



## CAVHCS has Alabama Health Care Hero

Seven men and women were honored recently as Alabama Health Care Heroes at a luncheon in Birmingham. The luncheon, hosted by the Alabama Hospital Association, was an effort to recognize the dedication and compassion of these health care workers, selected from hundreds of applications statewide.

"It really makes you proud to be a part of the hospital field when you hear stories like the ones co-workers tell about these heroes," said Mike Horsley, president of the Alabama Hospital Association. "These men and women we are honoring truly represent the best in health care; they are people who make a difference everyday."

Among those honored at the luncheon were: Zandra Butler, recreation therapist, Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System and Valeria Rudolph-Rivers, M.S.N., director of home and community-based care at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Tuscaloosa.

### **Zandra Butler**

Zandra Butler graduated from Alabama State University with a bachelor's degree in recreation and

currently serves as a recreation therapist with the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS). Her responsibilities include planning daily activities and special events for the veterans on her unit.



Proudly displaying her commemorative plaque Tuskegee Campus' Zandra Butler is an Alabama Hospital Association Health Care Hero.

"Zandra has demonstrated commitment in her daily duties as well as in her community," said Renita Fitzpatrick. "She puts in tireless hours to ensure high quality care is being provided to our nation's heroes."

An example of Butler's devotion occurred during Thanksgiving 2005. A veteran at CAVHCS, who was a former quarterback for Alabama State University (ASU), wanted to go to the annual "Turkey Day Classic." Butler cancelled her personal plans so she could take the veteran to the game. She even helped him find some of his former teammates and friends.

"Zandra felt that giving up her time was just a small sacrifice in comparison to what this and other veterans have done and continue to do for the freedom we enjoy today," said Fitzpatrick. "She no doubt was a hero to this veteran."

## Not the Biggest, but the Best

# CAVHCS Develops Best Practice

*Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from the Office of Compliance and Business Integrity's Quarterly Investigation and Risk Highlights*

### **Revenue Review**

#### **Notable Practice:**

The VA Management Quality Assurance Service (MQAS), Health Care Financial Assurance Division (HCFAD) commends Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System accounts

receivable personnel for conducting exceptional follow-up initiatives.

To assist facilities in meeting new third-party follow-up requirements mandated in of Financial Policy O6GC1.04, Follow-up Procedures for Third Party Medical Care Debt, VISN 7 created three the 30-Day Report, 50-Day Report, and Follow-up Comments Report. These reports list all third-party bills

requiring follow-up according to the Bulletin guide. In June 2006, accounts receivable personnel began using these reports, in conjunction with the Insurance Payment Trend Report, as part of their third-party follow-up activity daily use of these reports has significantly decreased third-party bills more than 90 days old from 53.7 percent in June 2006, to 21.4 percent in August 2006.

# From the Director

**Robert W. Ratliff, Ph.D., FACHE**

As you well know March was an eventful time here at CAVHCS. The news coverage of conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center brought health care from the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs to Armed Forces Retirement Homes and yes us here at CAVHCS under considerable scrutiny

We at CAVHCS have recently undergone numerous inspections and certifications that validated our material conditions, but your responsiveness to personally conduct Environmental Rounds was essential as we successfully hosted visitors throughout the month. Local media, Congressmen and even the National Commandant of the American Legion dropped by and left making glowing reports about our physical conditions as well as the quality of care being provided to our veterans.

Coincidentally another visit was a result of a major, yet seamless, transition when Mr. Lawrence Biro took the helm as Director of the VA Southeast Network. Mr. Biro comes to us following a hugely successful assignment as Network Director, VA Rocky Mountain Network (VISN 19). He has a sustained focus on quality patient care. Under his leadership VISN 19 was ranked number one in meeting VHA Performance Measures in 2004 and 2005. VISN 19 was also awarded the prestigious 2006 VHA Kenneth W. Kizer Quality Achievement Award and the 2006 Carey Performance Excellence Award.

Upon visiting us here at CAVHCS, Mr. Biro shared some insights into his vision of where VISN 7 is headed. In keeping with our own, "Not the biggest, but the Best," mantra, he spoke of providing the best quality customer service and

the best care possible. He added that he was outcome



CAVHCS Director, Robert Ratliff guides Congressman Mike Rogers (r) of Alabama's 3rd District, through the Montgomery Campus during a recent impromptu visit.

orientated, and that from the point of view of our veterans and their families – not to mention the media and Congress – what matters most is that they have an accurate perception that we are, indeed, serving them at the highest standard of excellence possible.

Finally, I want to talk to you about our Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans. We have a strong program in place. We reach out to the community, we engage and coordinate with the DoD Medical Treatment Facilities and I have given you all direction to actively identify and expedite support for any and all of our OEF/OIF veterans. I want to re-emphasize that I expect each of you to actively identify our OEF/OIF veterans. We cannot allow any of them to go unidentified. I am looking forward to hearing a veteran mention to me that they'd been asked several times if they were a veteran returning from Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

We must all be actively engaged.



Director, VA Southeast Network, VISN 7, Lawrence Biro (L, kneeling) and CAVHCS Director, Robert Ratliff discuss quality of care with a Tuskegee Campus veteran during Biro's recent visit to CAVHCS.



CAVHCS Director, Robert Ratliff identifies the CAVHCS catchment area as American Legion National Commandant, Paul A. Morin (L) and staff (center) look on during a recent impromptu visit.

## The CAVHCS Salute

The CAVHCS Salute is produced by the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) Public Affairs Office. It's an unofficial, internal communications publication.

Director Robert W. Ratliff, Ph.D., FACHE  
Associate Director Brenda Schmitz  
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# Portraits in Professionalism

## Tuskegee Campus Employee of the Month

February 2007

Mr. Arthur Powell

Every now and again, an older employee has an opportunity to be involved in something new and exciting. This new and exciting opportunity was fated to this employee on Thursday, January 25, 2007.

On Thursday morning, which appeared to be like every other Thursday morning, this employee headed out to complete a site analysis in Montgomery, Ala. for a veteran residing in the local community.

Upon arrival to the veteran's residence, he observed smoke coming from the home. This employee immediately entered the residence to locate the origin of the smoke and fumes. He located the smoke coming from a bedroom occupied by another veteran, who had allegedly fallen asleep while smoking and dropped the burning cigarette into a pile of clothing that had begun to burn, and spread to the television and stand. This employee awakened the veteran to get him out of the home, removed the burning pile of clothes, assisted other residents from the home to safety and called 911 for help.

We can only visualize and speculate on the drastic outcome that would have occurred had this employee not been willing to help and risk his own safety. This employee is Arthur Powell, a veteran, a risk taker and Employee of the Month.



## Montgomery Campus Employee of the Month

March, 2007

Ms. Deborah Blankenbaker

Ms. Blankenbaker has proven to be a great asset for Imaging Service in the short time she has been with us. She is very intelligent and possesses a special demeanor that makes her a good liaison with staff and patients. Over the past few months, I have noticed a unique increased dedication to her work ethic. I feel this deserves recognition from the standpoint of continual personal development coupled with an increased awareness of the needs of our veteran patients.

In addition to this, she is the recorder for the Medical Records Committee and fills in for the Secretary for the Chief of Staff whenever she is away on any leave or temporary duty. Ms. Blankenbaker works on resolving patient complaints without requiring direction from the Chief, Imaging Service. She records and expedites the minutes for the Radiation Safety Committee and for all Imaging Staff Meetings.

She always has a smile on her face and is eager to help in any way she can. Without Ms. Blankenbaker's contributions, Imaging Service would not successfully complete required suspenses and short time responses for the Director. She exhibits excellent customer service skills. She performs her duties with a smile and goes out of her way to ensure that our veteran patients receive the necessary care they have earned. Ms. Blankenbaker's team spirit

I believe Ms. Blankenbaker really cares about her workplace, which is mirrored by the neat and orderly way she keeps her assigned area. Further, she goes the extra mile to assure all patients arriving for radiographic examinations receive prompt attentive service.



# Dr. Kussman Testifies on Budget, OEF/OIF Vet Support

**WASHINGTON** – VA’s proposed \$36.6 billion budget for medical care for 2008 will continue to provide timely, world class health care to a growing number of veterans who need it the most — including expanded services for veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) - Acting Under Secretary Dr. Michael J. Kussman said in recent testimony before two Congressional subcommittees.

In testimony March 6 before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and on Feb. 14 before the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health, Dr. Kussman said the VA budget for medical care for 2008 is comprised of \$27.2 billion for medical services, \$3.4 billion for administration, \$3.6 billion for medical facilities. An additional \$2.4 billion in revenues will come from medical care collections.

Dr. Kussman emphasized that the proposed budget provides sufficient funding and resources to enable VA to provide world-class care to those with service-connected disabilities, those with lower incomes and those with special care needs and for OIF and OEF veterans.

“We will continue to ensure that every seriously injured or ill serviceman or woman returning from combat in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom receives treatment they need in a timely way,” Dr. Kussman said.

He also said he wanted to dispel reports that VA is being “overwhelmed” by the number of veterans returning from Iraq or Afghanistan coming to it for care. “That is not correct,” Dr. Kussman said. In 2008, VHA expects to treat about 263,000 veterans from the global war on terror, which represents only a small fraction of its anticipated total of 5.8 million patients.

Dr. Kussman told members of Congress that VA has launched a far-reaching outreach initiative to ensure separating combat veterans know about the benefits and services available to them.

“VA has made a special effort to work with National Guard and reserve units to reach transitioning service members at demobilization sites and has trained recently discharged veterans to serve as National Guard bureau liaisons in every state to assist their fellow combat veterans,” Dr. Kussman said.

Dr. Kussman said the budget also includes funding to increase VHA services to severely injured service members from Iraq and Afghanistan. VA has

increased services at its four polytrauma centers in Minneapolis, Palo Alto, Richmond, and Tampa to encompass additional specialty services to treat patients for multiple complex injuries.

The VA’s efforts are being expanded to 17 additional polytrauma network sites and clinic support teams around the country, providing state-of-the-art treatment that is closer to injured veterans’ homes.

“Furthermore, we established a polytrauma call center in February 2006 to assist the families of our most seriously injured combat veterans and service members,” Dr. Kussman said. “The call center operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week to answer clinical, administrative, and benefit inquiries from polytrauma patients and family members.”

Dr. Kussman also noted that VA has significantly enhanced its counseling and other medical services for recently discharged veterans suffering from mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He said the budget request includes nearly \$3 billion to improve access to VA mental health services throughout the nation.

## From the VISN

### Polytrauma Call Center Reaching out

The National Polytrauma Call Center (NPCC) began calling all of the severely injured soldiers and veterans recently as an outreach effort. The purpose is to ensure that they are in receipt of their VA benefits and health care.

During these calls the patients are being asked, specifically, if they know who their case manager is and are being offered case management if indicated or desired. The facilities and case managers will be getting calls and reminders from the call center staff for continued follow up of this important patient population. Shortly, they will be sending out emails directly to case managers for follow up of these patients. Please be receptive to calls from the NPCC staff so that we can work together to continue to provide quality care to these veterans.

The Army has stood up its Wounded Soldier and Family Hotline - **1-800-984-8523**. Veterans from all generations are using that hotline to get resolution to any service-related issue. The NPCC has set up a process to receive all VA-related queries. They are handling and tracking these calls in a similar manner as the severely injured outreach calls. Please be receptive to the Call Center’s staff and their efforts to hand-off the issues to VHA facilities and VBA offices.

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# Women's History Month Celebration



## JCAHO: Full Accreditation and Meet Ms. Bealer



Photos by: Robin Johnson,  
Medical Media



**Balad Air Base, Iraq,  
Feb. 19, 2007 --**

The American flag-embalzed canopy known as Hero's Highway is shown at the Air Force theater hospital.

The flag will remain underneath this tent to let injured troops know they are home when brought in on litters for medical treatment.

(U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Cecilio M. Ricardo Jr.)

# April

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10 Patient Care Ergonomics Training for Healthcare Workers (Bldg. 90) Theater on Tuskegee Campus	11	12	13	14 Volunteer Recognition/ Award Ceremony Montgomery Campus Multi-purpose Room at Noon
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22 Volunteer Recognition/ Award Ceremony Tuskegee Campus Bldg 90, Room 1A-107 at 2pm	23	24	25 Administrative Professionals Day Activities STR Tuskegee Campus 8:00 am – 1:00 pm	26 and 27 E&LR Guiding Customer Conversations Series II Edu. Classroom,	26 E&LR- Expending Customer Relationships Series II Edu. Classroom, Tuskegee Campus 12:30 pm - 4:30 pm	27 28
29	30	<b>April is Occupational Therapy Month</b> <b>Administrative Professionals Week is April 22-28</b> <b>Medical Laboratory Week is April 22-28</b>				

The CAVHCS Calendar is not intended to be an all-inclusive, official calendar. It is intended rather to provide a medium for CAVHCS Salute to share upcoming events.

If you would like to add a CAVHCS event please email details directly to alan.bloom@va.gov. Submissions are not guaranteed to be published. Considerations will be made for propriety, promptness and print space.