



On The Beat

Minneapolis VA Health Care System
February 2011

Mission:

Honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional healthcare that improves their health and well being.

Vision:

To be a patient-centered, integrated health care organization for Veterans providing excellent health care, research and education; an organization where people choose to work; an active community partner and a back up for national emergencies.

Values:

- Trust
- Respect
- Excellence
- Compassion
- Commitment
- Empowerment
- Continuous Improvement
- Collaboration

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Plans Moving Ahead for Patient Parking Garage



Work is progressing for a parking ramp to serve patients. An engineering firm has submitted preliminary design concepts. One proposal calls for solar panels that would provide electricity for the ramp's lights and elevator. The garage will increase the total parking capacity by 300-400 vehicles, and will be built in a way to allow future expansion. Construction is expected to begin in Spring 2012 and will take at least a year to complete.



VA Researcher: Spiritual Strength Helps Patients Cope with Symptoms of PTSD

By Rachel Walters, Administrative Fellow

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the primary wounds of war and, as such, is of great interest to those working with combat veterans and active duty military personnel. A type of anxiety disorder, PTSD is characterized by three main groups of symptoms: repeated “re-living” of the traumatic event, avoidance, and arousal.



Dr. Harris

Since PTSD is so prevalent among veterans, clinicians are continually seeking ways to improve treatments and reduce symptoms. Recently, Dr. Irene Harris and a team of researchers did just that--tested their hypothesis that PTSD treatment could be enhanced through including a spiritually-integrated protocol.

The team included many other staff of the Minneapolis VA including Dr. Christopher Erbes, Dr. Brian Engdahl, Dr. Paul Thuras, Dr. Dixie Grace, Dr. Henry Ogden, Ann Marie Winkowski, Russ Bacon and Catherine Malec. Based on earlier studies, the team knew that a person’s spirituality, faith community or Higher Power can be instrumental in recovery if that person views their spirituality as a source of support and validation.

For this reason, Dr. Harris and her team developed a treatment protocol called Building Spiritual Strength (BSS) that aims to help participants draw meaningful conclusions from their traumatic experiences in light of their personal spirituality. BSS is an inter-faith intervention consisting of eight

“It would be completely inappropriate to try to tell a patient what to believe. That’s not within the purview of mental health. However, if something has disrupted their relationship with their Higher Power, that is within the purview of mental health. We treat it the same way we would any other relationship with a spouse, child or friend.”

structured group discussion sessions. The protocol focuses on the need to minimize or eliminate the distress that can come from a disruption in a person’s relationship with his or her Higher Power.

Once the BSS protocol was fully developed, the research team piloted the intervention on a group of 26 trauma-exposed veterans and compared their self-reported PTSD symptoms with a control group of 28 trauma-exposed veterans. Upon completion of the eight-session treatment, the team found statistically significant evidence to suggest that the spiritually-integrated intervention resulted in lower levels of PTSD symptoms.

Dr. Harris, who has worked with MVAHCS since 2002, is quick to point out that the BSS material can be viewed as sensitive territory.

One of the major benefits of the BSS protocol is that it may reach a demographic who otherwise would not have sought any type of treatment for mental health conditions. The hope is that BSS will

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Salute to Veteran Patients



More than 60 special guests attended the annual National Salute to Veteran Patients on Monday, Feb. 14.

Following a brief ceremony in the Flag Atrium balcony, they visited inpatients throughout the hospital delivering Valentines created by area school children. VAVS committee members presented each inpatient with a cap and pin adorned with the National Salute logo.



Secure Messaging Now Available for Patients

By Susan Aspley, MyHealtheVet Coordinator

To date, seven care teams at the Medical Center have Secure Messaging (SM)! More than 3300 patients have opted in.

Your clinic can be next! SM is a private and safe online service that allows you, the caregiver, to send and receive messages from participating patients who have opted to participate in SM. The medical center expects to have the SM system fully functional by the end of this year.



Online communication is convenient for the patient and the caregiver. SM makes it easy to coordinate care with other members of your team. It's convenient! For example, you can send your patient pre-guidance or answer any questions they may have quickly.

Your patients may participate in SM if they are a MyHealtheVet account user and have completed the In-Person Authentication (IPA) process. They then choose to opt in by following directions on their screen.

To begin, VA staff needs to establish their care teams, or triage groups, and opt in. Participating providers can then access Secure Messaging through the CPRS Tools Menu. Click **Tools**. Select **Secure Messaging (SM)**. Enter your VHA Network login username and password. It's that easy!

To participate, contact Susanne Aspley, MHV Coordinator, at x 4269 or email Susanne.aspley@va.gov for overview training and set up.

Spiritual Strength Helps Patients Cope with PTSD

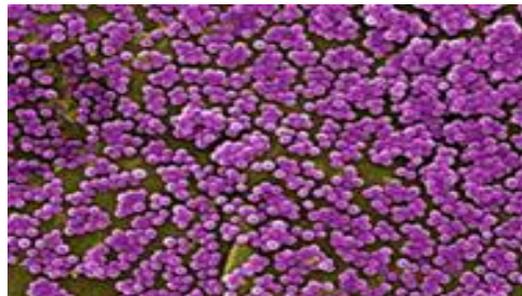
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eventually be adopted and practiced in communities of faith throughout the country and therefore serve as a gateway to further mental health care for those who need it. Qualitatively, BSS participants who said they would never have presented to a medical center for mental health treatment before completing BSS, upon completion saw the VA as a credible source of help.

These interesting results on spirituality and recovery warrant further study in the future and could be reinforced by using a larger sample size of participants. Substantial previous research indicates that minority groups are less likely to seek mental health from an institution but more likely to seek help from local communities of faith; the BSS study yielded similar ancillary findings. Furthermore, trends in the data suggested that individuals from ethnic minority groups may have derived more benefit from the BSS intervention than Caucasians. However, this trend was not found to be statistically significant because the size of the overall study was too small. With a larger study size, such trends initially observed could be further analyzed and—as Harris hopes—could be used to address some of the current ethnic disparities in mental health care.

Study Shows Routine MRSA Screening Saves Money, Reduces Patient Morbidity

Routine screening for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infection in patients admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) is likely to provide significant cost savings to the entire hospital, according to a new study conducted at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.



NIH Photo of MRSA under microscope

MRSA is an antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can lead to severe infections and is associated with approximately 19,000 deaths annually, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A 2006 national survey showed that 46 out of every 1,000 inpatients were either infected or colonized with MRSA -- a rate eight times higher than previous estimates. The annual cost to treat MRSA in hospitalized patients is estimated at \$3.2 to \$4.2 billion.

Study results were reported in the February issue of the *American Journal of Infection Control*, the official publication of APIC – the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology.

“We conducted this study to help inform the debate about how hospitals should approach the prevention of *S. aureus* infections. Based on the models and assumptions we used, we were surprised that our findings would be so cost-effective,” said **Greg Filice, MD, MPH**, chief of the infectious disease section at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center and a co-author of the study. Some policy-makers have recommended universal screening to reduce hospital-acquired MRSA infection.

Using a statistical model applied to Minneapolis VAMC data, researchers found that even under the most conservative assumptions, the screening would be cost-neutral if early detection of MRSA would lead to a reduced rate of infection and transmission within the hospital. Under optimal assumptions, screening could result in savings of almost \$500 per hospital admission.

VA’s Outpatient Clinic Network Expanding

Here’s a synopsis of activities in the Minneapolis network of Community-based Outpatient Clinics:

- An award has been made to Sterling Medical Group to provide primary care and mental health clinics in **Mankato** and **St. James**. Construction is underway and the clinics will open in April 2011.
- In **Ramsey, MN**, a new 19,000-square foot clinic is under construction with plans to open in November 2011. Projected membership of the clinic is 7,200 veterans. Services will include primary care, mental health, social work, telemedicine, laboratory, dental, audiology, eye clinic.
- In **Maplewood**, planning is underway to expand the current clinic from 5,000 to about 10,000 square feet in 2012.

February Staff Career Awards

40 Years

Steven Ludwig

30 Years

Gilbert Gallo
Nancy Gauthier
Warren Samuelson
Clark Wotring

25 Years

Wendy Barlow
Linda Beem
Christine Gauthier
Darlene Kari-Owen
Tamra Krech
Louis Plevell
Mary Gorman

20 Years

Donna Carpenter
James Drewes
Sandra Johnson
Nancy Lundblad
Mary Nielson
Debbie Schmidt
Angela Steele

15 Years

Nancy Haack, MD
Mary Jones
Rosemary Malchow
Wade Neubauer
Craig Penttinen
Todd Vang

10 Years

Joseph Clancy
Jeffery Claseman
Arlene Craker
Joseph Loye
Martha Lutz
James Rucker
Kathryn Schoonover
Brenda Stickler
Jason Velasquez



SCHOOL AT WORK GRADUATES

Ray Olivera and Edward Working display certificates following graduation from the School at Work (SAW) program in December. They are pictured with SAW Coach Norm Hendrickson from Staff Education. (Unavailable for the photo were recent SAW graduates Alice Campbell and Misty Collins).

New Televisions for the Medical Center

The old television sets in patient rooms and waiting areas are being replaced as part of a major “Interactive TV System” plan spearheaded by Biomedical Engineering. The 22-year-old sets, which were installed in the hospital when it opened in 1988, are being replaced with 26-inch High Definition TVs. The replacement effort is already underway in Phase I of the upgraded technology program. A total of 296 new TVs are being installed. In Phase II, new Coaxial cable will be installed that will allow transmission of new programming such as video on demand, information updates from the medical center, and other options. Additionally, “welcome boards” will be stationed in common areas of the hospital with messages, video and information of general interest to visitors and staff.

NEWS FROM VACO

VA Announces Budget Request for 2012

In announcing the proposed budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) during the next fiscal year, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki emphasized “making every dollar” count in the \$132 billion budget proposal for VA. “In the current constrained fiscal environment, every dollar counts,” The budget request must be approved by Congress before taking effect.



New VA Support Line Assists Caregivers

VA is increasing its support to caregivers with a new, toll-free telephone line for the caregivers of Veterans of all eras. The National Caregiver Support Line— 1-855-260-3274 – will serve as the primary

resource and referral center to assist caregivers, Veterans and others seeking caregiver information. The line unofficially started Feb. 1, and in its first week logged nearly 600 calls, including 134 referrals to local VA caregiver support coordinators and 233 calls from caregivers themselves.

VA & HUD Issue First-Ever Report on Homeless Veterans

For the first time, VA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development published the most authoritative analysis of the extent and nature of homelessness among Veterans. Nearly 76,000 Veterans were homeless on a given night in 2009 while roughly 136,000 Veterans spent at least one night in a shelter during that year. The report, *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, is available at www.usich.gov/PDF/OpeningDoorsOverview.pdf

VA Mail Order Pharmacy Outperforms all Others in Survey

In the 2010 JD Powers' National Pharmacy Customer Satisfaction Survey, the VA outscored all 13 non-VA mail order pharmacists ([see full report](#)). The VA has a long history of using mail order pharmacy through the Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP) facilities. In the VA system there are 7 CMOPs that fill 427,000 prescriptions every day – shipping approximately 78% of all prescriptions filled in the VA. The CMOP for the Minneapolis VA is the Great Lakes CMOP in Hines, IL. Of the 6,000 prescriptions processed at the Minneapolis VA daily, approximately 4,500 are filled at the Great Lakes CMOP; the remainder are filled at the Minneapolis VA.

VA Has Gone Mobile!

Visit m.va.gov from your mobile device to read and share featured VA news stories, watch videos, and find a VA facility on the go!



New Office to Serve as Advocates for Tribal Veterans

VA has announced the creation of a new Office of Tribal Government Relations to ensure the more than 200,000 Veterans who are American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians receive the VA benefits they have earned.

Capt. Luedtke: 2010 Customer Service Award

Police Captain Charles Luedtke received the Customer Service Award for for 2010. His nomination indicated: "He approaches every situation with utmost respect and professionalism. . . He demonstrates knowledge, courtesy, integrity, competence and confidence when he is called upon to respond. . .He strives for excellence in the workplace at all times, as shown by his impeccable uniform, his positive helpful approach and his rapid response time to all of our needs. He personifies Customer Service at the VA." It was noted that he tests and inspects security systems at the CBOCs at night and weekends to avoid disruption to staff and patients.



Pictured (l-r); Dr. Petzel; Dr. West; Janet Murphy, VISN 23 Director; and Steve Kleinglass, director, Minneapolis VA Health Care System

Dr. Melissa West Receives VA's Top Ethics in Medicine Award

Melissa West, MD, was honored February 15 in Washington, DC, with the presentation of the William A. Nelson Award for Excellence in Health Care Ethics by Randy Petzel, MD, VA's Undersecretary for Health.

Dr. West is co-director of the Community Living Center at the Minneapolis VAMC. She also heads the Ethics Consultative Services, and Co-Chairs the Compliance and Integrated Ethics Council. She is a member of the Executive Leadership Board and as a result is a direct link to providing information related to our consultation services.

Her nomination said: "She is always available to inform, advise, or assist veterans or their families, and/or staff members with ethical dilemmas and decisions. She developed the training materials available to the ethics consultation service to continually improve the practice of ethics consultation."

Minneapolis VA Health Care System Calendar

March 16-17 – Employee Forums

April 30 – Mankato and St. James CBOC dedication ceremonies

May 18 – Minneapolis VA Wellness Fair

June 2 – VA 2K Walk around the hospital

June 9 – Dedication ceremony for Fisher House II

November 15 – Target date for opening Ramsey CBOC