

## FISHER HOUSE: A CHANCE TO GIVE BACK

By Cecile Bagrow, Fisher House manager

When VA Puget Sound broke ground at the Seattle division on the new Fisher House project in July, I brought high-powered binoculars from home so that I could keep my eye on the progress of the construction taking place outside my office window. Today as I look out at ongoing construction and the snowcapped mountains in view, I remembered the reasons for my involvement in the Fisher House project: Creation of a warm, inviting, homelike atmosphere. Just last spring I had the opportunity to work on a reconstruction project in New Orleans that helped those who lost their homes when Hurricane Katrina tore the city apart. The satisfaction I felt from being part of that community of caring led me to the new position I now hold as manager of the Fisher House project here at VA Puget Sound.



VA Puget Sound's Fisher House is one of 38 homes across the nation (and in Germany) created through a unique partnership that provides housing to military and veteran families in times of need. The program recognizes the special sacrifices of American men and women in uniform and the hardships of military service. Fisher House provides, at no cost, a place where families can be near their loved ones as veterans recover from illness or injury at a nearby VA or military medical facility. With 16,000 square feet, VA Puget Sound's Fisher House will house 21 suites – a home away from home for approximately 42 family members at any given time. All décor and furnishings will reflect the comfortable and homey Northwest style. The structure will include a cozy family room, chef's kitchen, full dining room, community living room, and shared laundry facilities.

Elizabeth and Zachary Fisher established a foundation in 1990 that, by the time Mr. Fisher died in 1999, had created 24 houses for military and VA families. The program has continued to thrive through partnerships with local communities, who work in tandem to raise funding for the projects. The Fisher Foundation has contributed \$5 million dollars for our local project and VA Puget Sound is working to "pay it forward" by raising an additional two million dollars. To date, we have raised almost a quarter of that amount through the Friends of VA Puget Sound Fisher House, the Combined Federal Campaign, and other community partnerships.

Of course the biggest impact the Fisher House project has had so far on the Seattle division is the loss of one hundred parking spaces at a time when parking was already at a premium. We appreciate the sacrifice our staff and patients now endure when parking at the medical center. We hope the benefit to our veteran patients and their families

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*Artist's rendition of VA Puget Sound Fisher House*

outweighs the inconvenience to our staff. A secondary project to add parking spaces is underway.

I want to personally acknowledge the many individuals, VA staff, patients, family members and community funding partners who have already made a difference by supporting this exciting project. When the house is completed and we celebrate its opening in the fall of 2008, this house will have great meaning for those who need it most. As I watch the progress outside my window, I am thrilled to see the way we are giving back to those who have served, and to their families who have sacrificed so much.

To learn more about how you can support this amazing project visit the website at: [www.fisherhousevaps.org](http://www.fisherhousevaps.org) or contact me directly at: 206- 277-3950.



*Michael Fisher, VISN 20 Acting Deputy Network Director, Stan Johnson, Director, VA Puget Sound Health Care System, Rod Skaar, President, Friends of Puget Sound Fisher House, Senator Patty Murray, Congressman Dave Reichert and David Coker, President, Fisher House Foundation at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System Fisher House groundbreaking ceremony on Friday, July 20, 2007*



## PATIENT FEEDBACK

Dear VA Puget Sound Director-

I cannot begin to express how much I appreciate Michele Meconi as my Primary Care provider.

Michele has done more for me than any other doctor that I have had in all of the years I have been in the VA Healthcare System here and in California. She is caring, listens to everything I say and tries to help in anyway that she can.

She is so very, very special to me and my wife. I do hope that she will be recognized in some way.

An appreciative veteran  
Sequim, WA

Dear Patient Advocate-

Thank you for all of your help in getting my new hearing aid. This is the best Christmas present I could ever get: better hearing!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,

A thankful veteran  
Stanwood, WA

To all physicians, nurses, technicians and maintenance staff of 2 West:

Thank you for your many kindnesses and your professionalism as you treated our family member during his illness over these past months. We believe he chose to stay on 2 West in your care knowing that he would be in capable and caring hands as he left this earth. We appreciate all you did for him and for us during this most difficult time. Please accept our heartfelt thanks.

Sincerely,  
A thankful family

To the staff-

Our family would like to send our thanks to all involved with the care of our family member throughout the 2 years of his cancer treatment. Never once were we treated with disrespect. Everyone went out of their way to make him comfortable. Every different department involved with the cancer care has great caring people.

The hospital staff last week couldn't have treated us better. Every time our family came to visit a doctor would come into his room to talk to us. The nurses checked in every 10 minutes to see if any of us needed anything. They really treat the veterans with a lot of love.

His doctors were all great, especially Dr. Bruce Montgomery. Special thanks to him for the 2 plus years of treatment.

Thank you all very much,  
A veteran's family  
Graham, WA

# IN THE NEWS

## Team Work Leads to a Better Work Environment and Happier Patients

by Stan Johnson, Director



Thank you for the warm Northwest welcome I received when I arrived in July of 2007 as the new medical center director. I am honored to serve you in this capacity and I look forward to working with each of you as we continue to improve the services we provide to veterans and to each other. Since becoming the director, I have identified several goals that we can

work on together to ensure that VA Puget Sound is the best in providing care, timely access and increased patient satisfaction in a cost-effective manner.

Currently, our facility ranks 82nd out of 139 facilities in all three facets - access to care, patient satisfaction and cost effectiveness. To make the critical improvements necessary to become better at what we do for our veterans, we must work together as a team. We need your ideas and suggestions in finding ways to continue to improve our services, to enhance the way we share information and increase the timeliness of our interaction with our patients. To achieve these goals, we need to be able to support each other as colleagues. This means recognizing the efforts of everyone as part of the same team working toward the same goal – giving the best care possible for our veterans provided in the best environment we can create.

First, we must continue work together to exceed our patients' expectations. When veterans choose us for their healthcare needs, we want to be able to show them the special attention they so richly deserve. Secondly, although I believe the quality of care at VA Puget Sound is excellent for the patients who reach us, we need to improve access to care. Our Northwest Network, VISN 20, has a goal to eliminate the electronic waiting list by April 1, 2008. This will ensure that veterans wait no longer than 30 days for an appointment beyond their desired date. This goal covers all clinics with the exception of orthopedics, which is targeted to eliminate their waiting list by September 2008. Timely access is one of the keys to quality care. Thirdly, we have some support system issues to address such as our parking capacity, our telephone tree system when veterans call for appointments and prescription refills, and the challenge of not having enough space for our growth to accommodate offices, research, meeting space and patient care within the medical center.

In the short time I have been at VA Puget Sound, I have been struck by the dedication and the many talented people working at both divisions. I believe if we focus on the issues at hand we can accomplish whatever we desire. I look forward to working with each of you in the future while we strive to enhance the VA Puget Sound community.

### COMMUNITY BASED OUTPATIENT CLINIC N E W S

- VA Puget Sound will soon be opening a new Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in NW Washington (Mt. Vernon area). This new CBOC will provide primary care and mental health services. The NW CBOC will be operated and staffed by VA Puget Sound employees. Recruitment for staff positions is already underway. Watch for more news about our plans.

- VA Puget Sound has also submitted a business plan to VISN 20 leadership to establish a new CBOC in SW Washington. This VA-staffed facility, when approved, will also provide primary care and mental health services to veterans in this currently underserved area.

*For more information on CBOC's contact Pat Tulip at (206) 764-2547*

# IN THE NEWS

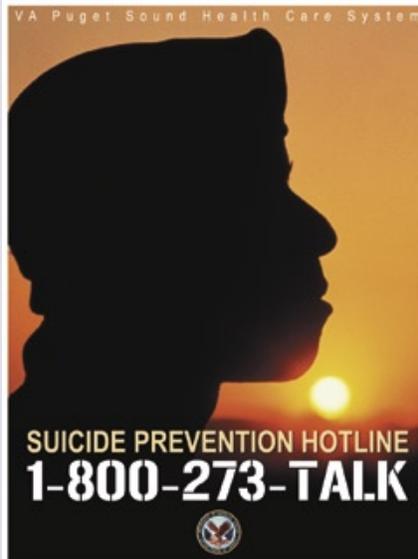
## Suicide Awareness

by Lisa Kelly, Training Administrator, Mental Health Services

Suicide is the 11th most frequent cause of death in the United States, accounting for approximately 30,000 deaths annually. It is estimated that someone dies from suicide every 16 minutes. To ensure that veterans contemplating suicide, along with concerned family and friends, have immediate access to a trained person who can help, the Department of Veterans Health Affairs (VHA) has established a 24-hour national suicide prevention hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255). In a recent three-month period, the hotline received more than 200 calls from Washington State alone.

The hotline is staffed by mental health professionals who assess and respond to crisis situations for veterans at risk for suicide. When a veteran calls the hotline, a hotline professional can arrange community rescue services or an immediate community referral. If the veteran agrees, information from the call is confidentially forwarded to the Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC) nearest their location for follow-up.

Suicide Prevention Coordinators are located at more than 150 sites and puts VHA ahead of legislation that is expected to become law shortly. In October, Congress passed the Joshua Omvig Suicide Prevention Act which the President signed in



early November 2007. It comes amid growing concerns over mental health issues borne by veterans who have seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The law requires mental health training for all VA staff following the Public Health model approach to suicide prevention. The law also mandates screening for suicide risk factors for veterans who receive VA care. Furthermore, it provides referrals of at-risk veterans for counseling and treatment and designates a Suicide Prevention Coordinator at each VA medical facility. It also supports outreach and education for veterans and their families, peer support counseling, and research into suicide prevention. The measure (H.R. 327) honors a 22-year-old Army reservist from Grundy Center, Iowa who took his life in December

2005 after returning from Iraq. More information is available at the following link: [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

VA Puget Sound has two Suicide Prevention Coordinators whose contact information is listed below:

Valerie Haynes, RN  
American Lake Division  
Phone: (253) 583-1727  
FAX: (253) 589-4067  
Valerie.Haynes@va.gov

David Ubelhor, MSW, BCD  
Seattle Division  
Phone: (206) 277-3456  
FAX: (206) 764-2572  
David.Ubelhor@va.gov

## Construction and Facility Upgrades Continue

The Building 18 replacement project at American Lake division began the first week of November 2007. The new building will be located on Veterans Drive between Buildings 20 and 143. A slight increase in vehicle traffic is anticipated, but it should not affect traffic flow much.

Research will have storage within the building, but the major occupant will be Information Systems Service Line.

The hospital's computer servers and technical staff will be relocated to this building as well as the computer training room. These services are scattered through out the division, and this consolidation of activities will give better service to the division.

Consolidation and state of the art facilities will allow faster response times to computer problems leading to less

disruption of clinics. The new training room will enhance the learning experience of staff who are upgrading computer skills used in patient care allowing us to provide better service to our veterans.

Construction should take about a year. Anticipated completion date is November, 2008.

## Valor Joins VA Puget Sound in Providing Primary Care in King County

Effective this fall, outpatient primary care for enrolled patients residing in King County and the surrounding area, changed from the University of Washington Physicians Network to Valor Healthcare. Valor Healthcare operates 17 clinics across the nation including three in King County. Valor Healthcare clinics are unique because they treat only veterans at their clinics. Valor clinics have a community presence in Seattle, Federal Way and Bellevue. As part of their contract, the Valor clinics display VA signage so patients and community members can easily identify them as VA facilities.

All three clinics in King County plan to provide primary care and mental health services. Additionally, clinic patients will be able to fill their prescriptions via VA mail order or fill emergent prescription needs through local pharmacies. Veterans who are x-rayed at the clinics can have them digitally transmitted to VA Puget Sound medical centers for review.

This change in outpatient clinics also brings a new benefit previously unavailable to patients and their doctors. Valor providers have direct access to VA's Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS). This means that a patient's health information will now be easier to access by both their primary

care physicians and specialty care providers at VA medical centers across the country.

King County outpatient clinic locations and contact information are listed below. All clinics are open from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

### **Bellevue**

13033 Bel-Red Road  
Suite 210  
Bellevue, Washington 98005  
Telephone: (425) 214-1055

### **North Seattle**

12360 Lake City Way NE  
Suite 200  
Seattle, Washington 98125  
Telephone: (206) 384-4382

### **Federal Way**

34617 11th Place South  
Suite 301  
Federal Way, Washington 98003  
Telephone: (253) 336-4142  
Toll Free: 800-310-5001

For more information about Valor or other CBOC's contact:  
Pat Tulip at 206- 764-2547.

## A Personal Health Record is On Its Way



What if you could view your medical record on line, interact with your physician or provider via email and schedule appointments online? Well, it's all coming together as VA's rolls out its web-based design for veterans and their families.

As a provider, are you encouraging veterans to take advantage of VA's emerging personal health record? My HealtheVet is a web-based application designed for veterans and their families and it allows veterans to develop and use their own personal health record to optimize their health care. As of October 27, 2007, there were almost a half million registrants across the VA's health care system of care.

As a gateway to veteran health benefits and services, My HealtheVet provides access to:

- Online VA prescription refills
- More than 4.1 million refills have already been processed through My HealtheVet
- Trusted health information
- Personal health journals
- Links to federal and VA benefits and resources

This system is being rolled out and is intended to help veterans make informed health care choices to stay healthy and locate services when needed, My HealtheVet empowers a veteran to:

- Record health insurance information
- Keep track of personal health information such as emergency contacts, insurance carriers
- Monitor readings for common health metrics such as blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol
- Store comprehensive family medical histories
- Track illnesses, accidents, or other events
- Record important events from their military history
- Record medications, allergies, immunizations and daily exercise activities

In the future, VA patients with My HealtheVet accounts will be able to view their VA appointments, co-pay balances and certain portions of their digital health record. Additionally, they will be able to share portions of My HealtheVet with clinicians and family members.

Check it out! Go to [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) The release of information staff at both divisions can help you register and access MyHealtheVet. For more information please contact: Susan Helbig, (206) 277-1951.

# IN THE NEWS

## Welcome New Employees

**Emily Franklin** is an Administrative Fellow for the Office of the Director at VA Puget Sound. She will spend the next year rotating through each service line in the medical facilities at Seattle and American Lake and be involved in a wide array of special projects. She also plans to visit the local Vet Centers, Community Based Outpatient Clinics, VISN Office and Regional Office. Emily came to VA Puget Sound from the Lexington VA Medical Center in Kentucky, where she worked as a Health Administration Service (HAS) intern and a Program Support Assistant. She is a 2007 graduate of the Masters in Health Administration Program from the University of Kentucky.

**Joyce Wipf** directs the Women's Program for VA Puget Sound. She is excited about the unique program, and hopes to advance care for women veterans. She will keep her primary care clinic, including some patients she's cared for since 1985! Wipf grew up in rural Minnesota and completed medical school at the University of Minnesota. In 1984, she came to Seattle to the University of Washington for Internal Medicine Residency. During residency her continuity clinic was based at the VA in General Internal Medicine Clinic. After residency, she joined the VA faculty and was involved in the clinician-teacher track. In 1994 she became the Associate Director of the Medicine Residency program at the University of Washington. However, she did not want to leave the VA patients, and kept VA GIM continuity clinic and divides her time between UW and Seattle VA.

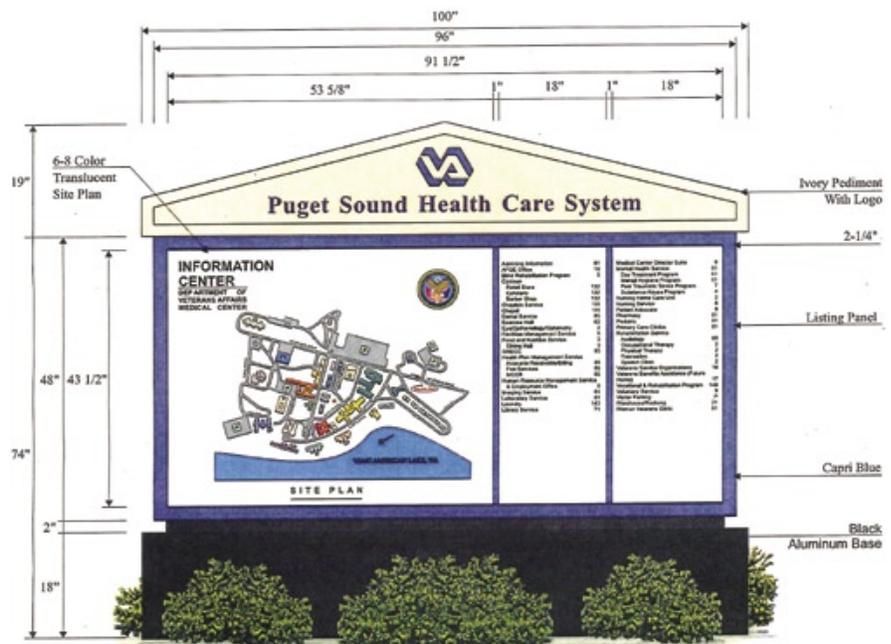
**Sonyo Graham** has recently joined VA Puget Sound Executive Office as a Facility Planner. Prior to her position in Seattle, Ms. Graham spent six years in the Business Office at the McDonald Army Community Health Center in Fort Eustis, Virginia.

**Mercedes Gross** was selected as the new Compliance & Business Integrity Officer (CBIO) for VA Puget Sound Health Care System in May 2007. She has extensive administrative experience in Rehabilitation as Administrative Officer, Chief of Occupational Therapy at Puget Sound and Rehabilitation Manager of various specialized disciplines in the private sector. Gross was recently accepted to the University of Washington Executive Masters Degree in Health Care Administration.

## New Signage Welcome Patients and Visitors at American Lake

After 20-plus years of greeting visitors and patients, to the well recognized illuminated drive-up information sign at American Lake division is being replaced. The new sign will be brighter and easier to read and is designed so that we will be able to update information easily and more frequently. We are in the final phase of design. Installation should take place some time in the spring.

In addition to the new information sign, we are replacing street identification signs, the service officers sign at Building 16, and key directional signs. They will be installed in the spring as well, making it easier for patients and visitors to find their way.



## FACILITY UPDATES IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT OF CARE

### SEATTLE

#### Two new Cardiac Cath Labs coming soon

Look for some important and exciting construction projects currently underway at VA Puget Sound. Contractors began late last year to build two new state-of-the-art Cardiac Catheterization Labs and add 8,000 additional square feet to the 4th floor of the Diagnostic and Treatment Building 100. The scope of the project includes installation of the two new Cath Labs, and remodeling of the Cardio clinical spaces, along with offices and clinical spaces in the adjacent Pulmonary department. The project is on schedule to be completed in late Fall, 2008.

#### Two New Parking Lots

Two new parking lots are also beginning construction in January. A total of 120 new parking spots will be added to two existing lots on the grounds. A beautiful formal entry drive into the facility will be developed and, combined with the new exterior signage project, will provide a striking landmark in the Beacon Hill community. The new entry drive design will include substantial landscaping changes. New trees will be planted in both new parking lots and more new trees will be included in the Fisher House landscaping.

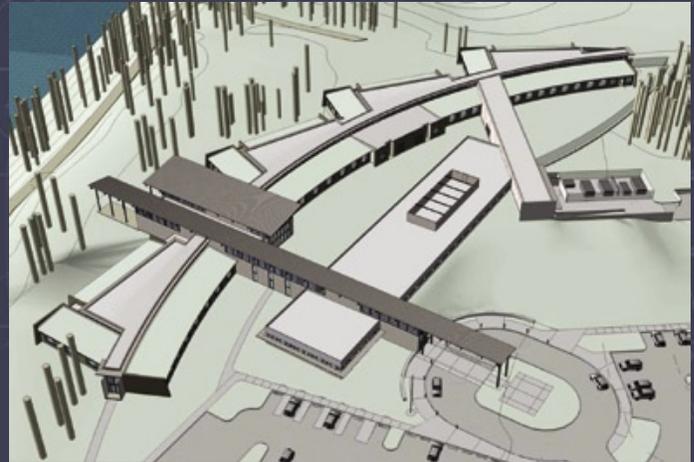


#### Emergency Department Expansion planning begins

Preliminary planning will begin in February for a new 12,000 sq. ft. Emergency Department project located between the Spinal Cord Injury entrance and the Ambulatory Care entrance. This project will significantly expand the ER for better service to our veterans. Construction is slated for 2009 with completion in 2010.

### AMERICAN LAKE

#### Replacement Nursing Home



The design is nearly complete for the replacement nursing home at the American Lake division. Congress has allocated funding for the project and construction will begin later this year. The new nursing home will be located south east of Building 61 and will feature lake views from a majority of the patient rooms. Homelike dining and recreation areas are featured in addition to a beautiful securely fenced "wander garden" specially designed for dementia patients. Additional parking will also be constructed on the site.

#### Building 81 Radiology and ER Remodel

Design continues for the remodel and expansion of the second floor radiology area. The project will ultimately include minor remodel work for the ER in Building 81. The actual construction start date has not yet been identified pending funding and final approval.

# REACHING OUT TO THE NEWEST GENERATION OF VETERANS

By Linda Gillespie-Gately, OIF/OEF Program Manager

The primary mission of VA is “To care for him/her who shall have borne the battle and for his/her widow and orphan.” Through the years the evolution of VA services has often been driven by the unique care needs of specific veteran cohorts or signature injuries of combatants from particular conflicts. Health risks posed by military deployment include:

- Physical injury
- Exposure to environmental hazards, chemicals and biological agents such as Agent Orange, chemical weapons and ionizing radiation
- Psychological trauma and subsequent post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions
- Exposure to temperature extremes of cold or heat
- Medically unexplained symptoms that often follow combat exposure

Following the first Gulf War, Dr. Stephen Hunt, realized that veterans who were fresh from the battlefield often had multiple physical and mental health concerns that were not being addressed in a traditional primary care setting. In collaboration with the Mental Health Service Line and PTSD programs, Hunt established the Deployment Health Clinic that would provide a wide spectrum of care and would address the bio-psycho-social needs of combat veterans.

The objective of the Deployment Health Clinic is to assess returning combat veterans for any of the health consequences arising from their combat exposures and to provide for and coordinate ongoing care for these health concerns.

These health consequences include: physical injuries, psychological and/or emotional injuries related to physical injuries, mental health conditions and symptoms associated with the psychological traumas of war and health concerns related to toxic environmental exposures.

The Clinic offers an integrated model of healthcare, using current research and established best practices in an environment of



*Department of Defense photos*

professional collaboration between diverse groups of service providers.

Under the Deployment Health Clinic umbrella, Hunt has assembled a core team of providers to address veteran’s basic medical, mental and social needs. These providers are trained and experienced in evaluating and managing deployment-specific concerns. The clinic team includes primary care providers, a variety of mental health practitioners (including psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers). The clinic also utilizes the expertise from specialty services including:

- Physical, occupational and rehabilitative therapists
- Pain management teams
- Rehabilitation counselors
- Dietitians
- Chaplains
- Veterans Benefits staff and veteran service officers.

Each campus has established its own clinic to work with our region’s combat veterans. The Puget Sound OIF-OEF (Operation Iraqi Freedom-Operation Enduring Freedom) team includes:

## ***OIF-OEF Program Manager***

Linda Gillespie-Gateley – social worker 253-583-1165

## ***Madigan Army Hospital***

Marcie Williams – social worker 253-968-2898 VA Healthcare Liaison	Gordon Retterath – social worker 253-968-0546 VA Healthcare Liaison
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## ***American Lake – Gold Team***

Lisa Olson, MD – primary care provider  
Trisha Hyatt, PhD – psychologist  
Timoteo Yepes – social worker/combat case manager  
253-583-1144

## ***Seattle – Deployment Health Clinic***

Stephen Hunt, MD, – clinic director/primary care provider  
Mack Orsborn, MD – primary care provider  
Matthew Jakupcak, PhD – psychologist  
Michelle Klevens – social science specialist  
Mark Correale, MSN – social worker/combat case manager  
Lisa Allen – transition patient advocate

This multidisciplinary integrated approach to healthcare delivery has been so successful in Seattle that VISN20 has chosen to implement it at all medical centers throughout the VISN.

# Breakthroughs in Medicine

## TELERETINAL IMAGING

*New procedure provides hope for early detection of blindness*

By John Mangan, Ophthalmic Photographer

VA Puget Sound practices a new approach for screening the eyes of those diagnosed with diabetes mellitus. It is called teleretinal imaging. This process takes about 15 or 20 minutes, does not require a patient's eyes to be dilated, and can be done in the Primary Care Clinic.

Diabetes mellitus is the leading cause of blindness and visual impairment for working age adults in the United States. Despite advancements made in treating such complications as diabetic retinopathy and macular edema, a patient diagnosed with diabetes is much more likely to suffer vision loss than a non-diabetic patient. Early detection is crucial in the prevention of blindness.

Currently, VAPugetSound treats more than 10,000 veterans with diabetes mellitus. The American Medical Association suggests an annual examination for diabetic veterans with no evidence of moderate or severe retinopathy. VA Puget Sound's Teleretinal Imaging Clinic can absorb some of that demand.

Anthony Trahan is VA Puget Sound's teleretinal imager. He acquires retinal images of diabetic patients through primary care referrals then sends them to an optometrist at another VA Medical Center within VISN 20 for an inter-facility consultation. The optometrist reads the images and makes the appropriate treatment and follow-up recommendations. The optometrist looks for hemorrhages, aneurysms, edema and other symptoms. Patient alerts are then sent to both the imager and the primary care provider.

Patient involvement and education is crucial with a diabetic diagnosis. Trahan



*Teleretinal Imager Anthony Trahan sits ready at the non-mydriatic camera.*

notes that his patients take notice, "especially when I show them the pictures on the screen...they are pretty excited to see their retinas," he said.

George Meers is an optometrist who reads images at Seattle division. He has seen his share of problematic retinas. "The majority of veterans imaged tend to have normal results, but two out of ten patients will have something wrong with their eyes," said Meers. "That may be because of complications with diabetes or because they are at higher risk for glaucoma." He added, "Depending on severity, we can see them in the eye clinic – sometimes that same day."

Trahan offers diabetic education to the patient during the imaging session and takes part in formal diabetic education classes. About half the patients he sees will have already attended these classes. "I like the fact that I can help patients out. It's rewarding when I can educate the patients about something they need to take care of," he said.

Recognition of the diabetic condition and moderating the lifestyle to prevent complications is the primary goal of teleretinal imaging. It has proven to be a very effective method of informing both the clinician and the patient of specific symptoms.

# Making a Difference

## Achieving Compliance Excellence Business Integrity At Its Best

Legislation was recently passed in response to an increasing number of corporate scandals dominating society today (e.g., Enron, WorldCom). In the healthcare industry, we have seen scandals involving HealthSouth, Tenet, HCA, and UnitedHealth Group among others. Most often, employees do not report violations for fear of retaliation or fear that corrective action would not be taken.

In an effort to avoid similar scandals, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) established the Compliance and Business Integrity Program (CBI). It has evolved in the last eight years to advance VHA's culture of business integrity and accountability. VHA has a strong commitment to the Compliance and Business Integrity (CBI) program. Several agencies are monitoring our business practices including VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Office of Management & Budget (OMB), and the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Veterans Service Organizations, and third party payers. The standards for accountability are rigorous because preserving veterans' trust is the foundation of CBI's mission.

At VA Puget Sound Health Care System the director has overall responsibility for the program. The CBI Officer (CBIO) is responsible for the implementation, management and oversight of the program.

Requirements for monitoring and auditing for many of the elements of the revenue

cycle include clinical coding, first party billing and third party billing. Other areas consist of patient registration, insurance identification, insurance verification, and pre-certification among others.

Examples of high risk activities are:

- Erroneous Billing
- Unnecessary Services
- Fraudulent Coding
- Misrepresentation
- Employment Issues
- Refusal of Services
- False Certification
- Kickback
- Failure to Report

All employees have a responsibility to ensure compliance. The chain of command for reporting noncompliance are:

- 1.) Supervisor
- 2.) Higher level Manager
- 3.) Facility Compliance Officer
- 4.) The CBI Help Line (1-866-842-4357).

If employees are uncomfortable with following the steps identified above, they can contact the CBIO directly at any time: (206) 764-2115.

Compliance and business integrity training is available to all employees at:  
<http://education.puget-sound.med.va.gov/CEDProject/performax/redirect.asp>

VA Puget Sound Health Care System CBIO:  
M. Mercedes Gross, (206) 764-2115

## Veterans Birthday Dine-In at American Lake

Written by Leonard Blas

Nutrition & Food Section at American Lake and Seattle divisions provide meals to veterans undergoing medical treatment and those in long-term care three hundred sixty five days a year. These meals include the three basic meals as well as snacks and special feedings for those patients who need them.



At American Lake, one special event turns a routine meal into something much more meaningful and gives pleasure to both the nutrition staff and patients is the birthday recognition meal – a special birthday steak dinner. Dessert is an individually decorated birthday cake and ice cream. A birthday card completes the tray.

Veterans are often surprised and ask, "How did you know it was my birthday?" They often become teary eyed when someone has thought enough of them on their birthday to make them feel special. Nutrition & Food Services has always cultivated the philosophy to make each day a special day for veterans while they are in the care of VA Puget Sound and they demonstrate this philosophy consistently every day.

## THE POWER OF PURPOSE

### *Lewis County is the site for grief, then assistance*

Much of Western Washington was affected by the heavy rains in mid-December 2007. Most of us were fortunate to only suffer wet basements, muddy yards and slow commutes. But many residents of Lewis and Grays Harbor Counties suffered even more when levees were overrun by the record rainfall and homes were flooded. The area was declared a federal disaster area allowing residents to apply for federal aid.

On December 19th, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs and VA Puget Sound Health Care System offered in-person assistance to veterans and their families at Centralia College. Several dozen veterans and their family members came in to receive care and to register for benefits. Services available at the event from VA Puget Sound Health Care

“WE WERE ALL TOUCHED BY HIS HUMILITY AND HOPE AFTER SUCH DEVASTATION.”

System included flu shots, tetanus shots, pneumonia shots, pharmacy and primary health care services.

VA Puget Sound staff heard many difficult stories from the veterans. One veteran’s story that sticks with VA Puget Sound Nurse Executive Frankie Manning is the WWII veteran she met who “lost everything, including all of his medications. His property remains but nothing else, so no phone, personal effects or anything. He gets around with the aide of a walker and his elderly wife and he currently resides in a local motel. When we gave him his medicine he cried and was so grateful.” Ms. Manning

added, “We were all touched by his humility and hope after such devastation.”

VA Puget Sound and Washington Department of Veterans Affairs were joined at the event by Federal Emergency Management Agency, United Way, WorkSource, American Legion, Legal Assistance, Congressman Brian Baird’s office, Marine Service Corps, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Homeless Benefit Services and others.

During the event, Veterans were also able to receive assistance with clothing, food, mental health counseling and homeless services, amongst others services VA Puget Sound Health Care System wishes to thank Washington Department of Veterans Affairs for organizing this event and all of the other agencies for assisting these veterans in need.



*VA Puget Sound Nurse Executive Frankie Manning, RN talks with First Gentleman Mike Gregoire and Washington Department of Veterans Affairs Deputy Director Lourdes E. Alvarado-Ramos at the flood victim assistance event at Centralia Community College on December 19th.*

## Employees make baskets to help charities

For the past several years, a group of dedicated VA Puget Sound employees have been making gift baskets to raise money for charitable causes. Started by Denise Smith and Jeanette Sanchez at the American Lake division, the baskets are created and assembled by employees and raffled off during holiday times with the proceeds given to charities like a women’s shelter program and Fisher House.

Each basket had its own theme including coffee, poker night, candles and car racing. In an extra charitable twist, a raffle ticket for the baskets was also given in exchange for each can of non-perishable food donated. This year, 220 pounds of food were collected for a local food bank. Sadly, this is the last year the baskets are being made. Thank you to Denise, Jeanette and all of the employees who have made the baskets possible.



# What is Service Recovery?

by Cathy Davidson, Minority Veterans Coordinator

Service Recovery is not just a new buzz term. It means turning a negative experience into a positive one. Service Recovery means responding in an organized way to address veterans concerns about their health care delivery. Service recovery is not focused on complaint reduction, rather complaint management and resolution. It is a four-stage process:

- Identify failures, such as a service or benefit that was not met
- Resolve problems
- Classify and communicate failures
- Integrate results to improve overall service

Service recovery is important to VA Puget Sound because it speaks to the heart of our mission to care for veterans and is a crucial part of quality and customer service. Keeping and developing positive relationships with our veteran patients is also critical in terms of the bottom line. The average veteran generates approximately \$2572 in revenue yet it costs up to five times more to gain a customer than to keep a customer.



Additionally, veterans are more likely to share their negative experiences with others than they are to share positive ones. Service recovery efforts can facilitate recovering the confidence and loyalty of veterans. This process helps maintaining VA as veterans' provider of choice.

A well-trained staff is crucial to excellent customer service and essential to successful service recovery. Effective listening and excellent interpersonal skills are vital to customer service and service recovery. Ideal service recovery behaviors begin by connecting with veterans or fellow employees. Respecting the concerns raised and showing empathy and understanding reassures both patients and co-workers. If you don't know how to address the issue, find a person who can. For more information about service recovery, call Cathy Davidson at (206) 768-5363.

# Patient Safety

by Angelie Medina, Patient Safety Manager

The goal of patient safety is the reduction and prevention of harm to patients as a result of their care in our facility. The Patient Safety program is based on a systems approach to problem solving that focuses on prevention of harm, rather than punishment for reporting issues. Adverse events seldom occur for a single reason or because of one person's actions, but from a complex interaction of many components.

Patient Safety uses a multi-disciplinary team approach, known as root cause analysis to study adverse medical events and close calls ("near misses"). The goal is to find out what happened, why it happened, and what must be done to prevent it from happening again. There

are various patient safety tools used in proactive risk assessment and prevention. One such tool is a non-punitive learning program that gives VA employees a "safety valve" to confidentially report adverse events and close calls that for whatever reason, would not be reported elsewhere. Information gathered by these tools can be analyzed so that lessons learned can be shared across the system.

If you wish to learn more about the Patient Safety Program or have questions about a patient safety concern, please call the Patient Safety Manager at (206) 764-2287 or QI Department at (206) 764-2357. You can also email Angeli Medina, Patient Safety Manager at [angeli.medina@va.gov](mailto:angeli.medina@va.gov).

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