

Competency Assessments and Education

Competency reflects the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors needed to perform any job. The Competency Assessment process evaluates skills needed to do a job now and in the future as the job develops. Competency Assessments are required of most employees.

Annually supervisors and employees collaborate to develop ongoing competency assessments based on new procedures, policies or equipment; changes in existing policies and procedures or high-risk aspects of the job or problems that have developed. Competency assessments contain domains of care, methods of verification, a reference list, age specific competency, organizational competency and an action plan.

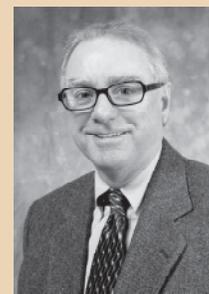
Domains of care are present in all jobs whether we deliver patient care, tend to custodial needs, or lead the organization. Technical domain refers to psychomotor skills. Critical thinking domain refers to such skills as problem solving, priority setting, clinical reasoning and time management. Interpersonal domain refers to customer service, communication, conflict resolution and collaboration skills. The supervisor uses such verification methods as post-tests, discussion groups, case studies and observation of daily work.

While developing the annual on-going competency assessment, supervisors and employees will discover needs for training. These training needs will be noted in the action plan portion of each employee's assessment. Copies or reports of all these plans go to the Center for Education and Development to be included in the medical center's education needs assessment. This past September, all supervisors were asked to contribute this information and this data was summarized into a facility wide educational needs assessment. This report was used to establish our top five facility educational needs. These needs were then rolled into a VISN level report that was forwarded to Employee Education System for their consideration in planning nation wide training initiatives.

Both the supervisor and the employee have accountabilities in the competency assessment process. They develop competencies collaboratively. The employee submits evidence that demonstrates competency. The supervisor validates competencies annually and reports completion to the Service Line. The Competency Champion from each Service Line then consolidates and reports the completion rate to Human Resources each fiscal year. These reports form the backbone of our Educational Plan.

Training Healthcare Professionals: Is This Important at VA Puget Sound?

The training of health care professionals is an important ingredient of life and culture at VA Puget Sound Health Care System. In 2004 we will be training nearly 1800 health care



*Dr. Starkebaum,
Chief of Staff*

professional students ranging from vascular technologists to physician/residents, nursing students, physician assistants and respiratory therapy students. Our two largest student populations are nursing students and physician/residents, with 748 nursing students and 560 physicians, dental and podiatry residents.

Nationally, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) trains one-quarter of all physicians in the United States by virtue of their rotations through VA Medical Centers. VA Puget Sound is no exception. Through our affiliation with the University of Washington, at least a quarter of all UW physician residents (excluding obstetrics and pediatrics) will rotate through VA Puget Sound making it a major teaching hospital for the University of Washington residency program. Our relationship with the nursing schools is more complex since we

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Making a

Why is Jack Homeless?



Each night in Seattle, an estimated two thousand veterans are without shelter. The road to homelessness, back to employment and a home address is not impossible, but it takes perseverance and hard work.

The goal of the Homeless Care Line is to reach out to homeless veterans and provide them options that might not otherwise exist. The care line provides access to a wide range of health care screenings and

services, and through community partnerships, provides shelter alternatives. Vocational counseling and rehabilitation services help veterans regain skills and the confidence to seek employment and find a safe place to call home. This type of stability may have been absent in their lives for some time.

One such veteran who traveled the road back from homelessness is Jack. He came to VA Addictions Treatment Center at the recommendation of a friend and then entered the Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (DCHV) program. This four-month residential program works in conjunction with an outpatient treatment and/or rehabilitation treatment program. Full participation by the veteran is required to maintain residence.

Jack previously had nine years of sobriety and a job many would envy - a stunt driver in the motion picture industry. He relapsed

while in Honduras attending a friend's funeral. In a very short time, Jack lost everything: his job, his home and his money. He flew back to the states and contacted friends in Seattle. He came to VA after being homeless for seventeen days and entered the DCHV program for four months while receiving outpatient treatment for alcohol dependence.

Jack worked hard at regaining his sobriety and was recently able to return to the movie business on a project in Thailand that provided housing. Jack's gratitude to VA is evident when he talks appreciatively of the dedicated staff involved in his program. VA is the ONLY federal agency that provides hands-on assistance directly to homeless persons.

To learn more about the Domiciliary, call (253) 583-1697 or 800-329-8387, select option two for American Lake, and select extension 71697.

Can a good bedside manner be taught?

Today medical schools say, "Yes." Thirty years ago the question was not even asked. A seasoned long-time physician recently reflected, "When I attended medical school some twenty years ago, the study of the psychology of illness was a new concept. My mentor was of the old school. He believed that the doctor just told a patient what to do and expected total compliance." A more recent medical

school graduate reports that patient-physician dynamics and the psychology of illness were both elements of her medical school curriculum from day one.

Dana Alskog, a patient at Puget Sound for two decades once asked a physician, "What makes a doctor with a good bedside manner? Is it the personality of the doctor or is it learned in medical training?" The

doctor's answer was, "It is some of both." A good bedside manner is an essential part of VA Puget Sound's goal to improve partnering with patients. Patient surveys show that patients believe they are more involved in their care decisions than in prior years. Outpatient satisfaction scores improved by 7% from 2002 to 2003. Patient education satisfaction improved by 6% over the same time period.

Difference

Mentoring Relationships Benefit Everyone

VA Puget Sound utilizes mentoring programs to assist staff in reaching their full potential. A mentoring relationship involves a seasoned person (the mentor) as a role model who encourages and empowers a the novice (the mentee) by providing guidance, advice and encouragement. The relationship between a mentor and mentee is based on mutual trust and respect and generally covers an extended period of time.

Mentoring relationships follow a pattern and typically involve a four-phase process: initiation phase, cultivation phase, separation phase, and redefining phase.

Mentoring relationships are beneficial for the individuals involved, and have a positive effect on organizations. Organizations that have built-in mentoring programs have benefited through a decrease in loss of staff. Mentoring relationships assist in the inclusion of new staff and promote staff retention by creating supportive environments that promote teamwork. Teamwork increases inter-connectedness and cooperation among team members, which increases skill level and supports professional growth. In interrelated environments, staff work together on activities that encourage growth and support expansion of professional

goals. The structure of organizations is often enhanced. Because mentoring creates a supportive environment that helps reduce anxiety, mentoring can help individuals cope with the stress and anxiety associated with organizational change.

Mentoring relationships have been around since the dawn of time and continue to serve a valuable purpose in any organization. They enrich the lives of everyone involved by increasing skill levels and promoting growth.

My life at VA...

It was the summer of 1977. I had just graduated from high school and was looking for a summer job. Little did I know that the temporary job I took at VA that summer would change my life.



Pamela Popplewell, RN

My VA career started as a file clerk in the file room and then as a ward secretary. In 1980 I received a promotion to supervisor of the department on the evening and weekend shifts. As time passed and I gained more experience, I advanced further into

management as new opportunities emerged. By 1987, I was supervising more than 55 employees.

In 1990 VA gave me the opportunity to change career directions and become a nurse. Through its tuition reimbursement program, I was able to work part time and go to school with VA reimbursing me for my tuition costs. I graduated at a time when there were few nursing jobs available (hard to imagine in the nursing shortage of today). Still VA was able to find a position for me, and I began my nursing career.

In 2003 I obtained my Masters in Nursing Leadership and my Certification as a Nurse Practitioner through a combination of

tuition reimbursement and a scholarship targeted at advanced nursing degrees (the National Nursing Education Initiative).

I received my twenty-five year VA Service pin in December 2003. I am proud of my career at VA and the advancements that have come along the way. Each day, I appreciate the opportunities that VA has provided me. I look forward to several more years of practicing the art and science of nursing as I care for veterans who so bravely served our nation. I encourage others to learn more about the opportunities that exist to develop and grow within VA. It's a great place to work!

Quality in

“Yes, You Can!”

To say that spinal cord injury is a life-changing event is an understatement. People with a spinal cord injury must make adaptations to almost every aspect of daily living. Rehabilitation is the process by which they learn to make those adaptations. New approaches can be developed for moving, self-care, accessing the community, working and building relationships with others.

Patients with spinal cord injury learn to function in a variety of new ways that complement and reinforce each other. In the course of their rehabilitation, patients learn from not only the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) team members (physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists and vocational counselors) but also from their fellow patients.

There are formal education opportunities as well. A 10-session patient education lecture series focuses on personal life skills and tips. The “Yes, You Can” manual is issued to each SCI patient. This “guide to self-care for persons with spinal cord injury” was written by VA Puget Sound’s SCI team and published by Paralyzed Veterans of America. It covers all those aspects of daily living that are changed as a result of a spinal cord injury with an emphasis on prevention and early detection of spinal cord injury-related problems. Chapters focus on the possibilities for living well after the initial hospital-based rehabilitation (e.g., sexual health, recreation, home modifications, driver training, exercise, using the internet and alternative medicine). Patients discuss each chapter as they move through their rehabilitation in preparation for returning to their communities.

CARF Accreditation

VA Puget Sound’s Comprehensive Blind Rehabilitation Services received its first three-year CARF (Commission on Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities) accreditation. The survey report cited Blind Rehabilitation program’s exemplary compliance with standards in the areas of flexibility and creativity.

The Blind Rehab program operates a 15-bed inpatient program at American Lake. Veterans come from Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska. Every year over 100 patients come through the program to learn such skills as counting paper money to learning to use computers. This is one of ten such programs in the VA system. The

American Lake program has been here since 1971.

CARF accreditation means that services offered to our vision-impaired veterans meet the highest level of services in the field. It also means that VA Puget Sound programs can be judged by independent surveyors to compare favorably with any program of its type in the world.

CARF also surveys other programs at VA Puget Sound to include Spinal Cord Injury, the Inpatient Rehab Program, Compensated Work Therapy, Veterans Assisted Housing Program and Transitional Residence Program.

Patient Education Templates

The Surgical and Perioperative Care director of nursing and nurse managers have created patient education templates that address the required patient education activities for JCAHO (Joint Commission for Accreditation of Health Care Organizations) certification.

Patients and their families receive education and training specific to the patients’ assessed needs, abilities and preferences. Based on assessed needs, patients are taught safe and effective use of medications, nutrition interventions, medical equipment and rehabilitation techniques. They also learn how to measure and manage their pain and how to access other resources they may need.

Patient education includes information about the patients’ own responsibilities in their care, which includes self-care activities that will aid in their recovery.

Each patient education template has been individualized to allow each surgical specialty to document exactly who is receiving the education and any written material provided.

The template will be used to rate and measure pain prior to and following surgery. Providers will then be able to plan how to manage pain proactively. At follow up appointments, patients will again rate their pain so that providers can determine if changes to the pain management plan are required.

Your Role in the JCAHO National Patient Safety Goals



Every VA staff member understands that patient safety guides their day-to-day work, no matter if they provide direct or supportive care to veterans. In addition to the everyday commitment to patient safety, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) has asked health care systems around the country to focus on specific patient safety goals. New goals are added each year based on issues in the patient safety field and are emphasized in an effort to reduce potential harm to patients.

The 2004 JCAHO Patient Safety Goals are:

1. Identify the patient – Use ‘active’ identification of patients by asking the patient to provide a name and last four, or a complete the Social Security number. Additional identifiers include date of birth, address or telephone number. Staff at VA Puget Sound use the ‘active’ method of patient identification.

2. Clarify the message – Ensure accuracy of information through verbal and telephone communications. This means reducing the overall use of abbreviations, especially with handwritten communications. At VA Puget Sound, verbal orders are taken only in emergency situations.

3. Be aware of High Alert medications- This particular goal has achieved almost 100% compliance in most of the healthcare organizations throughout the United States, including VA Puget Sound.

4. Use correct procedure/surgery techniques – Ensure that patients have surgery and other tests done on the correct part of the body. This includes marking the site prior to the procedure or surgery and calling a ‘time out’ by the team to verify correct patient, correct procedure/surgery, and correct site. Surgical procedures at VA Puget Sound use a checklist and multiple checks and balances to ensure correct surgery. The patient is also involved in the process.

5. Avoid free flow pumps – Ensure that patients do not receive more fluid and/or medication than is intended. All pumps used in the delivery of fluids or medications at VA Puget Sound are equipped with safety mechanisms to guarantee safe administration of fluids and medications.

6. Ensure proper alarm setting and function – Make sure staff can see and hear alarms signaling any patient need. This includes checking that alarms are set properly. Patient alarms at VA Puget Sound Health Care System are regularly reviewed to make certain that all alarms function effectively.

7. Reduce the risk of health care acquired infection – Washing hands is the key to reducing infections! Dispensers of a waterless, alcohol-based product that is easy to use and eliminates infectious agents are available throughout our health care system.

What part does the patient play? The patient’s role is to work with health care providers to make certain that all care is consistent with expectations of both the patient and physician. Patients share in ensuring safe health care practice by asking questions about their care, by understanding what their medications are for and when to take them, and by participating in decisions about their care.

It is only through ongoing cooperation of patients and health care staff that we can continue to improve our ability to provide safe and effective care. Working together at the VA Puget Sound, staff and patients can meet the national patient safety goals.

IN THE NEWS

Angela Goode, LMSW



Angela Goode, LMSW

Angela Goode returns to VA Puget Sound from San Francisco VAMC in the new position of VA Social Worker at Madigan Army Medical Center (MAMC). Goode received her master's in social work from University of Washington-Tacoma in 2002 and worked at the American Lake division in the Urgent Care and Emergency Department.

At MAMC, she will coordinate discharge planning and psychosocial support for veterans and their family members. In addition, she will assist with lodging referrals for families visiting loved ones in critical care units. She will also help link veterans back to VA by arranging transfers to the Seattle division and community nursing homes as well as setting up follow-up appointments in primary care for every patient when they discharge. Welcome back!

A-One NE Nurse Executive

The American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE) Institute for Patient Care Research and Education has named VA Puget Sound's Nurse



Frankie T. Manning, MN, RN

Executive, Frankie T. Manning, MN, RN, as one of two recipients of their 2004 Community Partnership Award. Sharing the award with Manning is Cheryl Hickman, MS, RN, Pikeville Methodist Hospital, Pikeville, KY.

Do you know...this about HIPAA?

When veterans are admitted as inpatients to VA Puget Sound, they now have the right under the new HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) privacy rule to decide whether or not to have their names listed in the inpatient hospital directory. The inpatient hospital directory lists the name, hospital location and telephone number for each inpatient.

What happens if patients choose not to be listed? When patients request not to be listed in the directory it means that they have "opted out." What this means is that protected health information will not be given out about those patients nor will VA Puget Sound Staff even acknowledge that they are in the hospital. Protected health

information includes patient names, location in the hospital, patient condition in general terms and religious affiliation. It means that VA Puget Sound will not give any information to callers or visitors, including family, friends, colleagues, non-VA clergy, delivery persons (such as for flowers or cards) or to anyone asking about them.

What happens if a patient chooses to be in the directory? If patients choose to have their names listed in the inpatient directory and someone asks for inpatients by name, staff may disclose limited, general information to a member of the public regarding the location or condition of the patient and to a member of the clergy

regarding religious affiliation. Staff may also disclose general health information about patients' conditions such as "critical," "poor," "fair," "good," "excellent," or similar statements to next-of-kin or person(s) with whom the patient has a meaningful relationship. Staff will not disclose diagnoses, test results or specific information about a patient's condition without a written consent from the patient specifying to whom the information may be given.

If you want additional information or have questions, please contact one of the Privacy Officers: Susan Helbig, (206) 277-1951 or Bobbie Smith, (253) 207-2018.

Introducing Leela Suppaiah

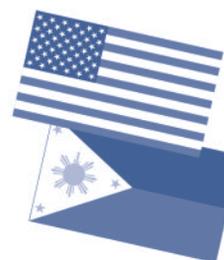
Leela Suppaiah has joined VA Puget Sound as the new Director of Nursing for Primary and Specialty Medicine Care Line. Suppaiah's nursing career began in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and eventually took her to Britain for critical care and midwifery certification. She later moved to Portland, Oregon, where she received both her bachelor's and graduate nursing degrees. Suppaiah has since worked at VA medical facilities in Portland, Nashville and Sioux Falls.



Leela Suppaiah, RN

Suppaiah has extensive experience in critical care. She was also one of the early pioneers of clinical pathways and as a Quality Management Specialist, Associate Chief Nurse and Nurse Executive.

Filipino Veterans' Eligibility for VA Health Care Benefits



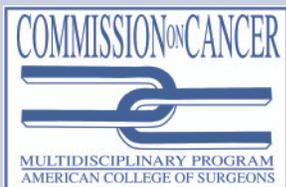
On December 6, 2003, President Bush signed into law the "Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003." This bill enhances the eligibility of certain World War II Filipino veterans. Non-service connected and service-connected Filipino Commonwealth Army veterans (those who were recognized by authority of the U.S. Army as belonging to organized Filipino Guerilla forces, and New Filipino Scouts who reside in the United States and who are citizens or lawfully admitted for permanent residence) are now eligible for care on the same basis as U.S. veterans.

Filipino veterans applying for health care benefits under this authority must provide proof of citizenship or residency to qualify for this benefit.

For more information regarding this new benefit, questions may be referred to 1-800-329-8387, or 1-877-222-8387; or you may go to the following website: www.va.gov/elig.

Teaching Hospital Cancer Program Re-Certified!

VA Puget Sound Health Care System was informed by the Commission on Cancer from the American College of Surgeons that we successfully obtained recertification



as a Teaching Hospital Cancer Program approved through October 2006. This designation has continued to qualify us as a Comprehensive Cancer Center in the VA system. This proud achievement was the result of a three-year effort by many motivated people within the medical

center. We are also indebted to the members of the Cancer Committee for their dedication and hard work.

The Commission on Cancer of the American College of

Surgeons has recognized VA Puget Sound as offering high-quality cancer care as an approved program. Only one in four cancer programs within the United States receive this special approval that recognizes the commitment and quality care that is provided at VA Puget Sound.

Then and Now

Technology is advancing at an amazing rate. In this issue and in those to follow, we will be featuring a new column titled, "Then and Now," where we will showcase some of the changes that have taken place in health care. Our first look is at nursing and the impact technology has had on nursing.



At the turn of the century, it was not uncommon to see a patient ward of fifteen beds or more. Two nurses might be assigned to care for the entire ward.



Here we see the Intensive Care nurse of today. It will take all of her time and knowledge to care for this patient and maintain the machinery supporting him.

Training Healthcare Professionals: Is This Important at VA Puget Sound? Continued from page 1

are affiliated with at least one dozen nursing schools in the Puget Sound area, including the UW School of Nursing.

- Training health care professionals is one way to ensure that we can recruit health care staff. By having students trained within our facility, recruitment is greatly simplified and enhanced. Students who work here often jump at the opportunity to work for VA. In some cases, we have more students than we have positions.
- The opportunity to train health care students provides job satisfaction to many VA staff. In 1948, VA recognized that affiliations with medical schools would be one way to improve quality of care. Having a learning environment in which staff participate in professional training, giving lectures, writing books, teaching courses contribute to improving care of patients. Becoming a teacher is one way to improve one's own skills. As

a consequence, most physician staff at the Seattle campus of VA Puget Sound are also faculty at the University of Washington School of Medicine, many with rank of Professor. Indeed, we have two division heads from the Department of Medicine based at VA Puget Sound and a former dean. At the American Lake campus, we have affiliations with Madigan Army Medical Center's training program for geriatric residents as well as with a freestanding podiatry residency program. In short, the culture of having responsibility and opportunity for teaching and training young health care professionals of multiple disciplines is an important and valued part of the culture at VA Puget Sound Health Care System.

With training comes responsibility. Clinicians who are training and supervising health care professional students must ensure that adequate supervision and

documentation of that supervision is present, and is appropriate to the level of the student's training. This is particularly important for physician/residents who provide a great deal of hands-on care as part of their post-graduate physician training.

In some cases, the environment for training health care professionals is linked to the opportunity to perform research. Often the professional staff/faculty are both expert teachers and accomplished researchers. Reflecting our success, researchers at VA Puget Sound currently have an annual research budget of over 30 million dollars funded both through VA and federal agencies such as National Institute of Health.

In summary, learning, teaching, research and patient care are all closely linked and reflects the excitement and commitment of this culture.

Attention: Returning Active Duty

VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle has specific resources available to assist all returning Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve service members with readjustment issues related to serving in Operations Enduring Freedom and/or Iraqi Freedom. Questions about benefits for veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom may be sent via e-mail to: freedom@vba.va.gov. You may also call 1-800-827-1000 and ask to be directed to your local Vet Center.

We have provided the following links for veterans or family members who would like additional information on readjustment:

<http://www.appc1.va.gov/directory/guide/division.asp?divisionId=1>

<http://www.va.gov/rcs>

http://www.ncptsd.org/facts/treatment/fs_seeking_help.html

Veterans Outreach Centers

Bellingham Vet Center

3800 Bryon, Suite 124
Bellingham, WA 98226
Telephone: (360) 733-9226
Fax: (360) 733-9117

Seattle Vet Center

2030 9th Avenue, Suite 210
Seattle, WA 98121
Telephone: (206) 553-2706
Fax: (206) 553-0380

Spokane Vet Center

100 N. Mullan Road, Suite 102
Spokane, WA 99206
Telephone: (509) 444-8387
Fax: (509) 444-8388

Tacoma Vet Center

4916 Center Street, Suite E
Tacoma WA 98409
Telephone: (253) 565-7038
Fax: (253) 589-4026

Yakima Vet Center

1111 N. 1st Street, Suite 1
Yakima, WA 98901
Telephone: (509) 457-2736
Fax: (509) 457-1822

Bereavement Counseling for Surviving Family Members

The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) is now offering bereavement counseling to parents, spouses and children of Armed Forces personnel who die in the service of their country. Also eligible are family members of reservists and National Guardsmen who die while on duty. This bereavement counseling includes a broad range of transition services, including outreach, counseling and referral services to family members. These services will be provided at the community-based Vet Centers located nearest them. There is no charge to the families for receiving these services. To obtain these services, call the Readjustment Counseling Service at (202) 273-9116, or by electronic mail at vet.center@hq.med.va.gov, both of which are specific to this specialized service. Readjustment Counseling Service staff will assist families in contacting the closest Vet Center.

Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom Resources

VA has brochures and other information for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom available on the Web:

VA Puget Sound Health Care System Deployment Health Clinic

<http://www1.va.gov/psgulfwar>

Veterans Benefits Information

<http://www.vba.va.gov/>

Information for Iraqi Freedom Veterans

<http://www.va.gov/gulfwar/>

Afghanistan Service Information

<http://www.va.gov/agents/>

PTSD and Iraq Veterans

<http://www.ncptsd.org/topics/war.html>

VA Health Care Enrollment Information

<http://www.va.gov/elig/>

Brochures and Publications, Including:

* A Summary of VA Benefits for National Guard and Reserve Personnel

* Health Care and Assistance for U.S. Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom

<http://www.vethealth.cio.med.va.gov/Pubs/Index.htm>

Online Benefits Applications

<http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/>

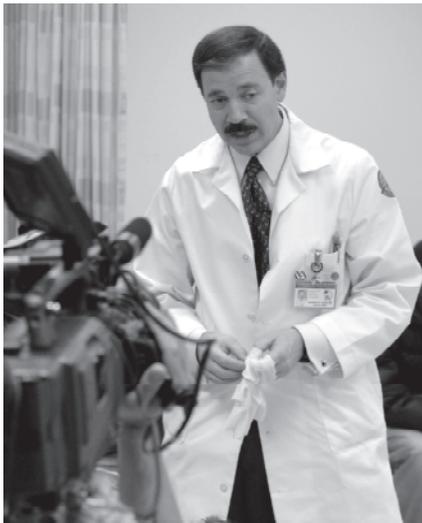
Women Veterans Health and Benefits

<http://www.va.gov/wvhp/>

<http://www.va.gov/womenvet/>

<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Topics/Women/>

Research In the News



Benjamin Lipsky, MD, Director, GIMC

Significant strides in research are made at VA Puget Sound. Some of the research is published in prominent medical journals, generating media attention. Some recent media coverage has included:

- A study by Benjamin Lipsky, MD, Director, GIMC, finds a new antibiotic, Linezolid, is effective for diabetic foot infections and is among the first new treatments since vancomycin was introduced in the 1950s. Based on the results of the new trial, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has now specifically extended the drug's use to most diabetic foot infections. Dr. Lipsky's research was published or aired on radio and television stations, including all three major broadcast outlets, in over 100 newspapers and magazines.
- Murray Raskind, MD, Director, Mental Health Services, continues to receive media interest based on his research with prazosin, a medication that easily enters the brain after taking it for several days that blocks the adrenalin-like effects in the brain which are thought to be tied to the nightmares and sleep disturbances experienced by persons with PTSD.
- Dr. Raskind, and Elaine Peskind, MD, Associate Director, MIRECC, were among the investigators in research involving Galantamine in a study of Alzheimer's patients showed that patients treated continuously with Galantamine for 36 months experienced a substantially smaller decline in awareness (approximately 50%) than that predicted for untreated patients.

Lab Technician Becomes Psychiatrist and Leader in Research

Elaine Peskind, MD started her VA career as a lab technician for a sleep research study of Alzheimer's disease at American Lake VA Medical Center in 1979. The daughter of a Korean War veteran and sister of a Vietnam era veteran, she had just received her Master's degree in Zoology (molecular biology) from Washington State University. Shortly thereafter, she and her husband and their young child moved to the Puget Sound where he had accepted a position as a clinical psychologist. She worked for two years before dropping back to half time to enter medical school at the University of Washington. She received her MD degree in 1986. She worked as a VA staff psychiatrist in Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC)

and Mental Health Service (MHS). In 1996 she accepted the position of Associate Director of the Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) at the Seattle Division.

In addition to research, she treats veterans in her clinic suffering from Alzheimer's disease, depression or PTSD. In particular, she targets problems that affect older veterans. Following the example of her mentor, Dr. Murray Raskind, she has mentored numerous junior faculty, clinical scientists and fellows, ensuring excellence in the next generation of VA researchers. In addition, Dr. Peskind has successfully written grant applications for fellowships in advanced psychiatry and psychology and

for geriatric medicine and geriatric psychiatry. Because of her efforts, VA Puget Sound has been awarded six new two-year research fellowship positions.

VA is pleased to be partnered with this renowned researcher and to share in her successes. She is an inspiration us all as she continues to provide relief to veterans suffering from Alzheimer's disease and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Dr. Peskind hopes that her dedication and devotion to this quest will one day result in a cure for these devastating disorders. For further information on normal aging, Alzheimer's or PTSD, please call 1-800-317-5382.

Message from the Network Director



Message from the Network Director

April 8, 2004

As most of you have no doubt already learned, the ABC news program, Primetime, which is scheduled to air this evening, at 10:00 PM PST, is dedicated to a negative report on VA Hospitals. Although ABC has declined VA's request to allow us to view an advanced copy of the program, we understand that the show will focus on adverse conditions at facilities in Texas (Temple), Arizona (Tucson), Pennsylvania (Butler) and Ohio (Cleveland).

The Primetime TV crews apparently went into these facilities, with hidden cameras, over an extended period of time. What they will report on are cleanliness and infection control issues, physical plant issues and management issues. The report appears to be negatively focused, with very little room for a balanced perspective.

It is also my understanding that the program will include an interview with a Gulf War veteran who is currently receiving care at our Puget Sound facility. The patient is an active member of the National Gulf War Resource Center. While it has been reported to me that she applauds our efforts locally, we do not know what kind of "spin" Primetime will put on her story.

In any case, although it is likely that no VISN 20 facility will be the direct target of the criticism aired this evening, such negative reports cast the entire VA system in an unfavorable light, and raise questions in the minds of veterans, and the public, about VA's ability to provide quality health care.

While it is true that a small number of facilities and employees may be portrayed in an unfavorable light during tonight's broadcast, this should not be a reflection on the large number of VA employees, like each and every one of you, who are dedicated, caring and committed to excellence in service to America's veterans.

I truly appreciate and admire your work, and I want to personally thank you for the careful and caring attitude that you consistently provide our patients.

Although it is my sincere hope that this negative publicity will not have a detrimental impact on our staff and patients, I would like to reiterate some of the extremely positive steps taken within the VA Northwest Health Network which address some of the issues that tonight's program is likely to focus on. Please use these bullets to reassure our patients, volunteers and staff of the systems we have in place to monitor quality of patient care, facility cleanliness, patient safety and control measures we use to provide an effective and safe healthcare environment.

- Performance Measures and Quarterly Performance Reviews: More than 100 measures and monitors that assess quality, satisfaction, access, cost, and functional status are tracked monthly at the facility and VISN level. Each of our facility directors reviews these monitors, with me, on a monthly basis.
- Continuous Organizational Readiness Evaluation (CORE): CORE is VISN 20's method of conducting ongoing self-assessments against applicable standards and expectations, utilizing Internal Consultant teams. Teams identify strong practices, and opportunities to improve, to continually promote excellence in our facilities. More information regarding CORE, as well as VISN 20 performance standards and results are available on the VISN 20 website at: <http://vawww.visn20.med.va.gov/visn20>
- Efforts to Ensure the Highest Quality Patient Safety within VISN 20 include:
 - Computerized Patient Medical Record
 - Bar Code Medication Administration
 - Root Cause Analysis (RCA) process for Adverse Events & Close Calls

- Monitoring implementation of Joint Commission Patient Safety Goals
- Infection Control:
 - The VISN 20 Environment of Care Committee coordinates activities across the network to assure the safest possible environment for our patients and employees.
 - Annual Workplace Evaluations (AWE) are conducted by the VISN 20 Safety Officer and safety staff from around the network identify and track correction of infection control and other patient and staff safety issues.

Although we do not claim to have a perfect VA health care system, it is my firm belief and experience that facilities within VISN 20, and throughout VHA, deliver world class quality health care to our veterans. At this time, it is important that we remain objective, and that we keep the welfare of the veterans we serve uppermost in our thinking.

In spite of tonight's broadcast, our job has always been, and continues to be, providing the veterans in the Pacific Northwest the finest health care possible, while remaining responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars. You are to be commended for your dedication and your commitment to our cause.

Again, I sincerely thank you for your efforts.

Sincerely,

Les Burger
Network Director
VA Northwest Health Network
VISN 20

VA Chief: TV Program a Disservice to America's Vets

On Thursday, April 8, 2004, ABC's Primetime ran an hour-long program *Fighting for Care*. On April 9, VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi responded.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the nation's largest integrated health care system, a model of health care delivery, was attacked last night by ABC's Primetime Thursday, which challenged the quality of VA care and lapses in professional standards.

"Last night's program did a disservice to veterans across America. Far from exposing problems, the program's apparent purpose was to alarm people who deserve a more thoughtful and thorough analysis of the nation's veterans health care system," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi.

"I am disappointed that Primetime Thursday took hidden cameras into a few of our facilities, then withheld the videotape from us for five months. That is simply unconscionable," said Principi.

"If they were truly interested in the care veterans receive, they should have shared that information immediately. When we learn of a problem in our system, we take corrective action right away," Principi said. The day after learning of problems at certain facilities, VA immediately dispatched inspection teams. Corrective actions taken by VA were cited by Primetime.

VA encourages feedback about the quality of its health care programs from all sources. Hotlines, patient advocates and partnerships with veteran service organizations allow veterans, families and employees to anonymously report any concerns they have. Contrary to comments made during the report, veterans cannot lose benefits by voicing concerns about their care.

Veterans, family members and employees may contact the Inspector Generals office and the VA Consumer Affairs office with their concerns at the following numbers:

- VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG)
1-800-488-8244
email: VAOIG.hotline@forum.va.gov
- VA Office of Consumer Affairs:
<http://www.va.gov/customer/conaff.asp>

Confident that the program's narrow focus, featuring a few of VA's 162 hospitals, does not represent the system as a whole, Principi opened the doors to VA facilities nationwide today, inviting media to see for themselves the high quality care that Primetime clearly missed.

"We welcome media and public interest in veterans care," Principi said. "Veterans care and benefits absolutely deserve a prominent place in public debate."

VA has received praise from several independent organizations that measure quality in the delivery of health care as well as a national patient satisfaction survey. Much of that quality is a direct result of the passion shared by 200,000 great men and women for our mission of providing health care to this nation's veterans.

"With the biggest budget increases in our history, we cared for more than 800,000 veterans last year than in 2001," said Principi.

"Veterans are coming to us in record numbers, including those who have other options for health care," Principi said. "We had more than 50 million outpatient visits last year. This is a clear indication that VA is providing veterans with the quality health care they want."

"While I expect all employees to uphold the highest standards when caring for veterans, ultimately this is a leadership issue. I accept that," Principi said. "And I fully expect VA employees in leadership positions across the nation to stand up to that."



1660 South Columbian Way
Seattle, WA 98108-1532
(206) 762-1010

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Angela Goode, LMSW	Kay Shabazian
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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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