

Summer 2009

Veterans' Health

*Your key to
better health
in the Midwest*

**Bike Your Way
to Health**

**'Tis the Season
for...Allergies?**

**Emergency
Preparedness**

**H1N1: VA
Mobilized
for Battle**

**The Truth
About *MOVE!***





Meet Cynthia Breyfogle

VA Midwest Health Care Network Acting Director

Cynthia Breyfogle is serving as Acting Network Director of the VA Midwest Health Care Network while Network Director Dr. Robert Petzel is currently serving as the Acting Principal Deputy

Under Secretary for Health in Washington, DC. In this position, she is the senior official for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, and portions of the bordering states of Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. VISN 23 includes 8 health care systems and 45 community-based outpatient clinics that serve 290,000 Veterans.

Ms. Breyfogle served as Deputy Director since February 2007. She was responsible for network operations, including strategic and tactical planning, human resource management, business operations, finance, capital asset management, contracting, biomedical en-

gineering, and logistics for a network with a \$2 billion dollar annual budget.

Ms. Breyfogle has worked for VA since 1996. Prior to joining VA, she held positions with the Department of the Army in Resource Management, Combat Development, Training and Doctrine, and Quality Management. She is a graduate of Command and General Staff College, the Health Care Leadership Institute, and is credentialed as an Executive Career Field Candidate Mentor.

Ms. Breyfogle serves on the Management and Financial Systems Health Information Executive Board, the CPAC Executive Advisory Council, and the OI&T Region 2 Executive Partnership Council. She is a member of the Association of the United States Army, Senior Executives Association, and American Society of Military Comptrollers. She holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in Business Administration. She is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives and board certified in healthcare management.

Ms. Breyfogle is married to retired Colonel Bill Breyfogle and they have one son, Gerram.

BIKE *health!*

By Richard Harvey, Ph.D.

Program Manager, Health Promotion

National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP)

Just about everyone rode a bicycle as a child. But how many of us ride as adults? Not nearly enough—but we should because it is a great way to improve our health, have fun, and feel good!

Regular physical activity is extremely good for our health. It helps us lose weight or maintain weight loss, makes us feel more energetic, boosts our spirits, and helps us sleep better. Bicycling is a great way to get that physical activity, plus it is fun, easy, and gets us outdoors.

For tips on choosing a bicycle, staying comfortable while riding, biking safety, and much more, visit the

MHV COMMUNITY section of MyHealthVet at www.myhealth.va.gov. Click on News, then click on In the Spotlight Archive.

Remember, grown-ups need to have fun too, and riding a bicycle is a great way to do that! Get going, get riding, enjoy!



Read dozens of other ways to improve or maintain your health at www.myhealth.va.gov.

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.

'TIS THE SEASON FOR... **ALLERGIES?**

Although spring is commonly thought of as the peak time for allergy sufferers, many allergens drift their way right through summer and fall. For the estimated 40–50 million Americans with allergies, the lingering symptoms can be very frustrating.

If your allergies flare during late summer or early fall, pollen and mold are usually the troublemakers. A runny nose, watering eyes, and itching and swelling are your immune system's sensitivity to the allergens. But this doesn't mean you must stay locked up indoors! While you can't completely avoid all allergy triggers, you can take steps to reduce your exposure and ease your symptoms by planning your day around the peak times for pollen and mold.

Late summer and early fall pollen counts are highest in the morning. Dry, windy days increase the spread of pollen, while rainy days are worse for mold. You can better plan outside activities by checking the daily pollen and mold levels by clicking on Pollen Levels at www.aaaai.org, the National Allergy Bureau's online public resource.

Here are some additional tips for reducing contact with pollen and mold:

- ✓ Wear a pollen mask when mowing or gardening.
- ✓ Clear out leaves, grass clippings, and compost from your yard.
- ✓ Don't hang laundry outside to dry—the pollen can attach to the fabric.
- ✓ Shower and change clothes after spending time outdoors.
- ✓ Keep windows closed in your home and car, and use re-circulating air conditioning.



NEED ADDITIONAL HELP CONTROLLING YOUR ALLERGY SYMPTOMS?

- ▶ Ask your doctor if an over-the-counter or prescription medicine could help you breathe easier this summer.

DID YOU KNOW...

- ▶ Late summer allergies are often called “**hay fever.**” However, hay is not the cause, and fever is not a symptom. In fact, ragweed, tumbleweed, sage, and other weed pollens are the most common causes of allergies in late summer and fall.
- ▶ In just one day, one ragweed plant is capable of releasing **1 million** pollen grains!



EMERGENCY

*Follow our lead...
and do not wait
until an event
occurs to begin
planning.*

PLAN + PREPARE + RESPOND



PREPAREDNESS

relocated some services so they could continue offering emergency benefit services as needed. Additionally, Fargo VA Medical Center pharmacy refill services were temporarily transferred to the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.

Outpatient services continued, too. Thanks to partnerships with

When VA Midwest Health Care personnel responded to the spring floods that threatened the Fargo VA Medical Center, one thing was missing: **panic**. And when the news first spread about the H1N1 flu, again—VA staff remained calm.

The composed response to these and other disasters is due to the emergency management planning that occurs within VA every single day on a local, regional, and national level.

Each facility participates in at least two emergency preparedness drills per year and tries to incorporate the community in at least one of those. Consequently, when the “real thing” happens, VA staff know exactly what to do. They simply execute the plans they already have in place to minimize disruption of health care services.

Veterans who evacuate, for example, will find that VA providers at facilities across the country can instantly access their electronic health care records. During Hurricane Katrina, this service proved extremely valuable to Veterans who scattered to other states.

For those hospitalized in a VA medical center—as was the case in Fargo—emergency management plans included moving Veterans to other VA medical centers or to private sector hospitals within the community. During the spring floods, patients were transferred to facilities in Minneapolis, Sioux Falls, and St. Cloud. The Veterans Benefits Administration office also

health care providers and facilities in Fargo, which were on higher ground. By transferring some outpatient services to another location, Fargo VA was able to continue offering laboratory and x-ray services to Veterans in need. Any time a clinic closes due to an emergency, staff reschedules appointments or sets the patient up for services at an alternate location. As an added bonus during an emergency, VA medical centers also have access to national mobile health resources that can be coordinated through the Veterans Health Administration office in Washington DC and the national network of Vet Centers (see Mobile Outreach Vehicles on page 7).

Other types of emergency preparedness activities have also paid off. Ongoing preparation for a pandemic flu, such as H1N1, began over two years ago. Consequently, when people began arriving at emergency rooms with flu-like symptoms, personnel in the VA Midwest Health Care Network were trained and ready to mobilize because they had “experienced” the scenario in one or more practice exercises.

On a national level and within the network, VA is constantly looking ahead at ways to provide Veterans with uninterrupted health care in the event of a disaster. We know that floods, tornados, wildfires, and winter storms will likely occur again in this region. We have taken time to prepare for such events, and **we encourage you to prepare, too.**

Follow our lead...and do not wait until an event occurs to begin planning. Instead, be proactive and take steps NOW to get ready.

- + You should keep enough food and water in your home to meet the needs of you and your family for at least three days. (*Hint: Pick up a few items on each shopping trip until you have a well-stocked supply.*)
- + You'll need food and water in your basement or tornado shelter, too, in case debris prevents you from getting out or you emerge to find your home (or community) suffered catastrophic damage.
- + Program your cell phone (or carry a list at all times) so that you can reach family members, insurance agents, etc.



September is the sixth annual **National Preparedness Month**.

Go online to **www.ready.gov** to

prepare and print a customized "family readiness" plan. Also, check out the *Preparing for Emergencies* section of the American Red Cross web site at **www.redcross.org** for information on how to prepare for blackouts, fires, floods, pandemic flu, tornadoes, wildfires, and much more.



Ready

Prepare. Plan. Stay Informed.



American Red Cross

When disaster strikes, VA works hard to maintain communication with Veterans. One such effort is the **Emergency Notifications** section at **www1.va.gov/emergency**. Veterans and their families may also call **800-507-4571** during an emergency for information and assistance.

H1N1: VA Mobilized for Battle

Emergency management isn't just preparing for what Mother Nature dishes out in the form of floods, wildfires, tornados and such. It's also preparing for events like pandemic flu.

VA Midwest Health Care Network responded quickly to the H1N1 outbreak earlier this year because we plan for such events year round. A special pandemic flu committee has been in place for over two years now, and each facility in the network has participated in at least one simulated flu exercise outbreak. VA centers have also participated in national drills. Thanks to this preparation and training, our staff knew exactly what to do when the H1N1 story broke.

Similarly, you should prepare for emergencies year round so that if a disaster strikes, you will have a plan and know exactly what to do. It's also important to help yourself and others by practicing prevention.

Even though H1N1 virus is no longer the lead story on the evening news, VA continues to work closely with other Federal departments and agencies to monitor human cases of H1N1 flu in the United States. These simple, yet powerful actions can help protect you and help prevent the spread of the flu virus.

- ✓ Avoid close contact with people who are sick with flu.
- ✓ Stay home when you are sick.
- ✓ Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- ✓ Clean your hands.
- ✓ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

For more information log on to **www.publichealth.va.gov/h1n1flu**

SafeGuarding and Serving



Department of Veterans Affairs
www.publichealth.va.gov



The truth about **MOVE!**

DID YOU KNOW

...that poor diet and physical inactivity may soon overtake smoking as the nation's leading cause of preventable death?

Sadly, over 70 percent of Veterans receiving medical care from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are overweight or obese. That means almost three out of four Veterans face an increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, cancer, and diabetes.

If you are overweight or obese, it's time to consider what the *MOVE!* program can do for you. What is it and how does it work?

MOVE! is a national weight management program designed to help Veterans lose weight, keep it off, and improve their health. It is **NOT** a strict diet and a list of exercises you must do. It **IS** a multi-level program that focuses on physical activity, eating habits, and behavior modification.

Veterans enroll by completing a *MOVE!23* questionnaire (named for the 23 questions about your medical history, eating habits, activity level, and obstacles that may keep you from managing your weight). Next, *MOVE!* professionals help you set beginning goals based on **your** lifestyle and on activities **you** want to work into **your** schedule. Through regular follow-ups, your VA health care team tracks your progress and helps you continue toward your goals.

While every Veteran's *MOVE!* plan is unique based on individual goals, patients can participate in group support if they choose to. Those attending classes, for example, benefit from the encouragement and camaraderie of other Veterans while learning from specialists such as dietitians, physical therapists, pharmacists, social workers, and psychologists.

Bottom line? *MOVE!* is tailored to **your** goals, and **you** choose how much to participate.

For more information, contact your VA primary care provider or a *MOVE!* coordinator in your area, or log on to www.move.va.gov, where you'll find the *MOVE!23* patient questionnaire and over 100 handouts on topics as varied as:

- * Whether the *MOVE!* program is right for you
- * Coping with pain and medical problems
- * Making sweets nutritious and delicious
- * Choosing appropriate shoes for an active lifestyle
- * Calculating your body mass index (BMI)

VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK **MOVE! COORDINATORS**

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**Black Hills Health
Care System**
Marni Whalen

**Central Iowa Health
Care System**
Sandra Verhasselt

Iowa City
Krista Kazembe

Fargo
Holly Beckius

Minneapolis
Jacquelyn Costabilo

**Nebraska Western Iowa
Health Care System**
Shelly Oestmann

St. Cloud
Debbie Baumgartner

Sioux Falls
Amy Eisenbeisz

There is NO co-pay for *MOVE!* visits when you are receiving VA health care!

Mobile Outreach Vehicles

PULL DOUBLE DUTY



Two mobile outreach vehicles were dedicated recently—one to be based in Fargo and the other in Bismarck—but it wasn't the first time this type of vehicle has been to Fargo. During the spring flooding, a mobile outreach van was dispatched from St. Paul and set up in a community center parking lot alongside the two North Dakota-based vehicles so that VA Midwest Health Care staff could offer some outpatient services and dispense medications when the Fargo Medical Center was closed.

The state-of-the-art recreational vehicles, which are wired with satellite links and contain mini-offices for counseling, will be used to make services more available to Veterans in rural areas. They will also be available to take care of Veterans in emergencies.



What's Buggin' You?

In the summertime, insects and creepy-crawlies can really be a *pain*. Ants, bees, fleas, mosquitoes, spiders, and ticks are some of the most common creatures preying on your exposed skin. The following tips can help you avoid the irritation caused by insect bites and stings, and help you know what to look for if serious symptoms develop.

- ✓ Take away the bait—when outside, cover up with light long-sleeved shirts, pants, and close-toed shoes.
- ✓ Bright colors and patterns can attract bugs, so stick with solid, neutral colored clothing.
- ✓ Wear insect repellent, making sure to read the instructions and warnings. Repellents with DEET are usually the strongest and longest-lasting, but be aware that DEET can reduce the effectiveness of sun block.
- ✓ Don't wear scented products, such as perfume, lotion, or aftershave.
- ✓ Keep food and trash containers sealed tightly.
- ✓ Don't leave windows open in your home or vehicle.
- ✓ Treat minor swelling, redness, itching, and mild pain from bites and stings by soaking the area in water and Epsom salt, applying a cool compress, or applying calamine lotion on the bite. You can also use hydrocortisone cream or take an antihistamine for itching.
- ✓ For more severe reactions—nausea, hives, lightheadedness, difficulty breathing, fever, headache, disorientation, excessive swelling, or any other unusual symptom—see a doctor right away.
- ✓ Some bites lead to serious illnesses, like Lyme disease (from tick bites) or West Nile (from mosquito bites). Visit the VA if you have any concerns resulting from these bites.

To learn more about insect bite symptoms, visit My HealthVet at www.myhealth.va.gov.

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



www.healthierusveterans.va.gov/

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



www.visn23.va.gov



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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