

# The Cloak

The VISN 3 Palliative Care E-Newsletter

Department of Veterans  
Affairs

Volume 6, Issue 1  
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## VISN 3 Palliative Care Program Update: FY 08 Year in Review

Submitted by Therese Cortez, NP, ACHPN and Carol Luhrs, MD

Looking back to FY 08 accomplishments, our VISN Palliative Care Program continues to strive towards our initiative's mission of honoring veterans' preferences for quality care at the end of life across all sites and venues of care. We continue to expand our standardized, network-based program through ongoing quality improvement, enhancement of staff expertise of our staff on end of life care, and collaboration with strategic hospice partners in the community.

We began FY 08 with the implementation of the nationally approved Bereaved Family Member Survey (BFS) for patients who have died in our acute and CLC with Palliative Care Consultation. Our trained interviewers, the "Gold Partners Team," consist of our interdisciplinary team members throughout the VISN. Our VISN is the

first in the nation to implement the Bereaved Family Member Survey as a VISN-wide quality improvement initiative. As the Bereaved Family Member Survey gets rolled out nationally, our VISN will be able to share with other VISNs our experience in conducting the surveys, the feedback mechanism to the teams and the development of site/ VISN action plans. We are looking forward to this ongoing quality improvement initiative and the expansion of these surveys for all patients who die in acute and CLC in FY 09, as the surveys provide us valuable feedback about the end of life care we are providing our veterans and their families.

We continue to promote the education of our staff on end of life care through our ongoing partnership with EES and VISN 3 GRECC Program. Our VISN Palliative Care

Quarterly Educational Meetings continue to provide our teams an opportunity to network, share best practices and mutually learn from one another. Our January 22, 2008 featured Ken Doka, PhD, who spoke about "Challenging the Paradigm: New Understandings of Grief." During the January VISN Palliative Care Quarterly Meeting, several VISN awards were presented by Mr. James Farsetta and Dr. Judith Feldman, on behalf of VISN Leadership. Terry Altilio, MSW, spoke about Pain Management during our April 22, 2008 Quarterly Meeting. We were honored to have Lynn Spragens, Consultant to the Center to Advance Palliative Care, speak about Maintaining and Sustaining a Palliative Care Program during our June 24, 2008.

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### Calendar of

#### Upcoming Events

- November 20, 12:00 - 1:00 pm, VISN Noon Case Audioconference: Manhattan Facility
- December 18, 12:00 - 1:00 pm, VISN Noon Case Audioconference: Northport Facility
- January 27, 2009: 8:30 am - 2:00 pm, VISN Palliative Care Quarterly Meeting

## VISN 3 Palliative Care Program Priorities for 2009

### Priority # 1

Improving Palliative Care in the Intensive Care Units and implementation of the Comfort & Communication Quality Indicators in MICUs.

### Priority # 2

- \* Participation in the National Roll-Out of the Bereaved Family Survey.
- \* Expansion of VISN Bereaved Family Surveys to all patients who die in hospitals

and Community Living Centers (CLCs) and who are identified as appropriate for Palliative Care Consult.

### Priority # 3

Improving end of life care in the VA CLCs.

### Priority # 4

- \* Formalization of the Bereavement Program for patients who die with PCCT in VA hospitals and Community Living Centers in VISN 3.

- \* VA NY Harbor Health Care System to pilot expansion of staggered Bereavement Mailings for all patients who die in Brooklyn, New York and St. Albans.

### Priority # 5

Increase in the number of patients assessed by all members (physician or NP, social worker, chaplain, psychologist) of the interdisciplinary Palliative Care Team.



## VISN 3 GRECC Research

We are currently funded by VA HSR&D through 2009 on a three year study: Hospital Costs and Utilization of Veterans Receiving Palliative Versus Usual Care. We are waiting for IRB approval to begin a descriptive study of family satisfaction with end of life care. Below are palliative care papers in the past 24 months:

Luhrs, C & Penrod, JD. End-of-life care pathways. Current Opinion in Supportive and Palliative Care (2007) 1:198-201.

Luhrs C, Cortez T, Penrod JD, & Howe JL. The VISN 3 Palliative Care Program: A Successful Collaboration. Federal Practitioner June, 2008: 36-39.

Penrod JD, Cortez T, & Luhrs CA. Use of a report card to implement a network-based palliative care program. Journal of Palliative Medicine 2007; Aug;10(4):858-60.

Penrod JD, Morrison, R. Sean, Meier, DE. Studying the Effectiveness of Palliative Care. 2008; JAMA, 300(9):1022-1023.

## Education & Training Workgroup

Submitted by Louisa Daratsos, LCSW, ACSW & Judith L. Howe, PhD Co-Chairs

The VISN 3 Palliative Care Patient Education Manual has been updated. A project of the Education and Training Workgroup during 2007, it contains current information about palliative and end-of-life care and other health-care programs offered in the metropolitan New York-Northern New Jersey area of the VHA System. It contains information on financial benefits, pain management, care at home, emotional support, and nursing home care, listings of VISN 3 facilities, Vet centers, phone numbers, websites, and a glossary. Please distribute this **Patient Education Manual** when appropriate in your discussions with patients, families and caregivers. It is an excellent way to initiate conversations and inform your patients

about the VA and community resources available to them. Copies of the Manual will be available at the October 24th Quarterly Education Meeting and PDF versions will be sent to all PCCT members via Outlook. If you have any questions about the Manual or if you note a factual error, please notify Valerie Menocal, GRECC Education Coordinator.

We thank all of the members of the Education and Training Workgroup as well as our editors and reviewers, all of whom are acknowledged in the Manual. In particular, we would like to thank Valerie Menocal, Managing Editor, who shepherded this project and spent many hours editing the Manual.

## A Year in Review

(continued from page 1)

On February 28 and 29, 2008, we hosted an ELNEC (Education for Nurses on End of Life Care) Program at the NY VAMC. Deborah Sherman, PhD, APRN, ANP, PCM, BC, FAAN was the faculty for this program, which was attended by a total of 131 staff throughout the VISN. In collaboration with New Jersey State HVP, VISN 4 and EES, VISN 3 planned, hosted and executed the New Jersey HVP Educational Symposium on May 8, 2008 at the Lyons VA. Ninety-three participants from the New Jersey hospice community and VA staff attended the conference and collaboratively learned how to care for veterans at the end of life and ensure access to care. Another educational program hosted in collabora-

tion with VISN 3 GRECC and EES, was the ELNEC Critical Care Program on September 10, 2008 at the JJP Bronx VAMC. The program faculty consisted of some of the 17 ELNEC Critical Care Trained front-line nurses in the VISN who had attended the ELNEC Critical Care training program in FY 06 and 07. It is the hope that this educational program will be the impetus to the development of the ELNEC Critical Care Curriculum at the site level. We look forward to the continuation of our educational initiatives and the opportunity to collaborate with other programs in our VISN and community partners to enhance the expertise in end of life care.

As we strive to ensure access to hospice and pallia-

tive care across our system, we developed two initiatives: the ICU Initiative and the CLC Initiative. We developed the Palliative Care - ICU Quality Improvement Initiative and Taskgroup with nurse and physician champions from the ICU and Palliative Care teams at all 5 ICUs to promote comfort and communication in the ICU. Moving forward with this exciting initiative, Dr. Judith Nelson, Intensivist at Mount Sinai Medical Center, will serve as consultant to this program in FY 09. In an effort to ensure quality end of life care across the CLCs in our VISN, we developed a Palliative Care - CLC Taskgroup, consisting of CLC Leads, Palliative Care Unit Nurse Managers and Physicians,

and the Palliative Care Teams from all the CLCs. The Taskgroup has developed Draft Standards for Palliative Care in the CLC.

With many exciting initiatives ahead of us for FY 09, both in our VISN and nationally with the National VA Comprehensive End of Life Initiatives, we thank you for your dedication to our program and your enduring efforts to enhance the quality of care provided to your veterans and their families at the end of life. It continues to be a tremendous honor for us to collaborate with such talented and committed individuals, as we strive to enhance and sustain our VISN Palliative Care Program.





## VISN 3 AWARDS

### 2007 Cherokee Inspired Comfort Award Top National Prize Winner:

*Robyn Anderson, APRN-BC, MS*

Recipients are chosen for their exceptional service, sacrifice or innovation. Dr. Susan Cohen wrote "Robyn has been able to connect with challenging patients and perhaps this is one of her most remarkable talents. In a VA hospital where many of our patients suffer with mental illness, it isn't always easy to connect. She has been able to peel away the layers of aggression, personality disorders and mental illness to show many of us on the team the person and soul inside who needs our help.

This is art in nursing."

Another judge wrote "...excels not only in her compassion, boundless commitment, and ability to provide humanizing care to patients, but also in her ability to through her example help her colleagues to grow in these same traits. This nurse does not let her patients' difficulties with coping with the dying experience push her away, but she recognizes the challenges and faces them head on with compassion. This is why patients know her by name."



Robyn, we thank you for your dedication to the Veterans and Team. Congratulations, Robyn on a well-deserved award!



### Outstanding Palliative Care Team Awards

Every year, VISN 3 recognizes the Palliative Care Consultation Teams (PCCT) that have demonstrated exceptional growth and development in acute care and the Community Living Center (CLC). The PCCTs were evaluated on their overall performance and adherence to the National Quality Forum and Preferred Practices for Palliative and Hospice Care Quality for FY 07. During the January 22, 2008 VISN Palliative Care Quarterly Meeting, Brooklyn PCCT was recognized as the Outstanding Palliative Care Team in Acute Care and Bronx PCCT and Hudson Valley PCCT were both recognized as the Outstanding Palliative Care Teams in the CLC.

### 2007 VISN Palliative Care Outstanding Individual Awards:

*Joby David, NP, ACHPN and Hanna Hermanowski, NP*

During the VISN Palliative Care Quarterly Meeting on January 22, 2007, Joby David, NP, ACHPN, PCCT Coordinator for Hudson Valley Palliative Care Program and Hanna Hermanowski, NP, PCCT Coordinator for New Jersey Palliative Care Program were both presented with the 2007 Individual Awards for Excellence in Palliative Care. As the PCCT Coordinators for their re-

spective facilities, they led their teams to ensure ongoing quality improvement, participation with the Bereaved Family Member Survey, ensure access of the veterans to hospice and palliative care across the system, promote expertise of their staff in end of life care, and collaborative with the hospice community.

### Newly Inducted Hospice and Palliative Care Board Certified Recipients

#### Advanced Certified Hospice and Palliative Care Nurse

Joby David, NP, ACHPN (Hudson Valley)

#### Certified Hospice and Palliative Care Nurse

Charnette Simpson, RN, CHPN (Northport)

Jeane Betti, RN, CHPN (Hudson Valley)

Sandra Dumeng, RN, CHPN (Hudson Valley)

Barbara Arrowsmith, RN, CHPN (Lyons)

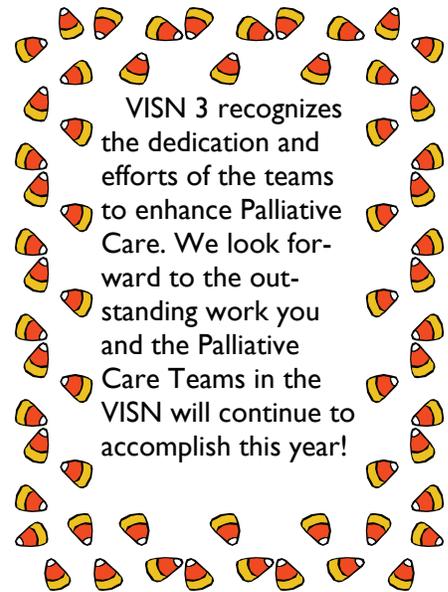
## Welcome to this Year's VISN 3 GRECC Palliative Care Fellows

Robert "Drew" Heyding, MD received his bachelor's degree from McGill University and his medical degree from Columbia. He comes to us from the New York University Internal Medicine Residency Program. "...has an extraordinary work ethic and is a tireless advocate for his patients." As an undergraduate, he won a prestigious undergraduate research award for work on drug receptor sites within Alzheimer's disease implicated proteins. Drew looks to increase his fund of knowledge and strategies for managing symptoms at the end-of-life and continue research in prognosis and non-cancer illness.

Lauren E. King, MSW is this year's Social Work Fellow. She received her undergraduate Psychology and Master of Social Work degrees with a concentration in Older Adults from Winthrop University in Rock Hill, SC. One of her professors stated "Lauren will be one of our leaders of tomorrow." Lauren is excited to provide the best possible care, compassion and advocate for her patients, clients, and families. She will accomplish this by increasing her knowledge of policies and terminology while assisting families in coping and beyond of advance care planning.

Ellyn S. Stein, PhD comes to us from the New Jersey Healthcare System, East Orange Campus where she completed her Psychology Internship and received her PhD from Seton Hall University with an undergraduate degree from Cornell University. One supervisor writes "her greatest assets are her patience, ability to convey accurate empathy, and establish an emotional supportive and soothing environment." She believes it is crucial to acknowledge and understand patients; complex psychosocial needs in making end of life decisions.

A. Collins Villamor, MD is a war veteran serving during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. He completed his Internal Medicine Residency Program in Atlanticare Regional Medical Center, New Jersey receiving his Doctor of Medicine from Angeles University in the Philippines. He is referred to as "a latter day John Wayne, a quiet man who asks no quarter of life, but does not wait to be asked when caring is needed." Collins plans to search for a career as a Medical Director for a Palliative Care Program.



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