NETWORK UPDATE

June 2014

VA Midwest Health Care Network
Honoring Service. Empowering Health.

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In This Issue:

Secretary Shinseki Resigns - Sloan Gibson named Acting Secretary

On May 30, 2014, Eric Shinseki, Secretary for the US Department of Veterans submitted his resignation to the President and it was accepted. In a letter to VA employees Secretary Shinseki said, "My personal and professional commitment and my loyalty to Veterans, their families, and our survivors was the driving force behind that decision."

Under Secretary Shinseki's leadership VA made significant and lasting progress in expanding access for Veterans and ending Veterans homelessness.

We are deeply grateful to the Secretary for his service to America and his unwavering support for Veterans.

The progress made during Secretary Shinseki's tenure will continue under the leadership of Acting Secretary Sloan Gibson.

Mr. Gibson, a 1975 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, earned both Airborne and Ranger qualifications and served as an infantry officer in the US Army.

He was confirmed by the Senate to serve as the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs on February 11, 2014. On May 30, he was appointed Acting Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Accelerating Access to Care

On Wednesday, May 21, 2014, Secretary Shinseki directed the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) leadership to personally review their processes to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is doing everything possible to schedule Veterans for their appointments.

VA has redoubled its efforts to provide quality care to Veterans and has taken steps at national and local levels to ensure timely access to care. VHA has developed the Accelerating Care Initiative, a coordinated, system-wide initiative to accelerate care to Veterans. This new plan was promptly communicated to leadership in the field on May 22, and was set in motion the morning of May 23.

Key Facts:

Across the Network, VA health care facilities are systematically reviewing clinic capacity in an effort to maximize our ability to provide Veterans medical appointments when, and in the manner they want them. Activities being reviewed to maximize our abilities include

- Capacity and efficiency assessments
  - Ensuring Primary Care clinic panels are correctly sized and achieving the desired level of productivity
  - Extending or flexing clinic hours on nights and weekends
  - Overtime capability for providers
  - Assessing the availability of community providers to provide the care being requested

- Identification of resources required to provide timely care for Veterans.

Accelerating Access Initiative -Continued

The VA health care system was established to provide the health care and benefits Veterans have earned and deserve. Veterans and Veteran Service Organizations know the importance of a VA health care system dedicated to serving Veterans - given VA's mission, expertise and focus on care specifically for Veterans. For instance, VA offers specialty services and expertise in many areas that are unique to VA health care delivery and hard to find outside VA, including mental health, spinal cord injury.

Purpose:
The purpose of the initiative is to strengthen access to care in the VA system, while also ensuring flexibility to use private sector care when needed in accordance with VA guidelines.

Using Private Sector Care:
Where VA cannot increase capacity, it is increasing the use of non-VA care in the community.
- Currently, approximately 9-10% of VA's budget for health care costs is for non-VA care.
- From 2008-2013, non-VA care outpatient visits grew from 8.9 million to 15.3 million, a 72% increase.
- In fiscal year 2013, VA provided non-VA care to more than 1 million Veterans at a cost of $4.8 billion dollars (an increase from fiscal year 2012 total of $4.5 billion).
- For fiscal year 2014 year-to-date (April 2014), VA provided non-VA medical care to approximately 904,714 unique Veterans at a cost of $3.38 billion.
- Because VA knows that capacity can be a challenge in any healthcare system across the country, VA works with Veteran patients to develop an agreed upon treatment plan in communities where sufficient (non-VA care) capacity to provide timely care does not exist.

Reaching Out to Veterans:
Each of VA's facilities is reaching out to Veterans to coordinate the acceleration of their care.
- Facilities will make a minimum of three attempts to contact any Veteran new to VA care or new to a particular clinic in a facility, who is scheduled for any appointment more than 30 days out, or is currently on the Electronic Wait List (EWL).
- Facilities will assess whether the Veteran wishes to be seen sooner than currently scheduled.
  - If yes, and the capacity and resources exist – (following the facility assessment), the Veteran will be scheduled into new appointment openings.
  - If yes, and the capacity and resources do not currently exist, non-VA medical care referral will begin.

Reviewing, Tracking, and Reporting:
Facilities will review their cancellations and available appointments on a daily and on-going basis and contact Veterans currently on the EWL to offer available appointments. Facilities will track activity and report to the Veterans Health Administration, clinic capacity, clinic productivity, Non-VA Care Authorizations/Obligations and the EWL on a bi-weekly basis.

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Frequently Asked Questions about Accelerating Access to Care

Q: How long does VA anticipate the Accelerating Access to Care Initiative will take to implement?

A: VA initiated Accelerating Care on May 23, 2014. VA anticipates the initial reviews to be completed by Friday, May 30, 2014. Following those assessments, VA will work with individual Veterans to arrange their treatment in accordance with their wishes. VA will continue this effort for at least 90 days.

Q: How was this initiative communicated to VA facilities, and who will be overseeing the initiative to ensure it is carried out at the local level?

A: VA staff has developed a series of training calls that began on Friday, May 23rd. An oversight group comprised of Network Directors, Deputy Chief Business Officers, Clinic Administration and other Senior Leaders and Staff have been established to monitor the implementation of the Accelerating Care effort.

Q: How long does VA anticipate continuing this initiative?

A: Once the initial implementation is complete, this initiative will transition to an operational component of normal VA business.

Q: What are the goals of the Accelerating Access to Care Initiative?

A: This initiative is designed to increase timely access to care for Veteran patients; decrease the number of Veteran patients on the EWL and waiting greater than 30 days for care; and standardize the process and tools for on-going monitoring and access management at VA facilities.

Q: In what circumstances can VA currently authorize non-VA care? How does this initiative change that?

A: VA can use non-VA medical care for eligible Veterans when care cannot be provided due to unavailability of the service or lack of capacity and/or capability. Non-VA medical care is also used when geographical distance is a hindrance to receiving timely care. This initiative doesn't change the use of non-VA medical care.

Q: Who is currently eligible to receive care at a non-VA facility? How does this initiative change that?

A: Eligibility for non-VA medical care is complex and varies for non-service connected Veterans. This initiative doesn't change eligibility requirements as they are outlined in statute. Veterans can find more information on eligibility on the National Non-VA Medical Care Program Office website at http://www.nonvacare.va.gov/.

Calendar of Events – July 2014

Jul 1	St. Cloud	Veterans' Law Clinic - 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CST) VAMC, Building 28, Room 126
Jul 2	Nebraska	Omaha VA Pantry for Veterans - 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CST) 825 Dorcas St, Ste. 200, Omaha
Jul 2	Nebraska	Veteran Group Exercise Class - 5:15 PM - 6:15 PM (CST) VAMC 3rd Floor TV Studio, 4101 Woolworth Ave, Omaha
Jul 3	St. Cloud	Mobile Vet Center - 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM (CST) Princeton Library, 100 4th Ave. S., Princeton
Jul 4		Holiday – Independence Day
Jul 7	Nebraska	VA Food Pantry - 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM (CST) VA Clinic, Bldg 40, Room 105, 600 S. 70th St, Lincoln
Jul 7	Nebraska	Veterans Group Exercise Class - 5:15 PM - 6:15 PM (CST) Omaha VA Medical Center 3rd Floor TV Studio, 4101 Woolworth Ave, Omaha
Jul 7	St. Cloud	Veterans Affairs Radio Show - KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3
Jul 8	St. Cloud	VA Caregiver Support Line - 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (CST) From your home phone!
Jul 8	St. Cloud	Free Summer Golf Instruction (Women's Session I) - 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM (CST) Building 96, St. Cloud VA Health Care System
Jul 9	Minneapolis	Veterans Career Fair - 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM (CST) Earle Brown Heritage Center, 6155 Earle Brown Drive in Brooklyn Center
Jul 9	Sioux Falls	147th Army Band - 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM (CST) Sioux Falls VA, CLC 3
Jul 9	Sioux Falls	Patriotic Concert - 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM (CST) Veterans Memorial Park
Jul 10	Minneapolis	Vietnam Veterans Traveling Memorial Wall - Independence Park, Marshall
Jul 10	St. Cloud	Free Summer Golf Instruction (Men's Session I) - 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM (CST) Building 96, St. Cloud VA Health Care System
Jul 11	Sioux Falls	Tobacco Cessation - 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CST) Sioux Fall VA, Front Lobby, Room F-07
Jul 15	St. Cloud	Veterans' Law Clinic - St. Cloud VA Medical Center, Building 28, Room 126
Jul 16	St. Cloud	Voices for Veterans Radio Show - 8:10 AM - 8:45 AM (CST) WJON AM 1240
Jul 16	St. Cloud	Quarterly Memorial Service - 1:00 PM - 1:30 PM (CST) St. Cloud VA Chapel
Jul 16	Nebraska	Omaha VA Pantry for Veterans - 825 Dorcas St, Ste. 200, Omaha
Jul 17	Minneapolis	Minnesota American Legion and Auxiliary conventions - Rochester
Jul 18	Nebraska	VA CoffeeHaus-Lincoln - 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM (CST) Auditorium, 600 S. 70th St, Lincoln
Jul 18	Nebraska	VA CoffeHaus - 600 S. 70th St, Lincoln, Neb (canteen on lower level)
Jul 18	St. Cloud	Southwestern Minnesota Veterans' Law Clinic - 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CST) Montevideo CBOC

* Dates and times are correct as of June 25, 2014. Information may have changed, please check local VA Health Care System websites for the latest information.