

VETERANS' health *matters*

VOLUME 2, 2010

TELE- VETERAN ABOUT RURAL HEALTH

One in every three Veterans of almost eight million enrolled in the VA Health Care System lives in a rural area. While VA has many projects that are expanding health care to all areas of the nation, some of these Veterans live too far away from clinics and are unable to make the long drive. This is where VHA Office of Rural Health (ORH) services can be of help.

The ORH makes rural Veterans a top priority with Outreach Clinics that provide physical and mental health in rural areas where the number of Veterans is low and building a clinic might be too expensive.

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New Scholarship for the Children of Fallen Service Members Benefit Honors Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry

The children of military personnel who died in the line of duty since Sept. 11, 2001 can apply for an educational scholarship similar to the new Post-9/11 GI Bill. Benefits are retroactive to Aug. 1, 2009.

The scholarship, which is administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs, is named after Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry, 28, a Texas native who died in Iraq in 2006 while disarming an explosive. He was survived by three young children.

“The Fry scholarship represents this nation’s solemn commitment to care for children whose mothers and fathers paid the ultimate price for our country,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki.

VA began accepting applications for the Fry scholarship on May 1, 2010. For more information or assistance applying, call toll-free 1-888-GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551), or visit the VA GI Bill Web site at www.gibill.va.gov.

VA estimates nearly 1,500 children will receive benefits under the Fry scholarship program in 2010. Recipients generally have 15 years to use their benefits, beginning on their 18th birthday.

Two VISN 21 Directors Are Recognized by the President

Each year the president honors an exclusive group of top senior executives as prime examples of dedication to good government by awarding them the Distinguished Executive Presidential Rank



Lisa Freeman



Al Perry

Award. In a recent Washington, DC, ceremony, Lisa Freeman, the Director of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, and Al Perry, Director of the Central California Health Care System, were two of a handful of government executives to receive this distinguished award.

Less than one percent of government employees ever receive the Distinguished Executive Presidential Rank Award. Ms. Freeman and Mr. Perry, judged on their leadership qualities and performance results, were nominated by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, evaluated by boards of private citizens, and approved by the president.

“Ms. Freeman and Mr. Perry are truly outstanding leaders who consistently demonstrate strength, integrity, industry, and a relentless commitment to public service,” said Sheila Cullen, Director of the Sierra Pacific Network 21. “Through their personal conduct and results-oriented leadership, they have earned and kept a high degree of public confidence and trust.”

The 2009 Award Banquet in Washington, DC, attracted a distinguished list of public servants, including Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who delivered the keynote address, as well as deputy secretaries from the departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs, and the directors of the National Security Agency, the Office of Personnel Management, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and many others.

Ms. Freeman and Mr. Perry join the ranks of two other Distinguished Executive Presidential Rank Award Recipients from VISN 21, Ms. Sheila Cullen, Director of VISN 21, and Ms. Suzanne Will, Regional Counsel for VISN 21.

VA Health Information Technology Improves Quality of Health Care While Reducing Costs

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs has shown that health information technology provides improved quality of health care and substantial cost savings, according to a study in the public health journal *Health Affairs*. The use of technology lowered costs while producing improvements in quality, safety, and patient satisfaction.

“VA has seen its investment in health information technology pay off for Veterans and taxpayers for many years, and this study provides positive evidence for this correlation,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “The benefits have exceeded costs, proving that the implementation of secure, efficient systems of electronic records is a good idea for all our citizens.”

The study, which covered a 10-year period between 1997 and 2007, found that VA’s health IT investment during the period was \$4 billion, while savings were more than \$7 billion. The authors noted that most of the savings are in areas that also improve quality, safety, and patient satisfaction.

More than 86 percent of the savings were due to eliminating duplicated tests and reducing medical errors. The rest of the savings came from lower operating expenses and reduced workload. The authors further noted that these were conservative estimates of net value, based on available literature and published studies.

VA has also begun piloting health record exchanges with the Department of Defense and private-sector providers. These programs are paving the way for the seamless, lifetime exchange of the health care records of Veterans, regardless of where they live.

VA has been using health IT systems for more than 20 years to improve medical outcomes and efficiency in delivering care. The use has grown to support the full range of patient care, including computerized patient records, bar-coded medications, radiological imaging, and laboratory and medication ordering.

SECRETARY SHINSEKI ANNOUNCES STAFFING BOOST WITH RECOVERY ACT FUNDS

Processing of Claims Targeted for Extra Personnel

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is putting Americans to work with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, while bolstering staffing at VA benefits offices where Veterans’ claims are processed.

“Our hiring has put about 2,300 people in jobs at these important local offices where staffs are working hard to process claims for eligible Veterans and their family members,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki.

The new hires do not directly decide Veterans claims, but they are involved in general office administrative work supporting the professional adjudicators making compensation or pension decisions or processing changes in Veterans benefits. This frees the more highly trained personnel to spend more time on their core activities.

VA expects the additional staffing will reduce the time it takes VA to process claims, meaning Veterans will receive benefits more quickly than they would otherwise.

The Recovery Act provided \$150 million for the program to hire and train the new staffers. VA has hired 500 new staff members as permanent employees. While Recovery Act funding for the temporary employees will expire in September 2010, the 2011 President’s budget includes funds to retain or replace these employees on a permanent basis and to hire more than 2,000 additional new processors.

VA FACILITY HIGHLIGHTS

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA



Northern California Health Care System opened a rural outreach clinic in Yreka, Calif. Local Veterans will not have to travel as far for health care.

Veterans in the Yreka area can now get primary care visits through Dr. Stephen Kolpacoff, a local HealthNet provider. Northern California HCS has partnered with him in Yreka to provide services nearer to Veterans' homes. At this outreach clinic, they will receive:

- * Primary care
- * Mental health care
- * Lab and routine X-ray services

The Yreka clinic added many services to address the health care needs of our rural Veterans. The clinic opened in January. Since then, more than 600 Veterans have signed up as patients.

"Northern California Health Care System's commitment is to provide the best quality care to Veterans. We plan to do this by reaching our Veterans where they live," said Brian J. O'Neill, MD, director. *"Our goal is to provide world-class health care and serve our Veterans in Northern California closer to their homes."*

PALO ALTO

VAPAHCS Launches Facebook!

VA Palo Alto Health Care System has launched Facebook. Already it has had more than 1,500 "fans" in only a couple of months.

A post came in last month from a Veteran who was having trouble getting an appointment from our Modesto Clinic. The World War II Veteran was 95 years old! That proves Facebook is for all ages. We contacted him that day with an appointment for the week that followed. Facebook provides an opportunity to address or answer questions and issues more quickly.

"I was one of the folks who came to Facebook kicking and screaming. Now I feel it's one of our most effective means of communication, among Veterans, community members, and employees. It's just fantastic!"

- Kerri Childress VAPAHCS Communications Officer

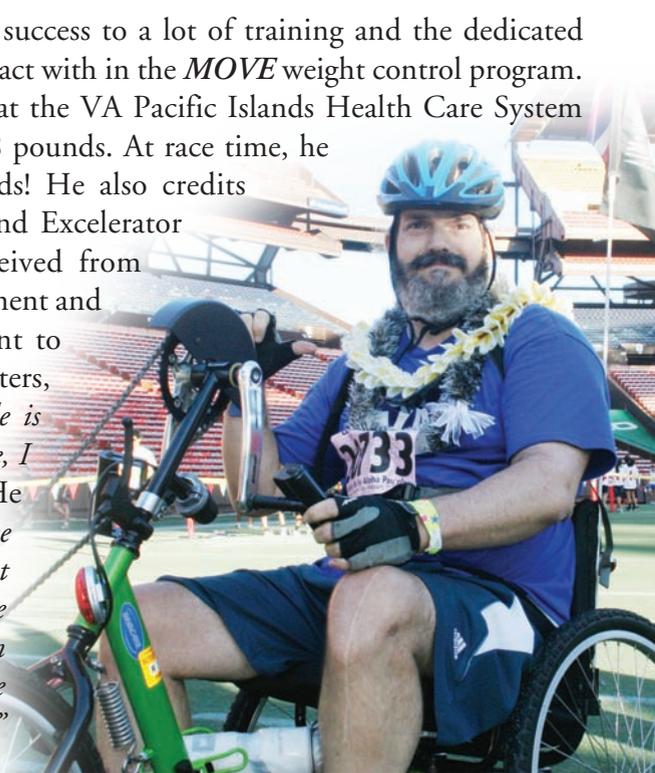
Become a member. Keep up on what's happening at VA and in the community for Veterans. You won't be sorry – and if you are, you just have to "unfan" us. Please give us a try. www.facebook.com/vapahcs

PACIFIC ISLANDS

Aloha Charity Run

The 8.1 mile Hawaii Aloha Charity Run was held on Feb. 15, 2010. More than 20,000 people took part in the race. This included one very special disabled Veteran, Lonnie Hicks, who entered the wheelchair/hand cycle division for the very first time. He came in second place!

Veteran Hicks credits his success to a lot of training and the dedicated employees he came in contact with in the *MOVE* weight control program. When he started *MOVE* at the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (PIHCS), he weighed 278 pounds. At race time, he weighed in at 239 pounds! He also credits the new Invacare, Top End Exceleator Hand Cycle that he received from PIHCS' prosthetic department and the VA. In a letter he sent to VA's Prosthetic Headquarters, he wrote, *"This hand cycle is freedom for me. When I ride, I want to go and go and go."* He also said, *"I could not have done the weight loss without the hand cycle and you (the VA) gave me my freedom back. I can never repay the debt of gratitude I now owe."*



CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

Two New Clinic Sites in Central California

On April 22, 2010, a Ground Breaking Ceremony was held for a new VA Community Outpatient Clinic. This one story building will be located at 40595 Westlake Drive in Oakhurst, Calif. It is scheduled to open in September of this year. The new clinic will serve over 3,000 mountain area Veterans. It will have 8,500 square feet and will house 18 treatment rooms and services. These include:

- * Primary care
- * Eye care
- * Pharmacy
- * Mental health care
- * Women's health services

Staff will include three physicians, a nurse practitioner, a social worker, a psychologist, and two patient-services assistants.

On May 3, 2010, the VA Castle Clinic transferred staff and services into a new building at 340 E. Yosemite Ave. in Merced, Calif. It is now named the Merced CBOC. This is an ideal site to meet the healthcare needs of more than 4,000 Merced and North Valley Veterans. They now have a shorter drive to receive their VA care. The Castle Clinic had been inside the Bloss Medical Center at the old Castle Air Force Base since 1999. The formal Ribbon Cutting event took place June 2, 2010.

SAN FRANCISCO

Vision Services at Ukiah OPC

The Ukiah VA Community-based Outpatient Clinic now offers low vision services for Veterans that have impaired vision from:

- * Macular degeneration
- * Diabetic retinopathy
- * Glaucoma
- * Other problems that impair vision

These low vision aids may be prescribed:

- * Magnifiers
- * Electronic items that enlarge objects
- * Telescopes
- * Other tools that can help with tasks of daily living

These new services will make it easier for Veterans of the North Bay to get treatment for their low vision problems. Veterans who live in Sonoma, Mendocino, Lake, and Humboldt Counties may use these services if they have a visual impairment. This includes being diagnosed as legally blind or having restricted side (peripheral) vision. It can also mean being unable to see better than 20/50 with glasses or contact lenses in the better eye.

Optometrist Marilyn Gilbreath, OD, provides these services. She is a diplomate of the Low Vision Section of the American Academy of Optometry and has been in practice in Ukiah for 17 years.

Veterans who want to find out more about the low vision services can call the Ukiah VA Clinic at (707) 468-7700.

SIERRA NEVADA

The VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS) provides care for Veterans in 21 counties of northern Nevada and northeastern California. These cover 116,000 square miles. About 120,000 Veterans live in this region.



Diamond View Outpatient Clinic

Two new sites have been added to VASNHCS. Both provide health care to Veterans who live in rural areas.

- * **VA Diamond View Outpatient Clinic.** This opened on May 3, 2010. It is at 110 Bella Way in Susanville, Calif., and serves Lassen, Plumas, and Modoc counties. These are north of Reno in northeastern California. The clinic offers non-emergent primary care, mental health, and support services during regular business hours.
- * **Rural Outreach Clinic in Winnemucca, Nev.** This provides health care to Veterans who live in highly rural areas of northeastern Nevada. Before this clinic opened, Veterans had to drive two to three hours to get care at another VA center.

TELE-VETERAN ABOUT RURAL HEALTH

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“Veterans give a very high rating to this new service. They are grateful for the convenience and value from getting care right in their homes,” said Craig Oswald, administrative officer to the Director of VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS).

VISN 21 recently opened three new outreach clinics in Yreka, Winnemucca, and Saipan, which include a new nurse practitioner recently hired from Rural Health funding.

Although rural health care services are now available, there is still the problem of making Veterans aware of these. Working with local community leaders, like Veteran Louis Bickford of Coulterville, Calif., has proven to work for outreach teams in the VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS). Veteran Bickford volunteers with the VFW Department of California, travelling to rural communities and working with Veteran organizations as a liaison between outreach teams and rural Veterans.

“I have found that a successful outreach program needs strong community partnership. We are lucky to have found such a willing and capable partner in Louis Bickford,” said Dr. Ian Tong, Medical Director of the VA Palo Alto Veterans Outreach Service, which has a mobile unit fully equipped to provide primary care to Veterans.



Rural VFW, Palo Alto, and Fresno Facilities work to pilot mobile telehealth clinic.

Along with outreach services, VA has pushed for newer technology and created programs for some Veterans that are just out of reach. An example is Telehealth, which provides in-home video and messaging devices to send and receive health data to and from a VA health care provider.

Teledermatology provides a nurse that goes to the Veterans’ home to take pictures of skin problems and send these via computer to a VA doctor for review.

Telemental health is one of the newest features in rural health that allows Veterans to connect via Web camera to a mental health care provider at a VA facility, giving a face-to-face interaction without the long drive to a clinic.

VA designated \$215 million to improve access and quality of care in rural areas throughout the nation. A portion of which went to VISN 21 where outreach and telehealth services in all of the health care systems in Nevada, California, and Hawaii serve rural Veterans. For more information about VHA Rural Health care, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov.



Survey for VA Health Services

What is it?

The 2010 Survey of Veteran Enrollees' Health and Reliance Upon VA. This is being taken by the VHA's Office of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health (ADUSH) for Policy and Research. It is an update to a national VHA survey of enrollees taken in years past.



What is it for?

To find out what health services enrollees use. This information is used to project how many Veterans will use health services, what services will be needed, and how much they will cost. The VHA uses this information for policy and budget decisions.

Who will be asked to take the survey?

A random sample of 42,000 Veterans enrolled in the VA system. About 2,000 Veterans from each VISN will be chosen. If you are chosen to take the survey, you will get a letter. This tells you about the survey and the contractor who will call you to take the survey on behalf of the VA. The call will take about 15 to 30 minutes. The survey started the week of May 24, 2010. Survey calls will be made into the month of August.

We need your support in this survey!

Your answers will help us ensure that we provide the best care possible, where it is needed, when it is needed, and by whom it is needed.

You can get past survey reports from www4.va.gov/healthpolicyplanning/reports1.asp

New Hotline for Homeless Veterans

1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838)

This is the new VA National Call Center for Homeless Veterans hotline. The hotline is intended to help homeless Veterans and their families, VA Medical Centers, federal, state and local partners, community agencies, service providers, and others in the community. Find out about VA homeless programs and mental health services in your area that can help you.

- * Call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to talk with a trained VA counselor.
- * Call for yourself or someone else.
- * The call is free and confidential.

What will happen when I call?

- * You will be connected to a trained VA staff member.
- * Hotline staff will conduct a brief screening to assess your needs.
- * Homeless Veterans will be connected with the Homeless Point of Contact at the nearest VA facility.
- * Family members and non-VA providers who call on behalf of a homeless Veteran will find out about homeless programs and services.
- * Contact information is needed so staff may follow-up.

RURAL HEALTH WORD SEARCH

ACCESS	HOME MESSAGING	SERVICES
CHALLENGE	OUTREACH	TELEHEALTH
DEVICES	QUALITY	TREATMENT
FOOT CARE	RURAL HEALTH	VITAL SIGNS

A T H K W H Y D T A Q U D C T
 Y I F O O T C A R E J H N G E
 T J R L I D E V I C E S N R L
 N G P L M Y G I J D E I B T E
 Y C A K S T F T D F G S W C H
 I U H C Y R T A I A N E L Z E
 Q L C R M E E L S W E C H L A
 U H A M Z A L S L T L I B R L
 T X E N W T E I B R L V Y S T
 S U R J I M H G U X A R S H H
 L H T W E E L N V E H E Z U L
 V K U M U N T S R J C S T J M
 P W O Q U T H G S C B X V E D
 M H A L Z B L N A Y L L W G A
 T G H T L A E H L A R U R I V

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Where to find us! * OPC = Outpatient Clinic

VA Central California Health Care System

VA Central California Health Care System

2615 E. Clinton Avenue
Fresno, CA 93703-2286
(559) 225-6100

VA South Valley OPC

1050 North Cherry Street
Tulare, CA 93274
(559) 684-8703

VA Castle OPC

3605 Hospital Road, Suite D
Atwater, CA 95301-5140
(209) 381-0105

NEW Merced OPC

340 E. Yosemite Avenue
Merced, CA 95340
(209) 381-0105

VA Northern California Health Care System

VA Sacramento Medical Center

10535 Hospital Way
Mather, CA 95655
(916) 843-7000

VA Martinez OPC

150 Muir Road
Martinez, CA 94553
(953) 372-2000

VA Redding OPC

351 Hartnell Avenue
Redding, CA 95926
(530) 879-5000

VA McClellan OPC

280 Cohasset Road
McClellan Park, CA 95652-1074
(916) 561-7400

VA Mare Island OPC

201 Walnut Ave.
Mare Island, CA 94592
(707) 562-8200

Oakland Behavioral Health Clinic

525 21st Street
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 587-3400

VA Oakland OPC

2221 Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 267-7800

VA Fairfield OPC

103 Bodin Circle, BLDG. 778
Travis AFB, CA 94535
(707) 437-1800

NEW VA Yreka Rural Clinic

101 E. Oberlin Road
Yreka, CA 96097
(530) 841-8500

NEW Yuba City Outreach Clinic

1231 Plumas Street
Yuba City, CA 95991
(530) 751-8455

VA Palo Alto Health Care System

VA Palo Alto Division
3801 Miranda Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290
(650) 493-5000

VA Menlo Park Division

795 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025
(650) 493-5000

VA Livermore Division

4951 Arroyo Road
Livermore, CA 94550
(935) 373-4700

VA Capitola OPC

1350 N. 41st Street Suite 102
Capitola, CA 95010
(831) 464-5519

VA Stockton OPC

500 W Hospital Road
Stockton, CA 95231
(209) 946-3400

VA Modesto OPC

1524 McHenry Blvd. Suite 315
Modesto, CA 95350
(209) 557-6200

VA Monterey OPC

3401 Engineer Lane
Seaside, CA 93955
(831) 883-3800

VA San Jose OPC

3401 Engineer Lane
Seaside, CA 93955
(408) 363-3011

VA Sonora OPC

13663 Mono Way
Sonora, CA 95370
(209) 588-2600

NEW VA Fremont OPC

39199 Liberty Street
Fremont, CA 94538
(510) 791-4001

San Francisco VA Medical Center

4150 Clement Street
San Francisco, CA 94121-1598
(515) 221-4810

Downtown S.F. VA OPC

401 3rd Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
(415) 551-7300

VA Eureka OPC

714 F Street
Eureka, CA 95501
(707) 442-5335

VA San Bruno OPC

1001 Sneath Lane
San Bruno, CA 94006
(650) 615-6000

VA Santa Rosa OPC

3841 Brickway Blvd.
Santa Rosa, CA 95403
(707) 569-2300

VA Ukiah OPC

630 Kings Court
Ukiah, CA 95482
(707) 468-7700

VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System

Ioannis A. Lougaris VA Medical Center

1000 Locust Street
Reno, NV 89502-2597
(775) 786-7200

VA Lahontan Valley OPC

345 West A Street
Fallon, NV 89406
(775) 428-6161

VA Sierra Foothills OPC

11985 Heritage Oak Place
Suite #1
Auburn, CA 95603
(530) 889-0872

VA Carson Valley OPC

925 Ironwood Drive, Suite 2102
Minden, NV 89423
(775) 786-7200 Ext. 4000

NEW VA Diamond View OPC

110 Bella Way
Susanville, CA 96130
(530) 251-4550

NEW Winnemucca Rural Outreach Clinic

Army 735 4th Street
Winnemucca, NV 89445
(877) 320-4990

VA Pacific Islands Health Care System

Spark M. Matsunaga VA Medical Center

459 Patterson Road
Honolulu, HI 96819
(808) 433-0600

VA PTSD Residential Rehabilitation Program

459 Patterson Road
Honolulu, HI 96819
(808) 433-0004

VA Maui OPC

203 Ho'ohanna Street, Suite 303
Kahului, HI 96732
(808) 871-2454

VA Hilo OPC

1285 Waiuanue Ave., Suite 211
Hilo, HI 96720
(808) 935-3781

VA Kona OPC

75-377 Hualalai Road
Kailua-Kona, HI 96740
(808) 329-0774

VA Kauai OPC

3-3367 Kuhio Hwy., Suite 200
Lihue, HI 96766
(808) 246-0497

VA Guam OPC

US Naval Hospital
Wing E-200 Box 7608
Agana Heights, GU 96919
(671) 472-7250

VA American Samoa OPC

Fitele Teo Army Reserve Building
Pago Pago, American Samoa
96799
(684) 699-3730

NEW VA Lanai Outreach Clinic

628-B Seventh Street
Lanai City, HI 96763
(808) 565-6423

NEW VA Saipan OPC

Marina Heights Business Park
P.O. Box 500938
Saipan, MP 96950
(670) 323-9000

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PSC 501
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