



# Veterans'

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE  
FOR OHIO VETERANS

# Health

SUMMER • 1999

## Pain—The 5th Vital Sign

VA's commitment  
to easing chronic  
discomfort

## A Special Gift

Advance directives  
take a burden off  
loved ones

## The Seeds Of Life

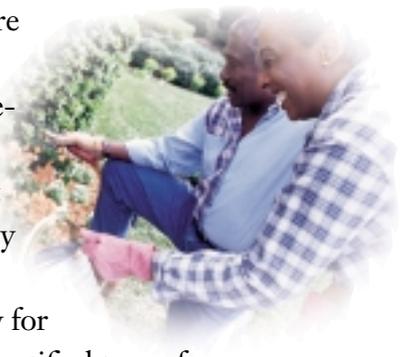
Cutting-edge therapy  
is helping men beat  
prostate cancer

VA Healthcare  
System of Ohio



# Come To VA For Cutting-Edge Care

I'd like to call your attention to some changes in the way VA is approaching your healthcare. On the facing page, you'll find an article about pain assessment and treatment. The VA has made a commitment to assuring that our healthcare providers are trained in the latest approaches to pain assessment and treatment, particularly in the treatment of chronic pain and pain experienced by the terminally ill as they approach the end of life. In most cases, we believe that pain can be controlled to allow you to go about your daily routine or, at a minimum, to improve your quality of life by making you more comfortable.



On pages 4 through 6, you'll find out about a cutting-edge therapy for prostate cancer called brachytherapy. The Cincinnati VAMC has been certified to perform this effective and highly sought-out procedure for over a year. Hear doctors and one patient explain how this therapy works to heal the second most common cancer in men.

Lastly, VA wants to remind you that the time to make important decisions about your healthcare is now, while you are healthy and aware. Too often, illness or accidents leave people unable to express what types of treatment or life-prolonging care they desire. This puts a major burden on loved ones. The article on page 7 explains how advance directives can help your family and friends survive a potentially stressful period.



And, of course, I would like to take this opportunity to wish veterans and their families a happy, healthy summer. Should you travel this season, remember that you can obtain healthcare from any VA facility across the country. If you have any questions, call **1-888-838-6446** 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

—Laura J. Miller  
Network Director

*Veterans' Health* is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 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 the 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 the 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.

ON THE COVER: Korean War veteran Oliver Staples keeps healthy and active by volunteering at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center seven days a week. Mr. Staples has logged in over 21,000 hours at the medical center over the past 40-plus years. He welcomes the patients and makes them feel like family.

PHOTOGRAPHER: MARK ARLINGHAUS, MEDICAL MEDIA DEPARTMENT, CINCINNATI CAMPUS

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**T**he last time your VA healthcare provider checked your vital signs, he or she took your pulse, listened to your heart, measured your blood pressure and took your temperature. In a future visit, don't be surprised if a fifth vital sign is monitored.

As a part of your exam, you may be asked if you regularly experience pain as you go about your daily routine. Chronic pain is a common condition for many older Americans and although it may never be completely cured, some relief is available for about 90 percent of patients.

Whether you feel backaches, joint stiffness or any other persistent pain, your VA medical team can help you find comfort. Helping you receive treatment is an important mission for us. To that end, we have made a commitment to:

- assure that pain assessment is performed in a prompt, consistent manner
- include you and your family in pain management
- assure that your healthcare provider is trained in the best techniques
- work as a team with various specialists to ensure appropriate care
- evaluate and monitor the success of your pain-management treatment

Over the next two years the VA will spend

\$3 million to \$5 million on pain management research. The findings will be implemented by

your VA healthcare provider, thanks to an educational grant of nearly \$1 million from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In addition, an expert will be

appointed to coordinate a national strategy for addressing chronic pain.

The next time you are being interviewed by a member of your healthcare team, remember to

discuss any chronic pain. This will help your healthcare provider develop a pain management treatment plan for you. **VA**



# Pain—

## The 5th Vital Sign

### The Language Of Pain

**Y**ou can help your VA healthcare provider diagnose your pain by using precise language to describe the discomfort.

Start off by telling your provider where it hurts, what makes the pain better or worse, the intensity of the pain and its frequency.

Use words like:

- stinging
- penetrating
- dull
- throbbing
- achy
- nagging
- gnawing

### Noting A Pattern

**A** pain diary can help your healthcare provider find a pattern to your pain. Keep a log of where and when you felt the discomfort, what you were doing, how the pain felt, what you did to relieve it and how long it took to go away. Also mention how the pain made you feel: angry, frustrated or helpless.



# Seeds Of Life

**Y**ankees manager Joe Torre's recent bout with prostate cancer has surely caused some men to think about what they would do if they were diagnosed with the disease themselves. It's a question well worth exploring since prostate cancer is the second most common cancer in men (after skin cancer) and the second most deadly (after lung cancer).

Today, thanks to screening methods, such as the PSA test, prostate cancer can be caught earlier than ever, when the chance of a cure is highest. And here's more positive news: In addition to surgery to remove the prostate gland and external beam radiation, men can now opt for brachytherapy, a new treatment offered at the Cincinnati VAMC.

## What is brachytherapy?

"In brachytherapy, radioactive seeds are injected directly into the prostate gland," says Albert F. Muhleman, M.D., Chief of Hematology–Oncology Section at the Cincinnati VAMC.

"The purpose is to apply intensive therapy to the gland in order to kill the cancerous tumor before it metastasizes, or spreads, to other parts of the body," he says.



In brachytherapy, radioactive seeds are implanted into the prostate, where they remain active for up to one year.

Cincinnati VAMC Chief of Urology Thomas Bell, M.D., shown performing brachytherapy, says the procedure takes about an hour and is usually performed on an outpatient basis.

"The seeds are carefully placed so that all areas of the prostate receive the radiation," explains Thomas E. Bell, M.D., Chief of Urology at the Cincinnati VAMC. "The seeds remain radioactive for about a year—that is the maximum dose of radiation the prostate gland may receive."

The internal radiation made possible by

# VA at the vanguard of prostate cancer treatment



brachytherapy is an advantage over traditional external radiation because the surrounding healthy tissue is spared side effects such as burning, pain and bleeding.

Another advantage of brachytherapy is that it does not cause incontinence or impotence, two side effects often linked to surgery and traditional radiation.

## Procedure perfected

Although brachytherapy was introduced in the 1970s, it did not prove to be as effective as surgery or radiation. The reason: Today's advanced imaging techniques were not yet available, making the procedure less precise. "Using CAT scans, better quality ultrasound and other imaging techniques, technicians can now pinpoint the location of the prostate gland and develop an actual map of the prostate. This ensures that the seeds can be placed in the proper location," says Kevin Redmond, M.D., a radiotherapist at the VA Cincinnati Medical

Center. So far, researchers have found that brachytherapy appears to be every bit as effective as surgery.

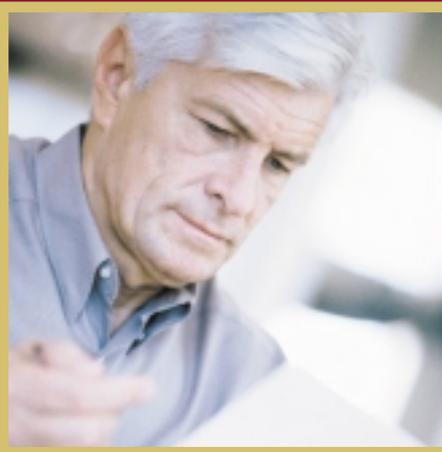
## How it is done

About two days before the actual procedure, a patient comes in for a volume study of the prostate gland.

Using various imaging techniques, technicians make a diagram of the prostate on a video screen. The image is printed out from several angles and given to the physicist, who determines the dosage and number of seeds needed to irradiate the entire gland. About 48 hours later, the seeds are implanted.

"The procedure takes about an hour," says  
*continued on next page*

## Early Detection Of Prostate Cancer Saves Lives



The best way to find prostate cancer early is by using a combination of two tests. Together, these tests can pick up 70 percent of prostate cancers when they can still be cured. The first test is the digital rectal exam, or DRE. In this test, a doctor feels the

prostate through the wall of the rectum to check for areas that feel unusually firm or otherwise irregular.

The second test is the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test, a blood test that measures a protein made by the prostate. Normal PSA readings are under 4 nanograms per milliliter (ng/ml), borderline readings are between 4 and 10 ng/ml and anything over 10 is considered high. The higher the PSA level, the more likely the presence of prostate cancer.

Screening is important since prostate cancer usually causes no symptoms in the early stages. VA recommends that beginning at age 50 all men be informed of the risks and benefits of prostate screening in order to make an informed decision regarding their own screening. Men at high risk (African Americans, those with a family history of prostate cancer or those with symptoms) should talk to their healthcare providers about yearly screenings beginning at age 40.

# "It Made Sense To Me"

When 60-year-old Paul Wallpe learned about a year ago that he had prostate cancer, he took the diagnosis in stride. His PSA levels had been going up and down for about six months, so when a computerized biopsy confirmed the cancer diagnosis, he was neither surprised nor alarmed. "I knew that prostate cancer can be slow growing, and I felt confident that it had been caught early," says Paul. "So I was extremely calm about the whole thing."

What's more, the Cincinnati resident was aware of the current treatment options for prostate cancer. He had been particularly impressed by an article he had read in *Fortune* magazine about brachytherapy. "The situation described in the article was

py works," he says. "It made sense to me. I wasn't comfortable with surgery to remove the prostate, my other option."

Cementing his decision were Paul's discussions with Dr. Bell. Besides being an expert in brachytherapy, Dr. Bell also happened to be an old classmate of Paul's from the University of Cincinnati. "I had a lot of confidence in Dr. Bell," says Paul. "I was very lucky to have him to talk to. He reassured me that brachytherapy was effective and that I was an ideal candidate."

As for the procedure itself, Paul says it was painless. "In fact, I was carrying on a conversation with one of the nurses," he remembers. Several hours later, when the spinal anesthesia wore off and he was able to walk, Paul went home.

Today, Paul remains pleased with the outcome. About every three months, he visits the Cincinnati VAMC, where he has been getting regular PSA screenings. So far, the readings have hovered around the 0.8 range—a sign that his cancer is well controlled. Paul is confident that with the level of care he receives at the Cincinnati VAMC, any future problems will receive the same expert attention.



**"I felt confident that the cancer had been caught early, so I was calm about the whole thing."**

almost identical to mine—it seemed like the way to go."

By the time he met Dr. Thomas Bell, a urologist at the Cincinnati VAMC, Paul had more or less decided that the radioactive seed implants were for him.

"I liked the way the thera-

*continued from previous page*

Dr. Bell, "and is most commonly performed using spinal anesthesia. In about five or six

hours, the patient can go home."

The patient is then followed closely for about a year, getting a PSA test at each visit. If the PSA blood test remains low, it means the prostate gland has been destroyed—and the cancer along with it.

## Who is a candidate?

Brachytherapy is not for every man diagnosed with prostate cancer. Doctors Muhleman and Bell point out that the procedure is effective only for patients whose cancer has not spread beyond the prostate gland. For a list of other criteria and guidelines regarding brachytherapy, visit <http://home.att.net/~muhlemaf/va-ho-pg.html>.

If you have other questions about prostate cancer screening or treatment, do not hesitate to ask your VA healthcare provider. **VH**



**M**ost of us like to take an active part in our healthcare. But sometimes, an illness or an accident makes it impossible for us to express our wishes. If that should happen, you can save your loved ones the burden of decision by preparing a living will and a durable power of attorney—two legal documents that together are called an advance directive. (These documents pertain to your healthcare choices only; they do not pertain to your financial matters.)

A living will lets you express your wishes about the use of life support to prolong your life. For example, it might state that you desire any life-sustaining treatment, regardless of your life's quality, or that you desire life-prolonging treatment only if it will restore consciousness.

A healthcare power of attorney allows you to name someone who will make medical decisions on your behalf if you're unable to do so. He or she should be capable of understanding complex medical issues, have the ability to make tough decisions and be strong enough to override the opinions of relatives or friends who may disagree with your stated wishes.

Your advance directive is valid only if signed and dated in the presence of two witnesses who

# Have You Made This Gift To Your Loved Ones?

## What To Do With Your Advance Directive

**T**o make sure your advance directive is followed (by law, your healthcare team must respect it), it

must become part of your medical records. But that won't happen unless you take these simple steps:

- **Give** a completed copy to a family member or trusted friend as well as to your VA healthcare provider.
- **Take** a copy with you when you receive care from a hospital or other healthcare facility.



must also sign and date the form. It comes into effect only if you become unable to make decisions or express your own wishes. You have the right to change or revoke it at any time until then.

During a VA clinic visit, ask to see the social worker. The VA has advance directive forms, and the social worker can assist you in completing them. **VH**

## We Want To Hear From You!

Your opinions and ideas are very important to us. Please let us know...

1. **What specific information have you used from this or past issues of *Veterans' Health*?** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **What topics would you like to see covered in upcoming issues?** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Any other ideas on how this newsletter can best meet your/other veterans' needs?** \_\_\_\_\_

If necessary, attach a separate piece of paper, and send your comments c/o:  
Debbie Sigmon, Communications Officer  
VA Healthcare System of Ohio,  
8600 Governors Hill Drive, Suite 115  
Cincinnati, OH 45249



# Reaching Us Is Easy

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

## Athens VA Campus

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

## Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark  
Bellevue, KY  
513-861-3100

## Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road  
Brecksville, OH 44141  
216-526-3030

## Canton VA Campus

221 3rd Street SE  
Canton, OH 44702  
330-489-4600

## Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104  
Chillicothe, OH 45601  
614-773-1141

## Cincinnati VA Campus

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

## Columbus VA Campus

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

## Dayton VA Campus

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

## Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue  
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075  
513-861-3100

## Lorain VA Campus

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

## Mansfield VA Campus

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

## McCafferty VA Campus

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

## Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.  
Middletown, OH 45042  
513-423-8387

## Call Tele-Nurse



There's someone on the line 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to serve you. If you have symptoms, questions or need advice about any health problem, call us toll free at **1-888-VET-OHIO (1-888-838-6446)**.

## Otis Moss/University Hospital VA Campus

8819 Quincy Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
740-353-2850

## Painesville VA Campus

54 South State Street  
Suite 204  
Painesville, OH 44077  
440-357-6740

## Sandusky VA Campus

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

## Springfield VA Campus

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

## Wade Park VA Campus

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

## Youngstown VA Campus

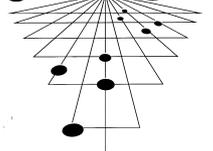
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