Bad weather, distance and the cost of gas can make it difficult for Veterans, especially those who live in rural areas, to get to VA medical centers to receive the care they need. Access to care has greatly improved with Telehealth. This uses medical devices, video conferencing and a variety of other technologies that allow Veterans to receive certain services in their homes and at community-based outpatient clinics.

VA offers different forms of Telehealth to make it easier for Veterans to get the right care in the right place at the right time.

**HOME TELEHEALTH** allows Veterans to work with a registered nurse care coordinator to manage their health needs right from their homes. VA provides a messaging device, such as Health Buddy, that a Veteran uses to send health information through a land line telephone to the care coordinator. He or she monitors this information daily and discusses it with the Veteran’s primary doctor to prescribe treatment as needed. The care coordinator provides care and support to the Veteran and to caregivers. Finding and treating problems early helps prevent them from turning into more serious problems and helps prevent the need to be hospitalized.

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VA Changes Billing Process for Third Party Pharmacy Prescriptions

Change Will Not Affect Co-pay Status of Veterans

VA is implementing a new billing process for charging third party insurers for outpatient prescription medications provided to Veterans for conditions unrelated to their military service. This change will not affect Veterans’ co-payments for prescriptions.

“This is a simple change that makes sense for delivering Veterans’ health care,” said Gary Baker, chief business officer of VA’s Veterans Health Administration. “VA should recoup from insurers the actual costs for prescriptions provided to Veterans rather than a flat fee that is the average of all medication costs.”

Starting March 18, 2011, VA began charging third party insurers of Veterans for the full costs of prescription medications plus an administrative fee of $11.40, rather than the flat fee of $51 that is currently billed.

Veterans with questions about their health care benefits can call the VHA Health Resource Center at 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visit http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/.

VA/DOD Smart Phone App Helps Veterans Manage PTSD

Veterans dealing with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can turn to their smart phones for help anytime with the PTSD Coach application created by VA and the Department of Defense.

“This is about giving Veterans and servicemembers the help they earned when and where they need it,” said Secretary Shinseki. “We hope they, their families and friends download this free app. Understanding PTSD and those who live with it is too important to ignore.”

PTSD Coach lets users track their PTSD symptoms, links them with local sources of support, provides accurate information about PTSD, and teaches helpful individualized strategies for managing PTSD symptoms at any moment. The free PTSD Coach app is now available for download from the iTunes store and will be available for Android devices by the end of spring.

“This application acknowledges the frequency with which our warriors and Veterans use technology and allows them to get help when and where they feel most comfortable,” said Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Dr. Jonathan Woodson.

The PTSD Coach is primarily designed to enhance services for individuals who are already receiving mental health care, though it is certainly helpful for those considering entering mental health care and those who just want to learn more about PTSD.

Information on the PTSD Coach app is on the VA’s National Center for PTSD website: http://www ptsd va gov/public/pages/PTSDCoachasp. More apps from DoD’s National Center for Telehealth and Technology can be found at: http://www.t2health.org/apps.
VA to Begin Taking Applications for New Family Caregiver Programs

VA Implementing Enhancements to Their Existing Services for Veterans and their Caregivers

The VA published the interim final rule for implementing the Family Caregiver Program of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act 2010. This new rule will provide additional support to eligible post-9/11 Veterans who elect to receive their care in a home setting from a primary Family Caregiver.

“We at VA know that every day is a challenge for our most seriously injured Veterans and their Family Caregivers,” said Secretary Shinseki. “I know many Veterans and their Family Caregivers have been waiting anxiously for this day and I urge them to get their applications in as soon as possible so they can receive the additional support they have earned.”

On May 9, 2011, staff in VA’s Office of Care Management and Social Work opened the application process for eligible post-9/11 Veterans and Service members to designate their Family Caregivers.

Additional services for primary Family Caregivers of eligible post-9/11 Veterans and servicemembers include a stipend, mental health services, and access to health care insurance if they are not already entitled to care or services under a health care plan. Comprehensive Caregiver training and medical support are other key components of this program.

Veterans may download a copy of the Family Caregiver program application (VA CG 10-10) at www.caregiver.va.gov. The application enables the Veteran to designate a primary Family Caregiver and secondary Family Caregivers if needed. Caregiver Support Coordinators are stationed at every VA medical center and via phone at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) to assist Veterans and their Family Caregivers with the application process.

Richmond VA Medical Center Launches Health Information Exchange

Partnering with MedVirginia to Enhance Patient Care

VA announced a new pilot project in the Richmond region to improve the delivery of Veterans health information. The Richmond VA Medical Center will partner with MedVirginia (MedVA) to create a comprehensive health information network for exchanging health information in the area.

“This pilot is one more step taken to deliver a Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record for our Nation’s Veterans and Service members,” said Secretary Shinseki. “This new technology will enhance our ability to continue providing Veterans with high quality health care.”

VA selected the Richmond area because it has a high concentration of Veterans, military retirees, and members of the Guard and Reserve present in the region.

More detailed information on the pilot program is available by calling 1-877-771-VLER (8537).
VA Palo Alto Health Care System
Early Start to Healthy Choices at VAPAHCS Farmers’ Market

Get ready for fresh fruits, vegetables and healthy food right at VA’s doorstep. The VA Palo Alto Health Care System’s Farmers’ Market, in its 4th year, started early this year, just in time for beautiful weather. The best part is the first 100 customers received a reusable bag for a sustainable shopping experience!

“VA Palo Alto Health Care System receives no money for this event, which keeps prices as low as possible so Veterans and employees can have the healthiest and lowest carbon-footprint options,” said Dr. Wendy Thanassi, one of the organizers who helped bring the market to VA Palo Alto. “We have vendors who represent many people including Veteran and disabled-owned businesses.”

This year’s market will feature plenty of themes as the holidays arrive. Look for announcements of themes and special giveaways at the Farmer’s Market on the VAPAHCS Facebook. The market will be open every Wednesday this year in front of the Palo Alto hospital until Nov. 16, 2011.

VA Pacific Islands Health Care System

On April 13, 2011, a dedication ceremony was held for the new VA Manila Regional Office and state-of-the-art Outpatient Clinic. These are located at Seafront Compound, 1501 Roxas Blvd., Pasay City (near Cuneta Astrodome).

The benefits office and outpatient clinic are now both located in the new facility, which provides more efficient delivery of financial and medical services and better customer service in general to Veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces living in the Philippines, as well as to certain Philippine nationals. About 18,600 individuals receive financial and/or health benefits from the benefits office and outpatient clinic.

For more information on the new facility, please visit http://manila.usembassy.gov/us-agencies2/veterans-affairs.html. Veterans are advised to schedule an appointment prior to their visit to the VA building.
In 2009, a Veteran’s Court was established in Reno to address the unique problems for Veterans associated with war-time service and various other psychological stressors of military service. Substance abuse and mental health issues often lead to the arrest and imprisonment of Veterans. Many times, these Veterans are unaware of the services available to them through VA. The Vet Court brings VA staff into the courtroom where defendants are able to quickly access VA resources. The judge monitors the progress of the Veterans, over time, as they receive VA services. This is a win-win for everyone.

Since opening in March 2011, the Oakhurst clinic has used Telehealth to serve many patients, including California Congressman Jeff Denham (CA-19), an Air Force Veteran. Devices called Tandberg Interns transmit skin and wound images, real time heart and lung sounds, and images of the eyes, ears, nose and throat to a provider at a remote location. All three Community-Based Outpatient Clinics can store and send retinal (eye) screening and skin images to other providers in the VA network.

VA Central California also uses a rural van five days a week to provide Veterans with free transportation to their nearest local clinic or the main Medical Center. Because of the initial success in using Telehealth to meet the needs of Veterans in its rural regions, Central California Health Care System is planning to expand existing programs and begin providing wound care and ear, nose and throat Telehealth services in coming fiscal years.

Garnette J. Cotton, Ph.D., Telehealth Coordinator, is excited to expand the Telehealth program in Northern California this coming year. According to Dr. Cotton, “Telehealth is not about having the latest gadgets; it’s about expanding the care and services available to our Veterans.”

Currently, Telehealth services are available to certain patients for retinal imaging, surgical follow up, neurology and prosthetics, as well as home-based management of some chronic conditions. More clinics will be added in the coming year. To find out more about Telehealth or if you can participate, please contact your health care provider.
Telehealth Increases Access to Care

(Cont. from page 1)

VA is a world leader in home Telehealth technologies and currently provides care to over 40,000 patients, which is projected to expand to 75,000 by the end of 2011. For VA Central California Health Care Center alone, home Telehealth has increased its enrollment by 150 percent in the last year.

The goal of home Telehealth is “to make the home into the preferred place of primary care, when it is appropriate to do so,” said Dr. Adam Darkins, Chief Consultant of Care Coordination Services at the VA.

**CLINICAL VIDEO TELEHEALTH** reviews images to diagnose problems, manage care, perform check-ups, and provide advice and care to patients from remote locations. Veterans see providers by scheduled appointments using Telehealth technologies.

**TELEMENTAL** health allows Veterans to make an appointment at the nearest clinic to talk to and see a mental health care provider using video Teleconferencing. Veterans and mental health care providers communicate through small all-in-one VTEL units or larger TV monitors equipped with cameras similar to webcams or Skype. All appointments are live time.

The video Teleconferencing lines are encrypted and secure. Nothing is recorded. No one else can hear or see the counseling session.

“I like VTEL,” said one Veteran in Sonora. “It’s really convenient because I had to travel two hours to see the nearest psychiatrist. This is much nicer and it’s only ten minutes from my house. I would recommend it to other people. It’s nice, convenient and easy.”

Other forms of clinical video technology include Teleneurology and Telemove clinics.

**STORE-AND-FORWARD TELEHEALTH** gets and stores clinical data and/or images and sends them to another site for expert evaluation. An example of this is Teleretinal Imaging. Early in 2010, VA Palo Alto Health Care System found out that 658 Veterans living in Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties needed yearly retinal (eye) screenings to ensure that they did not have diabetic retinopathy, which can cause blindness. Veterans can now get immediate appointments for diabetic eye screenings and prompt and thorough care at Sonora Clinic instead of having to travel two or more hours to Livermore. This has reduced travel time for some Veterans by 85 percent. After enrolling in this clinic, one Veteran found out that he had diabetes! The new Teleretinal Clinic has doubled the number of Teleretinal diabetic eye screening clinic sites in the VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

**TELEDERMATOLOGY** allows Veterans to get skin care without having to travel to a dermatology clinic. Digital pictures are taken of skin problems and sent to a skin specialist (dermatologist) for diagnosis. He or she sends a report with treatment advice to the Veteran’s primary care doctor.

**TELEDERMATOLOGY** is not just about technology. It is about connecting Veterans and caregivers with health care providers to receive high quality care at home and at local facilities. Veterans are able to spend more time with their families and become more empowered in their care.

Find out more about Telehealth from your VA health care provider and from VA’s Office of Telehealth Services at www.telehealth.va.gov.

See what other Veterans say about Telehealth in the YouTube video from: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJvmsMZoBzw
VISN 21’s Telehealth Coordinators / Managers

San Francisco VA Medical Center
Elaine Der, Telehealth Program Coordinator
4150 Clement Street | San Francisco, CA 94121
(415) 221-4810 Ext. 4018

VA Central California Health Care System
Dawn Golik, Chief, Public Affairs
2615 E. Clinton Avenue | Fresno, CA 93703
(559) 228-5308 | (559) 920-7857 (Blackberry)

VA Northern California Health Care System
Garnette J. Cotton, Ph.D, Telehealth Coordinator
150 Muir Road | Martinez, CA 94553
(925) 372-2465

VA Palo Alto Health Care System
Beth Pittman, Telehealth Program Director
3801 Miranda Avenue | Palo Alto, CA
(650) 493-5000 Ext. 68006

VA Pacific Islands Health Care System
Reese Omizo, MD, Director, Telehealth Systems Support
429 Patterson Road | Honolulu, Hawaii 96819
(808) 433-7692

Jana Lindsey, RN, BSN, MBA
Telehealth RN / Clinical Informatics Service
459 Patterson Road | Honolulu, Hawaii 96819-1522
(808) 433-7349 | (808) 433-1920 (Fax)

VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System
Kathleen M. Roehr, RN, MS, NEA-BC, FACHE
Rural / Telehealth Program Manager
1000 Locust Street | Reno, NV 89502
(775) 786-7200 Ext. 1562 | (775) 636-3779 (Cell)
Kerri Childress, Editor
Veteran Integrated Service Network (VISN) 21
3801 Miranda Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290
kerri.childress@va.gov