

# SIERRA PACIFIC

*Quarterly*

VISN 21 Newsletter

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VASNHS Mental Health Nurse Jaeryl Manuel provides U.S. Army Veteran Richard Walker a single-dose Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine during a pop-up point of dispensing clinic in North Las Vegas, Nev. in May 2021. Dozens of Veterans in the HUD/VASH program received their vaccination doses at the clinic with coordination from VASNHS social workers and peer support. "I got the vaccine because my mom is 84 years old and lives in a nursing home," said Walker. "If I want to see her, I have to get vaccinated so I don't put her life at risk."

Photo by John Archquette

## VA Las Vegas employee named Patient Experience Champion of the Quarter



Panthea Johnson, Patient Experience manager at Southern Nevada Healthcare System, accepts the VISN 21 Patient Experience Champion award, presented by Medical Center Director Bill Caron.

Panthea Johnson, Patient Experience manager at Southern Nevada Healthcare System, has been named the VISN 21 Patient Experience Champion of the Quarter (FY21 QTR1). Johnson has led by example to promote Veteran centeredness and excellent customer service.

Recipients of this award are recognized for: going above and beyond to provide service recovery; being a leader and role model; and demonstrating attributes such as commitment, professionalism, advocacy, and service.

Johnson was presented with this award on Friday, March 19, 2021, at the monthly VES Staff Meeting. She is the second proud owner of the prestigious "VISN 21 Patient Experience Champion" pin.

### Award finalists:

Panthea Johnson, Southern Nevada (recipient)

Ma. Clarita Singh, RPH, Manila OPC

Sandy Stierlin, Northern California

Kimberly Ranade, RNC-OB, BSN, Palo Alto

Cherry Vitorino, Pacific Islands

Maricel Bay, Sierra Nevada

Phila Cole, San Francisco

Dr. Ivance Pugoy, Central California

# VA Palo Alto doctors receive prestigious award

Two doctors at VA Palo Alto Health Care System are both being recognized by The Joint Commission and National Quality Forum (NQF) with the 2020 Eisenberg Award, a prestigious honor aimed at recognizing the best examples of individual, local and national efforts to improve patient safety and health care quality.

Dr. David Gaba is a staff anesthesiologist and director of the Patient Simulation Center of Innovation at VA Palo Alto Health Care System, who received the Individual Achievement award for his career as an educator, researcher, scholar, physician and institutional leader.

"I'm honored and humbled to receive this award and to be placed alongside many other recipients who I consider to be mentors and inspirations. I surely could not have achieved the accomplishments for which I am receiving the award without such forward-thinking support at VA Palo Alto," he said.

Gaba's innovations have led the field in invention, use and commercialization of modern mannequin-based simulation, adaptation of Crew Resource Management (CRM) from aviation to use within anesthesiology was adapted by Dr. Gaba's group in the late 1980s as part of simulation-based training, and the creation and promulgation of multi-event "cognitive aids" for real-time use in time-critical, life-threatening situations.

Dr. Elizabeth M. Oliva is an investigator at VA Palo Alto Health Care System's Center for Innovation and Implementation (Ci2i) and is the VA National Opioid Overdose Education and

Naloxone Distribution Coordinator. Oliva led VA Rapid Naloxone Initiative implementation efforts in 2018 with support from VA's Diffusion of Excellence program. The initiative was recognized for the National Level Innovation in Patient Safety and Quality award.



"Naloxone is used to reverse opioid overdose, and its timely administration during an overdose saves lives," she said. "VA is at the forefront of this fight, changing lives every day through the Rapid Naloxone Initiative, the Opioid Safety Initiative, Substance Use Disorder Treatment and our Whole Health approach to improving overall well-being."

This concerted approach has equipped 301,084 VA patients, 3,552 VA police officers and 1,095 AED cabinets with naloxone. VA's efforts have resulted in 2,083 opioid overdose reversals, with 136 additional opioid overdose reversals facilitated by VA police and 10 with AED cabinet

naloxone.

The patient safety awards program, launched in 2002, honors the late John M. Eisenberg, MD, MBA, former administrator of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), an impassioned advocate for health care quality improvement.

The achievements of each honoree will be featured in a special issue of The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety later this summer. The recipients were also recognized in a virtual awards presentation during the NQF Annual Conference in July 2021.

# Honolulu mayor visits VAPIHCS



Honolulu Mayor Rick Blangiardi, Chief of Staff Sam Moko, Director of Housing Anton Krucky, and Director of Department of Design and Construction Alex Kozlov visited the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System on Tuesday, June 22. Mayor Blangiardi (on the left in both photos) and staff met with VAPIHCS director Dr. Adam Robinson (right) and VA staff, who provided a detailed briefing on multiple topics that impact local Veterans.



# VA Southern Nevada holds inaugural summit to improve patient experience



**VASNHS' new Patient Experience Committee attended the inaugural Patient Experience Summit at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center April 29, 2021.**

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System commemorated Patient Experience Week by holding an inaugural Patient Experience Summit at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center April 29.

Co-hosted by the Veterans Experience Service and Public Affairs, the full-day event brought together the VASNHS' new Patient Experience Committee, which consists of clinical and administrative leaders and frontline staff, to focus on improvement in several areas.

"At VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, our motto is 'Here Every Day is Veterans Day,'" said Director/CEO William J. Caron. "We conducted this first-ever summit because of the importance of including the human experience in delivering quality and high-value health care."

Caron opened the summit by highlighting VASNHS' Veterans Experience Service staff and presenting each member with a patient experience superstar pin for their efforts in providing service recovery on the frontlines. "We do great work, but oftentimes we get an

individual who is upset and frustrated with the system," he said. "When this happens, our VES staff have to deescalate and try to find a way to say yes for those Veterans if feasible. They also review our patient survey data and work closely with services to make sure we're providing the best experience possible."

In addition to VES staff, Caron explained that every employee, volunteer, and Red Coat Ambassador is part of the patient experience. "Our satisfaction surveys are based on Veterans' perceptions of their interactions with our healthcare system, and much of that comes from how we made them feel. For example, were we welcoming? Did we listen and show empathy? And were their needs addressed?"

To illustrate and learn more about the patient experience from the Veteran's perspective, attendees participated in "Own the Moment" training. Then, they were provided an overview on the Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) as well as V-Signals and discussed how data can be used to improve the

patient experience.

"We recently conducted a facility self-assessment and discovered that using survey results to enhance the patient experience was our lowest scoring area out of six domains assessed," said Charles "Chuck" Ramey, VASNHS chief of Public Affairs and acting chief of Veterans Experience Service. "Our aspirational goal is to improve every SHEP measure tracked in SAIL (Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning) by one quintile. And, to do so, we need champions who are able to understand, interpret and communicate the data."

To turn information into action, summit participants divided into groups to review SHEP, V-Signals and All Employee  
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**Above: Director William J. Caron opens VA Southern Nevada's inaugural Patient Experience Summit at the North Las Vegas VAMC. The event brought the new Patient Experience Committee together to focus on improving the human experience in delivering quality and high-value health care.**



**Left: Executive leaders listen as Dr. Monica Rawlinson-Maynor, chief of Administrative Medicine, presents a series of initiatives to use survey data to improve patient satisfaction. Four groups presented projects and proposed more than 20 initiatives related to data use, communication, appointment flow and culture to improve the patient experience during the event. Photos by Kerry Gardner Jr.**

# VASNHS Patient Experience summit (cont.)

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Survey data, then developed a series of patient experience initiatives in the following areas: 1) using survey data to improve satisfaction; 2) synergizing communication to better inform and educate Veterans; 3) addressing gaps in scheduling and flow of appointments; and 4) promoting a patient-centered culture. To cap off the day, each group presented their project and proposed initiatives to VASNHS' executive leadership team for approval and feedback.

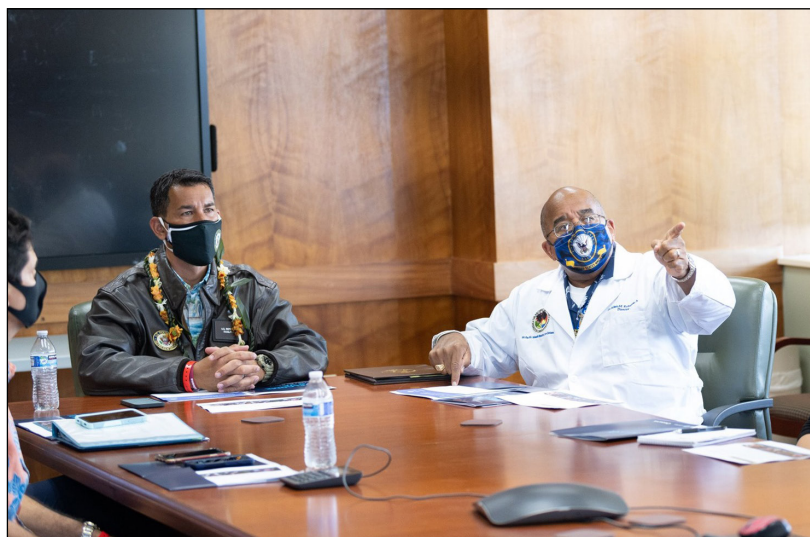
"The projects were a huge success with participants developing and presenting more than 20 local initiatives to improve the patient experience," Ramey said. "The next step will be for the workgroups to flesh out their proposals with action items and timelines. Then we will fold everything into our master patient experience action plan and continuously assess and measure results."

"The patient experience must be sustained nonstop and is based on a combination of touchpoints, from phone calls to parking, to prescriptions and all interactions with staff," Caron concluded. "By committing to a patient-centered culture and putting the needs of Veterans first, we not only live up to our I-CARE values, but we are also well-positioned to continue delivering timely and quality care that is second to none."



**Tami Biniaz, administrative assistant, Business Administration Service; Dr. Monica Rawlinson-Maynor, chief of Administrative Medicine; Panthea Johnson, customer service manager, Veterans Experience Service; and Dr. Heather Manor, acting chief of Behavioral Health, review SHEP and V-Signals results while working on a group project to use survey data to improve patient satisfaction during VA Southern Nevada's inaugural Patient Experience Summit at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center, April 29, 2021.**

# Congressional reps visit VAPIHCS



U.S. Representative Kai Kahele (above) visited the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System on Friday, April 9. Congresswoman Amata Coleman Radewagen (right) visited the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System Tuesday, May 25. Both met with Director Dr. Adam Robinson and discussed healthcare and other Veterans issues.



# She served; she's a Veteran!

In a collaborative effort to raise general awareness of VA's Women Veteran Services and Programs, three VISN 21 Health Care Systems created an ad campaign to educate women Veterans, other Veterans, Service Members and the community about gender-specific VA health care services. VA Northern California, VA Palo Alto and VA San Francisco partnered to make this campaign possible.

The campaign was the brainchild of Yolanda Hagen, Kimberly Ranade and Dr. Kaela Joseph, the Women Veteran Program managers at each of the health care systems involved.

After deliberating over location, cost and potential reach, the three agreed that San Francisco International Airport would have the most potential reach. With the support of VISN leadership, the VISN public affairs officer, VISN special populations program manager, and assistance from VA Northern

California webmaster Anthony Rivera, this ad was created and is now live in three locations at the San Francisco International Airport.

The "She Served, She is a Veteran!" ad showcases local women Veterans from each HCS, includes a QR code that directs to the external VHA Women's Health website, as well as provides access to the Women Veteran Call Center's number, offering a connecting point for any female Veteran regardless of geographical location.

The intended outcome is to educate women who have served in the Military that they are Veterans and they are entitled to VHA benefits and services.

Photos by Armenthis Lester



## Palo Alto Blind Center helps WWII Veteran despite pandemic

By Janie Salguero, MA COMS Blind Rehabilitation Specialist

Losing your vision can be a hard pill to swallow, but the Western Blind Rehabilitation Center (WBRC) helps many Veterans get back on the path to independence. Even during this pandemic, the WBRC is still serving our Veterans and taking all precautions while providing tailored plans to help them gain the skills needed to navigate their vision loss.

Just ask recently admitted Dorothy Ward, a WWII Veteran from Redding, California. She was in the Army Air Forces in 1940, where she actually served next to her own mother. Later, she became a firewoman in Tracy, California, an unusual job for a woman at the time. She has always been active in the community, whether she was spending time with her bowling team, planning dances at the local community center or serving as honor guard at the Veterans Home in Yountville, California.

This is her first time in the WBRC, after hearing nothing but good things from other Veterans. Her self-starter attitude helped her prepare for this new journey. She wasn't sure what she was getting into, but she found the WBRC to be much more than she expected.

"I learned a lot from the instructors. It's such a wonderful program," said Ward. "You don't have to rush. They have patience that we can learn from."

Ward participated in training for safe use of a four-wheel walker through the Mobility department, training with visual devices for hand-free tasks through the Visual Skills department,



Dorothy Ward, a WWII Veteran, receives care at the Western Blind Rehab Center.

and money identification, grooming and note-taking training through the Living Skills department. She even hand painted mugs and created buttons for her daughters through the Manual Skills department. Her leisure activities included playing Wii bowling with Recreation Therapy.

"Everyone that has a vision problem, they should come to a school like this; they would all benefit from it, and it would be very helpful," said Ward.

# Reno VA celebrates Nurses Month

by Shane Whitecloud, VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System

Being a nurse is not a profession for the faint of heart. They deal with life, death and everything in between. Nurses have an incredible opportunity to provide care that encompasses body, mind, emotion and spirit by being mindfully aware of everyone's unique needs. Combine that with the unique class of Veteran patients that are cared for at VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS), the nurses gain the added experience that comes with caring for our nation's heroes.

You may be asking yourself, "What is a nurse, and why is it considered to be one of the most satisfying, in-demand and overall best jobs in health care?"

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nurses are responsible for assisting physicians in administering patient care, providing advice, educating patients on a variety of medical conditions and giving advice to the patient as well as their family. Their duties and titles often depend on where they work and the patients that they work with, such as addiction nurses, critical care nurses, neonatal nurses, etc.

Shauna Cheney is a registered nurse at VASNHCS who was recently awarded the Daisy Award for her exceptional service. This award honors nurses who provide above-and-beyond compassionate care to patients and families and honorees are nominated by the patients themselves. She says, "It is important for me to fulfill my role as a nurse by caring for the whole person, because I want each of my patients to achieve their greatest potential for health and well-being. I hope the Veterans at the Sierra Nevada VA feel like they are cared for as family by the best health care team around."

When asked for her thoughts on receiving the Daisy Award during Nurses Appreciation Month, Cheney replied, "Receiving the Daisy Award was very touching and humbling. The award encompasses all that the providers, social workers, pharmacists, recreational therapists and administrative staff have done for me



**In May 2021, VA Sierra Nevada celebrated National Nurses Month, honoring the many VA nurses who make an enormous difference in the lives of Veterans every single day. Whether it's volunteer nurses like Therese Duggan, pictured, or the many full-time nurses employed by VA, nurses are a crucial part of Veterans' healthcare.**



## VA NURSES MONTH 2021 NURSES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

to be able to provide quality patient care. It takes a team. I am so grateful for all those at the VA that make the care of these Veterans possible."

Ed Hartman is not only a Registered Nurse, but a Veteran as well. Heeding the call after 9/11 and joining the military, Ed felt the need to continue his service afterward by coming to the Reno VA Medical Center. "I get to work with my fellow Veterans and hear their stories. I honestly tell people all the time that this is the best job I've ever had. The people that I work with are truly amazing," he says.

Acting Associate Director of Patient Care Services and Nurse Executive Beverly Johnson is also a licensed registered nurse and knows the reward is worth the everyday grind. "Nurses answer the call to serve our Veterans with courage and compassion. Think back to 2020 and look at what we achieved. I'm proud of all of our nurses," she says.

Johnson is referring to the period from March 2020 until current, where not only have our nursing staff had to be more flexible, they've also had to take on new roles due to staffing shortages and elevated response required at many off-campus sites. This also includes some out-of-state assignments when the call for assistance was raised through DEMPS, or Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System.

In the beginning, the long hours in an environment full of fear, anger and confusion left many exhausted. Loss of life of coworkers and those they cared for caused depression and a sense of defeat.

VASNHCS created support systems and resources to assist with physical and mental health and repurposed other staff into positions where they could alleviate some of the stress on the front lines. The Physician Ambassador Volunteer program was also revitalized, allowing licensed care providers who had retired to come back and assist as volunteers on their own time. Sense of family was reestablished and morale boosted as staff came together and bonded, providing care not only to their Veteran patients, but to each other as well.

Every service within the Veterans Health Administration likes to coin the phrase, "Our department is the backbone of this hospital." During Nurses Appreciation Month, it's fitting to proclaim that nurses are the actual backbone of health care services. There's a quote that reads: "Bless our nurses, for they have love to share, compassion to care and kindness to spare." Your tenacity and awe-striking vigor have been witnessed by all, now more than ever.

You are worthy of so much more, but let us start with a heartfelt "Thank you."

# Manila Clinic now offering vaccines

The VA Manila Outpatient Clinic vaccinated its first Veterans on Monday, April 19. Their first two vaccinated Veterans were Ricardo Capitle, 78, from Laguna Province, and Rogelio Torrices, 81, from Quezon City, Metro Manila.

Both Veterans have been using VA Manila for their healthcare needs since the early 1990s.

A total of 30 Veterans were vaccinated on each the clinic's first two days of vaccine administration. On Wednesday, April 21, VA Manila expanded its vaccine capacity to 60 Veterans per day.

The clinic will also offer vaccine appointments to help meet the high demand.

VA Manila provided between 350-400 vaccines in each of the first three weeks to fully utilize their initial allocation of 1200 doses.

As more vaccine shipments are allocated, VA Manila will continue to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to all Veterans living in the Philippines, and then to spouses and caregivers of Veterans as vaccine supplies permit.



**Ricardo Capitle, 78, was among the first Veterans vaccinated for COVID-19 at the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic. Capitle has received care from the Manila OPC for nearly 30 years.**



**Rogelio Torrices was among the first Veterans to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic. Torrices, 81, lives in Quezon City, and is a long-time recipient of care from the Manila OPC. He was among 30 Veterans to be administered the vaccine on the first day it was offered at the Manila clinic.**



**At 104 years old, Valentine Untalan is VA Manila's oldest Veteran patient. He has been a patient at the Manila OPC for almost 20 years. He served during WWII as a Philippine Scout, and went on to serve with distinction in the U.S. Army. He eventually earned the rank of Master Sergeant before retiring with more than 30 years of service.**



# Free Pantry opens at Eureka VA Clinic

Food insecurity, the lack of access to enough food for a healthy lifestyle, is an issue that transcends regional and cultural barriers in America. In 2018, approximately 11% of US households were food insecure at some point during the year.

Not only are our Veterans not immune from such vulnerability, but they are twice as likely to be food insecure compared to the general population. There is little doubt that the global health pandemic has worsened this situation for many, especially those Veterans living along the California Coast.

Katie Lansing, a resourceful medical support assistant at the San Francisco VA Health Care System's Eureka Clinic, encountered this firsthand while assisting a Veteran patient recently. The Veteran mentioned he only had cat food as a meal option at home. It was not her first time hearing unfortunate stories like this, but she had finally had enough.

"This is unacceptable," she thought.

She immediately began brainstorming a way to solve this issue in her little corner of the world. That is when the idea of the Little Free Pantry was born.

Lansing set up the makeshift pantry in the clinic's physical therapy room and encouraged clinic employees to donate canned goods. She also collaborated with the Eureka-based nonprofit food bank Food for People to help support its efforts with donations of dry food goods.

To say that she has made a difference is an understatement. In a few short months, Food for People has been able to deliver 17 boxes of food to the Eureka clinic, 10 of which have already gone to food insecure Veterans in the area. As of April 7, 12 Veterans received meals from the Little Food Pantry.

To Katie, the thought of Veterans and their families being able to have a filling home-cooked meal was reason enough to continue this effort.



**Katie Lansing, a medical support assistant at the Eureka VA Clinic, set up a free food pantry for local Veterans in need.**

"It is the best feeling ever to help Veterans when I can and where I can," she said. "I've experienced the joy of having my son, but the joy of knowing you've made a difference in the life of someone less fortunate is just as strong."

Pat Ragan, clinic director for the Eureka VA, applauds her efforts. "She is incredibly thoughtful and cares deeply about the plight of so many Veterans in our community," said Ragan. "We are so lucky to have such an inspiring employee at our clinic."

Katie hopes cat food will never be the only meal option for any Veteran visiting the Eureka clinic ever again. With the creation of the Little Free Pantry, hungry Veterans will have a variety of donated food to choose from. In fact, she says, "I've never seen more cans of tuna in my life!"

## VA Palo Alto honored for community partnership

Dr. Steven Lieberman, the Acting Under Secretary for Health, recognized VA Palo Alto Health Care System's medical legal partnership with Bay Area Legal Aid. Integrating screening for legal assistance into Veterans' well-being assessment allows social work to refer to the community partner to access a cost-free attorney.

The partnership is based on the understanding that wraparound legal services coupled with support by culturally competent social workers are essential for Veterans struggling to achieve and maintain health, housing stability, food security, transportation and economic stability, which are recognized barriers to achieving positive health care outcomes. The virtual awards ceremony is scheduled for August 19 at 9:30 a.m. EDT.

## SecDef visits Manila OPC



*photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy*

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic on Saturday, July 30. Austin toured the clinic and spoke to Veterans who were receiving their COVID-19 vaccines. He visited the Philippines for the first time as Defense Secretary to reaffirm the strong and enduring U.S.-Philippine alliance as the two countries celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations and the 70th anniversary of the Mutual Defense Treaty.

# Reno VA promotes PTSD awareness

VA officially recognized June as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month. Throughout the month, the mental health team at VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS) held activities and exercises to not only draw awareness, but also provide resources to Veteran survivors of PTSD.

Dr. Adam Bradford, the PTSD clinical team program manager and lead psychologist at VASNHCS, consistently sends out resource information and guidance for Veterans diagnosed with PTSD.

“Our PTSD Clinical Team (PCT) is comprised of several specialists who focus on PTSD and other important areas of need, such as substance abuse, military sexual trauma, traumatic brain injury, chronic pain, and other co-occurring problems,” said Bradford. “PCT provides evidence-based treatments that have a high efficacy rate for symptom reduction and recovery. By the end of the year we will also be implementing virtual reality care to our treatment program. Veterans who complete our treatments respond very well to care and tend to have positive long-term outcomes.”

On Saturday, June 12, VASNHCS was involved in a PTSD Awareness Virtual Walk at Rancho San Rafael Park in Reno, Nevada, to help raise awareness for PTSD and treatment. This was part of a national VA event. PCT also had a table display in the pharmacy alcove at the Reno VA main campus to raise awareness for PTSD and offer flyers outlining effective treatment options. The goal for these events was to remove the stigma surrounding mental health disorders while promoting Veterans’ overall mental wellness.

PTSD isn’t just combat-related. It can result from other traumatic incidents such as sexual assault, car accidents or many



**On Saturday, June 12, VA Sierra Nevada’s PTSD Clinical Team participated in a PTSD Awareness Virtual Walk at Rancho San Rafael Park in Reno, Nevada, to help raise awareness for PTSD and treatment.**

other life-altering situations.

“The treatment we deliver at VHA for PTSD is very effective, but we can’t help Veterans alone, which is why we work with community organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness and others for support,” said former VHA Acting Under Secretary for Health Dr. Richard Stone. “We are grateful for these community partners who stand alongside us each day to help our Veterans live more fulfilled and healthier lives.”

Understanding PTSD can be hard – especially for the loved ones and caregivers of Veterans. VHA is here for them as well. If you are a loved one of a Veteran and are struggling, please call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press option 1.

## VAPIHCS collaborates with DoD for safe patient handling and mobility

On April 20, 2021, a collaboration between the Department of Defense and VA made history. Together, they engaged in safe patient handling and mobility (SPHM) using an offloading transfer device.

A weight offloading transfer device was placed under a patient in the Progressive Care Unit. This was performed after agreement with the patient’s family.

DoD and VA have never had a SPHM collaboration before. This collaboration is to stand up a SPHM Program for Tripler Army Medical Center. Until now, SPHM has only been a VA program.



**Dr. Jeffrey Rumfield acts as patient while Specialist Stephens, Major Cruz and Stryker representative Kenny Morris demonstrate the offloading transfer device.**



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