From the Director

Embracing excellence in everything we do

Every day I am amazed by the talent and dedication of the staff of VA Puget Sound. We have award winning doctors, nurses, social workers and staff who have dedicated their careers to our nation's heroes. Their passion and enthusiasm shows in the high quality of care provided here.

In addition to our amazing staff, I cannot thank enough the legions of volunteers that donate their time to give something back to our Veterans through their local VA medical center. Their enthusiasm and devotion to our Veterans is admirable and an inspiration to us all.

David A. Elizalde,

Director

Pressing Issues

Caring for all who have borne the battle: Women's Health

Women Veterans are now the fastest growing group of Veterans, accounting for approximately 11 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans. Currently, there are almost 2 million women Veterans of all eras with nearly 56,000 living in Washington State.

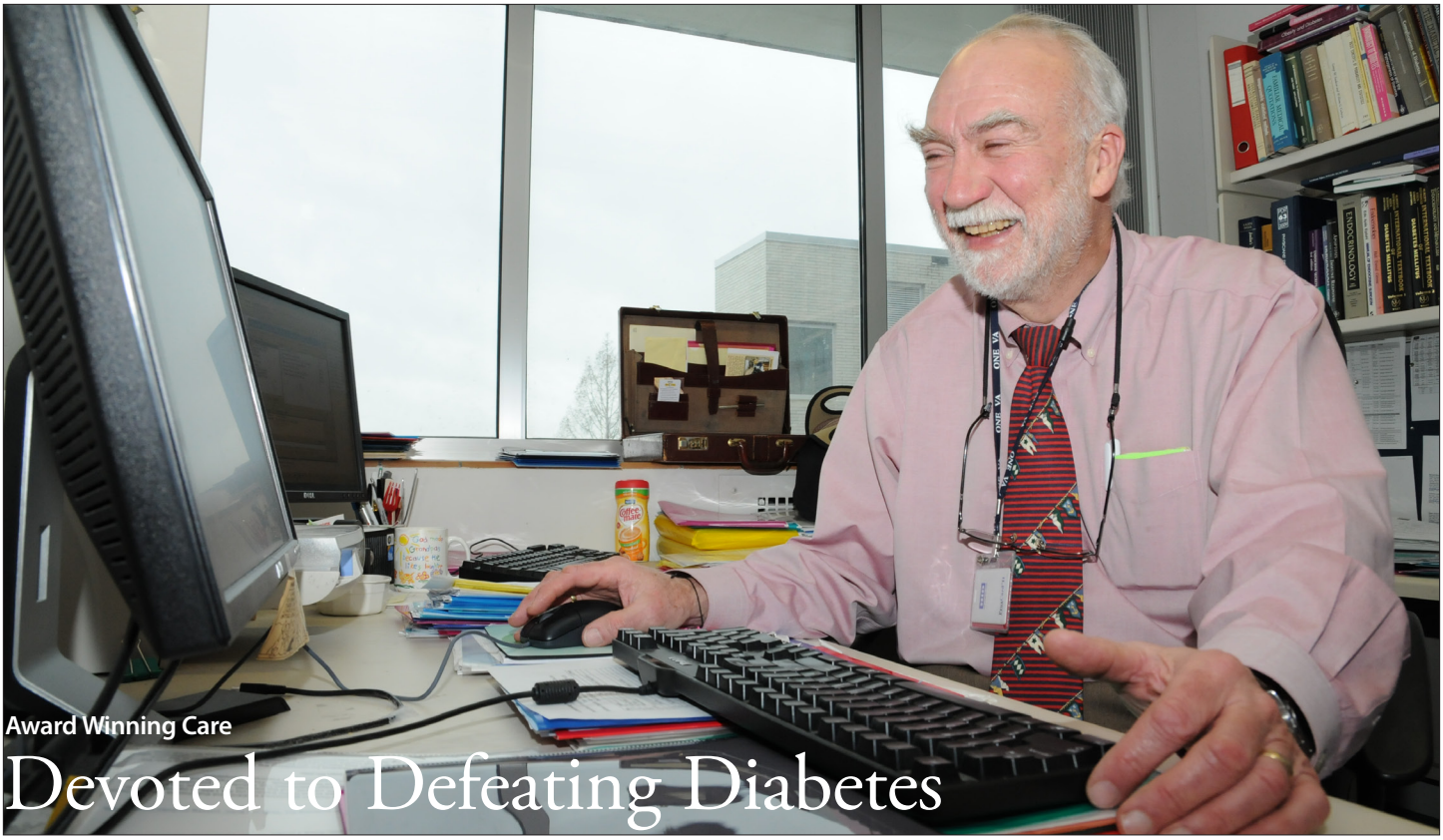
These numbers reflect a reality that includes having women on the front lines of battle and in harm's way more often than ever before.

At VA Puget Sound, each division has a dedicated womens clinic that provides care and services specifically tailored to the needs of women Veterans. This includes women's health services such as reproductive health screenings, pap smears, mammograms and maternity care.

In addition to medical services, VA Puget Sound expanded its mental health services to increase the availablity of military sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and substance abuse counselors while expanding outreach to homeless women Veterans.

"Over time, changes in warfighting doctrine dictate changes about where women serve within the battle space and the kinds of missions they are handed," said Eric K. Shinseki, Secretary of VA. "These doctrinal changes will continue to have an impact on women. So, it becomes [VA's] responsibility to anticipate those changes and prepare for women veterans who will have shaped and lived those changes."

Find out more about our Women's Clinic at
http://www.pugetsound.va.gov/services/women.asp



Award Winning Care

Devoted to Defeating Diabetes

Despite being identified more than 2,500 years ago, the fight against diabetes continues today. More than 25 million Americans have diabetes and the disease contributes to more than 200,000 deaths a year. Fortunately for Veterans living in the Pacific Northwest, there are physicians like Jerry Palmer looking for new and better ways to treat it.

Dr. Palmer, the 2011 American Diabetes Association Physician/Clinician of the Year, has worked in the fight against diabetes for nearly 40 years. He started the Diabetes Care Center at the University of Washington, one of the first clinics devoted solely to the treatment of diabetes, and was part of the study that proved glucose levels are linked to diabetes. It's for this dedication to researching and treating diabetes that Dr. Palmer will be recognized by the ADA.

"The American Diabetes Association is one of the bigger organizations in the country representing patients with diabetes," said Palmer. "Each year at the ADA scientific sessions they have a number of awards and one person from across the country is named the Physician/Clinician of the year – it's a person who has spent a lot of their career not only caring for people with diabetes, but as an advocate for patients with diabetes to try and do things to improve the well-being of people with diabetes."

Initially Dr. Palmer trained in endocrinology at the University of Washington in the 1970s, but quickly became interested in diabetes research which eventually led to his involvement in a groundbreaking diabetes study in the early 1980s.

"I was part of a big national study that tested how important blood sugar control was to the complications of diabetes, and the study showed unequivocally that there was a very strong relationship," he said. Prior to this study the relationship between diabetes control and the development of eye and kidney problems was very controversial. "When we got those results, I approached the chief of medicine at the University of Washington and since at that time, there was no diabetes care center at the university, he supported my proposal to design and begin one."

Furthermore, there was a growing population of patients with diabetes and few resources to directly support them. So when the opportunity arose for Palmer to start and oversee a clinic at the University of Washington, he jumped at the chance.

"We started a clinic for people with diabetes and it grew, and I really got very interested in not only what each individual with diabetes can do, but what we can do at a systems level for our patients," said Palmer.

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"I Do It For the Veterans"

When David Elizalde, director of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System, arrived for his first day on the job, he experienced a great first impression of the medical center when a volunteer "NaVAgator" greeted him upon his arrival and personally helped him find his way to his office.

That level of service was reinforced when a letter from a patient said, "I am grateful for the outstanding assistance of your volunteers. We have never been so impressed. Theresa Rodgers was our naVAgator and pleasantly engaged us in such a manner that we were both simply blown away. She removed any anxiety. I have experienced many VA facilities and this by far is truly above and beyond any and all medical centers I've encountered in my 69 years."

The letter caught the attention of Director Elizalde who presented Theresa Rodgers with a certificate for her excellent work representing the health care system and assisting Veterans and their families.

To learn more about how to volunteer, contact the VA Puget Sound Office of Voluntary Service at (206) 764-2195 or go online at: www.pugetsound.va.gov/giving

Award winning doctor recognized for lifetime of excellence

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While the clinic continued to grow, Palmer's research career also blossomed. He became the director of endocrinology at VA Puget Sound in 1989. Since then, he has become an internationally recognized expert in diabetes research through his role as the director of the Diabetes-Endocrinology Research Center at the University of Washington. He has seen the treatment of the disease become more sophisticated and effective even while the numbers of people who are being diagnosed are growing.

"It's rewarding in terms of how we have so much more to offer – we understand so much more about what is going on with diabetes," said Palmer. "If we hadn't had the obesity epidemic, it would have made a much greater difference, but unfortunately there are many more people with diabetes than we've ever had and it keeps going up every year. So in that way it's disappointing, we have lots more tools, lots of things we can do but on the other hand, the number of people who have diabetes, or who have pre-diabetes is increasing at an alarming rate – and it's a huge problem. It's not a disease you cure; it's a disease where you make the life of the person who has it as good as possible."

Although Palmer has received a phone call from the ADA president congratulating him, Palmer will not receive the award until the annual American Diabetes Association meetings in June.

"I think it means that other people have noticed some of the things I've done, and it's actually really nice," he said. "It's gratifying they thought that I was worthy of the award. I am sure there are lots and lots of other people around the country who are equally deserving, so I am thrilled to have been selected."

For more stories like this:
www.pugetsound.va.gov

Join the conversation!

If you aren't following us on Facebook and Twitter, you missed:

- Senator Patty Murray's visit to the Seattle Division,
- local news coverage of our nationally acclaimed Center for Limb Loss Prevention & Prosthetic Engineering research,
- "Rosie the Riveters" who shared their stories of working alongside men during World War II,
- local rockstar Duff McKagan and his band Loaded supporting local Veterans,
- and more!

You can find us at www.pugetsound.va.gov or on Facebook (facebook.com/vapugetsound) and Twitter (twitter.com/vapugetsound).

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VA HEALTH CARE | Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

VA Puget Sound Health Care System
Office of Public Affairs
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Our mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. Our vision is to continue to be the benchmark of excellence and value in health care and benefits by providing exemplary services that are both patient-centered and evidence-based. This care will be delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery and continuous improvement. It will emphasize prevention and population health and contribute to the Nation's well-being through education, research and service in national emergencies. For more information about the VA Puget Sound Health Care System, visit our homepage at www.pugetsound.va.gov.