

# VA Puget Sound

Proudly Serving  
Veterans of the  
Northwest

## NEWS

VA Puget Sound Health Care System • American Lake & Seattle

Autumn 2000

## *Congratulations to STP Participants*

Could you pedal a bicycle 200 miles over two days? ... in July? ... using only your arms? That is exactly what seven of our paralyzed veterans did one weekend in July. Along with eight support riders in the Seattle to Portland Bike Ride, Ernie Butler, Darrell Hunt, Toai Huynh, Pat McElrath, Dave Zurfluh, Casey Pooler, and Mike Carson prepared for three months with staff in the Recreation Therapy program. Three of the seven veterans completed the 200-mile ride. All seven met or exceeded their personal goals in this rigorous ride. Support riders & ground support staff included Carrie Booker, Recreational Therapist, SCI; Dr. Steven Burns, Physician, SCI; DeAnn Dietrich, Facility Planner; Skip Dreps, NW Paralyzed Veterans of America; Randee Frost, Occupational Therapist, SCI; Amir Jalali, Resident, University of Washington; Ron Kaplan, Employee Health; Kristie Kvitle, Recreational Therapist, RCS; Patty Lyman, Physician Assistant, SCI; Elaine Mulrone, Volunteer, Bowlers to Veterans Link; Jim Patton, Physician Assistant, SCI; Cathy Rundell, RN, SCI; Kirk Tostenrude, Volunteer and Timothy B. Williams, Chief Executive Officer for VA Puget Sound. This demonstrates one way that VA and its Recreational Therapy Program support veterans in their return to a healthy lifestyle. As one staff member commented, "It was an honor to share this experience with our veterans."



## *Comments from the CEO*

I would like to thank our staff and volunteers who gave unselfishly of their time and talents for the recent Seattle to Portland Ride (STP). This hearty group performed beyond expectations - participating in practice rides before the event, lending support and encouragement to riders, monitoring health and safety issues, tackling equipment problems, driving support vehicles, and during the event, setting up rest stops and camp— all to benefit our SCI veterans who participated in the ride.



*Timothy B. Williams*

Two big practice rides held late in June – one from Gasworks Park to Marymore Park (& back) as well as a ride at Friday Harbor provided everyone with additional training and team inspiration for what was to come.

Special thanks goes to the NW Paralyzed Veterans of America and Bowlers to Veterans Link whose contributions provided the beautiful team jerseys for veterans, staff and volunteers, and for their underwriting the camping fees for our entire team. Participating in this event with our veterans was truly inspiring for me. I look forward to next year's ride!



*Pat McElrath and Patty Lyman*



## *Veterans Return as Victors*

This past July, 21 veteran patients from the Spinal Cord Injury Unit and Rehabilitation Care Service competed in the 20<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheelchair Games in San Antonio, Texas. This event introduces wheelchair sports and healthy living to veterans with neurological impairments.

The participants learn additional skills such as trip planning, coordinating accessible transportation, and self-care management necessary to support active lifestyles. VA Puget Sound's team was supported through a partnership between VA Staff, Volunteers and the Northwest Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. Over 700 veterans from across the country, Great Britain, and Puerto Rico competed in 18 events that included track and field, wheelchair basketball, quad rugby, softball, and swimming. Despite blistering heat, the athletes endured and had a terrific competition. The medal count for the team totaled 50 medals (20 gold, 14 silver, and 17 bronze medals). Great Job!

# Quality in Action

# Quality

## Team Effort Produces Results (Project ICU)

An Ingredient Control Unit (ICU) project at American Lake Division was the brainchild of Nutrition and Food Service employee, Leonard Blas, who took the opportunity to put quality improvement into action. He recruited team members Mike Anderson, Frank Chargualaf, John Halmrast, Jesse Crisostomo, John Hill, David Bird, and Sy Simon to identify time and money wasters from poorly organized inventory and food rotation procedures. The team organized and standardized inventory sheets, established written safety and sanitation guidelines, and opened lines of communication among other Nutrition and Food Service employees. This grassroots team effort not only identified and solved their own work problems, but also created a structure that will save time and money and could serve as a model for other staff teams. In the process, they also experienced the satisfaction of team quality improvement — GO TEAM!



Star and Alvin Johnson

## Camp Chaparral Promotes Cultural Understanding

Camp Chaparral is located on sacred Yakima Indian Nation land on Mt. Adams. Attending Camp Chaparral is an opportunity of a lifetime. The focus highlighted what the Native American experience is like, and in particular, the Native American veteran and his/her experience at the VA. We gained some insight into their culture, their community, their spirituality and healing practices. All participants are now better equipped to interact with Native American veterans in a more meaningful and understanding way. Approximately 90 VA employees from various states were able to participate, learn, and grow both professionally and individually. It was an incredible experience and all consider it an honor to have participated.

## Star Visits Veterans

A new visiting therapist is making rounds on 7 West at the Seattle Division. Her name is Star, a seven-year old Portuguese Water Dog, owned and handled by Physician Assistant Christine Overton. Star's credentials include American Club Champion, Canine Good Citizen and Delta Society Pet Partner. Star has volunteered her time as a visitation and therapy dog for the last two years in a variety of settings including schools and hospitals.

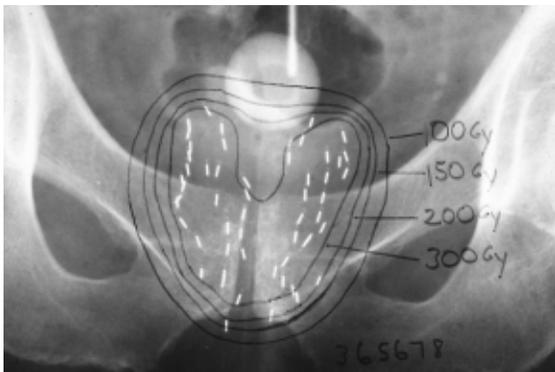
Therapy goals of her weekly visits are to increase socialization and decrease anxiety levels in the patient population. Every three weeks Star is present during group discussions concerning the health benefits of having animals in our lives. A video is shown and an article is read about the subject of loneliness. The veterans in the group then relate the part animals have played in their lives. Star's approachability has had a dramatic effect on at least one veteran in crisis.

Veterans in the nursing home and Alzheimer's unit at the American Lake Division also benefit from pet therapy. Patients in those units receive visitations from two English Labradors which are brought in on a regular basis by a volunteer.

## Prostate Seed Therapy Improved

Brachytherapy, the implantation of radioactive sources into the prostate gland is an increasingly popular therapy for early stage prostate cancer. It has practical advantages of being an outpatient procedure and mounting evidence that tumor control rates with brachytherapy are comparable to those achieved with radical surgery.

When the radiation oncology service at the Seattle facility decided to offer this exciting new therapy in September 1998, they were stymied by the need for substantial operating room time. Determined to accommodate the large number of patients seeking this therapy, they implemented a brachytherapy program using local anesthesia, rather than the current norm of spinal or general anesthesia. Accordingly, the procedure was moved from the operating room to the radiation oncology department, without the need for specialized anesthesia personnel.



Radiograph of implanted seeds in prostate

The substitution of local anesthesia has facilitated rapid introduction of a high volume brachytherapy program at our hospital, without requiring the allocation of significant operating room time. From a practical perspective, the use of local anesthesia conserves resources and anesthesia personnel time, and reduces the patient inconvenience of post-anesthesia recovery.

Over 300 patients have already been treated at VA Puget Sound. The Seattle brachytherapy team has achieved an international reputation for innovation in their specialty, primarily through scientific papers and presentations around the country by Dr. Kent Wallner. Approximately one third of their patients are self-referred from outside of VISN 20, based on the reputation of the group. The team participates in many studies regarding optimizing the way brachytherapy is delivered.

## “Controlled Heart Attack” Repairs Heart Condition

Kenneth Lehmann, MD, and colleagues at VA Puget Sound recently became the first Northwest team to perform a new procedure to treat hypertrophic cardiomyopathy – an overgrown heart muscle.

A surprisingly common genetic condition, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy appears in about one person out of 500. In some cases, enlarged muscle tissue can restrict blood flow, triggering symptoms such as fainting, shortness of breath, chest pain, and even sudden death. Until now, treatments have been limited to controlling symptoms with drugs and open heart surgery if drug therapy fails.

In the new technique, doctors thread an angioplasty catheter into the artery supplying enlarged muscle tissue with blood and then inject alcohol to close off the vessel. The resulting “controlled heart attack” causes the muscle mass to shrink, thereby improving blood flow through the heart’s chambers.



Dr. George Merriam and Monica Kletke

## VA Team Studies Growth Hormone In Elderly

In a preliminary study, VA Puget Sound researchers found that boosting production of growth hormone (GH) may benefit elderly men and women, but potential benefits may be undercut by estrogen replacement therapy.

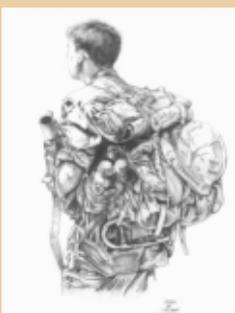
“Our findings suggest that optimum hormone replacement in aging may require careful balancing among several systems,” said George Merriam, MD. Overall, boosting GH production was found to improve body composition and put people in a holding pattern. “We didn’t see much functional improvement in the treated group,” Dr. Merriam said, “but we saw declines in the group that received a placebo.” He and UW colleagues Michael Vitiello, PhD, and Robert Schwartz, MD, reported their findings at a recent meeting of the Endocrine Society.

For continued research on potential benefits of boosting GH in the elderly, the team is seeking healthy volunteers aged 65-84. For more information, call either American Lake Division, (253) 582-8440, extension 76832, or Seattle Division (206) 762-1010, extension 76832.

# ON THE NEWS

## VA Puget Sound Veterans Take Honors

Out of nearly 1200 entries at the 2000 National Veterans Art Competition held recently, VA Puget Sound veterans took several awards: Ed Orr, First place – Special



Ed Orr's 'The Grenadier'

Commemorative Category; Patricia Ellis, Second place – Beading; Patrick Haskett, Second place – Watercolor; Rusty Hall, Second place – Black and White Photography; and Larry Kohnke, Third place – Knotting. Ed Orr's Gold Medal winning pencil drawing, *The Grenadier*, will be part of a special exhibit in the Russell Rotunda on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, September 11-15, 2000. Afterward, the exhibit will move to the Chicago Vietnam Veterans Museum. Vicki Booth, Recreation Therapist with Mental Health Service, coordinates VA Puget Sound's participation each year.

## Flu Shot Clinic Coming

VA Puget Sound's annual Flu and Pneumonia (Shot) Clinic will be held October 2-31 at American Lake Division and October 16-27 at Seattle Division. The clinic is open to patients and employees. 'Drop in' any time during the day (Monday-Friday) on these dates and get your Flu or Pneumovax shot. The general recommendation for Pneumovax is once in a lifetime, and Flu vaccine is recommended yearly. For more information call 1-800-329-8387.

## Hepatitis C - The Silent Epidemic

Approximately 3.9 million Americans have been infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV), making it the most common chronic blood-borne disease in the U.S. Since its identification in 1989, much has been learned about who is at risk, how to delay progression of disease, ways to prevent transmission to others, and what treatment options are available. Preliminary studies suggest that HCV may be more common among our nation's veterans than in the general population. While only 20% of HCV infections cause permanent scarring of the liver (cirrhosis), end-stage liver disease caused by the virus is the leading reason for liver transplants, and more than half of VA liver transplant patients have HCV.

Because there are few symptoms, many infected patients are unaware that they carry the virus. Understanding the risk factors is critical to identifying those who should be tested for hepatitis C. Risk factors include:

- Blood transfusion before 1992
- Intravenous drug use (even once)
- Tattoo or piercing under non-sterile conditions
- Organ transplant before 1992
- Long-term kidney dialysis

- Transmission from HCV-infected mother to new-born
- Multiple sexual partners
- Needle-stick injuries or exposure to blood infected with HCV

Research plays a key role in the VA response to HCV. About 60 VA investigators nationwide are conducting more than 100 individual research projects on HCV at VA medical centers ranging from basic mechanisms of the disease to prevention and new treatment strategies. One VA team is working on identifying key proteins on the virus in an attempt to design a vaccine that can prevent infection in people exposed to HCV.

VA Puget Sound has recently recruited Elizabeth Morrison, MD, a hepatologist, specializing in the treatment and care of HCV patients; and Anne Croghan, ARNP, a nurse practitioner whose experience as a liver transplant coordinator and in HCV studies will benefit screening and testing of patients. Jason Dornitz, MD continues to be integral to on-going efforts with HCV.

Screening, education and treatment for hepatitis C are available through both the American Lake and Seattle Divisions. For more information, call the VA Puget Sound Hepatitis C Information Line: (206) 764-2843.

## New Director Arrives At Tahoma National Cemetery

Mary Ann Fisher was recently named Director, Tahoma National Cemetery. She replaced Sandra Noguez who accepted a position with the National Cemetery Atlanta office.

Fisher joined the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1989 and served at the Bonham and Dallas VA Medical Centers. In 1991, she entered the VA National Cemetery Training Program and has since served as Director at the Ft. Knox, Kansas, Little Rock, Arkansas, and Saratoga, New York cemeteries. Welcome to the great Northwest!



Mary Ann Fisher

# Veterans

Our family, Our friends

STP Ride

## Comments from Veteran Riders



Toai Huynh, age 31, (Army)- "Each mile taught me a great deal about training and I mean really training."



Pat McElrath, age 30, (Army)- "Handcycling to me has been like being 16 again and just getting my drivers license. It's freedom!"



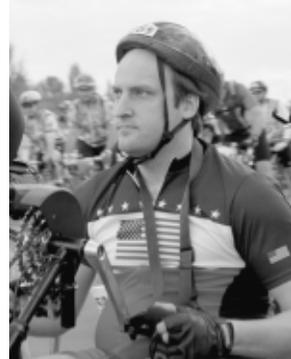
Mike Carson, age 32, (Army)- "It was important for me to be just another one of the 8000 riders. That's life!"

Ernie Butler, age 48, (Air Force)- "During the practice rides and the actual STP, I learned that I was just another cyclist."

Darell Hunt, age 30, (Navy)- "A challenge like this teaches you a lot more about yourself. And being part of such a dynamic group made the experience much more meaningful."

David Zurfluh, age 32, (Air Force)- "This experience gave me more confidence in myself. Although I didn't finish the entire 200 miles, I went further than I thought I could have."

Casey Pooler, age 24, (Marine Corps)- "I am a marine, I'll do anything once!"



## Never Forget! National POW/MIA Recognition Day

Each year since 1979, Congress and the President have proclaimed a POW/MIA Recognition Day. This year's POW/MIA Recognition Day is Friday, September 15, 2000, honoring the valor and sacrifices of those American service men and women who suffered as prisoners of war or who remain missing in action from all U. S. conflicts.

Less than half (40 percent) of the Americans held prisoner in the last six conflicts are now living. Some 142,256 Americans were captured and interned during World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam Conflict, the Persian Gulf War, and the Somalia Conflict. This includes 83 women seized on Guam or in the Philippines in World War II, and two in the Persian Gulf War.

Former American POWs are eligible for special veterans benefits, including medical care in VA hospitals and disability compensation for injuries and disease presumed to be caused by internment. These benefits are in addition to regular veterans benefits and services to which they, as veterans, are entitled.

POW coordinators have been assigned to each VA regional office and medical center. Former POWs can contact VA regional offices by calling toll-free: 1-800-827-1000 extension 2777 or POW Associate, O.J. Karnes at (206) 220-6734, extension 2777. POW Coordinators at VA Puget Sound Seattle Division: Kelvin McNeal (206) 764-2200 and American Lake Division: Sally Knutson-Larson (253) 582-8440 extension 76542.

## It's That Time Again...

VA Puget Sound employees went over the top last year, let's see if we can do it again this year! The Combined Federal Campaign will run from the beginning of October to mid-November. Most of us know someone who has benefited from services provided by these agencies ranging from youth organizations to shelters for battered women and children to national and local disaster relief. Employees may select as many organizations as they wish to support. VA Puget Sound is supporting both Pierce and King County campaigns. For more information, call Walt Werkhoven, extension 71287 at American Lake, or Ellen Martin, extension 62758 in Seattle.

### Veterans Web Sites

#### SCI/HANDCYCLE & WHEELCHAIR RELATED SITES:

[www.wheelweb.com](http://www.wheelweb.com)  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)  
[www.cascade.org](http://www.cascade.org)  
[www.dsusa.org](http://www.dsusa.org)  
[www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)  
[www.sailingalternatives.org](http://www.sailingalternatives.org)

#### HEPATITIS C SITES:

[www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)  
[www.hepnet.com](http://www.hepnet.com)  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
[www.hepatitisinfo.com](http://www.hepatitisinfo.com)

#### GENERAL INFORMATION:

[www.dtic.mil/dpms](http://www.dtic.mil/dpms)  
[www.vnis.com](http://www.vnis.com)  
[www.geocities.com/Heartland/7351/WM.HTM](http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/7351/WM.HTM)  
[www.ngwrc.org](http://www.ngwrc.org)  
[www.pva.org/sports/brochure1/pvasrp1.htm](http://www.pva.org/sports/brochure1/pvasrp1.htm)

## VA Puget Sound Wellness Fair, 2000

Veterans and employees are invited to attend the second annual Wellness Fair being held November 13-15 at the Seattle Division and November 17 at the American Lake Division. The Fair is sponsored by the Patient Education Committee to celebrate National Health Education Week and is being held in conjunction with the Great American Smoke-Out, November 16.

We are in the early planning stages for this year's event but hope to offer many of the same exhibits from last year, including; Healthy Diet and Low Cholesterol Diets from Nutrition, cancer care programs, skin cancer screening from Dermatology, medication reviews from Pharmacy, and blood pressure, vision screening, height and weight measurements from Nursing.

This year we hope to add cholesterol testing, flu shots, Women's Health, diabetes programs, library resources and an exciting addition of a mini-lecture series. Keep your eye out for the countdown to the Wellness Fair and updates. Potential exhibitors and volunteers should call or email Wendy Miller, 66553/570-7303 or Connie Browne, 610-0195.



VA Puget Sound News is published quarterly, each autumn, winter, spring and summer by the Office of Public Affairs. VA Puget Sound Health Care System proudly serves veterans throughout the Northwest with facilities located in Seattle and at American Lake. VA Puget Sound is part of the VISN 20 network of health care facilities.

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