

VA Launches New Multiple Sclerosis Center of Excellence

Drawing on a well-established program in Multiple Sclerosis (MS), VA Puget Sound Health Care System and the Portland VA Medical Center have established a new Center of Excellence in Multiple Sclerosis (MS Center West). The Baltimore VA Medical Center has also been awarded a grant. These centers will receive about \$8 million over the next four years devoted to the battle against Multiple Sclerosis, a disease that afflicts some 350,000 Americans. "The Pacific Northwest has one of the highest rates of MS in the nation, approximately one person for every 1,000 people" states Dennis Bourdette, MD, center co-director and associate director for research and development. Although scientists don't yet know what causes MS, studies have shown that genetic predisposition and certain environmental factors play a role.

"Our aim is to improve care for 50,000 veterans in the U.S. who have MS" states Jodi Haselkorn, MD, MPH and MS center director. Both health professional and

veteran education programs will be aspects of the Center's mission. Dr. Michael Hatzakis, the MS center's associate director for communications and informatics shares a view on the value of clinical informatics, "Our strength largely depends on the VA's state-of-the-art clinical informatics program which has a proven track record with our computerized patient record, bar code medication administration and other technology based assets such as Telemedicine. All of which play a major role in the diagnosis, care, treatment and education of those with MS."

MS is most often diagnosed between the ages of 20-50. Initial symptoms of MS often include difficulty in walking, abnormal sensations such as numbness and pain, and visual problems due to optic neuritis, and an inflammation of the optic nerve. For more information about MS please visit:

<http://vaww.va.gov/mswest> within VA and externally at: <http://www.va.gov/mswest>

VA/MAMC Embark on a Joint Venture

Beginning in 2002, VA Puget Sound and Madigan Army Medical Center began exploring a joint venture agreement that would support the President's objectives to enhance partnerships between



*Timothy Williams
Director*

the VA and DOD. Leaders from both agencies have been meeting to develop a plan to relocate the Inpatient Medicine Ward and Emergency Services at American Lake to Madigan. The Urgent Care walk-in clinic will continue to be provided at American Lake during normal daytime business hours. After hours and weekends, emergency care will be provided at Madigan. All other programs will continue at the American Lake campus including Primary Care, Mental Health, Women's Health, Medical and Surgical Specialty Care, Ambulatory Surgery, C&P exams, Blind Rehabilitation, Nursing Home and Dementia Care, and Homeless Veterans programs.

This joint venture will improve access to a full range of consulting services, will expand outpatient Primary Care and Specialty Care services at American Lake, and will serve as a model for VA/DoD Joint Ventures. In the coming months we will be sharing more information about this exciting project which we expect to launch later this year.

Excellence in Healthcare

What does the “Excellence” designation in VA health care mean? The Department of Veterans Affairs selects a small number of clinical programs and initiatives for this honor. VHA’s goal is to identify special, high-performing clinical programs that excel when compared with the best in American health care. VA Puget Sound Health Care System has competed successfully for many of these awards.

Nominees from across the VHA healthcare system undergo rigorous evaluation by review committees made up of their peers using stringent criteria for evaluation. Programs are judged on such things as how they reduced variation in treatment, improved patient care processes and clinical outcomes, improved the long-term health status of the population they served and enhanced the overall quality of VA care.

To be “a cut above the rest” means that these programs/services maintain a recognized and measurable high quality standard within their discipline. Clinical outcomes, patient focus, financial effectiveness and efficiency, productivity, and fulfillment of the dimensions of quality are some of the important criteria in attaining a designation of “Program of Excellence.” To be designated as one of the “Centers of Excellence” requires demonstration of significant and innovative approaches to treatment, education and research.



Designation as a “Program of Excellence” is made for two years. Designation as a “Center of Excellence” is made for four years. To retain this title (“Program of Excellence” or “Center of Excellence”) a service or program must re-submit an application and be evaluated each time the term of their designation expires. New designees are expected to serve as models for veterans’ health care and as information and referral sources to help other programs in VA achieve the same standards of care.

Nationally Centers of Excellence at VA Puget Sound:

- Geriatric Research, Education & Clinical Center
- Health Services Research & Development
- Mental Illness Research, Education & Clinical Center
- Multiple Sclerosis Education and Research Center

- Rehabilitation for Amputations, Prosthetics & Limb Loss Prevention
- Substance Abuse Treatment & Education

Special Emphasis Programs at VA Puget Sound include:

- Alzheimer’s Disease Research and Treatment Center
- Bone Marrow Transplantation,
- Brachytherapy Program
- Center for Ethics
- Comprehensive Cancer Center
- Diabetes/Endocrinology Research Center
- Epidemiology Research & Information Center
- Gene Therapy and New Cancer Treatments
- Gulf War Illness Research & Treatment
- Hepatitis C Collaborative Center for Education & Research
- Homeless Veterans Domiciliary Treatment & Rehabilitation Program
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Rehabilitation Research and Prosthetics
- Spinal Cord Injury Treatment

NIH-funded centers include:

- Alzheimer’s Research Center
- Diabetes/Endocrinology Research Center

You Can Make the Difference

VA Puget Sound Health Care System has a wide range of awards for recognizing our most important asset, our employees. Awards range from the “On-The-Spot Awards” to national recognition. Nominations for Special Contribution Awards for bargaining unit employees flow through an Awards Panel and can reflect tangible or intangible benefits to VA Puget Sound. The Employee-of-the-Month program recognizes employees from both campuses; selection is by the Employee-of-the-Month Committee, which includes labor and management representatives. In addition, there are also Suggestion Awards,

Honor Awards, Employee Invention Awards and a large range of national level awards.

In all cases an employee, supervisor or manager can make award nominations. With the exception of the “On-The-Spot Awards” all other recognition includes monetary awards as well as public recognition for individuals’ achievements. For further information regarding the availability of nomination forms and details, call Human Resources Management Service: extension 71065 at American Lake, or extension 66194 in Seattle.



Choosing a VA Career

Have you ever thought about where your provider received his/her training and why they chose to work at the VA rather than in another academic medical center setting or the private sector?

Did you know that more than 500 medical residents pass through our doors each year? In addition, there are nurses, social workers, therapists, technicians and fellows who also train here each year, exposing themselves to the VA's technology, education and research and clinical programs.

Three physicians who were residents at VA Puget Sound and then accepted staff positions afterward spoke about what drew them to the largest health care system in the country, and why those chose the VA.

For John Wicher, MD, General Internal Medicine Clinic (GIMC) staff physician, being able to provide the care that his patients need without the fear of it bankrupting the patients was a definite enticement as a practitioner. Tony Back, MD, oncology staff physician and director of the Palliative Care Program, cited the collegial atmosphere at VA Puget Sound that lends itself to a stimulating mix of patient care and research. He noted that the VA provided an environment to develop an innovative Palliative Care Service because he could assemble a team of excellent clinicians, has the support from top leadership, and experienced health services analysts.

Joyce Wipf, MD, GIMC staff physician, finds that working with the veteran population is a way for her to help repay them for their service to their country. When she found that her child's school did not observe Veterans Day, she went to the school and gave a presentation about the sacrifices military veterans have made, and did so for a number of years. Aside from the fact that VA is an industry



leader in computerized medical records, telemedicine consultation, and research funding, all three underscored the personal satisfaction they experience in working with their veteran patients. Most physicians at VA Puget Sound also serve on the faculty at University of Washington. VA is proud to attract and retain this high caliber of staff members in its mission of providing veterans state-of-the-art health care with compassion, commitment, courtesy and respect.

Living Well With Stroke

The University of Washington School of Nursing is now recruiting patients for a study to compare pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic ways to reduce depression in stroke survivors. Pamela Mitchell, PhD, RN, is the principal investigator; Dr. David Tirschwell is the co-investigator on this National Institute of Health-funded study. If within four months of an ischemic stroke, patients answer, "Yes" to the question, "Do you often feel sad or depressed?", they are eligible to be screened for the study. For further information about the study, please call the research team at (206) 543-6227.



Smallpox Vaccinations

In response to the President's call for bio-terrorism preparedness, VA Puget Sound Health Care System is working with local Public Health officials in both King and Pierce counties to identify potential members of volunteer Smallpox Health Care Response Teams. Employees who volunteer as team members will receive the first smallpox vaccinations to protect health care workers, and thus be able to provide care to others in the event of additional vaccinations or a smallpox attack. Individuals who have been previously vaccinated are preferred since the risks of adverse reactions are likely to be lower.

Smallpox team volunteers at American Lake and Seattle will: (1) inspect and provide inoculation site care for others who get smallpox vaccinations and (2) provide care to patients with suspected or confirmed smallpox for up to 7-10 days. The vaccination program will be coordinated with both county health departments and with VISN 20. Strict measures to prevent accidental infections will be followed and volunteers will be monitored regularly to ensure they are following protective guidelines. Questions may be addressed to Dr. Kathy Neuzil at ext. 62128 or Ron Kaplan, N.P. Employee health at ext. 66710.

IN THE NEWS

Patient Feedback:

Dear Mr. Williams:

I would like to take a few moments to commend and thank the entire staff that was superb in caring for my father, who passed away on January 4th after a long battle with cancer.

The “inspiration” and personal care he received from the TCU and the Palliative Care Team was by far the main reason my father was with us as long as he was. Additionally the superb interaction I received from Kristin Mullen, Huong Pham, Laura Emnott, Vicki Kirk, and a night nurse by the name of Mike, was above and way beyond the call of duty and each and every one of those named, and even those I forgot to mention, deserve a most admirable recognition for a job so very well done.

It was very frustrating for me in dealing with all the issues from 3000 miles away in

Virginia as you can imagine, however your team’s interaction with me was fantastic and made my job of dealing with everything so much easier. They always had answers for all my questions and concerns. I can honestly say that having a staff like this is a huge asset to the entire VA. The daily e-mails, and nightly updates via phone calls from Kristin, Huong, and Laura were truly a blessing for me. I am deeply saddened with the loss of my father but feel so blessed to know that he did in fact receive the “best possible care” at the VA.

As the Director of the VA you should be very proud of your staff and I hope the TCU and Palliative Care are both permanent divisions, as they are so instrumental in the inspiration for the Vet’s and the strength and support of the family members. Once again, my most sincere thanks to everyone and God Bless.

Warm Regards,
A grateful son

Geographic Means Test

Congress recently developed a plan to give relief to low income veterans living in high cost areas, and President Bush signed the plan into law late last year, implementing the Geographic Means Test (GMT). This method modifies VA’s system of determining a veteran’s ability to pay for health care. Effective October 1, 2002, veterans may have their inpatient copayments reduced by 80%. These reductions only apply to inpatient hospital stays. A new GMT copay status will identify veterans who qualify for a reduced inpatient GMT copay rate. This law did not change outpatient care and medication copayments. The current copayment for an outpatient basic care visit is \$15 and \$50 for an outpatient specialty care visit. The current medication copayment is \$7 for each 30-day or less supply of medication. For further information, check with the Supervisor, Business Office at: 1-800-329-8387 ext. 62170 (Seattle) or ext. 76781 (American Lake).

New Facility Manager Arrives

VA Puget Sound has a new permanent Facility Manager on site as of March 17, 2003. Phillip Fesmire was the Facility Manager at the VA in Prescott, AZ, and was previously at the VA in Allen Park, Michigan, where he was involved in the design and construction of the new VA hospital in Detroit. Prior to his VA experience he served in a variety of both military and civilian engineer assignments with the Department of Defense. He has a BS in Civil Engineering from New Mexico State University.

What is a Hardship Determination?

A Hardship Determination is a process by which veterans enrolled in eligibility categories of Priority Group seven or eight may request a change in their enrollment priority status if their projected income for the current year will be substantially lower than their income from the previous year. Circumstances that might warrant

hardship determination would be the loss of employment, business bankruptcy, or out-of pocket medical expenses. For further information, check with the Supervisor of Registration and Processing, 1-800-329-8387 ext. 62170 (Seattle) or ext. 76781 (American Lake).

Serving Homeless Women Veterans



(HWVP) was funded by Congressional Legislation. There are 11 programs nationally and Puget Sound HWVP is currently ranked as the second for the highest for the number of homeless women served.

It is estimated that four percent of homeless veterans are women. To lower this percentage the Homeless Women Veterans Program

is currently ranked as the second for the highest for the number of homeless women served.

The HWVP has two social workers, Sandra Perry in Seattle and Kathy Gerard at American Lake. They have worked with over 125 women since its inception December 2000. Almost half are now housed and a third are employed. The program's effectiveness has been achieved through community outreach, networking, and establishing community partnerships as well as the benefit of having well-established VA women's services.

Partnerships between HWVP and the Washington State Department Veteran Affairs, YWCA/Housing Assistance Support Program, Theodora, Fremont Public Association, and others have been instrumental in reducing homelessness. The HWVP has collaborated with the Transitional Residence program to establish a house for five women and a VA grant with the Metropolitan Development Council supports eight apartments for veterans with children in Tacoma.

Many women are recovering from past traumas, mental illness, substance abuse, and/or abusive relationships, and need ongoing treatment and support. Obtaining stable housing is only the first step in a long process of change. Oftentimes, seeking services is a last resort when everything else they tried has failed. The social workers will be providing "Seeking Safety" treatment, of which case management is crucial in meeting the women's intensive needs.

For more information about HWVP contact Sandra Perry at (206)277-3560 or Kathy Gerard at (253)583-1600.



Fisher House Awarded

VA Puget Sound's Seattle division is one of five sites across the country identified to participate in the VA's national Fisher House Program. The sites designated are: Houston; NY Harbor in Brooklyn; VA North Texas in Dallas; VA Palo Alto and Seattle. The Fisher House will provide a home away from home for veterans and their families while the veterans receive medical treatment here. The Fisher House Foundation pays for all or part of the construction of the fully furnished homes, which are built on government property and donated to the VA. Construction could begin as early as 2004.

News from the Pharmacy

Did you know that VA Puget Sound Health Care System filled over 2 million (30-day-supply) prescriptions last year? That's over 5,000 prescriptions a day! Of course, that does include mail out pharmacy prescription fills. VA Puget Sound expects a 12 percent increase in refills this year. Consider also that pharmacy services dispensed nearly 2.2 million aspirin pills alone last year.

Drug costs are approximately 10 percent of VA Puget Sound's budget – but medications used appropriately can help provide outcomes that improve the health and, ultimately, the quality of life for the nation's veterans.

For more information about the pharmacy, or to call in a refill to the automated telephone refill system (mail out pharmacy):
American Lake: (253) 583-3000
Seattle: (206) 277-4000
Toll free within Washington state:
1 (800) 329-8387



Quality in Action

Quality

CARF Accreditation

CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehab Facilities) announces that VA Puget Sound has received its first three-year accreditation for its VA Supportive Housing (VASH) and Compensated Work Therapy/Therapeutic Residence (CWT/TR) programs.

VASH and CWT/TR are both programs of the Homeless Care Line, part of the Mental Health Service Line. VASH represents a partnership between VA and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). With Section 8 housing vouchers provided by HUD, case managers assist 115 disabled veterans to maintain long-term independent housing in the community. VASH case managers maintain routine contact with former homeless veterans to help solve problems that might result in a return to the streets.

CWT/TR is a transitional housing program. VA owns several homes in the Tacoma area and places veterans who are established in recovery from addiction in each house. CWT/TR staff follows up with case management, group meetings in each house, and ensuring the maintenance of the houses. Veterans stay for up to six months while they perform compensated work therapy and prepare to re-enter the world of employment.

A Three-Year accreditation is CARF's highest level of certification and shows VA's commitment to quality and conformance to the internationally recognized standards of CARF.

What does CARF accreditation mean to veterans?

- VASH & CWT/TR involve clients in selecting, planning and using services.
- VASH & CWT/TR have met client-oriented, state-of-the-art international

standards of performance based on input from consumers.

- VA Puget Sound is focused on helping each veteran meet his or her chosen goals and outcomes.

What does CARF accreditation mean to other agencies?

- VA Puget Sound stands together with other community rehab agencies in submitting to external survey and willingness to meet internationally recognized standards of quality.
- VA Puget Sound is a partner in providing care in the community.

For further information on CARF or the VASH and CWT / TR programs, contact Lisa Sowers, at extension 76204.

CARES Update

As our Western Washington Market plans for health-care needs of veterans over the next 20 years, the greatest challenge is a large predicted growth in demand for some services. VA has projected a 107 percent growth in demand for outpatient primary care in the Market through 2022, 149 percent for outpatient specialty care, and 45 percent for inpatient medical beds.

In addition to these CARES Planning Initiatives, defined by the gaps between current capacity and future needs, VA Puget Sound will also address collaborative opportunities with VBA and DoD, enhanced use-lease opportunities, lead paint issues and seismic deficiencies at both Seattle and American Lake.

CARES Timeline

- Market Plans submitted to VA Central Office - April 2003
- Draft National CARES Plan - June 2003

- CARES Commission Review/Public Comment/Public Hearings - June, July 2003
- Recommendations to Secretary - September 2003
- Secretary's Decision - October 2003

For more information you can visit the VISN 20 web site:
<http://vaww.visn20.med.va.gov/visn20/cares/index.html>, or the national CARES site at <http://www.va.gov/CARES>

Mission First, Employees Always...

This is the motto of VISN 20's Network Director, Dr. Leslie M. Burger who recently visited VA Puget Sound. Dr. Burger has stated that VISN 20's primary mission remains unchanged—to provide health care to veterans, supported and inextricably linked with the missions of health education and medical research. In today's environment, our mission of serving in a support role for our community and DoD has taken on an urgency of its own. The organizational vision remains unchanged – to become an integrated health care delivery system, as defined by Dr. Shortell in his book, "Remaking Health Care in America."

In order to accomplish our mission, and in keeping with our vision, this year we will focus our attention on: increasing our workload through efficiencies and the prudent application of resources; focusing on our people through improvements in recruitment, retention and professional development of our workforce, and continuing our pursuit of the Baldrige Award as the means to continuously assess ourselves as an organization.

Veterans

OUR FAMILY, OUR FRIENDS

Fran Agnes

USAF Captain (Retired) Francis W. Agnes of Everett, Washington, passed away February 9, 2003. He served his country for 22 years in the U.S. Army Air Corp and the U.S. Air force. In 1940, Fran enlisted in the Army Air Corp and was assigned to the 20th Pursuit Squadron. While stationed in the



Fran Agnes

Philippines, he was captured at Marvellas, Philippines Islands, where he endured the infamous Bataan Death March on April 9, 1942. He was held as a prisoner of war for three years, and liberated from the Hiro Hata prison camp in October, 1945. He witnessed the atomic bomb explosion at Hiroshima.

After retiring from the Air Force and returning to civilian life, he continued to serve his country with pride. Fran was a tireless, lifelong advocate for the betterment of veterans and their

families in the State of Washington, who frequently met with the Northwest's Congressional leadership. Fran served as Chair of the Governor's Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee and was a member of the Ex-POW Association. He also served as a charter member of the CEO Veterans Advisory group and as the veteran representative on the VA Puget Sound Executive Board. Fran's leadership was instrumental in the implementation of Tahoma National Cemetery at Kent, Washington, where he now resides in final rest.

Patient Story

He had been an artist for the Army in Vietnam. He built log cabins and taught others to build them. He looks like Santa Claus and has been involved in charity work at Christmas Time since 1972. He was interviewed on the NBC's Today Show on Christmas Day 2002.

Don Chapman, currently an outpatient at VA Puget Sound. When Don was initially diagnosed with a life-threatening blood disease, he was told to put his affairs in order. Instead he asked for advice from some of his customers, who were physicians. They all said medical treatment in Seattle offered his best hope. With the help of a social worker at a local hospital, he connected with VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia, and came to VA Puget Sound for a bone marrow transplant. He credits that procedure with saving his life.

While still in college he began making toys to be donated during the holiday season. He was joined by fellow artists and friends and soon was teaching a class in toy making. This early charitable activity grew into the foundation "One Special Christmas." Each year a log cabin is built and local artisans donate crafts for a one-



Mr. & Mrs. Don Chapman

night auction. The proceeds go to purchase gifts for needy children in the surrounding communities.

Don and his wife have been in Seattle for nearly a year. He has been away from his business, his children and friends. To maintain his lifeline to home, a friend created a website for Don. A Charlotte newspaper picked up the story and soon after, the Today Show became interested in a Christmas story about him.

Laughing, Don states, "I've learned a lot of stuff I didn't want to know." But he has also learned about the human race. He has been amazed at the kindness of others and has only wonderful comments about the care he has received at VA Puget Sound.

Brownie Braunsteiner

We say a final good-bye to Helmut "Brownie" Braunsteiner, who served his country and became a selfless advocate for veterans and the local community. In 2001, Brownie was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. On December 29, 2002, Brownie succumbed to the cancer.



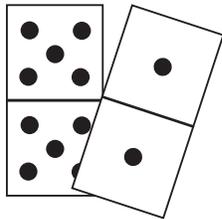
Brownie Braunsteiner

At age 12, Brownie emigrated from Vienna Austria to the United States; and in 1944, at 17, Brownie enlisted in the U.S. Army. After serving in WWII, Korea, the Berlin Crisis, and Vietnam, he retired as a First Sergeant in 1971.

For over 24 years Brownie volunteered at the American Lake Division as a member and VA Voluntary Service Representative for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Brownie also served as a valued member of the CEO Veterans Advisory group at VA Puget Sound, as well as serving as an educator and outreach worker for the Diabetes Association of Pierce County and he was a tireless advocate at the National level, meeting with congressional leadership.

Registration Remodel “Domino” Projects

What is a “domino” project? The domino projects focus on the registration remodel project scheduled to begin this summer. Currently, the biggest of the dominos will be a relocation and consolidation of beneficiary travel functions, a new agent cashier’s office, a new area for the DAV coffee service, a new volunteer reception desk and a designated waiting area for patients awaiting travel pick-up. These will be located in what is presently the main lobby area. New flooring, paint and artwork are included in the plans. The telephone operators have already been moved. Additional domino projects include a new pharmacy check-in area, a new procedure room in the West Clinic, a new quiet room off the PEC area, and a small new waiting area near the patient advocate offices. Pardon our dust!



Building 81 Pharmacy Remodel

Let the noise begin. The renovation of the American Lake Pharmacy has moved into phase II. Construction has started on the new addition, and the old inpatient side of the pharmacy has been closed for renovation. The noise everyone hears is the demolition of the walls and ceilings. When this phase is completed in June, the entire pharmacy will move. Phase III will renovate the outpatient pharmacy, turning it into a patient waiting room, and office space for the agent cashier and travel clerk.



2002 Combined Federal Campaign “Dare to Care”

Once again VA Puget Sound employees came through to give these groups a boost, and what an effort was made. The 2002 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) “Dare to care” totals for VA Puget Sound reached \$232,521. Through employee contributions, charity fairs, popcorn, ice cream and bake sales, and raffles, you came through to give to others.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to our Co-Chairs at the Seattle Division, Dan Longosky and Tanya Henman and to all key workers. With a goal of raising \$165,000 and employee participation rate of 650, the Seattle Division achieved, \$196,601 with 653 employees participation.



Timothy Williams, Director

Another thank you to our Co-Chairs at the American Lake Division, Michele Huber and Dorothy Inocentes and all key workers. They set out with a goal of raising \$38,000 with an employee participation rate of 150 and achieved, \$35,920 with 141 employees participating. Way to go!!!



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VA PUGET SOUND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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www.Puget-Sound.med.va.gov

