



VA Healthcare
VISN 4



BOARDING PASS

BOARDING PASS

Gate
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Status
PRIORITY

Seat
1A

Class
FIRST
Departure
VISN4
REF No
2010

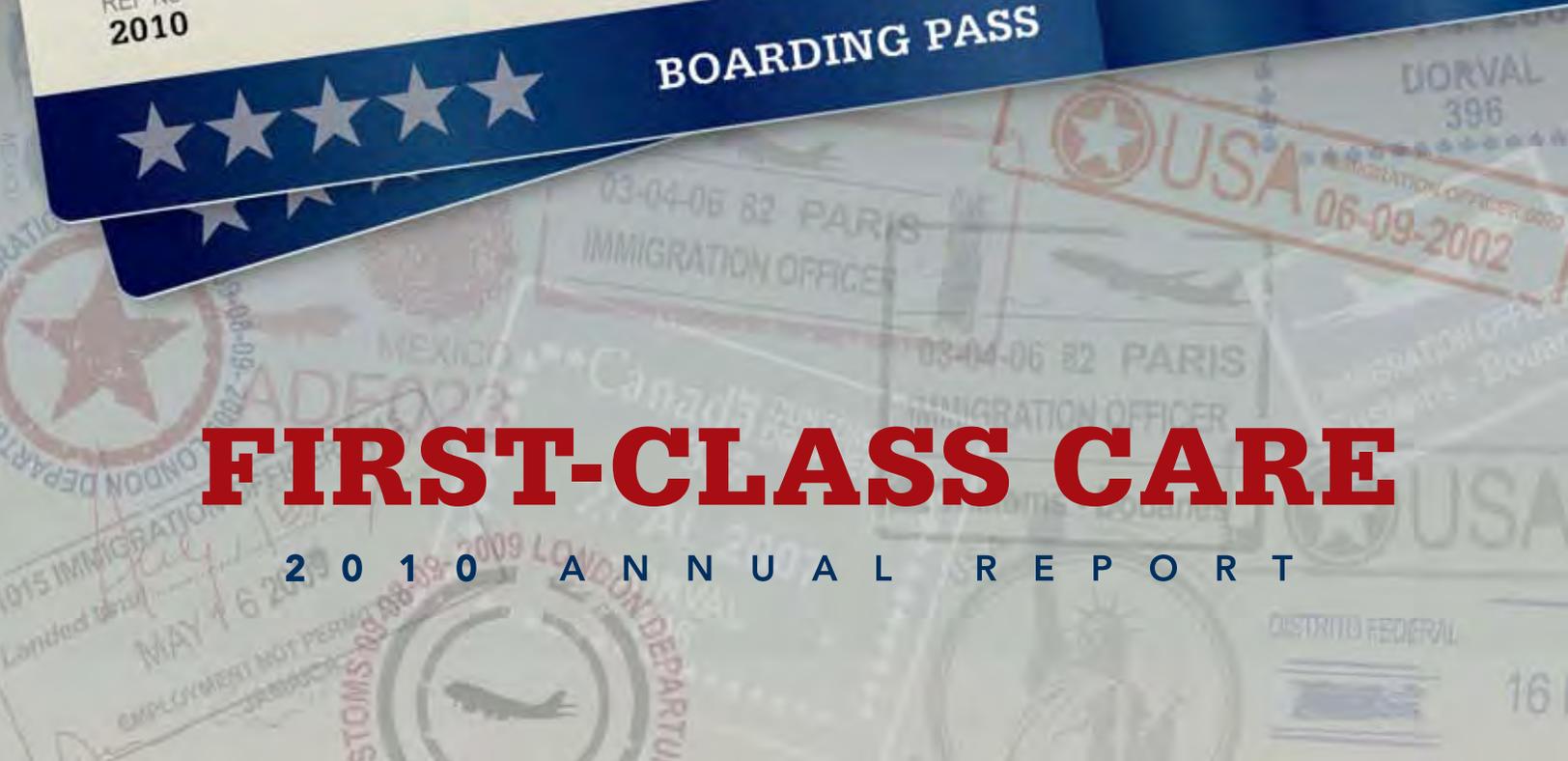


Gate
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BOARDING PASS



FIRST-CLASS CARE

2010 ANNUAL REPORT

VISN 4 BY THE NUMBERS



10 medical centers

45 outpatient clinics

\$43692427 in research

668 research projects

13347 employees

3137829 outpatient visits

4527 surgeries

\$2261282000 budget

316714 Veterans served

6492 volunteers

\$3331525 in donations

\$84374369 in prosthetics



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VISN 4:

It's hard to believe VISN 4 is at the close of another extraordinarily successful—and busy—year.

We've built up our facilities with a range of state-of-the-art construction projects, all with the goal of catering to returning service members, as well as female and homeless Veterans—in addition to further advancing our medical care and research efforts. We've continued to increase access to services, augmenting our telehealth programs so that distance is no obstacle to reaching Veterans in rural areas. We've strategically managed our costs, working within our means to keep providing the exceptional care that the men and women who served this country deserve.

But rather than simply tell you about our many accomplishments and accolades this past year, we've decided to do something different: We want to show you that this is truly a first-class health care system, a place where Veterans can receive cutting-edge care—and do, every single day.

In short, we're focusing on quality. Quality in every facet of what we do: surgical care, heart care, preventative care, even the care Veterans receive upon leaving our medical centers and outpatient clinics. And instead of talking about the already high bar we set for ourselves, we decided to go a step further and compare VISN 4 to the top-performing, highest-ranked health care facilities in the country: Johns Hopkins Hospital, Massachusetts General Hospital, the Cleveland Clinic and Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center.

I'm extremely proud to say that VISN 4 care is second to none, and I hope that as you flip through these pages, you will be assured that when we say we provide the best care anywhere, it's not just talk.

We've got the numbers to prove it.

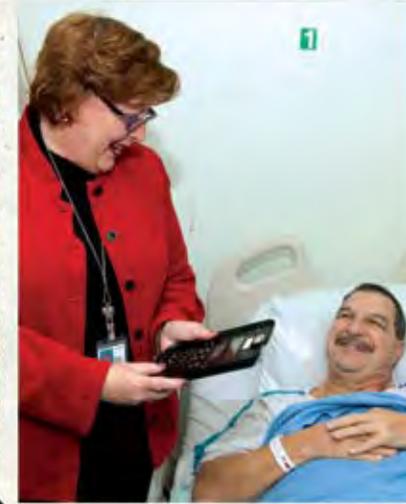
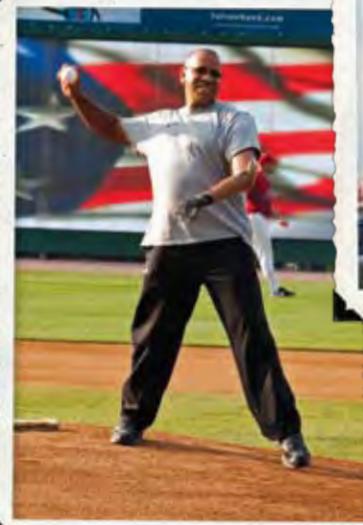
Sincerely,



Michael E. Moreland

★ **Michael E. Moreland, FACHE**
Network Director, VISN 4





Every year, VISN 4 aims to provide the best care to our Nation's heroes.

For 2010, we wanted to see how we measure up against four of the country's finest facilities, as ranked by U.S. News and World Report Best Hospitals 2010-11: Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore; Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston; the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland; and Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles.

Using statistics collected from various sources, we compared ourselves to the top of the class. Time and again, VISN 4 matched—and even surpassed—the achievements of the country's most respected institutions.

We offer...



FIRST-CLASS HEART CARE

Saving the lives of Veterans suffering severe heart attacks by making every precious minute count [Page 5]



FIRST-CLASS SURGICAL CARE

Making time to take precautions to protect patients before wielding a scalpel [Page 7]



FIRST-CLASS PREVENTATIVE CARE

Arming Veterans and staff against infection and disease [Page 9]



FIRST-CLASS AFTERCARE

Making it our business to ensure patients continue living well even after they leave our facilities [Page 13]



FIRST-CLASS COMMUNICATION

Making sure no Veterans are left to decipher their treatment alone [Page 17]



FIRST-CLASS TRANSPLANT CARE

Giving organ recipients a new lease on life [Page 20]

But we don't stop there. We do these facilities one better by ensuring first-class care for all Veterans, whether male or female (page 21), employed or jobless, homeless (page 23) or safely tucked under a roof.

No matter the category, specialty or location, VISN 4 consistently delivers the best and most comprehensive care.





Lavarr Franklin
Marine Veteran

A LIFESAVING INITIATIVE

VA PITTSBURGH FAST-TRACKS VETERANS SUFFERING SEVERE HEART ATTACKS

★ *By Shelley Nulph*

Lavarr Franklin wasn't immediately worried when he developed a cough and started feeling weak in late August 2010.

But when he failed to feel better after a few days and began having a squeezing sensation in his chest, the 49-year-old Marine Veteran went to the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System emergency department.

As soon as he told a nurse about the pressure in his chest, Franklin says, "That was it. It felt like only 10 minutes before I was upstairs, about to have surgery."

Franklin was having a severe heart attack, caused by an artery blockage that had cut off the blood supply to part of his heart. To restore blood flow, VAPHS's cardiac surgery team performed a balloon angioplasty, a procedure that involves reopening the vessel by inflating a tiny balloon.

OVERALL HEART ATTACK CARE

CLEVELAND CLINIC

99%

JOHNS HOPKINS

99%

MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL

99%

RONALD REAGAN UCLA

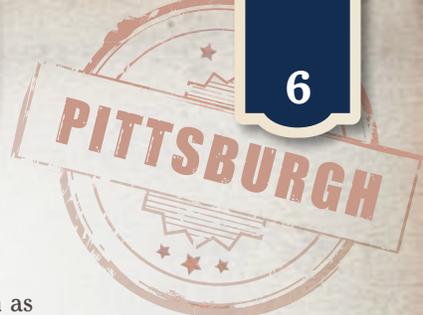
99%

VA PITTSBURGH 99%

VISN 4 99%

Source: www.whynotthebest.org. Measures the percentage of heart attack patients who receive smoking cessation counseling, the time until treatment such as medications or procedures to improve blood flow to the heart, and whether they get aspirin at arrival or checkout.

HEART CARE



The crucial window between when a patient arrives at a hospital and has this procedure is known as “door-to-balloon time”—and should be no longer than 90 minutes, according to the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association. This brief period gives patients a much better chance of survival and recovery.

The time it takes to get Veterans into surgery depends on the specific treatment they may need beforehand, says Nancy Young, a nurse and former chair of a VAPHS committee focused on meeting the 90-minute goal.

In striving for this window, an interdisciplinary team introduced several processes. Emergency department staff receive special lessons to help them recognize heart attack symptoms early. They ask all patients if they have chest pains, regardless of their reason for admittance.

The department also established an alert system that activates every member of the cardiac team with just one phone call.

In 2010, VAPHS met the mark for all but two heart attack patients. After addressing those cases with further improvements, staff consistently worked within the 90-minute window.

“Our door-to-balloon process saves lives and betters the Veteran’s quality of life, and we are continually improving the process and the time,” Young says. “This ensures that Veterans get the best care for heart attack treatment.”

Franklin says he was “quite surprised” that emergency staff got him to surgery so quickly. Three months after his heart attack, his recovery is progressing nicely, he says, and he remains impressed with the VA.

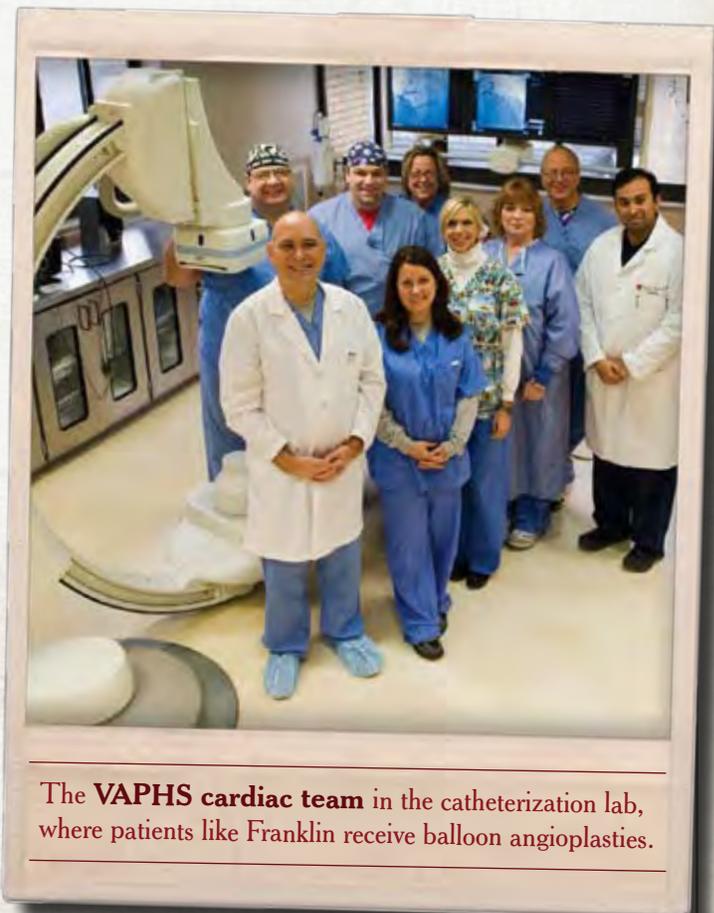
“They’ve seen to all of my medical needs, and I am very happy,” Franklin says. “They care.” ●

“
Our door-to-balloon process saves lives and ensures that Veterans get the best care for heart attack treatment.
”
★ *Nancy Young, VAPHS Nurse*



Only 25 percent of U.S. hospitals are equipped to treat heart attack patients through mechanical means such as angioplasties, according to the American Heart Association.

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The VAPHS cardiac team in the catheterization lab, where patients like Franklin receive balloon angioplasties.

PUTTING VETERANS BACK ON THEIR FEET

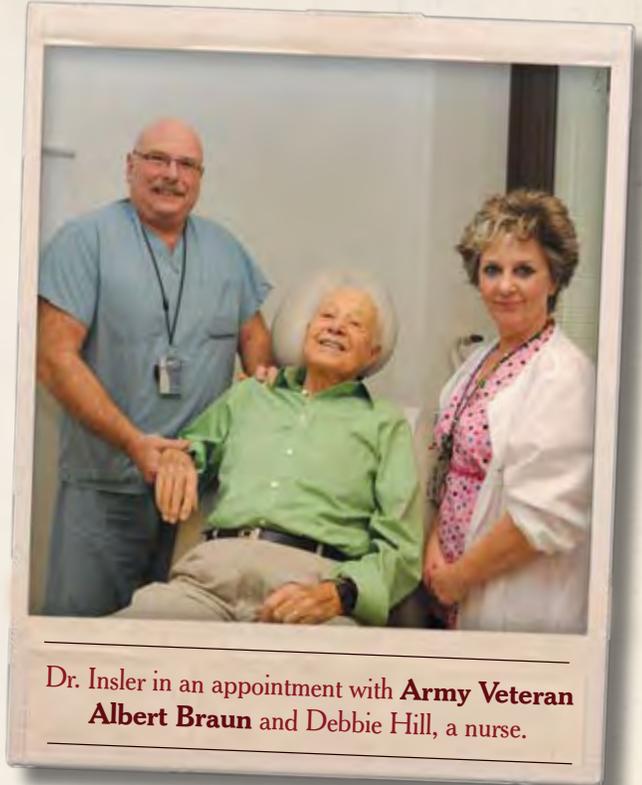
THE **ERIE VA'S** ORTHOPEDIC SURGERY PROGRAM ENABLES PATIENTS TO TAKE PAIN-FREE STEPS

★ *By Sarah Gudgeon*

Since its launch three years ago, the Erie VA's highly successful orthopedic surgery clinic has honed its care for total joint replacements.

Two key elements underlie the clinic's achievements, says Dr. William Schuchardt, the facility's chief of surgery: adopting a team-based approach and being committed to patient education.

In carefully crafting protocols, Erie's surgical team sought the expertise of every department, calling on staff from nursing, pharmacy, physical therapy, home care, infection control, social work and housekeeping. All play critical roles in educating Veterans.



Dr. Insler in an appointment with **Army Veteran Albert Braun** and **Debbie Hill**, a nurse.

SURGICAL CARE IMPROVEMENT

CLEVELAND CLINIC

93%

JOHNS HOPKINS

97%

MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL

96%

RONALD REAGAN UCLA

90%

ERIE VA

98%

VISN 4

96%

Source: www.whynotthebest.org. Measures best practices for preventing post-surgery complications, such as administering proper antibiotics one hour before an operation and removing urinary catheters within two days afterward to reduce the risk of infection.

SURGICAL CARE



The Erie VA's clinic is just one example of VISN 4's many exemplary surgical programs.

"The most important thing we do is teach patients what to expect," says Dr. Harvey Insler, the Erie VA's orthopedic surgeon. "Patients know how many days they will be in the hospital, what to expect the first day, what to expect once they go home."

Medical center staff also take practical steps to protect Veterans from surgery-related infections by screening—and as necessary, treating—for ***methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus***, or MRSA.

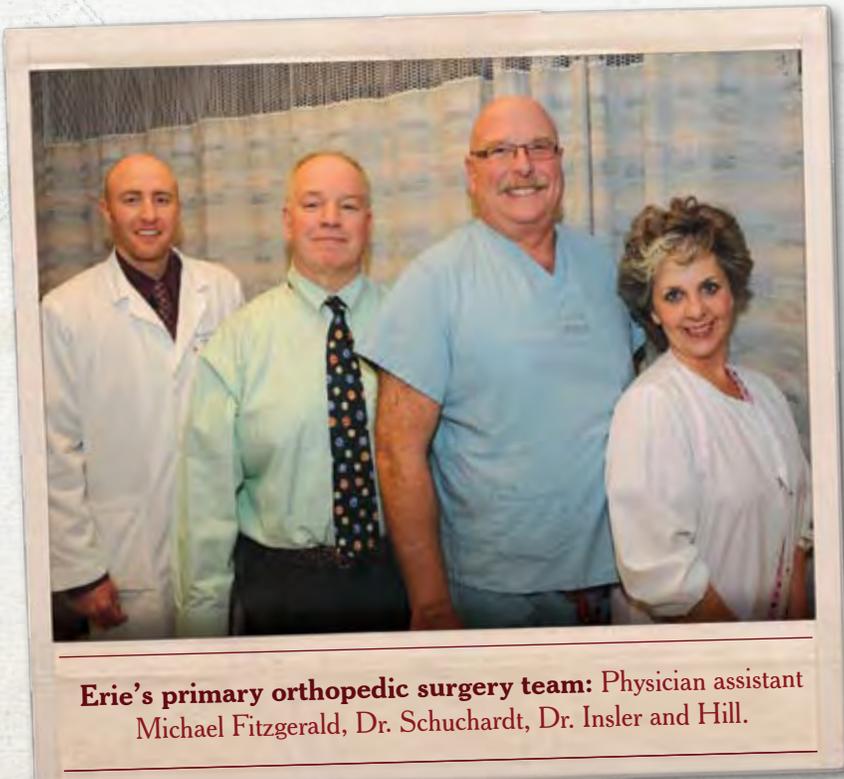
Army Veteran Charlotte Miller, 65, went to Erie's orthopedic surgery clinic after 20 years of tolerating pain and discomfort in both knees.

"The greatest killer of the spirit is fear—and that was gone after meeting with the orthopedic surgeon, the physical therapists, occupational therapists and home-care staff," says Miller, who had her right knee replaced in December 2009 and her left knee the following March. "They prepared me, and I was surrounded by a team that was aware of my physical needs."

Nine months after surgery, Miller is healthy and ready to start taking dance lessons again.

"I'm doing all the things I didn't have a chance to do before," she says. "The Erie staff's commitment, sincerity and involvement in caring for Veterans is healing in itself." ●

“
The most important thing we do is teach patients what to expect—in the hospital and once they go home.
★ *Harvey Insler, Erie VA Orthopedic Surgeon*
”



Erie's primary orthopedic surgery team: Physician assistant Michael Fitzgerald, Dr. Schuchardt, Dr. Insler and Hill.



Although Erie is a self-classified standard surgery program—which typically performs only simpler procedures—its track record of excellence in total joint replacements paved the way for an exemption to continue providing local Veterans with a convenient, and exceptional, service.

.....



Navy Veteran Paul Saxon
gets his flu shot in a drive-thru.

ONE CAR AT A TIME

DRIVE-THRU CLINICS AT ALTOONA'S
JAMES E. VAN ZANDT MEDICAL CENTER
MAKE FLU PREVENTION EASY

★ *By Andrea Young*

The term "drive-thru" conjures up many scenes: a bank, a fast-food place, a car wash.

For Veterans who receive care through the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center in Altoona, Pa., it might bring to mind their recent flu shot.

The drive-thru program, which has served thousands of Veterans in the past three years, begins early in the flu season as part of an aggressive campaign to ensure the health and safety of patients, as well as staff and volunteers. The program reflects a VISN-wide commitment to preventing the disease.

It's also convenient: Veterans simply drive up, show an ID, stick an arm out the window and go on their way.

FLU VACCINATION RATE

CLEVELAND CLINIC

100%

JOHNS HOPKINS

75%

MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL

95%

RONALD REAGAN UCLA

84%

ALTOONA VA

100%

VISN 4

96%

Source: www.jointcommission.org. Measures whether pneumonia patients older than 50 who were hospitalized between October and February received flu vaccines before leaving the facility.

“My husband uses a wheelchair, and this service saved me from lifting it in and out of the car,” says Arlene Dow, who came with her husband, Allen, from their home in neighboring Cambria County.

In addition to drive-thrus, walk-in clinics and vaccination at regular appointments, the medical center gives flu shots at Veterans service organizations in rural areas.

“We sent nurses to every corner of 14 counties to reach Veterans at American Legion and VFW posts—and anywhere they could be found,” says Leilani Callis-Keiser, the nurse in charge of flu-shot outreach.

Because staff play a critical role in infection control, a nurse visits employee offices, trainings and other gatherings with a cart, ready to give shots.

These efforts are about practicality as well as safety, Callis-Keiser says. “Hospitals have fewer people working because they’re at home sick. Veterans and employees unnecessarily experience lost moments of family fun, more days in the hospital and even deaths.”

Tammy Horne, chief of sterile processing and decontamination, has done her part by getting the vaccine each of her 17 years at the Altoona VA.

Horne, herself a Veteran, says the VA’s efforts toward preventing infection are what former service members deserve. “It’s fantastic,” she says.

Air Force Veteran Bill Lightner volunteers at Altoona’s Community Living Center, where he plays cards and other games with residents. For Lightner, taking advantage of the flu-shot program is essential to protecting his health.

“It makes me feel good to know the VA makes this a priority,” Lightner, 47, says. “I feel safe going into a facility knowing that most everybody there has been vaccinated.” ●



Tammy Horne
Sterile Processing and
Decontamination Chief



Air Force Veteran Don Foor and Lightner playing cards in the Community Living Center.



During the 2010 flu season, the Altoona VA held 18 outreach flu clinics at service organizations.

US FIRST CLASS
APPROVAL

TOP SECRET

FIRST CLASS PREVENTION

PROTECTING VETERANS AGAINST PNEUMONIA

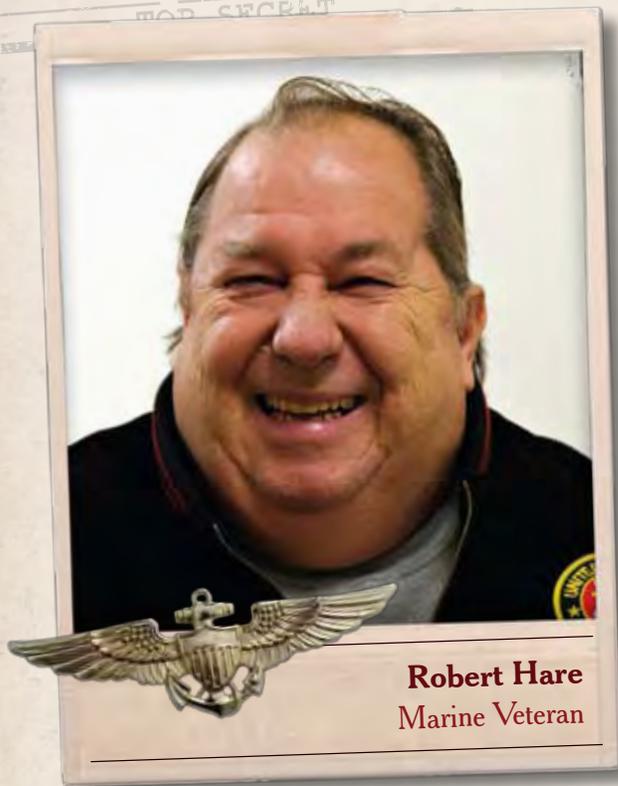
AN IMMUNIZATION CAMPAIGN AT THE CLARKSBURG VA HAS ACHIEVED NEARLY PERFECT RESULTS

★ *By Wesley Walls*

The Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center in Clarksburg, W.Va., has set its sights on protecting Veterans against pneumonia—with considerable success.

With an almost-perfect score when it comes to ensuring Veterans older than 65 receive a pneumococcal vaccination, the facility has put a number of measures in place to protect patients against the bacterial infection, which causes more deaths than any other infectious disease in the world.

“Pneumonia is the No. 1 killer of elderly patients, so it’s critical that we get them immunized,” says Helen Ray, a Clarksburg VA nurse who specializes in infection control. “We need to protect our Veterans.”



Robert Hare
Marine Veteran

PNEUMONIA VACCINATION RATE

CLEVELAND CLINIC	95%
JOHNS HOPKINS	79%
MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL	93%
RONALD REAGAN UCLA	89%

CLARKSBURG VA 99%

VISN 4 99%

Source: www.jointcommission.org. Measures whether pneumonia patients older than 65 received their vaccine before checkout.



Unlike flu vaccines, a pneumonia shot is generally a one-time occurrence, not a yearly precaution. The vaccination is usually recommended for the elderly and younger individuals at high risk for disease.

Clarksburg’s focus on immunizing for pneumonia began in earnest a couple years ago, Ray says, when flu shots were in short supply and the medical center wanted to offer something to protect Veterans—and scale back its high readmission rates for pneumonia. In particular danger are patients coming in with the flu who have not received their pneumonia vaccine, Ray says.

Now computer alerts serve as reminders to prompt the facility’s nursing staff to review outpatients’ immunization status during their visits to the medical center. A similar alert pops up during the discharge process for inpatients to guarantee that clinicians verify whether a Veteran has received a pneumococcal vaccination.

Electronic medical records enable staff to easily look up an accurate immunization history for each patient, with details on all immunization screenings, assessments and the administration of vaccines.

Veterans can also get vaccinated at the same time they come in for a flu shot during the medical center’s annual flu campaign, Ray says.

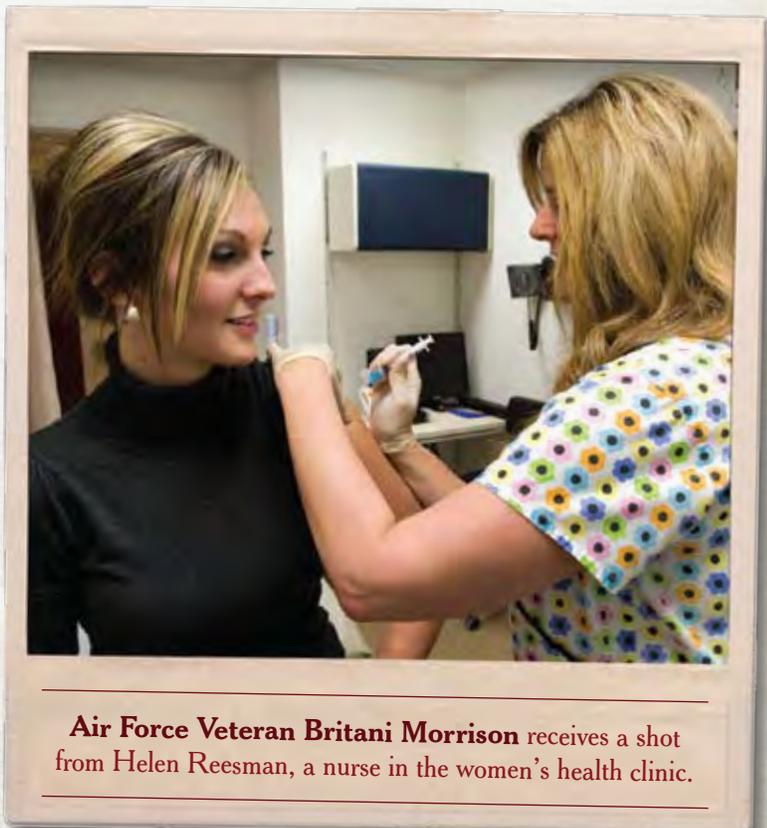
That’s when Marine Veteran Robert Hare received his pneumococcal vaccination this year.

“I feel it is easier and more convenient, as I don’t have to make two trips,” says Hare, 63, who served in Vietnam. “It’s great, and I’m glad the VA is working hard to make sure I get my vaccinations.” ●

“
It’s critical that we get patients immunized.... We need to protect our Veterans.
★ *Helen Ray, Clarksburg VA Nurse*
”



VISN 4 maintains a database that tells doctors and nurses at every facility which inpatients have received their flu and pneumonia shots—by ward and floor—allowing them to make sure all Veterans who want the vaccines get them.



Air Force Veteran Britani Morrison receives a shot from Helen Reesman, a nurse in the women’s health clinic.

QUITTING NOW

VETERANS KICK THE HABIT WITH THE HELP OF THE PHILADELPHIA VA'S SMOKING CLINIC

★ *By Shelley Nulph*

At the Philadelphia VA Medical Center, Joan Gallo is on a mission to snuff out tobacco use among Veterans.

"Tobacco cessation makes such an impact on Veterans' health—and the health of others in their families," says Gallo, program coordinator for tobacco cessation. "You see them after they've quit, and they're breathing better, they have lower blood pressure. There are so many wonderful health benefits."

Gallo's mission is shared throughout VISN 4 and has been a focus for nearly a decade, driven by Chief Medical Officer David S. Macpherson.

To tackle the issue, VISN 4 launched a tobacco cessation program nearly two years ago that gives Veterans a couple options: traditional face-to-face coaching or phone counseling through Quit for Life, a contracted program.



Joan Gallo
Tobacco Cessation Program Coordinator

TOBACCO CESSATION COUNSELING

PATIENTS WITH:	HEART FAILURE	PNEUMONIA
CLEVELAND CLINIC	99%	91%
JOHNS HOPKINS	97%	95%
MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL	100%	100%
RONALD REAGAN UCLA	100%	N/A*

PHILADELPHIA VA 99% | 100%

VISN 4 99% | 96%

Source: www.jointcommission.org. Measure whether facilities give cessation counseling to heart failure or pneumonia patients with smoking histories. *Insufficient patient numbers.



While clinicians aim to control health risk factors such as high blood pressure, cholesterol or diabetes, tobacco use is “equally or more potent”—and something they can cure, Macpherson says. “The cessation programs provide an integrated, accessible service that helps Veterans live healthier lives and, as a bonus, have fatter wallets.”

The Philadelphia VA takes a multi pronged approach to recruiting people to kick the habit. Nurses assess admitted patients for tobacco use. Primary care providers ask Veterans three times a year if they smoke or use tobacco. User-friendly alerts serve as another reminder to clinicians to incorporate tobacco counseling into conversations with patients. And at community-based outpatient clinics, staff screen for and educate about tobacco use—and provide individual or group counseling.

Staff also regularly explain the negative effects of tobacco: high blood pressure, damaged coronary arteries and the potential for vascular disease, to name a few.

“

Our tobacco cessation programs provide Veterans with an integrated, accessible service that helps them live healthier lives and, as a bonus, have fatter wallets.

★ *Dr. David S. Macpherson, VISN 4 Chief Medical Officer*

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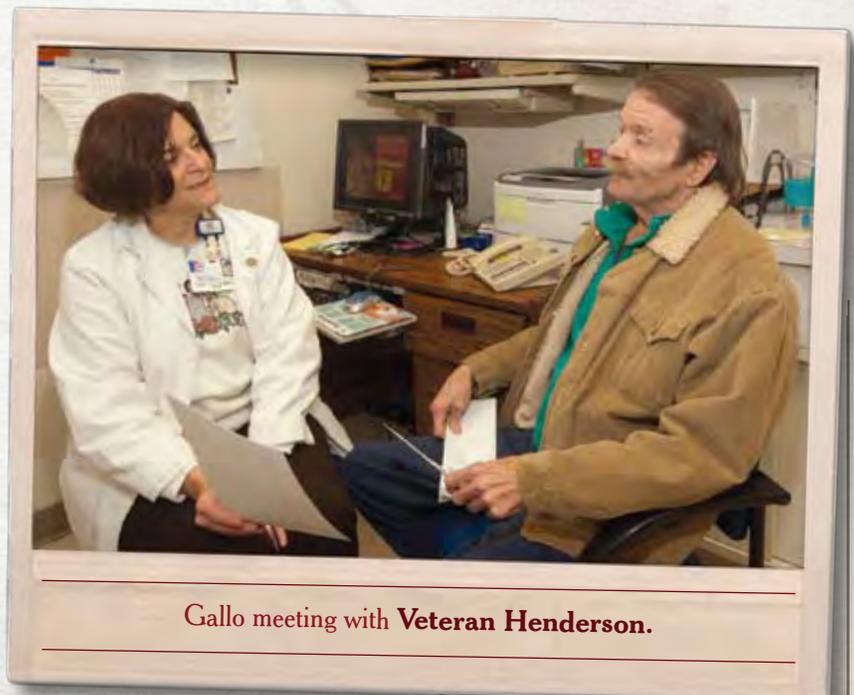
Nearly 4,000 VISN 4 Veterans have enrolled in Quit for Life, and more than 15 percent of them have quit successfully—compared with the 3 percent norm for individuals trying to do so alone.



For Veterans ready to quit, the facility has six certified counselors who can guide them through the process.

Vietnam Veteran Robert Henderson recently began his own journey after smoking for more than 40 years. Henderson, 63, says he’s grateful for the support of Gallo’s team, which helped him develop quitting strategies, such as using cut-up straws to simulate the feel of a cigarette in his mouth.

“It means a lot that the VA is helping Veterans kick the habit because I didn’t start smoking until I entered the service,” Henderson says. “The VA is concerned about me living longer and healthier.” ●



Gallo meeting with **Veteran Henderson.**

LIVING HEART HEALTHY

THE WILKES-BARRE VA IS GIVING VETERANS WITH HEART FAILURE THE TOOLS FOR BETTER LIFESTYLES

★ *By Arin Gencer*

Dr. Nabeela Mian has spent the past couple years tweaking the way the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center treats congestive heart failure patients.

Those seemingly small changes are adding up to a big difference: Now these Veterans leave the medical center well-equipped to maintain their health—with backup support in the form of their providers to help them stay on track.

“We have a huge congestive heart failure population, and we wanted to give them better service so that they live a better quality of life, instead of being admitted repeatedly,” says Mian, chief of medicine at the medical center, which saw more than 1,650 congestive heart failure patients in the past year.

Heart failure patients can be at risk for high blood pressure and stroke if they don’t adopt certain practices, such as limiting their fluid consumption, monitoring their weight and adhering to a low-salt diet.



Dr. Nabeela Mian
Chief of Medicine

PROVIDING DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS

CLEVELAND CLINIC **91%**

JOHNS HOPKINS **96%**

MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL **93%**

RONALD REAGAN UCLA **85%**

WILKES-BARRE VA 99%

VISN 4 94%

Source: www.jointcommission.org. Measures whether facility gives heart failure patients or caregivers written instructions or educational materials on such details as exercise, diet and medications.

AFTERCARE

WILKES-BARRE

The medical staff's efforts included revamping the process for discharge instructions and, this year, creating a multidisciplinary clinic for heart failure patients living with more severe symptoms.

Mian had a template developed that reminds the discharging team of topics to review before inpatients leave, such as smoking cessation counseling. It prompts staff to print special instructions for those with heart failure, which include guidance on medicines, diet, exercise and other details.

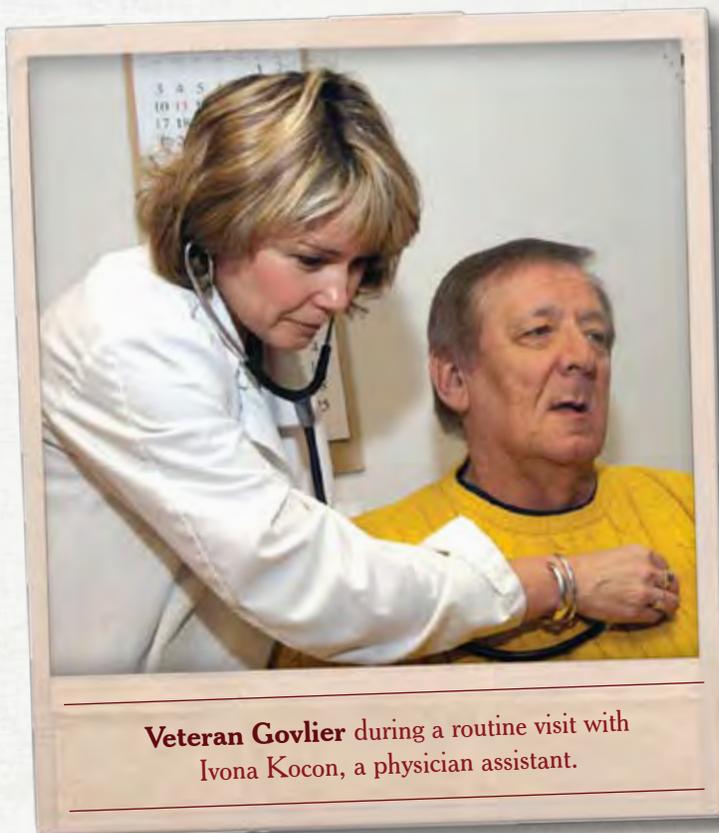
Launched in March, the congestive heart failure clinic—which takes place twice weekly and has two assigned cardiologists and physician assistants—enables VA doctors to help Veterans stick to the practices that keep them out of the hospital.

The clinic also affords providers the luxury of taking more time with these complex patients, Mian says. "They can see them as frequently as they need."

Mary Babcock, a dietitian who works with Veterans in the clinic, describes it as "sort of an intervention to have healthier people." Babcock focuses on teaching Veterans to avoid fluid overload and watch their sodium intake by reading food labels, and fields their health questions.

Michael Govlier, an Air Force Veteran, has been coming to the Wilkes-Barre VA for about a year and considers his monthly clinic appointments a useful resource.

"I really appreciate the close attention I get in monitoring my health," Govlier, 64, says. "I know that the VA is watching me so that if something does go wrong, they're there. It's a good feeling." ●



Veteran Govlier during a routine visit with Ivona Kocon, a physician assistant.



Beyond the clinic, the Wilkes-Barre VA checks up on outpatients every few months and holds group sessions to make sure they are maintaining a proper diet.

.....

“We wanted to give patients better service so that they live a better quality of life.”

★ *Nabeela Mian, Wilkes-Barre VA Chief of Medicine*

”



Seiler talks with **Veteran Miller** during her stay at the Lebanon VA.

A TWO-WAY STREET

THE LEBANON VA MEDICAL CENTER KEEPS THE LINES OPEN

★ *By Laura McIntosh*

At the Lebanon VA Medical Center, no Veteran is left to wonder about his or her care.

“We have a very open relationship with our patients,” says Kurt Seiler, a nurse manager. “We go to great lengths to make sure they are kept in the loop.”

This open environment reflects a philosophy that Veterans should be involved in their care—and treated like family.

To that end, clinicians meet with patients multiple times throughout the day to discuss what they should expect—whether a test or a procedure—and to update them on their treatment status.

COMMUNICATION WITH CLINICIANS

	DOCTORS	NURSES
CLEVELAND CLINIC	94%	95%
JOHNS HOPKINS	95%	96%
MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL	95%	95%
RONALD REAGAN UCLA	95%	95%

LEBANON VA **96% | 98%**

VISN 4 **95% | 95%**

Source: *Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) and www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov. Represents patient responses to questions about their hospital stay, including whether staff listened to them and explained their care.*

They also give Veterans and their families a chance to weigh in and share what they want to do.

Korean War Veteran Mary-Ellen Miller experienced this inclusion firsthand during her recent stay at the medical center.

“Here, you’re treated like an individual,” Miller, 77, says. “The staff explains what they’re going to do. If I asked a question and they didn’t know the answer, they found out—you’re always going to get answers.”

This concern with making sure Veterans understand what’s happening extends beyond their hospital stay. Staff also follow up after inpatients like Miller leave the facility—usually within 48 hours—using a new post-discharge template adopted at all VISN 4 facilities about a year ago. A nurse or other staff member asks Veterans about their medications, follow-up appointments and complications they’ve experienced since discharge, among other questions.

The calls are “a way for us to know if a patient has any issues,” says Barbara Forsha, VISN 4’s quality management officer. “If they do, we can intervene before they become problems.”

The template has become an invaluable asset to getting Veterans timely information and addressing concerns, Seiler says.

“It goes back to treating our patients like family members,” he adds. “We want to know how they’re doing and reassure them that the Lebanon VA is always here.”

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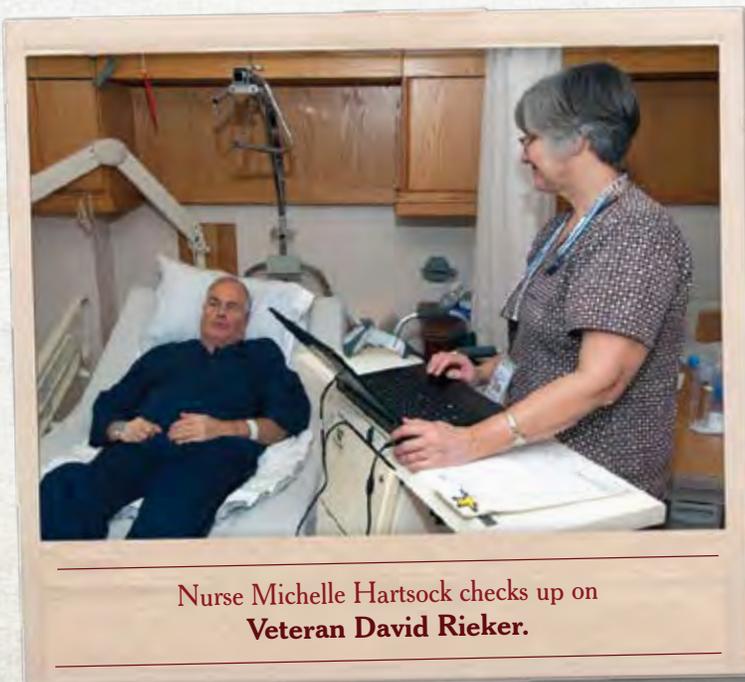
At the Lebanon VA, you’re treated like an individual.

★ *Mary-Ellen Miller, Korean War Veteran*

”

Miller received her follow-up call less than 24 hours after leaving the medical center.

“I told the lady who called I wasn’t sure about the scheduling for my next appointment, so she took care of it right then and there,” she recalls. “It makes me feel connected to the VA, even though I’m an hour away. I feel secure.” ●



Nurse Michelle Hartsock checks up on Veteran David Rieker.



To further ensure patient safety, follow-up calls include questions to verify whether Veterans have received a list of their medications and understand it.



AN OPEN EAR

WILMINGTON VA VETERANS HAVE THEIR SAY WITH ON-THE-SPOT ELECTRONIC SURVEYS

★ *By Arin Gencer*

These days, it's not unusual for a patient advocate holding an electronic tablet to walk up to Veterans at the Wilmington VA Medical Center and ask, "How did we do today?"

The practice, which began in May, is part of an effort to improve customer service, allowing staff to quickly identify issues needing attention.

Director Charles M. Dorman, who saw the tablets used at a restaurant, was confident they could work at Wilmington. Patient advocates and volunteers ask inpatients, as well as Veterans in primary care and the dental clinic, about their experience.

Survey results have already inspired changes, such as a 40-point checklist for the housekeeping staff to ensure room cleanliness, and bedside patient handoffs between night and day shifts to improve communication—and include Veterans in the process.

For Kathleen Duwe, whose husband Gerry—an Army Veteran—goes to Wilmington's specialty clinics, the facility's focus on constant improvement is reassuring. "If they know about a problem as it's happening, then they can nip it in the bud and keep the quality of care consistent," Duwe says.

Duwe has witnessed the medical center staff's dedication to customer service.



Duwe, far left, at a clinic appointment with her husband.



The electronic comment card

EXPLAINING MEDICATION

CLEVELAND CLINIC	76%
JOHNS HOPKINS	80%
MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL	81%
RONALD REAGAN UCLA	79%

WILMINGTON VA 87%

VISN 4 82%

Source: SHEP and www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov. Represents patient responses to questions about their hospital stay, including whether staff explained what medicines are for and possible side effects.

When her husband receives new medication orders, his doctors will check in the following day to find out how he feels. And when she had questions about one of his medicines, a pharmacist spoke directly to her.

"They took the time to explain to us why and what they were doing," Duwe says. "They're on top of everything."

The Wilmington VA aims to make the Duwes' experience the norm. When Veterans check out, a clinical pharmacist walks them or their caregivers through their medication list, emphasizing new drugs or dose changes.

"We try to make sure people don't fall through the cracks," says Judith Nwachukwu, a clinical pharmacy specialist. ●

NEW ORGANS, NEW LIVES

VA PITTSBURGH'S TRANSPLANT PROGRAM GIVES VETERANS A CHANCE

★ *By Arin Gencer*

For three years, Army Veteran Jerry Morrison's weekly routine included coming to VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System for dialysis on three days, and returning on several others to volunteer.

Morrison, 64, still visits the dialysis unit, but now exclusively as a volunteer who talks to "all the transplant people that I can" about his experience as a kidney recipient.

"I'm here for a reason," says Morrison, whose surgery was in October 2007. "I make a difference."

The Vietnam Veteran is one of dozens of patients who've benefitted from VA Pittsburgh's transplant program since it began in 2004.

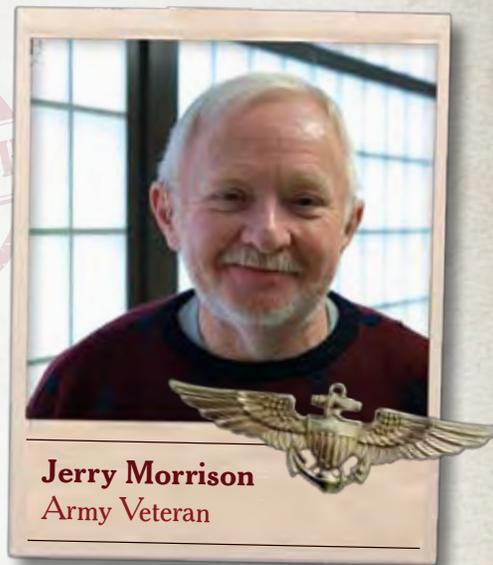
A VAPHS staff of nearly 20 handles kidney and liver transplants for patients referred from all over the country, says Beth Lambrecht, who supports VISN 4 and VAPHS surgery initiatives and is acting transplant administrator.

VA Pittsburgh established its own program—the first independent one in the VA—to meet the unique needs of Veterans, says Dr. Mark Wilson, VAPHS and VISN 4 chief of surgery.

"We recognized that there was a need nationally and felt that we had the expertise," Wilson says, adding that VAPHS sees about 85 percent of the entire VA's liver transplant candidates.

With an in-house service, surgeons are better able to ensure quality and access, Lambrecht says, adding that the program reflects a commitment to providing "innovative, cutting-edge health care for Veterans that is often better than the community."

Morrison says he never doubted the caliber of care he would receive.



Jerry Morrison
Army Veteran

3-YEAR SURVIVAL RATES: KIDNEY TRANSPLANTS

CLEVELAND CLINIC	89%
JOHNS HOPKINS	90%
MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL	94%
RONALD REAGAN UCLA	95%

VA PITTSBURGH 92%

VISN 4 92%

Source: Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (www.srtr.org). Measures kidney graft and patient survival three years after surgery.

"When Veterans come through these doors—no matter what it is—they're going to get good, professional care," he says.

A similar philosophy led Army Veteran Robert Burns to fly in from Philadelphia with hopes of becoming a transplant candidate.

"If I didn't have the VA, I wouldn't have anything," says Burns, 58, who has had kidney problems for about five years.

If he qualifies, he'll join a list of individuals waiting for that fateful call. And when it comes, his struggle with kidney disease will be a thing of the past. ●

ADF023



OFF TO A GOOD START

AT THE COATESVILLE VA, FEMALE VETERANS FIND COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE

★ *By Kathleen Pomorski*

Veteran Rachael Olson moved to Reading, Pa., ready to create a life with her husband and fellow Veteran, Derrick.

The couple, who served in Iraq and were stationed at Camp Pendleton near San Diego, were already off to a good start: Olson was seven months pregnant with a baby girl.

Olson, 23, knew she only had several weeks left before her August due date to iron out details for her young family's future. She turned to the Coatesville VA Medical Center for help.

"I was new to the area, and it was my first pregnancy, so there was a lot of stress," Olson recalls.

WOMEN VETERANS ENROLLED

ALTOONA	1,307	LEBANON	3,326
BUTLER	943	PHILADELPHIA	4,182
CLARKSBURG	1,167	PITTSBURGH	3,160
ERIE	1,224	WILKES-BARRE	2,698
WILMINGTON	2,460	COATESVILLE	1,078

VISN 4

21,545

Source: VISN 4. Reflects 2010 enrollment.



The former Marine found a ready guide in Women Veterans Program Manager Karen Madrigal. Even before Olson arrived, Madrigal arranged an appointment for her with a primary care provider—and another the next day, with her preferred OB-GYN. She also gave Olson Coatesville’s newly developed maternity booklet, which serves to help the VA coordinate care with outside OB-GYN providers and to educate expectant mothers.

“Thank goodness for the VA and Karen, especially,” Olson says. “They helped me work out the details of safely delivering my baby and provided the care as a VA benefit. I am forever grateful.”

For Madrigal, it was just part of doing her job well. “We’ve helped a family start a good life,” she says. “Outcomes like this are why I come to work each day.”

With more women in the military, the Coatesville VA is committed to providing excellent health care to female Veterans. The facility offers comprehensive primary care specifically tailored to women’s needs, including services ranging from menopause management and Pap smears to birth control prescriptions and referrals for maternity care, as in Olson’s case.

Newly returning women Veterans can access primary or behavioral health care, as well as social work services, through the Post-Deployment Health Clinic or through the Women’s Health Clinic.

The VISN as a whole has been working to grow the ranks of designated providers for women’s health—in the facilities and community-based outpatient clinics, says Desmarie DeCuir, the network’s women Veterans program manager.

“Our big message is, ‘We’re here for you. Just give us the opportunity to serve you as you have served us,’” DeCuir says. “We owe it to these Veterans.”

This commitment to women’s care helped the Olsons welcome their daughter, Aurora Eileen, to the family on July 30. ●

“
The VA helped me work out the details of safely delivering my baby....I am forever grateful.
”
★ *Rachael Olson, Marine Veteran*



VISN 4 has offered primary care providers mini-residency programs focused on women’s health care to increase the number of clinicians trained in gender-specific care.

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Olson with Madrigal, who is holding Aurora Eileen.

BRINGING VETERANS HOME

VA BUTLER HEALTHCARE GIVES HOMELESS VETERANS A SAFE PLACE TO LAND

★ *By Paula McCarl*

In 2009, VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki set an ambitious goal: ending homelessness among Veterans in five years.

Ever since then, VA Butler Healthcare has worked tirelessly to meet this challenge and the needs of area Veterans, expanding programs and services, strengthening local partnerships and increasing outreach efforts.

A major key to tackling homelessness is strong community support and awareness, says Dan Slack, Butler's homeless Veterans coordinator. "You have to be visible, get out into the community and start building relationships if you want to be effective," he says.

To that end, Slack has spent the past year expanding his outreach from several times monthly to weekly, visiting known homeless locations, county service agencies and Veterans.



Frank Fields
Army Veteran

PERMANENT HOUSING VOUCHERS

ALTOONA	35	LEBANON	150
CLARKSBURG	55	PHILADELPHIA	345
COATESVILLE	200	PITTSBURGH	155
ERIE	60	WILKES-BARRE	95
WILMINGTON	95	BUTLER	75

VISN 4

1,265

Source: VISN 4. Reflects number of HUD-VASH vouchers for each facility as of 2010.



Such efforts—along with community partners such as Catholic Charities and the Mechling-Shakley Veterans Center, a temporary housing site in Cowansville, Pa.—allowed the Butler VA to help Army Veteran Frank Fields put his life back together after nearly two years of homelessness.

Fields, 53, now has a vocational training job working with Veterans in the facility’s Adult Day Health Care Program, right across the hall from Slack’s office.

“I know that I can always count on the VA to have my back,” says Fields, who now lives in downtown Butler. “The VA was instrumental in turning my situation around and provided me with great assistance and resources. I cannot say enough about the quality of care that I received. If it were not for these programs, I would be out on the street or incarcerated.”

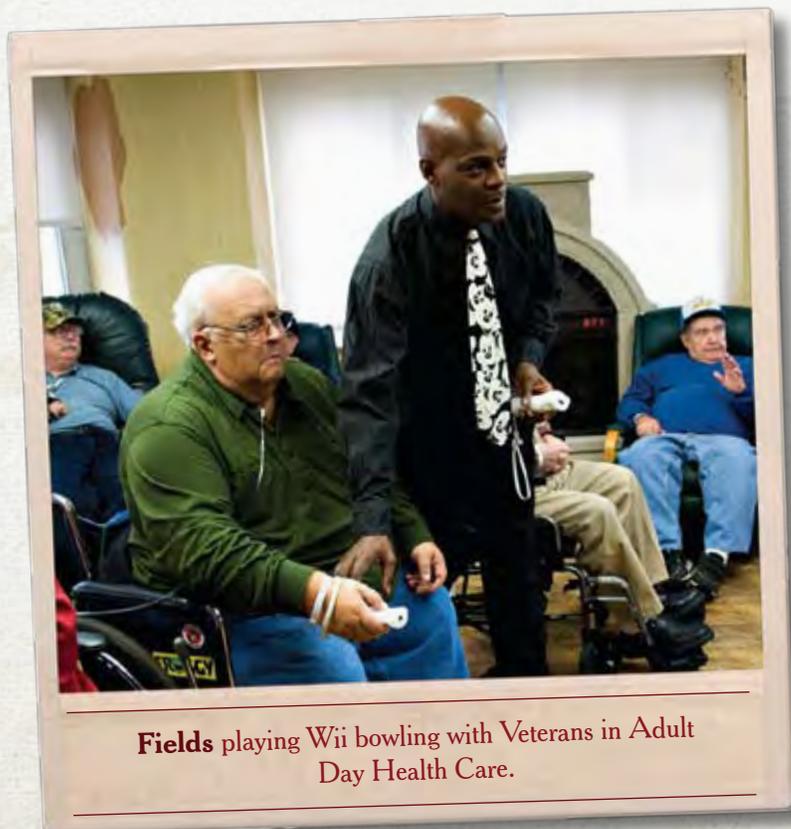
More Veterans have found a permanent place to call home this year thanks to an influx of new vouchers to help them with rent, supplied through the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) program.

For Veteran Mindy Harruff, 27, the program has been a lifesaver. Harruff, whose tenure in the Army included time served in Kuwait City, Kuwait, recently lost her job but has kept a roof over her head with the help of HUD-VASH.

“I had a lot to worry about, but at least I knew that my rent was covered and that my family and I wouldn’t be homeless,” says Harruff, who entered the HUD-VASH program in February 2009. ●



Veteran Harruff with Slack



Fields playing Wii bowling with Veterans in Adult Day Health Care.



Butler-area Veterans will soon be able to take advantage of a state-of-the-art, residential-style domiciliary. Slated for completion in 2012, the new facility will offer temporary housing and include space for women—a first for the Butler VA.



AT A GLANCE: VISN 4 EAST

Coatesville

1400 Blackhorse Hill Road
Coatesville, PA 19320
610-384-7711
www.coatesville.va.gov



- Opened Independence Hall, a 40-bed supportive housing program for homeless Veterans with serious behavioral health issues. Run by Philadelphia-based nonprofit Fresh Start, Inc., the program is expected to help more than 650 additional homeless Veterans over the next four years.

- Participated in some 45 outreach events, including Veterans summits, Stand Down for homeless Veterans and post-deployment health reassessments for returning service members.

- Improved customer service and access to care through the call center, which takes 12 seconds to respond to calls—the fastest in VISN 4, well below the network's 30-second goal.

OPERATING BUDGET:

\$179,377,000

Veterans Served: 19,532

Operating Beds: 475

Outpatient Visits: 185,864

Employees: 1,409

Volunteers: 537



- Reached thousands of Veterans through outreach efforts, including two post-deployment health reassessments and nearly a dozen information sessions for combat Veterans, informing them of benefits and enrolling them for health care.

- Completed a \$3.6 million rehabilitation center that brings together services such as psychiatry, physical and occupational therapy, kinesiotherapy and prosthetics, improving the coordination of rehabilitative care and patient satisfaction.

- Received the VA Secretary's Labor-Management Relations Award in overall achievement, honoring a commitment to open communication, mutual respect and trust in the workplace. The labor-management partnership's efforts have led to increased employee recognition and improved safety with protective measures such as patient lifts, rooftop guardrails and lighting.

Lebanon

1700 South Lincoln Ave.
Lebanon, PA 17042
717-272-6621
www.lebanon.va.gov

OPERATING BUDGET:

\$237,551,000

Veterans Served: 44,746

Operating Beds: 193

Outpatient Visits: 440,127

Employees: 1,416

Volunteers: 464

Philadelphia

3900 Woodland Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19104
1-800-949-1001
www.philadelphia.va.gov

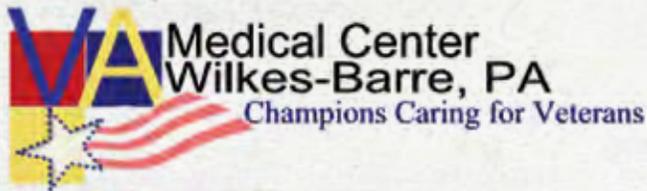
- Held 31 outreach events, enrolling more than 6,000 Veterans, including a post-deployment health reassessment for 300 Veterans from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. Staff offered health screenings and information about the medical center and benefits to returning service members.



OPERATING BUDGET:
\$441,689,000

Veterans Served: 55,795
Operating Beds: 280
Outpatient Visits: 504,697
Employees: 2,200
Volunteers: 677

- Launched Veterans Justice Outreach, a partnership with the Philadelphia Municipal Court, which connects justice-involved Veterans with VA services to help them tackle issues at the root of their legal problems. The program, which has more than 150 participants, aims to help Veterans minimize or avoid jail time.
- Awarded gold medal from the Federal Executive Board for Employee Volunteer Ambassador Program, a greeting and escort service for people navigating the medical center.



- Held Welcome Home Celebration for more than 250 Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans and their families at a local amusement park. Staff provided information on various VA programs, including those for OEF/OIF and female Veterans.
- More than doubled the celebrations in the Community Living Center as part of a cultural transformation initiative, putting on events ranging from an autumn luncheon and Earth Day brunch to New Year's and Mardi Gras parties.
- Cut down on missed doses of medication by 90 percent, helping to ensure continuity in patient care, as well as safety.

Wilkes-Barre

1111 East End Blvd.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
1-877-928-2621
www.wilkes-barre.va.gov

OPERATING BUDGET:
\$209,808,000

Veterans Served: 40,954
Operating Beds: 173
Outpatient Visits: 381,661
Employees: 1,168
Volunteers: 606

Wilmington

1601 Kirkwood Highway
Wilmington, DE 19805
1-800-461-8262
www.wilmington.va.gov



OPERATING BUDGET:
\$116,789,000

Veterans Served: 25,870
Operating Beds: 120
Outpatient Visits: 218,218
Employees: 906
Volunteers: 620

- Developed a nearly \$45 million construction program to revamp various areas, including projects to renovate the chiller and boiler plants and the canteen.
- Broke ground for a \$4.2 million emergency department that will more than double available beds and include a triage area and built-in decontamination room. The new space is expected to improve overall workflow and patient care.
- Started construction for an OEF/OIF specialty clinic expansion, allowing these Veterans to receive the bulk of their care in one place. The project also includes a new women's health clinic.
- Celebrated the opening of a newly renovated unit for diagnostic testing.

AT A GLANCE: VISN 4 WEST

Altoona

2907 Pleasant Valley Blvd.
Altoona, PA 16602
1-877-626-2500
www.altoona.va.gov



**James E. Van Zandt
VA Medical Center**

- Improved access to health care for Veterans in rural areas, expanding specialty care—such as podiatry, audiology, comprehensive women’s health care and telehealth—to community-based outpatient clinics in surrounding counties.
- Developed a storm-water management system to preserve and restore the area’s wetlands and ecological assets. The ponds are also a resource and calming environment for Veterans, visitors and family members.
- Completed major canteen renovation and opened a coffee shop, Freedom Café, in the medical center’s main entrance area to offer Veterans, visitors and employees a wider range of food options and a customer-friendly experience.
- More than doubled the number of outreach events to 70, leading to more than 500 new OEF/OIF Veteran enrollments.

**OPERATING BUDGET:
\$113,601,000**

**Veterans Served: 25,074
Operating Beds: 68
Outpatient Visits: 181,529
Employees: 624
Volunteers: 328**



- Increased Veterans’ access to health care and benefit information, as well as their health records, through aggressive recruitment for My HealthVet, an online resource allowing patients to see prescriptions, order refills and become informed participants in their care.
- Achieved the highest participation in the country—99.5 percent—on the Veterans Health Administration’s All Employee Survey. A team promoted the survey with events including a Cinco de Mayo-themed kickoff.
- Used telehealth, community partnerships and the Cranberry Township, Pa., outpatient clinic to add services for rural Veterans, such as radiology, physical therapy and podiatry.

Butler

325 New Castle Road
Butler, PA 16001
1-800-362-8262
www.butler.va.gov

**OPERATING BUDGET:
\$95,113,000**

**Veterans Served: 18,733
Total Employees: 646
Operating Beds: 163
Outpatient Visits: 141,597
Volunteers: 580**

Clarksburg

1 Medical Center Drive
Clarksburg, WV 26301
304-623-3461
www.clarksburg.va.gov

- Opened \$1.5 million state-of-the-art emergency department—quadrupled in size from the original—with private rooms for patients, improved flow and family access to the area and the latest emergency medicine technology and equipment.



OPERATING BUDGET:
\$128,508,476

Veterans Served: 21,543
Total Employees: 871
Operating Beds: 100
Outpatient Visits: 250,411
Volunteers: 538

- Unveiled new diagnostic imaging center, which features a fully automated lab for blood testing.
- Placed first in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in La Crosse, Wis., with a sculpture by Marine Veteran James Lykins, who represented the facility and won Best in Show. “Green Faces/Purple Heart” depicts about 60 faces of men Lykins served with during the Vietnam War.
- Provided dermatology services through the telehealth program, which aims to connect patients with doctors despite distance. The staff dermatologist spent two days per week virtually examining Veterans at the Altoona, Erie and Huntington, W.Va., medical centers.



Veterans Served: 21,702
Total Employees: 715
Operating Beds: 65
Outpatient Visits: 243,158
Volunteers: 570



Erie

135 East 38th Street Blvd.
Erie, PA 16504
1-800-274-8387
www.erie.va.gov

- Launched the Enhanced Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (RANGE), which combines behavioral health intensive case management services with homeless outreach resources for Veterans in rural counties.
- Continued rolling out secure messaging, one of the newest My HealthVet program features, allowing 1,270 patients to communicate with their health care team online. More than 20 patient-aligned care teams use this service.
- Reduced time between identifying an abnormal CT scan and starting treatment for lung cancer—down to two days, from 31—through the Systems Redesign-Lean Lung Collaborative. The collaborative’s efforts also halved the number of days to complete an ordered consult.

OPERATING BUDGET:
\$114,593,468

Pittsburgh

University Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15240
412-688-6000
www.pittsburgh.va.gov



OPERATING BUDGET:
\$539,711,333

Veterans Served: 61,750
Total Employees: 3,395
Operating Beds: 583
Outpatient Visits: 561,997
Volunteers: 1,023

- Collaborated with the Veterans Benefits Administration to process compensation and pension claims in a more efficient manner. The pilot program led to a cumulative timeliness score of 23.45 days, well below the 30-day benchmark.
- Held focus groups with 144 work teams to share All Employee Survey results and discuss improvement opportunities. Facility leadership is developing initiatives to address major issues and incorporating staff input into the strategic planning process.
- Pioneered outreach initiatives to focus on returning OEF/OIF service members, participating in 67 community events that ranged from a motorcycle rally and car shows to a marathon, county fairs and concerts—and led to treating 1,609 Veterans.

2010 OPERATING STATISTICS

TOTAL BUDGET: \$2,261,282,000



**MEDICAL CARE COLLECTIONS FUND
\$115,568,328**

Salary and Benefits	\$1,159,868,000
Consolidated Mail-Out Pharmacy	\$146,033,000
Drugs and Medicines	\$89,571,000
Services	\$417,847,000
Lands and Structures	\$95,537,000
Equipment	\$56,843,000
Miscellaneous	\$295,583,000



**TOTAL OPERATING BEDS
2,320**

Domiciliary	443
Medicine	334
Neurology	4
Psychiatry	240
Rehabilitation	10
Surgery	129
Nursing Home	1,118
Psychiatric Residential Rehab. Treatment	42



**TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS
3,137,829**

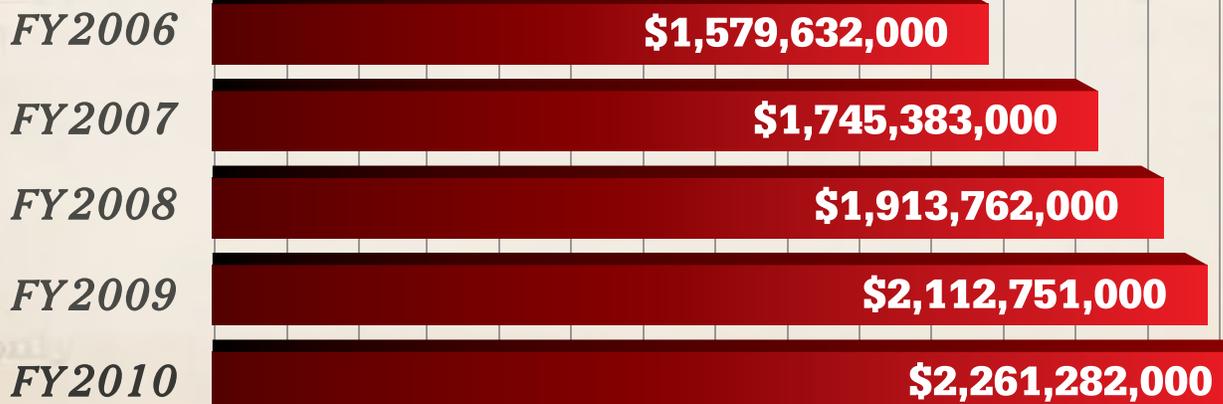
Altoona	181,529
Butler	141,620
Clarksburg	250,411
Coatesville	187,540
Erie	243,569
Lebanon	454,685
Philadelphia	516,101
Pittsburgh	561,997
Wilkes-Barre	381,717
Wilmington	218,660



**INPATIENTS TREATED
64,990**



TOTAL BUDGET COMPARISON



VISN 4 LEADERSHIP



From left to right
 Barbara Forsha, David
 Macpherson, Carla Sivek,
 Michael Moreland, Dot
 Steele, James Baker and
 David Cowgill

MICHAEL E. MORELAND, FACHE Network Director

Moreland directs the operations, finances and clinical programs for the 10 medical centers and 45 outpatient clinics that comprise VISN 4.

CARLA SIVEK, MSW Deputy Network Director

Sivek oversees the operational aspects of VISN 4, including finance, logistics and capital assets.

DAVID S. MACPHERSON, MD, MPH Chief Medical Officer

Macpherson oversees all inpatient and outpatient clinical programs, along with research and education activities.

JAMES BAKER Chief Financial Officer

Baker directs all financial management activities to ensure compliance with departmental and Veterans Health Administration financial policies.

DOT STEELE Executive Assistant

Steele plans and facilitates projects, reports and initiatives for the network office, and provides oversight and advice for administrative and logistical activities.

DAVID E. COWGILL Public and Community Relations Manager

Cowgill directs all media, communications and outreach initiatives, and stakeholder and congressional relations.

BARBARA FORSHA, MSN, RN, ET Quality Management Officer

Forsha oversees the operations for the network's quality management programs, which include performance measurement, internal and external accreditation, utilization management and Veteran satisfaction.



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VISN 4 publishes its annual report for the patients, employees, volunteers and friends of VA Healthcare-VISN 4. For content questions, contact David Cowgill at 412-822-3578 or david.cowgill@va.gov.