



PHILADELPHIA VA MEDICAL CENTER
Serving those who served.

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Ambassadors focus energy on Veterans, visitors

Veterans and visitors arriving at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center are being greeted at the door by employees with one question: “How can I help you?”

More than 90 VA staff members in The City of Brotherly Love now participate in the Employee Volunteer Ambassador Program, which provides greeters during peak clinic hours to help patients navigate the medical center. The need for the Ambassadors grew out of patient satisfaction scores and missed appointments, as well as the sight of Veterans or visitors lost in the corridors.

“It’s all about the Veterans,” said Melissa Heinlein, Voluntary Service Chief and architect of the Ambassador program. “They would come here and receive great health care but their experience may have been less than ideal because they would get lost or be late for their appointments.”

The way the system works, employees volunteer for one hour each pay period – or a one-hour shift every other week. Ambassadors greet visitors and Veterans when they enter the building at both entrances, escort them to appointments, and answer questions. The program began operation from 8 a.m. – 12 noon Monday through Thursday, before being expanded to Fridays by popular demand. This matches the busiest clinic times when there are the most Veterans and visitors to help.

Ambassadors can be easily identified by their maroon vests and “Ask Me” pins. They received training in a variety of areas including wheelchair safety, escorting visually impaired individuals, and customer service. They also went on a scavenger hunt to locate frequently visited areas of the hospital.

“I enjoy the patient interaction and helping the Veterans,” said Ambassador Habibah Afif. “I feel they have served us and we should go above and beyond to serve them.”

Afif also pointed out that the program helps ensure the Veterans get to their appointments on time and provides an informal forum for employees to receive feedback about the services the hospital provides.

The program is part of a larger goal for the hospital: to create a customer service culture focused on the Veteran. The hope is that ambassadors will carry their efforts into their regular tours of duty.

The Philadelphia VAMC provides health care to more than 50,000 Veterans in Philadelphia and seven surrounding counties in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. More information is available at www.philadelphia.va.gov.