

SPRING • 2008

Veterans'

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Health

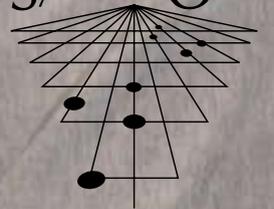
The effects
of traumatic
brain injury

What you
need to know
about MRSA

CBOCs: More
convenient care
for you



VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



To our readers

More and more people today are becoming health conscious, and Veterans' Health is proud to provide you with the information you need to live a longer, healthier life.



Traumatic brain injury is a serious problem that many veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi

Freedom are facing. Learn the symptoms of this condition and how to get help on pages 4–5.

Diabetes is a growing problem in this country, and we recognize the importance of combating the disease's complications. Read about how VA is fighting diabetes-related vision loss with new testing and how you can schedule your exam on page 6.

We're pleased to offer our veterans more healthcare services than ever. Find out more about our Community Based Outpatient Clinics, which are helping veterans across the state get the care they need, and locate a facility near you on pages 7–8.

Remember, quality care is never too far from home!

—Jack Hetrick, Network Director

A deserving recipient

Embodying the “give it your all” spirit of our veterans, Glenn Minney, a patient advocate with VA Healthcare System of Ohio, recently received an Accomplishment of the Year award from Vision and Vocational Services. The honor recognizes Glenn's perseverance through a combat-related injury to aggressively support fellow veterans and veteran issues.

Glenn lost complete vision in his right eye and had partial loss in his left eye following a mortar attack on his Marine battalion while stationed in Haditha, Iraq, in 2005. When he returned home, he worried about how he'd earn a living and remain independent with his new disabilities. A counselor for Ohio's Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired referred Glenn to Vision and Vocational Services, whom he credits for helping him overcome his challenges.

Glenn has been an advocate at the Ohio State House for people with low vision as well as a guest speaker for Blinded Veterans of America. In his role as VA patient advocate, Glenn gives a voice to veterans, addressing their concerns and working through any disputes between them and VA staff members. He's been a VA advocate since October 2006.



Left to right: Rick Isbell, Columbus Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs; 2nd Lt. Guy Zierck, HM1 (FMF); Glenn Minney (retired); and Doug Thompson HM1 (FMF).



About our mailing list

We make every effort

to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

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Veterans' Health is online at www.visn10.va.gov. Visit this site to view back issues or subscribe.

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

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What you need to know about MRSA

The “superbug” MRSA has been the focus of many news reports lately. Short for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, MRSA is a type of staph infection that’s tricky to treat and can lead to serious health problems.

But you shouldn’t panic, says Jack Bernstein, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Program Director of infectious diseases at Wright State University, and Chief of Infectious Diseases at the Dayton VAMC. “Treatments and steps to staying healthy are available,” he says.

Is it MRSA?

MRSA infection falls into two categories: hospital-acquired and community-acquired. Infection due to community-acquired strains may lead to more serious disease, says Dr. Bernstein. Infections from either often appear as pimples, boils or have been reported incorrectly as being due to spider bites. But they can quickly become deep, painful inflamed tissue that can cause serious infections in bones, joints, wounds, lungs and the heart. So, keep an eye on any skin problems that arise.

Are you at risk?

As the name implies, hospital-acquired MRSA affects people who have recently been in the hospital, people living in a long-term care facility or people who’ve recently received antibiotics. Community-acquired MRSA is becoming more common and most often affects those participating in contact sports or living in crowded conditions, such as military camps.



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Playing it safe

Do your part to prevent infection:

- Wash your hands with soap and water. “It’s the most important thing you can do to protect yourself,” says Dr. Bernstein. Hand sanitizers work when soap or water aren’t available.
- Avoid sharing items such as sheets, towels, clothing and athletic equipment.
- Cover cuts and scrapes with sterile bandages until they’re healed.
- Shower right after athletic games or practices. Don’t participate in contact sports if you have a wound that’s oozing or red, swollen, tender or warm to the touch.

VA is on your side

Patients can carry staph bacteria and not even know it. Though you may not feel sick, you can pass those germs to someone who is vulnerable to infection. All patients admitted to a VA hospital acute care ward are tested for MRSA. Patients who test positive are kept away from other patients. It is important to realize that these patients are not “sick” but could possibly transmit staph to other patients in the hospital. Carriers of staph are usually not treated and they may carry staph for only a short period. **VH**

Is it all in your head?



Memory problems, headaches and trouble focusing—you know something isn't right, but you're not quite sure what that "something" is.

For veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), these symptoms aren't uncommon. They're often signs of traumatic brain injury (TBI), a disruption to the brain's normal functions resulting from a blow or jolt to the head. Most soldiers diagnosed with TBI have been injured by mortar blasts or improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

"We're seeing a huge increase—even in just the past few months—of patients screening and testing positive for TBI," says Laura Pretz, a speech pathologist with the Cincinnati VA Medical Center. VA is currently performing TBI screenings on all troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Those who test positive during initial screenings go on for further evaluation. Based on the extent of the injury, veterans may receive physical and cognitive rehabilitation, as well as other treatments.

Mild vs. severe

Brief changes in mental status are likely a sign of mild TBI. You may not even realize you've suffered a head injury until you start having any of the following symptoms, which can take weeks or months to appear:

- headaches
- trouble concentrating
- memory problems
- increased sensitivity to light and sound
- blurred vision or tired eyes
- dizziness
- excessive fatigue or sleep pattern changes
- organization difficulties
- thinking, acting, speaking or reading slowly
- being easily distracted
- mood changes
- confusion

Traumatic brain injury could be behind your health problems

- ringing in the ears
- neck pain
- loss of taste or smell
- feeling sad, anxious, listless, irritated or angry for little or no reason

Mild and severe cases of TBI have similar symptoms, but severe TBI lingers for a long time. “Mild TBI results from an injury that may have only caused you to feel a little dazed or have knocked you out for a few seconds, while severe TBI stems from an extended period of unconsciousness,” says Pretz. “With severe TBI, you may also experience amnesia about things that occurred before or after the traumatic event.”

Getting help

Because VA is screening all returning OEF and OIF troops, more and more cases of TBI are caught earlier—an important factor for successful treatment. (VA has reminders in place in its computer system to alert staff when a soldier hasn’t received the screening.)

Treatment of TBI includes a multidisciplinary approach. Doctors, neuropsychologists, speech pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, audiologists and case managers are all available to aid in the recovery process. Pretz’ role as a speech pathologist includes guiding soldiers through cognitive rehab. “You’re training the brain, working it to improve its skills,” says Pretz. “Like physical therapy for your body, the proper exercises and drills can help your brain get better.”

Little mental reminders also help. Personal Palm Pilots and GPS navigational systems are given to TBI patients who have trouble remembering daily tasks or who may forget directions.

While such devices can make life easier for those suffering from TBI, they aren’t a solution. If you’re an OEF or OIF veteran and haven’t received your TBI screening, set up an appointment at your local VA clinic. **VA**

Head injury to blame for post-traumatic stress disorder?

A recent study conducted by the military and published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that suffering at least one concussion (mild TBI) while serving in Iraq could heighten the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

While the results are preliminary, they don’t surprise speech pathologist Laura Pretz. She says about 90 percent of the patients treated at her facility for TBI have also been diagnosed as having PTSD and are receiving treatment for it.

While the link may seem like just one more thing to worry about, there may be a silver lining: A TBI-PTSD connection could mean that mild brain injuries have a strong psychological component, which can be treated successfully.



Keeping an eye on your vision

New program checks for diabetic retinopathy

To help patients with diabetes prevent vision loss, VA now offers Teleretinal Imaging (TRI) so doctors can keep a closer eye on their vision.

What is TRI? TRI is a new test that takes pictures of your retinas at your primary care clinic. The pictures are sent to a VA optometrist who looks for diabetic retinopathy, a condition in which high blood sugar damages the small blood vessels in the retina, which can lead to blindness. A TRI exam takes about 15 to 30 minutes to complete.

TRI is a good tool to help your doctor find certain eye problems as early as possible, but it doesn't take the place of a complete eye exam.

Who should have TRI? VA covers one eye exam every two years, with TRI occurring between those years. Any diabetic patient whose records don't show an eye exam within the last year should have TRI.

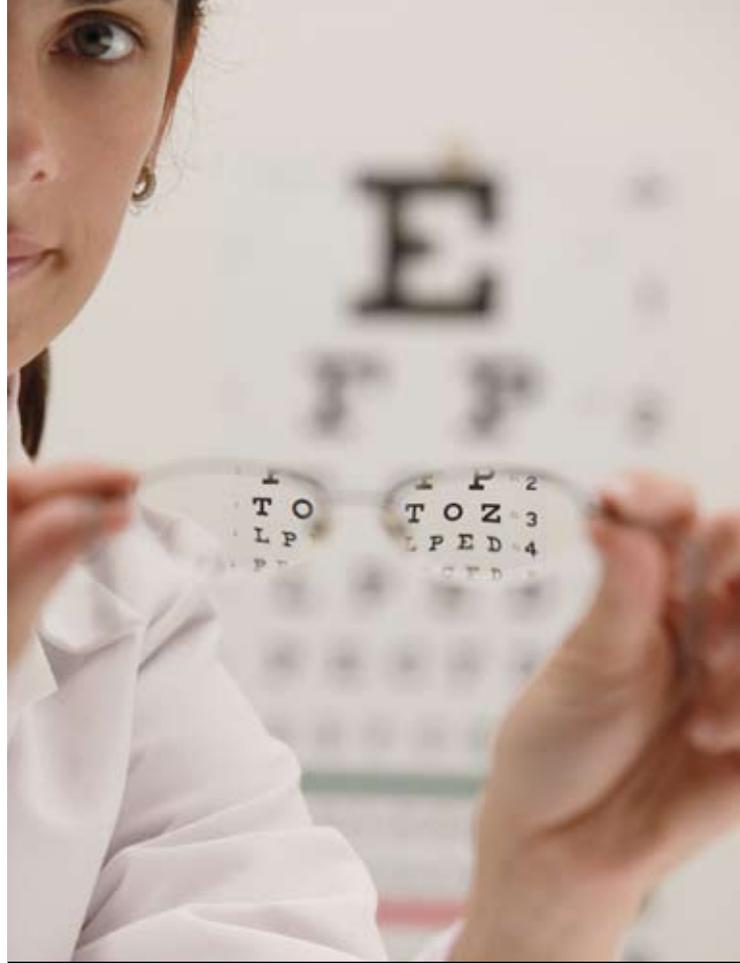
Has the TRI program been successful? Yes. "Last year, 3,650 patients took advantage of TRI," says Lynn Wise, administrative coordinator for VISN 10. "In the four months since then, 1,554 more patients had an exam."

How am I scheduled for a TRI exam? Your primary care provider (PCP), nurse or the TRI technician will notify you when you come in for your primary care appointment. Or you can ask your PCP for a referral.

Do I need eye drops to dilate my pupils? Most patients can be imaged without drops. If you can't, you'll be given an appointment to be seen at an eye clinic where your pupils will be dilated.

What happens next? You'll receive a letter or phone call with the results and when you should return for a full optometry eye exam or have photos taken again.

Contact Lynn Wise for more information at 440-526-3030, ext. 6729, or Lynn.wise@va.gov. 



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CANTON CBOC
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330-489-4600,
ext. 1710

VAMC WADE PARK
Renee Warstler
216-791-3800,
ext. 5152

More convenient care for you

CBOCs expand to serve you better

Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) were established in 1999 to increase healthcare access for veterans. “We don’t want veterans to travel more than 30 miles to find a primary care provider,” says Joe Kohut, Primary Care Line Director at VISN 10. “With the current and planned expansions of the CBOC system, we’ve met that goal.”

There are now 30 clinics in Ohio that offer primary care, mental health, and other healthcare services. “The CBOCs deliver basic care and services to our veterans, while the medical centers provide specialty, diagnostic and inpatient care,” says Kohut.

Many services are available

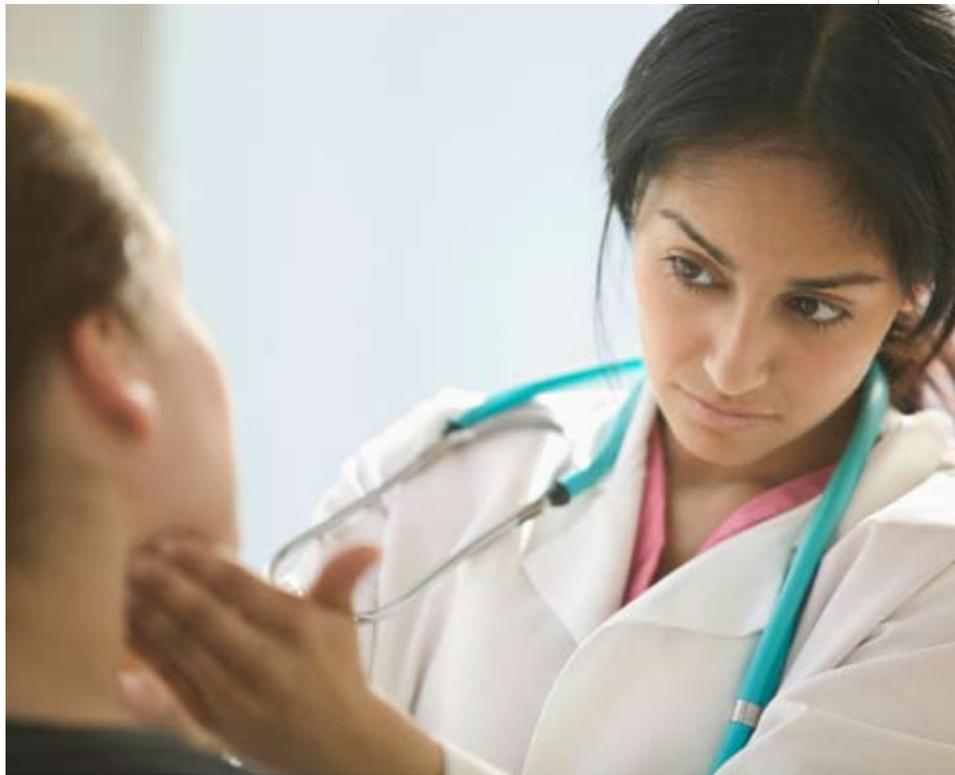
In addition to primary care, our CBOCs and medical centers offer patients many services. These include:

- optometry
- podiatry
- mental health case management
- telemedicine
- telepsychiatry
- teleretinal imaging
- physical therapy
- home-based primary care
- mental health services for Operation

Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans

“The VA Healthcare System of Ohio is well prepared for the influx of new Iraq War vets at all our CBOCs and medical centers,” says Kohut.

A list of contact information for our medical centers and related CBOCs is located on page 8. **VH**



New ambulatory care clinic to open

The Chalmers P. Wylie Veterans Affairs Ambulatory Care Center (ACC), is scheduled to open this fall. Located within the Defense Supply Construction Center in Columbus, the ACC will offer new and expanded services, including:

- prosthetics and orthotics lab
- same-day surgery for many procedures
- presurgical/preadmission testing
- nuclear medicine (bone scan and liver/spleen scan)
- sleep lab
- pulmonary, ear, nose and throat procedures
- cardiac and pulmonary rehab capabilities
- two additional primary care clinics
- three new operating rooms
- new 64-slice CT scanner
- expanded oncology services
- expanded urgent care area

Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Chillicothe VAMC

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Athens

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Cambridge

2145 Southgate
Cambridge, OH 43725
740-432-1963

Lancaster

1550 Sheridan Drive,
Suite 100
Colonnade Medical
Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Marietta

418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

Portsmouth

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Cincinnati VAMC

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
859-572-6202

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Bellevue

103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Clermont County

Eastgate Professional
Office Park
4355 Ferguson Drive, Suite 270
Cincinnati, OH 45245
513-943-3680

Hamilton

1755 South Erie Highway
Hamilton, OH 45011
513-870-9444

Dearborn County

1600 Flossie Drive
Greendale IN 47025
812-539-2313

Florence, KY

7711 Ewing Boulevard
Florence, KY 41042
859-282-4480

Louis Stokes Wade Park VAMC

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Brecksville VA Medical Center

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Akron

55 West Waterloo
Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Canton

733 Market Avenue South
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

East Liverpool

Ogilvie Square
15655 State Route 170
Calcutta, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Lorain

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield

1456 Park Avenue West
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

New Philadelphia

1260 Monroe Avenue, #15H
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330-602-5339

Painesville

7 West Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Ravenna

6751 North Chestnut Street
Ravenna, OH 44266
330-296-3641

Sandusky

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Warren

1977 Niles Road SE
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Clinic

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Grove City

1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Marion

1203 Delaware Avenue
Marion, OH 43302
740-223-8089

Newark

1912 Tamarack Road
Newark, OH 43055
740-788-8329

Zanesville

840 Bethesda Drive
Building 3A
Zanesville, OH 43701
740-453-7725

Dayton VAMC

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Lima

1303 Bellefontaine Avenue
Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Middletown

675 North University Boulevard
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Richmond

4351 South A Street
Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Springfield

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at www.visn10.va.gov.

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