

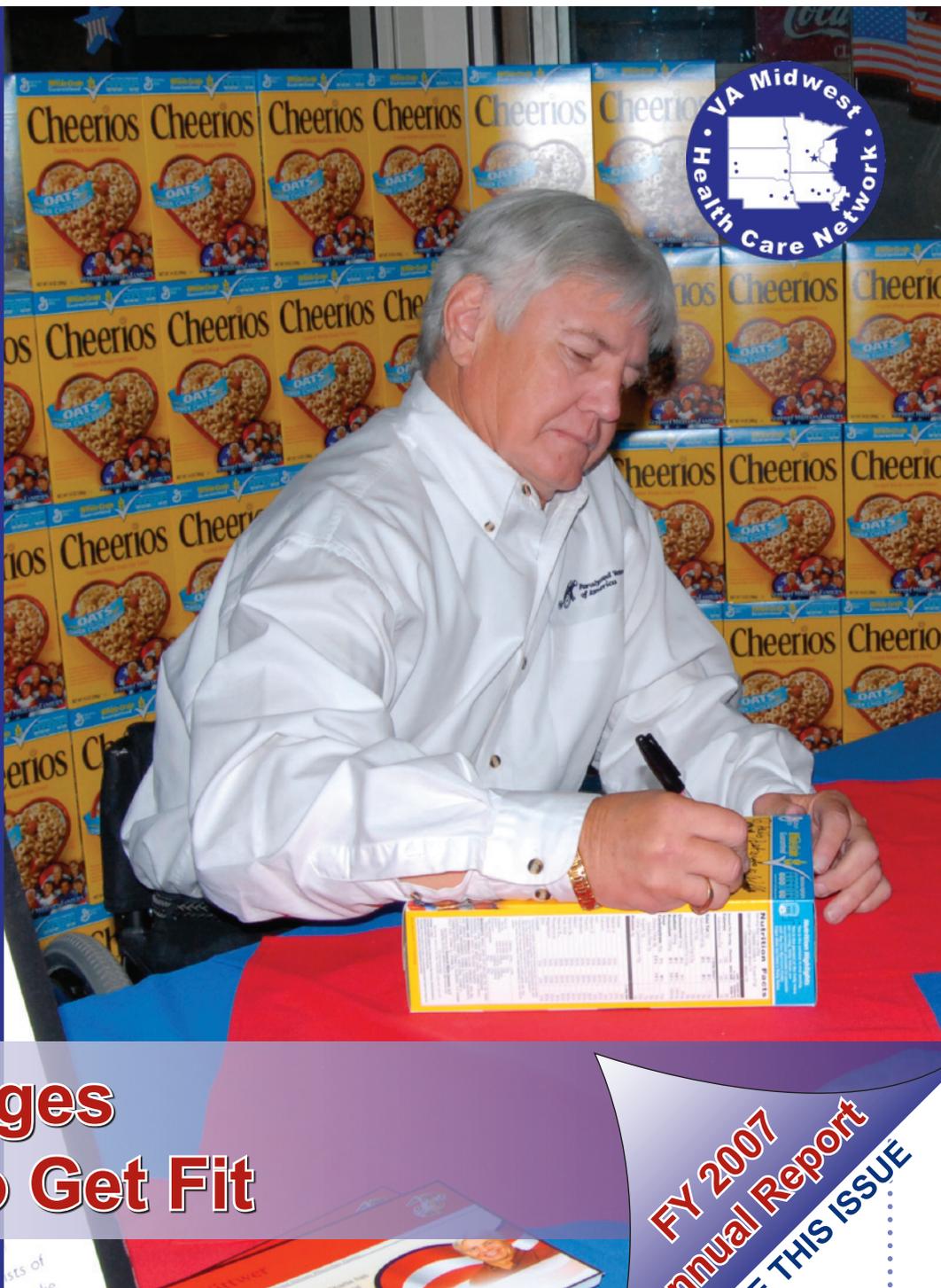
Veterans' Health

Your key to better health in the Midwest

Transitioning Home: From Soldier to Civilian

Take Ten: Clean Hands Save Lives

No Butts It's Time to Quit



VA Challenges Veterans to Get Fit

FY 2007 Annual Report
INSIDE THIS ISSUE

ARM YOURSELF FOR THE LONG RUN WITH PREVENTATIVE CARE

No matter what your age or health concerns, good health care is important. However, the importance of preventive health care is often underestimated. According to Network Director Dr. Robert Petzel, “It is sometimes difficult for people to look at the long term. The effectiveness of prevention develops over a much longer period of time.” Preventative measures, such as smoking cessation, weight control, and immunization, are fundamentally important to a person’s overall health and well-being.

The VA is working to help veterans take charge of their health, with hands-on programs available to provide tools and options for individual needs. For example, VA medical centers are helping veterans who want to stop smoking, thereby immediately improving their overall health. “The impact of smoking on the health of the nation is very serious,” says Petzel. “Congestive heart failure, cancer, chronic emphysema and heart disease have a direct relation to tobacco use.” Petzel noted that smoking should be viewed as an addiction. “The elements that are effective for smoking cessation—support groups, medication, and constant

attention to the issue—are the same types of things that can assist in other dependencies,” he says.

Another easy way for veterans to protect themselves is through good hand washing habits. Hospital-acquired infection is a serious issue in health care, and VISN 23 has developed an excellent hand washing program to address this. “A campaign exists in every VA medical center,” says Petzel, stressing that the most important element in reducing hospital acquired infections is appropriate hand washing, so providers do not transmit infection from one patient to another.

Throughout the warm spring and summer months, veterans are reminded to protect their skin. “It can be dangerous to not protect yourself,” says Petzel. Using sun blocks and limiting exposure to the sun can help prevent sunburn or more serious problems, such as skin cancer.

As new veterans enter the VA system, Petzel wants them to be aware that help is available, especially if they are having difficulties accessing VA’s health care system. Find out what services your VA has to offer by visiting us online at www.visn23.va.gov/ or by calling our network office at 612-725-1968.

UPCOMING VISN 23 WELCOME HOME EVENTS

NORTH DAKOTA

“Welcome Home American Hero”

Thursday, June 5th from 1-8:00 p.m. at the VA Medical Center in Fargo

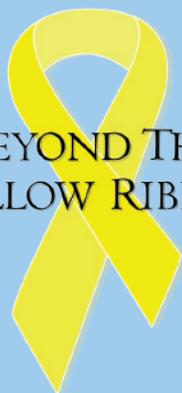
Friday, June 6th from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. at the VA Medical Center in Fargo

SOUTH DAKOTA

“Home, Not Forgotten... Saluting our Nation’s Heros”

Thursday, July 10th from 5:30-8:30 p.m. at the Black Hills Health Care System in Rapid City

BEYOND THE YELLOW RIBBON



on the cover

Charlie Wittwer,

Gold Medal winner at the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair games in Minneapolis, signs special edition Cheerios boxes featuring Wittwer and other Gold Medal finalists.

Veterans’ Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Midwest Health Care Network, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your health care and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

Transitioning Home:

from soldier to civilian

When an individual decides to join the Armed Forces, it takes time, training, and commitment to learn how to become a soldier. Conversely, when a soldier returns home from combat, it once again takes hard work to go back to a civilian lifestyle.

After a deployment to a combat zone, many service members must deal with new physical and mental issues. The VA wants to help these veterans reintegrate into civilian life and offers a long list of services and support. Sarah Meisinger, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Program Manager at the VA Medical Center in St. Cloud, Minnesota, explains some of the issues concerning soldiers and their families. “There are a number of family challenges when reintegrating, such as communication, relearning family roles, intimacy with a spouse or significant other, and transitioning from living in an intensely structured environment to a flexible and often unstructured home environment,” says Meisinger. “Part of our job is to do a tremendous amount of outreach to these service members returning home from deployment.”

The outreach is offered throughout Welcome Home events, demobilization training, workshops, family reintegration academies, and a variety of other events to make new veterans aware of benefits and services available through VA. The Minnesota National Guard has also developed a program for returning soldiers called Beyond the Yellow Ribbon. Joan Vincent, Public Affairs Officer at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, says, “The National Guard is actively interacting with and training families before their service member comes home by teaching them what to expect and what might have changed.” Vincent adds that the Guard is also engaging communities to let them know what they can do to help.

Both Meisinger and Vincent stress that one of the most important things returning soldiers can do is to be patient throughout their readjustment. “Once you’ve been in a war zone, things change,” says Meisinger. Take time to reconnect to your

civilian life, and know that VA is here to help. For more information about transitioning home, visit www.seamlesstransition.va.gov/, or visit your local VA health care provider.



Specialist Lopez gets kisses from his little fans.

The Minnesota National Guard offers the following advice for reconnecting with your children (www.minnesotanationalguard.org/returning_troops/family.php):

- LEARN ALL YOU CAN ABOUT YOUR CHILD’S LIFE WHILE YOU WERE GONE.**
Let them share pictures, crafts, stories, and memories.
- BE PATIENT WITH YOUR CHILD AND YOURSELF.**
You can’t make up missed time overnight. It will take time.
- REMEMBER THIS IS A CHILD, NOT A SOLDIER!**
Learn the developmental stage your child is in and use age-appropriate parenting techniques.
- ACCEPT GUIDANCE FROM YOUR SPOUSE OR YOUR CHILD’S GUARDIAN.**
Listen to the person who has the most experience with your child.

Take Ten: Clean Hands Save Lives

There's an old adage that says, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and when it comes to preventing infection, this saying still rings true. The simple act of washing your hands can stop the transfer of bacteria, reducing illness and saving lives.

As a health care leader, VA is working towards a goal of 100 percent hand-washing compliance. This important task involves health care providers, patients, and family members, encouraging all to "Speak UP for Hand Hygiene." Kathleen De Roos, VISN 23 Infection Prevention Coordinator, says that the VA wants to prevent infections before they start, using hand hygiene to break the chain of transmission.

A major target area in the VA's hand washing campaign involves fighting a germ that spreads through direct physical contact and can cause pneumonia or other serious infections. Called Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), this bacteria is resistant to antibiotics, making it tough to treat, and has become the number one organism that causes skin infection.



MRSA is hardy enough that it can hang around on surfaces ... for over a week.



Kathleen De Roos

MRSA is also hard to detect, since it can be carried on the skin or in the nose of a healthy person without any symptoms or visible signs. If a skin infection does occur, the area can become red, hot, swollen, and painful, much like a spider bite. However, without any presence of symptoms, MRSA can be easily passed through contact with a person or object. "MRSA is hardy enough that it can hang around on surfaces such as countertops, doorknobs, or elevator buttons for over a week," said De Roos.

The VA is committed to reducing MRSA in all VA medical centers, and over the past year has implemented a new health and safety program to prevent MRSA. Through this directive, VISN 23 has dedicated an MRSA Prevention Coordinator in each of its acute care facilities. The Coordinator is responsible for overseeing the MRSA initiatives, including testing patients for MRSA (which involves placing a cotton swab into the nose and sending the sample to the lab); separating patients that have MRSA germs

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

from those that do not; encouraging thorough hand-washing; and educating patients and employees.

While MRSA is a serious illness, there are many simple ways you can help prevent MRSA and other infections. “Our VA wants to stop this organism in its tracks,” said De Roos. The following are suggestions from De Roos and the CDC to protect yourself from MRSA and other infections (especially if someone you live with is ill):

- ◆ Wash your hands when they are visibly soiled and at other key times such as before eating and after toileting. Hand sanitizer can be used at all other times, since it is an effective product for killing germs, but not for killing viruses that live in your gut.
- ◆ Antibacterial soap is not necessary for hand washing at home. The most important thing is to rub the soap all over your hands with a lot of friction for at least 15 seconds so you are removing the germs from your skin before rinsing them down the drain with water.
- ◆ Use liquid soap to avoid sharing germs on bar soap. If bar soap is used, place on a drainage rack so it doesn't sit in water and grow more germs.
- ◆ Dry your hands with paper towels instead of hand towels.
- ◆ If you have a cut or wound, make sure to keep the area clean and covered, and visit a medical facility if you notice that it isn't healing, is painful, hot to touch, or has a red streak.
- ◆ Keep your hands away from your face as much as possible.
- ◆ Don't share personal items that could pass bacteria, like razors or towels.
- ◆ Carry hand sanitizer (with between 60 and 95 percent alcohol content—check the label) for use when hand washing facilities are not available. Note: the alcohols in hand sanitizer are not the same type of alcohol as in an alcohol beverage.

If you have any concerns about a skin infection, call the VA telephone care call line or visit the nearest VA facility for an evaluation. And if you do find out that you carry MRSA, make sure to practice regular hand-washing, follow these tips, and let your future health care providers know you are a carrier to ensure proper treatment.

TIPS FOR BETTER HEALTH

SHORT ON TIME? Check out these quick tips to eat right when you're spread thin.

For a healthy, balanced meal, fill your plate with grains, fruits, and vegetables, and smaller portions of meat, poultry, fish, or eggs.

- ⊕ Rice, noodles, seasonal fruit, and salad are good options.
- ⊕ Use low-fat or fat-free butter and salad dressing.
- ⊕ Stock up on frozen and canned vegetables for quick sides.
- ⊕ Buy pre-cooked, lean meats that simply need to be heated up.
- ⊕ Choose ground meat with 10 percent or less fat.
- ⊕ Use a crock-pot or slow cooker to make stews or soups with lots of vegetables and little effort.
- ⊕ Try pre-made frozen or refrigerated meals that have reduced calories, fat, and sodium.
- ⊕ Substitute skim, ½ percent, or 1 percent milk for whole milk.



Want to find out more?
Visit www.healthierusveterans.va.gov or www.move.va.gov for more healthy cooking tips.

*For more health tips,
visit the HealthierUS
Veterans website at:*



www.healthierusveterans.va.gov/

Pandemic PRUDENCE

Additionally, VA has collaborated with other agencies to ensure the best communication with veterans. In the event of a pandemic, guidance will be issued by various agencies to help veterans understand what actions to take. These agencies include the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, state or local health departments, and the VA healthcare system.

But how can veterans protect themselves? Become more aware of the seasonal threat of influenza. Annual influenza vaccinations and good hand hygiene are the most effective ways to avoid catching influenza. Get a flu vaccination, wash your hands, cover your mouth, and visit your local VA healthcare provider if you are suffering from flu symptoms.

For more information, visit www.PandemicFlu.gov. Plus, look for a detailed pandemic flu insert in the next issue of *Veterans' Health*.

Pandemic flu is a human flu that causes a global outbreak of serious illness and can spread easily from person to person. It is important for veterans to be informed about the possibility of a pandemic influenza and how to prepare for an emergency. Veterans Affairs (VA) has adopted an emergency preparedness plan outlining preparation, response, and recovery procedures to protect both patients and staff.

SUNSENSE

Protect Your Skin From Overexposure

Sun block is only beneficial when used correctly. Apply heavy, waterproof SPF 30 sun block on all exposed skin about 20 to 30 minutes before you go outside, and reapply every two hours. Don't forget areas like the back of your ears and neck.

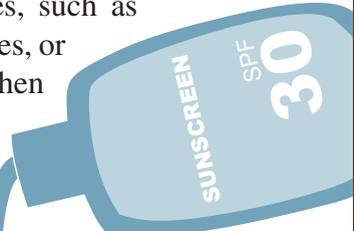
Although past skin damage is irreversible, you can prevent any new damage to your skin. If you have children or grandchildren, take the time to start protecting them early. "Frequent sunburns at a young age seem to be a significant factor in developing skin cancer," says Regan. "Protect not only yourselves, but also your kids—especially if your children are fair-skinned."

If you've had many sunburns over the years, Regan advises skin cancer screenings with your VA health care provider. It is also important to regularly check for any skin changes, such as new growths, changing moles, or growths that don't heal. When it comes to saving your skin, the best protection is prevention.

With the cold winter past and the hot summer around the corner, springtime is the perfect season to shake off the winter blues and get outdoors to soak up the sun. But beware—too much sun can do more harm than good!

The VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention reports that every year over one million people are diagnosed with skin cancer. Fortunately, there are many easy ways to protect your skin from the sun's ultraviolet rays.

Dr. James Regan, a dermatologist at the Omaha VA Clinic in Nebraska, recommends planning ahead to shield yourself from overexposure. "Sun protection is more effective when used in a combination," says Regan. This combination includes limiting time outside or staying in the shade during midday when the sun's rays are the most direct, usually from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Regan also advises wearing protective clothing such as wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses, and covering up with long-sleeves and pants.



Apply heavy, waterproof SPF 30 sun block on all exposed skin about 20 to 30 minutes before you go outside, and reapply every two hours. Don't forget areas like the back of your ears and neck.



Tina Lund, Minneapolis Nurse Executive, leads a team of walkers on a morning walk.

Veterans Canteens across the nation. These wise meals offer better choices for both veterans and VA employees who eat in VA cafeterias.

According to Linda Daninger, VA Health Promotion Coordinator at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, this is an exciting time for preventive health. “Staying active and healthy is becoming a priority,” says Daninger, who encourages VA staff to be leaders in the effort to

VA Challenges Veterans to Get Fit

At the end of March, over 1,200 Minneapolis veterans and VA employees celebrated the conclusion of an inspiring challenge to walk or roll in wheelchairs 100 miles in 100 days. Called the Champions’ Challenge, this new pilot program kicked-off in medical centers across the nation as part of the HealthierUS Veterans initiative, a program that helps teach participants to increase physical activity and improve eating habits.

This program was open to veterans, their families, and VA staff members. Participants kept track of their daily miles, either through an online tracking system or on paper cards. Upon reaching milestones of 25, 50, and 100 miles, the walkers received certificates for prizes from their local Veterans Canteen Service totaling \$14,000 in prizes nationwide!

However, the greatest rewards were improvements to each participant’s individual health. Robert Fischbach, Canteen Food Director at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, is a great example of the significant changes that can result from healthier habits. Since December 1, 2007, Fischbach has lost 40 pounds by eating healthier and participating in the Champions’ Challenge. In addition to losing the weight, he has more energy, lower cholesterol levels, and he may no longer require some of his regular medication. “It works, and it will work for others,” says Fischbach, “but first veterans need to learn how to incorporate exercise and healthy eating into their lifestyles.” Now nutritious meal choices are available at 178

become healthier. “Use the stairs instead of an elevator, make appointments to walk with a friend, and celebrate victories in your health,” she says.

Programs like the Champions’ Challenge help advance the VA’s mission to improve veterans’ health and well-being. “We’re listening to our veterans’ needs and making a big commitment to help them become more physically fit,” says Debra Pederson, VA Patient Education Coordinator at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.

This fall, the Champions’ Challenge will once again take place at VA centers across the nation. Participants will be able to pre-register online or sign up at their local VA facility. More information will be available in the next issue of *Veterans’ Health* or at your local canteen service.

To get more active, try these exercise ideas from the MOVE! program (www.move.va.gov):

-  Walk or ride a bike for transportation
-  Park at the far end of the parking lot and walk
-  Walk your dog
-  Take a brisk walk while you are shopping at the mall
-  Mow the grass, rake the leaves, or weed the garden
-  Go walking with others
-  Go dancing
-  Find a beginner’s exercise class that you might enjoy

Start walking! Be a part of this year’s Champions’ Challenge!

NO BUTTS—IT'S TIME TO QUIT SMOKING!

Smoking has been the leading cause of preventable death for over 40 years. Each year smoking-related illnesses (such as cancer, lung disease, and stroke) kill approximately 430,000 Americans. Sadly, the rate of tobacco use is increasing, as nearly 50 percent of returning veterans of Operation Iraqi and Enduring Freedom return home with new tobacco habits, according to Smoking Cessation Coordinator Deb Dingmann at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.

Quitting is not easy, but the VA can help. Dingmann recommends tobacco users make a commitment to quit and set up a personalized plan with their health care provider. “There are three important elements,” says Dingmann. First, she tells patients to assess their body’s addiction level, especially paying attention to how many cigarettes are smoked each day. Next, Dingmann tells patients to prepare alternative activities to smoking, such as taking a walk or meditating. Finally, she recommends that patients analyze their personal stress management to discover new ways to respond to stress. “Around 70 to 80 percent of smokers relapse after their first attempt, and most don’t fully quit until their sixth try,” says Dingmann.

The VA offers many services to assist veterans who are trying to quit all forms of tobacco, such as counseling and group clinics. In addition, many medications are available for nicotine replacement including patches, gum, and medications to block cravings. Veterans should consult with their

primary care providers to determine what’s best for them. Dingmann also advises that cigars, light cigarettes, or ultra-light cigarettes do not offer any benefits over regular cigarettes. “There is no such thing as a safe cigarette,” she says.

If you’re a smoker who wants to quit, you are not alone. The VA National Smoking and Tobacco Use Program data shows that 70 percent of smokers want to quit. Within 20 minutes from your last tobacco use, your blood pressure and pulse rate begin to return to normal.

If you’re ready to quit, talk to your VA provider about setting up a plan. Dingmann wants to remind veterans that it’s normal to have difficulty when making a lifestyle change and adds, “Your health is worth fighting for!”



Deb Dingmann, RN

Resources for support:

1-800-784-8669 or www.quitplan.com – offers free telephone counseling and help with prescription costs

1-800-4CANCER – American Cancer Hotline

1-877-44U-QUIT – Smoking Cessation Hotline

1-800-CDC(232)-1311 – Center for Disease Control



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

VA Midwest Health Care Network
5445 Minnehaha Avenue S., 2nd Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55417-2300

PRST STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Effingham, IL
Permit 714

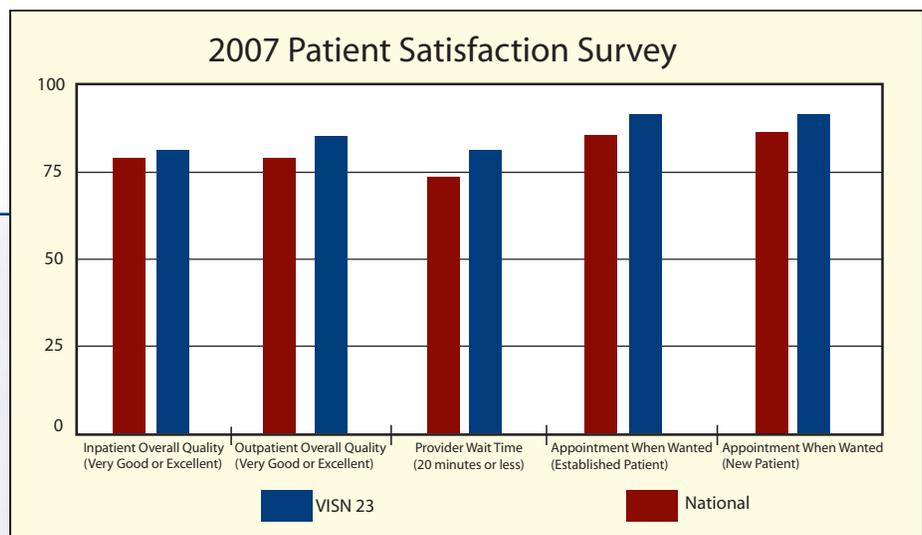
VA Midwest Health Care Network FY 2007 Annual Report

Dear Friends of the VA Midwest Health Care Network:

Fiscal Year 2007 is a year to celebrate. Program expansion in mental health and telemedicine was significant this past year. Outreach to service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan was another area where we were successful. We made progress reducing patient wait times through the use of proven “Systems Redesign” strategies. Through these and many other initiatives, 2007 marked yet another year in a decade-long trend of treating more patients than the year before. Veterans reported on VHA customer satisfaction surveys and our scores outranked the other Networks, **exceeding VA’s national average on all five key performance measures by at least 3 percent – in one case by 7 percent!** To all who played a role in VISN 23’s achievements this year – veterans, employees, volunteers, and community partners – we thank you and will build on our success as we continue to create a culture of continuous improvement and service excellence.



Robert A. Petzel, M.D.
Network Director



VA Midwest Health Care Network (VISN 23) is part of the Veterans Health Administration and one of 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) that comprise the largest, fully integrated health care system in the United States. Our *mission* is to honor America’s veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well being. Our *vision* is to be:

1. a patient-centered, integrated health care organization for veterans providing excellent health care, research, and education;
2. an organization where people choose to work; and
3. an active community partner and a backup for national emergencies. Our *core values* are trust, respect, excellence, commitment, compassion, empowerment, continuous improvement, and collaboration.

Workload and Financial Report

The Network serves veterans residing in a seven state area through a system of community based outpatient and outreach clinics (42), hospitals (10), nursing homes (8), and domiciliary residential rehabilitation treatment programs (4). The states served by VISN 23 include Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and portions of Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Wisconsin and Wyoming. An estimated one million veterans live in our defined service area. In fiscal year 2007, approximately 36 percent of the veterans living within the network received care at our facilities. The majority of patients are men (94 percent), but the number of women selecting VA care is expected to increase as the percentage of women in the military continues to grow.

Performance

The Network's goal is to provide veterans same day access - appointments when they want them. By using advanced clinic access practices, we are making progress and waiting times are getting shorter. Service connected veterans and service members returning from combat remain a scheduling priority.

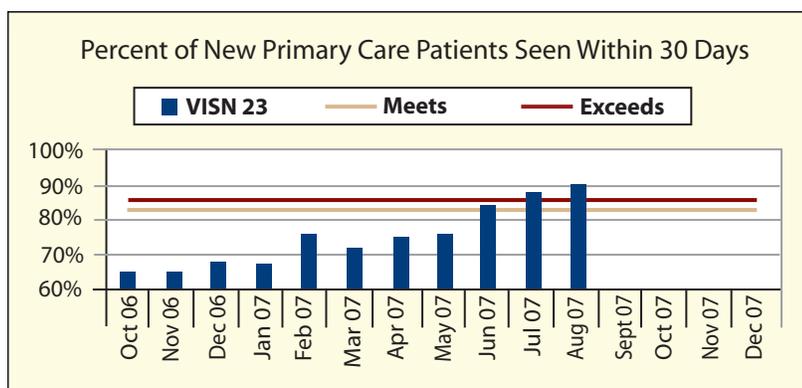
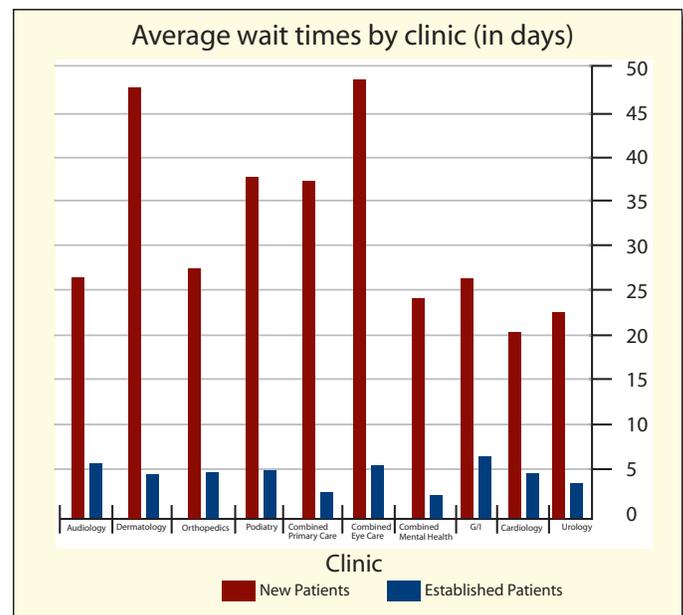
VISN 23 is one of four Networks in the country to achieve the "Exceeds" level in fiscal year 2007 for the Non-Institutional Care Performance Measure. VISN 23 achieved 109.7 percent of its Home & Community Based Care average daily census target which increased Home and Community Based Care services for veterans.

Network	2005	2006	2007
Veteran patients treated	266,973	270,273	275,567
• Priority 1-6	172,898	178,237	184,913
• Priority 7-8	81,775	92,036	90,654
Inpatient discharges	23,156	25,016	25,493
Outpatient visits	2,349,603	2,333,551	2,403,036
Annual budget ¹	\$1.398B	\$1.49B	\$1.62B
Costs/patient	\$4,825	\$4,943	\$5,133
Pharmacy costs	\$212.9M	\$221.6M	\$218.8M
Pharmacy costs/patient	\$800	\$809	\$784
Prosthetic obligations	\$39.5M	\$43.4M	\$45.5
MCCR collections ²	\$142M	\$150M	\$153M
Staffing FTE ³	9,277	9,427	9,707

¹Annual Budget – Appropriated funds (VERA, Collections, Specific Purpose) used for operations it excludes Major and Minor Construction.

²Medical Care Cost Recovery (MCCR)– Funds collected are kept by the Network and used for direct patient care.

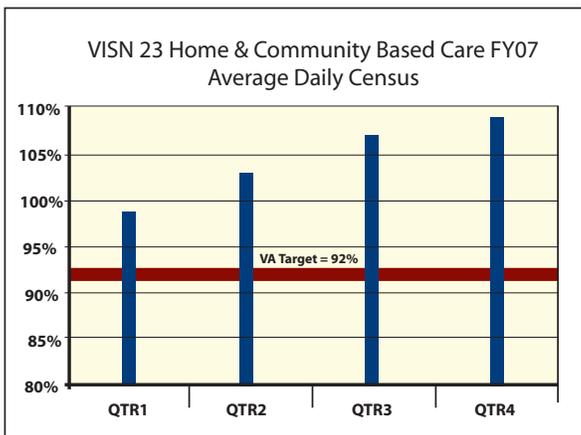
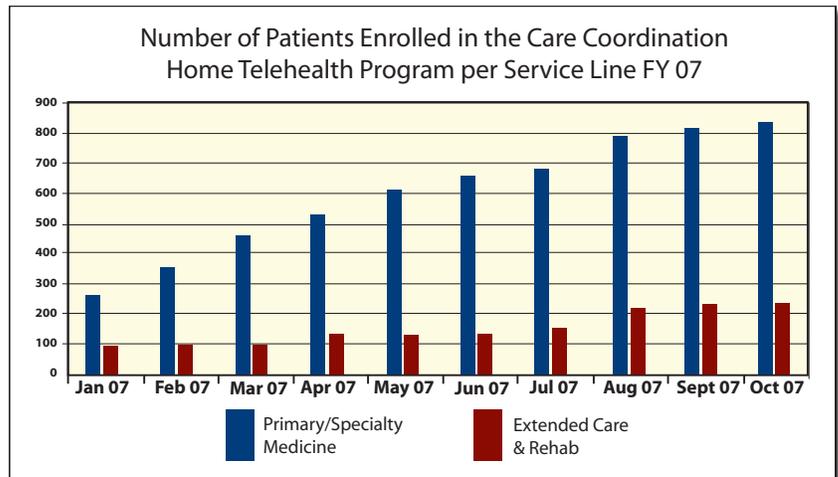
³Full time equivalent (FTE)



These Non-Institutional Care services include:

- ★ VA Home Based Primary Care (HBPC)
- ★ Purchased Skilled Home Care
- ★ Homemaker/Home Health Aide services
- ★ Adult Day Health Care (VA ADHC and Purchased Community ADHC)
- ★ Home Respite Care
- ★ Home Hospice Care
- ★ Care Coordination Home Telehealth (CCHT)

One of VISN 23's continuing priorities is to expand innovative models of non-institutional care and address medical access to care, especially for veterans living in rural areas. Innovative models of care involve the provision of home care, community partnering, creative housing alternatives, and new applications for home telehealth. VISN 23 approved Strategic Initiative Funding to expand Home & Community Based Care services, including Home Based Primary Care in its Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Medical Foster Homes, and Rehabilitation Home Telehealth.



The home telehealth program is growing, resulting in an increased use of equipment by veterans at home, better information for health care providers, and greater accessibility to health care for veterans.

Updates

Returning Service Members

VISN 23 intensified its commitment to serve the troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Medical centers across the Network are hosting focus groups to better understand the

needs of these young men and women. In 2007 we named Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) managers at each facility to help returning service member navigate through the system, and facilities partnered with local communities to host welcome home events. Providing service to returning service members is a priority for us. If you know of a service member who has not enrolled with the Department of Veterans Affairs, please encourage them go to the nearest VA medical center or apply online at www.va.gov. There are specific timelines for certain benefits, and we want to give returning service members the opportunity to access the benefits they earned. Overall, Network facilities treated **5,569** returning service members in 2007 (vs. **3,426** in fiscal year 2006).

Mental Health

Since fiscal year 2005, the Network increased our mental health staff by a total of 207 new positions through mental health enhancement initiatives. Fifty positions were added in 2005, 55 positions in 2006, and 102 positions in 2007. We expanded mental health services to all of our 44 community based outpatient clinics and we appointed suicide prevention coordinators at each of our hospitals. VA mental health professionals and a 24-hour suicide prevention hotline are available seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Veterans in crisis can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273 TALK (8255) to be connected to VA suicide prevention and mental health service professionals.

Polytrauma Rehabilitation

The Minneapolis VA Medical Center is home to one of four VA Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers. These centers provide acute, comprehensive inpatient rehabilitation. They maintain a full team of dedicated rehabilitation professionals and consultants from other specialties related to polytrauma. Our polytrauma teams of physicians from

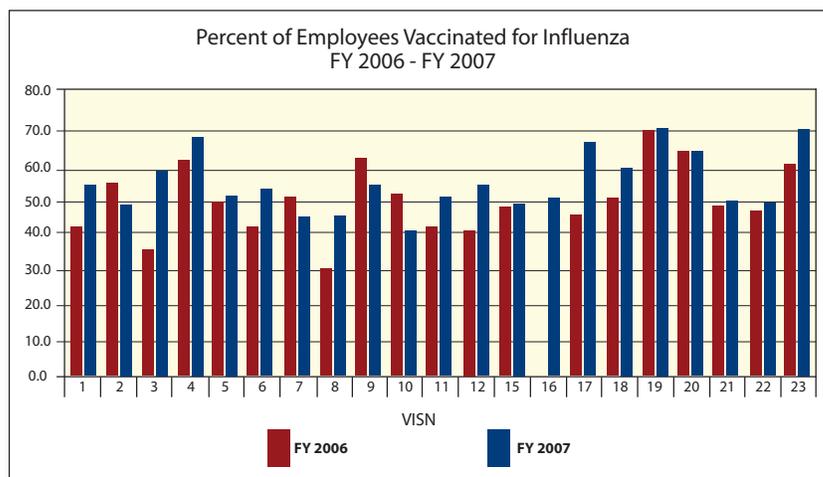
VA Midwest Health Care Network FY 2007 Annual Report

every relevant field develop and administer an individually tailored rehabilitation plan to help the patient recover as much as possible. The Minneapolis Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center has been nationally recognized for its excellence throughout the year. In 2007, visitors included the Secretary of US Department of Veterans Affairs, congressional members, military officials, Veteran Service Organization leaders, and health care professionals from around the world.

Disease Prevention

Introduced in 2007, *Living Well – Helping Veterans Manage Their Health* education classes teach veterans to take responsibility for and manage their own chronic illnesses.

Persons with chronic illness often feel left out and alone, but this six-week class can help veterans take back their lives. They learn that with a few modifications they can do many of the activities they did before they were diagnosed with a chronic disease. Realizing they hold the key to living a more functional, enjoyable life is a powerful tool for maintaining wellness.



Preventing the spread of influenza – VISN 23 has the second highest achieved influenza vaccination rate in the nation for its employees.

Improving Access to Rural Areas

Under the Secretary's (CARES) Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Service, VA Midwest Health Care Network received approval to open 21 Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). Significant progress to improve access in rural areas was made in 2007. Seven new sites of care opened this past year, seven more are scheduled to open in 2008, and eight more are proposed and under review by VA Central Office.

CBOCs Approved Implementation Plans Under Development		
Location	Host Facility	Target Opening Date
Shenandoah, IA	Omaha VAMC	April 2008
Holdrege, NE	Omaha VAMC	April 2008
Carroll, IA	Des Moines VAMC	April-June 2008
Marshalltown, IA	Des Moines VAMC	April-June 2008
Cedar Rapids, IA	Iowa City VAMC	April-June 2008
Wagner, SD	Sioux Falls VAMC	July-Sept. 2008
Watertown, SD	Sioux Falls VAMC	July-Sept. 2008
Devil's Lake, ND	Fargo VAMC	July-Sept. 2008
O'Neill, NE	Nebraska/Western Iowa VAMC	July-Sept. 2008
CBOCs Proposed - Business Plans Under Review in VA Central Office		
Alexandria, MN	Ottumwa, IA	
Redwood Falls, MN	NW Twin Cities Metro Area, MN	
Bellevue, NE	Grand Forks, ND	

New CBOCs Opened in 2007	
Location	Host Facility
Dickinson, ND	Fargo VAMC
Williston, ND	Fargo VAMC
Jamestown, ND	Fargo VAMC
Bemidji, MN	Fargo VAMC
Hayward, WI	Minneapolis VAMC
Rice Lake, WI	Minneapolis VAMC
Spirit Lake, IA	Sioux Falls VAMC

