

The Augusta Pulse

Summer 2006

For the employees and friends of the Augusta VA Medical Center

www.va.gov/augustaga

This Issue

A Winning Summer Student Program

American Legion Donates Towards Stroke Research

Athens Outpatient Clinic Receives Approval

MOVE Program Promotes Healthier Veterans





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The Augusta Pulse is published quarterly for the employees, volunteers, partners and friends of the Augusta VA Medical Center. To submit articles or story ideas for possible publication, contact Janice Kennedy, (706) 823-1733 or via e-mail at Janiceb.Kennedy@va.gov.

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On the cover:

Student volunteer, Catherine Balcer with Active Duty Rehabilitation patient, Chief Warrant Officer Williams

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Directors Message

I am delighted to share with you the outstanding news received by the Augusta VA Medical Center which will enable us to expand the exceptional care and services we proudly provide our nation's veterans. In July, Secretary Nicholson announced the approval for us to have a Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Athens, Georgia. This clinic has been a goal of the Augusta VA for the past five years and is now becoming a reality. Upon hearing the news, our CBOC Implementation Team quickly jumped into action to find a temporary space for the clinic, which we hope to be opened by October 1, 2006. At the same time, proposals for permanent space are being solicited and once received, will be evaluated so that a permanent clinic can be established as soon as possible.



One week after learning of the approval, a Town Hall meeting was held in Athens between the management team from the Augusta VA and the citizens of the community, Veterans Service Organizations, and local political leaders. The response was overwhelming with well over 250 people in attendance, all embracing this new win/win relationship. Everyone agrees this Athens clinic will improve access and provide a more efficient delivery of primary care to the approximately 5,755 veterans already using the VA system. With more than 33,000 veterans living in this college community and the surrounding areas there is an enormous potential for growth and future demand for services.

I look forward to sharing with you more detailed information as this aggressive project unfolds. These continue to be exciting times for our staff and all the veterans we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jim Trusley".

James F. Trusley III



Downtown Division



Uptown Division



For Dr. James E. Carroll, Research Biologist at the Augusta VA, Christmas arrived early with a gift of \$20,000 from the American Legion Department of Georgia. This special donation was presented to Dr. Thomas W. Kiernan, Chief of Staff, during the 88th Annual Summer Convention of the American Legion, held June 24, 2006 in Macon, Georgia.

Dr. Carroll is the principal investigator for a research project currently in progress at the Augusta VA. The project title: *Transportation of Multipotent Progenitor Cells in Ischemic Injury* sounds complicated and incomprehensible to most of us. However, Dr. Carroll's interest in this area of research arises from his background as a Clinical Neurologist who saw first hand the devastating results of stroke. Stroke is the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer, and is the leading cause of serious, long-term disability affecting 750,000 Americans a year.

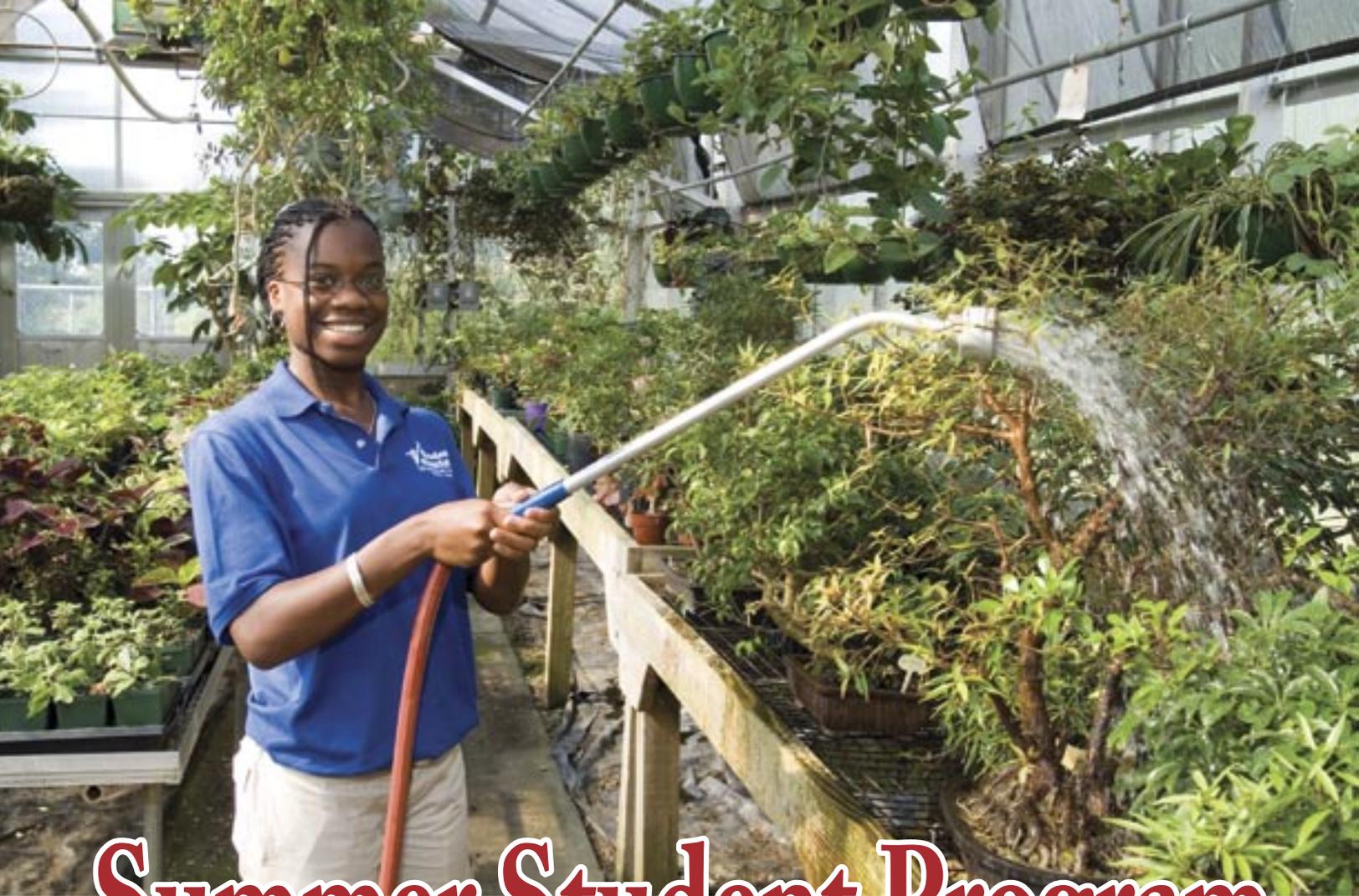
Because stroke remains an enormous medical problem especially for veterans, translation of the present laboratory experiments into clinical application will likely impact on the treatment of VA stroke patients.

To date, there exists no available effective treatment for stroke. Dr. Carroll's desire to help patients suffering from stroke has prompted his research group to seek novel treatments that could benefit patients recovering from stroke. Over the past year, his team has worked with stem cells, derived from human adult bone marrow, an excellent source since it avoids the ethical problems associated with using embryonic tissues. These cells can mature into different types of cells in the human body including brain cells. Dr. Carroll and his colleagues have discovered that these adult bone marrow-derived stem cells survive in the brains of stroke rats, and that they aid in the improvement of motor performance of these animals.

They are now conducting several experiments to bring this laboratory investigation into the clinic. A major ongoing study includes delivery of the cells using the vein or artery, instead of putting the cells into the brain, which will allow a less traumatic administration of the cells in stroke patients. Additional studies are also underway examining the optimal dose and timing of stem cell transplantation. Dr. Carroll anticipates that this stem cell transplantation therapy may have similar applicability to other brain disorders (e.g., Parkinson's disease, Lou Gehrig's disease, Alzheimer's disease), which are prevalent in the VA population.

The American Legion, Department of Georgia, and all their supporters deserve a grateful thank you for this generous donation. Working together as a team will enable the VA to continue to provide quality care for our veterans today and into the future.

Dr. James E. Carroll pauses in his lab at the Augusta VA Medical Center



Summer Student Program

A WIN/WIN FOR
STUDENTS AND THE AUGUSTA VA MEDICAL CENTER

“I love working with computers. The new bar coding system for the warehouse has been a fun project for me to help with inventory control. After I scan the barcodes I download the items that go into the total inventory of the warehouse.” This comment from Leah Taylor, 15 year old summer student volunteer, is just one of the many positive comments made by summer students.

The Augusta Veterans Affairs Voluntary Services (VAVS) Summer Student Volunteer Program was established more than 25 years ago to provide student’s meaningful, structured activities during the summer months, expose them to a variety of health care professions, and help them gain valuable experience working in health care and health care related fields. Students completing the program are savvy, polished, and confident in their skills and abilities, and usually go on to experience success in academic, athletic, and extracurricular activity involvement. Leah

adds, “Volunteering at the hospital is a great opportunity in learning about the medical field, especially if you are pursuing a job in the medical field. There are many things that go into running a hospital- such as working on computers.”

“it’s the coolest program and I have learned a lot.”

- Gurinder Singh

The program, administered by the Voluntary Services Department, begins in early March of each year, with a survey of medical center staff to assess needs for the summer. Student volunteer packets are distributed to schools and churches during the months of March, April and May, and include the application form, parental consent forms and a request for a letter of reference from one of the student’s teachers. The program has continued to thrive through



Matthew Miklas working in the Voluntary Services Office, Uptown Division. Matthew developed a new Summer Student Volunteer Newsletter.

the years and has acquired an outstanding reputation in the community as an established, well organized program providing unique experiences for the participants. Parents and potential new students call anxiously throughout the year to obtain information on entering the program. One true sign of loyalty and value of the program is the number of students that return year after year and the number of siblings that participate once the required age of 14 is reached.

Each student is interviewed individually in April and May and must attend an orientation before they begin their volunteer assignment. The orientation, similar to the New Employee Orientation, is quite extensive and covers such topics as safety, infection control, confidentiality and privacy training, computer security and much more. There is also a separate orientation for parents and staff supervisors to ensure that requirements and expectations are understood by everyone involved. Student volunteer assignments are made



Stephanie Wilson provides assistance in the Dental Clinic

by matching the medical center and service line needs, identified in the initial assessment survey, with the student's interest in a particular health care or administrative career field.

A unique feature of the program is the sponsorship of each student by a Veterans Service Organization (VSO). This sponsorship of \$20.00 per student allows for the purchase of special student volunteer shirts to be worn while volunteering, and assists with costs for awards and an outing at the end of the summer. The organizations count the student's volunteer hours toward their total organizational hours for the year. The sponsors and the students meet during an orientation luncheon enabling the student to thank them and to begin to build a cross-generational relationship. The VAVS Student Volunteer Program

“My mom made me volunteer. Now I really like it. It’s fun.”

- Nicole Williams

is a win/win proposition for the students, the Augusta VA Medical Center and the community. Through their volunteer contributions, students provide a valuable service to patients and staff, offering a smile, personal touch and an extra pair of hands for the staff. Nicole Williams, first year volunteer stated, “My mom made me volunteer. Now I really like it.

It's fun." Nicole volunteers in the mail room delivering mail throughout the hospital. The students experience first-hand what it takes to be successful and to cope with the challenges they face in their daily lives. They also gain experience in new job skills, appropriate job behavior, increasing significantly their chances for success, all while receiving a valuable education in the price of freedom. These students are a positive link to the community and are able to return to their schools and educate others about the outstanding services that the Augusta VA provides to our nation's heroes.

"I love working with computers. The new bar coding system for the warehouse has been a fun project for me to help with inventory control. After I scan the barcodes I download the items that go into the total inventory of the warehouse."

- Leah Taylor

When asked why he volunteers, Ronak Patel, 17, a senior volunteering in Physical Therapy, stated "it looks good on college applications and gives me something to do for the summer." Many students use their volunteer experience on college and technical school applications, which are requiring community service or volunteer work more and more as the competition for admission increases. Another student, Gurinder Singh works in both the Blind Rehabilitation Unit and Physical Therapy Department. He has volunteered in these areas for the past 3 years, accumulating more than 340 hours. He assist patients with walking, organizing their rooms and other special needs. Gurinder says he likes



Lindsay Hinnant enjoys working in the Downtown Pharmacy, where student volunteers are always welcome and busy!

At the end of a busy summer, the Summer Student Volunteer Program begins to wind down as students prepare to return to school. A highly anticipated end-of-the-summer outing is scheduled, usually to a water park or amusement park. In addition, a Student Volunteer Recognition Program is held in early August to recognize all the participants for a job well done. Students, parents, friends and staff look forward to attending this program. Refreshments are provided and certificates and pins are presented by hospital management to recognize and thank each student for the number of hours they worked. Another highlight is the Summer Student Volunteer of the Year Award which is presented during this ceremony. Supervisors nominate students based on criteria patterned after the national James H. Parke Memorial Youth Scholarship Award. Each student nominated goes before a panel of judges comprised of community leaders and Veterans Service Organization members. The panel of judges interviews each nominee, asking the same questions of each. The panel rates and ranks the nominees and selects the Summer Student Volunteer of the Year. All nominated students receive a gift card to a local store. The student selected as Student Volunteer of the Year receives a \$500 savings bond.



Left to right, Lakisha Funches and Jessica Shealy working as a team in the Downtown Division Pharmacy

volunteering because "it's the coolest program and I have learned a lot." Gurinder also adds how the summer student program has helped him during the school year with his organization skills and has made him a better student.

There are currently 96 student volunteers, 40 of them returning from prior summers and 56 joining us for the first time. Student assignments vary, but include such areas as: Dental Clinic, Director's Office, Nursing, Allied Health, Blind Rehabilitation, Active Duty Rehabilitation, MCCR, Pharmacy, warehouse, and many other areas. A new Junior Executive Committee was developed this year, with plans to sponsor a fundraiser to support patients' needs and develop a youth newsletter. The smiles, energy levels and creativity of the students are infectious; spreading to staff and patients alike. Kim Hoge, Chief, Voluntary Services, states "each summer seems to get better and better!"

ATHENS OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Will Soon Be A Reality

On June 23, 2006, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, R. James Nicholson, announced the approval of 25 new community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). Included in this announcement was the Athens, Georgia clinic. This new clinic, operated by the Augusta VA, will enable VA to bring health care to more veterans where they live. "VA has established itself as one of the top health care organizations in the country," said Nicholson; "by putting health care facilities in more communities, we're enhancing veterans' access to VA's world-class health care."

There are currently 700 community-based clinics operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs. All 25 new clinics are scheduled to begin operation this year. The Athens CBOC is prepared to serve not only veterans in Athens, but the surrounding counties as well. Initially, staff from the Augusta VA will be operating out of a temporary clinic while the permanent space is finalized.



James F. Trusley III, Director, Augusta VA Medical Center, addresses a full house during Athens Town Hall meeting, July 12.



Dr. Michael Spencer, Service Line Executive for Primary Care, answers questions from the audience while the management team looks on.

2006 Employee of the Year!



The 2006 Employee of the Year is Janet G. Campbell. Janet is a Nurse Practitioner (NP) and the Manager of the Employee Health Department. Janet transferred from the Biloxi VA Medical Center to Augusta in July 2004. She is a United States Navy veteran (former hospital corpsman) and has worked in private hospitals in Florida, Texas and Maryland.

The person nominating Janet for this honor wrote that Janet welcomes every employee/patient with kindness and empathy. Her consistently cheerful attitude is infectious. She works daily with the Worker's Compensation

(OWCP) personnel to assure employees receive the benefits they deserve. Through her coordination with the Occupation Health and Physical Therapy staff, she has been instrumental in returning employees to full health. She has been accepted by the Medical College of Georgia and University of South Carolina in her pursuit of a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree.

Although she was born in New Orleans and attended schools in Texas and Alabama, she is proud to call Augusta her home. We are proud to have Janet as our Employee of the Year!

2nd Annual Diversity Celebration

The 2nd Annual Diversity Celebration was held May 24, 2006, at the Uptown Division of the Augusta VA Medical Center. This year's celebration, "A Winning Team Has Diversity," provided employees with educational information on various cultures and patient and employee services. The information offered promotes respect for the diverse populations at the worksite and in society.

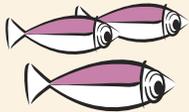


Diversity Committee from left to right: Al Brown, Dr. Kim Williams, Rosalind Scott, Andrea Johnson, Tyra Lightfoot-O'Bryant, Cecil Rachels, Earnie Johnson, Gary Tom, Caroline Caesar, Susan Hancock, Ed Shepherd, Venus Wood, Bruce Gulko

Displays included artifacts, clothing, and food samples representing a variety of cultures. Various service organizations and VA patient programs were also represented.

The Diversity Celebration was held in conjunction with the REACH (Respect, Education, Awareness, Collaboration and Honesty) Program which was designed to increase diversity awareness.

FISH FRY



The Employee Enhancement Group (EEG) sponsored a fish fry on Friday, June 9th at the Uptown Division Pavilion, with delivery service available for the Downtown Division staff. The meal consisted of Moe Terry's famous fried fish, Denise Whitten's special recipe baked beans and Paul Whitten's creamy coleslaw. Over 400 employees enjoyed the food and merriment. Word around the hospital is that the meal was delicious, plentiful, and affordable. Employees are already asking when they can expect the next fish fry. Keep your ears open and your taste buds ready for the announcement of the next EEG fish fry.



MOVE! *Management of Overweight Veterans Everywhere*

In May 2006, the Augusta VAMC began offering the MOVE! program to veterans. This program is designed to provide education and support to veterans as they try to make changes to live a healthier lifestyle in order to lose weight and reduce their risk for conditions such as diabetes, HTN, and high cholesterol.

Veterans who are referred to the MOVE! team by their Primary Care provider receive individualized advice and support in the form of hand outs, counseling sessions, and telephone follow up. In addition, veterans are given the option to attend group sessions on nutrition, physical activity and behavior modification.

Since the program's inception, over 50 Augusta veterans have been enrolled and the team is receiving good feedback from those enrollees. The MOVE! Coordinator is Charlene Jackson, the MOVE! Clinical Champion is Dr. Raymond Kostromin, and team members include Rhys Anderson, Karen Cota, Angie Rollins, Eric Johnson, Shannon Matta, Dave James, Anthony Maye, and Josephine Gardner.



2006 Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing

The Excellence in Nursing Award annually honors two Registered Nurses (RNs), one staff nurse role and one

in a non-staff nurse role; a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) or Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN); and a Nursing Assistant (NA). All nominees and award recipients are actively engaged in the care of patients at a VA facility. The recipients' contributions to the care of patients in any VA health care setting are patient-centered and

demonstrate such excellence as to merit recognition from their peers.

On May 10, 2006, a special ceremony was held to honor and recognize the Augusta VA 2006 recipients of these prestigious awards. The following were the distinguished award winners:



Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing, RN Category
Non Staff Nurse Role
Janet Campbell, RNP,
Manager of the Employee Health Department



Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing, RN Category
Staff Nurse Role
Charlene Martin, RN,
Primary Care



Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing, LPN Category
Christina Patton, LPN,
Primary Care

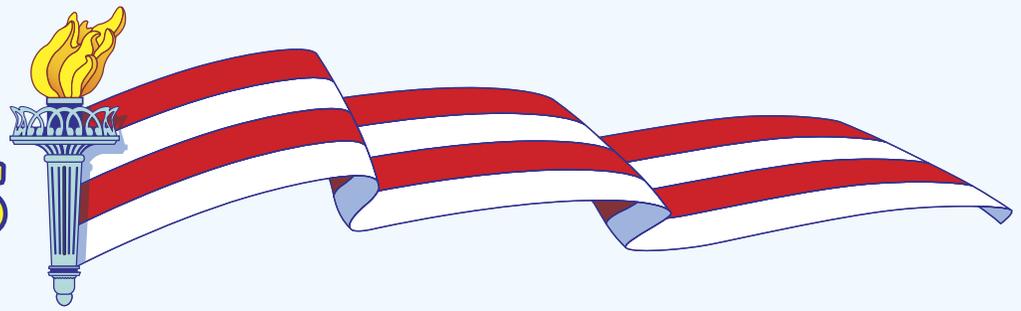


Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing, NA Category
John Walker, NA,
Mental Health

2006 National Hospital Week Activities



SERVICE AWARDS



Employee Of The Year:

Janet G. Campbell,
ARNP-C, COHN-S

Employee Of The Month:

Joan D. Mims, LPN
(June)
Janice Rucker
(July)

Star TRECC Awards:

Joseph Soporas, PA
(May)
Able Suber
(June)
Shavonne Garrett
(July)

The following employees have reached a special milestone in their years of government service during the months of May, June and July:

10 Year Service Awards:

Robin S. Ball
Persephone M. Banks
Maria M. Black
Lorena A. Giron
Larry D. Jacobs
Pamela H. Snowdy
Mattie J. Taylor
Remedios V. Virata
Tammie M. Williams

15 Year Service Awards:

Estrellita G. Bautista
Leonard Booker
Yvette D. Cordy
Miranda L. Dunn
James E. Elam
Ruby N. Harbin
Elizabeth A. Hill
Morris V. Hutchins
Gerry F. Hydrick
Wendolyn L. Lacy
Pamela L. Leach
Yteria G. Linney
Robert G. Lloyd
Kim M. Lowery
Vicki D. Mercier
Louis Scharff III
Sherry L. Sims

20 Year Service Awards:

Scott M. Adam
Rhys J. Anderson
Janice D. Hollis
Sandra D. Diggs
Celestine E. Dunbar
Anita F. Griffin
David N. Hunter
Pamela D. Jones
Luanne D. Lawler
Dorothy R. Moore
Anthony M. Murro
Linda D. Payne
Chong M. Pearce
Lionel Paul Solorsh
Vidya C. Sridharan
Lizzie Faye Tucker
Lucille C. Walker

25 Year Service Awards:

Linda E. Ball
Bernard B. Bland
Robert Bookman
Anita A. Boyer
Barbara R. Bryant
Vivian S. Carpenter

Margaret D. Chesser
Bernice E. Clardy
Charles D. Cosby
Venita W. Dicks
Cynthia T. Hale
Penny D. Jackson
Luranie Johnson
Janice B. Kennedy
Vernon Key
Nathaniel Lowery
Kibbie L. McKettrick
Joseph A. Ranke
Cheryl A. Readett
David F. Sanders
Dorothy E. Spivey
Larry Swinney
Laney J. Walker
Selgerian Walton
Roland H. Watson
Ernestine Williams
Essie M. Young

30 Year Service Awards:

Anita L. Aguirre
Richard D. Boggan
Joe C. Grubbs, Jr.
Ricky A. Hedgepeth
Linda J. Hilliard
Richard D. James
Gloria J. Jones
Mary B. Lariscy
Regenia P. Mutcherson
Jessie L. Parks
Wallace A. Sharp
April E. Starks
Leland H. Winger, Jr.
Delores B. Whitley
Timothy W. Williford
William W. Williford

35 Year Service Award:

Robert N. Cook
Donnell Harris
Thomas W. Kiernan
Catherine C. Williams

45 Year Service Award:

William H. Kelly

Welcome:

Mike Dobbins was selected as the new Green Environmental Management System (GEMS) Coordinator, Facility Management Service Line. Mike grew up in Abbeville, SC; enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and served 20 years as a Bioenvironmental Engineering Technician. He comes to the Augusta VAMC from the Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

VA Secretary's Annual Equal Employment Opportunity Awards

Cecil N. Rachels
- Category A (Non-supervisory Employees)



Pulse Points

We Are Fully Accredited!

.....by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) in the following programs:

Hospital Accreditation Program
Long Term Care Program
Behavioral Health Program
Home Care Program

Due for full survey in 2007.

.....by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) for the following programs:

Blind Rehabilitation *(next survey due August 2007)*
Medical Rehabilitation and Active Duty Unit
next survey due in December 2007
VRT and Homeless programs
received full accreditation in April 2006
Traumatic Brain Injury (as part of Active Duty)
received full accreditation in April 2006
Spinal Cord Injury
surveyed in June 2006; awaiting results.

Check it out!

The July 17, 2006 issue of Business Week includes an article titled "The Best Medical Care in the U.S." noting that the "154 hospitals and 875 clinics run by the Veterans Affairs Dept. have been ranked best-in-class by a number of independent groups on a broad range of measures".

Outstanding Docs!

Dr. Talmadge A. "Joe" Bowden, Augusta VA Chief of Vascular and General Surgery, and **Dr. E. Clark Garner**, Primary Care Team C, were recognized among the best doctors in the CSRA in the June/July 2006 issue of Augusta Magazine, BEST DOCTORS IN AUGUSTA.

Did You Know?

Since the official opening of the Active Duty Unit in June 2004, we treated 203 active duty inpatients and 188 active duty outpatients. (This data is through 7/11/2006.)

VAMC Augusta's Blind Rehabilitation Center projects workload of 140 inpatients and 300 outpatients by the end of the current fiscal year.

For FY2006 through June, there have been 4786 hospital discharges plus an additional 72 discharges from the Nursing Home Care Unit.

For FY2006 through May, there have been 205,575 outpatient visits.

Quality of Care Update

100% of Acute Coronary Syndrome patients have troponin results within 60 minutes of reporting to the medical center with chest pain.

85% of Acute Coronary Syndrome patients have an EKG within 10 minutes of reporting to the medical center with chest pain.

100% of Acute Coronary Syndrome patients who need a cardiac catheterization have the procedure prior to discharge.

Check Us Out!

The Augusta VAMC is now on the World Wide Web at:

www.va.gov/augustaga



VA Police Chief Howe,

Late last month I attended a social work conference at the Augusta VAMC. I was accompanied by one of my colleagues who is also a female. When we returned to the government car to drive back to Atlanta, the car would not start. We had a dead battery and we did not have cables. Naturally, as females traveling alone with inadequate mechanical skills, we became anxious and started to panic. My colleague called Triple A and they basically provided no help to us. Fortunately for us, Officer Alvin Peeples was making his rounds at your medical center. He stopped and took the time to recharge the battery and make sure the car was safe for us to drive back to Atlanta. He was courteous, friendly helpful and a gentleman. Chivalry is not dead thank goodness and neither is compassion and concern for others. I am sorry it has taken me so long to acknowledge Officer Peeples.

Thank you again,

FD

Mr. Trusley,

I am writing this letter on behalf of my dentist Tuan H. Nguyen, to express my satisfaction with the quality of his work. Dr. Nguyen has treated me at the Augusta VA for almost a year now. At every visit, he and his staff always demonstrate professionalism, give my concerns high priority, and make me feel at ease. In my 22 years in the military, he is by far one of the best dentists that has ever treated me; and the hospital is privileged to have such a proficient and talented young dental practitioner on staff.

Thank you for your time.
JHD

The Augusta VA Medical Center
One Freedom Way
Augusta, Georgia 30904



To Augusta VA,

I want to let someone know about Sheila Hamlet at the 4C check-in desk. I have watched her and know that she is extremely competent and works well under stress. She works well with all the patients and provides a valuable service. It looks like she performs the work of two people. Please thank her for this work.

LD

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