



# **Wilmington VA Medical Center 2012 Annual Report**

# Message from Leadership

It is a distinct honor and privilege to have been appointed by the Secretary to serve as the Director, Delaware and Southern New Jersey Healthcare System, Wilmington, Delaware. In this position, I have the exciting challenge of directing the provision of services to over 26,000 Veterans in our service area. Wilmington VAMC and its five Community Based Outpatient Clinics have excelled in many areas over the past several years. In fact, our medical center was recently recognized by J.D. Power and Associates for Service Excellence and for the second year in a row, also listed by The Joint Commission as a top performer on healthcare quality measures.

As the Director, I welcome the opportunity to take our healthcare system to an even greater level of service to our Veterans. That journey has already begun with the implementation of a number of initiatives. We have expanded inpatient services with the re-opening of ward 4 East. Dialysis patients are now cared for in newly renovated space using the latest technology and equipment. We are also very excited about our new Endovascular program that has been launched recently. It is with great pride that I credit our dedicated employees for these achievements and for the high quality care delivered to our **nation's heroes every day.**

I am please to present our 2012 Annual Report that offers only a glimpse of our efforts to provide exceptional service to the Veterans we serve.

Sincerely,

*Daniel D. Hendee, FACHE*

Director, Delaware and Southern New Jersey Healthcare System



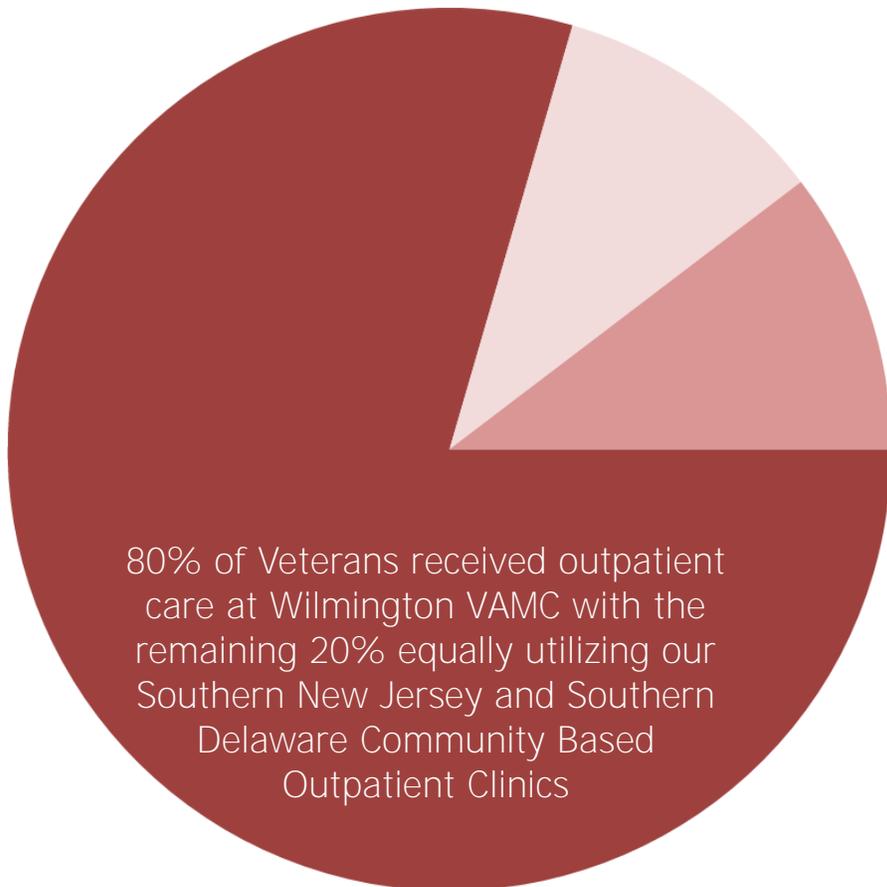
*Wilmington VAMC leadership (left to right): Enrique Guttin, MD, Chief of Staff; Daniel D. Hendee, FACHE, Director; Mary Alice Johnson, MS, RN, Associate Director for Patient Care Services; and William England, Associate Director for Finance and Operations.*



Wilmington VAMC proudly serves Veterans throughout Delaware and Southern New Jersey. The main campus for our medical center is in Wilmington, Delaware. Our five Community Based Outpatient Clinics are located in Kent and Sussex Counties, Delaware and Cape May, Atlantic and Cumberland Counties, New Jersey. We offer comprehensive services ranging from preventive screenings to long-term care. We are grateful to our men and women who have served our country. We are honored to assist you and intend to provide you with the coordinated care that you deserve. We welcome you home and will assist you with your transition back into civilian life. A simple plaque in Washington, D.C. states, **in part: "To care for him, who has borne the battle..." It's what we do, and we're proud to do so. Please visit our website to learn more at <http://www.wilmington.va.gov>.**

### Financial Report & Statistics

Medical Care Appropriations	\$167,323,814
Staffing Statistics:	
• Direct Medical Care	683
• Administrative	169
• Engineering & Environmental	98
Authorized Beds:	
• Hospital (Inpatient)	60
• Community Living Center	60
Unique Veterans Served	26,566
Total Outpatient Visits:	
• Wilmington VAMC	193,381
• Sussex County (DE)	12,857
• Kent County (DE)	11,828
• Cumberland County (NJ)	10,453
• Atlantic County (NJ)	9,514
• Cape May County (NJ)	5,229
Voluntary Service:	
• Volunteers	595
• Service Hours	62,726
• Cash Donations	\$49,856
• In-kind Donations	\$121,111



**1,579**  
Women Veterans Served

**2,064**  
OEF/OIF/OND Veterans Served

# Advancements

Wilmington VAMC has made incredible advancements in 2012 including robust construction upgrades and renovations totaling \$43.4M, the addition of a new endovascular suite, and expanding our Telehealth services to reach Veterans through technology. The fourth floor expansion is another project directly responding to new needs and requirements. Single patient rooms, totally equipped with the latest equipment, and brand new energy-efficient windows welcome Veterans who need inpatient care as part of their treatment plan.



Wilmington VAMC has been preparing for a new endovascular program for the past three years. We completed construction of a state-of-the-art endovascular interventional procedure room and began using it in July 2012. Dr. Krishnasamy Soundararajan came on board as our full-time Director of Vascular and Endovascular Services and is leading the launch phase of the program. We began performing endovascular procedures in late 2012 with excellent outcomes, supported by an outstanding operating room.

Endovascular procedures include diagnostic angiograms, balloon angioplasty, stent placement of diseased and occluded peripheral arteries to allow healing of wounds and/or increase their ambulatory distance to enable better lifestyle. The procedures are performed through a needle in the groin, with the patient on sedation but awake during the procedure and discharged on the following day. We are now treating abdominal aortic aneurysms with endovascular grafts done through small groin incisions; allowing patients



*Dr. Krishnasamy Soundararajan*

*Dr. Priya Sundararajan*

to go through much a far less stressful procedure and ready to leave the hospital in a day.

We are hiring additional staff to further bolster the program. We are treating patients in the eastern hub of VISN 4 and will see Veterans from the Coatesville, Philadelphia, Lebanon and even Wilkes-Barre VAMCs by late spring/early summer of 2013.

In 2012 we began a podiatric surgery program. We acquired an energetic, well-trained, full-time surgical podiatrist, Dr. Priya Sundararajan, to build expand the availability of podiatric surgical services to our Veterans.

Other eastern hub VAMCs have voiced interest in sending their surgical podiatry patients to Wilmington, and we are preparing the infrastructure to effectively treat additional patients. We plan to add an additional exam room to improve clinic efficiency as well as training and utilizing a foot hygienist or health technician as part of the podiatric clinical team. The enhancements will address an increased need for basic foot care and the podiatric physician to treat more complex foot and ankle conditions.

Our Behavioral Health Service significantly increased access to mental healthcare services in 2012. We added a host of new staff including 13 social workers, 9 registered nurses, 7 psychologists, 3 psychiatrist, 1 nurse practitioner, 5 licensed practical nurses and seven administrative support staff. The additional resources allowed us to offer evening hours services, increase outreach to Veterans in rural areas and further expand telehealth services.

Behavioral Health Service staff attended numerous conferences and community outreach events; including the Yellow Ribbon/Post Deployment Health Reassessment, where our OEF/OIF/OND team met with deploying and returning members of local military units to brief them on VA services available to them. Our Veterans Justice Outreach and Suicide Prevention Program Managers attended conferences and town **hall meetings including having a presence at last year's NASCAR races in Dover, Delaware.** They participated in several Stand Down events in New Jersey and Delaware and hosted the Annual Homeless Summit in October, which brought together VA Homeless Programs with numerous community partners.

Our Northfield Community Based Outpatient Clinic officially opened in 2012. The new 11,000 square-foot clinic opened its doors December 5 in Northfield, New Jersey. The new clinic provides improved access and upgraded technology for Veterans in Southern New Jersey. The official ribbon-cutting ceremony was held January 9, 2012.



*The new Northfield CBOC officially opened in 2012 improving access for Veterans in Southern New Jersey.*

For more than a dozen years, the clinic was located in Ventnor, N.J. The new facility is four times larger with ground floor access, easy parking, and bus transportation. The new clinic offers primary care as well as blood and lab work, electrocardiography, telehealth, behavioral health, substance abuse treatment, psychosocial rehabilitation and homeless Veteran support including HUD-VA Supported Housing program coordination.



VA's Caregiver Support Program (CSP) was established as a result of the Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act to recognize the sacrifices of caregivers/families and the many challenges they experience as they care for those who have "borne the battle". The program provides comprehensive assistance, support and services for caregivers/families of eligible Veterans of all eras. The program promotes Veteran/caregiver health and allows Veterans to remain in their homes to enhance their quality of life. The CSP has three components: Caregiver Support Line, General Caregivers Program, and Family Caregivers Program. There are 41 caregivers in Wilmington VAMC's program, supported by two coordinators.

The incorporation of telehealth technologies means many things; patients and providers can communicate over long distances without the inconvenience of travel and still provide and receive high quality healthcare services. The first programs to get "up and running" were behavioral health, some primary care services and dermatology services. As the program continues to expand more and more clinical services will be added, patients will not have to travel to the main facility as often, costs will be reduced, and satisfaction levels will increase.



Elevators are always in constant demand. To meet the ever increasing need for internal transportation, Wilmington VAMC invested in a project in 2012 to add three new elevator banks. When completed in early 2013 there will be twice as many elevators available for patients, visitors, staff and support services. Mentioned earlier, the entire campus is receiving new high-efficient windows as part of meeting reduced energy requirements, lowering heating and cooling costs and giving the interior and exterior a facelift. The project is scheduled for completion in 2013.



The east wing of our fifth floor was renovated in a major way in 2012. We expanded our dialysis capabilities by almost doubling the number of patient chairs; increasing the number from six to ten. We also added two isolation rooms for immune-compromised patients, further enhancing quality care and addressing key patient safety concerns. Several engineering-related improvements were also incorporated into the work with respect to the mechanic of safety and efficiently operating dialysis equipment.

We were also fortunate to secure the resources to renovate our Urology Suite. Part of the renovation work **included adding three "cysto" (cystoscopy) rooms to meet the needs of our Veteran population.**



The MyHealthVet (MHV) Program continues to expand and reach more Veterans. MyHealthVet is VA's online personal health record. It was designed for Veterans, active duty Servicemembers, their dependents and caregivers. MyHealthVet helps you partner with your healthcare team. It provides you opportunities and tools to make informed decisions and manage your healthcare.

Secure Messaging, a safe, encrypted 2-way communication between a Veteran and their VA provider is online in our outpatient clinics in Delaware and New Jersey, as well as Primary Care and our Medical and Surgical Specialty clinics. Secure Messaging supports making or changing appointments, asking questions, and filling/refilling prescriptions. Veterans can also see and print their lab results, get wellness reminders and much more.

Among the newest features available to Veterans include the Blue Button and VA Notes. The Blue Button organizes your personal health record and allows you to download your record either as a PDF or text file. Print out information to file away at home or take a copy to your next appointment to share self-entered information with your provider.

VA Notes are clinical notes that your healthcare team records during your appointments or hospital stays. Also available are your VA Immunization records, more detailed lab reports and a list of your current medical issues.

Visit <http://www.myhealth.va.gov> to learn more about how MyHealthVet can help you!



*MyHealthVet Coordinator Mary Gallagher, RN and Tyrone Dixon are available to answer your questions about MyHealthVet and Secure Messaging.*

# Achievements & Recognition

Wilmington VA Medical Center received high marks from Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki during his visit in **April 2012 at Delaware Senator Tom Carper's invitation to join** him for his annual Veterans Summit. Secretary Shinseki toured the facility along with Senators Tom Carper and Christopher Coons, and Congressman John Carney.

**"As the tide of war recedes, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to anticipate the needs of returning Veterans, and this clinic is just the kind of anticipation we're talking about. We also toured the new surgical suite, a renovated area designed to perform same-day surgeries and procedures consistent with the highest levels and qualities of patient care," Shinseki said during his visit.**



The Department of Veterans Affairs Consolidated Mail Order Program (CMOP) for pharmacy prescriptions was once again recognized as a J.D. Power and Associates 2012 Customer Service Champion -- one of only 50 companies to have earned the distinction this year. To qualify for inclusion on this elite list, companies must not only excel within their own industry, but also must stand out among leading brands in 20 major industries evaluated by J.D. Power. **Wilmington VAMC's Outpatient Pharmacy** Department processes approximately 40,000 prescriptions per month. Our Inpatient Pharmacy Department also processes approximately 46,000 orders monthly for IV solutions, chemotherapy treatments, ward stock items, and inpatient unit dose medications.



## The Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Nursing Innovation

Awards program recognizes nursing leadership in quality improvement. VA nurses are dynamic change agents, influencing practice and system-wide initiatives improving Veterans healthcare. The program recognizes ten hospital programs and/or initiatives each year with a \$10,000 group award. Wilmington VAMC was one of 11 winners in 2012 nationally recognized for improving the care of Veterans with congestive heart failure (CHF).

The team was led by Colleen Donahue, RN who worked with nursing staff, **physicians, pharmacists and dietitians with the support of the Medical Center's Chief Nurse.** Some of the results include patients' increased knowledge about their disease process and primary care appointments scheduled for follow-up one week from discharge. Evidenced-based practice drove the three-year initiative, which resulted in dramatically decreased readmission rates from 24.5 percent in 2009 to zero percent by early 2012.



Our Environmental Management Service (EMS) employees received the 2012 Team of the Year award. EMS employees are dedicated to the mission of the medical center and provide a clean, safe environment for staff, patients and their families. Over the past year, our facility has undergone major construction and the EMS employees rose to the challenge ensuring that all areas were maintained at the highest level of cleanliness.

John M. Lafferty, Voluntary Specialist and champion for our Veterans and their families, received the distinguished honor of **Employee of the Year in 2012.** When you pass John's office, it is not unusual to see a resident or patient talking with John. He willingly gives guidance when appropriate or refers individuals to appropriate staff members. John is a warm and compassionate individual who always thinks of others first. John has an enormously positive impact on the overall operation of the Voluntary Service through his infectious work ethic and can-do spirit. John unselfishly gives of his time and shares his expertise. He acts as a mentor to new volunteers, ensuring that every volunteer demonstrates the highest standards of **providing patient care.** John's dedication to America's Veterans, the volunteers, and Wilmington VAMC staff is a reminder to us all of our responsibility to contribute unselfishly to a cause greater than



Wilmington VAMC was recognized for continuing to improve the quality of the programs and services we provide. One of our goals in being totally transparent in terms of what we do and how we measure up **against other VA Medical Centers and community providers. VA's transparency program reports healthcare goals, successes and opportunities to improve.** The ASPIRE and LinKS dashboards reflect the specifics on how we are meeting these goals. We were recognized for achieving excellence in Surgical Care, lipid management, ischemic heart, tobacco and "all cause" readmissions.

**But we weren't done there!** We also achieved the highest weighted score possible (500) in the VISN 4 FY2012 Annual Summary Rating. The score represents outstanding performance on all five elements of performance: Leading Change, Leading People, Business Acumen, Building Coalitions, and Results Driven.

We also demonstrated high levels of success in:

- Innovative Solutions/Leading Change - Mobile Medical Van, Endovascular Program, HyGreen Handwashing Reminder System
- Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) - Telephone Utilization, Continuity of Care (same provider)
- Workforce Management - Diversity, Disability Hiring, Emergency Department Physician staffing
- Behavioral Health - HUD-VASH, PTSD access, Grant and Per Diem Program
- Budget Execution - staying within fiscal limits
- Community Relationships - many outreach efforts
- Clinical Excellence - **Patient Safety, Preventive Programs, Cancer Screening, Women's Health, Diabetic Care, Heart Failure, Surgery, etc.**

**We're still not done!** We were visited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) who complimented Wilmington VAMC for one of the smoothest original surveys they had completed in 15 years. VA staff was recognized for several significant issues such as treating our Veterans with **utmost dignity and respect, Leadership's commitment to the program, staff advocacy for Veterans,** program practices based on sound ethical principles and staff quality, dedication and enthusiasm.

Lastly, we were among nineteen VA medical facilities from across the nation who were recently recognized by The Joint Commission as top performers on key health care quality measures for 2011-2012. For a second consecutive year, Wilmington VAMC received Top Performer status -- a noteworthy distinction. **The listing recognizes facilities that are the top performers based on The Joint Commission's review of evidence**

-based care processes that are closely linked to positive patient outcomes. Three new accountability measure sets were included in the calculation for **this year's Top Performers program: stroke; venous thromboembolism; and inpatient psychiatric services.**

**"VA health care has been a leader in performance measurement, electronic health records, research and clinical quality for more than a decade," said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel. "I am proud of the staff and I fully expect to see more VA medical facilities making this list next year."**

Veterans are assured by numerous outside auditing and reviewing entities that we are among the best of the best providing high quality, timely and **efficient healthcare services to our nation's most deserving.**

**The Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the VA's Under Secretary for Health are committed to transparency -- giving Americans the facts. The Veterans Health Administration releases the quality goals and measured performance of VA healthcare in order to ensure public accountability and to spur constant improvements in healthcare delivery. To learn more about the ASPIRE and Linking Information Knowledge and Systems (LinKS) dashboards, visit <http://www.hospitalcompare.va.gov>.**



# Community Involvement

Dozens of children, young and old, waited patiently for the arrival of the Easter Bunny during the second annual Easter Egg Hunt held on the grounds of Wilmington VA Medical Center. A chilly breeze and overcast skies did not deter the eager egg hunters, who scrambled across the property in search of brightly-colored eggs. In addition to the Easter Bunny, the State Farm Good Neigh Bear walked around the pavilion giving hugs, handshakes and high-fives as children lined up to collect a few treats. Walgreens' employees were on hand to provide free photographs with the Easter Bunny and distribute health information. Wilmington VAMC Voluntary Service brought it all together as more than 500 visitors participated.



*Dozens of community children gathered on the lawn to search for brightly-colored eggs during the second annual Easter Egg Hunt.*



The third Annual Community Health Day was also hosted by Wilmington VA Medical Center in 2012. The community event had five businesses participate in it's first year. The third event had thirty-seven community businesses and services represented.



*Thirty-seven community businesses and services attended the third annual Community Health Day in 2012. The events included free Zumba lessons, a visit from the State Farm Good Neigh Bear, and games promoting healthy living.*

# Veteran Support



Wilmington VAMC collaborated with the Delaware Food Bank in 2012 to have a distribution at the Medical Center for needy Veterans. One hundred forty-four Veterans received cases of food which would provide for a family of four for approximately three days.



During 2012, the Department of Delaware Korean War Veterans Association donated two benches with embossed emblems of the branches of military services on the front of each bench. The benches can be seen at the beginning and end of the walking trails that were installed on campus last year.



*Members of the Dept. of DE Korean War Veterans Association and Director Daniel Hendee display the new benches.*



Our devoted staff continued to create special events for our Community Living Center (CLC) residents throughout the year. One special event included a Mardi Gras celebration. The resident's dining room was decorated with a New Orleans theme, games were developed to engage residents, and lunch was served including a "King's Cake."

*Sabriya Sabur, RN helped decorate the dining area and engage Community Living Center residents with games during the Mardi Gras celebration. Each resident took a turn having their picture taken as "King of Mardi Gras."*



The First State Patriots, a Wilmington VAMC sponsored team of wheelchair athletes, arrived in Richmond, VA in June 2012 for the National Wheelchair Games. Our Voluntary Service successfully raised over 80% of the athletes expenses through generous contributions from the community and fundraising activities. The team returned home with two gold medals, one silver medal, and two bronze medals; however, the medals did not compare to the enthusiasm they have in returning to the National Wheelchair Games in Tampa, FL in 2013.

Wilmington VAMC residents received a special visit from Tara Greathouse, Mrs. Delaware 2012. The mother of three stopped by to chat with Veterans and thank them for their service.



*Larry Binger*



*"Jersey" Jeanne Goldy-Santitate*



# Serving Locally -- And Globally

*It's terrifying, awe-inspiring and humbling.*

Most of us will never experience the thrill of seeing the world's tallest mountain up-close. We can admire the courage of those intrepid few who have climbed to the top of the world. Dr. Dennis Witmer, lead general surgeon and director of Surgical Education at the Wilmington VAMC traded his scalpel in 2012 for a backpack, cold-weather climbing gear and a ticket to Kathmandu, Nepal, the southern gateway to Mount Everest.



*Dr. Dennis Witmer presents banners that were carried on his journey to Mount Everest to Community Living Center residents Carl Mazzearelli and Charles Stewart, Jr.*

Dr. Witmer “experienced an emotional and spiritual impact” far beyond what he expected when planning the trip. He did not attempt to “summit” Everest; his trek from Base Camp (at 17,500 feet above sea level) to Camp 1 (20,000 feet) meant crossing the treacherous Khumbu Icefall.

The Khumbu Icefall is regarded as one of the most dangerous stages along the southern route to the summit. Geologists estimate the glacier moves 3 to 4 feet every day. The glacier moves so fast that large crevasses open with little or no warning. Large towers of ice often suddenly collapse. Huge blocks of ice regularly sheer off and tumble down the mountain.

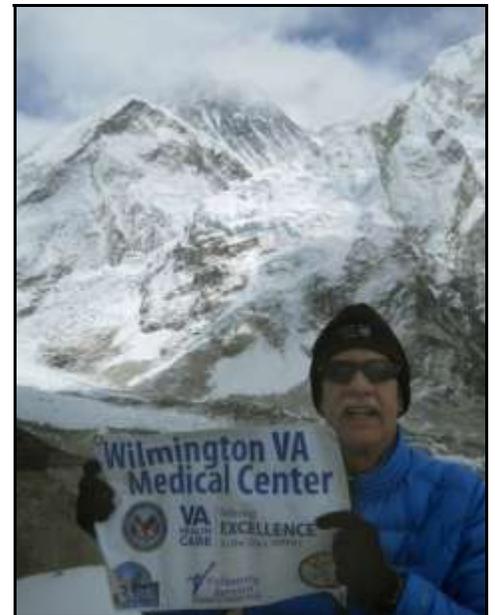
“In base camp, at night, as you lie there in your tent, you can hear the glacier moving,” Witmer said with wonderment in his voice. “During the day, you can hear avalanches as the glacier moves down the valley.”

An experienced hiker and climber, Witmer took on Mount Everest as a personal challenge, just as he did with previous treks up Mount Rainier in Washington, Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa, Mount Elbrus in southwestern Russia and the Maipo volcano in Argentina.

“I ascribe to physical and mental challenges – to prove to myself that I can do it,” Witmer explained. “The ultimate competition in life is with yourself – you need to continually challenge yourself physically, mentally and professionally. If you don’t, you stagnate and you die. If you are not moving forward, you are moving backward. You can’t sit still in this life; I guess that’s why I do it.”

Witmer carried a Wilmington VAMC banner with him on his journey. While on Everest, he earned 17 hours of Continuing Medical Education credits from the Wilderness Medical Society.

“Reaching the summit is only possible when Monsoon winds shift the jet stream away from the summit at 29,035 feet,” Witmer explained. “Winds in excess of 100 miles per hour WILL blow you off of the mountain,” he added. The daytime temperature at Base Camp was in the upper 30s, and at night dropped to the teens.



*What is the next challenge?*

Dr. Witmer has nothing new planned and is happy just “enjoying the afterglow for now.”



