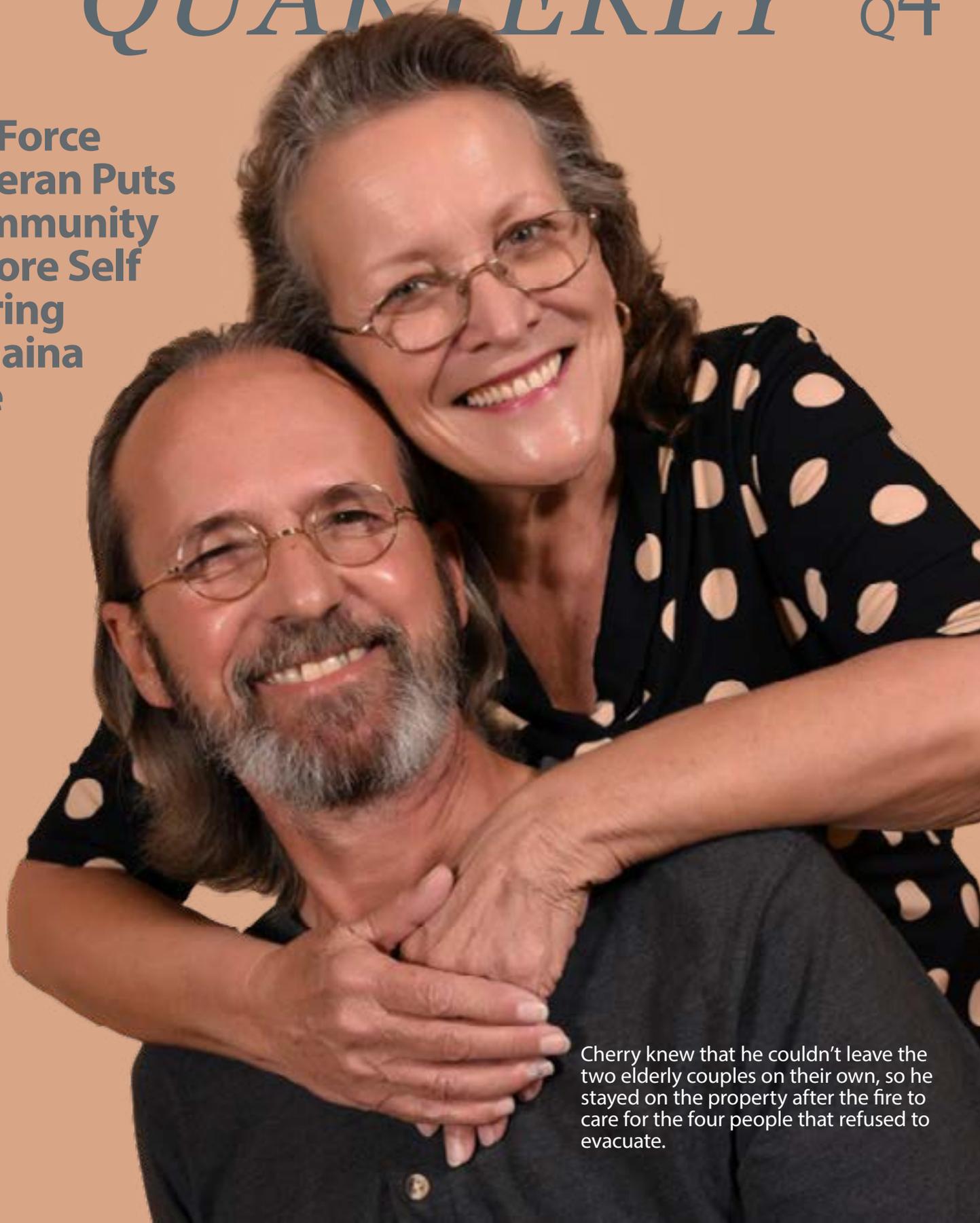




SIERRA PACIFIC QUARTERLY ²⁰²³ Q4

**Air Force
Veteran Puts
Community
Before Self
During
Lahaina
Fire**

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Cherry knew that he couldn't leave the two elderly couples on their own, so he stayed on the property after the fire to care for the four people that refused to evacuate.

Inside this Issue



VHA Welcomed Ada Clark as VISN 21 Network Director

The Department of Veterans Affairs is pleased to announce the appointment of Ada Clark as the new Director of the VA Sierra Pacific Network (VISN 21).

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Korean War POW Continues to Serve

Ramos and his men were attacked by the enemy in an area known as the Chosin Reservoir.

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Girl Scout Troop Volunteers at Maui VA Clinic

Troop 672 jumped in to help however they could at the Maui Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

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VHA Welcomed Jean Gurga as new Medical Center Director in Palo Alto

VA announced the appointment of Jean Gurga as Executive Medical Center Director for VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

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Leading with empathy: A Master Sergeant's story

Elizabeth Saltigerald, Veteran and extraordinary individual who serves as both a nurse with San Francisco VA Health Care System and a dedicated Master Sergeant in the Air Force Reserve.

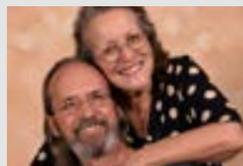
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Bringing New Technology to the Pacific Islands

Dr. Curtis Lowery won a VA Innovation Grant that will allow him to bring remote ultrasound technology to the Pacific Islands.

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Air Force Veteran Puts Community Before Self During Lahaina Fire

Martin Cherry went above and beyond in securing care for the residents of the building.

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Palo Alto/Stanford to Develop Cancer Center

VA Palo Alto Health Care and Stanford Medicine announced a collaboration on a joint cancer care and research center.

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Transforming the lives of Veterans with PTSD

Dr. Jennifer Mitchell was the lead author of the study "Nature Medicine" which showed that is effective in treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

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VA Menlo Park Hosts 100 Centennial Celebration

The VA Menlo Park 100 Centennial celebration held on August 19, 2023, exceeded all expectations as it brought together over 750 attendees.

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Powering Up for A Greener Future

Three solar-powered electric vehicle (EV) charging stations were delivered to VA Central California Health Care on June 28.

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Power Knees Returns Veteran Upright

61-year-old Army Veteran Allen Doolin tried out his new Power Knee prosthetic legs and is learning to walk again.

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VHA Welcomed Ada Clark as new VISN 21 Director

In August the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the appointment of Ada Clark as the new Director of VA Sierra Pacific Network (VISN 21) in Pleasant Hill, California. In this role, Ms. Clark oversees the operations of an integrated health care network spanning over 294,000 square miles, providing services to over 450,000 Veterans in seven major health care systems located in Nevada, central/northern California, Hawaii, the Philippines, and the vast Pacific region including Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern

Mariana Islands. VISN 21 has an operating budget of \$6.7 billion and over 22,800 employees.

"We are excited to bring Ms. Clark on board as the new Director of the VA Sierra Pacific Network," said RimaAnn Nelson, VHA Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations. "Her sound leadership qualities and proven experience will be valuable assets for our facilities, employees, volunteers, and most importantly, for the Veterans we are honored to serve. Ms. Clark's appointment is effective immediately.



Network Director's Corner

I am thrilled to announce the re-launch of our employee newsletter, Sierra Pacific Quarterly. This exciting addition to our communication channels is designed to keep you informed, engaged, and connected to the heartbeat of our organization.

Sierra Pacific Quarterly is your exclusive window into the latest happenings, updates, and insights across our network. Whether you're a long-time team member or a recent addition, this newsletter will be your go-to source for news, highlights, and valuable resources to enhance your experience with us.

What can you expect from Sierra Pacific Quarterly?

Insider Insights: Gain a deeper understanding of our company's mission, vision, and strategic initiatives. Get a sneak peek into the minds of our leadership team and learn about the direction we're headed.

Employee Spotlights: Discover the incredible talents and stories of your colleagues. We'll be featuring the unique contributions of our team members.

Upcoming Events: Stay in the loop about company events, workshops, training sessions, and more. Never miss an opportunity to connect, learn, and grow.

Fun and Engagement: Expect a dash of fun and positivity in each edition. We believe that a motivated and engaged workforce is a successful one, so we'll sprinkle in some games, challenges, and

recognition for your achievements.

Sierra Pacific Quarterly is your passport to staying informed, involved, and inspired. We're excited to embark on this journey with you and look forward to your active participation. Let's stay connected like never before!

Our recent VISN 21 Leadership Summit was a great success. Leadership from the VISN Office and all our VISN 21 facilities participated to collaborate and brainstorm ways to improve our Network as a whole and continue providing the best care possible to our Veterans. One of our strategies moving forward is to think more like a Network and work across our sites on specific goals and objectives, always keeping the Veteran in the center of everything we do.

The Summit also addressed the critical issues of access and workforce to ensure that we have the staff we need to provide greater access to care within our health care systems. By the conclusion of the summit, we formed eight work groups to focus on specific areas including hiring, labor mapping, compensation, Veteran enrollment and outreach, Veteran transportation, and referral coordination both within VA and with community providers.

These workgroups are chartered and have begun meeting; they will report to our VISN Executive Leadership Forum at least monthly until the objectives have been met. In this way, we can follow progress with the workgroups, provide input across the VISN, and meet the goals set at the Leadership Summit. We believe this

process will lead to greater access to care and promote both Veteran and staff satisfaction.

I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for the unwavering dedication and hard work of each and every one of you. It is because of each and every one of you that VISN 21 continues to thrive and achieve success.

Every day, your commitment and tireless efforts make a difference. Whether it's meeting tight deadlines, going the extra mile for our Veterans, or collaborating on innovative projects, your passion and professionalism shine through. You are the driving force behind our achievements.

VISN 21 would not be what it is without your incredible contributions. You are the core essence driving the organization forward, and your commitment fuels our growth and progress. We value your talents, your insights, and your teamwork, and we recognize the sacrifices you make to ensure our collective success.

As we move forward, let's remember that we are a family, a team, and a community that thrives because of each other. Together, there is no challenge too great, no goal too ambitious, and no milestone beyond our reach.

Sincerely,
Ada YC Clark, FACHE, MPH
Network Director
VA Sierra Pacific Network (VISN 21)

VISN Spotlights

Pain Management, Opioid Safety and Prescription Drug Monitoring Program
Kate Schopmeyer

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Chief Nursing Officer
Maisha Moore

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Business Implementation Manager (BIM)
Michael Grauer

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Through the night, Ramos lay bleeding in his foxhole, unable to escape. The next morning, Chinese forces swept the area, collecting the wounded soldiers and taking them as prisoners.

VISN 21 Leadership Summit



The main takeaway from the August 29-31 Summit was the importance of thinking and working like a network to better serve our Veterans and to ensure our Veterans receive the best possible care. Here are the key points and actions from the Summit:

-  **1. Think Like a Network:** The over arching principle is to think and act like a network. This means collaborating and coordinating efforts across different parts of the VA Sierra Pacific Network (VISN 21) system to improve service delivery for Veterans.
-  **2. Strategic Hiring:** One of the critical actions is to fully staff Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) and manage patient panels effectively. This involves ensuring that health care teams are adequately staffed to meet the needs of Veterans.
-  **3. Capacity and Transparency:** Understanding and having transparency on capacity is essential. This includes knowing how many appointments can be booked and having accurate labor mapping to determine staffing needs.
-  **4. Workload Management:** Despite significant growth in full time equivalent (FTE) employees, there is concern about the high spending on community care, but decreasing Veteran workload. This suggests the need to optimize resource allocation.
-  **5. Veteran-Centric Approach:** The primary focus should always be on what's best for the Veteran. This involves effective referral coordination, ensuring Veterans are educated about all their options, including community care and utilizing facilities/resources (Clinical Resource Hub, Clinical Contact Center) within the VISN for specialized or faster care.
-  **6. Summit Commitments:** Commitments made during the summit included forming inter-facility, VISN-wide workgroups to address the following areas: labor mapping, strategic hiring, market compensation, Veteran enrollment, Veteran outreach, transportation, referral coordination, and HR advisory/improvement.
-  **7. Tight Timelines:** To ensure immediate action and active engagement, the workgroups were given tight time lines to submit draft charters, present charters to VISN-wide leadership, and hold workgroup meetings. At minimum, projects brief monthly at the VISN 21 Executive Leadership Forum to update and seek feedback until completion

In summary, the main message from the Summit is about fostering a network mind-set and taking specific actions to improve the VISN as a system, ensure efficient resource allocation, and prioritize the well-being of Veterans. Collaboration and coordinated efforts across the VISN are key to achieving these goals in this new fiscal year.



Air Force Veteran Puts Community Before Self During Lahaina Fire

Some say that America has become polarized, and that people have forgotten the importance of being of service to their community. In the case of Air Force Veteran Martin Cherry, nothing could be further from the truth. At the time of the deadly wildfires on Maui, Cherry was working as the Resident Manager of Lahaina Roads Condominiums. The building is one of only two left standing on Front Street, at the edge of where the fire burned on the north end of town.

Although the building is still standing, there was enough damage done to it that engineers will have to come and assess the electrical wiring and plumbing before basic utilities could potentially be restored. When the fire was approaching, Cherry knew to alert all occupants of the building to evacuate and to secure the building. However, he wasn't counting on two elderly couples refusing to leave their units.

"The military taught me a lot of skills that I was able to use during this disaster," Cherry said. "More importantly, they taught me that you don't leave a man behind. Those people didn't have anyone else to look after them and they were in units without water or electricity. What else could I do but help?"

Cherry knew that he couldn't leave the two elderly couples on their own, so he stayed on the property after the fire to care for the four people that refused to evacuate. The residents shared a toilet that Cherry flushed with water from the community pool. They drank bottled water Cherry gathered from other units and kept the industrial water heater as potable backup. They made do with cans of chili and other foods that they could eat cold or warm up over a grill and they used Cherry's portable solar panels to charge their devices, though they had no cell service for the first week.

"It wasn't until day sixteen that I finally got the last residents to agree to leave the property," Cherry said. "Even then, it took several more days for the Red Cross and everyone else to secure a place for me to take them. It was day twenty-one when my wife and I were finally able to leave the property."

Cherry went above and beyond in securing care for the residents of the building, including waiting over eight hours at the Hyatt to speak with the

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and fill out paperwork to get the last couple the services they needed. Cherry was shocked when they were initially denied assistance, however, he re-filed paperwork after explaining that the units in Lahaina Roads Condominiums are not habitable without electricity and running water.

By the time Cherry left the building, both he and his wife Lana were experiencing symptoms from being in what Maui residents are calling "the zone." They wore masks when they could, but ash was on everything they touched for the entire 21 days that they were in the area, and the wind kicked up particulates that stuck to their skin, got in their eyes, and landed on their belongings. Cherry's Primary Care Doctor is Dr. Abelson of the Maui Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). Once Cherry finally left the burn zone after 21 days, he made sure to get evaluated and access VA resources to figure out what to do next.

"The people at the Maui VA clinic aren't there for duty sake," Cherry said. "I have never experienced such kindness and care. I don't just mean my doctor; I mean everyone I talked to from when I checked in to when I left. They have such compassion and concern."

VA staff will do all they can to assist Cherry as they have with other Veterans from the Lahaina area. For some, this means getting help finding housing through the homeless program. For others, it can mean picking up donated supplies. In the direct aftermath of the fire, Veterans without homes were showering at the CBOC as well. For everyone from Lahaina, it will be a long road to recovery.

"A lot of our community lost a lot more than I did," Cherry said. "I hear their stories and I'm devastated by how heartbreaking they are and by how much some people lost."

Cherry experienced home fire loss in 1988 when he was living in Texas. However, he says that losing things doesn't compare to losing loved ones, including your entire existence. He doesn't reflect on what he lost, only that he was lucky he didn't lose any loved ones. Cherry is humble, and he tends towards optimism. Some of this may be credited to his father Wayne Cherry, who



Martin Cherry, 65, and his wife Lana, 70, were residents of the Lahaina Roads Condominiums at the time of the wildfires that broke out August 8, 2023, which destroyed most of the town of Lahaina. Martin Cherry was the Resident Manager of the condominium complex, and both husband and wife stayed after the fires to assist elderly residents who refused to leave.

served in the Air Force for 23 years. This meant that Cherry grew up on military bases around the world -in fact he was born on a military base in Morocco! He says there is a sense of resilience that comes from being a "military brat."

Although Cherry grew up all over the world, he came to Hawaii in 2013 because he loved the sense of community and connectedness that he saw in Hawaiian life. He and his wife had been wanting to move into Lahaina since they came to Hawaii because his wife Lana is an artist and part of the Lahaina Art Society. Cherry took the job at Lahaina Roads Condominiums in June of this year, and he and his wife were excited to

move into the building and finally be part of the Old Lahaina Town. Two months after they got their wish, wildfires swept the town.

"I guess most people thought I'd been at the job longer, when they saw how concerned I was for the residents," said Cherry. "But I tell them, I just did what any decent human being would do in the same position."

Despite his humble protests when people call him a hero, the fact remains that Cherry and his wife put themselves at enormous risk by staying in Lahaina after the fire. The police set up barricades on the roads, but people were still getting in. Some came to help, but others came to loot the buildings that stood empty. The health risk is also significant. By the time he and his wife left, they both had rashes and coughs from the toxic chemicals in the air and on every surface.

"I don't think I could have done it without my military training," Cherry said. "That discipline and presence of mind is how I was able to figure out what resources we had, and how to keep everyone safe and alive, as best I could under the circumstances. I hope telling my story will help inspire some young people to join the military or some other Veterans to think about how useful our training really was."

The 42 units in Lahaina Roads Condominiums will need assessment and repair before they can be inhabited again. Like so many now, Cherry is in a hotel room while trying to secure a place to rent. However, he says that the Lahaina Art Society will be putting on shows again soon at the Cannery Mall, at 1221 Honoapiliani Hwy in Lahaina. Much of what was lost in the Lahaina fire can never be replaced, but many are committed to continuing traditions that can be continued and resurrecting what can be restored so that all is not lost forever.

Maui Veterans who need assistance from the VA can call: 1-800-214-1306.

Korean War POW Continues to Serve

Each year on the third Friday of September, we honor the Prisoners of War who suffered under enemy captivity and remember those who are still Missing in Action. Eugene Ramos is a local Veteran who spent over 2 years as a P.O.W. in Korea and returned home to continue serving his country and his fellow Veterans.

Ramos joined the Army in 1950 at age 18 and was trained to repair tanks and ordinance equipment. After Ramos reached his first duty station in Guam, war broke out on the Korean peninsula. He was deployed and assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division as a machine gunner.

Ramos and his infantry division spent four long months marching across South Korea, from Busan to Seoul, to a point known as the Kansas line. Nearing the end of his first deployment, Ramos and his men were attacked by the enemy in an area known as the Chosin Reservoir. They were ordered to hunker down and prepare to hold the line, no matter the cost.

"At that point, I had been there a day shy of six months," stated Ramos. "All I needed to do was set up my machine gun and stand by until the morning," said Ramos. "Then I would go on my R&R."

Unfortunately, Ramos never made it to his rest and recovery time. That night, the Chinese forces advanced upon the line his division was holding. Initially he thought that the attack was happening further down the line, but Ramos began to hear an unusual noise just several feet ahead of him—the cutting of barbed wire.

"I looked down past our barrier, and I saw the enemy in front of the barbed wire fencing," said Ramos.

Without hesitation, Ramos opened fire with his machine gun, rapidly unleashing nearly 250 rounds into the darkness, towards what he rightfully identified as a threat.

"I fired several boxes of ammunition toward the enemy," said Ramos. "That went on for a while because once I opened fire, everyone began firing as well."

Once he had exhausted his ammunition, Ramos threw hand grenades as the enemy approached the line. Knowing that the area would soon be overrun, Ramos prepared to go down fighting. The last grenade was thrown at an enemy so close that the explosion sent shards of shrapnel into Ramos' body, wounding him. In the fighting, Ramos had also been shot through the arm.

Through the night, Ramos lay bleeding in his foxhole, unable to escape. The next morning,



Eugene Ramos, US Army, POW, Veteran who spent over two years as a prisoner of war in Korea and returned home to continue serving his country and his fellow Veterans at the Korean War Memorial in Washington, DC.

Chinese forces swept the area, collecting the wounded soldiers and taking them as prisoners.

"They tied us arm-to-arm in a single file column," said Ramos. "They had us march all the way to their labor camps." Injured and exhausted, Ramos had one motivation during the taxing journey to the camps – staying alive.

"Anyone who fell out was thrown into a ditch and killed," said Ramos. "Throughout the trip, the marching would stop, we'd hear a gunshot soon after and then the marching would continue."

After reaching their destination, the true horrors of captivity set in.

Ramos endured the coldest winter of his life. He and his fellow captives spent their days cold, hungry and in silence. Every day he was expected to cut and gather wood from morning until night.

In the evening, the prisoners lined up for chow where they were served what Ramos described as soupy rice. "They'd boil just a few cups of rice and add it to a giant pot of water," he said. "That's all they'd provide for the hundreds of us imprisoned there."

Soldiers were forced to wear lice-infested clothing and sleep on floors with no bedding. Their living quarters were overcrowded and soldiers had to sleep curled up on their sides just so there was enough space for everyone to lay down at night.



“They were trying to brainwash us,” said Ramos. “They hoped I would turn on my country, but I never did.”

Afterwards, they would have to make positive comments about what they had seen, or else endure the torture chamber. This was a small box with holes that would drip water on the prisoner for days at a time. They would receive no food, and the box would be rotated so that the captive could never sit comfortably or rest.

Ramos spent over two years as a P.O.W. before finally being liberated in August of 1953. He left the U.S. as a fully healthy and functional young soldier and returned as a 97-pound man with limited mobility in his arm from the night he was wounded.

Throughout his time as a P.O.W., Ramos always stayed true to his fellow captives. He attributes his survival of those harsh years to his bond with his brothers and his determination to come home to his family.

Despite his time as a prisoner of war, Ramos was dedicated to continuing to serve the United States of America and his fellow Veterans. After returning to the U.S., Ramos stayed in the Army and retired after 22 years with an honorable discharge. At age 91, he still serves Veterans as the Nevada State Commander of the American Ex-Prisoners’ of War organization.

Ramos and the rest of the camp were also forced to watch communist propaganda. Prisoners were made to sit on planks of hard wood and watch videos about converting to communism for hours.

Palo Alto/Stanford to Develop Cancer Center



Department of Veterans Affairs leaders and Stanford Medicine executives believe their collaboration has the potential to expand specific cancer programs by integrating clinical trials into care. (Mark Kostich/GettyImage)

On June 30, 2023, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System and Stanford Medicine announced a collaboration on a project to potentially plan, build and operate a National Cancer Institute-designated joint cancer care and research center on the VA Palo Alto campus.

Stanford Medicine and Veterans Affairs (VA) leaders gathered at the Stanford School of Medicine to announce their signing of a memorandum of understanding to begin discussions that will have far-reaching implications for what is expected to be an increasing number of Bay Area Veterans seeking treatment.

“We deeply value our partnership with the VA and are grateful for the opportunities that we’ve had to serve our nation’s Veterans over the years,” said David Entwistle, Stanford Health Care president and CEO. “To be able to work together to serve our Veterans when they have given so much to us, when we owe them a great debt of gratitude, is the epitome of this.”

President Joe Biden’s signing of the PACT Act in August 2022, which will increase the number of Veterans seeking treatment for cancer, set the stage for the collaboration. The proposed project would support Biden’s Cancer Moonshot Initiative — which aims to cut the cancer death rate in half over the next 25 years — and related goals for prevention, earlier diagnosis, better treatments, and eliminating health care access inequities.

Shereef Elnahal, MD, VHA Under Secretary for Health, said the influx of Veterans via the PACT Act could represent “the largest expansion of Veterans’ benefits in history” and said the VA has consistently learned best practices from the collaboration between the VA Palo Alto Health Care System and Stanford Medicine.

“This is an announcement that solidifies that extraordinary relationship,” Elnahal said.

Leaders believe the project could expand specific cancer programs by integrating clinical trials into care, an important detail as the PACT Act opens the door to Veterans needing care for conditions related to exposure to airborne toxins and other environmental hazards.

“Stanford and VA Palo Alto employ some of the brightest clinicians and researchers who are poised to meet this mission together,” said Jean Gurga, interim medical center director, VA Palo Alto Health Care System. “The Veterans we serve deserve nothing less. And through this collaborative work, we can afford them and their families a brighter tomorrow.”

The proposed center would enhance cancer care for Veterans and the community at large. The Stanford School of Medicine’s dean, Lloyd Minor, MD, echoed the enthusiasm for a potentially transformative collaboration and referenced the success of the 20-year-old Stanford Cancer Institute which received NCI designation as a clinical cancer center in 2007.

“We see opportunities to elevate this crucial work and, in the process, set a new standard for cancer innovation,” Minor said. “I’m personally excited about the potential to contribute Stanford Medicine’s deep expertise in areas such as genomics, artificial intelligence, as well as our novel cancer engineering program, our innovative therapeutic and immunotherapy approaches, and our ground breaking clinical trials. All in the service of our Veterans and the broader community.”

The collaboration also has the possibility to advance health equity, Minor said: “It promises to expand access to clinical trials in underserved communities as well as research into the persistent health disparities in cancer outcomes.”

Paul King, president and CEO of Stanford Medicine Children’s Health, said the proposed joint cancer center and research center reflects a shared mission.

“It presents an opportunity to harness our strengths and redefine cancer care and research in a way that touches the lives of countless individuals, young and old,” he said. “We see the work happening here as a high tide that could potentially lift all boats, benefiting patients across the entire care continuum. I firmly believe that our shared potential will only be limited by our imagination.”

Elnahal said that giving those who served their country all possible treatment options by being connected directly to a research institution that regularly conducts clinical trials is the type of partnership that Veterans deserve.

Article courtesy of Mark Conley, Stanford Medicine.

VISN Spotlight

Pain Management, Opioid Safety and Prescription Drug Monitoring Program
Kate Schopmeyer, DPT



Fun fact about me:
I love to read and typically finish 2-3 books per month (fiction)

Area of Focus for the Service / Strategic Priorities

I support expansion of non-pharmacological clinical pain management services and focus on opioid safety in my oversight duties.

There are a lot of opportunities at VA, why did you choose this role?

I am passionate about The Big Picture for pain care. I enjoy educating and connecting people so we can work towards evidence-based, effective, team-driven health care for people living with chronic pain conditions. This role allows me to use several of my skills and strengths, and to promote my vision of cohesive, biopsychosocial, whole-person pain care throughout VISN 21.

Primary program challenges

Teleprescribing laws within the VA Connected Care world, and special purpose funding tracking

Top collaborators and purpose

- Clinical Resource Hub: connect Veterans to soonest and best pain care; TelePain Team is nearly complete
- TeleHealth: prescribing practices for the practice of telemedicine is complicated for controlled substances
- Whole Health/CIH: biopsychosocial pain care includes whole person care and non-pharm treatment options
- SUD/Harm Reduction: no wrong door for substance use disorder, and often that door overlaps with pain management
- Primary Care: the stepped care model for pain management starts with primary care
- Pharmacy: aligns closely with tasks and priorities overseen by national pharmacy program offices
- BIM: care in the community oversight for safe controlled substance prescribing to Veterans
- Veterans Experience: voice of the Veteran should inform pain

What is important for other programs to know AND when you should reach out to us:

please reach out if you have any questions about treating pain in our Veterans!

Girl Scout Troop Volunteers at Maui VA Clinic



In August of 2023, devastating wildfires swept through Maui and destroyed much of the historic town of Lahaina. Many people watched the news and wished they could do something, but Girl Scout Troop 672 didn't just wish; they began fundraising and making concrete plans to help. Troop leader Rebecca Adams works for the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS), so the troop decided to focus on a way to help Veterans affected by the wildfires.

"The troop is comprised of all military affiliated children," said Troop 672 Leader and VAPIHCS Research Assistant Rebecca Adams. "Their caregivers come from different services, but they're all connected to a branch of the military."

Approximately 12,000 people were displaced following the wildfires. This has been devastating for Maui, where housing was scarce before. With 12,000 people now looking for homes or hoping to rebuild homes they lost, housing is scarcer than it has ever been. Many people have found themselves in hotel rooms, and they may have to stay in them for the foreseeable future. As if staying somewhere with no kitchen wasn't bad enough, these people will have to rebuild their entire lives from nothing. During all this, Troop 672 jumped in to help however they could at the Maui Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC).

"The girls spent a lot of time writing cards to Veterans," Adams said. "The cards will go into care packages of food that the CBOC will distribute to Veterans. It will be nice for them to know that people are thinking of them when they read the cards."

The troop also carried donations from Oahu to Maui. This proved to be a challenging endeavor since the donations were stored in boxes that were just a little bit too big for airline requirements. The girls carefully unpacked each box, and then re-packaged the donations into boxes that fit the airlines' required dimensions. Then, they took the first flight of the morning,

waking up at 4 a.m. to be sure they could get on the 6:45 a.m. flight to Maui.

"Michelle Kanehe from the Maui CBOC staff met us and let us in," Adams said. "From there, the girls had to unpack the donations boxes and start sorting them."

Donations of food and clothing are wonderful, and the outpouring of love and support that Maui has received is heartwarming. However, sorting donations is a time-consuming process. By helping to sort donations, Troop 672 saved the Maui CBOC staff a great deal of time. The girls even sorted the clothing by sizes so that it would be easier for Veterans to pick out donated items that they would like to have.

"Just getting things to Maui is hard right now," Adams said. "I know bringing the boxes helped, and they didn't just sort the donations we brought. They sorted all the donations in the Maui CBOC."

Center for Development and Civic Engagement Chief Schoen Safotu helped coordinate getting donations to the Girl Scouts, and Maui CBOC Chief Kristin Cordaro assisted in coordinating a good time for them to come. In addition to writing cards for Veterans and sorting donations, the Girl Scout troop also helped morale at the CBOC. Staff have been working very hard to do all they can for Veterans on Maui. Seeing support from the community can serve to boost morale, and to let the staff know how much people care.

After the CBOC closed, the girls got to do a few other activities around the islands before flying out that night. Volunteers who go to Maui try to fly home each night to ensure that hotel rooms are free for displaced residents, as well as for tourists who bring money to the island. Troop 672 also presented a check to VAPIHCS on September 20, 2023, with a \$500 donation in which they had raised during their previous cookie season. If you would like to donate to assist Maui Veterans, you can [use this link](#). Veterans needing VA assistance can call 1-800-214-1306.



VISN Spotlight

Chief Nursing Officer - Maisha Moore



Area of Focus for the Service/Strategic Priorities

Advancing health by providing expanded access to care with a focus on quality, safety, and service. Nursing and Patient Care Services strategic planning, organizational assessment, program development, evaluation, policy development and execution.

There are a lot of opportunities at VA, why did you choose this role?

This role supports my ability to inform policy & strategic direction for nursing & patient care services while being able to mentor and coach executive leaders at the facilities.

Primary program challenges

A post pandemic workforce & embracing whole health; new to regional role; fully virtual staff engagement and balancing significant traveling with a heavy schedule.

Top collaborators and purpose

- **Medical providers:** my program requires a lot of collaboration with our providers to ensure optimal access for our Veterans and support of positive outcomes
 - **OII:** Currently with the Call Center we need their just in time support to ensure access for our main gateway for patients.
 - **Quality, Engineering, EMS, Police, HR, & Fiscal:** cannot function without them
- What is important for other programs to know AND when you should reach out**
- **My program covers nursing practice, social work, food and nutrition, chaplaincy, organizational development and wellness (DEI, Patient Experience, Patient Advocate)**

Fun fact about me:
I am very adventurous and will try most things once. I love music, reading, and traveling.



Are you eligible ?

People at risk for lung cancer who get screened are likely to catch 80% of lung cancer at an early stage when it is most curable.



The preceding painting is by Aoife Raitt, a high school student who is pursuing a College degree in Art. Aoife is donating her time to help VA and create art to inspire patients and providers to support preventive health care and cancer screening causes to save lives. [Learn more about Aoife's work.](#)

Did you know ?

In 2023, VISN 21 achieved full approval for CRRs at all sites to perform high quality Lung Cancer Screening. Each year, 5000-6000 low dose CT lung cancer screening exams are performed in VISN21, detecting over 100 suspicious "Category 4B" nodules which have a malignancy probability of >15% annually. Two large-scale clinical trials (National Lung Cancer Screening Trial [NLST] in the United States and the Netherlands-Leuven Longkanker Screenings

Onderzoek [NELSON] trial) reported more than 20% reductions in mortality for both men and women in screening populations.

How can you help?

- Support your facility LCS Coordinators !
- Encourage eligible patients to learn more !
- Get the word out about VISN21's LCS services.

[Read How Radiology is Making a Difference to Save Lives from Cancer.](#)

Transforming the lives of Veterans with PTSD



Dr. Jennifer Mitchell, Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development, was the lead author of a recently published study in "Nature Medicine" which showed that MDMA, a psychedelic drug, reduces symptoms and is effective among ethnically and racially diverse people with moderate to severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). By the

end of the study, 71.2% of participants no longer met the criteria for PTSD. The phase 3 trial included participants often under-represented in clinical trials, underscoring the importance of testing efficacy within the larger population. Noting the diversity of the study participants, "We worked long and hard to get a study population that's more in line with the general population with PTSD," Dr. Mitchell said. "This isn't just privileged people with lots of time and resources." These results are ground breaking suggesting that MDMA-assisted therapy may be effective as a treatment for a broader population of people with PTSD. [Read more about the clinical trial](#) and her [recent interview with the New York Times](#).

VHA's Under Secretary Dr. Shereef Elnahal launched a new podcast, "New Horizons in Health: Bringing Veteran Health Care into the Future"

and the inaugural episode featured SFVAHCS' Dr. Joshua Woolley (Psychiatrist, Mental Health Service) and his remarkable work in psychedelic-assisted therapies for Veterans with PTSD and other mental health conditions. On the future of these treatments, "figuring out how we can go from these clinical trials to more implementation effectiveness studies...within the VA framework is really important." [Listen to the podcast or watch the web series.](#)



Happy New Year... HRO Style



Sue Holly, Pharm.D., V21 HRO Program Lead

As we say goodbye to 2023, a new year is upon us. I frequently find myself reflecting on the past year, celebrating my professional and programmatic accomplishments, and acknowledging my remaining opportunities. With that information, I then look forward to what lies ahead, planning and strategizing about what projects to tackle and when. (This is an exercise in **accountability** – a tenet of High Reliability Organizations).

For FY23, some VISN accomplishments that HRO contributed to include the following. Quality Management hosted a

celebratory and educational week of VISN-wide events in October for National Health Care Quality Week, followed shortly thereafter by the Quality Management and Patient Safety Strategic Planning Summit. HRO education and information was widely shared throughout the VISN and beyond, including at the VISN 21 Emergency Management Summit, Health Informatics EHRM Summit, WSNC Aspiring Leaders and VISN Leadership Development programs, and at the VISN 21 Surgical Workgroup Summit. In March, we celebrated the first ever VISN 21 National HeRO Award winners from our Clinical Informatics team. Proudly, the first ever VISN 21 HRO Operational Plan was developed and from an opportunity identified therewithin, we formed the VISN 21 NCPS Team Training Workgroup that has been meeting bi-weekly since February. Additional accomplishments for our HRO program include participation in our VISN's quality review site visits, affectionately known as VCARE. On the national stage, VISN 21 HRO Program has been represented on several VHA

HRO workgroups and pilots including participation in the VHA HRO Maturity Matrix. Perhaps the event I am most proud of is the recently held Psychological Safety: Base Camp symposium. There were many lessons learned through the planning process, as well as insightful information gleaned from VISN 21 staff in the feedback portions. The biggest lesson learned is that staff want to talk about **psychological safety**. Rest assured, there will be more VISN-level symposiums to continue these discussions.

As for opportunities in the coming year, I look forward to partnering with you on continuing to hone in on our Four Foundational HRO Practices (huddling, leader rounding, visual management systems, and safety forums). I'm excited to update our HRO Operational Plan and continue to work on the VHA Priorities. Perhaps most importantly, I'm anxious to see the progress we make on improving our Zero Harm metrics and the quality and safe care we provide to our Veterans. P.S. How are you doing on your commitment to ensuring psychological safety?

Voluntary Leave Transfer Program

Under the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program employees may donate their annual leave directly to another employee who has a personal or family medical emergency. The applicant must exhaust all accrued leave (annual/ sick) and be in a Leave Without Pay Status for 24 consecutive hours.



Applicants who have been approved of the VLTP are posted on the V21 HR Resources SharePoint for others to view. Keep in mind this is a VISN 21 roster, and you may see employees from other facilities that are seeking donations. The VLTP SharePoint link is: [VISN 21 HR HUB - Voluntary Leave Program Recipients - Open VLTP Donation Requests \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

To apply for VLTP, submit a request through the WLB Leaf Portal at: [Resource Request - Worklife Benefits & Reasonable Accommodation | VISN 21 \(va.gov\)](#), select "Voluntary Leave Transfer Program – To Receive", complete the OPM630 (Supervisor approval is required) and upload your medical documentation for employee or family member's serious medical condition. Upon submission of your request, a WLB Specialist will process in the order received.

To donate leave to an eligible employee, submit a request through the WLB Leaf Portal at: [Resource Request - Worklife Benefits & Reasonable Accommodation | VISN 21 \(va.gov\)](#), select "Voluntary Leave Transfer Program – To Donate", complete the VA0239, sign and date. Donated leave is donated as Annual Leave in increments no less than 4 hours.

For Further information please reach out to the respective WLB Team members:
Fresno, Palo Alto – v21wlbteam1@va.gov
Las Vegas, Northern California, VISN – v21wlbteam2@va.gov
Hawaii, Reno, San Francisco – v21wlbteam3@va.gov

Informatics VISN and Facility Highlights

Informatics News

INFO²¹

From the Office
For the Office

CY 2022, Q4 National HeRO Award Winner:

V21 Clinical Informatics Team, REC ICC Palliative Care Lead, and Las Vegas VA Informatics and CLC/Palliative Care Teams collaborated on National Life-Sustaining Treatment process improvement in the EHR involving over 16,000 code status orders.

Patient Safety Highlight:

V21 Clinical Informatics Team, Primary Care ICC, and Pacific Islands and Northern California VA Clinical and Informatics Leadership collaborated on analysis of abnormal laboratory view alerts in CPRS and developed interventions to improve reliability of view alerts received by ordering providers.

VHA Welcomed Jean Gurga as new Director in Palo Alto

In July, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the appointment of Jean Jones Gurga as Executive Medical Center Director for VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) in Palo Alto, CA. In her new role, Ms. Gurga oversees a \$1.1 billion annual operating budget and leads over 7,000 staff and volunteers.

VAPAHCS has 800 operational beds spread between three inpatient divisions and four community outpatient clinics. In addition, VAPAHCS is home to a Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center, which is one of five facilities in the country designed to provide intensive rehabilitative care to Veterans and Servicemembers who experienced severe

injuries. Being a teaching hospital, VAPAHCS has strong partnerships with Stanford University School of Medicine, numerous academic affiliations in allied health programs, and other community health institutions.

"We are excited to welcome Ms. Gurga back to VISN 21 as the new Executive Medical Center Director of VA Palo Alto Health Care System. Given her 26 years of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) experience, I anticipate excellent leadership and continued commitment to America's heroes," said Ada Clark, Interim Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 21 Director.

Ms. Gurga most recently served as the Interim Executive Medical Center Director at VA



Palo Alto Health Care System. She previously served as the Executive Medical Center Director at Kansas City VA Medical Center. Ms. Gurga began her VHA career in 1996 as an Occupational Therapist in Alexandria, Louisiana. Prior to her current appointment, Ms. Gurga served in a broad range of administrative and executive management positions throughout VHA.



VA Menlo Park Hosts 100 Centennial Celebration

The VA Menlo Park 100 Centennial celebration held on August 19, 2023, exceeded all expectations as it brought together over 750 attendees to commemorate a century of service, sacrifice, and unity.

Esteemed guests Congresswoman Anna Eshoo and a representative from the Office of Congressman Kevin Mullin presented commendations to the health care system, while two Veterans expressed their deep gratitude as they shared their life-changing experiences on the VA Menlo Park campus.

The picturesque grounds of VA Menlo Park provided the ideal backdrop for this historic occasion, with attendees from various walks of life gathering to honor the legacy of a century of commitment to Veterans and their families. The event truly demonstrated the deep appreciation that the community holds for those who have served our nation.

Presentation of colors at the opening ceremony was provided by the U.S. Marine Corps, Headquarters Company, 23rd Regiment, with Songmee Connolly serenading guests with her rendition of the national anthem.

Congresswoman Anna Eshoo's heartfelt address underscored the importance of honoring

Veterans and acknowledged the ongoing efforts to provide support for them and their families. Her participation served as a testament to the significance of the event and its lasting impact on the community.

"I will always work to not only support the VA but all it represents, the Veterans and their families," said Congresswoman Anna Eshoo. "I believe that every American that has worn a uniform to defend our country should have the health services, the opportunities, and the care that they have really truly earned."

The celebration offered various activities for all ages to enjoy, including a resource fair, field games, and live music by local band, Crossing Dana. The car show featured an array of over 30 cars and motorcycles. Each vehicle not only represented a piece of history but also symbolized the unwavering spirit of patriotism and honor. One car and one motorcycle were awarded Best in Show, with one of the car clubs walking away with an award for Most Participation.

The VA Menlo Park 100 Centennial celebration was a resounding success, reaffirming the commitment of the community to honor and support Veterans and their families. The California Air National Guard's 129th Air Rescue Wing commanded by Colonel Victor Teal closed the event as its HC-130J Combat King II performed a fly over to the tune of America the Beautiful.

"As we celebrate this remarkable milestone, let us remember the past with reverence, embrace the present with gratitude, and step into the future with renewed determination. Here's to the next 100 years of extraordinary care, innovation, and service to our Veterans," said Jean J. Gurga, Executive Medical Center Director of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

View the full history of the VA Menlo Park at [History | VA Palo Alto Health Care | Veterans Affairs](#). Find raw footage and photos from the event at [Files | Adobe Creative Cloud](#).



VISN Spotlight

VISN 21 BIM - Michael Grauer

What is the BIM? Business Implementation Manager

Six program areas: Community Care, Enrollment/Eligibility, Decedent Affairs, Beneficiary Travel, VERA, and Revenue/Collections. Common theme: Administrative touch points for Patients to access care coupled with bringing in money to expand operations.

Area of Focus for the Service / Strategic Priorities

Defining our program, selecting appropriate actionable metrics, and working to build transparent value-added relations with Facility Staff, and Program Office leaders. Expanding collaboration and efforts to get it RIGHT for the Veteran. We have a complicated healthcare delivery system that requires ALL, and it is important to be meaningful with our actions and words.

There are a lot of opportunities at VA, why did you choose this role?

This role chose me.

Primary program challenges

The speed of change across all programs and how we reduce the noise vs. action the appropriate work.

Top collaborators and purpose:

VISN Program Offices approach: strong intersections with GPM, Fiscal, CNO, QM, Planning, CRH, CCC, Compliance, CAM. If you want to collaborate, please reach out!

What is important for other programs to know:

Our programs are broad and often overlap with Clinical functions, and or other VISN Stakeholders. I ask that we share the responsibilities and each tow the line! Together, we can accomplish more.

Success is measured by that sweet satisfaction when all stakeholders come to the table, ready to contribute, and you feel organic camaraderie take shape.



Leading with Empathy: A Master Sergeant's story

Within the depths of our great nation, amidst the uniformed heroes, lies a story of resilience and boundless compassion.

Meet Elizabeth Saltigerald, Veteran and extraordinary individual who serves as both a nurse with San Francisco VA Health Care System and a dedicated Master Sergeant in the Air Force Reserve where she serves as a medical technician. Influenced by her military service and personal experiences, Elizabeth's journey embodies dedication, empathy, and a commitment to the well-being of her fellow Veterans.

Inspired to volunteer for the Air Force Reserve in the aftermath of the tragic 9/11 attacks, Elizabeth began her military career in 2001 as a military police officer (MP) showcasing tremendous commitment and courage.

Injured while on Title 10 orders in Milwaukee, Saltigerald used that off time to return to school and pursue her bachelor's degree. Originally intent on majoring in criminal justice, which would build on her experience as a MP, a supervisor said to her, "the Air Force is going to pay for you to get a degree, you should go into nursing."

While visiting her local VA to submit an injury claim, she sat in the waiting area, watched, and made a decision.

"For me, it was a self-promise at that point. That's where I was going to work and hopefully make a little bit of a difference."

Having traversed the demanding journey of a service member, she possesses a unique understanding of the physical and emotional challenges faced by her fellow Veterans. Beginning her career as a spinal cord injury nurse, Elizabeth's experiences within the VA health care system as both a caregiver and a patient forged an unbreakable bond rooted in empathy.

"You've got to look at that person in the bed like 'that could be me!'" Saltigerald said. "We all have a connection to a servicemember that could potentially be in that bed. We need to treat them



Elizabeth Saltigerald. Wound, ostomy and continence nurse and team lead at San Francisco VA Health Care System.

as such."

This bond propels her to deliver exceptional care, ensuring the holistic well-being of the Veterans in her care, and championing their rights with determination.

Leading with empathy is not a surprise if one knows Elizabeth Saltigerald. Serving as a National VA Pride representative, empathy plays a large part in her role.

"This work is too important," Saltigerald said. "My daughter is a member of this community. I feel it is my duty, as a mother, to make things better."

Elizabeth Saltigerald's remarkable journey as a nurse and a devoted medical technician in the Air Force Reserve and VA showcases her commitment to the well-being of her fellow Veterans. Informed by her military service, she brings a unique perspective to her nursing practice, driven by empathy and a deep understanding of the challenges faced by those under her care. Her dual roles embody dedication, compassion, and an unyielding desire to make a positive impact on the lives of Veterans. Elizabeth's story serves as an inspiration, reminding us that through a single individual's unwavering commitment, we can ignite profound change. We are proud to call her a member of our team here at San Francisco VA Health Care System.



www.visn21.va.gov

Need to get the most accurate VA health and benefits information in a timely manner? [The BLUF](#) is a great way to accomplish that goal. The BLUF is your bottom line up front for all VA info. Produced by the VISN 19 Creative Task Force and hosted by Sarah Kallassy, [The BLUF](#) is a 3 minute or less video produced weekly.

Veteran Experience/ Customer Service/ Advocacy



Service Level Advocate Training Pacific Islands



PX Week Las Vegas



VISN 21 VEX Chiefs Strategic Planning Event Pleasant Hill



ELEVATE PX Dallas



GEMBA Fresno



PX Week Nor Cal



VISN 21 VIP POST Monterey



PX Week Reno

Clinical Contact Center



VA Health Connect (also known as the VISN 21 Clinical Contact Center) gives Veterans and their caregivers immediate, 24/7, on-demand access to clinical and scheduling services that address health care needs over the phone, video and, in the future, even via email or chat.

Core services Clinical Contact Centers connect Veterans to dedicated clinical and administrative contact center professionals who deliver the following four core services: Scheduling, Clinical Triage, Virtual Clinic Visits and Pharmacy Services.

Technology VA Health Connect harnesses state-of-the-art technology and software to improve Veteran access to care.

Key benefits A simpler way for Veterans, families and caregivers to connect with medical providers.

Improved resource utilization for Emergency Department, Urgent Care and Primary Care walk-in clinic visits.

Coordinated care using state-of-the-art technologies to improve Veterans' satisfaction and health outcomes.

Reduced potential Veteran and staff exposure to COVID-19, influenza (flu) and other communicable diseases.

To reach the VA Health Connect Clinical Contact Center, dial the number to your respective health care system:

VA Central California Health Care System - 559-225-

6100. For pharmacy choose option 1, then option 2. For scheduling choose option 2, then option 1. For clinical triage choose option 3.

VA Northern California Health Care System - 916-843-7000. For pharmacy choose option 1, then option 2. For scheduling choose option 2, then option 2. For clinical triage choose option 3.

VA Pacific Islands Health Care System - 800-214-1306. For pharmacy choose option 1, then option 2. For scheduling choose option 2, then option 2. For clinical triage choose option 3.

VA Palo Alto Health Care System - 650-493-5000. For pharmacy choose option 2, then option 2. For scheduling choose option 3, then option 2. For clinical triage choose option 4.

VA San Francisco Health Care System - 415-221-4810. For pharmacy choose option 1, then option 2. For scheduling choose option 2, then option 3. For clinical triage choose option 3.

VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System - 775-786-7200. For pharmacy choose option 1, then option 2. For scheduling choose option 2, then option 2. For clinical triage choose option 3.

VA Southern Nevada Health Care System - 702-791-9000. For pharmacy choose option 1, then option 2. For scheduling choose option 2, then option 2. For clinical triage choose option 3.

Powering Up for A Greener Future

In a bid to embrace sustainability, VA Central California Health Care System (VACCHCS) is paving the way toward a greener future. Three solar-powered electric vehicle (EV) charging stations were delivered to the campus on June 28. VACCHCS is also working to implement a composting program by the beginning of 2024 to comply with new state regulations.

The massive vehicle charging units, weighing a whopping 12,000 lbs. each and standing 21 feet high, are located in the parking lot near Fresno and Harvard Streets. Taneasha Roberts, VACCHCS Energy Engineer says, "With the capacity to charge four vehicles simultaneously, they'll be a game-changer for our eco-friendly fleet of government-issued vehicles. Initially, we are hoping to see possibly 10% in energy savings."

At the same time, the Green Environmental Management System (GEMS) Program at VACCHCS is working to implement a composting program to comply with new California laws. GEMS is collaborating on the initiative with Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) 21, which manages and oversees VACCHCS.



Three solar-powered electric vehicle (EV) charging stations were delivered to the campus on June 28. VACCHCS is also working to implement a composting program by the beginning of 2024 to comply with new state regulations.

The VISN 21 GEMS Manager Daniel Wood said, "The department 's most affected by this program will be Food and Nutrition Service, Environmental Management Service, and Canteen Service as they will need to divert food waste from the solid waste stream. To avoid fines, the program needs to be established by January 2024."

By complying with these regulations and adopting sustainable practices, VACCHCS aims to help create a healthier environment for our Veterans and our community.

Bringing New Technology to the Pacific Islands

Dr. Curtis Lowery, associate chief of staff for the department of research and development, has spent his life helping women. Before coming to the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS), he worked at the University of Arkansas, where he made significant advancements in Obstetrics-Gynecology (OB/GYN) care. Now, he's won a VA Innovation Grant that will allow him to bring remote ultrasound technology to the Pacific Islands.

"There is an unfortunate inequality in the distribution of care," Dr. Lowery said. "The more urban islands have greater access to technological equipment in health care, while less rural islands do not have access."

The new machine, called 'MELODY,' was originally developed by a French company. It is already being used in other countries, including Canada and France. However, the unit coming to VAPIHCS will be the first to be used in the United States. MELODY is a robotic telemedicine solution which allows an experienced doctor to operate ultrasound equipment remotely.

Unlike a blood pressure cuff or a scale, ultrasound equipment isn't easy for a novice to use. In fetal medicine, an experienced doctor can be the difference between life and death. It's not possible to have someone on every island in VAPIHCS who has the necessary experience. Therefore, it is often helpful to utilize telehealth modalities to get quality care

to patients in places like Saipan or American Samoa. VAPIHCS has already deployed Accessing Telehealth Through Local Area Stations (ATLAS) booths for health checkups, as well as Audiology booths that allow telehealth appointments with an Audiologist. MELODY is the next step in the efforts to allow accessibility of care to every Veteran in VAPIHCS, helping them get care closer to home instead of traveling to Honolulu for appointments.

"This is a technology that could have applications in rural areas of the mainland as well," Dr. Lowery

Continued on pg. 19



Dr. Curtis Lowery, associate chief of research and development at VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS), taken as the Doctor was reviewing a fetal ultrasound.



Dr. Curtis Lowery, associate chief of research and development at the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS), as part of a Telehealth conference.

said. "Patients in rural areas wouldn't need to drive for hours to get to a facility where the care they needed was available. If their local facility had MELODY, a doctor from somewhere else could log in to that machine and help the patient without anyone needed to travel."

MELODY isn't just for fetal ultrasounds. The machine can be used by a Cardiologist to perform an echo cardiogram, or by a Nephrologist to do a renal ultrasound. There are many different potential applications because a variety of specialists could operate the machine. In this way, Dr. Lowery hopes that Veterans will be able to access more aspects of specialist care without having to travel.

There are two parts to a MELODY unit. One part is the control Room, which will be installed on Oahu. The second part is the ultrasound machine itself, which is equipped with the remote access technology. For this test of the system, the ultrasound machine will be installed in the Hilo Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). If it meets expectations, the hope would be to install remote access ultrasound equipment on other islands in VAPIHCS in the future.

"Getting the VA Innovation grant was wonderful because the cost of the robot is significant," Dr. Lowery said. "I'm excited to be selected for the grant, and excited to see MELODY installed when it arrives."

Dr. Lowery is originally from Alabama, and he went

to medical school at the University of Alabama before doing a fellowship in Charleston, South Carolina. Most of his career was spent doing research at the University of Arkansas. However, the climate in the Southeastern United States shifted towards restrictions on women's health care that Dr. Lowery felt inhibited his ability to provide effective care to patients. When he decided to come out of retirement, he looked for somewhere with more favorable views. He first went to the University of Hawaii, but it didn't take long for him to be recruited to VAPIHCS.

Dr. Adam Robinson, director VAPIHCS, approached Dr. Lowery about working in the Research and Development Department, and Dr. Lowery was glad to accept. He is currently working on several exciting projects that have the potential to help Veterans in the Pacific Islands. Additionally, the Research and Development Department has two vacancies, and they hope to hire more qualified researchers to expand the department in the future. There will undoubtedly be more news on innovations coming from them in the future.

"With the development and application of newer and better technologies we can begin to equalize the delivery of care in the Pacific Islands," Lowery said. "I hope to assist in facilitating that process. I think there are many new tools, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) diagnostics programs, which will be useful tools to aid doctors of the future as we move towards a reality where technology augments and enhances more of the care process."

Of course, there is no substitute for the human touch. Dr. Lowery is excited for better equipment and better ways of delivering care, but he also says that there will never be a substitute for the insight and experience that a trained physician can provide. He thinks of technological advancements as something to be used in partnership with experienced physicians to provide a level of care that couldn't be achieved without both the human and the machine. When MELODY is installed in November of this year, VAPIHCS will get to test out one such partnership, and hopefully the results will provide the proof of concept needed to expand the program to other areas where such technology is needed.

Video:

[MELODY Technology](#)

'One View' Named Top 10 Promising Practice



Congratulations to Dr. Jennifer Marin and team on being selected as a top 10 Promising Practice across VHA at the 2023 VA Shark Tank competition!

- Jen Marin (Project Team Leader)
- Steve Flynn (Project Technical Implementation)
- Jeff Balsam (Project Innovation Specialist)
- Amy Robinson (Prior roles as project innovation specialist and technical implementation)
- Justin Iannello (Project Leadership Liaison)

One View, a unified dashboard created

to streamline the management of view alerts from multiple facilities. Providers are alerted to Veteran needs across multiple categories (e.g. abnormal lab results, imaging results, scheduled and completed consults), will join Diffusion of Excellence's next Facilitated Replication cohort, implementing their winning practice at VACO's National Clinical Resource Hub after receiving their winning Shark Tank bid.

[Learn more about One View.](#)

Power Knees Returns Veteran Upright

Forrest Gump famously said to Lt. Dan "You got new legs." But to see a Veteran on new legs is something to behold. With April being limb-loss awareness month, it's prophetic that 61-year-old Army Veteran Allen Doolin tried out his new Power Knee prosthetic legs and is learning to walk again.

Doolin, who says he rarely got sick, found his health going downhill quickly. He ultimately lost his legs through a progression of complications from diabetes. "I'm looking forward to working with these things," said Doolin. After taking his first steps, Doolin was excited. "I'm still getting used to being able to stand up at full height," he said. "But I can take regular steps, now like people do". Doolin knows that it will take practice to get used to walking again.

The Power Knee is "new to the market," he said. It has a motor-powered microprocessor knee (MPK) that provides active assistance. They enable amputees to maintain and regain mobility and participate in the daily activities they enjoy.

"This is a night and day difference from what I had before, said Doolin. "The knees do all the work". After walking back and

forth on parallel bars, Doolin said he felt comfortable wearing them and being able to stand and walk again. "I'm looking forward to all this," said Doolin. "I want to be able to walk around the block, go to the store, and shop. It truly is a momentous occasion."

Kristine Parker, VASNHS Chief of Prosthetics, said, "the amputee care team of Jessica Blackwell, Andrea Blin, and Dr. Eric Aguilar did a fabulous job getting him prepared for this moment." Doolin's kinesio-therapist, social worker, and physiatrist, respectively, had worked months to ensure he was ready for today. Along with composite worker Vincent Reeves who fabricated the socket and Ryan King, the prosthetist fitting Doolin's prosthesis, "it was, truly, and herculean team effort," said Parker.

The MPK added power gives you the opportunity for better symmetry and more natural motion according to the manufacturer's website. While the technical aspects of biomechanical systems, percentages of flexion, and specifications are impressive. Doolin recognizes that learning to walk freely on new legs will be a process. "I'm sure it'll take days



or weeks, 'till I'm comfortable," said Doolin. "I want to get to the point where I don't even need a walker anymore, and not be reliant on others."

This opportunity gives his freedom, again. "It's right in front of me", said Doolin. "It's not like a light at the end of the tunnel. It's here now". He displayed so much motivation as he, simply, walked back and forth.



VA



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