

In This Issue:

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Veterans to Receive 1.5 Percent Cost of Living Increase

Minneapolis VA Psychiatrist Leads Alzheimer's Research.....

St. Cloud Groundbreaking Ceremony for New Rehabilitation Center.....

See the Diversity of Veterans Canteen Services

Calendar of Events – January 2014



The New Year gives us an opportunity to reflect back on the past and look forward to the future. As we close out 2013, we recommit ourselves to your service and are reminded there is no greater service than to care for the service member who has or continues to preserve and protect our freedoms.

We thank our employees, volunteers and the thousands of Veteran Advocates who help us honor your service and empower you to be healthy. We could not do our job without their support and commitment.

On behalf of our entire staff we extend greetings and best wishes for a prosperous, healthy and happy New Year.

Janet P. Murphy,
Network Director

VA Adds Five Illnesses Related to Service Connected TBI

Some Veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI) who are diagnosed with any of five other ailments will have an easier path to receive additional disability pay under new regulations developed by the US Department of Veterans Affairs. The new regulation, which takes effect in January 2014, impacts some Veterans living with TBI who also have ***Parkinson's disease, certain types of dementia, depression, unprovoked seizures or certain diseases of the hypothalamus and pituitary glands.***

The regulation stems from a report of the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine (IOM) regarding the association between TBI and the five diagnosable illnesses. The IOM report, *Gulf War and Health, Volume 7: Long-Term Consequences of Traumatic Brain Injury*, found "sufficient evidence" to link moderate or severe levels of TBI with the five ailments.

Eligibility for expanded benefits will depend upon the severity of the TBI and the time between the injury causing the TBI and the onset of the second illness. However, Veterans can still file a claim to establish direct service-connection for these ailments even if they do not meet the time and severity standards in the new regulation.

Veterans who have questions or who wish to file new disability claims may use the eBenefits website, available at www.eBenefits.va.gov/ebenefits.

Service members who are within 180 days of discharge may also file a pre-discharge claim for TBI online through the VA-DoD eBenefits portal at www.eBenefits.va.gov/ebenefits. The published final rule will be available Dec. 17 at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Information about VA and DoD programs for brain injury and related research is available at www.dvbic.org. Information about VA's programs for Gulf War Veterans is available at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/hazardous_exposure.s.asp

Veterans to Receive 1.5 Percent Cost of Living Increase

Veterans, their families and survivors receiving disability compensation and pension benefits from the US Department of Veterans Affairs will receive a 1.5 percent cost-of-living increase in their monthly payments beginning Jan. 1, 2014. For the first time, payments will not be rounded down to the nearest dollar. Until this year, that was required by law. Veterans and survivors will see additional cents included in their monthly compensation benefit payment. For Veterans without dependents, the new compensation rates will range from \$130.94 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$2,858.24 monthly for 100 percent. The full rates are available on the Internet at www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/rates-index.asp. The COLA increase also applies to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving dependency and indemnity compensation, disabled Veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits. For more information about VA benefits, visit www.benefits.va.gov or call 1-800-827-1000.

Minneapolis VA Psychiatrist Leads Alzheimer's Research



Dr. Maurice Dysken, geriatric psychiatrist at the MN VA Health Care System, led a VA study testing vitamin E and other treatments for Alzheimer's disease

More than 600 Veterans from 14 VA medical centers around the country took part in the VA-sponsored trial that found Vitamin E, known for its antioxidant power, helped slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease in Veterans with mild to moderate symptoms. Trial findings were reported Jan. 1, 2014, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Researchers followed the Veterans up to four years, with an average follow-up of about two years and three months. Although the disease progressed in all treatment groups, vitamin E slowed the disease by about six months.

In other terms, it slowed the worsening of Alzheimer's disease by almost 20 percent per year, when compared against a placebo. The main outcome measure was a test of how well the Veterans could perform activities of daily living. Lead researcher from the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, Dr. Maurice Dysken, MD, a geriatric psychiatrist, said a delay of this size in the disease's progression can have a significant impact on quality of life for patients and their family members. –

For more information go to <http://www.minneapolis.va.gov/MINNEAPOLIS/features/Vitamin-E-Slows-Alzheimers-VA-trial.asp#sthash.ekyiga9l.dpuf>

St. Cloud Groundbreaking Ceremony for New Rehabilitation Center



In the midst of wintry conditions, the St. Cloud VA Health Care System held a groundbreaking ceremony for a new Rehabilitation Center on Dec. 16.

A new VA Rehabilitation Center is planned for St. Cloud. The new center will support residential and outpatient programs provided by Psychiatry, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech Therapy. The center will also allow for expanded programming for Veterans with traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injuries, and vision impairments. An Independent Living Skills area is planned in kitchen, bedroom and bathroom areas, along with a low vision lab. The Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and Electromyogram and Nerve Conduction Study Clinic will include exam rooms, waiting rooms and support functions for the Psychiatrist. -The center is designed for individual clinic and treatment rooms as well as a large gym space to accommodate Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Music Therapy and Speech Pathology. The clinics will be equipped with overhead lifts to support services for SCI and bariatric Veterans. Finally, and perhaps

most significantly --all of this will be located in one place—easily accessible to residents and outpatients alike. For more information go to

http://www.stcloud.va.gov/STCLOUD/features/Rehabilitation_Center_Groundbreaking.asp#sthash.PyM9SAGE.dpuf

See the Diversity of Veterans Canteen Services



Looking for a quick bite or a good deal on a retail item? The Veterans Canteen Service offers this and much more. VCS operations include retail stores, inpatient food services, vending machine operations, cafes and catering. Patriot Cafes at the VA Nebraska Western Iowa Health Care Systems' campuses in Grand Island and Omaha provide customers with hot and cold food selections for breakfast and lunch. Whether you want a burger, hand-made wrap or a healthy "Smart Choice" meal with less than 500 calories, the VCS has it. If you can't find what you want at your VA Canteen Service store, Veterans and VA employees can access items from more than 70 retailers through the VCS catalog online at <http://www.vacanteen.va.gov/OnLineCatalog.php>

Karyn Stodden, VA Privacy Officer, browses for a Christmas present at the Patriot Store at the Omaha VA Medical Center. The store is one of many services offered by the Veterans Canteen Service

Calendar of Events – January 2014

Jan. 1 [New Year's Day](#)

Jan. 1 [Spa & Lunch](#) - 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM (CST) Model College: 201 8th Ave S, Saint Cloud

Jan. 3 [Tobacco Cessation](#) - 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CST) Room F07 in the Main Lobby

Jan. 7 21 - [Veterans Law Clinic](#) – 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM, St. Cloud VA medical Center, Building T-100

Jan. 10, 17, 24, 31 - [Tobacco Cessation](#) - 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CST) Room F07 in the Main Lobby

Jan 10 - [Montevideo CBOC Caregiver Support Group](#) – 1:30 PM – 2:30 PM, Montevideo CBOC

Jan 10, 17, 24, 31 - [Red Cross Blood Donation at the Minneapolis VA](#), 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM, 2nd Floor Flag Atrium

Jan. 17 [Tobacco Cessation](#) - 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CST) Room F07 in the Main Lobby

Jan. 17 - [Southwestern Minnesota Veterans' Law Clinic](#), 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM, Montevideo CBOC

Jan. 20 [Martin Luther King Day](#)

Jan. 27 & 29 - [Spa & Lunch](#) - 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM (CST) Model College: 201 8th Ave S, Saint Cloud

* Dates and times are correct as of December 30, 2013. Information may have changed, please check local VA Health Care System websites for the latest information.

For More information, call the Network Office at (651) 405-5600 or
Log on at www.visn23.va.gov or email sharyl.schaepe@va.gov