



## Care Where You Need It

In August 2017, VISN 4 appointed market-level workgroups to explore collaboration opportunities that would enhance access, expand services, improve Veteran satisfaction and more effectively utilize resources.

The Eastern Market’s charge was to develop and implement a plan to enhance and integrate surgical services within the market. Initial focus was placed on considering opportunities for vascular, urological, orthopedic and general surgeries through collaborative efforts between Coatesville, Philadelphia and Wilmington.



The Western Market was charged with developing and implementing a plan to enhance and integrate specialty and surgical services in the market, both virtual and on-site. Initial priority was placed on development of options for pulmonology, urology, cardiology, orthopedic and ophthalmology services.

*(Continued on Page 4)*

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

VISN 4 is working hard to transform toward personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care. In pursuit of this goal, VISN 4 appointed market-level workgroups last Summer to explore collaboration opportunities that would enhance access, expand services, improve Veteran satisfaction and more effectively utilize resources. Our feature story provides an update on all the great work that has been accomplished toward our objective to function as an integrated health network covering the entire state of Pennsylvania and parts of the adjoining states.

Our key areas of focus Network-wide continue to be: access to care, trust in VA care, and proving a greater choice for Veterans. As you will read in this issue, we continued to improve in all three areas during the past year.

With the passage of the MISSION Act last year, the various community care programs will be consolidated into one community care program. This means that Veterans will have the ability to access care from VA or the community when and where they need. This does not mean that VA is privatizing, but that Veterans have a choice. Our intention is to have VA remain as the centerpiece of a Veteran's decision process and the integrator of a Veteran's care.

I hope to have the opportunity to meet many of you during my site visits to the medical centers and participate in community meetings during my tenure as the Acting VISN 4 Director. On behalf of our VISN 4 Leadership team and staff, I thank all Veterans and their families for entrusting VISN 4 for your health care.

I hope you enjoy this issue and will share the good news.

Sincerely,

Timothy W. Liezert  
Acting Network Director



## VA Healthcare-VISN 4 Leadership Team

**Timothy W. Liezert**  
Acting Network Director  
Since February 2019

**Charles R. Thilges**  
Deputy Network Director  
Since January 2018

**Timothy Burke, M.D.**  
Chief Medical Officer  
Since March 2016

**Vacant**  
Chief Financial Officer

**Moira M. Hughes, FACHE**  
Quality Management Officer  
Since April 2014

**Teneal Caw**  
Human Resources Officer  
Since August 2012

**David E. Cowgill**  
Communications Manager  
Since January 2007

**Jo Petro**  
Executive Assistant  
Since January 2018

### 2018 VISN 4 Fact Sheet

VA Healthcare-VISN 4 is a fully integrated network of 9 VA campuses, 44 outpatient clinics, 1 mobile clinic, and 17 vet centers.

In fiscal year 2018, VISN 4 served 311,449 Veterans from across the Nation. With an operating budget of more than \$2.8 billion and a staff of 13,132, VISN 4 is working hard to transform toward personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care.

Get all the latest facts including a complete listing of all sites of care. Download the VISN 4 Fact Sheet at [www.visn4.va.gov/VISN4/news/fact-sheet.asp](http://www.visn4.va.gov/VISN4/news/fact-sheet.asp).



# AROUND the NETWORK

## ERIE

### **Erie VAMC Launches Whole Health Champion Education Trainings**

As a Whole Health Flagship facility, Erie VAMC kicked off the new year with a focus on recruiting and educating Whole Health Champions through the inauguration of two new training courses: Primary Care Whole Health Champion Training and Whole Health for You & Me (Flagship course).



Two current Erie VAMC Whole Health Champions, Dr. Linda Peng and Mari Johnson, led the Flagship course for 14 staff members from Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs) who had been actively engaged in prior Whole Health trainings and embodied the spirit of Whole Health.

Members of the executive leadership also attended the training to show their support for the diffusion of Whole Health and highlight the role Whole Health Champions will play in the transformation of health care. Similar to “Train the Trainer” programs in the military, staff members who completed the Flagship course participated in Train the Champion sessions where they learned how to take the key concepts of Whole Health – the wheel of health, personal health inventory, personal health plan, and other resources – back to their work areas and train fellow staff on how

*(FRONT COVER) Dr. Seshaiyengar Venkatesh, an Ophthalmologist from VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, regularly visits the Erie VA Medical Center in order to provide cataract surgery and other routine surgical services for Veterans.*

to use the Whole Health approach. This form of training allows a better understanding of the program throughout multiple departments.

At the end of FY18, 16% of Erie VA employees participated in a formal training offered by Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC & CT). In FY19, Erie VAMC will continue to train staff and forge paths of innovation in Veteran health care.

## COATESVILLE

### **VA Chief Biomedical Engineer of the Year**

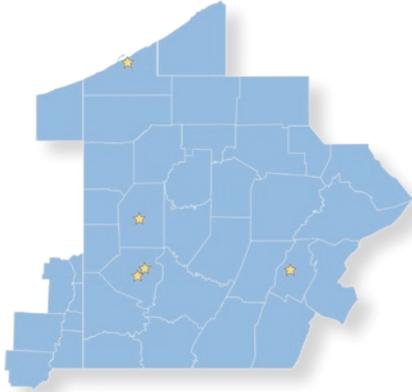
Congratulations to Kim Sekiya, VISN 4 Healthcare Technology Manger, for being named the VA Chief Biomedical Engineer of the Year for the second time in her VA and VISN 4 career.



She was recognized by VA Central Office for providing significant leadership and involvement in multiple VACO Office of Healthcare Technology Management (HTM) initiatives and projects. She was also acknowledged for being a “go to” resource for issues on NAC equipment for the VISN Office and Biomedical Engineering, Logistics and clinical staff at all VISN 4 facilities.

Kim was also recently selected as the recipient of the 2019 American College of Clinical Engineering Professional Achievement in Management Award. This prestigious award is given for Professionals who demonstrate managerial contributions to the clinical engineering profession, such as the application of new techniques to clinical Engineering with measurable position results.

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### Western Market Clinical Integration

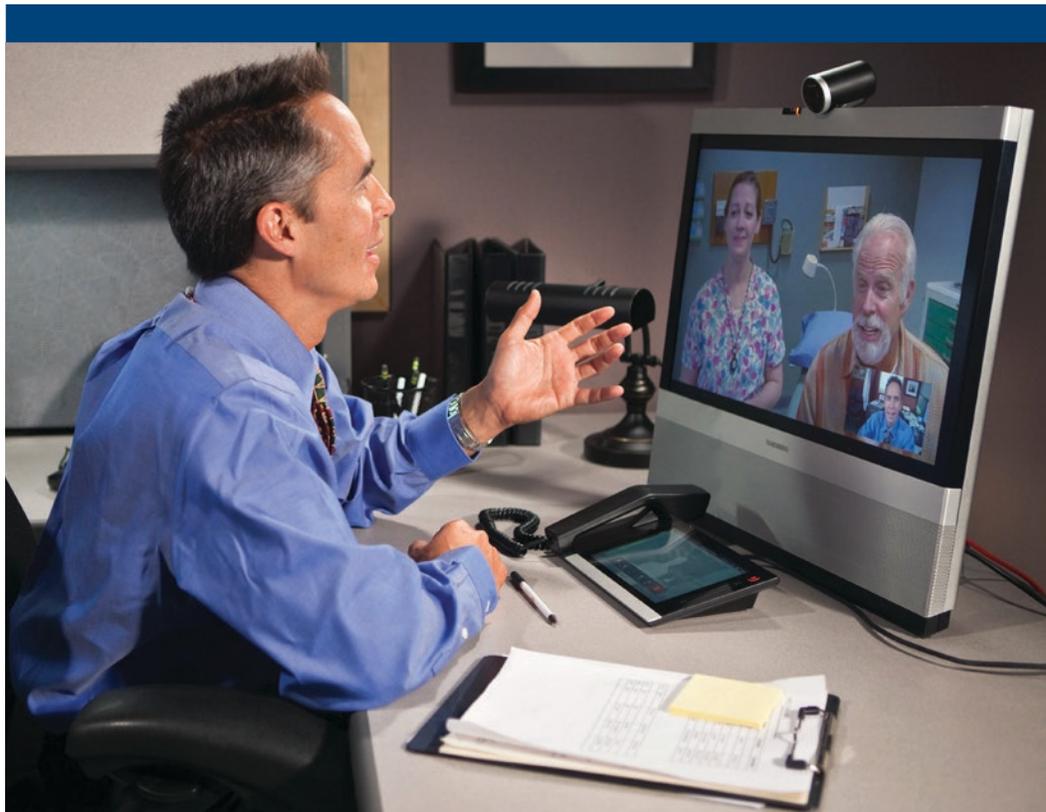
More than 30 clinicians are involved in providing support to the Western Market collaboration in Pittsburgh, Butler, Erie and Altoona. Clinical support staff from the spoke campuses are trained at the Pittsburgh campus by the specialty care teams, ensuring consistent clinical practice and improved communication.

Most clinics offer face-to-face, clinical video telehealth, and phone consultations, and soon will provide specialty care medical education to the primary care providers. These clinics operate a few days per month and have been well-received by Veterans seeking quality care close to home.

### Market Specialties in place

- A chemotherapy and infusion clinic is offered 5 days per week and serves more than 100 visits per month at Altoona. Staff completed additional training at the UPMC Hillman Cancer Center.
- Cardiology clinics were initiated one day a week at the Altoona and Butler campuses utilizing a mix of face-to-face and video telehealth.
- At-home sleep apnea testing was recently launched at Altoona with additional clinics to be added at Butler. In addition, the Erie campus receives virtual sleep studies performed by Pittsburgh Sleep Medicine.

- The dermatology clinic is well-established and provides 100% virtual care 5 days a week. Opportunities to offer microscopically controlled surgery used to treat common types of skin cancer are currently being explored. Primary Care Providers are trained at multiple sites, and mid-level providers at Altoona and Butler are trained on punch and shave biopsies.
- An ophthalmologist from Pittsburgh performs eye surgeries in Erie one day a month. Butler also has a part-time ophthalmologist, and additional recruitment is underway.
- The urology clinic in Altoona operates five days a week and works along with providers in Pittsburgh to provide prostate biopsies. Another urology clinic is active at Butler one day a week.
- An orthopedic surgeon from Erie operates at Pittsburgh at least one day a month. Altoona hired an additional physician who collaborates with Pittsburgh on an orthopedic clinic and pain injections.
- Virtual tele-wound clinics were launched in Altoona and will be expanded into their outpatient clinics.
- Altoona is pursuing certification as a basic ambulatory surgery center which will allow providers to perform colonoscopies on campus. Butler is also undergoing a preliminary review to possibly perform colonoscopies within the space of suburban community partner.
- A transplant pharmacist is located in Pittsburgh and provides virtual transplant medication monitoring and adjustment to transplant recipients across the VISN 4 network.
- Additional clinics are under development including Pain, Palliative Care, Dental, and virtual consultation to urgent care clinics.





- General Surgery – Dr. Victor Stelmack and Dr. Robert Caskey provide on-site general surgical care at the Wilmington and Coatesville VA medical centers.
- Plastic Surgery/Advanced Wound Care – Dr. Aron Wahrman supports the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Coatesville VA medical centers with on-site care, Telehealth visits and CVT consults.
- Vascular – Under the direction of Dr. Robert Krouse, surgical director for the eastern market, two full-time vascular surgeons will be hired this summer to cover both operative sites as well as vascular clinics.

**Market Telehealth Initiatives in place**

- Rheumatology clinic at Coatesville in collaboration with Wilmington
- Tele-Cardiology clinic for Wilkes-Barre provided by Philadelphia
- Tele-Dermatology clinic for Coatesville provided by Wilmington
- Tele-psychiatry care provided by Coatesville to Wilkes Barre
- PADRECC and Neurology Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) in place from Philadelphia to Coatesville and Wilkes-Barre
- Tele-Prosthetics between Philadelphia and Wilkes-Barre
- Tele-Sleep where Philadelphia providers interpret Sleep studies from patients at Coatesville

**Medical Sub-Specialty Integration Plans for 2019**

- Cardiology – on-site and Telehealth clinics planned at Coatesville in collaboration with a provider at Wilmington
- Endocrinology – a telehealth clinic provided by Wilmington is planned to support Coatesville

**Eastern Market Surgical Integration**

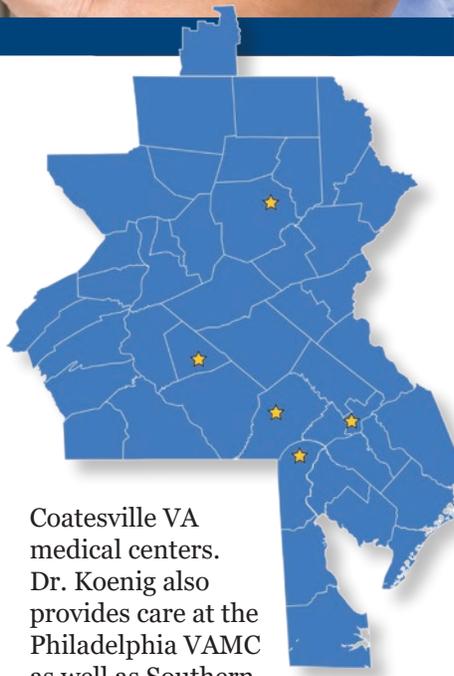
Market-level surgical providers were hired full-time beginning in 2018 to provide on-site and virtual care across the eastern portion of VISN 4 including Coatesville, Wilmington and Philadelphia.

Surgical specialty clinics including Urology, Orthopedics, General Surgery, Gynecology and Plastic Surgery/Advanced Wound care have been established. Specialty clinics are now held on-site at the referring/spoke medical centers (Wilmington and Coatesville), and complex care and surgical procedures are coordinated and referred to Philadelphia, which serves as the tertiary care hub.

The goal is to establish a comprehensive specialty care system where the specialty provider is on-site and thus reducing the travel burden for Veterans.

**Market Specialties in place**

- Gynecology – Dr. Angela Koeing and Anne Brown, a full-time nurse practitioner, provide gynecological care at the Wilmington and



Coatesville VA medical centers. Dr. Koenig also provides care at the Philadelphia VAMC as well as Southern New Jersey outpatient clinics.

- Orthopedics – Dr. Vincent Moretti provides orthopedic care at the Philadelphia and Coatesville VA medical centers. A second physician will start in May to support Philadelphia, Wilmington and Coatesville VA medical centers.
- Urology – Dr. Nabet Kasabian and Beth Euston, a nurse practitioner, provide urological care at Coatesville and Wilmington VA medical centers.

# Providing Greater Choice for Veterans

All medical centers in VISN 4 are working diligently to expand community care access when we are not able to provide timely services within a VA medical center.

We've partnered with our third party administrator to ensure that outreach is occurring to our large and small community health systems. We encourage our providers to become part of their networks so that we can continue to coordinate and schedule care seamlessly in a timely fashion.

Our staff is committed to gaining access to timely health care for Veterans. From October 1, 2018 to March 13, 2019, VISN 4 Community Care Offices scheduled and completed 36,181 community care consults.

Community Consults	
Fiscal Year 2017	70,193
Fiscal Year 2018	86,200
Fiscal Year 2019*	36,181

\* through March 13, 2019



# Earning Your Trust

In 2016, VA's Veterans Experience Office lead a nationwide initiative to improve our customer experiences. The goal is to foster the delivery of effective and easy customer experiences in which Veterans feel valued. To achieve this goal, they developed a customer survey using the trust questions listed below.

VA believes that trust is built one interaction at a time, and trust is earned by knowing our Veterans and showing them that we care; by understanding and anticipating their needs; by providing fair benefits and timely services; by being there when they need us; and by keeping our promises.

Today, we continue to monitor Veterans' responses to questions related to effectiveness, ease, emotion, and trust on VA surveys. Our goal is to have 90% of Veterans respond that they agree or strongly agree with these four statements, although VISN 4 is exceeding the national average in most of the measures.

Statement for Response	Inpatients				Outpatients				Specialty Care Outpatients			
	FY17	FY18	FY19*	AVG	FY17	FY18	FY19*	AVG	FY17	FY18	FY19*	AVG
<b>EFFECTIVENESS:</b> "I got the service I needed."	87.8	88.9	<b>87.7</b>	88.2	86.0	87.5	<b>90.3</b>	83.1	84.8	85.6	<b>84.7</b>	82.7
<b>EASE:</b> "It was easy to get the service I needed."	83.5	83.5	<b>84.6</b>	83.6	80.2	81.3	<b>83.8</b>	74.6	77.9	78.0	<b>78.3</b>	73.9
<b>EMOTION:</b> "I felt like a valued customer."	84.0	85.0	<b>87.6</b>	85.2	81.7	83.0	<b>85.0</b>	77.8	79.3	80.2	<b>83.7</b>	77.8
<b>TRUST:</b> "I trust VA to fulfill our country's commitment to Veterans."	84.0	86.6	<b>88.4</b>	85.4	77.7	80.5	<b>80.6</b>	74.6	76.2	76.5	<b>79.2</b>	75.1

\* FY19 compared to VA national average through November 2018

# Improving Access

So far in fiscal year 2019, nearly 96% of appointments in VISN 4 were completed within 30 days of the Veteran's preferred date. Our facilities

have conducted more than 1 million appointments already this year, and the average wait time has been 5.1 days. (Data as of March 17, 2019)

Clinics	Number of Appointments	Wait Time <30 days (#)	Wait Time <30 days (%)	Average Wait (days)
All Clinics	1,083,540	1,022,945	95.7%	5.1
Mental Health	158,646	152,467	97.5%	3.5
Primary Care	247,969	242,792	97.9%	3.5
Specialty Care	425,834	384,725	93.0%	7.5

## Average Wait Times at VISN 4 Facilities

The table below shows how many days new or returning patients waited for a primary care or mental health care appointment in the last 30 days as of March 11, 2019. Coatesville, Philadelphia, and Wilmington are all considered high Medicaid-accepting communities.

The data on the table was obtained from VA's access and quality website

located at [www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov). The website also shows the wait times for each outpatient clinic and specialty care clinics (where available), and it includes Veteran satisfaction data and some comparisons with other local hospitals.

This information is not offered by any other major national hospital organization in the country.

VISN 4 Facility	Primary Care		Mental Health Care	
	New	Returning	New	Returning
ALTOONA	15	2	10	7
BUTLER	9	1	9	2
COATESVILLE	15	2	8	2
ERIE	19	4	13	2
LEBANON	25	3	8	2
PHILADELPHIA	31	6	19	2
PITTSBURGH - UNIVERSITY DRIVE	21	8	9	2
PITTSBURGH - H.J. HEINZ	15	4	8	5
WILKES-BARRE	14	3	14	7
WILMINGTON	18	3	12	2

Above data routinely updated and obtained from [www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov).



If you have been bitten by a tick, get a FREE same day, virtual appointment.

Call your local medical center and press #3.

Monday-Friday  
8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.



**VA**

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Healthcare – VISN 4



*I CARE represents the core values that define the basic elements of how we go about our work—“who we are”—and form the underlying principles we use every day in our service to Veterans.*

*VISN 4 established a new, quarterly I CARE award to recognize employees who not only demonstrate our I CARE values, but who go the extra mile to live by our I CARE ideals. There are many wonderful examples of employees demonstrating these values in their day-to-day work.*

## Integrity • Commitment • Advocacy • Respect • Excellence

### 1st Quarter Winner

#### ***Chaplain E. Dean Luther***

Over the past year, Chaplain Luther has served as the coordinator for Lebanon VAMC’s employee assistance program, and continues to implement support services for employees. He established a Clinical Pastoral Education program there, only the second such program in Pennsylvania. He launched the Warriors to Soul Mate program. And, he continues to enhance pastoral care services for Veterans at Lebanon VAMC, including both inpatients and outpatients through Home Based Primary Care and palliative care.



### 2nd Quarter Winners

#### ***Denise Rowley***

Ms. Rowley is a medical support assistant at one of the facility’s outpatient clinics. Even though a Veteran tried to leave the clinic after asking for an employee who was not available, Ms. Rowley observed that the patient was in distress and initiated discussion, encouraged the Veteran to remain there, and contacted the suicide prevention coordinator for additional support. The Veteran received the care she needed, and Denise’s alert response likely prevented a Veteran suicide. For this excellent effort, she was personally recognized by U.S. Senator Tom Carper and received a letter from U.S. Senator Chris Coons.



## Charlene Wegelin

Each year for the past 14 years, Ms. Wegelin, a nutrition and food services employee, has dressed up as and played the part of Mrs. Claus for the Community Living Center Christmas Dinner. For the past two years, she has organized and arranged for a local non-profit organization, Santa's Toy Shop, to donate wrapped, handmade wooden toys for her to deliver during the dinner. Two local news stations, Erie News Now and Your Erie, even published articles highlighting the Veterans' appreciation and delight.



## Colin Quinn, M.D.

When Dr. Quinn, a neurologist, encountered a young Veteran recently diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (also known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease), he identified an opportunity to utilize the newly signed Right to Try legislation to access an investigational treatment. He advocated for the Veteran with facility leadership, the Office of General Counsel, VA Central Office and ultimately Dr. Richard Stone, VHA's Executive-In-Charge. Utilizing his extensive knowledge of ALS progression, limitations in current treatment, and familiarity with the treatment to which the Veteran was pursuing through Right to Try, Dr. Quinn was able to obtain approval and then coordinated timely administration of the treatment. This case may impact federal code revisions to allow consideration for future access to health services through the Right to Try legislation.



**#Be There**  
for Veterans and Servicemembers





Veterans can now connect with their VA health care team through video from the convenience of their home!

VA Video Connect (VVC) enables Veterans to virtually meet-up with their VA health care team in a virtual medical room using video that is secure and private. It allows Veterans to see and talk with their care team from anywhere, making VA health care more convenient and reducing travel times.

VVC is easy to set up. Veterans can simply use the camera on their mobile phone, computer, or tablet to directly access their VA care team. While the concept of video appointments isn't new, the VVC solution has been developed exclusively for VA and the Veterans in our care.



**Benefits of VA Video Connect include:**

- **Improves health care access**  
especially for Veterans that live in rural areas or have health conditions that make it difficult to travel
- **Reduces appointment wait times**  
allowing Veterans to almost immediately connect with their VA health care team in the location of their choosing
- **Eliminates co-pays for the Veteran**  
VVC visits are co-pay exempt
- **Makes it easy to include Veteran caregivers or support systems in their VA health care visits**  
Family members can join in-person visits through VVC when they can't travel to the appointment

For more information on VVC, visit the VA mobile app store at <https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect>. If you have any questions, please contact the VVC coordinator at your local medical center listed below.

Facility	Name	Phone
ALTOONA	Julie Clark, PSA	814-943-8164 x4272
	Molly Maines, TCT	724-349-8900
BUTLER	Laurie Conti	878-271-6528
	William Bowmer	878-271-6616
	Lauren Heiger	878-271-6963
COATESVILLE	Ralph Strickland	610-384-7711 x6219
ERIE	Anne Kane	814-860-2547
LEBANON	Angela Diehl	717-272-6621 x4076
PHILADELPHIA	Lynn Watson	215-823-5800 x6824
PITTSBURGH	Jessica Gurley-Randolph	412-360-3235
WILKES-BARRE	Norman Beers	570-824-3521 x7865
	Michael Selby	302-994-2511 x4240
WILMINGTON	Marisabel McGrail	302-994-2511 x5928
	Stacey Jefferson	302-994-2511 x2392



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**We'd Like to Hear from You**

Vision for Excellence is published for the employees, volunteers, patients and friends of VA Healthcare-VISN 4. For more information about this publication, contact David Cowgill at 412-822-3318 or [david.cowgill@va.gov](mailto:david.cowgill@va.gov).