Control program) are designed to capitalize on the expertise that our Mental Health providers use with our Veterans every day,” Dr. Laura Tugman, Western North Carolina VA Health Care System Chief of Mental Health Services, said. “Gifting it to the staff in our entire facility helps keep us strong and ready to serve Veterans.”

As a measure to help employees deal with new additional stresses, Mindful Moments was initiated by Charles George VA Medical Center Mental Health personnel.

The program runs daily from 12:30-12:45pm and is presented as a Teams Meeting for all employees to take 15 minutes out of their day and focus on their own wellbeing.

### The Schedule is:

- Mondays** – Chair Yoga
- Tuesdays** – Mindfulness
- Wednesdays** – Chair Yoga
- Thursdays** – Mindfulness
- Fridays** – Building Resilience

Some of the employees who participate have left comments in the chat box such as “Thanks so much! It was very helpful, and I needed it”; “Thanks! Great meditation!”; “Warmth — I sense brightness, calmness, grounded, sound in my core as a whole.”

As things have progressed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the operational tempo at the Health Care System has remained high, but many folks are still tuning in daily.

### Warm Up with Whole Health!

With the New Year, a Webex program was introduced through the WNC VA Health Care System’s Whole Health Program. The program — which runs Mondays through Thursdays from 8:30-9:00am — began Jan. 11 and is scheduled to run through March 5.

### The Weekly Schedule is:

- Mondays** – Ditch the desk, get up and move — group aerobics.
- Tuesdays** – Channel your inner healthy chef — new recipes are posted each week.
- Wednesday** – 20 minutes of Mindful Meditation
- Thursdays** – Thrive on Thursdays: Stories, spiritual wisdom and inspiration. Whether employees take advantage of one or both programs, it’s just an example of how the Health Care System is taking care of employees. After all, as the old saying goes — to take care of others, you must start by taking care of yourself.

# VA Deepens Commitment To Women Veterans' Health in Jacksonville Area

By Steve Wilkins | VISN 6 PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Over 10 years, the Women Veteran population enrolled in VA has grown a good bit in the Fayetteville/Jacksonville region of North Carolina. Overall, the Women Veteran cohort in the Fayetteville VA NC Coastal Health Care System (Fayetteville VA HCS) comprises about 20 percent of enrolled Veterans served. Yet, admission doesn't always equal welcome. Despite the fact they sacrificed and served, just like their male counterparts, just "37 percent of the 256 women Veterans who participated in a survey by nonprofit The Mission Continues said they felt 'recognized, respected and valued.'" VA is making an effort and working hard to change those feelings for Women Veterans inside their walls.

Most recently, the Fayetteville VA HCS moved to deepen its commitment to female health care in a meaningful, intimate way that leaders hope will encourage more Women Veterans to trust their care to VA — they hired a midwife.

According to the American College of Nurse Midwives, Midwifery encompasses a full range of primary and gender-specific health care services for women from adolescence beyond menopause. They are well-trained, coached and mentored. In fact, certified nurse midwives are registered nurses with advanced degrees, offering medical specialization that could include diagnosing conditions and prescribing medications, where such licensing and credentialing allows.

VISN 6 Nurse Executive Lisa Shear says Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM) can enhance health environments by their participation and their ability to educate in areas where their specialization is exclusive to their profession: "This nurse is a peer in education/training/certification to Nurse Practitioners, Clinical Nurse Specialists and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists." She added that, "by having a CNM on the Women's Health Team, VISN 6 enhances the care VA can provide to its female veterans in her practice and also provides a subject matter expert for care coordination with the community for Women's Health and Maternity Care."

Certified Nurse Midwife Lynn Carlton is the new addition in Fayetteville's Women Veterans' Health offering, based in the Jacksonville VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic. But the 23-year Navy Veteran, serving also as Nurse Manager, isn't new to Jacksonville. "Much of what I did for the Navy was opening new women's clinics, but I have been in the Jacksonville area for a long time. It became my last duty station when I decided to stay put while my children finished school, and ended up staying after retirement." In many ways, given her longevity and the large number of women Veterans who remain in the area following their Marine Corps or Navy service, she is a sort of community fixture.

"This is exactly the good news Veterans and other Coastal Carolina stakeholders need to know," declared VISN 6 Women's Health Coordinator Shenekia Williams-Johnson. Johnson has been developing and promoting expansion of women Veterans' services in the VISN for more than 10 years. She added that "VISN 6 is committed to expanding access to quality care and services to our women Veterans, where access to gender-specific services in rural geographic areas can be challenging!"

Carlton is passionate about her work. "After about 10 years as a Navy nurse in Obstetrics and Gynecology, I heard the call and never looked back," she said. Carlton, who set up shop in the Jacksonville VA CBOC with her former Camp LeJeune Corpsman Christina Watson, explains that as a midwife, her interest is in providing intimate care to women over the span of their lives. She hopes that her passion is contagious, and her patient list continues to grow. "There are certain services that midwives have more experience with than general practitioners," so in some cases there may be an advantage for women in seeing someone with her skill set, especially gender-specific preventive medicine. Veterans may not all need to go to Jacksonville, as Carlton will occasionally travel to Wilmington, for appointments in the Wilmington Health Care Center. She is also working on completion of a Memo of Understanding with Camp LeJeune to credential her to treat patients at Naval Hospital there. For information about women's health services at the Jacksonville Clinic call (910) 353-6406.



Nurse Midwife Dr. Lynn Carlton (right) and Christina Watson, LPN, both Navy Veterans, have brought Midwifery and a special level of women Veterans' care to the Jacksonville community and Southeast North Carolina. The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System is offering resiliency programs to enable employees to practice self-care.

## Fayetteville VA Medical Center Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center

### Available Services and Clinical Resources Women's Comprehensive Primary Care Throughout the Life Cycle

- Wellness and Healthy Living
- Primary Care
- Cancer Screenings
- Mammograms
- Transgender Care
- Menopause Evaluation & Treatment
- Osteoporosis Screening and Treatment (bones easily break)
- Nutrition and Weight Control
- Smoking Cessation Program
- STD Work Up and Treatment
- Birth Control (including IUD)

### Women's Health Specialty Services

- GYN Consultation and Surgery
- Maternity Care Coordination

### Mental Health Services

- Management of Stress, Depression & Anxiety
- Adjustment From Deployment

### Counseling and Treatment for:

- Abuse and Violence
- Military Sexual Trauma
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Parenting and Caregiver Issues

Each Veteran is unique. If you are seeking care and services, contact your local VA facility or call 1-800-827-1000 for help with your acceptance status.

# Mindfulness as Preventive Complementary Health Care

By Steve Wilkins | VISN 6 PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Increasingly, health authorities are discovering tangible benefits of complementary and integrative health care (CIH). Within the scope of Whole Health, promoting attention to the body in every phase, sits meditation. Practicing meditation enables individuals to gain greater awareness of their body. A form of meditation is Mindfulness.

VISN 6 Mental Health Chief David Buyck suggests that, “For most, mindfulness and meditation are more about practicing the skill and building a quiet, non-judgmental, receptive mind/spirit [state of being] during the exercise period.” The mention of an exercise connected with meditation may be surprising. But meditation is built around exercises that eliminate distractions to thought, allowing concentration on inner awareness.

In mindfulness, a person practices micro-analyzing what they’re doing to discover infinitely small functions and feelings that their body conducts from moment to moment. According to the American Psychological Association (APA.org, 2012), mindfulness is “a moment-to-moment awareness of one’s experience without judgment.” Consider an exercise that concentrates on the change in air temperature as it passes through your nostrils, coming and going. Imagine what that feels like. “As a clinician, mindfulness meditation allows me to fully embrace my humanity while on the job,” asserts Dr. Natalie Cross.

Doctor Cross is a mental health integration specialist at the Raleigh VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic. She says that most times, she and other clinicians are so wrapped up in their jobs caring for Veterans that they don’t often get a chance to take time to slow down.

She thinks slowing down can help. It could help thinking about the next steps treating patients, relating to patients and staying healthy. So, it could help patients, too. Of she and her colleagues, Cross explains, “We spend far too little time on the moments of our own lives for self-care. How easy it is to ignore our own bodily sensations, as well as our own thoughts and feelings, while we care for others.”

The exercises can be done anywhere. Mindfulness is noting the things you do. It could be something as simple as turning on a water faucet. Imagine the movements



required to do something so simple; lifting an arm, stretching out fingers, leaning in to reach the handle, looking for the time fingers reach the handle and begin to close around it, touching, exerting and increasing a grip on the handle, then moving the arm, elbow, forearm, wrist in sequence to initiate a turn. We could go on — since the water hasn’t even come on yet — but you get the idea.

Cross says the exercises can be inserted into anyone’s day through what she calls check-ins. She claims check-ins “might be as simple as deep breathing on the way to the lobby, stretching one’s shoulders in between phone calls, or paying attention to one’s thoughts before reading the next instant message.” Buyck insists that it is important to stay focused on the action and not get distracted by why you are doing something. “Leave [the whys] to the waking, alert mind to do the judging, he says. “One of the values of meditation is moving aside the inhibitions and prejudices that are inherent in judgement or assessment, and opening [yourself] to noticing or accepting what is there.”

Cross suggests that by performing these exercises and coming into greater self-aware-

ness, we can be more present and in the moment for others, like when clinicians encounter Veterans. “[Our] skills in active listening and compassion are sharpened,” she says. “Clinician-Veteran interactions can be strengthened by mindfulness practice, in that both individuals are more capable of truly being in the moment with each other.”

As a clinical psychologist working with Veterans, Cross says mindfulness plays an important role. Since 2014, she has led a mindfulness group at the Durham VA that includes Veterans with a wide range of medical, stress-related and mental health conditions. Knowing that she has to be there for each of them, as well as the patients she sees for treatment, Cross says she tries to do whatever she can to increase the quality of their encounters. She thinks, “How can I be fully present with the Veteran during clinical work if I’m not in the habit of being fully present with myself?”

In addition to possible meditation offerings in VA medical centers, Veterans and staff can also find resources in the [VA mindfulness coach app](#) and the [Live Whole Health app](#), both of which are available to Veterans and VA staff for free in the VA app store.



**(Left-Photo)** Dawud Hughes, vice president of V.O.I.C.E., Marcia Hubbard, president and founder of V.O.I.C.E, and Les Eason, Voluntary Services chief (Salisbury VA) display a donation of backpacks and sleeping mats that will be distributed to homeless Veterans. **(Right-Photo)** Les Eason, Voluntary Services chief (foreground) and Dawud Hughes, vice president of V.O.I.C.E. (in the pickup) unload a donation of backpacks and sleeping mats that will be distributed to homeless Veterans.

## Small Club Makes Big Impact With Donation to Homeless

By Todd Goodman | SALISBURY VA HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

A local club in Hickory with 13 members, Volunteer Outreach in Community Efforts, is making a big difference in the lives of the homeless. Recently, they chose to help homeless Veterans by donating 25 field backpacks and sleeping mats to the Salisbury VA Medical Center.

Led by President and Founder Marcia Hubbard, club members spend a lot of time volunteering, and reaching out to community leaders and organizations.

“I began volunteering at the Hickory Soup Kitchen about a year ago,” said Hubbard. “I was touched and needed to do more.”

She started making the sleeping mats, which is a national initiative called Bags to Beds, and giving those out. The mats are made from plastic grocery store bags, which are flattened, cut into strips and crocheted together — a time-consuming process.

She did backpack drives at various agen-

cies, including the United Way in Catawba County. The generous outpouring of community support at those drives was so good that she was able to help the homeless in Rowan County — in this case, Salisbury Veterans.

“I wanted to come here because Veterans are near and dear to my heart,” she said, “especially homeless Veterans. I come from a strong military background and family.”

The backpacks contain 12 essential items, which Hubbard learned were essential by speaking to the homeless. Wherever she volunteered, she’d ask what items are most helpful.

“They want baby wipes, toothbrush/ toothpaste, dry shampoo, activity books, gloves, socks, ponchos — those types of things,” said Hubbard.

These backpacks and sleeping mats are a welcome donation for the Salisbury VA.

“The donation of backpacks and sleeping

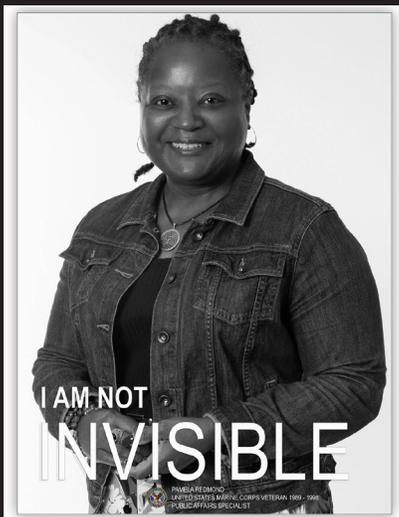
mats are an asset to our Health Care for Homeless

Veterans Outreach clothing closet and will be well utilized by our homeless Veterans,” said Natalie Shaver, LCSW and supervisor of Homeless Community-Based Programs at the Salisbury VA.

Veterans who present to outreach often are looking for items that they can easily transport and utilize for everyday needs.

“The donated backpacks and sleeping mats fulfil that very request,” said Shaver. “The HCHV appreciates the support of Ms. Hubbard and Volunteer Outreach in Community Efforts program as well as the time spent organizing and creating the bags and mats.”

“We’re glad to help,” said Hubbard. We’ve got a really good team behind us. Without them, none of this would be possible.”



**Pamela Redmond**  
United States Marine Corps Veteran 1989-1998  
Public Affairs Specialist

## I Am Not Invisible Campaign *We Are Not Invisible*

We are two million strong. We are mothers, sisters, friends, partners and wives. We are advocates, bosses, students and survivors. We are all eras and branches of service. We are women. We are Veterans. We are not invisible.

There are roughly 2 million women Veterans, making up 10 percent of the Veteran population and growing. Yet they continue to face significant barriers and challenges in accessing necessary health care and other services, while experiencing a lack of recognition. The I Am Not Invisible (IANI) project, developed in Oregon, aims to increase awareness and dialogue about women Veterans and to open viewers’ eyes to the myriad contributions, needs and experiences of women who have served in the military.



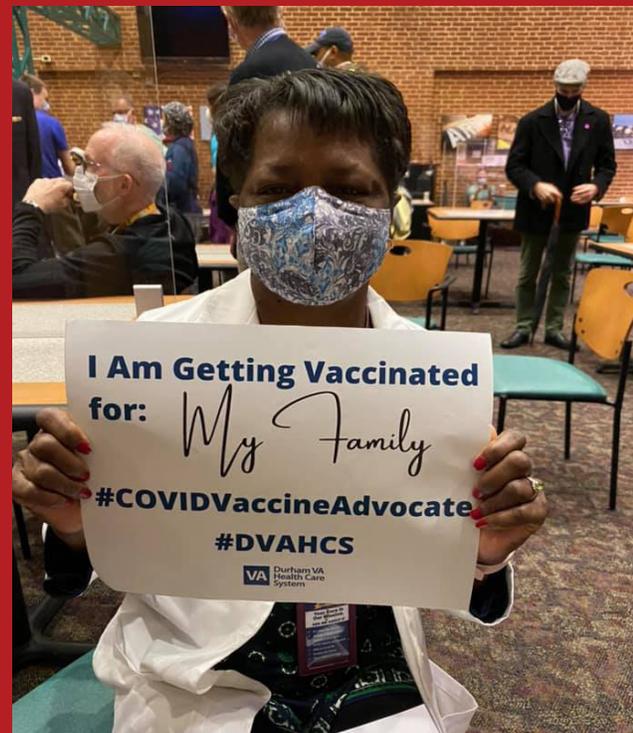
**Heather Osborne**  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS VETERAN 1994-1998  
Senior Analyst - Bas Outreach

# #IWearAMaskFor



Wearing a mask is one of the most important things you can do to keep the people around you safe. Tell us who you wear a mask for by posting a photo of yourself in a mask and tagging us on Facebook/Twitter/Instagram @insert\_localVAMC\_handle using the hashtag #IWearAMaskFor.

 @deptvetaffairs  
  @VeteransHealth  
  @VeteransHealth  
   
  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Tina Padgett, a registered nurse at Charles George VA Medical Center, screens a Veteran prior to providing the first dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at one of the drive-up shot clinics held six days a week at the medical center. The Moderna Vaccine comprises two injections, with the second dose being scheduled 28 days after Veterans receive the first injection. The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System is currently following CDC and VHA guidelines for administering the vaccine. (VA Photo by Rod Doty)



Annette Racer, a Charles George VA Medical Center registered nurse, speaks with a Veteran prior to providing the first dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine in mid-January. The Moderna Vaccine comprises two injections, with the second dose being scheduled 28 days after Veterans receive the first injection. The medical center has been operating a drive-up shot clinic six days a week since receiving its first shipment of the vaccine Dec. 22, 2020. (VA Photo by Rod Doty)



Veterans and caregivers line up to receive the Moderna vaccine. Hampton VA vaccinated 284 Veterans and Caregivers Jan. 30, 2021.

## A Message Regarding Vaccination at the VA

In the month that VA has administered the COVID vaccines to staff and Veterans, more than one million doses have been given. That level of performance is admirable, and VISN 6 facilities have done their best to set or keep pace. So far, our staff has given more than 50,000 vaccine doses. VISN 6 medical centers have expanded vaccine operations by spreading distribution to health care centers and community-based outpatient clinics, offering multiple sites for inoculation in single locations and, like many community providers, offering drive-through service. People are getting the shot for many reasons, starting with their own protection, but that concern is quickly dwarfed by concern for others. Stopping the spread is primary, and if we can stop the spread among those closest to us and others who mean a lot,

that's even better.

As one VISN 6 Doc who has recovered from her own horrifying COVID-19 experience put it, "While most only have mild symptoms and recover without the need to be hospitalized, there are those with a much worse experience. No one ever expected that I would be one of those people. I was healthy. I urge you to consider getting vaccinated. I would not want to see any of you experience what I have, nor put your family through this. My family was terrified. I am so sorry to have put them through that. It really was awful for them." This is the story she is able to tell us firsthand. Her doctors prepared her family for the worst. Imagine if they were right, and she didn't recover, what her and their suffering would have been. As she asked, finally, "Please get vaccinated."

**WAKE TECH**  
VETERANS PROGRAMS

**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

**NC STRIVE Career Fair**  
hosted by NCSU and Wake Tech Community College

**Tuesday, March 30**  
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

**UNC-TV**  
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Network with Employers ★ Learn about Educational Opportunities  
★ Veterans Round Table Discussions

★ Military, Veterans, Family Members and Hidden Heroes Welcome. ★  
Register today at [Eventbrite link](#)

## Who Can Get a COVID-19 Vaccine at VA at This Time

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized the first two COVID-19 vaccines. We currently have a limited amount of these vaccines.

We've worked with the CDC and other federal partners to develop a phased plan. Our goal is to do the most good for the most people during this time.

**Under this plan, these groups are now being vaccinated at some VA health care facilities:**

- VA health care personnel. Vaccinating our VA health care personnel helps us continue to provide care for Veterans.
- Veterans living in our long-term care facilities.
- Veterans who receive care at VA and are at high risk from COVID-19 based on VA and CDC [risk criteria](#). At many VA health care facilities, this group includes all Veterans who are at least 75 years old. Each facility will deter-

mine when Veterans in this group can receive a vaccine. They'll base this decision on vaccine availability, local needs, as well as the strict storage and handling requirements of the vaccines.

**Some designated family caregivers may qualify for vaccines:**

- Family caregivers who are enrolled in our Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) are eligible for vaccination when the Veteran they care for becomes eligible. If the Veteran you care for meets the criteria above, both you and the Veteran may be able to get vaccinated now. Vaccinating caregivers helps us to support and protect Veterans.

**Please wait for us to contact you about getting a COVID-19 vaccine.** When you can get a vaccine at your local VA health facility, we'll contact you. You don't need to call us to

reserve a vaccine, or come to a VA facility to request or receive a vaccine until we contact you. Our staff will only provide vaccines to Veterans and designated caregivers who are currently eligible for one based on VA and CDC risk criteria.

Be aware that some VA health care facilities are hosting large vaccination events or asking Veterans to call the facility directly to schedule a vaccination. If you receive communications from your local VA health care facility about getting vaccinated at a large-scale event or contacting the facility to make an appointment, we encourage you to do so if you are in one of the risk groups currently being vaccinated at VA.

**If you have questions, here's how to get the information you need:**

- For ongoing updates on our COVID-19 vaccine plan, [sign up for email updates](#).
- For more details on your local VA health facility's current plan, [find your facility's website](#). On the facility website menu, go to **Health care services**, then **COVID-19**.
- For answers to general questions about getting a vaccine at VA, [read our FAQs below](#). If you don't find your answer there, call our MyVA411 main information line at 800-698-2411 (TTY: 711).
- For more information about how your personal risk for COVID-19 will determine when you can get a vaccine, [send a secure message to your VA health care provider](#). If you don't receive care at VA, contact your primary health care provider.

### Online Tools for Veterans

Call centers are experiencing unusually high call volumes. Using one of the following resources may be more efficient methods of contacting VA for the service you need:

#### Veteran Request

- Update contact information\*
- Schedule or view appointments online
- Get email updates on COVID-19 vaccines
- Read questions frequently asked about the COVID-19 vaccines
- Enroll in VA Health Care
- Volunteer for VA's COVID-19 research

#### Tool

- <https://www.va.gov/change-address/>
- <https://www.va.gov/health-care/schedule-view-va-appointments/>
- <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed>
- <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>
- <https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction>
- <https://www.va.gov/coronavirus-research>

\*Important: Veterans are strongly encouraged to submit address changes through [va.gov](#) rather than My HealthVet.

# 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 Street  
Durham, NC 27705  
919-286-0411 | 888-878-6880  
www.durham.va.gov

### Fayetteville VAMC

2300 Ramsey Street  
Fayetteville, NC 28301  
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106  
www.fayettevilleenc.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 County CBOC

18 Doctors Cl., Units 2 & 3  
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

### Clayton CBOC

11618 US Hwy 70 Business Highway West,  
Suites 100 & 200  
Clayton, NC 27520

### 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

### Fayetteville Rehabilitation Clinic

4101 Raeford Rd. Ste 100-B  
Fayetteville NC 28304  
910-908-2222

### Franklin CBOC

647 Wayah Street  
Franklin, NC 28734-3390  
828-369-1781

### Fredericksburg CBOC

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

### Fredericksburg at Southpoint CBOC

10401 Spotsylvania Ave, Ste 300  
Fredericksburg, VA 22408  
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

2580 Henderson Drive  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-353-6406

### Jacksonville 2 VA Clinic

306 Brynn Marr Road  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-353-6406

### Jacksonville 3 VA Clinic

4 Josh Court  
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

### Raleigh III CBOC

2600 Atlantic Ave, Ste 200  
Raleigh, NC 27604  
919-755-2620

### Robeson County CBOC

139 Three Hunts Drive  
Pembroke, NC 28372  
910-272-3220

### Rutherford County CBOC

2270 College Avenue, Suite 145  
Forest City, NC 28043-2459  
828-288-2780

### Sanford CBOC

3112 Tramway  
Road Sanford, NC 27332  
919-775-6160

### Staunton CBOC

102 Lacy B. King Way  
Staunton, VA 24401  
540-886-5777

### Tazewell CBOC

141 Ben Bolt Ave.  
Tazewell, VA 24651  
276-988-8860

### Virginia Beach CBOC

244 Clearfield Avenue  
Virginia Beach, VA  
757-722-9961

### 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) 361-6419

### Roanoke Vet Center

1401 Franklin Rd SW  
Roanoke, VA 24016  
540-342-9726

### Virginia Beach Vet Center

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

## VISN 6 Newsletter

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VA Mid-Atlantic Health Care Network.

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

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