It is my privilege to present to you the Minneapolis VA Health Care System Annual Report for 2017.

I am proud to report that for the sixth year in a row, we were recognized as a VA 5-Star Facility based on 28 performance measures ranging from mortality, length of stay, responsiveness to calls, and overall performance. The Minneapolis VA is the only 1A facility (large, tertiary care hospitals) to earn a 5-star rating since 2012.

We continue to focus on access to services at the medical center in Minneapolis and the 13 community clinics. When we can’t see Veterans in a timely manner, we refer to a network of private providers. We have expanded this network while adding significant VA staff to improve customer service in the referral process.

For patients who receive care at the medical center, several new services were added in 2017: two new hybrid operating suites with sophisticated equipment; a new “primary care super clinic” on the fourth floor that offers a variety of services such as mental health, nutrition and pharmacy education; and an Integrative Health and Healing Center where patients receive non-traditional treatments such as acupuncture, yoga, tai-chi and mindfulness.

Our Research Service distinguished itself as one of the premier groups in the VA with the publication of important studies on dementia, Body Mass Index, early amputations and prostate cancer, to name just a few. Dr. Frank Lederle received the VA's top clinical researcher award.

In the Education Service, MyHealtheVet Enrollment climbed to more than 35,000 Veterans and we introduced the Annie text messaging system via web; Annie provides VA appointment reminders. Minneapolis became one of three pilot sites for a new Online Patient Scheduling System.

Many of our staff were recognized for individual achievements during 2017, including Dr. Kristine Ensrud, who was inducted into the prestigious Association of American Physicians, Dr. Gary Goldish, who was recognized by the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Dr. Apostolos Georgopoulos who received the American Legion’s Distinguished Service Medal. Four of our nurses received recognition as leaders in their specialties, based on reviews by their peers.

During 2017, we held Town Hall meetings in Hibbing, North St. Paul, Minneapolis and Forest Lake. VA staff reached out to veterans in several Stand Downs, the Minnesota State Fair and other outreach events on college campuses and Minnesota National Guard trainings.

I am proud to lead an organization of almost 3700 employees and nearly 1300 volunteers who are committed to providing Veterans with the best care anywhere.

Patrick J. Kelly, FACHE
Director, Minneapolis VA Health Care System
**Integrative Healing Center Opens**

On December 12, the Minneapolis VA celebrated the new center, located in three rooms, totaling 1600 square feet, on 3P. The space was previously used as “wet laboratories” by the Research Service. “Although the space is relatively small, the impact on veterans’ lives will be powerful,” said Director Patrick Kelly. Services include:

- **Whole Health Group:** Designed to guide you in creating optimal health.
- **Tai Chi:** Slow, guided movements designed to increase flexibility, ease pain, and improve balance and agility.
- **Yoga:** Gentle movement to release discomfort, increase balance and improve overall health.
- **Group Acupuncture:** to address a variety of conditions as well as overall wellness, in a group setting, fully clothed, seated in chairs.
- **Mindfulness:** Practice and develop mindfulness-based skills for use in daily life.
- **iRest Yoga Nidra:** Meditation to induce deep relaxation, decrease stress, improve sleep and release self-limiting beliefs.
- **Integrative Nutrition:** Focus on using food as medicine. The food we choose affects how our body functions. Learn more about the power at the end of your fork!

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**Two New Hybrid Operating Rooms Open**

On Jan. 3, Minneapolis VA celebrated the opening of two new operating room suites with a ribbon-cutting and tours. Each OR, located on the 2nd floor near the Surgery Center, consists of 900 square feet and is equipped with sophisticated imaging equipment. The typical current OR is half that size. With the new ORs, the number of surgeries will increase by more than 250 per year.
On June 26, the Department of Veterans Affairs’ Midwest Health Care Network and the Air Force Medical Operations Agency announced a collaborative Tele-ICU agreement that will allow Air Force patients at five military treatment facilities to use VA’s Tele-ICU capabilities through its centralized support center at the Minneapolis VA.

The agreement extends to Air Force patients in Las Vegas; Hampton, Virginia; Biloxi, Mississippi; Dayton, Ohio; and Anchorage, Alaska.

The patients will be able to see VA’s Tele-ICU licensed physicians and critical-care nurses through telecommunications or other electronic technologies, which include direct view of the patient through live audio and video feed; electronic monitoring; and chart review and consultations. The doctors are also able to prescribe medications, order tests or procedures, make diagnoses and discuss health care with patients and family. The Minneapolis VA-based Tele-ICU opened in 2011; it was the first in the VA.

When Veterans pass away in the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, we now acknowledge their death with a Walk of Honor. The tribute began on February 1. This final journey allows us to honor their sacrifice and service to our Nation. Chimes and an overhead announcement will sound, indicating which floor the Walk of Honor will occur. Veterans, staff and visitors are encouraged to pay tribute and respect by saluting or standing in silence. The procession route proceeds to the “E” elevator bank on the floor indicated in the overhead announcement.
Clinical research scientist Dr. Frank A. Lederle received the 2017 John B. Barnwell Award. It is the VA Clinical Science Research and Development Service’s highest honor. The award is given to senior VA investigators in recognition of outstanding contributions to clinical research that ultimately benefit the health of U.S. Veterans and others. Lederle, an internist and core investigator for the Center for Chronic Disease Outcomes Research at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System, is noted for his seminal work on surgical management and treatment for patients who have abdominal aortic aneurysms (AAA), a condition in which a major blood vessel in the body becomes so enlarged that it weakens, which can lead to rupture and possibly death. Dr. Lederle passed away in January 2018.
Dementia Research Finds No Easy Answers

Is there anything you can do to prevent the onset of dementia in your later years? Extensive research by the Minneapolis VA Health Care System and the University of Minnesota has come to a disheartening conclusion: None of the various methods—drugs, vitamins, supplements, exercise, or memory training—can prevent cognitive decline late in life. The research, published in four separate articles in the Annals of Internal Medicine, reviewed dozens of previous studies on the impact of physical activity, prescription medications, cognitive training, and over-the-counter vitamins and supplements in older adults. The researchers said these were the most commonly cited interventions and were the only ones that had enough evidence to warrant review. They also said it's unclear why these interventions showed no benefit and it's possible the studies themselves were flawed. "Overall the results didn't show much benefit," said Howard Fink, MD, of the Minneapolis VA's Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center.

Minneapolis VA researchers found that many commonly used wet wipes contain a high number of potential allergens. The research teams, headed by Erin Warshaw, MD, examined ingredient lists for 178 facial wipe and 54 personal hygiene wipe products. They found that a majority of wet wipes contain ingredients that could cause allergic contact dermatitis.

Minneapolis VA ingenuity was on display in the nation's capital on May 16, as researchers showed off new technologies that can potentially improve the lives of Veterans and others with limb loss or neurological disorders such as paralysis. Speaking at Cannon House Office Building, Minneapolis VA's Gary Goldish, MD, discussed the standing manual mobile wheelchair.

Other Highlights

**RESEARCH ADVANCES Minneapolis VA Health Care System**

- Patients with schizophrenia showed cognitive improvements after cognitive remediation training (use of computer exercises) in a Minneapolis VA/University of Minnesota study. Patients who received 48 hours of cognitive remediation showed increased activation of the left prefrontal cortex of the brain, compared with those in the placebo group.

- A literature review by Minneapolis VA researchers found that little information is available about outcomes for blast versus nonblast traumatic brain injury (TBI) in U.S. military personnel. The research shows that blast and nonblast TBI groups had similar rates of depression, sleep disorders, alcohol use, vision loss, balance problems, and functional status.

Minneapolis VA and University of Minnesota study confirmed that higher body mass index (BMI) is linked to greater risk of death from colorectal cancer. Researchers followed more than 46,000 participants for 30 years. **Study lead was Aasma Shaukat, MD.**

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Minneapolis VA Offers New Ways to Connect Veterans and Care Teams

**MyHealtheVet Enrollment climbs** - More than 35,000 Veterans now use MyHealtheVet and over 13,000 are active Secure Message users. MyHealtheVet is an on-line portal for Veterans to use to track their health, order medications, view appointments, communicate with their care providers and access their medical records, and much more.

**Annie, text messaging system via web** - Annie provides VA appointment reminders as well as individualized protocols that promote self-care such as medication reminders. It is named for Lt. Annie G. Fox, of the Army Nurse Corps, the first woman to receive a Purple Heart for her actions at Pearl Harbor.

**Mobile Apps** - The VA mobile app store has access to dozens of apps, including many that have been created specifically for Veterans, their caregivers and their Health Care Professionals. Staff at Minneapolis are encouraging patient use for self-management.

**Online Scheduling is coming to the VA** - In 2017, Minneapolis VA was one of three VAs to pilot an online scheduling software called OPSS (Online Patient Self-Scheduling). Online scheduling is active for Primary Care, Mental Health, Eye Clinic and Audiology.

Three 2017 Excellence in Education Award Recipients were honored at the Annual Minneapolis VAHCS Education Day

- **Jessica Gottenborg, MS, RD, LD**, who works on the 4J Polytrauma unit, was honored for advancing education about veteran-centric wellness and health.
- **Nersi Nikakhtar, MD**, (Left) Medicine Clerkship Site Director for nearly 10 years, was honored for strengthening the academic affiliations.
- **Brad Foley, MSN, RN**, Co-Director of the VANAP Nursing Program, was honored for promoting interprofessional education.
‘Residents Clinic’ Offers Advantages for Veterans and Young Doctors

Every July, a new group of recently graduated MDs arrive at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center to begin training in a three-year internal medicine residency program.

Forty-three young doctors will spend one day a week in the “residents clinic” located in 4D, the new “super outpatient clinic” located on the fourth floor. Each will have a panel of 90 patients who they will follow under the supervision and mentorship of 18 attending VA internal medicine staff physicians.

“Patients really have two doctors when they come to the clinic,” explained Amy Candy Heinlein, MD, who supervises the program. “You have the enthusiasm of the recent medical school graduate, and the experience of a seasoned staff physician.”

Veterans whose resident-doctors are ending the three-year assignment are notified by letter that they will be assigned to a new resident. The vast majority choose to remain as patients in the “residents clinic.”

Young residents bring numerous advantages to their patients, including longer appointment times and long-term relationships.

Dr. Candy Heinlein emphasized that all residents have earned either an MD or a DO from a certified medical school. Their training at the VA is designed to allow them to sharpen their skills in Internal Medicine.

University of Minnesota Recognizes VA Doctors

The University of Minnesota Medical School has recognized three VA physicians with “Primary Care and Specialty Medicine Service Line Teacher of the Year Awards.” They are (l-r): Dimitri Drekonja, Craig Roth and William Maguire.

Venkat N. Tholakanahalli MD, a Minneapolis VA cardiologist and Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of Minnesota, received the “Lifetime Teaching Award” from the U of MN cardiology fellowship program.
The July issue of Minneapolis/St Paul magazine recognized the Top Doctors in the region, based on peer feedback in their specialties. Eleven physicians from the Minneapolis VA were recognized: (Pictured above): Neal Foman, MD, Ezgi Tiryaki, MD, Susan Czapiewski MD, Juan Carlos Manivel, MD, Charles Billington, MD, Stephanie Boyle, MD, Steve Santilli, MD. (Not pictured): Gary Goldish, MD, Erin Warshaw, MD Rosemary Kelly, MD, Sara Shumway MD

Four Minneapolis VA Nurses Receive Top Honors from Mpls/St Paul Magazine - The Minneapolis VA took home top honors in four of 16 categories in the annual Mpls/St Paul magazine “Outstanding Nurses Awards” competition for 2017. They were: Faith Broman, Nursing Administration; Jonathan Gair, Nurse Researcher; Jamie Lang, Rising Star and Emily Ehmke, Mental Health.

1. VA Internist Amy Candy-Heinlein received the MN American Legion’s Spotlight Physician of the Year award.
2. Drs. Misghina Abraha and Yan Bakman (3) are co-recipients of the 16th annual Medical Staff Award for Clinical Excellence. The award was created in 2002 to recognize a member of the medical staff who provides outstanding clinical care.
3. Clinical Psychologist John P. Billig received the VHA William A. Nelson Award for Excellence in Health Care Ethics.
4. Dr. Apostolos Georgopoulos, Brain Sciences Center director, recipient of the American Legion’s Distinguished Service Medal.
5. Dr. Kristine Ensrud, physician/researcher, inducted into the prestigious Association of American Physicians.
6. Heidi Hoover, supervisor of the Dietetic Internship program, received Federal Executive Board Civil Servant of the Year “Leadership Award.”
7. Mandy Smoot, of PM&R, 2017 Minneapolis VA Supervisor of the Year.
8. Psychiatrist Patricia Dickmann received VHA communication award for editorial “State is Mistaken in Authorizing Use of Marijuana for PTSD.”
9. Public Affairs Officer Ralph Heussner received a VHA communications award for feature story on the toxicology testing laboratory.
Disaster Responders Help Puerto Rico Recover

Four Minneapolis VA staff spent two weeks on the Island of Puerto Rico as part of the VA’s Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPs) emergency response program following Hurricane Maria in September 2017. They were nurses Mary Bauer, Mark Matzek and Colleen Holmgren, and pharmacy technician Ana Tosca. They worked 16-20 hours a day, triaging acute patients and providing care. “We saw trauma and a lot of dehydration,” Colleen said. All said they would do it again.

Staffer and a Stranger Bring Smiles to Veteran, Grandson

Minneapolis VA Occupational Therapist Rhonda Plautz-Lineer is a huge Rod Carew fan. Carew was a star of the Minnesota Twins between 1967-1978. So when Rhonda heard the Twins were giving away bobble-head dolls of Carew at its August 18 game, she decided to head down to the stadium after work, buy a cheap ticket and obtain a Carew doll. Earlier in the day, she had heard from a colleague that a VA patient on 4J was hoping to attend the game but could not because of his condition. Rhonda decided to try and land a second doll for the veteran whom she did not know. As Rhonda was standing in line for her ticket, she mentioned to a stranger that she was hoping to somehow obtain a second doll. The stranger said he had an extra ticket, and gave it to Rhonda. On August 21, Rhonda met the Veteran on 4J. Ken Reeser was surprised as he walked into the hallway after lunch to be greeted by Rhonda holding the bobble-head. “It’s for my grandson,” Ken said, with an obvious tear on his cheek. “Thank you so much.”

No Time to Wait, Nurse Assistant Rushes Veteran to ED

Georgia Hudson-Benson, Nursing Assistant, Specialty Care, was walking with a co-worker on her lunch break when she noticed a man attempting to get in the gate of the peripheral fence outside the medical center. When the man started to go down to the ground Ms. Hudson yelled “call the SMaRT team and security.” Based on her assessment of the Veteran’s speech and pain levels, she realized there was no time to wait for emergency responders. Tears were falling down the man’s cheeks. Security arrived to unlock the gate but said that it was their protocol to call 911. Ms. Hudson said there was no time. Another staffer found a wheelchair and they raced to the ED. He recovered. She was honored with an Employee of Month award.

Two VA Staffers Help Woman in Rollover Accident on Busy Shepard Road

If you’re ever in an accident near the Minneapolis VA, rest assured that help is on the way – and may arrive before the rescue vehicles. Such was the case around 4:30 p.m. on July 20 along busy Shepard Road in Saint Paul, located just a few miles from the medical center. A woman driving her car in the east-bound lane swerved to avoid hitting a slow-moving vehicle as the two-lane road narrowed to one lane due to construction. She hit the median curb and the car flipped into the median. One of the first on the scene was Gary Matteson, RN, safe patient handling coordinator, who was followed by Rhonda Donahue, RN, patient safety manager. Gary, a former EMT, and Rhonda checked on the condition of the driver, who was shaken but unhurt, after crawling out the window of the backseat through the broken glass. The driver was on her way to pick up her kids.
INSTITUTIONAL AWARDS

Environmental Awards
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recognized six federal facilities, including the Minneapolis VA Health Care System (Minneapolis VA), for efforts to improve efficiency, save resources and reduce costs as part of the Federal Green Challenge (FGC). The Minneapolis VA received the EPA’s top award for environmentally preferable purchasing practices. In FY 2016, the Minneapolis VA decreased its printer and copier paper purchased by 44 percent from the previous year, saving $125,600. The Minneapolis VA received the “Top 25 Environmental Excellence Award” from Practice Greenhealth, the nation’s leading networking organization for institutions in the health care community that made a commitment to sustainable, eco-friendly practices.

VA Workplace Wellness Gold Award
Minneapolis VA is one of only 8 to receive the VHA Workplace Wellness Award of Excellence. Factors for judging include leadership support, healthy activities, employee fitness centers, walking paths and wellness and fitness events. Pictured is Cindy Tomczak, RN, Employee Wellness Coordinator.

VHA’s Office of Patient Care Services recognized the VISN 23/ MINNEAPOLIS VA team with ICARE Certificate of Commitment Awards for its work with lung cancer screening. The team developed an automated tool linking patients’ screening results to their current health record.

MINNEAPOLIS VA RECEIVES TOP QUALITY RATING SIX YEARS IN A ROW

For six years in a row, the Minneapolis VA Health Care System has maintained a five-star rating based on the Department of Veteran Affairs’ internal measures. The Minneapolis VA was one of 19 VA medical centers in the 146-hospital system to receive a five-star rating for FY 2017. The ratings are based on 28 measures in areas such as readmission rates, length of stay, complications, mortality and customer satisfaction. The tool is called Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL). The system was designed for comparing VA hospitals to one another so that within VA we can share learnings and improvements can be made. In the SAIL/Star rating system, if one VA hospital improves in performance, then another will drop in performance. Therefore, there will always be a distribution of VA hospitals between 1 and 5 stars.
VA Leaders Hear Concerns at Four Town Halls

Now in its fourth year, the VA (VHA, VBA and National Cemeteries) holds quarterly Veterans town halls to hear firsthand from veterans and stakeholders. Here’s a summary of the 2017 events: March 29 – North St. Paul VFW Post 1350; June 21, Whipple Federal Building in St. Paul; September 28, Hibbing Memorial Building; December 7, Forest Lake YMCA. More than 250 people attended the four events.

Declining Stand Down Attendance a Positive Trend

The annual homeless veterans stand down Aug 1-2 drew fewer veterans than in the past but that was welcomed as a sign of progress. Event organizers reported 781 veterans attended with 128 self-identifying themselves as living in a shelter or on the streets. Last year, 842 veterans attended and 160 were homeless. VA staffed the clinic with a joint VA-Military operation of 44 personnel (26 VA and 18 Military). Military partners were from the 934th Aeromedical Staging Squadron, U.S. Air Force Reserves and the 133rd Medical Group, 109th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron and 133rd Airlift Wing, Air National Guard, MSP Airport.

Military Appreciation Day at the State Fair

The Suicide Prevention and Post 9/11 Transition teams spent a day at the Great Minnesota Get Together with Veterans. Hundreds of Veterans stopped by to chat with VA staff and receive information.

200 Attend Mental Health Summit

More than 200 mental health providers from throughout Minnesota participated in the Annual Mental Health Summit, September 22 at the Whipple Federal Building. The purpose of the meeting is to build partnerships and share best practices. This year’s summit also focused on suicide prevention efforts.

Minnesota Military Radio Hour

Twice a month, the Minneapolis VA has a slot on the one-hour program that airs on 50 commercial radio stations. Director Patrick Kelly gives a “VA Update” once a month and a VA subject matter expert provides an in-depth look at a topic once a month. Topics covered in 2017 included compensation and pension, suicide prevention, a study of resiliency in Minnesota National Guard and the VA audiology clinic.
FIRST IMPRESSIONS PROGRAM GOES NATIONAL

The Minneapolis VA’s First Impressions Volunteer Program received national recognition in 2017. It is now being implemented throughout all VA facilities as the Red Coat Ambassador Program. Trained volunteers assist Veterans with wayfinding and referring them to different resources. First Impressions volunteers impact many areas of the medical center by assisting as greeters, providing directions, escorting, curbside assistance, check-in kiosk assistance, pharmacy assistance, travel office assistance, and providing free coffee via a roving cart.

APPRECIATION BANQUET RECOGNIZES YEARS OF SERVICE

In June, more than 400 volunteers enjoyed a fine meal and entertainment as a small token of appreciation for their many hours of assistance. Volunteers receive awards for hours of service. Andy Urness was honored for 8,750 hours of service.

NATIONAL SALUTE TO VETERAN PATIENTS

Every year around Valentine’s Day, the Voluntary Service department sponsors the National Salute to Veteran Patients. Following a program, Congressional staffers, service organization offices and beauty queens from around the state visit patients in their rooms. They deliver hats, pins and hand-made Valentine’s Day cards created by Minnesota school children.

STATISTICS

1,289 volunteers
176,595 hours of service
247 new volunteers
282 registered drivers
19,061 patients transported
1,239,010 miles traveled

Lucille Lyons a VA Volunteer for 33 Years. Lucille passed away in January 2018.
UNIQUE PATIENTS
Minneapolis VA Medical Center........ 94,648
Northwest Metro (Ramsey, MN)....... 8,253
Twin Ports (Superior WI)............... 8,232
Maplewood Clinic.......................... 6,805
Fort Snelling Whipple C/P Clinic....... 6,521
Chippewa Valley (WI)...................... 4,667
Rochester Clinic........................... 4,542
Hibbing/Ely Clinics......................... 3,508
Hayward (WI)................................. 3,389
St. James Clinic............................. 3,275
Shakopee Clinic............................ 3,111
Albert Lea Clinic........................... 1,974
Lyle C. Pearson Clinic (Mankato MN).... 1,708
Rice Lake (WI)................................. 1,260
Total Unique Patients.................... 102,758
0.4% increase in 2 years

ACUTE CARE BEDS
147 average daily census
6.37 days - avg. length of stay

COMMUNITY LIVING CENTER
66 average daily census
32.29 days - avg. length of stay

CLINICAL LAB TESTS 3,120,558

OUTPATIENT BLOOD TESTS 206,176

FLU vaccinations 42,467

PATIENTS IN ADULT DAY CARE 200

OUTPATIENT VISITS 931,383

STAFFING TOTALS
MEDICAL STAFF ......................... 456
including 42 Psychiatrists
Psychologists ................................. 84
Dentists ........................................ 13
NURSING STAFF ......................... 1,416
RNs ............................................ 1,032
LPNs ............................................. 153
Nursing Assistants ....................... 112
APRNs .......................................... 83
CRNAs .......................................... 36
TOTAL FTE ................................. 3,675
EMPLOYEES WHO ARE VETERANS .... 1,025

ANNUAL BUDGET $880,566,648

Female
6,899
185 Increase in one Year
Male
95,688

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Age 85 and older 10,128    Average age 64.93    Age 24 and under 640
On the Cover:
Audrey Caine, MD, Director of the Women's Imaging Suite, talks with a patient in front of one of two 3-D mammographic machines in our FDA-accredited mammography department. 3 board certified radiologists and 2 mammographic technologists provide a full range of breast imaging services, including screening and diagnostic mammography, stereotactic biopsy, ultrasound – and soon, breast MRI. About 1400 mammograms are performed annually.