



Health Beat



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News from the South Central VA Health Care Network

www.visn16.med.va.gov

National Suicide Prevention Hotline (1-800-273-TALK) Has Dedicated Line for Veterans

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Veterans experiencing emotional and suicidal crisis can now immediately access emergency counseling services from VA employees 24 hours per day/7 days per week via the **National Suicide Prevention Hotline (1-800-273-TALK)**. The 2004 VHA Mental Health Strategic Plan specified the development of a national hotline for veterans experiencing emotional crisis. VHA partnered with the established national hotline operated by the Suicide Prevention Lifeline Organization (a grantee of

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration – SAMHSA), hired a group of experienced crisis counselors to respond to the calls of veterans and their concerned family members, and established a process for ensuring timely follow-up for the veteran at local VA facilities through the network of Suicide Prevention Coordinators. Some of the frequently asked questions about the National Suicide Prevention Hotline are answered below.

What happens when a veteran calls the National Suicide Prevention Hotline?

The caller immediately hears an instruction to enter the number “1” if he or she is a veteran or a concerned family member of a veteran. Once entered, the call is immediately transferred to the VA crisis call center located in Canandaigua, NY. The VA staff member receiving the call immediately assesses the urgency of the call, whether or not emergency rescue services are needed, provides counseling, and with the

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Intellidose Software System Is Sole Source for Chemotherapy Ordering

by Terry Algood, VISN 16 Pharmacy Benefits



The IntelliDose Software System is a commercial product that can meet the needs for ordering chemotherapy with the degree of sophistication needed to provide order checks for min/max dosing, dosing of specific chemotherapy agents, and tracking the history of dosing (e.g., lifetime or per cycle dosing) of these critical

agents. Since VA’s Pharmacy Re-Engineering project in this area has been delayed, the current impetus is to use existing Commercial Off-the-Shelf (COTS) software to meet such needs. The IntelliDose System prevents common errors based on inadvertent incomplete orders, outdated patient information, calculation errors, and

unintended non-standard terminology or procedures.

The IntelliDose Software System interfaces with VA’s VistA software to provide the ordering safety checks and dose tracking. No other system offers the unique features in the IntelliDose system, which include:

- a. Allows entire multi-cycle treatment plans to be built to meet local ordering protocols at virtually all levels of complexity related to polychemo, supportive agents, lab studies, and schedules.
- b. Maintains a record (readily retrievable during order entry) of patients’ prior treatment plans and order sets. The prior

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South Central VA Health Care Network, also known as VISN 16, is one of 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) of the Department of Veterans Affairs. VISN 16 is comprised of 10 medical centers and 37 community-based outpatient clinics that serve veterans in all or parts of the following eight states— Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Missouri, Alabama and Florida.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

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permission of the veteran, sends an electronic consult to the Suicide Prevention Coordinator in the veteran's immediate area. The local Suicide Prevention Coordinator then contacts the veteran and works with the veteran to connect him or her to mental health services at the local VA facility, community based outpatient clinic, Vet Center, or community mental health center depending on the individual needs of the veteran.

When should a veteran or someone concerned about a veteran call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline?

It is important to recognize the warning signs of suicide and respond immediately. These warning signs include but are not limited to:

- Thinking about hurting or killing oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself
- Talking about death, dying or suicide
- Self-destructive behavior such as drug abuse, weapons, etc.
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling like there is no reason to live

- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Rage or Anger
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, mood swings
- Increasing alcohol or drug abuse.

(Source: [Suicide Prevention: Men & Women Veterans Know the Warning Signs of Suicide](#), Department of Veterans Affairs)

How can veterans and their family members access the hotline?

The National Suicide Prevention Hotline is available 24 hours per day and 7 days per week. Veterans and their concerned family members or friends can call the hotline at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** and select number 1.

Interpretation services are also available on the veteran option.

To find out more about Suicide, the signs and symptoms visit the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> or speak with your health care provider. However, if you feel your symptoms are so severe that you feel you may be a danger to yourself or others, get help immediately by calling the hotline or 911.

VA Reaches Out to Veterans in Cyberspace to Provide Health Information in the Virtual World

Washington – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reaching out to veterans and their families in an innovative new way by setting up an office inside the Second Life virtual world at www.SecondLife.com.

Virtual worlds are online three-dimensional spaces, enabling users to interact with each other and their environment through an animated character called an 'avatar,' which is similar to characters used in video games.

In VA's new office, avatars can view and link to important information about VA health care and benefits. The avatars can interact with other avatars and communicate further with VA.

The features provide a creative way to access information that also is posted on VA's Internet site. Avatars also can watch videos, listen to audio, view pictures, participate in presentations before a live audience, link to external web sites, and set up a live conference to communicate with other avatars.

"This communication strategy enhances VA's outreach to new veterans and their family members through a non-traditional pathway such as Cyberspace," said Dr. Michael J. Kussman, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "The office provides an imaginative, light-hearted approach to offer veterans who like to go online to obtain information they need and can use."

The pilot project is housed in a modern three-story virtual office building. Posters hang on the walls, showing the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) homepage and a map of the United States avatars may touch to obtain official information about VA medical

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Intellidose (story continued from page 1)

set can be used as a template for current treatment.

- c. Provides a 'contraindications' check against the patient's current medical conditions and provides alerts when a drug could affect an existing condition.
- d. Calculates and provides alerts for cumulative dose limits.
- e. Lab values can be set for age and gender. Abnormal values are highlighted

and an alert is given when parameters set in a template for pre-treatment lab values are exceeded. It also provides an alert if labs are no current with pre-set parameters.

- f. Calculates body surface area (BSA) for each drug from 3 available formulae.
- g. Automatically calculates creatinine clearance from serum creatinine for area-under-the-curve (AUC) dosing – or the

user can choose actual creatinine clearance.

- h. Automatically calculates AUC dose using Calvert formula.
- i. Pre-loaded treatment plans are derived from published literature.
- j. Automatically calculates the patient dose from the template (regimen) dose, dose. basis, weight or BSA, serum

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Intellidose (continued from page 1)

creatinine or creatinine clearance, as appropriate and as specified by template.

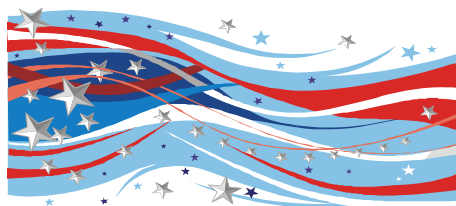
k. Prompts for hydration, antiemetics, and premeds in pre-built templates that can be edited at the patient level.

l. Permits review of dosing variables on line and in hard copy by displaying dose basis; formulae used in calculations; height, weight, BSA, ideal weight; serum creatinine and CrCl when applicable; template (regimen) dose; actual calculated dose; and percent of template dose if there has been a dose adjustment.

m. Displays lab data on the same page as the electronic order.

n. Produces a cumulative treatment flow chart that displays each drug and dose basis; actual dose administered, height, weight, and BSA on which each cycle's doses were based and lab values.

Implementation has begun and will continue until all sites are fully operational with the software, with a target of completion at all sites by the end of the calendar year.



facilities. Visitors to the office can stop at the desk and pick up a free virtual VA t-shirt that their avatar can wear.

Additional features at this site include access to a video clip from VA's "Get Fit for Life" exercise DVD. Users will soon be able to obtain additional information from VA by submitting questions through their avatars, and VA staff will communicate with avatars using instant messaging.

The Second Life project came about through research VA conducted on how to better reach veterans through the Internet. VA worked with a contractor to develop the approach and "lease" the office in Second Life to establish an entry point into the virtual world. New features will be added over time to support key initiatives. VA joins a growing number of federal agencies hosting projects on Second Life.

For more information on VHA's presence in Second Life, visit: www.va.gov/health/VHAINSecondLife.asp.

Network Increases Rehabilitation Services to Veterans with Low Vision, Blindness

by Richard A. Harper, MD, Staff Surgeon, Ophthalmology, Central Arkansas Veterans HCS

VISN 16 is participating in a national effort to increase rehabilitation services to veterans with low vision. As stated on the VA Blind Rehab Services website: "The VA provides rehabilitation programs targeting low vision and blind veterans, and is also aggressively pursuing innovative service delivery models. The challenge of helping these low vision and blind veterans has greatly increased, and the Department of Veterans Affairs has made a commitment to provide world-class rehabilitation training by enhancing services, improving access to care and increasing patient satisfaction for veterans with visual impairments."

This effort will involve developing low vision clinics that have increasing levels of services to meet as many needs of low vision veterans as possible.

The first level of care will be basic low vision services provided at

each VISN facility that has an Eye Clinic (Muskogee, Fayetteville, Jackson, Alexandria, Biloxi, Shreveport and New Orleans). The services here will include a low vision eye exam to determine the veteran's level of functioning and provision of basic low vision aides (magnifiers, etc.) These services are already available at many of these clinics.

The next level of care is the Intermediate Low Vision clinic in Oklahoma City. In the Intermediate Low Vision Service, a moderate breadth and level of complexity of low vision services are provided. The moderate spectrum of low vision devices available for prescribing include, but are not limited to, spectacle prescriptive considerations such as height of bifocal segment, frame size and shape to allow use of the preferred retinal locus, tints for contrast and glare, specialized coatings, etc., specialty contact lenses for low vision, etc., spectacle microscopes,

handheld and stand magnifiers, handheld and simple spectacle-mounted telescopes, absorptive lenses to control glare and photophobia and enhance vision and various non-optical aids (large print, illumination controls, etc) as well as other emerging technologies that may be evaluated and prescribed. An eye care specialist (MD or OD) who has been trained in vision rehabilitation will provide this service, or the trained eye care specialist may directly supervise allied health professionals in some aspects of the clinical low vision examination and prescription of devices.

The third level of care is the Advanced (Ambulatory) Low Vision clinic in North Little Rock. An eye care specialist (MD or OD) who has been trained in vision rehabilitation will oversee the clinical low vision examination and prescribe optical and/or electronic devices, or the trained eye care specialist may directly supervise allied health professionals in some aspects of

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We're on the web!
Visit us at
<http://www.visn16.va.gov/>



Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 16, known as the South Central VA Health Care Network, is an integrated health care delivery system of medical centers with the primary purpose of providing care and treatment to eligible veterans. VISN 16 is one of 21 networks within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and includes ten medical centers, 37 associated community based outpatient clinics, six nursing homes, and one domiciliary.

VISN 16 spans 170,000 square miles and includes nearly two million veterans in all or parts of Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. The network office is located in Jackson, MS.

The South Central VA Health Care Network's Mission:
To honor America's veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.



Rehabilitation Services *(story continued from page 3)*

the clinical low vision examination and prescription of devices. The full spectrum of low vision devices available for prescribing include, but are not limited to, spectacle Rx special considerations such as height of bifocal segment, frame size and shape to allow use of PRL, tints for contrast and glare, specialized coatings, etc., specialty contact lenses for low vision, spectacle microscopes, handheld and stand magnifiers, handheld and spectacle mounted telescopes, bioptic-mounted telescopes, electronic aids (CCTV, portable CCTV, head-mounted video magnifier, etc), absorptive lenses to control glare and photophobia and enhance vision and various non-optical aids (large print, illumination controls, etc), ergonomic positioning devices for using low vision devices, as well as other emerging technologies that may be evaluated and prescribed.

The last level of care is the Advanced (Hoptel) Outpatient Blind

Rehabilitation clinic in Houston. In this program, a full spectrum of low vision devices will be available for prescribing include, but are not limited to, spectacle Rx special considerations such as height of bifocal segment, frame size and shape to allow use of PRL, tints for contrast and glare, specialized coatings, etc., specialty contact lenses for low vision, spectacle microscopes, handheld and stand magnifiers, handheld and spectacle mounted telescopes, bioptic-mounted telescopes, electronic aids (CCTV, portable CCTV, head-mounted video magnifier, etc), absorptive lenses to control glare and photophobia and enhance vision and various non-optical aids (large print, illumination controls, etc), ergonomic positioning devices for using low vision devices, as well as other emerging technologies that may be evaluated and prescribed. An eye care specialist (MD or OD) who has been trained in vision rehabilitation will provide this service, or the trained eye care specialist may directly supervise allied health

professionals in some aspects of the clinical low vision examination and prescription of devices.

These clinics will offer a continuum of care to veterans in VISN 16. As patients' needs are assessed, they will be offered services at the facility best suited to meet their needs.

Currently, the Houston clinic is operational, and is seeing patients. The North Little Rock and Oklahoma City clinics are in the process of hiring staff and acquiring space. The target date for all clinics to be operational is September, 2008.

For more information on the VA Blind Rehabilitation Services, visit their website at <http://www1.va.gov/>

Health Beat is a patient newsletter published quarterly by VISN 16. *Health Beat* gives veterans and their families insightful information about managing and accessing health care from VA medical centers within VISN 16.