

VISN 23 Fall 2011



Veterans' Health

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Wishes on Wings
Grants Dying Wishes
for Veterans

Get MOVE!ing
with Your VA

Accessing VA Care
While Traveling



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Message from the Director



Dear Veterans,

As we enjoy our fall weather, I would like to remind you that it is also flu season. In this issue of *Veterans' Health*, you will read about the importance of

getting a flu shot. I strongly urge all Veterans and their family members above the age of six months to get vaccinated. There is a substantial supply of flu vaccinations available.

On page 3, you will find helpful information about accessing VA health care when traveling. Once enrolled, you can receive VA care throughout the country. With a little upfront planning, you can benefit from seamless treatment from any VA facility.

I recommend that you have a tissue when you read the heart tugging article on pages 4 and 5 about how the Fargo VA Health Care System's Wishes on Wings program, in conjunction with the VA Hospice and Palliative Care Program, granted wishes to Veterans who had been diagnosed with terminal diseases.

Your VA is hard at work to provide you with the most up-to-date medical technology and equipment. On page 6, you will discover how new technology is helping

Veterans in intensive care units (ICU) get much needed specialty care from doctors located in offsite workstations through the Tele-ICU program.

At VA, we are always inspired to help our Veterans be the healthiest that they can be. That is why the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention established the MOVE! Program. On page 7, you will see how MOVE! helps overweight Veterans lose unhealthy pounds by educating or counseling them about nutrition, exercise, behavioral and psychological issues.

Finally, I recommend all Veterans to complete the one-time, In-Person Authentication process to upgrade your My HealthVet account. With your upgraded account, you can receive your VA wellness reminders; view your VA appointments; participate in secure messaging (emailing) with your health care team; view your VA chemistry/hematology results and share your medical information with your family, caregiver or others. It puts **you** in control of your information.

Thank you for allowing us the privilege of helping you meet your health care needs.

Sincerely,
Janet Murphy
Network Director



Flu Prevention 101

Flu illness is nasty and makes you miserable. It can also put you at risk for complications such as pneumonia. Thankfully, there are a number of strategies to keep you from getting the flu altogether.

According to Dr. Kristin Nichol, flu researcher and associate chief of staff for research at the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis, the flu vaccination is a terrific bargain. She points out, "They are safe, they work and they are available to our patients at no cost." There are now several types of vaccinations, and at least one is available for just about everybody. Dr. Nichol urges all Veterans and their family members above the age of six months to get a flu vaccination. "Please do not wait until the peak of flu season to get your flu shot. The shot

takes 10 to 14 days to provide full protection, but it is effective for the entire year."

Hand washing is also an excellent way to prevent the spread of flu and other types of infections. Wash your hands before preparing food, after using the restroom, after wiping or touching your nose or any other time it seems like a good idea.

Even if you are vaccinated, it is a good idea to avoid exposure to the virus, if at all possible. Your co-workers and family members should stay at home when they are sick. Of course, if you do get sick, be polite by practicing good illness etiquette; such as coughing in your elbow, washing your hands frequently and staying at home to keep your germs to yourself.

On the cover: Veteran Arthur Carlson, surrounded by family. Photo by Tricia Bosak-Bovkoon.

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.



Accessing VA Care while Traveling

Did you know that you can receive high quality VA health care and assistance, even when traveling? This includes access to medical centers, hospital-based systems and community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). In fact, once enrolled in VA care, you can receive VA care throughout the country. “Most patients have a preferred facility that they are attached to; but if they are traveling, they can access other VA health care systems and outpatient clinics on their journey and at their destination,” says Sally Frohn, VISN 23 Primary & Specialty Medicine Service Line, HSS/Administrative Officer.

The transition is smooth because VA maintains electronic records. If you are enrolled, a new facility can have access to your records and will be able to contact your preferred caregiver if they have questions. Your files, which demonstrate eligibility, will be brought into the local VA medical facilities database through a registration process known as Register Once, says David Garland, Fargo VA Medical Center’s Business Office Manager. The remote facility will ask you for some basic information, which will include your full Social Security number, date of birth and full name, as listed in your preferred facility’s database. This takes about 30 minutes, but you can do it prior to traveling. If you know you will need medical services while traveling, call the sites you plan to visit ahead of time to register.

“Register Once is a quick and easy way to verify eligibility. Veteran ID cards also make things quicker. VA has increased its education efforts, to both VA medical facility staff and Veterans, to ensure that receiving care while traveling is easy and hassle-free,” says Garland.

Before leaving, you may call 1-877-222-8387 to find locations along your route, or use the facilities locator application at <http://www.va.gov/health>. In addition, eligibility and enrollment staff at your local preferred facility can also assist you.

Your VA understands that health care needs do not always allow for pre-planning. You can feel at ease knowing that if you arrive at a VA facility needing urgent care, you will receive a clinical assessment and be stabilized. You will receive the appropriate level of care *before* registration is completed.

You also have access to the toll free VA Nurse Line (1-866-687-7382) on weekends and after clinics are closed, where you can speak to a VA nurse about health care questions and symptoms. The nurse will have access to your medical records and can enter notes and advise you, based on your symptoms, if you should seek immediate attention or see a local physician. They can also direct you to VA locations in the area that you have travelled.

“When taking a trip, please take a sufficient supply of medications with you, if possible,” says Frohn. “But if you do not, we have processes in place where we can bridge a supply of medication. Also, it’s a good idea to notify your primary care provider if you are going to be away for an extended amount of time, and provide a temporary address to the VA Eligibility Office. A little preparation before a trip can assure that you seamlessly receive your needed care throughout the United States. “Remember the term Register Once if you plan to travel,” says Garland.



Veteran Arthur Carlson and Fargo Jet School pilot Danny Blaha. Photo by Tricia Bosak-Bovkoon.

Wishes on Wings

Grants Dying Wishes for Veterans

If you are suffering from a life-limiting or terminal illness, now may be the time to talk to your physician about the benefits you can receive from VA. “Our goal is to help all Veterans in the community who have never participated in VA care, even those that have never enrolled in the VA,” says Caroline Schauer, Hospice and Palliative Care Program Manager for VISN 23.

“Our biggest focus is making sure you are able to do the things you want, with the time you have

left,” says Jodi Holman, the Fargo Coordinator for Hospice and Palliative Care and Program Coordinator for the Wishes on Wings (W.O.W.) program that grants dying wishes to terminally ill Veterans. The program began in September of 2008. “Some wishes are really big and get a lot of media coverage, and some just happen at the VA facility and involve anniversaries or birthday celebrations,” says Holman.

Fargo granted the first wish to a Veteran who had just been diagnosed with cancer. “We provided

the specialized medical care to treat his symptoms and make him more comfortable. We asked what he wanted to do with the time he had left, and he said he wanted one last helicopter ride. We really weren’t expecting that answer,” says Holman. “We expected him to say he wanted to be comfortable or try to stay at home, or something to that effect. But he wanted to ride a helicopter one last time. When he served in Vietnam, he would catch rides on the helicopters.” Eight days after the request, through a team

effort, VA located an orthopedic surgeon in Fargo, with a privately owned helicopter. A Veteran himself, he volunteered his services to give this Veteran his dying wish. The Veteran received a motorcycle escort from the VA to the airport. The Veteran requested media coverage so other Veterans would know that their wishes could be granted, also. It made the front page of the paper and all the news channels. “The program pretty much grew from there,” says Holman.

W.O.W is specific to the Fargo VA. “Each of the palliative care and hospice teams have developed a specialty program that they support, and this is Fargo’s,” says Schauer. “It comes from the heart of those individuals caring for the Veterans. It was something that was genuinely a team effort.”

A recent wish granted through the program involved 64-year-old Arthur (Art) Carlson, a Veteran who served in Ft. Bliss as an Army missile technician. Art came to the Fargo VA after he was diagnosed with a very quick moving cancer. He had always dreamed of learning to fly, and when he was diagnosed with cancer, he thought that was the end of his dream. He was very excited to learn about the W.O.W. program.

“His recreational therapist and I called the Fargo Jet School and told them about Art’s dying wish of learning to fly,” says Holman. “We knew there was no way he could pass the physical to become a pilot, but the next best thing would be for him to go up with a flight instructor.” The jet school volunteered a pilot, the plane, their services — everything, and the flight instructor flew with him. Art requested media coverage so his family would have it to remember him. Side-by-side with the flight instructor, he flew the plane. It was

“Each of the palliative care and hospice teams have developed a specialty program that they support, and this is Fargo’s,” says Schauer. “It comes from the heart of those individuals caring for the Veterans. It was something that was genuinely a team effort.”

a wonderful day for him. His sister and his favorite clinic nurse flew in the plane with him.

A Sergeant with the National Guard saw a news clip about the story and was moved. He felt that Art should be pinned with wings. “Art knew nothing about this. I just told him that there were people coming to visit, and he’d want to have his sister here,” says Holman. The Sergeant and a pilot came to the VA, in uniform, and pinned Art with wings. Because of the media coverage, friends Art hadn’t spoken to in forty years found him, contacted him and have come to visit him in the VA. They would have never found Art without the

media coverage. They have reconnected and speak regularly now.

Schauer urges Veterans to consider VA for their hospice or palliative care needs. “If you are experiencing an illness and are appropriate for hospice care, the VA can often assist you in enrolling quickly for VA benefits, even if you have tried to enroll in the past and were not able to, for whatever reason,” says Schauer. VA-paid hospice care very closely follows Medicare, with similar levels of payment and types of care.

If you are suffering with a life-limiting or terminal illness, ask your provider if you would benefit from hospice or palliative care.



Mr. Carlson gives a thumbs-up before taking off.
Photo by Tricia Bosak-Bovkoon.

Editor’s Note: We regret to report that Mr. Carlson passed away a few days after this article was written. The VA Midwest Health Care Network would like to express our deepest condolences to Mr. Carlson’s family and friends, and to all of the families of Veterans who have lost a loved one to a terminal illness.



Extra Special Care

Dr. Robert Bonello demonstrates the new technology found at the Tele-ICU center to Veterans Affairs Secretary, Eric Shinseki. Photo by April Eilers.

New technology will help provide intensive care units (ICUs) with some much-needed help. This means better care for you during an emergency. The VA in Minneapolis rolled out the first VA Tele-ICU program this August. Because of this program, ICU patients will have an “extra set of eyes” to watch their vital signs.

“VISN 23 is the first in the VA to use this model of added care for ICU patients, but it is not a new or untested model,” says Dr. Robert Bonello, the Medical Director of the VISN 23 Tele-ICU Program. “The technology and clinical processes are now well established.” This program ensures that ICU specialists will be located in a secure workstation, 24 hours a day. From there, they monitor patients in each of the updated ICUs and track changes in patients’ conditions. When alerted, the Tele-ICU staff can look into the patient’s condition to see if more evaluation is needed. They use a camera in the room or call the attending nurse or physician to talk to them about what they are seeing. Each VISN 23 ICU room will be equipped with a wall-mounted camera, two-way video screen, microphone and speaker. When a clinician activates the camera, the patient and visitors in the room can see and hear the Tele-ICU nurse and physician, and vice versa.

From the Tele-ICU, the camera allows clinicians to see the patient very well. Clinicians see multiple patients’ breathing patterns, changes in the color of skin

and other important signals of a changing condition. They also see all the monitoring equipment in the room. They only turn on the camera and microphone when needed. Otherwise, they are turned off and facing away from the patient. The Tele-ICU nurse or physician use two methods of letting anyone in the room know they are using the camera. They ring a chime that sounds in the room and turn on the screen that permits the people at the bedside to see the Tele-ICU nurse or physician. There are strict rules to protect patient privacy. It is not possible to record video with this system. A patient or their family may decline camera use, but families often welcome this added support.

This program provides Veterans living in rural areas better access to critical care specialists without moving to a larger facility. ICU medicine is a board-certified specialty. Critical care specialists can improve the outcomes of critical patients. There are not enough of these specialists available to cover all ICUs. The Tele-ICU provides critical care specialist coverage to all VISN 23 ICUs, no matter of their size or location.

If you require ICU care, be sure to ask your nurse or physician about the Tele-ICU program. You may ask the nurse to point out the Tele-ICU screen and camera. You can even ask them to call the Tele-ICU on-duty staff. “They will be delighted to introduce themselves, even if their specific services are not needed at that time,” says Dr. Bonello.

Get MOVE!ing with Your VA!

Research has clearly shown links between excess weight and lack of physical activity and numerous disease processes, including mental health issues. This affects a person's quality of life. The health care costs that result from excess weight and physical inactivity are considerable. In fact, there is no similar single health risk that is so prevalent and connected with so many diseases that lead to a decrease in quality of life. And it is preventable!

That is why the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention established the MOVE! Program. This program helps overweight Veterans lose pounds by educating or counseling them about:

- Nutrition
- Physical activity
- Behavioral issues
- Psychological issues
- Long-term evaluation and treatment
- Medical record documentation of weight and physical activity statistics

To date, more than 17,500 Veterans in VISN 23 have enrolled in the MOVE! Program.

Research shows that Veterans who have enrolled in the program lose more weight than those who do not. All of the VA MOVE! Coordinators are experts that have specialized training working with overweight and obese Veterans. In addition, you will find that all VA medical centers have a MOVE! Physician Champion who works with the MOVE! Treatment Team.

According to Sheri Downey, VISN 23 MOVE! Coordinator, "The MOVE! weight management program has been very successful since it was implemented at all sites across VISN 23. But we desire to make it even better for you! Our goal is to expand access to MOVE! by providing a more robust telephone self management support program." The new program is called MOVE! Telephone Lifestyle Coaching (TLC). MOVE! TLC will allow you to receive telephone care provided by staff members who are specifically trained



The new and improved Edward Urban.

to give healthy life style coaching. The MOVE! TLC program has been successfully trialed at another VA location and is now ready for national staff training. It will be offered to you in 2012.

When you use MOVE! TLC, you receive a structured telephone call where you get updates and new goals for your routine schedule that can help you lose weight. All Veterans will have access to this at no cost. Ms. Downey eagerly anticipates the future use of MOVE! TLC. "The goal is to increase participation in MOVE! and improve weight management outcomes directly to you, while eliminating extra driving time to your VA facility."

Veteran Edward Urban is an outstanding example of the MOVE! Program success. With the help of St. Cloud MOVE! program staff Mr. Urban met his BMI goal and lost over 20 pounds. The St. Cloud MOVE! staff tailored his eating habits to six light meals a day. They emphasized the correct amount of protein, starches, fruits and vegetables that he should be eating, as well as encouraged him to drink plenty of water. According to Mr. Urban, "Without the help of MOVE! I would have never accomplished my goal of 188 pounds. The VA dieticians and VA nurses have been helpful by their teaching, encouragement, patience and availability. I am a much healthier person. I feel better, and my wife tells me that I even look better." He goes on to say, "I would encourage others who have a weight or eating problem to enroll in MOVE! It takes an effort on each person's part which results in rewards for your time, work and discipline."



VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK – VISN 23

VA Black Hills Health Care System

www.blackhills.va.gov

Fort Meade Campus

113 Comanche Road
Fort Meade, SD 57741
(605) 347-2511
(800) 743-1070

Hot Springs Campus

500 N. 5th Street
Hot Springs, SD 57747
(605) 745-2000
(800) 764-5370

Sioux Falls VA Health Care System

www.siouxfalls.va.gov

2501 W. 22nd Street
PO Box 5046
Sioux Falls, SD 57117
(605) 336-3230
(800) 316-8387

Fargo VA Health Care System

www.fargo.va.gov

2101 Elm Street
Fargo, ND 58102
(701) 239-3700
(800) 410-9723

Iowa City VA Health Care System

www.iowacity.va.gov

601 Highway 6 West
Iowa City, IA 52246
(319) 338-0581
(800) 637-0128

VA Central Iowa Health Care System

www.centraliowa.va.gov

3600 30th Street
Des Moines, IA 50310
(515) 699-5999
(800) 294-8387

Minneapolis VA Health Care System

www.minneapolis.va.gov

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

St. Cloud VA Health Care System

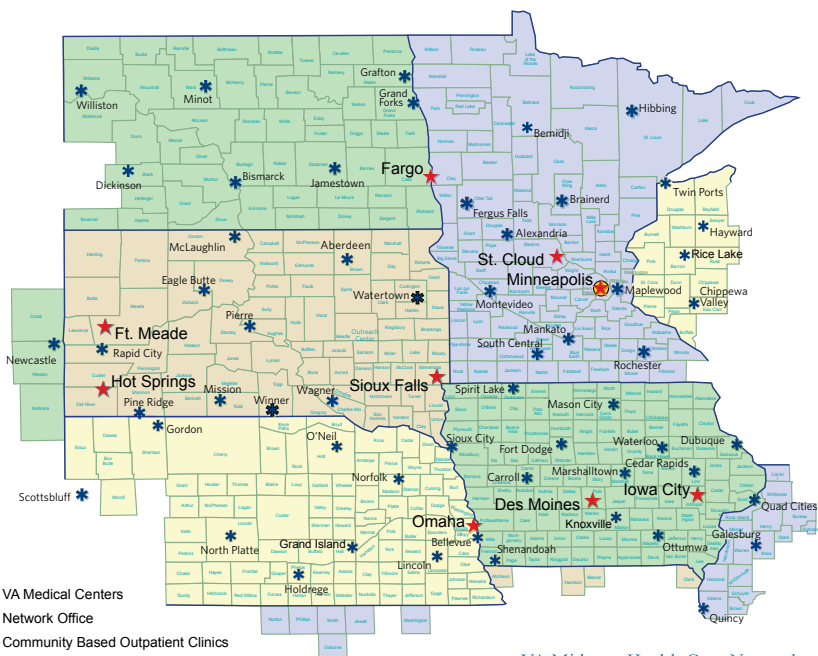
www.stcloud.va.gov

4801 Veterans Drive
St. Cloud, MN 56303
(320) 255-6480
(800) 247-1739

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

www.nebraska.va.gov

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



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