

VISION

for Excellence

SUMMER | 2011

BACK *on* THEIR FEET



A JOINT REPLACEMENT ORTHOPEDIC
SURGERY PROGRAM BETWEEN THE LEBANON
AND WILMINGTON VA MEDICAL CENTERS HAS
VETERANS WALKING A PAIN-FREE PATH

STORY ON
PAGE 8

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

From time to time I hear the question, “What is a VISN?” My short answer is “A team of knowledgeable people whose shared goal is to provide the best care anywhere to our Nation’s Veterans.” Allow me to go into a little more detail.

VISN stands for Veterans Integrated Service Network. The Veterans Health Administration is divided into 21 of them. These shared systems of care work together to better meet local health care needs and provide greater access to care.

The VA Healthcare-VISN 4 service area encompasses all of Pennsylvania and Delaware along with portions of West Virginia, New Jersey and Ohio. VISN 4 operates eight VA Medical Centers (VAMC) in Pennsylvania, along with one VAMC in both Delaware and West Virginia. We also have 44 Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) throughout the service area. But VISN 4 is really just “One VA.”

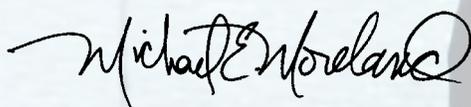
Whether they are stationed at the Erie VAMC in Pennsylvania, the Wilmington VAMC in Delaware, or the Wood County CBOC in Parkersburg, W.Va., each VISN 4 employee shares a common bond—the desire to help a Veteran, even if they don’t share the same hometown.

In order to provide every Veteran who lives in the VISN 4 area with health care that is second to none, VISN 4 employees band together to share knowledge, resources, lessons, and ideas.

You will find one extraordinary example of this in our cover story. Two VISN 4 facilities—Lebanon and Wilmington—have joined together to ensure smooth coordination of care, providing Veterans with access to surgeries that can drastically improve their lives. As a bonus, VISN 4 saves money by keeping patients within the VA system, instead of sending them to private-sector hospitals for care.

Throughout the pages of this newsletter, you will see a multitude of inspirational stories of collaboration among VISN 4 facilities. I also invite you to check out all previous—and future—issues on our website, www.visn4.va.gov, because in VISN 4, the teamwork never ends.

Sincerely,



**MICHAEL E. MORELAND, FACHE
NETWORK DIRECTOR**



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AROUND the NETWORK

AMONG PITT'S DISTINGUISHED

VA Pittsburgh researcher recognized by university chancellor

A VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System senior research scientist recently received the University of Pittsburgh's 2011 Chancellor's Distinguished Public Service Award.

Dr. Rory A. Cooper is the founding director of the Human Engineering Research Laboratories, which seek to improve the mobility and function of people with disabilities. One of these laboratories—Wheelchairs and Associated Rehabilitation Engineering—is a VA national research center of excellence. Cooper, an Army Veteran, has dedicated his career to helping former service members with spinal cord injuries live to their fullest potential.

As part of the award, Cooper received a \$3,000 grant to support his public service activities. He will use the money to help Veterans with severe disabilities successfully transition into college studies in science, technology, engineering and math.

Cooper's list of accomplishments is impressive, including nine issued or pending patents. But there are two things that Cooper is most proud of: "seeing the people whom I have helped train go on to succeed and make important contributions and seeing the positive impact of our work on Veterans, people with disabilities, and their families."



As a Veteran with disabilities, I found my calling to be helping other Veterans have the opportunity to achieve the highest quality of life.

Dr. Rory A. Cooper (shown here with Pitt Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg)



ADVANCING PROGRESS

VA Pittsburgh selects new leaders



20 YEARS OF VA SERVICE

13 YEARS OF VA SERVICE

Lovetta Ford, LCSW

Associate Director since April 24, 2011

Previously served as VISN 4 mental health manager and homeless program coordinator

"My vision is to continue to provide excellent health care in creative yet responsible ways. That means we're going to have to increase rural health and telehealth care, and see Veterans where they are most comfortable—which includes going to the Veteran's home."

Ali Sonel, MD

Chief of Staff since March 13, 2011

Previously served as VA Pittsburgh associate chief of staff for research and development and director of cardiac catheterization

"I am excited to play a greater role in making a difference at a higher level for improving care and outcomes for Veterans. I'm also looking forward to working with all clinical departments more closely in helping them achieve excellence in their specialties."

NEW HEALTHY WOMEN'S CENTER

VA Pittsburgh's new women's clinic will provide a private space to serve the needs of female Veterans



Construction Start Date: Jan. 11, 2010

Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony: March 30, 2011

Activation: April 19, 2011

Cost: \$1.6 million

Square Feet: 1,730

Architect: John Nolan of Wexford, Pa.

Contractor: ADDVETCO of Bethel Park, Pa.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ★ private waiting area that is warm and inviting, with an electric fireplace
- ★ Women's Wellness Area with educational resources including computers, pamphlets, and brochures
- ★ sound system to play soothing music in exam rooms
- ★ group meeting room for classes
- ★ lactation area
- ★ large examination rooms
- ★ children's play area

CONGRATS, CHIEF ENGINEER!

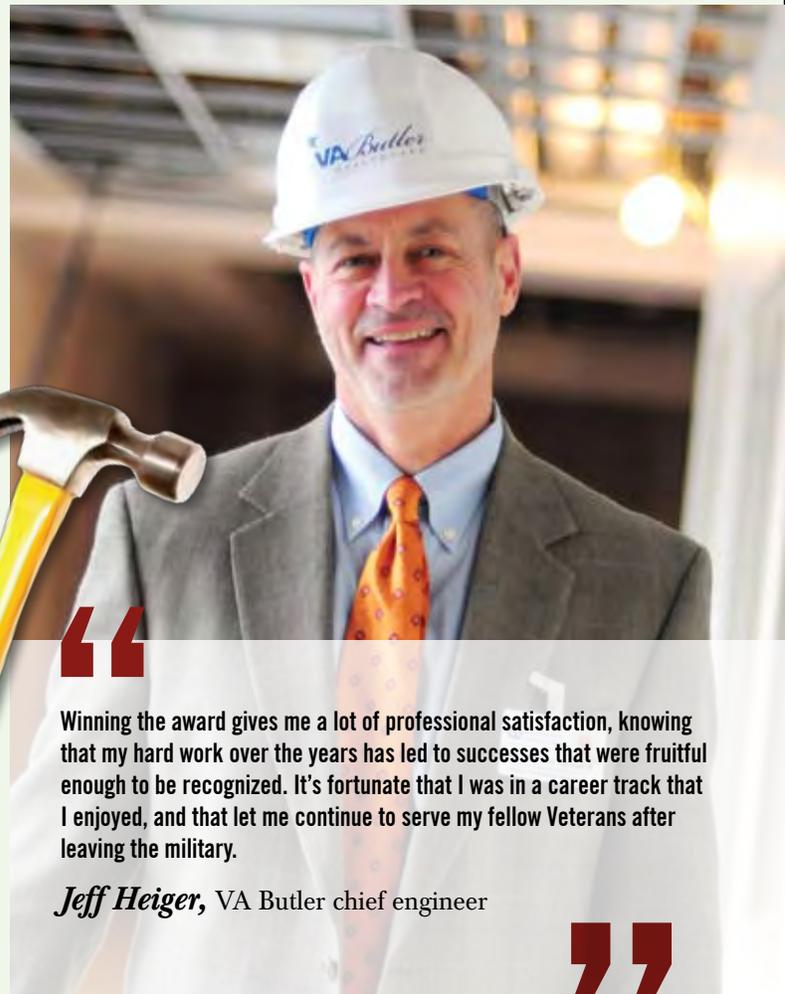
VA Butler engineer #1 in Nation last year

The Veterans Health Administration selected Jeff Heiger as the Chief Engineer of the Year for 2010. A 4-year Navy Veteran, Heiger has worked as VA Butler Healthcare's chief engineer since May 2008 and was instrumental in securing \$15.7 million dollars for construction and restoration projects to offer Veterans a state-of-the-art health care facility for years to come.

After serving two tours in Vietnam, Heiger earned his engineering degree thanks to the GI Bill. Now he is leading efforts to redesign patient care facilities, update infrastructure, improve efficiency, and increase environmental responsibility.

"My proudest accomplishment was using the GI Bill to go to college and earn my engineering degree," said Heiger. "That experience gave me critical thinking skills that have brought me professional success in engineering and leadership and will carry into the future."

VA Butler Healthcare has 44 acres and about 485,000 square feet of buildings, many of them more than 70 years old. Heiger's primary goals to improve the campus are to reduce energy costs, ensure that new equipment is energy efficient, use recycled materials in construction, and demolish older, unused buildings.



“Winning the award gives me a lot of professional satisfaction, knowing that my hard work over the years has led to successes that were fruitful enough to be recognized. It's fortunate that I was in a career track that I enjoyed, and that let me continue to serve my fellow Veterans after leaving the military.”

Jeff Heiger, VA Butler chief engineer



The 99th Division reenactors, decked out in authentic World War II uniforms, visited the Erie VAMC, including Veteran Bill Donald.



A SALUTE TO OUR VETERANS

VISN 4 facilities participate in national, annual observance

All VISN 4 medical centers celebrated the 33rd National Salute to Veteran Patients during the week of Feb. 13-19, 2011.

The Salute is a time of expressing honor and appreciation to inpatient and outpatient Veterans. Visitors learned about the important roles volunteers play in VISN 4 throughout the year and made a positive difference in the lives of Veterans, lifting their spirits at special events and delivering refreshments, gifts, and Valentines.



Patricia Jones, human resources specialist, spins the wheel for Wilkes-Barre inpatient Jim Roberts during Casino Day.



Pausing for a photo after a National Salute event are (from left) Dave Oslin, MD, Philadelphia VAMC Interim Chief of Staff; Michael E. Moreland, Director, VA Healthcare—VISN 4; Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter; and Joseph M. Dalpiaz, Director, Philadelphia VAMC.



TOTAL TEAM

COMPUTING COMPREHENSIVE CARE

VA boldly enters the world of cyber health care

You're sitting in the coffee shop when you suddenly realize that you're running low on your VA medication.

It's late in the evening and you remember that you have a VA appointment tomorrow, but you don't know what time.

You have a question for your health care team, but you don't have time to call during your work day.

Don't worry—My HealthVet has you covered.

With My HealthVet, you can refill prescriptions, view upcoming appointments, and send secure messages to your health care team anytime from anywhere you can access the Internet. Welcome to health care in the 21st century!



Healthy Living ONLINE

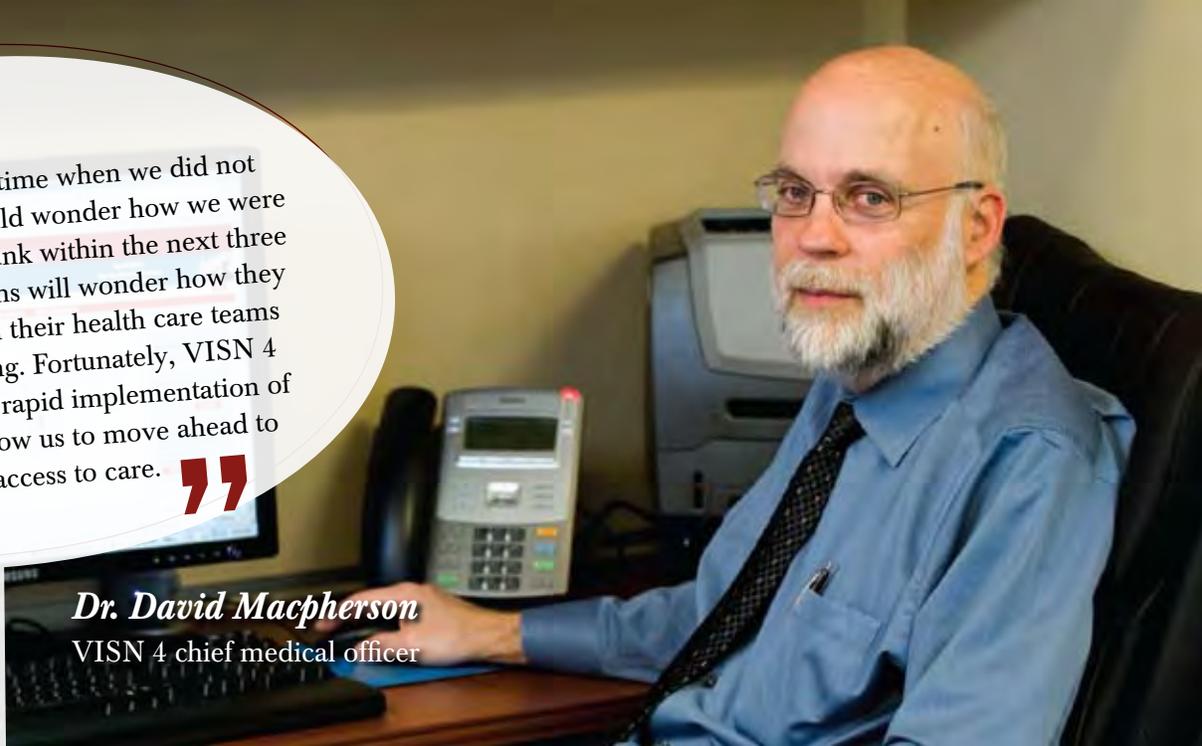
My HealthVet (MHV) helps Veterans take ownership of their care and collaborate with their providers and families by combining essential health record information with online health resources. Veterans can choose to share all or part of the information in their MHV account with their health care providers, whether inside or outside VA.



If you think back to the time when we did not have cell phones, you would wonder how we were able to communicate. I think within the next three to five years, most Veterans will wonder how they ever communicated with their health care teams without secure messaging. Fortunately, VISN 4 facilities have embraced rapid implementation of secure messaging to allow us to move ahead to ensure high access to care.



Dr. David Macpherson
VISN 4 chief medical officer



AM EFFORT ★★★

IPA: I PERSONALLY APPEAR

Before VA patients can access personal wellness reminders, view VA appointments and send secure messages, they must complete In-Person Authentication (IPA). IPA verifies the Veteran's identity, in person, along with their desire to use MHV—all in an effort to protect Veterans' personal information.

To get this upgraded account, Veterans must register online for an MHV account, watch the orientation video, and take their identification to the closest VA facility. Legal guardians and powers of attorney can authenticate a Veteran.

Anyone can access VA and health resources or register to take advantage of the personal health journals and other features, but only VA patients can become authenticated.

Remember to check the boxes for VA patient and Veteran under "Relationship to VA" during the registration process.

MHV FEATURES

- Access online medical libraries
- Keep track of personal health information
- Self-enter military and family health histories
- Track illnesses, accidents, or other events
- Enter and track over-the-counter medications, immunizations, and tests
- Record, track, and print important vital statistics
- Explore the Healthy Living Centers and Diseases & Conditions Centers
- Take online courses in the Learning Centers



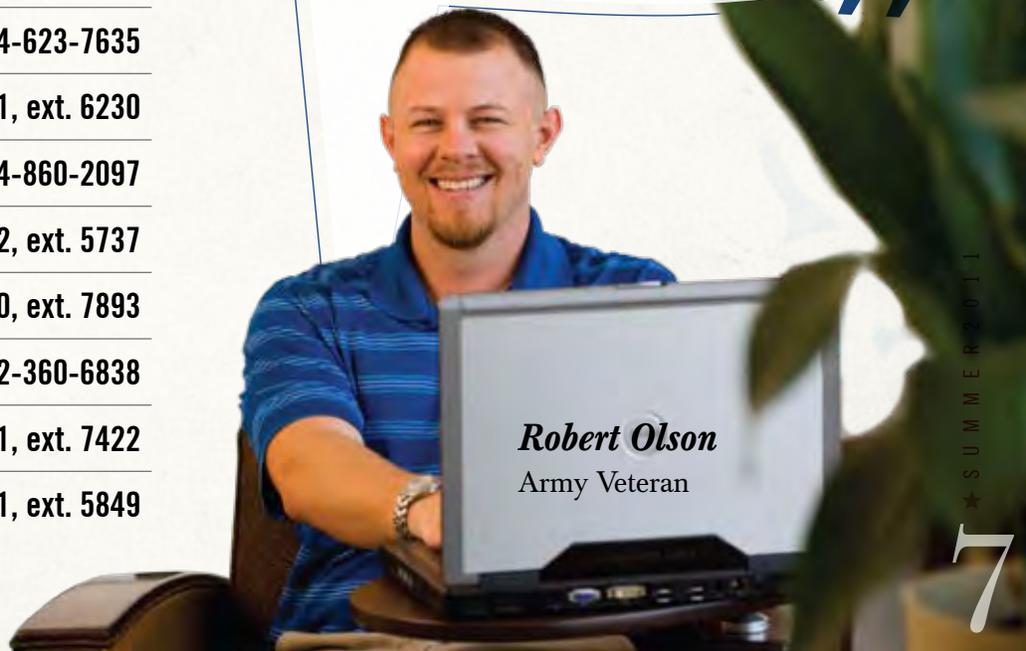
- Patient Empowerment
- Improving Health Outcomes
- 24/7 Access to VA Information

For more information about MHV or IPA, contact the MHV coordinator at your VA facility.

Altoona VAMC	814-943-8164, ext. 7146
VA Butler Healthcare	724-285-8595
Clarksburg VAMC	304-623-7635
Coatesville VAMC	610-384-7711, ext. 6230
Erie VAMC	814-860-2097
Lebanon VAMC	717-272-6612, ext. 5737
Philadelphia VAMC	215-823-5800, ext. 7893
VA Pittsburgh	412-360-6838
Wilkes-Barre VAMC	570-824-3521, ext. 7422
Wilmington VAMC	302-994-2511, ext. 5849



My HealtheVet has made refilling my prescriptions and tracking my health simple—it's all in one spot and I can log in anytime and anywhere. I have used secure messaging since it started and have never had an easier time getting direct communication with my health care team, including my provider. I'd recommend it to any Veteran!



Robert Olson
Army Veteran



“

I can actually walk out into the woods with my camera and take pictures. ”

— Veteran Harry Chew

★★★ AS GOOD *as* NEW

A JOINT EFFORT BETWEEN THE LEBANON VA AND WILMINGTON VA IS ALLOWING VETERANS TO PUT THEIR BEST FOOT FORWARD—WITHOUT PAIN

by Arin Gencer

The walls in Veteran Harry Chew's home in Cherry Hill, N.J., are covered with photographs.

Black-and-white images of his daughters when they were young. Color photos of his stepdaughter and grandson. Snapshots of sailboats.

In more recent years, Chew's troublesome knees—crippled by arthritis and “a history of injuries”—limited his photography to his living room, where he would take pictures of his grandchildren.

But now, after two total knee replacements in the past year, the Army Veteran is back, running along the sidelines at his grandson's soccer games and venturing into the wetlands of rural New Jersey, camera in tow, to indulge his passion once more.

“Now, it's more of an adventure,” Chew, 63, says. “This is the first time I've walked without a limp in my life.”

Chew is one of dozens of Veterans who've gone through a new total joint replacement orthopedic surgery program, organized between the Wilmington and Lebanon VA medical centers. The program represents an effort to provide Wilmington-area Veterans with access to a procedure within the VA system that can dramatically improve their lives.



Veteran Brice, who has had both hips replaced, standing outside his Chester, Pa., home.

Providing such surgery across the network presents a bit of a challenge at times because “there’s not a huge surplus of orthopedic surgeons out there,” says Dr. David S. Macpherson, VISN 4’s chief medical officer.

Medical centers may lose a surgeon to retirement or military deployment and find themselves unable to quickly fill the void, Macpherson adds. And the alternative—paying for Veterans to have surgery at a private community hospital—not only means losing coordination of care but also control of care quality, at a significantly higher cost.

Although the Wilmington VA does offer outpatient orthopedic surgery such as arthroscopies, the facility does not have the capacity to do joint replacements, particularly with the large geographic area it serves, says Dr. David Axon, the medical center’s part-time orthopedic surgeon.

The collaboration between Lebanon and Wilmington is “an innovative approach,” Macpherson says, and one that has been replicated in other specialties: Since January, the Lebanon VA has sent patients to Wilmington for vascular surgery (see “Working Together” for more details).



Indeed, “we work in a very collaborative manner to help each other so that Veterans get nothing but the very best of care,” says Dr. Kanan Chatterjee, the Lebanon VA’s chief of staff.

About 40 Veterans have had joint surgery through the program, which aims to serve some 50 patients annually. The first surgery took place in November 2009.

Marine Veteran Daniel Brice, 58, says he’s experienced a “100 percent difference” since having both of his hips replaced—one in November 2009, the other the following October.

Before his surgeries, Brice lived with “excruciating pain” that kept him from one of his favorite pastimes: cooking. Today, the Vietnam Veteran is back in the kitchen of his Chester, Pa., home, whipping up his closely guarded spaghetti recipe.

“I can walk with no pain and climb the stairs better,” says Brice, who diligently does exercises—such as going up and down steps—daily to strengthen his legs. “I told my grandson, ‘Give me another month, and I’ll play you in basketball.’”



A PATIENT'S JOURNEY

From Wilmington to Lebanon and Back

Once the Wilmington VA's Dr. David Axon or orthopedic nurse Tina Masiello identifies Veterans as surgical candidates and they are cleared for an operation, staff schedule an appointment for them at the Lebanon VA. Each medical center provides transportation for departing patients.

Beyond improving quality of life, the medical centers' combined efforts serve to "open Veterans' eyes to let them know that we are here for them and will provide as much service as we can," says Marian Goslin, the Wilmington VA's patient transfer nurse who works with the Lebanon-bound Veterans.

"We've had very good success, and the patients can't say enough good things about it," Goslin says. "They're out the door in a week's time and on the road to recovery." (See page 12 for more about what Veterans are saying about the program.)

Veteran Chew has been sprinting down that road. The surgeries—particularly on his right knee—were nothing short of a miracle, he says, taking him from being severely bowlegged and in constant pain to growing a half-inch taller after orthopedic surgeon Rex Herbert straightened his right leg.

He already has the next challenge in mind: waterskiing.

"It's given me my life back," Chew says of the knee replacements. "I'm totally happy." ★

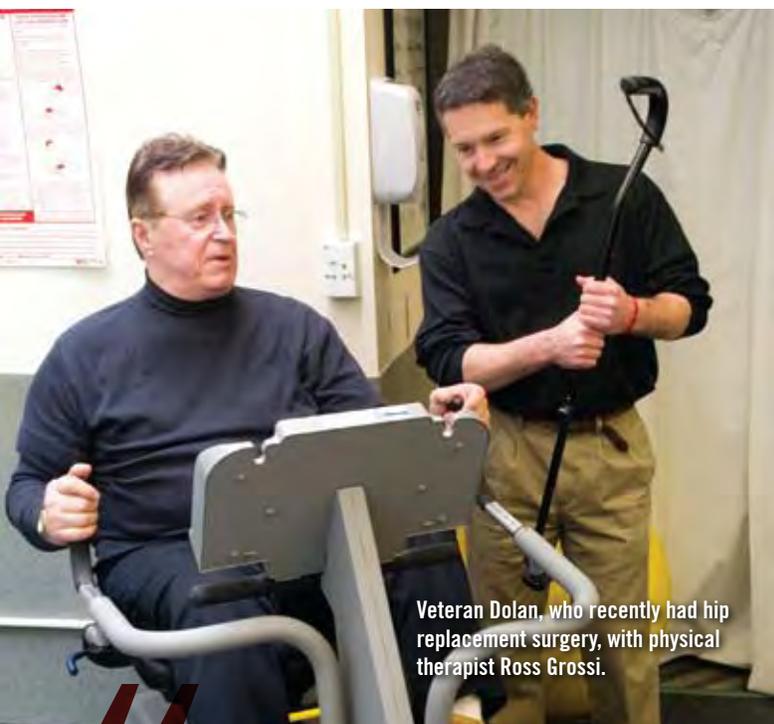
First Thursday of every month: Wilmington surgical candidates head to Lebanon for Dr. Rex Herbert's orthopedic surgery clinic, where they also meet the anesthesiologist and learn what to expect before, during and after surgery.

Mondays: Herbert operates on one Wilmington patient. The Veteran recovers at the Lebanon VA for two nights.

Wednesdays: Patients typically return to Wilmington, where they remain for at least the rest of the week.

Six weeks: Herbert reviews X-rays to see how the joint is healing.

Veterans usually do 12 sessions of physical therapy, either at the Wilmington VA or at a facility closer to them.



Veteran Dolan, who recently had hip replacement surgery, with physical therapist Ross Grossi.

“It’s just an excellent program. It makes me feel special that they’re doing everything they can to help Veterans.”

— Veteran Jim Dolan



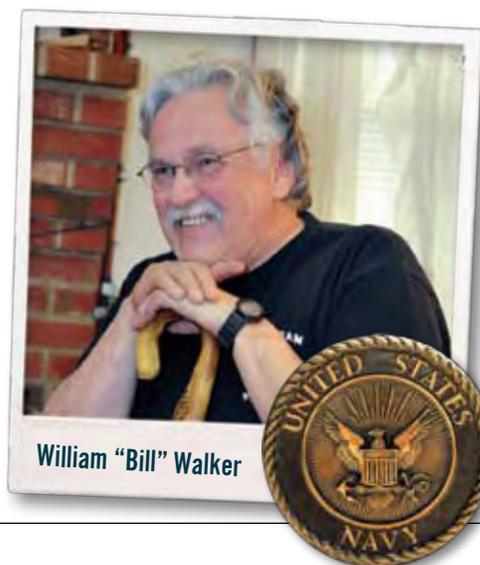
Masiello and Axon review one of their patients' X-rays at the Wilmington VA.

VETERANS PRAISE THE ORTHOPEDIC SURGERY PROGRAM

Instead of a romantic dinner, Veteran William Walker and his wife, Sarah, spent their Valentine's Day at the Lebanon VA, where he received a new left knee. The riding enthusiast and certified scuba diver hopes to soon get back in the saddle—and the water—and is already itching to return to his job as a fire dispatcher.



"I couldn't move without medication—couldn't bend my knee... [Then] I got my letter for surgery. Was I apprehensive? Nervous? You bet. But glad, so glad. I should have had this done years and years ago."



William "Bill" Walker



Dave Covington

For Veteran Dave Covington, a general contractor who owns a business in the Dover, Del., area, an arthritic right knee and limp were tantamount to job hazards. One partial knee replacement later, Covington can duck rafters and navigate crawl spaces with an ease previously unimaginable.



"The VA in Lebanon was extraordinary, from the surgeons to the nurses to the orderlies—even the cleaning staff. You knew you had people who were really helping and looking out for your best interest. They're Olympians in their field."

Veteran Jim Dolan—a Wilmington, Del., resident and recipient of two Purple Heart medals—had his left hip replaced after doctors discovered that his hip bone was dying and, as a result, collapsing. Mere weeks after his Feb. 7 surgery, Dolan's mind has already turned to the repairs he can do on his old Victorian home.



"Before my surgery, the pain was just unbelievable. I couldn't sleep, I didn't walk, I couldn't sit. Now I don't have any pain at all... It's like night and day—like I'm reborn. I've had a lot of experience with the VA, and this has been my best yet."



Jim Dolan



Dr. Bruce Panasuk

WORKING TOGETHER

The joint replacement orthopedic surgery program is one of several collaborative relationships in VISN 4 and the result of a concerted effort to foster cooperation among network facilities over the past few years.

In January, the Lebanon VA began sending patients in need of vascular surgery—because of blocked arteries in the legs, neck or abdomen—to Wilmington, says Dr. Bruce Panasuk, chief of surgery at the Wilmington VA.

The Wilmington VA reserves 20 percent of the available appointments in its weekly vascular clinic for these patients, who come together in a van provided by the Lebanon VA.

This arrangement is likely to grow as the Wilmington VA seeks to expand its program to include an endovascular suite that would allow staff to use an advanced, less invasive method for treating vascular disease, replacing surgery with a simpler procedure. It's a logical step: About 75 percent of vascular cases are treated this way, Panasuk says.

"It's an incredibly positive thing," Panasuk says of collaboration. "Once you build relationships with staff at both institutions and work out the logistics, it benefits the facilities and the patients. It's a win-win all around."



THE VISN 4 KIOSK INITIATIVE

SELF-SERVICE CHECK-IN EXPANDS FOR OUR VETERANS

New check-in kiosks will empower Veterans to update personal information and register for appointments

Veterans all across VISN 4 will soon take charge of their medical care like never before.

In VA's new Point of Service program, self-service kiosks in all 10 of VISN 4's medical centers and most community-based outpatient clinics will be replaced. The new kiosks look like the old ones, but will simplify registration and allow Veterans to update some of their medical information themselves.

VISN 4 is leading the introduction of these new kiosks, just as the network did in 2005 with the first generation of self-service stations.

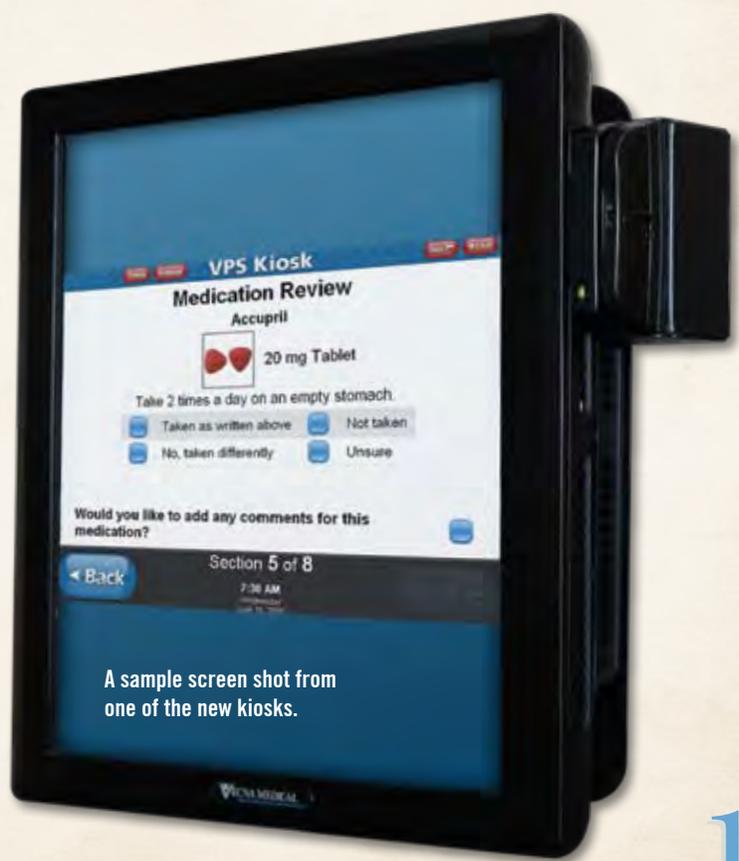
Veterans will use the new kiosks to update their personal information, view their account balance, and check in for an appointment—all by touching the screen.

But the biggest change is that Veterans will update their medication and allergy records right at the kiosk. The goal is to ensure that Veterans and their doctors have up-to-date medication and allergy information—information that saves lives.

“Doctors and nurses won’t have to collect this information during appointments,” said Paul Fast, VISN 4’s Point of Service project manager. “The self-service kiosk will take care of initial data collection, which can sometimes be time-consuming.”

Results from the Portland VA Medical Center in Oregon, which piloted a medication check system, show that self-service kiosks are the best way to collect patient information. Doctors have more time to review updated information before appointments, talk about medications and allergies with Veterans, and discuss treatment changes. Having medication information at the ready will also help doctors avoid potentially dangerous interactions.

Beyond improving care and convenience for Veterans, Fast said the new self-service kiosks will save money by conducting business more efficiently. Some new self-service capabilities will not be available immediately, but will be added later this year.



A sample screen shot from one of the new kiosks.

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) will serve as the Point of Service pilot site for VISN 4. Eleven new self-service kiosks will be installed at the University Drive division, where Veterans can try them out and give feedback on how they work during the 90-day pilot. Once this pilot is complete and the process perfected, 400 to 500 new self-service kiosks will be installed throughout the network over the next year.

Once the kiosks are in place, Veterans will bring all their medications in to make corrections to their medication record using the new system. Seeing all their medications listed at every check-in will help the Veteran understand why each one was prescribed.

“They’ll be more aware of the medications being utilized in their treatment,” said Linda Klootwyk, co-chair of the Point of Service project at VAPHS. “After they do this enough times, they’ll be comfortable in recognizing all of their medications.”

VA employees are ready to help Veterans transition to the new system. “An advocate will be there to help them every step of the way,” Klootwyk says.

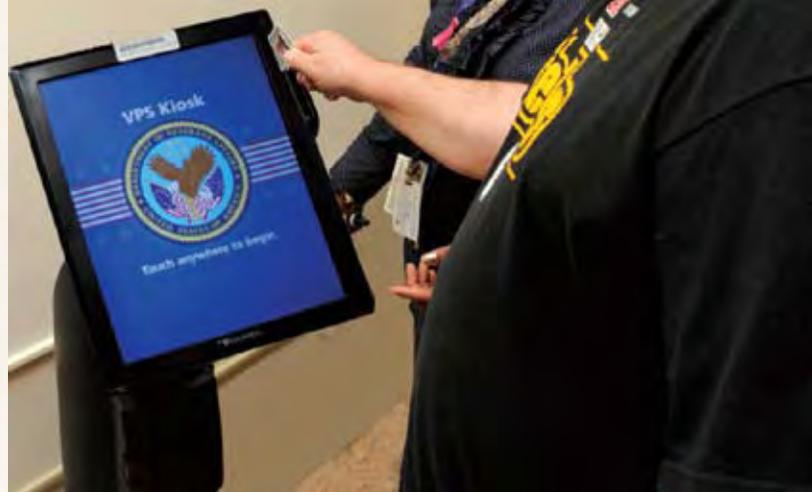
Fast expects a learning period similar to 2005, when some Veterans had difficulty getting used to the new machines. But Fast said it didn’t take long for the Veterans to prefer the kiosks over the clerks.

“The clerks like them, too, because it reduces the need to answer lots of repetitive questions and allows them to help Veterans with more complex issues on an in-depth, one-on-one level,” said Fast.

WITH OUR NEW SELF-SERVICE KIOSKS, YOU WILL...

- **avoid waiting in line for a clerk to update your information. With the touch screen, you can do it yourself!**
- **ensure the accuracy of your information. As part of check-in, you will verify several pieces of personal information—and have the opportunity to make changes, if necessary. This also will help guarantee that appointment letters, notices and prescriptions go to the correct address.**
- **print an appointment schedule. After checking in, you will receive a printed list of your appointments for the day.**

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System lead patient service assistant Monica Wilson guides Veteran Lonnie Rose through his first touch of a new kiosk.



PARTNERING WITH PORTLAND

VISN 4 pioneered self-service kiosks to track business functions (such as registration or appointment check-in). Soon after their implementation, Portland VA Medical Center initiated self-service kiosks for clinical applications. The new Point of Service kiosks will incorporate the clinical functions—including medication reconciliation and allergy review—that were developed in Portland with the business functions developed here.

Army Veteran Michael Kelly, of Beaverton, Ore., said that seeing a list of all of his medications reminds him to ask his doctor if he still needs to take some of them.

“I had some medications on the list that I wasn’t taking anymore, and the doctor got an alert from the check-in,” said 54-year-old Kelly, who served in the Persian Gulf and Bosnian wars.

Dr. Blake J. Lesselroth, Portland VAMC clinical informaticist, is grateful that these kiosks help improve the accuracy of medication records. He reports that about 95 percent of Veterans’ medication records are not accurate.

“Twenty-five to 30 percent of medications that Veterans take are not recorded,” said Lesselroth. “Ten to 15 percent of Veterans are not taking medications that are in their records.”

“

Twenty-five to 30 percent of medications that Veterans take are not recorded, and 10 to 15 percent of Veterans are not taking medications that are still in their records.

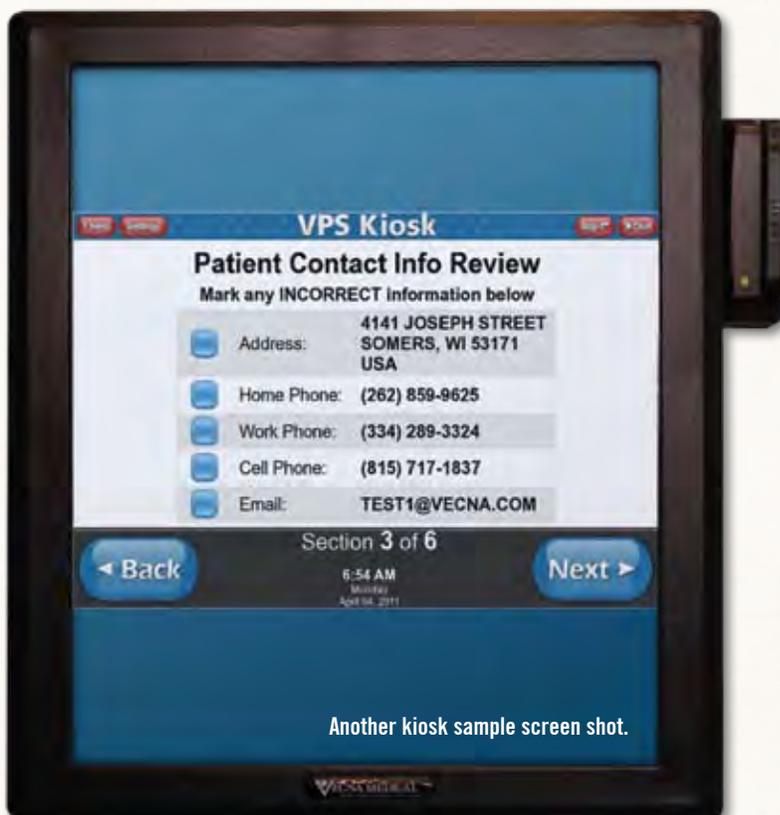
”

Dr. Blake J. Lesselroth

Portland VAMC clinical informaticist

FUTURE KIOSK CAPABILITIES:

- Complete health screenings
- Scan health insurance cards
- Make credit card payments
- Request pharmacy refills
- Schedule or change future appointments
- Complete surveys
- Access personalized health information through My Healthevet



Once the kiosks are in place, Veterans will bring all their medications in to make corrections to their medication record using the new system. Seeing all their medications listed at every check-in will help the Veteran understand why each one was prescribed.

ASK THE STAFF!

Why did you choose to work for VA?



LARRY STADULIS
Wilkes-Barre
FOOD SERVICE WORKER

"I began to look for something useful to help other Veterans in some capacity. The VA system provided that opportunity when I was informed that a part-time position was available in nutrition and food service."



DELORIS TIDWELL | **Clarksburg**
HOUSEKEEPING AIDE

"I obtained my sobriety here, and the people have always made me feel welcome. I decided to work for the VA because it feels like I am a part of a family."



TRANG VO | **Coatesville**
PHARMACIST

"I work for the VA because I love to help Veterans. I am proud that I am always trying my best to bring the best services to our Veterans. I enjoy learning something new and working hard for the better."



KLAVENS NOEL | **Altoona**
CHAPLAIN

"I served as a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force for more than six years in places such as San Antonio, Cheyenne, Wyo., and Dover, Del. It was encouraging and motivating to counsel others so the VA was the logical place to continue serving those who served."



DIANNE WALLACE | **Philadelphia**
OPHTHALMIC TECHNICIAN

"If I had known the VA had ophthalmic techs 40 years ago, I would have been here sooner. I love working with Veterans, especially Vietnam Vets as I am the same age as most of them. Very rewarding!"

VISION

for Excellence

SUMMER 2011

VISN 4

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