

## *Leadership Team Training*



*Health Plan Management, Leadership Team Training*

Over the past three years Health Plan Management service line (HPM) has launched a Leadership Team Training process to allow HPM to deal effectively with the many frequent changes brought on by automation, legislation and changes within the healthcare industry. Specifically, the goals are:

- To improve performance from good to excellent
- To increase quality in daily work
- To eliminate re-work
- To involve front line staff in decision making
- To improve job satisfaction and
- To retain employees

John Park, Director of HPM, and Tom McWhinnie, Deputy Director, Center for Education and Development, developed the Leadership Team Training program, to

develop employees skills within a scope of responsibility that is realistic, allows for innovation, career ladder opportunities, personal growth, and leadership.

The training for 130 employees included an opening session of three consecutive days that served as the foundation for participants. Four two-day follow-up sessions were held with the employees' supervisors and section chiefs reinforcing development of business skill sets and continuity for the learning environment. Employees worked through a series of exercises on effective communication, planning and problem solving. The early result of the training, in addition to improved communication and understanding between staff, was a list of recommended actions from front line employees and supervisors to improve its operations.

As part of this process, an employee satisfaction survey was conducted in March 2003 and again in May 2003. Data was compared with results from the 2001 employee satisfaction survey. Results showed an improvement in the employees' perception of their environment and jobs (12.2 percent from 2001 to March 2003 and an additional 6.1 percent from March to May 2003). The highest score was 4.2 (out of a possible 5) for quality, and all categories were scored at 3 or better.

This is the beginning of a journey that will have a lasting positive impact on the services provided, the involvement and job satisfaction of staff. We will work together, learn together, and grow together to provide the highest quality service to veterans and to each other.

# Making a difference

# Making a Difference

## Nurse Executive Receives First Agency Award for Excellence



*Secretary, Anthony J. Principi;  
Frankie Manning, R.N. Nurse Executive;  
Undersecretary For Health,  
Dr. Robert Roswell, M.D.*

No group in VA has a more direct impact on the lives of veterans we serve than our nurses. Each year, National Nurses Week celebrates nursing excellence. This year held special meaning for VA Puget Sound, as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs presented the first ever Nurse Executive Award to Frankie Manning, RN. Secretary Principi lauded Manning's career achievements at a ceremony held in Washington DC.

This award is the latest honor bestowed upon Manning, who was recently appointed to the

King County Board of Health to serve as a citizen public health expert. She is also a retired lieutenant colonel from the Army Nurse Corp. Her accomplishments include developing the first on-site health clinic for older adults in Wichita, KS, and leading a missionary health team to Haiti. Manning is also the recipient of the Congressional Black Caucus Veterans Brain Trust Award for her exemplary national and community service to African-American veterans. She has served VA for thirty-six years; twenty-one of those years here at VA Puget Sound.

## Uncommon Valor

Most physicians are dedicated, caring individuals. How many have laid their life on the line in support of their beliefs and their desires, to get health care and supplies to those who are most in need? One individual fills that description, Tesfai Gabre-Kidan, MD. In his native Ethiopia, he has been honored with the highest of national honors, "In the Service of the Poor," from the Haile Selassie I Foundation and Trust.

So how does a physician from Ethiopia land at a VA medical center in the Pacific Northwest? Dr. Gabre-Kidan, known to many as "Dr. GK", worked closely with James Plorde, MD, (Retired), in an infectious disease fellowship for two years. Plorde had worked in the Peace Corps earlier and later returned to volunteer in Ethiopia. Dr. GK so impressed Plorde that he, working in conjunction with Dr. Robert Petersdorf was able to develop a residency



*Tesfai Gabre-Kidan, M.D.*

position for him. At about this time, a bloody revolution was occurring in Ethiopia resulting in the overthrow of the emperor. Dr. Gabre-Kidan elected to stay in the United States.

Although he remained in the Puget Sound area, Dr. GK returned to Ethiopia each year to provide medical assistance and supplies to the people of Ethiopia. The Marxist government in Ethiopia viewed him as a threat. As a result every trip could have cost Dr. Gabre-Kidan his life. Now that the Ethiopian government has again changed, he is welcomed back with open arms.

Since 1991, Dr. Gabre-Kidan has performed the role of Medical Advisor and Consultant to the Ministry of Health and Government of Ethiopia. In "retirement" from VA Puget Sound, his care, leadership and knowledge will be missed here, but our loss will be the world's gain.

Dr. Gabre-Kidan left VA Puget Sound in June, returning to his native Ethiopia as a world-recognized expert in infectious diseases, providing care to those in need. His efforts will focus primarily on HIV/AIDS.

# Veterans

Our family, Our friends

It's a Career by Choice



Lee Hendley, MSW

## Lee Hendley

Many of VA Puget Sound's employees accumulate decades of government service. With forty-two years of government service, Lee Hendley is one such employee.

Three months shy of his eighteenth birthday, Hendley joined the military. After a twenty-year career in the US Air Force, and then a move to serve in the US Army, Hendley retired as a Chief Warrant Officer, a CWO-2. Looking toward his future, while still on active duty in Vietnam, he took correspondence college courses. After retiring from the military, he obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Comparative Sociology from the University of Puget Sound, and a Master's Degree in Social

Work from the University of Washington. As a Social Worker, he has been helping veterans in Primary Care for twenty-two years at the American Lake Division of VA Puget Sound.

What drew him to devote the next twenty years and his second career to VA? He came to American Lake to maintain his connection with his fellow veterans and to assist them in accessing the care they needed. "I feel as though I am a part of something," he states. He feels a sense of camaraderie and a history at American Lake. Forty-two years and counting, Lee Hendley has been working with and for his fellow veterans.

## Comments from the Deputy Director



Sandy J. Nielsen,  
Deputy Director

- Up to 60 percent of employees at VA Puget Sound are eligible to retire in the next five years.
- In the VA at large, 77 percent of the nurses are over the age of 40, and 35 percent are eligible to retire by 2005.

- VA Central Office is so concerned about projected near-term shortages not only in health care workers but also in support fields (accounting, human resource specialists, contract specialists, information technology and others) that they have reinstated VA training programs for these positions. With scholarships, debt reduction programs, tuition support, and full time paid trainee positions, this is the best time yet for career growth in the VA.

How can you benefit from this situation?

- Check with the VA Puget Sound Center for Education and Development (CED) or their website to find schedules for classes such as Seven

Habits of Highly Effective People, computer classes, leadership, and supervisory classes. Find out from CED about scholarship programs, tuition support and debt reduction programs for employees who seek training for shortage positions.

- Check with Human Resources for announcements of "internship" programs for accountants, budget analysts, human resource specialists, health administration specialists, contract specialists, information technology specialists, engineers, and prosthetic representatives.

(Continued on page 8)

# Quality in

## Staff Retention Feedback

Staff retention continues to be a focus for the medical center as we strive to expand our workforce capabilities. Employees were asked to suggest steps the medical center could take to retain staff. Responses pointed to a need to improve the rewards and recognition programs. A team of Union, Human Resource and Quality Improvement officials recommended specific actions to the Executive Board.

One of the first recommendations was to encourage the “On-the-Spot Awards Program” by adding a monetary incentive. Based on community practices, employees who accumulate five “On The Spot Award” pins can exchange them for a cash award of \$50.00. Flyers about these changes will be posted soon throughout each division.

In addition, a brochure is being developed to clarify the awards program and to outline

the different processes for submission. This information will be presented at New Employee Orientation and provided quarterly to all employees on an ongoing basis.

The team thought it was important to share the results of its survey with employees. Future results will continue to be shared with employees following each survey.

The Executive Board approved all the reward and recognition recommendations put forth by the team. We all have the opportunity to recognize each other for the outstanding work we do serving veterans.

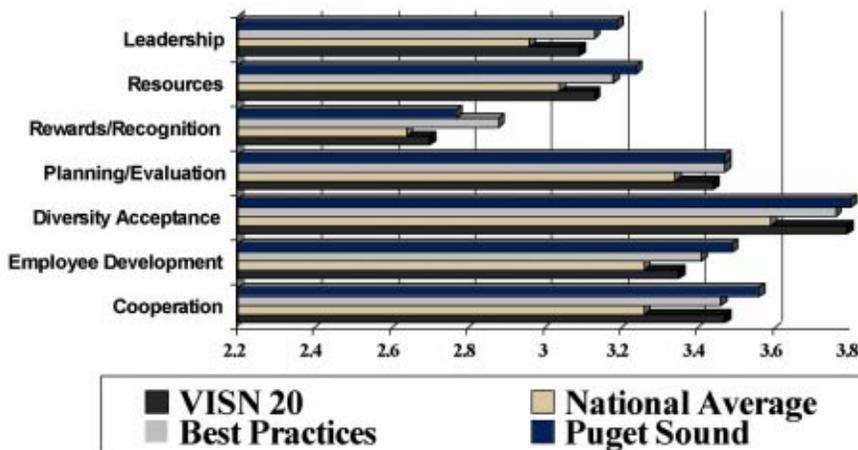
For more Award Program information, contact Human Resources Management Services at American Lake, extension 75463, or Seattle, at 62135.

## Success of Discharge Planning for Surgical Patients

VA Puget Sound’s Perioperative and Surgical Care Service promotes the recovery of their surgical patients with a comprehensive discharge plan. A multidisciplinary team focusing on each surgical patient meets daily to share vital patient information with recommendations for treatment and therapy. Successful discharge planning hinges on a careful mix of patient information and clear communication.

It has been four years since two surgical patient care wards merged on 3 East. Today, the patient census runs at full capacity. An increased number of patients with complex health care needs, coupled with nine surgical specialties with an assortment of pre- and post-op orders have resulted in longer durations of hospital stay (an average of 5-7 days). These demands led to the creation of a discharge planning nurse/patient care coordinator who oversees the development of each patient’s discharge plan.

### Staff Retention Survey Training





*Charmaine D. Kauth, RN*

From the initial pre-operative patient contact, and throughout the patient's post-operative hospital stay, the patient's response to surgery and changing health care needs are linked to:

- The patient's support system
- Health care services
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Transportation if the patient's home is closer to another VA health care facility

A fundamental part of this formula is the time-critical collaboration with the Northern Alliance Referral Service (NARS) that receives veterans from all over Washington, Idaho and Alaska.

The result is a tailor-made discharge plan that defines accessible community-based resources and ensures follow on appointments for all surgical patients. This action provides continuity of health care and bolsters patient confidence in the VA Puget Sound.

## Ceiling Mounted Lifts Provide Safety for Bedside Staff



*Ceiling Mounted Lift*

In a review of injury statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, health care workers are among the leading occupations at risk when considering job-related injuries. Back injuries in long-term care accounted for over fifty percent of the injuries. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) studied the workload on the human back during a patient transfer from wheelchair to toilet. The average NIOSH action limit was calculated to be 19.8 pounds. This indicates that unless the patient can assist the health care worker so that no more than 19.8 pounds must be lifted for each nurse involved in the lift, the lift can be considered unsafe and places each health care worker at risk for injury.

A strategy to reduce caregiver risk included purchasing equipment that has shown to reduce risks to health care workers. The best way to investigate such equipment is to have a variety of models brought into the facility for hands-on evaluation by the workers who will use them.

Such an evaluation is occurring right now in the Nursing Home Care Unit (NHCU) at American Lake and in Spinal Cord Injury Service in Seattle. So far two vendors have installed their ceiling-mounted lifts for staff evaluation. Ceiling-mounted lifts consist of a motorized lift that runs along a ceiling track in which a patient is placed in a sling, lifted and transported to any device. The tracks are mounted directly in the patient's room. The motor can maneuver in tight spaces and lift over four hundred pounds. Since the system is motorized, it reduces lower back injuries, moves patients without strain and accomplishes transfers in thirty-five to forty seconds.

Tampa VA NHCU conducted a study of these lifts. Results showed a dramatic decrease in time lost to injury. In the year prior to the lift installation, thirty-nine incidences of lost time were found. In the year following installation of the lifts, there were no incidences of lost time. All members of the staff reported that the lift relieved them of patient lifting, making their jobs easier, and most found the lifts easy to use. Over ninety-three percent of the patients responded favorably to this type of patient transfer.

Ceiling mounted lifts have drastically changed the way nursing personnel perform patient lifts. For patient transfers that used to take three to four persons, one lone staff member can now perform the transfer without incurring injury.

## Town Meeting with New Chief of Research



*Dr. Nelda Wray, Chief Research and Development Officer*

Dr. Nelda Wray, VA's new Chief Research and Development Officer, visited with faculty at VA Puget Sound's recent "Research and Development Day." Highlighting a day of presentations and poster sessions Wray addressed principal investigators and staff at an hour-long town meeting. She described her vision for the future of VA research, "Today's VA Research Leading Tomorrow's Health Care." Citing strengths and weaknesses of the program, she described a number of steps she is taking to revamp and improve the VA R&D program. These include the creation of several "blue ribbon panels" to advise her on such issues as overall R&D program structure, the peer review process, an increased emphasis on clinical research and revisions in management of clinician-investigator salaries. A major goal is to strengthen the infrastructure of the R&D program by capturing appropriate indirect costs for non-VA sponsors, such as National Institutes of Health.

## High-Tech Accommodations Assist Psychologist

Blindness is no barrier for Wendy David, PhD. Reading, writing and note taking are accomplished with a little electronic help. Devices such as a computer screen text reader; voice synthesizer, Braille note-taker and Braille printer assist David in maintaining her schedule as a busy clinical psychologist.

VA Puget Sound and the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) provided the accommodations for David. The CAP program was organized nationally to provide assistive technology accommodations to persons with disabilities in the Department of Defense and other federal agencies. Department of Veteran's Affairs joined with other federal agencies to receive CAP services in 2001.

"The nice thing about CAP," said David, "is that I don't have to ask my service chief, 'Can you take money from the department's

budget to purchase my accommodation equipment?' It is just so great to have a nationally organized program like this."

David joined the staff of VA Puget Sound in 1991 shortly after completing her UW doctoral internship at American Lake. She provides individual and group psychotherapy for female veterans in the Women's Trauma Recovery Program. She also teaches related classes and works on program development.

What does she like about working at VA Puget Sound? There are several things: "I like to be able to work for this complex, under-served population, and I like working with a stimulating team of diverse disciplines," David said. "In addition to core counseling services, we also have a lot of opportunity to develop new programs – when need is seen." Two recent programs include an eating disorder class and a self-



*Wendy David, PhD*

defense/personal safety class that she and fellow staff members have developed. "I also appreciate the significant availability and support for continuing education. I continue to expand my knowledge, and after 13 years in one work setting, it is important to still feel fresh."

# IN THE NEWS

## Canteens Receive National Recognition

Both the American Lake and Seattle divisions Veterans Canteen Service were selected as Outstanding VA Canteens for their accomplishments in 2002. The national competition includes criteria measuring customer service and financial performance. Congratulations to canteen chiefs, Rick Smith, American Lake, and Jeff Jackson, Seattle, and their VCS Associates!

## Susan Helbig Receives Prestigious Award

The Washington State Health Information Management Association has singled out ten of its members for its highest honor, the Distinguished Member Award. The tenth Distinguished Member Award was presented to Susan Helbig, MA, RHIA, and Health Information Management Service (HIMS) manager for VA Puget Sound. Helbig is a consultant, an educator, university instructor, and popular facilitator for strategic and educational events. Through all her roles, Helbig consistently strives for improvements to patient safety through developments for electronic patient records. Kudos to Susan!

## Energy Star Award Announced



*David Garman, Ed Boogaerts, Christine T. Whitman, Anthony J. Principi*

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy awarded VA Puget Sound for placing in the top twenty-five percent in efficient energy performance among all hospitals in the United States.

“Thanks to the leadership and initiative of our employees, VA serves as a model for all federal agencies in energy efficiency and the medical centers honored will save VA millions over the years.”

## New VISN 20 Chief Logistics Officer

Congratulations to Maria Boelter on becoming the VISN 20 Chief Logistics Officer! She will remain as head of the contracting activity and will continue to manage the equipment program at VA Puget Sound.

## Fifty-eight Years of Dedicated Federal Service



*Charlie Hunter,  
Timothy B. Williams, Director*

Many of you know the smiling face and the friendly “how are you today.” However, many of you may not be aware that Charles Hunter retired recently after dedicating fifty-eight years to his public service career. Prior to joining VA, Hunter served in the US Army (1946-1964) including service in England and Korea where he received several decorations.

Hunter’s VA career has been dedicated to making VA Puget Sound a better place. House-keeping is one of the most important aspects of VA. Upon entering our doors you form an impression of who we are and what we do. Charlie, thank you for a job well done.

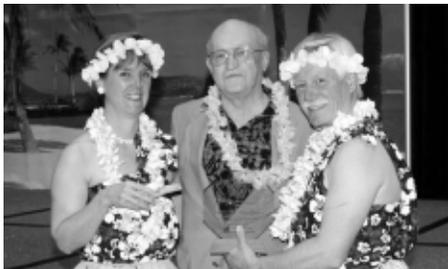
# Volunteer Recognition 2003

In the Aloha spirit, VA volunteers and staff recently gathered at the SeaTac Doubletree Hotel to recognize the contributions of VA Puget Sound volunteers. Director Timothy B. Williams, with the support from 35 talented VA staff, entertained 450 volunteers and guests. VA Puget Sound's 1,242 volunteers served over 169,000 hours in 2002.



Volunteer Helen Smith gives the "thumbs up" to Director Timothy B. Williams for his support

Doing the Hula VA hawaiian style



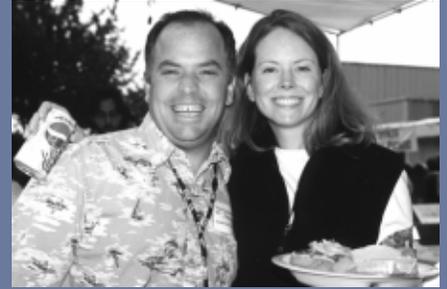
Deputy Director Sandy J. Nielsen and Director Timothy B. Williams present volunteer Marty Blackburn with an award for 40,000 hrs of service

## Options for Reducing Workplace Stress!

- Use VA's exercise facility
- Go for a walk
- Take breaks from the computer
- Deep breathe to relax
- Find a quiet place and meditate or clear your mind for 5 minutes
- Starting with your toes, alternate tensing and relaxing each muscle group
- Use humor to reduce stress
- Have realistic expectations - be optimistic. Longing for the impossible is stressful!

# Employee Appreciation Picnics

Because each of you makes a difference in the lives of veterans every day of the year, the Annual Employee Appreciation Picnic 2003 is our way of saying "Thanks!" Be sure to mark your calendars and get set for the great food, entertainment and camaraderie!



These satisfied VA Puget Sound employees enjoy fellowship and food at last year's picnic

### Seattle division:

August 5<sup>th</sup> 10:30 am – 1:30 pm  
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm  
August 6<sup>th</sup> 1:30 am – 3:00 am

### American Lake division:

August 8<sup>th</sup> 10:30 am – 1:30 pm  
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm  
August 9<sup>th</sup> 1:30 am – 3:00 am

You will receive your invitations shortly. Be sure to bring your invitation and your VA ID card to the picnic. This event is for employees ONLY; please do not bring guests.

## Moving Up in the VA (Continued from page 3)

- Check out nearly 1,500 courses ranging from personal development to management training at VA's on-line site: [www.vcampus.com/valo](http://www.vcampus.com/valo)

Aside from taking classes, there are other things you can do to build skills and position yourself for career growth:

- Network in the organization. Learn more about what we do at VA Puget Sound and discover possibilities that fit your interests.
- Be flexible and don't be afraid to apply for positions that will lead to more responsibilities. That's how you get ahead. Bone up on how to write a good application and how to present your strengths during an interview
- Get involved. Start within your department and volunteer to work on a committee or project. When you are ready, work with your supervisor to get involved on a facility committee.

The future is full of potential for those who choose to accept the challenge. Let us help you get there.

Department of Veterans Affairs  
**VA Puget Sound Health Care System**  
American Lake & Seattle

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### VA PUGET SOUND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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Comments or future story ideas may be submitted to the VA Puget Sound News Editorial Board via Outlook to Jeri Rowe. All photos for newsletter inclusion must be taken or approved by the Editorial Board.

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