

VETERANS' ADVANTAGE

SUMMER 2003

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE

FOR NEW YORK / NEW JERSEY VETERANS

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Study shows reform efforts improve VA care



The quality of healthcare veterans that receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has improved significantly, according to a VA study recently published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. A major overhaul of the healthcare system that began in 1995 led to these improvements.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi recently said, “VA is the benchmark of quality for many areas of healthcare—including patient safety, computerized patient records and bar coding. This study demonstrates how VA’s performance measurements, accountability and incentives for improvement led to more rapid improvement rates.”

In this study, researchers compared preventive, acute and chronic care quality indicators with similar data from the Medicare fee-for-service program, using data from VA’s External Peer Review Program. Researchers from VA, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, the National Quality Forum and the University of California participated.

The current study represented all VA locations nationwide and included between 50,000 and 90,000 individual medical records each year since 1995. Reviewers gathered data on standard quality-of-care indicators, including preventive care markers like mammography frequency, vaccination and colorectal cancer screening. The data also included quality outpatient care markers such as reaching target blood pressure readings for patients with hypertension, prescribing aspirin within 24 hours of a myocardial infarction (heart attack), screening for cholesterol and controlling diabetes and heart disease. Outpatient preventive care markers included vaccinations and other screenings.

Researchers found all quality-of-care indicators measured by VA between 1994 and 2000 improved. They also found VA outperformed Medicare on all 11 markers the two systems had in common between 1997 and 1999, as well as on 12 of 13 indicators measured between 2000 and 2001. The study also compared the VA health system’s quality of care with Medicare fee-for-service care. For all measures that the two systems had in common, VA performed better and improved faster.

In 2002, the Institute of Medicine recognized VA for implementing the kind of changes it had recommended the previous year to improve the quality of healthcare in the U.S.

Every single employee in the VA New York/New Jersey Network should be proud of the work they do to achieve these high standards. Our nation’s veterans surely deserve the very best, and these study results demonstrate that VA continues to strive to provide the highest level of care.

James J. Farsetta, FACHE
Network Director

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>

We’re just a phone call away

Veterans, do you need information about medication dosages or prescription interactions, or do you have questions about your general health? Day or night, get answers to all your healthcare questions by calling the VA Nurses Helpline, 24 hours a day, at 1-800-877-6976.

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Outsmarting osteoporosis

Osteoporosis, the condition that causes bones to shrink and become brittle and susceptible to fracture, affects 10 million Americans, 80 percent of whom are women. It is estimated that osteoporosis is the culprit behind more than 1.5 million fractures annually. Yet it is often called a “silent disease” because symptoms of bone fragility may not appear until something such as a fracture points to its existence. If osteoporosis is caught in its early stages, lifestyle changes like diet and exercise as well as medication may slow down or arrest bone loss well before serious damage occurs.

Boning up

Why is osteoporosis so common? Much of the answer lies in the nature of our bones. Until a woman is in her mid-30s, bones are constantly being broken down and rebuilt. But after about age 30, hormonal changes trigger a loss in bone density, making them thinner and more brittle. After menopause, when the body stops producing bone-friendly estrogen, bone loss occurs more rapidly, leaving seniors at a growing risk.

While osteoporosis is primarily a disease that strikes seniors, age isn't the only factor. Other risk factors include:

- a personal history of fracture after age 45
- a family history of osteoporosis

- Caucasian or Asian ethnicity
- a small bone frame
- smoking
- alcoholism
- poor nutrition
- an inactive lifestyle
- certain medications,

such as long-term use of corticosteroids or thyroid replacement therapy and certain chemotherapy drugs

Testing 1, 2, 3

In the past, you might not have learned you had the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis until a broken rib or hip landed you in the hospital. Today, however, you can ask your VA healthcare provider about testing and screening that gives you precise information about bone density.

Skeleton keys

Once you've taken stock of your bones, talk to your VA healthcare provider about how to prevent and manage osteoporosis. Steps range from the simple to the sophisticated.

Lifestyle. First, eat a healthy, balanced diet that includes enough calcium and vitamin D. Get 1,000 milligrams (mg) of calcium daily—1,500 mg daily after age 65—from low-fat dairy products, leafy greens, broccoli, sardines with bones and enriched juices. Also, if you're not getting

enough vitamin D from sunlight, you may need a daily supplement.

Exercise. Get out and exercise for 30 minutes at least three times a week. Weight-bearing exercises such as walking and gardening are best. Don't smoke, and don't drink too much alcohol. Before beginning any exercise program, check with your VA healthcare provider.

Medication. If necessary, your doctor might prescribe additional medications.

Falls. Prevent outside falls by using a cane or a walker and wearing rubber-soled shoes. Inside, keep your rooms free of clutter, don't walk in socks or stockings and use a rubber bath mat in the shower.

Taking osteoporosis seriously and paying attention to your risk factors and lifestyle can help keep your bones strong. Regular check-ups with your healthcare provider will also help fight the disease.

For more information on VA services for women veterans, check the VA NY/NJ website at <http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03/womenvets/wvc.asp> or visit the national website at <http://www.va.gov/womenvet>. ■

Northport VA celebrates



Above, left to right: Robert S. Schuster, Northport VAMC Director; Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Dorothy Oxendine, National President of the American Gold Star Mothers; and James J. Farsetta, Network Director, VISN 3, cut the ceremonial cake at Northport VA Medical Center's 75th anniversary celebration.

This year marks a special time for us at Northport VA Medical Center—our 75th anniversary as a provider of quality healthcare services to veterans. Looking back, we take pride in the progress we have made in helping to better meet our veterans' needs—a mission that continues to guide us today.

1916: Northport VAMC gets its beginning

The year 1928 is thought of by many Americans as the last great year of the Roaring '20s. It was the climax of a flamboyant period in American history, marked by shocking new lifestyles, widespread

prosperity and, for many, the fulfillment of the American dream.

One person living the dream was John Dennis Ryan. Under his guidance, the Anaconda Copper Company became one of the most successful industrial enterprises in American history. Although he died in 1933 during the Great Depression, his assets were said to total more than \$700,000,000. During World War I, he served as a member of the War Council of the American Red Cross. Shortly afterward, he became Director of the Bureau of Aircraft Production and was eventually appointed Assistant Secretary of War in August 1916. It is with John D. Ryan that the his-



The honorable Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, gives the keynote speech at Northport VA Medical Center's 75th anniversary celebration.

tory of Northport VAMC has its beginning.

1928: VA hospital opens for veterans

By 1921, Congress was struggling to provide veterans from World War I with the medical care

75 years of caring

they were entitled to through the Bureau of War Risk Insurance. So federal lawmakers established the United States Veterans' Bureau and assigned public health service hospitals to the new agency's control. Brigadier General Frank T. Hines headed the Bureau for seven years until being named the first Administrator of Veterans Affairs in 1930.

Early in his leadership, Hines realized the need for new and sophisticated hospitals and appointed a committee to choose a site in the New York area for what would be the Bureau's most modern 1,000-bed hospital. The committee considered more than 250 locations in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York. Hines finally approved the committee's recommendation to build the giant hospital on Long Island, close to the tiny, but picturesque, Northport harbor village. The government purchased 552 acres of farmland for approximately \$193,000. The owner of the land was none other than John D. Ryan.

2003: Northport honors moms of deceased servicemembers

On April 15, 2003, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi traveled to Northport VAMC to help celebrate the facility's 75 years of dedication and caring. The celebration began with the unveiling of a Gold Star Mother Monument in the center's outpatient pavilion. Secretary Principi; Richard Kitson, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 11; Dorothy

Oxendine, National President of the American Gold Star Mothers; James J. Farsetta, Network Director, VISN 3; and Robert S. Schuster, Northport VAMC Director, together unveiled the monument, which pays tribute to the mothers of servicemembers who were killed in the line of duty. The Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 11, funded the monument.

Aniceto Delect, a 105-year-old WWI veteran, began the formal anniversary program, which is located in the same site of the hospital's 1928 dedication. With help from the children of VA's Wee Luv 'Em Day Care Center,

he led the Pledge of Allegiance. Secretary Principi, in his keynote address, recognized Vivienne Ryder, a Northport VA volunteer for more than 57 years, and Albert Mehl, a VA employee with more than 60 years of federal service.

Since 1928, Northport VA has grown substantially, providing a broad spectrum of medical, surgical and rehabilitative care to thousands of Long Island veterans. As American servicemen and women continue to advance the causes of freedom, Northport's staff and volunteers, as the caregivers of veterans, are preparing to care for another generation of America's heroes. ■

POW/MIA poster honors troops



September 19 marks SPOW/MIA Recognition Day, but as with tradition, this year's poster was unveiled on June 26 during a national organization's annual meeting, according to Jerry D. Jennings, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs. The dominant picture on this year's poster, taken in March, reveals infantrymen fighting in the desert during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Jennings says the words "You are not forgotten," which grace the POW/MIA flag, "... remind us of their sacrifice for our freedom." He also says the rippling red, white and blue banner on the poster shows clearly and proudly through the battle smoke and leads American warriors forward. "Yes, we are at war," he says calmly. ■



VA MEDICAL CENTER
BRONX, NEW YORK

Technology speeds healing

Bronx VA goes beyond medicine in veteran care

BY JIM CONNELL, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST



Employee Robert Connolly helps veteran Stanley Kevelson master computer skills at the Bronx VAMC.

A patient's emotional well-being plays an important role in his or her recovery from illness or injury. At the Bronx VA Medical Center, this concept is supported by a unique program not typically found in a healthcare setting: a computer lab offering veterans the chance to learn technological skills while connecting with loved ones.

The Bronx VAMC information technology specialists and volunteers, with support from the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association (EPVA), developed a computer lab to help paralyzed veterans use computers to communicate with family and friends. The Bronx VAMC is a 315-bed tertiary care medical center with several specialties, including a 65-bed spinal cord injury (SCI) center that cares for paralyzed veterans who don't have the use of some or all of their limbs. The lab provides mental stimula-

tion and physical motivation for the veterans, while allowing access to their families and the world beyond the medical center walls.

Personal training shows results

This experience can be both exhilarating and challenging for veterans, many who have never used a computer. Bronx VA volunteers and staff provide one-on-one training to help veterans feel comfortable with learning the new skills that can enrich their lives and help them recover better.

Ms. Catherine Watkins, the daughter of a spinal cord-injured patient who spent four months recovering at the medical center, recently wrote the medical center director, praising the program: "My father, age 77, was resistant to the idea of computers and felt worn out from his extended hospital stay, but your staff set up an e-mail account

for him and then showed him how to use it. Shortly thereafter, he was in contact with many friends and family members. You even assisted him in creating a stunning anniversary card for my mother for their 50th wedding anniversary that included their wedding photo. Thanks to the program, my father took home a computer configured to meet his specific needs and a new skill of which he was quite proud."

Linda Bund, Director of Education and Information Management at the Bronx VAMC, describes the program as an oasis for veterans who suffer from debilitating physical limitations. "It's not exactly alternative medicine," says Bund, "but it certainly has improved the patients' enthusiasm to get well!"

Donations keep program going

Donations by veterans groups provide much of the special equipment used in this program and all of the computers that discharged veterans take home. The Bronx VA owes much credit to the EPVA and, specifically, Pete Adesso, its president, who spearheaded the initiative to build the lab and continues to support it with EPVA resources.

Anyone interested in donating quality computer equipment (586 Megahertz or higher) for use by our veterans should contact the EPVA at (718) 803-3782, ext. 203. ■

Unparalleled research at VA makes a difference in patient care

BY ERIK LANGHOFF,
BRONX CHIEF OF STAFF

No other healthcare system matches VA in the area of research. To date, VA research has been awarded three Nobel Prizes, one of which Dr. Roslyn Yalow of the Bronx VA Medical Center received. In addition, VA research has received six Lasker Awards and numerous other accolades. With \$1.3 billion in annual congressional funding, VA not only has advanced medicine but also has attracted public attention to recent clinical studies, including knee surgery outcomes, heart disease diagnoses and treatment, prophylactic pneumonia vaccination, diabetes care, HIV-1 and hepatitis C research.

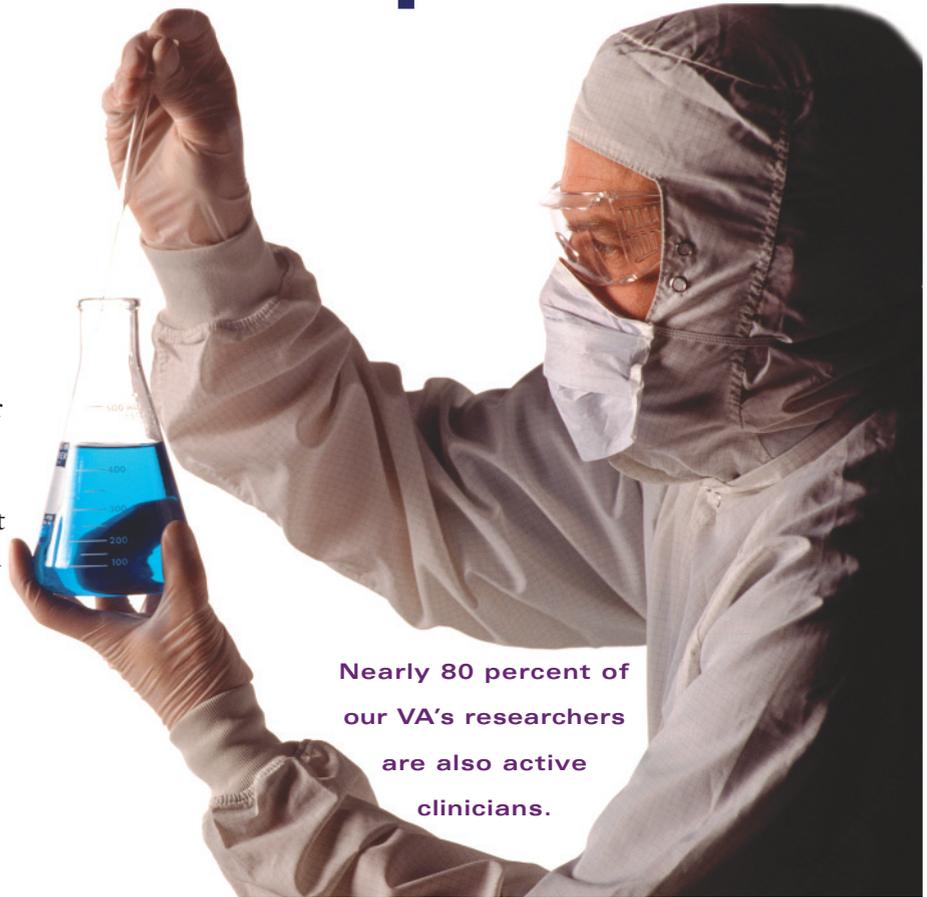
Why is it important to maintain excellence in research when there are so many other needs to be filled?

It's important because VA offers a unique approach to research that significantly benefits our veterans' health. Nearly 80 percent of our VA's research investigators are also active clinicians—quite rare in the

current research environment. In many non-VA institutions, clinician investigators increasingly face demands to select either research or a clinical track as a career choice.



Erik Langhoff, Bronx Chief of Staff, discusses how VA research helps improve patient care.



Nearly 80 percent of
our VA's researchers
are also active
clinicians.

Working at the interface of health-care delivery *and* research provides VA researchers with an unparalleled environment, allowing them to see their results rapidly applied. This, in turn, helps improve patient care.

Where do we see VA research challenges in the future?

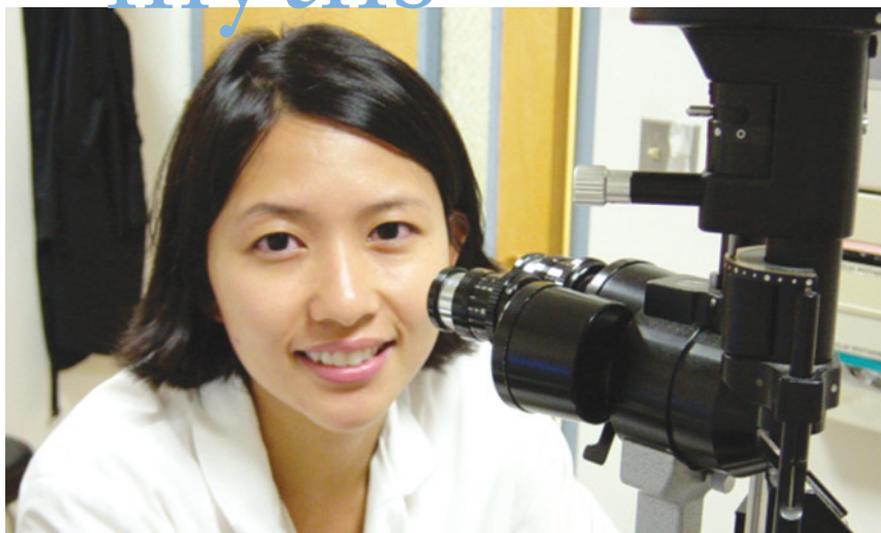
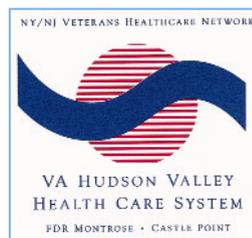
In the 1960s and 1970s, biochemical research laid the groundwork for our current advances in biotechnology and gene therapy. In the 1980s and 1990s, we saw tremendous progress in immunology research, which improved our understanding of molecular and cellular communication. This pre-

pared us for the next challenging frontier in neurobiological research and understanding of memory.

In the future, I anticipate our focus in VA research will be on neurodegenerative and chronic degenerative diseases, as our veteran population ages and becomes more at risk for associated medical problems. Having more than \$10 million in research funding puts the Bronx VA Medical Center in a strong position to begin to tackle these issues for our veterans and to prepare for increased clinical research support directed at these important health concerns—now and in the future. ■

Dispelling glaucoma myths

BY CHRISTINE LAW, O.D.



Christine Law, O.D., VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, tells the facts about identifying and managing glaucoma.

Glaucoma, one of the leading causes of blindness in the Western world, often causes a painless loss of vision, so it frequently goes undetected. Understanding the facts about glaucoma and getting early treatment can help preserve your vision in later life. Dr. Christine Law of the VA Hudson Valley Health Care System clarifies some common misconceptions about the disease.

Myth #1: Glaucoma only affects the elderly.

Although glaucoma mainly affects the elderly, it can strike individuals of any age. Approximately one in 10,000 babies are born with glaucoma each year. Glaucoma also tends to affect African-Americans at a younger age than other races.

Myth #2: A person can detect glaucoma symptoms before he or she becomes affected.

Unfortunately, the most common form of glaucoma—*primary open angle glaucoma*—is entirely painless and can be symptom free initially. Since glaucoma first affects a person's peripheral vision, and we use both eyes at the same time to see, one can overlook these early changes.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a disease of the optic nerve, which is essentially a cable containing about a million fibers that relay messages from the eye's retina to the brain. As glaucoma progresses, these fibers begin to die, leading to loss of vision. If undetected, they may continue to die, and, in some cases, lead to blindness.

The only way to identify glaucoma is through a complete eye health evaluation.

Myth #3: All glaucoma can be cured.

Despite many advances in treatment, no cure exists yet for primary open angle glaucoma. In most cases, the disease can be managed by eye drops or surgery to try to reduce the eye's pressure. This preserves and maintains optic nerve health and, therefore, the patient's vision. However, once vision is lost to glaucoma, it cannot be restored.

Myth #4: If your eye pressure is less than 20 mm Hg, you don't have glaucoma.

In the past, intraocular pressure (IOP) was regarded as the most important indicator of glaucoma. But we now know that different eyes have varying tolerances for pressure. For example, in one eye, a pressure of 25 mm Hg consistently shows no evidence of optic nerve damage or vision loss. In another eye, this pressure may cause significant glaucomatous optic nerve damage.

Get tested

The best way to protect yourself is to see your eye-care professional regularly for a complete eye health examination, including a stereoscopic—or binocular—view of the optic nerve through a dilated pupil. "A complete eye health evaluation is the only way to check for glaucoma," Dr. Law says. ■

Fatten up your diet... the right way

BY CONNIE TIRADO, R.D.



Connie Tirado, registered dietitian at Hudson Valley Health Care System, helps patients get the right amounts of fats to stay healthy.

Did you know your body needs some dietary fat for proper development and functioning? Fats supply energy, enable growth, help produce hormones and carry the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K. Fats are divided into three major categories: **saturated, monounsaturated** and **polyunsaturated**. Knowing which fats benefit—or harm—your body and consuming the right amounts of each will help keep you healthy.

Go easy on saturated fats

Some studies have linked diets high in saturated fat with an increased risk of heart disease and several cancers, including lung, colon, rectal, breast, endometrial and prostate. You find saturated fats in animal sources like meat, whole milk and cheese, and in tropical oils such as coconut, palm and palm kernel.

The National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) recommends that you restrict your saturated fat intake to 7 percent of your calories. This means if you consume 2,000 calories a day, you should aim for no more than 15 grams of saturated fat. Also avoid *trans fats* (trans fatty acids), which are created by saturating vegetable oils to increase the shelf life of food. These fats increase your LDL (bad) cholesterol, while lowering your HDL (good) cholesterol. To avoid trans fats, stay away from shortening, commer-

cially prepared baked goods, deep-fried foods, chips, cookies, crackers, margarine and salad dressings. Also beware of foods that list partially hydrogenated oils as an ingredient.

Help yourself to monounsaturated fats

Monounsaturated fats, in contrast, are generally considered to be good for you.

You get them in olives, olive oil, canola oil, avocados and nuts like almonds, peanuts and pistachios.

Studies have found cultures that consume a greater portion of monounsaturated fat than other fats have lower incidences of heart disease and cancer.

One type of monounsaturated fat, *omega-3 fatty acid*, is thought to produce significant health benefits. It's found in salmon, rainbow trout, mackerel and bluefish as well as in canola oil, flaxseed and walnuts. Recent evidence suggests that just two to three 3-ounce servings of fatty fish a week can benefit your body.



Lower your cholesterol with polyunsaturated fats

If you consume polyunsaturated fats in place of saturated fats, you can help lower your LDL cholesterol. Many nuts, seeds and their

oils contain it. The NCEP recommends that about 10 percent of your calories come from polyunsaturated fats—about 23 grams in a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet.

Find balance

Connie Tirado, registered dietitian, Hudson Valley Health Care System, says, “Fat is necessary for the body, but in the right amounts. The NCEP now recommends that 25 to 35 percent of your calories come from fat—primarily monounsaturated and polyunsaturated, with a stricter limit on saturated and a ban on trans fats.”

To help achieve this balance, add nuts on salad instead of cheese, use olive or canola oil when pan frying or sautéing and replace butter with canola oil. For a healthy bread spread, try olive oil, peanut butter, roasted garlic or avocado slices. ■





National History Project keeps memories alive

It is estimated that we lose 1,500 veterans a day, and their priceless stories are going with them.

To prevent this from happening, the Veterans History Project is acquiring veterans' and other citizens' personal stories to establish a permanent collection—a lasting legacy of recorded interviews and documents chronicling war experiences and how they affected America. The project, supported by the American Folklore Center, which is part of the Library of Congress, is now into its third year.

Veterans share stories

Typical of these personal histories are poignant and personal remembrances. During a recent interview, an elderly marine officer's eyes filled with tears as he described a battlefield comrade's last moments of life: "... and I looked into his eyes and knew he was dead." An Army Air Corps veteran held a torn and stained pair of army trousers and said, "I was wearing these when the Germans picked me up after I bailed out of our bomber. That stain is about where the doctor had to take my foot off. I kept them all these years."

These stories and many more like them are taken from taped interviews with ex-servicemen and women as part of the ongoing project. The interviews are creating a record for future generations and are available as research material. "We are very excited to have

Honoring veterans for their sacrifice



"We owe our veterans our profound appreciation for their sacrifices and services to our nation and its future. We also owe all our citizens an opportunity to appreciate and honor those men and women who have protected our nation in the gravest of times," said James H. Billington, who heads the Library of Congress. "Together with the help of all Americans, we can honor our war veterans and create a lasting body of documentary materials that will inform and educate our citizens in the decades ahead."

Stories will teach others

Ultimately, the national collection of personal histories on audio- and videotape—including letters, maps, diaries, photographs and home movies—will be of immeasurable value to historians, educators, students, authors and filmmakers. The Library of Congress will create a comprehensive, searchable catalog of all materials collected as part of this project so researchers and the public will be able to access them.

Local veterans interested in being interviewed can arrange an appointment at the VANJHCS Lyons campus by calling Mary Beth Hynoski or Lillie Battle at (908) 604-5814. Three teams of interviewers operate on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Specify your choice of date and time: 9:30 a.m. or 11 a.m. ■

an active role in this important national program," said Kenneth H. Mizrach, Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs New Jersey Health Care System (VANJHCS).

The ambitious project is being conducted nationwide by a supporting volunteer corps of interviewers. Each videotaped interview takes 90 minutes. Pictures and other documents are recorded, and copies are stored with each veteran's file. The veteran is later supplied with a personal tape that can be shared with friends and family members.

New center supports war-related illnesses

Servicemembers suffering from war-related illnesses can get better support and care, thanks to the May 30 opening of the East Orange War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC).

The East Orange site was selected for federal funding after a competitive, scientific, peer-review process. According to Kenneth H. Mizrach, the Department of

Veterans Affairs New Jersey Health Care System (VANJHCS) Director, "The purpose of the WRIISC is to address veterans' health concerns related to service in conflicts and improve the care of active-duty and veteran patients with war-related illnesses." He added that the East Orange location is one of only two such centers in the country; the other is at the VA Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Shortly after the first Gulf War, some servicemembers began to seek care for a wide range of symptoms they believed to be conflict-related. In many cases, the military medical community found it was not prepared to deal with these health issues, particularly when the presenting symptoms did not fit with a known disease.

The East Orange WRIISC is developing appropriate strategies

that can be implemented before, during and after future conflicts and peacekeeping missions to minimize illness and injury. It focuses on medical evaluation, research, risk communication and education for military personnel. The educational component will train VA's healthcare providers to better address and evaluate specific deployment-related health issues.



Above, left to right: Kenneth H. Mizrach, Director, VANJHCS; Benjamin H. Natelson, M.D., Director, East Orange WRIISC; James J. Farsetta, Network Director, VISN 3; Rodney P. Frelinghuysen, Congressman, 11th District, N.J.; Robert Bowser, Mayor, East Orange (partially hidden); and Frances M. Murphy, M.D., M.P.H., VA's Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Health Policy Coordination, kick off the WRIISC's celebration.

The East Orange WRIISC is academically affiliated with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. Additionally, it collaborates with the Department of Defense, including its Deployment Health Clinical Center, to ensure that active-duty military benefit as much as veterans do. The center replaced the nationwide Gulf War Referral Centers.

The East Orange WRIISC is actively seeking veterans with symp-

toms of no known medical cause, such as fatigue and concentration problems, that occurred during or after their service. Veterans with undiagnosed medical symptoms or deployment-related health concerns should—with their primary care provider—request an evaluation from the WRIISC so East Orange WRIISC specialists can begin their assessment. For more information, call toll free at 1 (800) 248-8005. ■

Golf driving range opens



The Department of Veterans Affairs New Jersey Health Care System (VANJHCS) and Middlesex County's Economic Opportunities Corporation (MCEOC) announce the grand opening of the MAVERIC Golf Driving Range and Learning Center, located on the Lyons campus.

The opening was celebrated in grand style with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Wednesday, May 14. James J. Farsetta, Network Director, VISN 3; William Holmes, Mayor of Bernards Township; Carroll Thomas, Chief Executive Officer, MCEOC; Jim Baird, U.S. Golf Association; veteran stakeholders; Veterans Service Organization state commanders; homeless veterans who will benefit from the program; employees; and volunteers participated in the event.

For more information about the MAVERIC Golf Driving Range and Learning Center, please contact Veterans Industries at (908) 647-0180, ext. 4166. ■



Above, left to right: John Kuhn, Chief, Homeless/Domiciliary Services, VANJHCS; Jim Baird, Agronomist, U.S. Golf Association; Bob Valentino, Marketing Director, MAVERIC; James J. Farsetta, Network Director, VISN 3; Kenneth H. Mizrach, Director, VANJHCS; and Carroll Thomas, CEO, MCEOC, celebrate the MAVERIC Golf Driving Range and Learning Center's opening.



Northport

Skin check: A Northport VAMC step-by-step guide to skin self-exam

Everyone is at risk for skin cancer. The most common form of cancer, it strikes 1.2 million Americans each year and accounts for half of all newly diagnosed cancers. However, by performing a monthly skin self-exam, you can catch potentially cancerous skin conditions when they are still highly curable.

The head-to-toe exam

To get started, you'll need a bright light, a hand mirror, a blow-dryer, a full-length mirror and a chair. Use the bright light to check your entire body thoroughly.

- **First inspect your face, ears, head and the inside of your mouth using the hand mirror.** The blow-dryer will help part your hair for a closer look at your scalp.
- **Next, examine your hands (including your fingernails and palms), elbows, arms and under-arms.** Raise your arms and check your right and left sides.
- **Now examine your neck, chest**

and torso. If you're a woman, check beneath your breasts. Use the hand mirror to carefully look at your back, shoulders and the back of your neck.

- **In the full-length mirror, focus on your buttocks and the backs of your legs.** Sit down on your chair and examine your genitals. Inspect your legs and feet, including your heels, soles, toenails and the area between your toes.

What to look for

If you notice any of the following skin changes, see your physician immediately. He or she can determine if the condition needs further medical attention:

- any new growths, including sores, lesions, nodules and pearly, waxy, colored or suspicious bumps that may or may not cause pain
- a change in a spot or in skin color, itching, scaling, bleeding, pain or tenderness

When examining moles, follow the "ABCD" checklist. (See "Is Your Mole Malignant?" on this page.)

Help prevent skin cancer

These days, ozone depletion means the sun's UV rays can do more damage than ever. Yet taking these simple protective measures can prevent up to 80 percent of skin cancers.

- **Avoid the sun between 10 a.m.**

Is your mole malignant?

To identify potential malignancies in moles, follow this "ABCD" checklist:

- **Asymmetry.** One half doesn't match the other in shape.
- **Border.** The mole isn't round, but irregular—with ragged, notched or blurred edges.
- **Color.** The mole is not a normal, uniform brown but is instead a varying shade (or shades) of tan, brown, black, red, blue, blue-black or white.
- **Diameter.** The mole is about the size of a pencil eraser—a quarter inch in diameter.

A recently proposed addition to this rule includes "E" for elevation or enlargement of the mole.

and 3 p.m., when the sun's damaging rays are strongest.

- **Rain or shine, always wear sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 15.** Apply 20 minutes before going outside to allow your skin to absorb the cream.
- **Wear a wide-brimmed hat and clothes that completely cover you,** including a long-sleeved shirt and a long skirt or pants.
- **Sport sunglasses that offer UV protection.**

Veterans with concerns about skin cancer are encouraged to speak with their Northport VA Medical Center primary care provider. ■

Gold Star Mother tribute at Northport VAMC



Above, left to right: Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Richard Kitson, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 11; and Dorothy Oxendine, National President of the American Gold Star Mothers, hold a replica at the unveiling of the Gold Star Mother Monument.

From the Revolutionary War to present day Iraq, American servicemen and women have never hesitated to fight for—and die for—our nation's security and freedom.

While we remember our war dead with ceremonies and visits to national cemeteries, not enough attention is paid to our American Gold Star Mothers, women who have suffered the supreme sacrifice of motherhood by losing a son or a daughter to war. On the 75th anniversary of Northport VA Medical Center, Director Robert S. Schuster and Suffolk County Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 11, dedicated a Gold Star Mother Monument in



VA's main lobby in the presence of National President of the American Gold Star Mothers Dorothy Oxendine.

Upon learning of Schuster's wish to establish a Gold Star Mother Monument at Northport VA, Richard Kitson, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 11, and the VVA Board of Directors insisted on funding the tribute. ■



Northport VA says 'thank you' to volunteers

On Tuesday, May 6, Northport VA Medical Center held its annual Volunteer Luncheon and Recognition Ceremony at the well-known Huntington Townhouse. More than 500 volunteers and their spouses dined, danced and were honored by the VA staff for valuable contributions of time and talent throughout the year.

If you are interested in finding out more about volunteer opportunities at Northport VAMC, call (631) 261-4400, ext. 7183. ■



Above, left to right: Rosie A. Chatman, R.N., VAMC Associate Director for Patient Care/Nursing Service; James A. Clark, Associate Medical Center Director; Thelma Cole-Reid, U.S. Women's Army Corps veteran and dedicated VAMC volunteer; and Edward J. Mack, M.D., VAMC Chief of Staff, pose at Northport VAMC's annual Volunteer Recognition Ceremony.



Healthcare Happenings

Information for Veteran Patients of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System



Cancer survivors celebrate

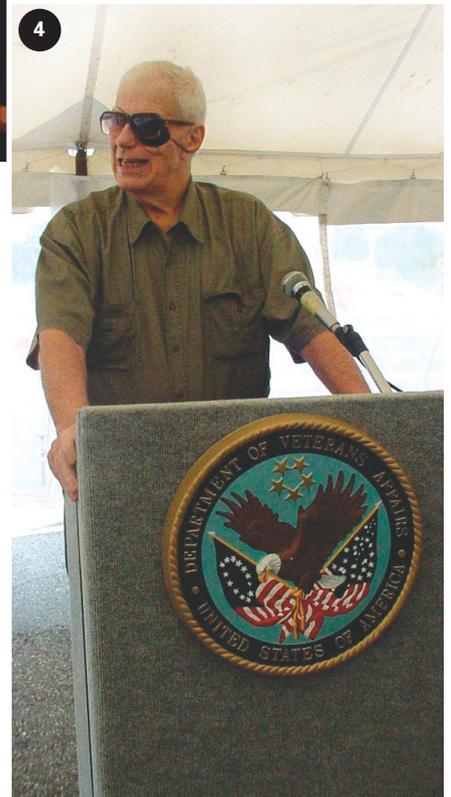
VA New York Harbor Healthcare System sponsored the 7th Annual National Cancer Survivors Day on June 1 at the Brooklyn campus. Despite the rain, approximately 150 veterans, family members and community residents attended this celebration honoring veteran cancer survivors, cancer care physicians and clinical and research staff.

Speakers at the Survivors Day ceremony included veteran George Archer, who receives cancer care at both the New York and Brooklyn campuses. Archer spoke of his struggle and acceptance of his disease. WABC TV Channel 7 News anchor David Ushery, WABC TV Channel 7

News producer Darcy Bonfils and WOR Radio host Arthur Schwartz also addressed the audience and discussed how this disease has touched their friends and families.

Dr. Simberkoff, Executive Chief of Staff, provided the keynote address. He noted the outstanding cancer care team at VANYHHS and the personal courage, strength and inspiration that veterans with cancer possess.

The Radiation Oncology Service at the Brooklyn campus of VANYHHS recently underwent renovation, doubling the service's size to nearly 11,000 square feet. Improvements included adding and updating inpatient and outpatient examination, treatment and waiting rooms. ■



1. Approximately 150 guests attend the 7th Annual Cancer Survivors Day ceremony.
2. VA staff provides educational materials and screenings.
3. Left to right: WABC TV Channel 7 News producer Darcy Bonfils, Executive Chief of Staff Dr. Simberkoff, WABC TV Channel 7 News anchor David Ushery and WOR Radio host Arthur Schwartz share their experiences.
4. Veteran George Archer addresses the Cancer Survivors Day audience.

Ensuring quality care at VANYHHS



Agencies accrediting VANYHHS include:

- Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations
- College of American Pathologists
- Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities-Physical Rehabilitation
- Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities-Psychosocial Rehabilitation
- American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer
- American College of Radiology
- VHA-Clinical Program of Excellence in Cardiac Surgery
- VHA-Clinical Program of Excellence in HIV
- VHA-Clinical Program of Excellence in Medical Rehabilitation
- VHA-Clinical Program of Excellence in Renal Dialysis

We are proud to be recognized by a number of agencies that accredit hospitals and hospital services, among them the Joint

Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). Accreditation by the JCAHO is a recognized nationwide symbol of quality that shows our organization has met or exceeded certain performance standards. To earn and maintain this accreditation, VANYHHS must undergo an on-site survey by a Joint Commission survey team at least every three years.

Accreditation requires a commitment to provide excellence in healthcare to meet the accrediting agencies' rigorous standards. With these achievements, VANYHHS continues to lead the way in delivering the highest quality healthcare to metropolitan New York/New Jersey veterans. ■

At VA New York Harbor Healthcare System, we set high standards for how we perform, diagnose and treat illness and injury. Patient assessments, medication use, operative procedures, patient rights, staff qualifications, laboratory and emergency services, infection control and social services are only some of the services that both the Veterans Health Administration and independent accreditation agencies evaluate.

Refill your prescriptions with ease

Obtaining refills for prescription medications has never been easier. Use one of the following three options **10 days before you run out!**

- **First**, when at any of VA New York Harbor Healthcare System campuses, drop off your prescription refill request slips in boxes located near the outpatient pharmacies.

- **Second**, mail your refill requests to any of our campuses. Once received, requests will be bar-coded into our computer system and then transferred to our

Consolidated Mailout Pharmacy. Your medications will be mailed to your home.

- **Third**, use the telephone for refill requests. Two toll-free telephone numbers provide automated service 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and cost nothing to use. Simply dial 1(888) 207-2004 or 1(888) 216-9094, punch in your Social Security number and follow the directions. You can check the status of your request day or night.



If you do not have a touch-tone phone, choose the option to speak with a live attendant during normal working hours. During periods of peak calls or when the outpatient pharmacy is closed, use the voice mail option and leave a message. You will receive a call back.

Rest assured that a registered pharmacist checks your medication history, proper dosing and potential drug interactions, one by one, to ensure your safety. Still, please remember that you are a partner in your healthcare and always educate yourself before you medicate.

And, again, remember to use one of the above methods 10 days before you run out of medicine. ■

Where YOU CAN FIND US—ANYTIME

Bronx

Medical Center:

130 West Kingsbridge Road
Bronx, NY 10468
(718) 584-9000

Community Clinics:

23 South Broadway
White Plains, NY 10601
(914) 421-1951

124 New Main Street
Yonkers, NY 10701
(914) 375-8055

41-03 Queens Boulevard
Sunnyside, NY 11104
(718) 741-4800

953 Southern Boulevard
Bronx, NY 10459
(718) 741-4900

VA NY Harbor Health Care System

Medical Centers:

Brooklyn Campus
800 Poly Place
Brooklyn, NY 11209
(718) 836-6600

New York Campus
423 East 23rd Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 686-7500

VA Primary and Extended Care Center

179th Street & Linden Boulevard
St. Albans, NY 11425
(718) 526-1000

Community Clinics:

40 Flatbush Extension—8th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 439-4300

21 Water Street
Staten Island, NY 10304
(718) 630-3550

55 West 125th Street—11th Floor
New York, NY 10027
(212) 828-5265

245 West Houston Street
New York, NY 10014
(212) 337-2569

1413 Fulton Street
Brooklyn, NY 11216
(718) 636-4500

VA New Jersey Health Care System

Medical Centers:

East Orange Campus
385 Tremont Avenue
East Orange, NJ 07018-1095
(973) 676-1000

Lyons Campus
151 Knollcroft Road
Lyons, NJ 07939
(908) 647-0180

Community Clinics:

970 Route 70
Brick, NJ 08724
(732) 206-8900

654 East Jersey Street—Suite 2A
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
(908) 994-0120

171 Jersey Street—Building 36
Trenton, NJ 08611-2425
(609) 989-2355

385 Prospect Avenue
Hackensack, NJ 07601
(201) 487-1390

115 Christopher Columbus Drive
Jersey City, NJ 07302
(201) 435-3055

317 George Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
(732) 729-0646

540 West Hanover Avenue
Morris Plains, NJ 07950
(973) 539-9791
(973) 539-9794

20 Washington Place
Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 645-1441

Patterson Army Health Clinic
Building 1075, Stephenson Avenue
Fort Monmouth, NJ 07703
732-532-4483

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System

Medical Centers:

Montrose Campus
Route 9A/P.O. Box 100
Montrose, NY 10548-0100
(914) 737-4400

Castle Point Campus
Castle Point, NY 12511
(845) 831-2000

Community Clinics:

275 Broadway
Monticello, NY 12601
(845) 791-4936

150 Pike Street
Port Jervis, NY 12771
(845) 856-5396

20 Squadron Boulevard
New City, NY 10970
(845) 634-8942

110 Crystal Run Road
Middletown, NY 10949
(845) 692-0551

488 Freedom Plains Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603
(845) 452-5151

1875 Route 6
Warwick Savings Bank—2nd Floor
Carmel, NY 10512
(845) 228-5291

VA Mobile Clinic
Call 1 (800) 269-8749

Northport (Long Island)

Medical Center:

79 Middleville Road
Northport, NY 11768
(631) 261-4400

Mental Health Clinics:

235 Merrick Road
Lynbrook, NY 11563
(516) 887-3666 (Mon. & Thurs. only)

98 Hubbard Avenue
Riverhead, NY 11901
(631) 727-7171 (Thurs. only)

560 N. Delaware Avenue
Lindenhurst, NY 11757
(631) 884-1133 (Tues. only)

39 Nassau Avenue
Islip, NY 11751
(631) 581-5330 (Wed. only)

4 Phyllis Drive
Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 475-6610 (Tues. & Fri. only)

Mt. Sinai Community Center
North Country Road
Mt. Sinai, NY 11766
(631) 473-4068 (Mon. only)

23 Foster Avenue
Sayville, NY 11782
(631) 563-1105 (Thurs. only)

1425 Old Country Road
Plainview, NY 11803
(516) 572-8567 (Tues., Wed. & Fri. only)

Primary Care Component:

4 Phyllis Drive
Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 758-4419
(Mon., Wed., Thurs. & Fri. only)

1425 Old Country Road
Plainview, NY 11803
(516) 694-6008 (Mon.–Fri.)

Westhampton Air Base
(by appointment only)
150 Old Riverhead Road
Westhampton, NY 11978

NY/NJ Veterans Integrated Service
Network 3
130 W. Kingsbridge Road
VISN Office
Bronx, NY 10468

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>

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