

Veterans' Health

Winter 2010

*Your key to
better health
in the Midwest*

**VA Launches
Online
Campaign
to Reach
Veterans**

**Dedicated
Volunteers
Give Back
to Veterans**

**VA Facilities:
Home Sweet Home**





Message from the Director: **VA Is At Your Fingertips**

Your VA is a forward-thinking organization, applying the latest technology to provide the best patient care. Now, VA is applying new ways to improve its outreach to Veterans and make access to information easier.

Cindy Breyfogle, Acting Director

An excellent VA resource is the new VA outreach page. Our staff has done a great job of getting the Web site updated so that it's more user-friendly for Veterans. The new look will help Veterans determine benefits, eligibility, and enrollment information, and much more. Log on to www4.va.gov/healtheligibility and see for yourself!

When weather is an issue, VA medical centers will post information on Web sites to alert you about closures. Anytime we cancel clinics or close due to bad weather, the Web is a good place to quickly find out about appointment cancellations. (See VA medical center links on this page.)

In addition to online improvements, VA is also making health care more accessible. On page 4, you'll find information about the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) model, a concept that makes complete care more convenient. For example, if you need appointments with multiple health care providers, we are striving to have all visits made for the same day, at

the same location. PCMH is a very good way to have a more coordinated approach to the comprehensive care we provide.

Finally, as VA begins a new year, it's important to look back at those who make a difference every day of the week. In this issue of Veterans' Health, read about the dedicated volunteers throughout the Network. These VA volunteers are crucial to our operation. Many are Veterans, so they relate well to our patients. In addition, your local County Veterans Service Officer plays a valuable role in helping us find and contact Veterans in need of our services. We appreciate them for all their help and dedication.

These volunteers help VA go above and beyond simply providing medical care.

For you, our Veterans, VA is working to improve your overall health and well-being.

We hope you'll take full advantage of the services VA has to offer. Thank you for serving!

Cindy Breyfogle
Acting Director of
the VA Midwest
Health Care
Network

VAMC sites for VISN 23

- www.visn23.va.gov
- www.blackhills.va.gov
- www.centraliowa.va.gov
- www.fargo.va.gov
- www.iowacity.va.gov
- www.minneapolis.va.gov
- www.nebraska.va.gov
- www.siouxfalls.va.gov
- www.stcloud.va.gov

On the cover: Stephen Bruggeman, U.S. Coast Guard Veteran, downhill skis for the first time since his below-the-knee amputation in 2003 at VA's 2009 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village, Colorado. Bruggeman said of his experience, "It was such a motivational program! Staff were enthusiastic and excited to help us achieve the most from our time there and show us that we can overcome our disabilities." For many newly injured Veterans, the clinic offers their first experience in winter sports and gives them the inspiration to take their rehabilitation to a higher level. Participants include Veterans with spinal cord injuries, amputations, traumatic brain injuries, neurological challenges, and visual impairments. For information on the Winter Sports Clinic, log on to www.wintersportsclinic.va.gov



On November 17, the White House announced Dr. Robert Petzel's nomination for Under Secretary for Health, Department of Veterans Affairs. Dr. Petzel has served as Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) since May.

Prior to his nomination, Dr.

Petzel was Network Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs Midwest Health Care Network based in Minneapolis. He also co-chairs the National VHA Strategic Planning Committee and the VHA System Redesign Steering Committee.

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.



Fargo Veteran Dan Dewey, National Veteran Service Officer for AMVETS, reviewed the recent changes to VA's Web site. "I'm impressed," he says. "There is lots of excellent information, and the verbiage is suited for any reading level. I really like the drop-down columns at the top of the window, which make information simple to access."

Dewey added that the "Hot Topics" section makes for easy reading and quick reference. "The entire site is clear and educational, and it has very nice graphics."

VA Launches Online Campaign to Reach Veterans

Thanks to technology, VA is now making it easier than ever for Veterans to find eligibility and enrollment information.

David Garland, Business Office Manager at Fargo VAMC, says the new online advertising campaign and recent Web site changes will greatly increase outreach efforts and better serve Veterans.

"Whether you click on an advertisement from elsewhere or simply type the URL www4.va.gov/healtheligibility into your Web browser, you land on the public outreach page," he explains. "There you will find a newly redesigned Web page with a wealth of information about VA benefits, a short checklist to see if you may qualify, an eligibility calculator, and a link to the VA Form 10-10EZ to apply for benefits online."

The site also features a healthcare overview and information about VA priority groups, special categories of Veterans, potential out-of-pocket expenses such as co-payment responsibilities, and much more.

"If you have never applied," Garland adds, "or if you applied and were deemed ineligible—regardless of when you served—we encourage you to apply for enrollment because VA has relaxed income standards for Veterans with no adjudicated service-connected disabilities. Additionally, Veterans suffering financial distress due to loss of employment or those with

catastrophic health care expenses may be eligible. Also, we never know what changes will come in the future that might qualify you."

While the online changes are helping VA reach out electronically to Veterans on the Web, you can also mail or fax a completed paper copy of your application to a local VAMC for processing or speak to a local enrollment coordinator or eligibility staff. County Veterans Service Officers across the Midwest Health Care Network are also available to help, or you can telephone 1-877-222-VETS (8387) toll free for assistance.

Stay in the know!



All VAMC Web sites now have an emergency page where Veterans can go to learn about closures or interruption in services should there be weather-related or other emergencies. Visit your local medical center's Web site for details. (See list on previous page.)

VA Facilities:

HOME Sweet HOME

Unlike the days when patients had only one healthcare provider, most Veterans today interact with a team of professionals working to meet their needs. That's good—but thanks to something called the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH), Veterans will see the team approach become much more convenient and efficient in the future.

Dr. Michael Hein, Medical Director, Network Primary and Specialty Medicine Service Line, explains. “Historically, health care has often been handled piece by piece. For example, if you needed to see multiple providers—such as a cardiologist, a dietician, an audiologist, and an ophthalmologist—you made appointments that likely fell on different days and at different facilities. This approach worked for the health care system but was time-consuming and sometimes a confusing process for Veterans.”

“The Patient Centered Medical Home,” he continues, “focuses on a **patient’s** needs and on

making health care accessible so that if a Veteran needs multiple appointments, they are all made for the same day at the same location. For working Veterans, that may mean arranging appointments for early morning, late evening, on a weekend, or all of the above—whatever is convenient for the patient.”

Dr. Colene Andersen, Acting Associate Chief of Medicine in Grand Island, Nebraska, agrees. “With PCMH, our goal is to provide care the way Veterans would like to see it provided,” she says, “even though it doesn’t always mean seeing a physician. For example, a diabetes educator or someone at a hypertension clinic may be able to address a Veteran’s needs, or we may need to get medication or a prosthetic device to a patient. The primary care provider guides the team’s efforts in the PCMH model; a clerk’s role is just as important as a nurse’s, which is just as important as a physician’s.”

Regardless of job title, Andersen says everyone works together to provide the best care.

“Because distance is a challenge for some Veterans, it may simply mean the team is accessible by phone or that we continue to enhance the features of MyHealthVet. But overall, it’s about an entire team providing accessible care the way Veterans want it.”

For Andersen, the Patient Centered Medical Home means exactly what the name implies: **home**. “A VA facility should feel like home,” she says, “where people are comfortable because they know each other. Veterans need a nurse they are familiar with and one that knows them so they can put a name to a face when they call in rather than talking to a stranger. We want a sense of community and continuity where Veterans know everyone on the team and where everyone on the team knows the Veteran’s needs and challenges. We want patients to feel like they are coming home when they walk into a clinic.”

The PCMH concept doesn’t stop with VA care, either. It involves your primary health care team coordinating both VA and private sector care in a way that makes



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- Dr. Colene Andersen
Acting Associate Chief of Medicine, Grand Island

sense to Veterans, which greatly enhances the quality of care.

Doctors Hein and Andersen both stressed that developing the PCMH concept requires involving Veterans in management decisions to ensure their voices are heard. In other words, if VA could create the very best outpatient primary care clinic, what would it be like and how would Veterans want it run?

“We’re getting input from Veterans on what they’d like to see,” says Andersen. “What we think is important may not be important to them, so we must adjust to our changing Veteran

population and ask what they’d like to see. A Veteran Service Officer on the PCMH team provides input, as well as input from many other Veterans. These Veterans bring things to our attention that we may not recognize as a problem so that we can rectify them.”

“PCMH is ongoing,” she says. “It’s not an overnight process but a progression of what we’re already doing. Home Based Primary Care is an excellent example of how VA has changed the way it provides care to meet the needs of Veterans.”

“We are the best at what we do,” agrees Hein, “but we don’t want to lose ground. We see PCMH as a tool we can deploy to achieve the exceptional care Veterans deserve. It’s the engine that continues to accelerate the quality of care we provide, but it is not new. Rather, it is a continuation of an ongoing evolution that has been underway at VA for many years. As we move forward, it may require changes such as restructuring clinics and hiring more staff. PCMH is a major step in transitioning the VA to a very Veteran-centered health care system.”

Dedicated Volunteers Give Back to Veterans

What do a 94-year-old gentleman, 25 husband-and-wife teams, and the three generations in one family have in common? They all volunteer in the Sioux Falls area—some of the thousands of volunteers who keep VA medical centers running smoothly.

Patricia Aljets, Recreation Therapy Voluntary Service Program Manager in St. Cloud, says volunteers are critically important to VA medical facilities.

“Volunteer transportation,” she explains, “makes a tremendous impact on the medical centers within this network. During the first eight months of 2009, nearly 45,000 Veterans were transported within the VA Midwest Health Care Network. Without volunteers, that’s 5,000 patients per month who may not have been able to receive care or for whom transportation would have posed a hardship.”

Aljets adds that in those eight months, Network volunteers drove 118,000 hours and 2.5 million



Minneapolis patient Raymond Schwirz takes advantage of the opportunity to use one of the hand hygiene stations, which volunteers like Ken Nelson keep stocked with masks and hand sanitizer.



Volunteer and Veteran Jim Haukedahl serves coffee to a fellow Veteran. Jim volunteers in the Fargo Greeter and Coffee Cart program.

miles. The volunteer-sponsored transportation services make each facility more efficient by decreasing parking congestion and “no show” appointments. For people who aren’t comfortable driving, many other volunteer opportunities exist.

“We try to match a volunteer’s interests and skills with the needs of the facility. Most locations have similar opportunities, but each has unique needs based on the culture, services provided, and interests of area Veterans. We welcome individuals of all backgrounds and abilities.” Volunteers help by providing an extra set of hands, serving refreshments, playing a game of cards, or simply visiting with a lonely Veteran. Some volunteers work behind the scenes in administrative roles, making reminder calls, assembling informa-



Jim Totushek, DAV Transportation Volunteer, has been transporting Veterans to the St. Cloud VA Medical Center for five years, logging nearly 4,000 miles.

Network volunteer data for 2009:

7,756 The number of regular and student volunteers

652,789 The total volunteer hours
(regular and occasional)

\$13 million Estimated cost savings from volunteer efforts

\$5,016,106 The total monetary and material donations



Charles Grossman, an Army Veteran who served in Vietnam, and Kathy Eckert, his volunteer hunting partner, participated in the 2009 Turkey Hunt sponsored by the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, Camp Ripley, and the MN Dept of Natural Resources.



U.S. Army Veteran John Swanson practices fly fishing on the Sauk River, near the St. Cloud VAMC, alongside Claude Neidlinger, a volunteer with Project Healing Waters.

tion packets, assisting with ID cards, or shredding data.

People volunteer for different reasons. "For some," says Aljets, "it gives purpose to their lives—a reason to get up each morning. They make new friends, improve their physical and mental health, and give back to our Veterans. Other volunteers are professionals who have lost their job and want to add experience to their resume or explore career opportunities while doing something meaningful."

If you are interested in volunteering or would like more information, contact the Voluntary Service staff at any VA facility or visit the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service site at www.volunteer.va.gov.

Right: At the Hot Springs VA Medical Center, U.S. Army Veteran Alfonzo Jarmon, Sr., receives assistance from American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) volunteer Susie Clyde during the ALA's annual Holiday Gift Shop. Ms. Clyde has been a volunteer for 20 years and is the 2009 Gift Shop Chairperson.



Stocking and distributing comfort items throughout the facility is just one of many assignments DAV Volunteer Frank Jones has undertaken in his 20 years as a VA Black Hills Health Care System volunteer.



VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK - VISN 23**NORTH DAKOTA****Fargo VA Medical Center**

2101 N. Elm St.
Fargo, ND 58102
(701) 232-3241
(800) 410-9723

SOUTH DAKOTA**Sioux Falls VA Medical Center**

2501 West 22nd St.
PO BOX 5046
Sioux Falls, SD 57117
(605) 336-3230
(800) 316-8387

**VA Black Hills
Health Care System**

113 Comanche Road
Fort Meade, SD 57741
(605) 347-2511
(800) 743-1070
500 N. 5th Street
Hot Springs, SD 57747
(605) 745-2000
(800) 764-5370

NEBRASKA**VA Nebraska Western Iowa
Health Care System**

600 South 70th St
Lincoln, NE 68510-2493
(402) 489-3802
(866) 851-6052

4101 Woolworth Avenue
Omaha, NE 68105
(402) 346-8800
(800) 451-5796

2201 North Broadwell Avenue
Grand Island, NE 68803
(308) 382-3660
(866) 580-1810

MINNESOTA**Minneapolis VA Medical Center**

One Veterans Drive
Minneapolis, MN 55417
(612) 725-2000
(866) 414-5058

St. Cloud VA Medical Center

4801 Veterans Drive
St. Cloud, MN 56303
(320) 252-1670
(800) 247-1739

IOWA**Iowa City VA Medical Center**

601 Hwy 6 West
Iowa City, IA 52246
(319) 338-0581
Illinois (800) 346-1843
Iowa (800) 637-0128

Central Iowa Health Care System

3600 - 30th St
Des Moines, IA 50310
(515) 699-5999
(800) 294-8387
1515 W. Pleasant St
Knoxville, IA 50138
(641) 842-3101
(800) 816-8878

