

The Role of Spirituality and Health Care



Chaplain Lamar Vincent greets a veteran

The role of spirituality and healing has received more attention in the news as providers look at how cancer patients, heart patients and rehab patients view their recovery based on their state of mind. Today, the connection between spirituality and health care is not only recognized and fostered, but also integrated into the health care team. Chaplains can be found throughout the medical center at all times of the day or night, participating in treatment teams and therapy programs, and ministering to patients and their loved ones.

Over the past 20 years, the face of the Chaplain Service at VA Puget Sound has changed dramatically, from only two individuals to nine chaplains, plus residents and students.

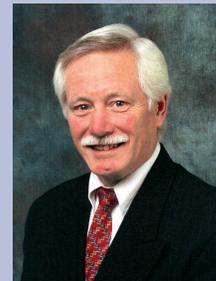
VA's chaplain service is extensive and strives to meet the needs of all our patients.

Chaplain Fred Rietema, Director of Chaplain Service, began as a part-time employee (under the late Chaplain Milton Whittaker) and became Director in 1993. He found his way to VA by his desire and interest in the work of "one-to-one chaplaincy" versus congregational settings. Chaplain Rietema conducts rounds in the clinical areas of surgery, intensive care, and wards 3 East and 4 East. He can be reached at (206) 764-2033.

Steve Spencer is the first full-time Clinical Pastoral Educator (CPE), having arrived six years ago. Throughout the year, he supervises and trains some 30 students who

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VA Employee Feedback



*Timothy B. Williams,
Director*

Employee feedback has tremendous value in shaping the organizational culture and provides leadership with a sense of the real concerns among employees. While Town Meetings

and other venues provide an in-person dialog, survey feedback provides more in-depth information and feedback on specific elements of job satisfaction, education training and promotion opportunities, customer service, the work environment and more.

Every three years our employees have the opportunity to participate in a VHA All Employee Survey. The survey results are tabulated on a local, regional (VISN) and national level and are confidential. The results provide employees the opportunity to share their thoughts about their job satisfaction and their perceptions of our strengths and weaknesses as an organization.

I would like to thank the VA Puget Sound employees for their participation in the 2004 VHA All Employee Survey. These results have recently been completed and show that 39 percent of you had the following perceptions about our organization: Overall, the highest scores related to the job satisfaction categories - these are work quality, work type, co-worker relationships, customer

Continued on page 12

include ministers, seminarians and others interested in pastoral care and counseling. He also supervises three, year-long general residencies - in Psychiatry; Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center; and Addictions Treatment Center. VA Puget Sound is one of three in the state that is nationally recognized as an accredited center for Clinical Pastoral Care. For more information regarding this program, call Steve at (206) 768-5210.

Chris Morton, a graduate of the Clinical Pastoral Educational (CPE) Program, has been on staff since 1999. She is the mental health outpatient chaplain, focusing on the spiritual injury and healing of women veterans. She participates in post-traumatic stress counseling, grief and loss, spirituality and women's trauma at both American Lake and Seattle Divisions. She also coordinates staff meditation that includes a portable meditation labyrinth, available



Rabbi William Greenberg

to employees twice a month. For more information, Contact her at (206) 277-3763.

Weldon Plett has worked the past nine years as member of a multidisciplinary team in the nursing home care unit, the senior care committee for patients, and providing pastoral care in the dementia ward at American Lake Division. He provides care and counseling to hospice patients and their families. He also participates in the twice-yearly memorial services held for patients who have passed away. He holds Sunday Protestant services, Bible study on Mondays and video gospel concerts for the Nursing Home Care Unit at American Lake. He can be reached at (253) 582-8440, Ext. 76531.

Lamar Vincent has been with the Seattle Division since in 1990. His main area of focus is ministering to veterans in hospice and palliative care. He brings a diverse background, including teaching and musical ministry, and works in marrow transplant and coronary care units and on ward 2 West. He considers it a "privilege to be with veterans in their medical recovery triumphs," as well as helping them to meet the "challenges of spiritual healing." He can be reached at (206) 277-3713.

Marvin Hughes retired from the US Army, having served as an airborne infantry chaplain for the Mobile Riverine Force in Vietnam. He began volunteering with the Chaplain Service in 1986 at American Lake. Since beginning his service with the substance abuse treatment program, he has completed his Doctor of Ministry. He provides comprehensive religious ministry



Chaplain Marvin Hughes

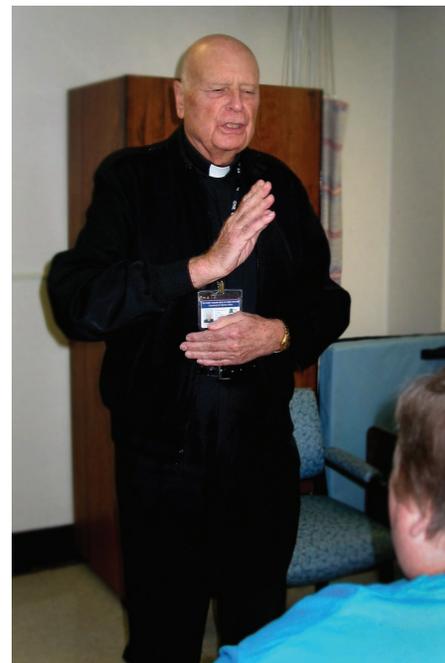
services on a part-time basis to assist full-time staff in their ministry to veterans. His phone number is: (253) 582-8440, Ext. 76531.

Rabbi William Greenberg started working as a part-time chaplain in 1975. At that time, he had a full-time congregation at Ezrahbessaroeth, from which he retired in the early '90's. His VA experience has been very satisfying for him. Even though some patients "aren't interested in religion, they do want a friend." Rabbi Greenberg makes rounds most Tuesday mornings.

Father Thomas Park is not only a chaplain, but also is board certified in clinical

psychology. He attends surgical rounds in the intensive care units. Curiosity has always been his motivation. "Finding out what makes a person tick is what makes life exciting," he said. He believes that the team concept of patient care and spirituality provides the largest possible "safety net" for patients and their families. Father Tom can be reached at (206) 764-2023.

Father Leo Rimmel retired from the Army and joined the American Lake staff in 1994. He has been stationed all over the world, including France, England, Germany, Turkey, Korea and Vietnam. In Vietnam, he was assigned to an artillery group and performed communion and sacraments to



Father Leo Rimmel

soldiers throughout the war zone, "out in the middle of nowhere." This duty gave him "insight into the spiritual suffering of combat veterans." He celebrates mass at American Lake on Monday, Thursday and Friday at 4:30 pm and on Sunday at 8:00 am.

The patients, their families and staff at VA Puget Sound are fortunate to work with these dedicated and enthusiastic individuals.

Quality in Action

Care Coordination /Home Telehealth Reaches England

The world's aging population is growing at a rapid rate. To better meet the needs of older adults with complex, chronic conditions, a health care team from Kent, England, recently visited VA Puget Sound experts in geriatrics. Their goal was to explore replicating a Care Coordination/Home Telehealth (CCHT) pilot project that originated here.

This project will allow for data sharing as the two groups follow some 300 patients over the next 18 months to assess the number of ER visits, prior to and after implementing the Care Coordination and Telehealth initiatives; the number of

hospitalizations prior to and after implementation of this outreach program; the number of admissions to nursing homes; and the satisfaction of patients and providers involved with the initiative.

Care coordination and the ability to link care via telehealth is significant for an aging population of patients. The program will focus on making the home the preferred place of care, assisting patients to self-manage their disease when possible and targeting patients with chronic diseases (e.g., chronic heart failure, diabetes, depression and chronic respiratory disease). CCHT will also make it possible

to exchange routine clinical data and visual assessments among medical facilities locally, regionally and nationally. Telehealth brings care to veterans, avoids the cost and inconvenience of travel, and may even expedite or defer hospital emergency room visits or admissions.

The reputation of VA Puget Sound's Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC) and the Geriatric and Extended Care (GEC) service line provide a multi-focal base of experts in all aspects of elderly care. This team will enhance future collaborative efforts between the Kent group and VA Puget Sound.

Working Together to Promote Patient Safety

Five years ago this November, the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) landmark report, "To Err is Human," challenged those in health care to break "the cycle of inaction" by developing a comprehensive approach to patient safety.

The report also called for programs to be evaluated after five years to determine what progress had been made to make health care safer.

"We're proud that VA addressed the patient safety challenge even before the IOM report was published," said National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) Director Dr. James Bagian. "We've aggressively developed and deployed systems that are used throughout VA and have been adopted as a benchmark by health care organizations throughout the world."

As early as 1999, Dr. Bagian described his vision of a culture of safety to several hundred Network 2 staff members at the

University of Buffalo Medical School. VISA 2 Director, Jim Feeley said, "We soon set a goal of involving every employee in our patient safety efforts, with particular emphasis on non-punitive reporting systems."

A cultural shift soon emerged. Employees at all levels began to participate, resulting in better detection of problems, improved systems and a safer environment for patients and staff. This effort could not have happened without the across-the-board support of VA leadership and VHA employees at all levels.

VA employees can be proud of what has been accomplished in patient safety in the last five years. VA is moving from a "name and blame" culture of the past to a healthier culture of safety based on prevention, not punishment.

For more information on VA's patient safety program, visit the NCPS website: www.patientsafety.gov.



Making a difference

Making a Difference

Make the Difference

Social workers at VA Puget Sound work with veterans and their families to ensure that there are social and medical support systems in place for veterans to remain at home instead of going to a nursing home. Social workers can assist in applying for benefits to make homes wheelchair accessible. As veterans' care needs increase, social workers can help explain VA pension or compensation benefits. Working with the families, they can assist in scheduling respite care that provides temporary relief for caregivers from the demands of tending to a loved one. Overnight custodial care is available on a space available basis from on-site care units: transitional care unit in Seattle and the nursing home care unit and dementia

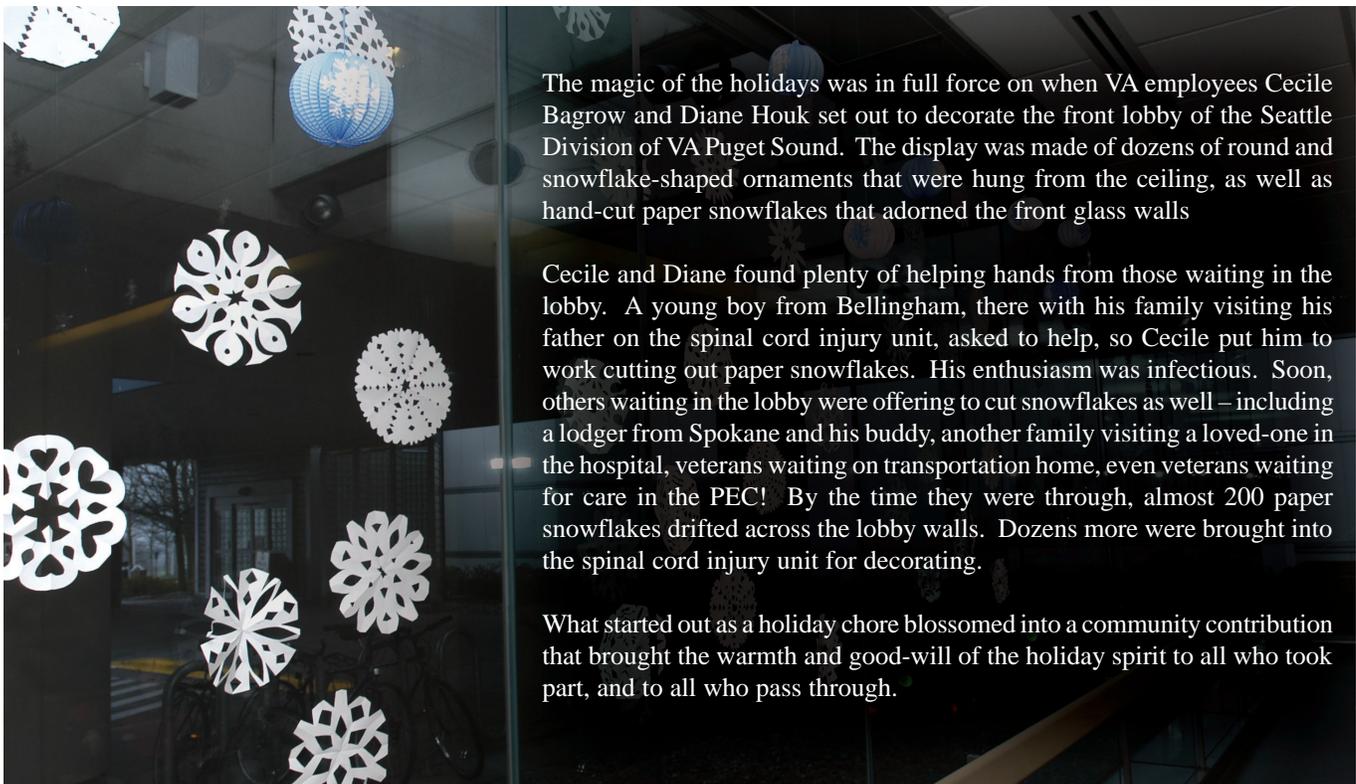
special care unit at American Lake. There may also be other support available through contracted care in the community with adult day health care or homemaker/home health aide services. As one of the caregivers who has utilized the adult day health program at ElderHealth Northwest said, "It has made a big difference. I am able to spend that time (six hours, one day a week) doing Tai Chi and gardening. My blood pressure has gone down a lot. Now I have time to take a nap if I choose. It makes the rest of the week easier, and I can enjoy being with my husband more."

Local senior services also offer some respite care on a sliding fee scale for caregivers who meet eligibility criteria. For

the past 16 years, VA Social Work Service has also sponsored a caregivers conference held at both American Lake and Seattle Divisions. A broad assortment of caregivers attends a wide range of topics by social service experts, share resources, and meet other caregivers. At the end of the conference, these caregivers feel a renewed energy in their commitment to keep their loved ones home for as long as possible.

To learn more about services offered in VA and in the community, talk with a primary care social worker. If you have further questions, please call the main Social Work office at (206) 764-2646 or (800) 329-8387, Ext. 62646.

Snowflakes Are Like Veterans...Each One Is Unique



The magic of the holidays was in full force on when VA employees Cecile Bagrow and Diane Houk set out to decorate the front lobby of the Seattle Division of VA Puget Sound. The display was made of dozens of round and snowflake-shaped ornaments that were hung from the ceiling, as well as hand-cut paper snowflakes that adorned the front glass walls

Cecile and Diane found plenty of helping hands from those waiting in the lobby. A young boy from Bellingham, there with his family visiting his father on the spinal cord injury unit, asked to help, so Cecile put him to work cutting out paper snowflakes. His enthusiasm was infectious. Soon, others waiting in the lobby were offering to cut snowflakes as well – including a lodger from Spokane and his buddy, another family visiting a loved-one in the hospital, veterans waiting on transportation home, even veterans waiting for care in the PEC! By the time they were through, almost 200 paper snowflakes drifted across the lobby walls. Dozens more were brought into the spinal cord injury unit for decorating.

What started out as a holiday chore blossomed into a community contribution that brought the warmth and good-will of the holiday spirit to all who took part, and to all who pass through.

Native American Healing Practices

Native American healing practices vary greatly among approximately 500 nations, or tribes, including Alaska and Hawaii. Despite that number, some basic rituals and healing practices are commonly used. Generally speaking, healing is based on the belief that health is interrelated with morality, spirituality and harmonious relationships with community and nature.

Healers, also called "medicine men or women," may use a combination of practices, such as prayer, meditation, symbolic healing rituals and/or counseling. Herbal remedies have been used for centuries by Native American healers. The herbs used vary from tribe to tribe depending on nature, the ailment and the patient. Some herbs may be ingested, while others may be burned using sage or sweet grass. In the latter, the smoke wafts over the patient during a ceremony. This "smudging" helps the patient to be more open to the healing process.

Purification ritual takes place in a sweat lodge. The patient, the healer, and others may pray, sing and sometimes drum together to purify the spirits. Water is poured onto red-hot stones to create large amounts of sweat-producing steam. Sweating is believed to purge and cleanse the body of disease.

Symbolic healing rituals/ceremonies include the medicine wheel, the sacred hoop, and the "sing," a community healing ceremony that lasts from two to nine days. Some healers may also use variations of drumming, chanting, dancing, painting bodies and wearing feathers.

Today, Native American medicine is used either as a primary source of health care or as an adjunctive treatment to conventional medicine.

Story Quilts Bring Much More



7West is a very special unit for many reasons. It's the richness of experience that touches you when you enter the unit; veterans who have touched the lives of the staff and the staff who have touched the lives of veterans. Besty Shapiro RN (now retired) had a vision for this special post traumatic mental health program. She envisioned a way for the veterans to express their

emotions through art and for school age children learning about veterans to share their gratitude. As a result, the rich quilt program was borne several years ago. Now story quilts from veterans and from school children grace the walls, intermingled with award winning art from the VA annual arts competitions.

The quilts and the program presented by the children are heartwarming. This year, the school children sang "God Bless the USA" and presented a veteran story book with pictures. The veterans were quiet during the program, but when asked if they had anything to say, several veterans said, "Thank you." Many had teary eyes and one said, "You (the children) are why we served." After the program, the children visited with the patients. Many smiles were evident throughout the room.

Partners Program



The Partners Program and its creator, Frankie Manning, RN, Nurse Executive at VA Puget Sound, were recently awarded the 2004 Community Partnership Award of the AONE Institute for Patient care Research and Education. The Partners Program was designed to help teenagers become responsible adults.

Local high school students, after being accepted into the program, are trained in basic first aid, communication skills, how to feed and transport patients. They are then qualified to work under the supervision of a registered nurse up to four hours a week. While earning a wage, they learn about self-worth, gain self-esteem, and are exposed to a variety of healthcare professions.

Manning obtained funding for this project through corporate and private contributors. Since its beginnings in 1997, 120 students have gone through the program. This innovative program was also recognized by the local community by receiving the "Hands and Hands" Award. Thanks to the Partners Program, several of the program's graduates have gone on to pursue health care related education and training and have turned their lives in a positive direction as a result of this experience.



*Frankie Manning, RN,
Nurse Executive*

Steven E. Kahn, MB, ChB

Recipient of the American Diabetes Association's "Distinguished Clinical Scientist Award"



Steven E. Kahn, MB, ChB

Steven E. Kahn, MB, ChB, Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development at VA Puget Sound has been awarded the American Diabetes Association's (ADA) "Distinguished Clinical Scientist Award (DCSA).

The DCSA was awarded for the first time and recognized four outstanding researchers and thought leaders in the United States who have advanced the field of patient-oriented diabetes research. The

award provides four years of unrestricted funding for these researchers to continue each of four researchers nationwide to continue providing leadership in his or her area of clinical research,

including mentoring of postdoctoral fellows. "This is the first time the American Diabetes Association has made such an award and it is quite an honor," states said Dr. Kahn.

He is studying the reasons why the pancreatic islet cells do not produce enough insulin, resulting in the development of diabetes. His research work has helped further the understanding of this critical defect in the pancreas. He has also led efforts trying to develop approaches that can be used to prevent the development of diabetes in adults.

Dr. Kahn is also professor of medicine, Division of Metabolism, Endocrinology and Nutrition at the University of Washington and principal investigator for three NIH clinical grants, a VA Merit Review, and two additional awards from the ADA.

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center Announces Recipients of its Inaugural Community Action Award

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center recently awarded one of its inaugural Community Action Awards to Bessie Young, MD, MPH, a kidney specialist at Northwest Kidney Center, and researcher at VA Puget Sound. The award honors individuals and community organizations who go above and beyond the scope of their normal duties to improve health-care

access and education, and to reduce health-care disparities.

Kidney failure affects African-Americans at a rate four times that of whites. Dr. Young was honored for making a difference in health issues affecting ethnic-minority populations by organizing screening events at African-American churches and health

fairs to bring awareness of kidney problems directly to the population at risk.

Dr. Young also organizes the annual African-American Kidney Health Conference at Seattle's Mount Zion Baptist Church, and is a member of the Washington State Department of Health Kidney Screening Task Force.

Mixing Herbal Supplements and Prescription Drugs Could Be Hazardous to Your Health

Having trouble falling asleep at night? Are those extra pounds getting increasingly hard to lose? Like many people, you may be using an herbal supplement to help with these common conditions. Millions of people use herbal remedies and thousands combine herbal remedies and prescription drugs. It is estimated that one-third of them take herbal supplements, and most of the time their physicians and pharmacists do not know about it. The results can be disastrous.

People are taking herbal supplements for conditions ranging from memory improvement to weight loss. Unprecedented advertising has dramatically increased demand and use of both herbal supplements and prescription drugs. Emergency room personnel are seeing growing numbers of people harmed by herb-drug interactions. Some herbal supplements may cancel the effect of a prescription drug, some may reduce it, and some may unintentionally enhance it.

The vitamin and herbal supplement industry is not well regulated. The strengths and dosages vary considerably between manufacturers, making herb-drug interactions less predictable. Manufacturers and advertisers can and do make claims that have not been researched or substantiated. Warnings about combining the supplement with prescription or over-the-counter drugs frequently do not show up on labels or in package inserts. It is important to tell your physician and your pharmacist about the herbal supplements you are taking. VA pharmacists are now tracking medications and herbal supplements on computer, and can tell you if your prescription medications and herbs are interacting with each other.

Some herb-drug interactions are common. For instance, the herb ginkgo biloba is advertised as a memory enhancer, but it also has blood-thinning properties. If you are taking an anticoagulant (blood thinning) drug such as warfarin (Coumadin) or aspirin and add ginkgo biloba, you increase your risks of severe bleeding or even stroke.

Licorice used to treat colds and coughs can increase blood pressure and, when used with diuretics or digoxin, could lead to severe loss of potassium that could endanger the heart.

St. John's Wort may help relieve mild depression, but combining it with prescription antidepressant drugs like Prozac and Zoloft can leave you weak, tired, confused and nauseated.

Garlic capsules, advertised as a cholesterol-lowering agent and sometimes taken to prevent blood clots, can increase the effect of prescription blood thinners and may decrease your blood sugar if taken with certain diabetes medications.

Ephedra is an herb used to help with weight loss. It is no longer sold over-the-counter in the United States because it can raise blood pressure, cause insomnia and interacts with heart medication. It has also been known to cause death.

You have a responsibility to protect your health and well being by telling your physician and pharmacist about any herbal supplements you are taking. Just because herbal supplements are a natural substance, do not assume they are good for you, especially if combined with other herbs or prescription drugs.

Three Reasons to Get a Flu Vaccine!

This year, in spite of national flu vaccine shortages, VA Puget Sound vaccinated more than 17,000 individuals as part of a national plan to vaccinate those most at risk. Why is this so important?

1. Flu vaccine prevents influenza-related deaths. Each year over 36,000 people in the U.S. die because of the flu - most are 65 years of age or older. More people die from flu than from any other vaccine-preventable disease.
2. Flu vaccine prevents severe illness. Influenza puts about 114,000 people into the hospital each year in the U.S. Children younger than two years of age are as likely to be hospitalized as adults over 65.
3. Flu vaccine protects other people. Get vaccinated if you live with or care for others who are at high risk of complications from the flu. Getting a flu vaccination can help protect family members, including seniors and young children.

What about a pneumonia or Pneumococcal shot? This once-in-a-lifetime shot protects persons from getting a serious infection in their blood or brain that can cause dangerous health problems, hospitalization or death. A Pneumococcal shot is recommended for persons aged 65 and older, or persons who have problems with their lungs, heart, liver or kidneys, and who have health problems like diabetes, sickle cell disease, alcoholism or HIV/AIDS.

Need more information or wonder whether you can still get a flu shot? Ask your primary care provider or check out www.cdc.gov/nip/flu

IN THE NEWS

Claude Owens VFW Outstanding Health Care Volunteer of the Year



Claude Owens

Claude Owens, a well-known figure around VA Puget Sound's Seattle Division, was recently named the 2004 VFW Outstanding Health Care Volunteer of the Year. The award was presented at the VFW national conference in Cincinnati. Claude was selected from nominees around the world for "taking those extra steps in providing exemplary service to veterans and their families." For everyone who knows Claude, that is an understatement.

Claude does not recall when he first started volunteering at VA Puget Sound, but he has logged close to 18,000 hours. Any day of the week, you can find him escorting patients to appointments, providing information at the front desk, assisting veterans, family members and visitors. If things get quiet he can be found lending a hand in the canteen, loading ice into the soda machine, among other tasks. "I can't sit down, got to keep this machine going!" Claude said.

The 88 year old WWII Normandy veteran, also volunteers at four area

nursing homes. As a Chaplain for Skyway VFW Post 9430, Claude frequently participates in memorial services at Tahoma National Cemetery and other area cemeteries for WWII veterans.

With over 1300 volunteers at both American Lake and Seattle, what is it that makes Claude so special? "It's not just what he does," says Barbara Hatred, Director of Volunteer Services, "it's how Claude makes people feel. He makes them feel good; he gives them hope."

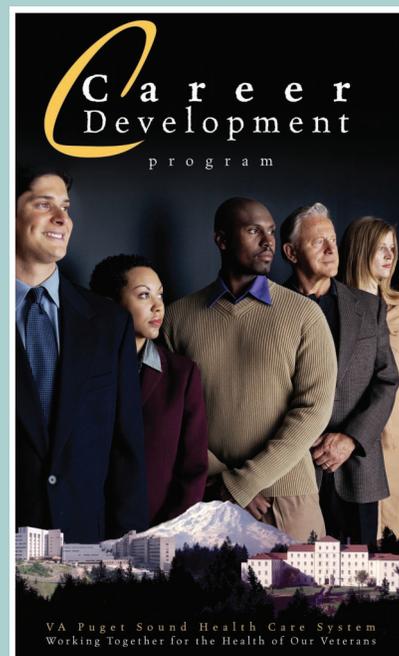
Even employees have stories about Claude. "He showed me his wife's picture and says, 'See the lovely lady I married?'" one staff member remembered. "He takes the time to talk to everyone," said another. And there are the times he wears roller skates to make his rounds, or brings flowers from his garden for the reception desks, cashiers' stations in the Canteen and the executive offices. On and on go the stories.

"What I love about volunteering is that you are reaching out to people with love, because if you do it from your heart, it's a labor of love. I'd like people to know that it is so rewarding. Knowing the Lord and volunteering are the keys to my longevity." Claude Owens, Volunteer of the Millennium.

For more information about volunteering at VA Puget Sound, call the Volunteer offices at American Lake: (253) 583-1054, or Seattle: (206) 764-2195.

Career Development Resource Center Opens

Need help preparing your federal resume or writing your KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities) for a job at VA Puget Sound? The Career Development Resource Center (CDRC) is now available to help employees and students with your career advancement goals. Counselors will be available for individual assistance in career exploration, job search, networking, resume and KSA writing, and interview practice. Quarterly workshops will be offered on a variety of federal job search topics. The CDRC also has career development books to borrow and an occupational interest assessment is available by request. To learn more, contact the Career Development Resource Center at (206) 277-3876.



American Lake Gingerbread House

Each year the American Lake Nutrition & Food Service staff find ways to make the holiday season more festive and enjoyable for the patients. Jesse Crisostomo and Denise Smith were the main architects of this project. They spent a week's time between their primary duties to complete the display for all to enjoy. This is a fine example of the dedication and commitment of the American Lake N&FS team. It makes the holiday season a cheerful one that brings a smile to the faces of the veteran patients they serve.



Denise Smith and Jesse Crisostomo



Responding with Action



Stephan Jancasz, NFS, Louise Ackerman, NFS, Kathy English, RN

It was not your typical day at the American Lake Division, or was it? Clive (Tony) Powell, VA central Office, Staff Assistant to the Under Secretary for Health, was touring the nursing home care unit dining room with Timothy Williams, Director of VA Puget Sound, when two employees from the dietetics section responded quickly to save a patient's life.

Louise Ackerman, a 20-year employee, first noticed the choking patient and immediately called for help. Stephan Jancasz, a three-year employee, responded to Ackerman's call for help, performed the Heimlich maneuver and quickly dislodged food stuck in the veteran's throat. Powell and Williams personally presented Jancasz with the Presidential Pin for his quick thinking and life-saving action.

IN THE NEWS

Goal Sharing Works

Goal Sharing is a team based employee incentive program that promotes collaboration, pride in performance, improved communications and a commitment to higher standards. Goal Sharing rewards teams, rather than individuals.

Originally developed in VISN 2 (upstate New York), the program was adopted by six other VISNs nationwide with a special contribution reward system designed to support employee innovation based on VA's key goals.

The first round of VA Puget Sound Goal Sharing Projects has just been completed and was based on three of VA's strategic goals:

- Resource utilization
- Quality of service
- Quality of care

A total of 616 employees organized themselves into 70 teams to achieve Gold, Silver or Bronze levels of success. Here are examples of how employees are making a difference in the care of veterans and in the way we do business:

Resource Utilization Team Examples

- Cost savings of station ambulance services by changing staffing mix: Six months, cost savings = \$29,971
- Switch existing patients to formulary prostaglandin analog from non-formulary, cost savings = \$40,000

- Reducing the rate of documented contaminate in central line blood cultures, cost savings = \$12,000
- Reducing amount of time to receive, store and inventory food supplies by realigning storage area. They modified existing equipment instead of purchasing new equipment, resulting in cost savings = \$10,000

These four teams alone achieved over \$90,000 in cost savings!

One team, although it did not meet the goals that it had originally identified, did achieve a secondary gain that resulted in a savings of over \$92,000!

That's a combined total of almost \$184,000 in cost savings in just 6 months!

Quality of Service Team Examples

- Processing of travel consults went from 3.1 days to 2.48 days to process = a reduction of over half a day.
- Turnaround time for Iraqi Freedom compensation and pension claims was reduced from 27.5 days to 22 days = 5.5 fewer days
- Compensation and pension processing time of 2,507 requests in the system went from 29.62 days down to 23.2 days = decrease of 6.4 days

- Developing a "Foods I Like" menu cycle for long-term care areas resulted in an increase in patient satisfaction scores from an average satisfaction score of 3.2 to 4.0.

Quality of Care Team Examples

- Reduce total hours of patients in restraints by 10% for total number of hours for 2003. Baseline was 5,868 hours in 2003. The total hours in six-month timeframe (April to September 2004) were 139 hours, which far exceeded the goal of a 10% reduction.
- Reduce the number of non-existing or wrong medication images in Pharmacy 2000 system. Goal was to achieve a 20% reduction. Goal was exceeded and resulted in an 80% reduction of wrong or non-existing images.

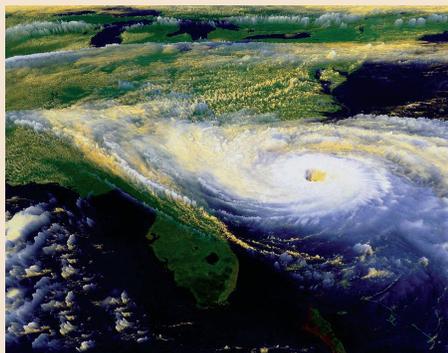
- Reduce the rate of C-difficile toxin positive patients from the level of B03 for a six-month period by at least 10%. The 2-West goal sharing team reduced the C-difficile toxin positive rate from 16% to 0% from April to September 2004, thus far exceeding their goal.

All of these examples translate into better care for veterans.

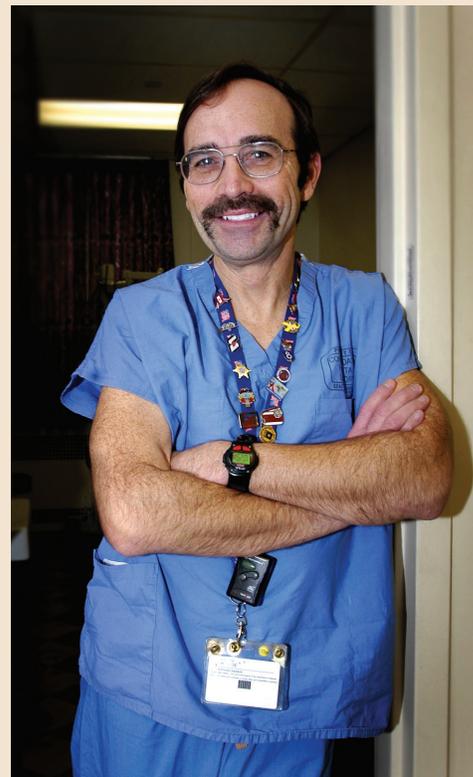


Return from Chaos

In September, I participated in a national VA-sponsored relief effort to help victims of hurricane Frances in Florida. VA employees from across the country were divided into three teams. Each 30-person team consisted of a pharmacist, two nurse practitioners and a combination of RN's, LPN's, nursing assistants and administrative staff. My team was assigned to Indian River County on the east coast of Florida.



We started working the same day we arrived. Within the first few hours, my team had established a functional field hospital at a high school in the Indian River area. With the exception of an ambulance crew, respiratory therapy and physician support, VA provided the entire medical/nursing support for the Indian River shelter. Our patient census changed hourly, and at one time was as high as 192. Most of the patients we treated had chronic medical problems, were bed-bound, or were children too young to care for themselves. All of the patients I took care of were special and each had a story, especially the elderly lady who was crying uncontrollably. When I asked if I could help, she told me, "I can't find my eyeglasses." It took a while, but I finally found them on a food tray in the kitchen. When I brought them back to her, she gave me a bear hug and explained that she had lost her home and belongings to the hurricane. If she had lost her glasses, her loss would have been total. More than anything during my 10 days there, I listened.



John Ortiz, LPN

Towards the end of our tour, Cathy Rick, VA's Chief Nursing Officer, paid us a surprise visit. She spent time touring shelters and thanking us for our work. Power outages were common, so when local media outlets interviewed several team members, we were unable to see the broadcast. I am amazed how quickly a group of 30 individuals jelled into a smooth operating team within a few short hours. Thanks to support from other Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) teams and from our colleagues back home, we did not work alone. Before we knew it, the 10-day assignment was over and we were back at work.

Thank you to all the staff of 81D who kept my clinics open during my absence. Perhaps the most precious gifts were the cell phone calls from our co-workers and friends - like mail to a person stuck in a deserted island, they were so appreciated by all of us. This was One VA in action.

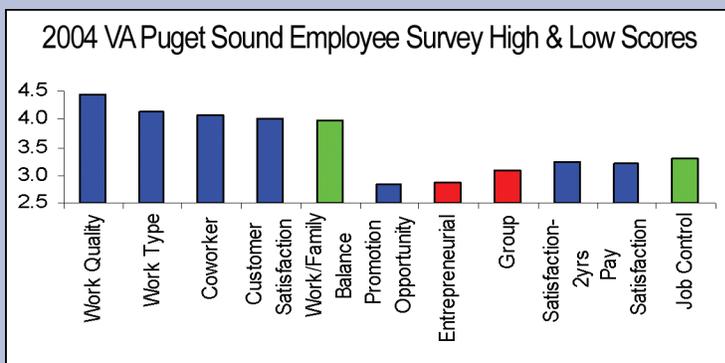
John Ortiz is an LPN assigned to the ENT Clinic at American Lake. Other employees from American Lake who participated in this effort were: Larry Careaga, carpenter, and Jeff Brown, pipefitter, assigned to West Palm Beach. Employees from Seattle were: Bob Rothwell, RN, and Erin Beesley, RN, both assigned to a Kissimmee hospital emergency room. In addition, five employees from VA Puget Sound, and seven other employees from VISN20 also participated in the post-hurricanes mop up.

satisfaction and the organizational assessment category of work/family balance. We are proud that our employee's highest scores were in these important work-related areas.

We do, however, have some areas where we can continue to improve. Examples of opportunities for improvement include both promotion opportunity and cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit among our employees and work teams. Programs such as the Goal Sharing effort aim to address this entrepreneurial desire among employees. The survey results tell us that these same items are a concern for employees across VA nationally.

I have formed an Employee Satisfaction Survey committee and have asked

Wendy Riverman, Health Plan Management Training Coordinator to chair this group, which includes your peers and colleagues. This group will analyze the data for the organization as a whole and for each service line in order to identify areas where improvements can be made. They will suggest specific recommendations to leadership. Each Service Line will be asked to pick one identified area for improvement and will work on this in the coming year. Service Line Leaders will be expected to share survey feedback and discuss it with their employees. Progress will be based on employee feedback within the service line. More information will be shared as the Survey Committee completes its recommendations.



VA Puget Sound News is published quarterly. 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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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.

Back Issues of VA Puget Sound News are available on the VA Puget Sound Web Site www.Puget-Sound.med.va.gov

The Spiritual Labyrinth

The labyrinth represents the path of life. It is found in most cultures of the world. Walking the labyrinth is a type of moving meditation that can clear the mind for facing life's challenges. The organization, V.E.T.S. (Victory Ensured Through Service), has made the portable canvas labyrinth available to VA Puget Sound through their generous donations. Those who have walked the labyrinth report that it focuses the mind, slows breathing and can induce a peaceful state or help them confront their problems. A growing number of people have rediscovered the labyrinth as a path to spirituality, introspection and emotional health. Nationally, more hospitals and health care centers (including two other VA medical centers) are now making labyrinths available. The hope is that those who choose to walk the labyrinth will attain an inner peace and an open heart during the time spent here at VA Puget Sound.

Beginning January 2005, Chaplain Services will be working with staff to plan ways in which to make the labyrinth available to both patients and staff at American Lake and Seattle. For more information, call Chris Morton, staff chaplain, ext. 63763.



Fred Rietema, Chief, Chaplain Service, Chaplain Steve Spencer, Chaplain Tom Park, Chaplain Chris Morton