

# Veterans' Health

Spring 2011

*Your key to  
better health  
in the Midwest*



**PACT**  
Patient Aligned  
Care Team

**Getting Care  
and Comfort  
at VA Medical  
Foster Homes**

**Secure  
Messaging**



# Message from the Director



Dear Veterans,

**T**he VA is offering many services to help Veterans manage their health and wellness, and I am proud to be leading those efforts as the new Network Director for VISN 23.

In this issue of *Veterans' Health*, you will read about new ways we can help Veterans receive the care and treatment they deserve. On page 3, you will find information about our 2010 initiatives. One project we are working on is a wind turbine to provide energy to the VA Medical Center in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Savings in energy costs from this project will be used to provide care for Veterans.

Throughout our Network, we are striving to enhance our services to provide improved and comprehensive care. On pages 4 and 5, you will read about Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT). This team approach to health care helps Veterans plan for their lifelong health and wellness with their own goals in mind and builds on our already successful health care foundation.

On page 6, you will find information about the Medical Foster Home program. This wonderful initiative benefits Veterans who have medical needs that make it impossible for them to live alone in their home. We link Veterans with group homes serving no more than three Veterans. Medical Foster Homes are inspected by VA and operated by qualified caregivers. These homes provide a comfortable atmosphere, where Veterans receive the care they need in the comfort of a home.

Finally, I encourage you to read about how your VA health care system is using the Internet and email to make communicating with your health care team fast and easy.

I look forward to leading this Network into the future and honoring America's Veterans by providing Veterans with the best possible health care and health care technology.

Sincerely,  
Janet Murphy  
Network Director

**The VA Midwest Health Care Network is happy to introduce our new senior leadership team. Combined, they bring more than 70 years of health care experience to serve our Veterans.**

Ms. Murphy serves as the senior official for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and portions of the bordering states of Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin and Wyoming. She joined Veterans Affairs in 2001 and has served as the Director of Primary and Specialty Medicine Service Line, Director of the Chronic Disease Collaborative, Patient Centered Medical Home Collaborative, Chair of the Executive Leadership Governance Council and as a member of the Strategic Planning Council.



**Judith Johnson-Mekota**  
Deputy Network Director

As Deputy Network Director, Ms. Johnson-Mekota is responsible for network operations including strategic and tactical planning, human resource management, business operations, finance, capital asset management and logistics. She began her career with the VA in 1992 as a nurse manager of a coronary care unit and has held various positions of increasing responsibility within the system. She is certified as a fellow with the American College of Healthcare Executives.



**Steven C. Julius, M.D.**  
Chief Medical Officer

As Chief Medical Officer for the VA Midwest Health Care Network, Dr. Julius has oversight responsibility for the provision of health care provided through the Network's eight health care systems which include fifty-three Community Based Outpatient Clinics throughout Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and bordering areas of Illinois and Wisconsin. Prior to his Network positions he was the Chief of Staff for the Sioux Falls VAMC, also serving as Acting Director of the Medical Center.

**On the cover:** Heroes meeting angels: Veteran Bill Dehart and Eileen Schmidt, foster home host

*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.

# VA Propels Renewable Energy Projects

**T**he winds of change are blowing in St. Cloud, Minnesota, where VA has awarded Recovery Act funds for renewable energy projects at the VA Medical Center.

According to Barry Venable, St. Cloud VA Public Affairs Officer, “The breezes flowing across the St. Cloud VA Medical Center campus have a bit of electricity in them, because we have installed the first VA National Energy Business Center-funded wind turbine project in the Veterans Health Administration.”

Venable says that construction progressed throughout the cold Minnesota winter, with the 290-foot-tall turbine now complete. The blades and nosecone were recently installed on the 600-kilowatt wind turbine, and it is now generating electricity.

The turbine isn’t the only new source of renewable energy for the St. Cloud VAMC. “A recently completed ground source heat pump system provides heating and cooling for one of the Community Living Center buildings,” explains Venable.

So why is St. Cloud working on these new renewable energy sources? “The VA is investing in energy efficient and renewable energy technologies and promoting sustainability at all of its medical centers, national cemeteries and regional offices,” says Venable. “VA’s goal is to increase renewable energy consumption to 15 percent of annual electricity used by 2013. The two projects at St. Cloud will help meet that goal.”

At St. Cloud alone, the ground source heat pump is estimated to save almost 464 kilowatt-hours of electricity per year. Plus, the turbine will produce up to 16 percent of the facility’s annual electricity usage, saving the St. Cloud VAMC about \$98,000 per year. “Most importantly,” says Venable, “it will allow the St. Cloud VAMC to be more energy efficient so that the organization can continue to accomplish its primary mission — serving Veterans.”



Wind turbine recently constructed at St. Cloud VAMC

In fiscal year 2009, the Veterans Health Administration Office of Rural Health announced the release of approximately \$500 million to improve health care service for Veterans in geographically rural areas. The funding signaled a substantial expansion of services addressing the health care needs of rural Veterans. The VA Midwest Health Care Network spent over \$39 million in fiscal year's 2009 and 2010 to improve access and coordination of health care services in rural areas.

This funding supported the following five rural health projects that were designed to provide high-quality coordinated care to Veterans:

- Care Coordination Home Telehealth (CCHT) expansion
- Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) expansion
- Audiology Services expansion
- Care Coordination Home Telehealth for Renal Care Patients
- Office of Rural Co-Management

These initiatives are beneficial because many of these projects were Network-wide and allowed Veterans who resided within rural areas of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Western Wisconsin and Western Illinois to benefit from improved access and coordination of their health care services.

The Network obligated roughly \$95 million in non-recurring construction funding in fiscal year 2010, including \$33.6 million to support American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) projects. In fiscal years 2009 and 2010, the Network ARRA projects totaled \$44.6 million. Minor construction projects totaled \$20 million in fiscal 2010. Some of the projects include upgrading infrastructures, upgrading elevators, significant improvements to heating and air conditioning systems, environmental improvements, enhanced waiting areas, correcting deficiencies with expansions in many of the clinics, waiting areas and specialty areas such as community living centers, dialysis units, pharmacy, emergency departments and inpatient units.

# PACT

## Patient Aligned Care Team

**T**here is a new term floating around VA Health Care Systems that will be heard more and more as we progress into 2011: Patient Aligned Care Team, commonly referred to as PACT.

PACT is designed around the patient-centered care model. According to Dr. Michael Hein, Medical Director, VA Midwest Health Care Network, a PACT serves the immediate needs of Veterans by engaging them in their own care. With the PACT model, each patient has a team of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, nutritionists, therapists and other health care individuals working together with the patient to plan for whole-person care as well as their life-long health and wellness.

Dr. Hein explains, “In the future of health care, the system is built around the preferences and needs of the patient.” The integral part of fulfilling these principles is engaging the Veteran as the center member of the team, with a group of professionals surrounding them for their comprehensive care. “VA understands that health promotion and well-being is much more than writing a prescription. The most successful health system has providers, nursing staff, health promotion and disease managers with specific training on building shared decisions along with

the Veteran, and helping Veterans begin the process of making their own choices about how they could go about improving their health,” states Dr. Hein.

A benefit of PACT is that the Veteran has a primary care provider working with a team of health professionals. This team’s job is to make sure that the best person is available to meet the Veteran’s health care needs in a timely manner. It will lead to easier access to their primary care physician, with better reaction and shorter wait times for other areas of care. In fact, according to Dr. Hein, the goal is for Veterans to have **same day access** to their health care providers, whether it is an urgent or routine matter.

PACT is patient-driven care that focuses on the Veteran rather than their conditions. It starts a partnership among the Veteran, their primary care team, their family and caregivers. Dr. Hein points out, “Many times in health care, the medical professionals think we know what the patient would want, or what is important to them. In fact, when we do meet with our patients and talk with them and ask them about their experiences with their health care systems, we often find the patient’s list of priorities is different than our list of priorities as health care workers.” With PACT, the Veteran’s wants and needs are

respected. Their care team looks at all areas of their health, asks what their health goals are and helps to meet them.

The teams will consist of health care individuals such as the primary care provider, but also a nurse who has specialized training in helping Veterans learn and manage any chronic diseases, a clinical pharmacist who can help them better understand the medications they use, as well as provide more and better access to information about their health and play upon the strengths of all the individuals on the health care team.

The communication between the Veteran and other team members is honest, respectful, reliable and culturally sensitive. Health care providers encourage the patient to offer truthful communication without the fear of judgment. This type of communication allows for all team members to make personal, informed health care decisions. In the PACT model, the health care provider will ask the patient what their overall health and wellness goals are and provide them with tools and resources to best help them meet those goals.

The primary care team, with the patient’s partnership, develops a plan for care that is given through coordination across all areas of the health care system. This allows the

## The focus is on **building trusted personal relationships.**

Veteran to make informed choices and get the agreed upon care when and where they need and want it. Information from many different places is pulled together into a single system supporting their information. All members of the team have clearly defined roles, and they meet to talk with the patient and each other about their progress toward making their health goals. The focus is on building trusted personal relationships.

VA Health Care Systems around the country are starting programs that support PACT by hiring new staff and changing their programs around the PACT concept. Dr. Hein reminds us that this concept is building on top of the exceptional foundation that VA has laid over the past decade, not starting a new program from scratch. “This work is part of the national health care reform. We are creating the type of primary care infrastructure necessary to deliver the highest quality, most efficient health care that Veterans need. VA is leading the country as far as the scope of this work, and we are uniquely positioned to be successful.”

In the days ahead, Veterans will be able to recognize changes that make their primary care more responsive to their individual health care, and help them be more confident with their overall well-being.



PACT is a partnership between you and your health care team

## What is a PACT?

A Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) is each Veteran working together with health care professionals to plan for whole-person care and life-long health and wellness.

### They focus on:

- ☑ **Partnerships** with Veterans
- ☑ **Access to care** using diverse methods
- ☑ **Coordinated care** among team members
- ☑ **Team-based care** with Veterans as the center of their PACT





Foster home host Eileen Schmidt, Veteran Bill Dehart and Kathryn West, LICSW, Minneapolis VA Medical Foster Home Coordinator

**For more information on the program or qualifications, please contact a VA Medical Foster Home Coordinator.**

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# Getting Care and Comfort at VA Medical Foster Homes

**W**hen medical conditions become too serious for Veterans to live at home any longer, the VA's Medical Foster Care program can provide a comfortable, quality, cost effective alternative to a nursing home. Medical Foster Homes (MFH) provide a "home away from home" atmosphere for Veterans. They also receive the full home-based care team via home visits. Medical Foster Homes can provide hands-on care, homemade meals, medication management, supervision, recreation and much more. These homes have no more than three residents receiving care, are owned or rented by the on-site caregiver and inspected for safety and suitability

by the VA Inspection Team. Most Veterans have private rooms and very individualized care.

The VA provides a Medical Foster Home Team to assist interested Veterans and their families in finding a compatible home. "We can help Veterans find an MFH that meets high standards of quality care and safety in a home that is warm and caring. Medical Foster Homes truly are where Heroes meet angels," said Kathryn West, Medical Foster Home Coordinator for the Minneapolis VA Health Care System. West encourages Veterans to visit the homes they are considering so they can meet the caregiver and their family.

The MFHs also use VAMC Home Based Primary Care (HBPC)

to ensure oversight, education and supportive care for the Veterans. Caregivers must accept, participate and follow the treatment plan set forth by the Veteran and the HBPC. All caregivers are carefully reviewed, and must have an emergency plan in place to employ a relief person for the care should they not be available to do so.

Veterans of any age can participate. Program officials hope to have MFHs in each state served by VA Midwest Health Care Network approved soon. For more information on the program or qualifications, please contact a VA Medical Foster Home Coordinator or visit [www.minneapolis.va.gov/services/serv\\_fosterhome.asp](http://www.minneapolis.va.gov/services/serv_fosterhome.asp).

# Secure Messaging is Making VA Health Care More Accessible

**W**e live in a society where a lot is possible with just a click of a button. Thanks to the Internet, a world of information is readily available and easily accessible. And now, VA is using this concept to make communicating with your health team just as fast and easy as clicking your mouse.

Secure messaging is a tool the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is putting in place at VA medical facilities across the country to help make health care more accessible to Veterans, and it is now available at all VA medical facilities in the VA Midwest Health Care Network. "With secure messaging, patients can communicate electronically in a secure environment with their medical team," said Brady Bautch, My HealthVet coordinator

for the VA Midwest Health Care Network. "Secure messaging is similar to email, but it is totally secure and safe." He added that a big plus to secure messaging is the elimination of trying to catch your health care team on the phone. It also has the potential to minimize the number of trips Veterans have to make to a VA medical facility.

Bautch noted that while all VA medical facilities in the VA Midwest Health Care Network are offering secure messaging, not all physicians and clinics are yet active in the program. "We continue to grow secure messaging participation in the facilities, but it will take some time before all physicians and clinics are involved in the program," he said.

For more information, or to try secure messaging yourself, log into My HealthVet at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov), and see how VA is working to help you take charge of your health care. Get connected!

## Tele-ICU Program Will Bring More Specialized Care to Veterans

**A** new high-tech program will soon be bringing more access to specialized care to Veterans. VISN 23's Tele-ICU program will make it possible for intensivists (fellowship-trained, board-certified specialists in critical care) and critical care nurses to care for Veterans through electronic monitoring systems set up in the patient's room. This allows the patient to see and hear the remote ICU physician and

the physician to see and hear the patient (or family member or nurse). The resolution is high enough on these cameras to see pupils constrict in response to light.

Typically, one critical care RN can monitor 30 to 35 ICU beds and one intensivist can monitor 70 to 100 or more ICU beds with the Tele-ICU system.

The first centers that will be receiving Tele-ICU care in the Midwest Health Care Network will be in Minneapolis, Omaha and Iowa City. The program is scheduled to begin in August of 2011.





# VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK – VISN 23

## VA Black Hills Health Care System

[www.blackhills.va.gov](http://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](http://www.siouxfalls.va.gov)

2501 W. 22nd Street  
PO Box 5046  
Sioux Falls, SD 57117  
(605) 333-6842  
(800) 316-8387

## Fargo VA Health Care System

[www.fargo.va.gov](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.minneapolis.va.gov)

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

## St. Cloud VA Health Care System

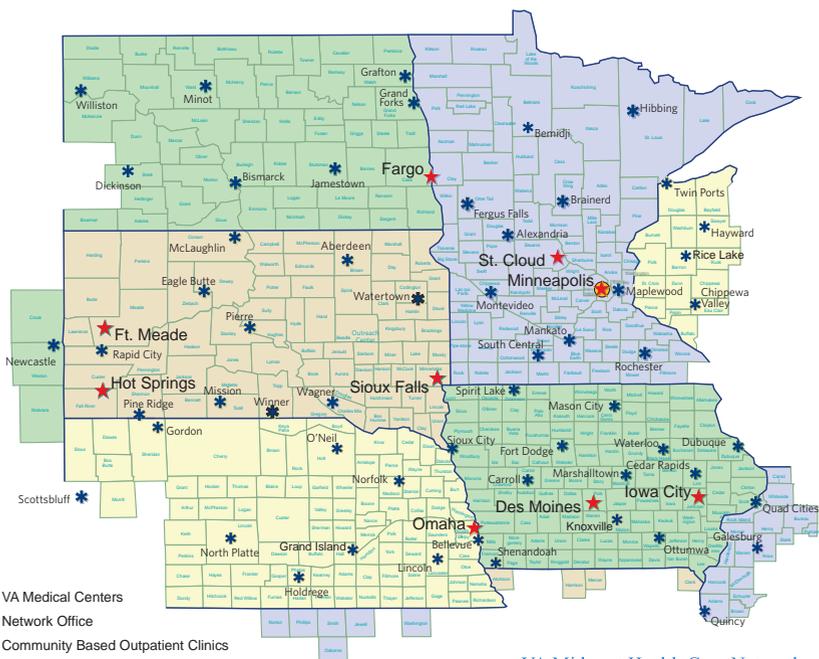
[www.stcloud.va.gov](http://www.stcloud.va.gov)

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

## VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

[www.nebraska.va.gov](http://www.nebraska.va.gov)

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



- ★ VA Medical Centers
- Network Office
- ★ Community Based Outpatient Clinics

4/4/2011

