



CAVHCS holds Inaugural Dothan Stand Down

In military life a Stand Down is a time to stop operations, rest and focus on specific areas of concern. And, for homeless veterans in Dothan, AL the inaugural CAVHCS Homeless Stand Down at the Army National Guard Building at 1842 Third Avenue on September 26, did just that by proving time for rest and an opportunity to regroup and focus on areas of concern in life after the military.

“Stand Downs are conducted to assist homeless veterans in crisis,” explained Spring Love, Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System’s Homeless Program Grant & Per Diem Liaison. “Working with Dothan’s House of Benjamin, we provided a single meeting point where homeless veterans were able to access several services at once

to hopefully assist them in improving their quality of life.”

“We want to make sure homeless veterans find out what resources are available to them in the area,” added Earl Jones, Jr., Director of House of Benjamin, in Dothan. “And, even though this is something new in



CAVHCS’ Ms. Regina Williams, LPN, gives a flu shot to a veteran during Dothan’s inaugural Homeless Veterans Stand Down.

Dothan, we’re hopeful we’ll be able to build this Stand Down into something we can do for veterans on an annual basis.”

Homeless veterans attending the Stand Down were greeted by volunteers, as well as members of more than 20 support activities based in the Wiregrass Region. “We had folks from Department of Human Resources, Social Security and the Alabama State Employment Service,” said Love. “Veterans were able to receive haircuts, clothes and even flu shots.”

Nationwide, the number of homeless veterans is estimated to be

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Transforming Mental Health Care

More than 700 mental health professionals, researchers, educators and clinicians met in Washington recently for the Veterans Health Administration’s (VHA) Office of Mental Health Services first comprehensive mental health conference.

Former VA Secretary R. James Nicholson, the keynote speaker at the opening summit for the four-day conference, emphasized that VA is increasing its focus on mental health. “We are well prepared,” Nicholson said. “With an annual budget of nearly \$3 billion for mental health services alone, VA is the largest provider of mental health care in the nation.”

Nicholson outlined VA’s recent mental health enhancements, including:

- Employing more than 9,000 front-line mental health professionals, a 15 percent increase over four years ago;
- Providing mental health services at each of VA’s 153 medical centers and 900 outpatient clinics, and every VA hospital now has special capabilities for treating post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD);
- Increasing funding for readjustment counseling

for veterans of Operation Iraq Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), including the hiring of 100 additional OIF/OEF veterans to enhance outreach to all veterans and those on active duty, in the National Guard or Reserves;

- Hiring Suicide Prevention Coordinators for each of VA’s medical centers and establishing an around the clock Suicide Prevention Hotline Center;
- Increasing availability of “telemental health” programs, which treated about 20,000 patients last year;
- Integrating mental health services into geriatric programs;
- Adding psychologists and social workers to the staffs of VA’s polytrauma centers; and
- Increasing the number of Vet Centers from 209 to 232, and adding 100 new combat veterans to run outreach programs to their former comrades.

Key changes VA has recently made also include a

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From the Director

Robert W. Ratliff, PH.D., FACHE

I've never been more proud to be director than I have been recently as I watch your efforts to deliver on our three promises to veterans.

With an increase of 21 percent in quality - as stated by EPRP - your commitment to "quality care, second to none," has never been stronger. This huge jump was the largest in the VISN by more than 10 percent.

Customer satisfaction scores are also improving, but not as fast as quality. However, with 2/3 of our veterans having to travel great distances to receive basic services, CAVHCS may be at disadvantage when it comes to satisfaction. Nevertheless, we will not allow that to be a convenient excuse. We'll continue to work hard to deliver on the promise of customer satisfaction with their outcome. Make no mistake, your efforts are being noticed.

In the meantime, we're working to do our best to eliminate as many requirements for extended travel as possible. We're working hard to mitigate the need for veterans to travel for basic services, which will result in happier veterans and satisfaction scores more reflective of your efforts.

Last month in the Salute you saw a report about our expanded sharing agreement with Lyster Army Health Clinic, which will result in a new Primary Care Clinic opening aboard Fort Rucker after the beginning of the year. I believe our ability to find new means of working with the Department of Defense will continue to increase.

This past month we received delivery of a new MRI. Once operational our ability to deliver quality care will be increased dramatically. The only way we could obtain this advancement was to pool our needs and resources with Maxwell AFB.

Flu Season is once again upon us and I look to every one of you to serve as an example for our veterans. We need you to receive your flu shots as well as promoting the effectiveness of preventative medicine. Considering the

average age of the majority of our veterans, I expect each of you to understand and promote the benefits of the Pneumovax shot as well.

We're also conducting Flu Season Prevention Outreach programs this year. A group of dedicated professionals will be traveling to different locations within the Wiregrass Region on Saturdays in October and November to deliver on another

promise to not only maintain services, but expand them. They'll be providing patient education, harvesting veteran data to issue Veteran ID Cards and of course giving flu and Pneumovax shots. For those of you participating...thank you.

I hope you've had a chance to welcome Dr. Judith St. Onge back from 18 months of active duty. If you were unable to break away for one of our welcoming events for her and our new Chief of Nutrition and Food Service Roger Isaacs, please take a minute whenever you see them to welcome them back and aboard.

Finally, I'd like to encourage you to take a look at our CAVHCS Salute Community Calendar. We're always a busy and dynamic work place here at CAVHCS, but this month we have a large number of activities identified.



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EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Tuskegee Campus

September

CASSANDRA LOVE RN, Nurse Manager Geriatric Primary Care Clinic

It is not uncommon to have unannounced visits from VHA or other inspection teams these days. That said, it is reassuring to know that CAVHCS can go to staff like Mrs. Cassandra Love, who would rise to the occasion in meeting such challenges. Mrs. Love is customer service oriented who depicts a professional manner.



Mrs. Love has followed up with nurse managers on a variety of urgent issues from veterans, their family members and the staff. She was resourceful in curtailing a resident leaving the premises prior to his discharge in conjunction with area team members. Mrs. Love has gained respect from management and co-workers alike due to her decision making, knowledge and willingness to share information with staff and others.

Mrs. Love is deserving of the Employee of the Month recognition not for a single or heroic act, but because of her dedication to duties above and beyond the routine.

October

DONZELLA BOZEMAN, Employment Specialist

Recently, Ms. Bozeman recognized that a veteran within her Supported Employment caseload had failed to report to both her CWT/TWE assignment and to the OIF/OEF Case Manager.



The veteran had been having some disturbing domestic problems and when she failed to report, Ms. Bozeman took the initiative to make a home visit.

After opening the door, the veteran tearfully shared that her boyfriend had abused her, taken her car and had keys to her apartment. Ms. Bozeman stayed with the veteran while she talked to the Police, reported the domestic abuse, issued a warrant for the boyfriend's arrest and was convinced that the Tuskegee Police would monitor her home.

Why is this so special? Well, Ms. Bozeman is an Employment Specialist, not a Social Worker nor an Investigator. Nevertheless, she exhibited a caring and compassionate approach to serving veterans. Proving actions speak louder than words, she was willing to risk her own safety to follow-up on a veteran and provide the supportive guidance needed to get results.

Montgomery Campus

September

BILLY COOK, Housekeeping Aid Environmental Management Service

Mr. Cook continually receives accolades surrounding his exceptional job performance, dedication, caring, friendly and cooperative demeanor from co-workers, supervisors, veterans and family members. He is a highly motivated employee that is committed to and fully supports the CAVHCS' standard of excellence while consistently exceeding expectations.



Mr. Cook has been tireless in his efforts to ensure not only the ICU/CCU areas, but all of his assignments, whether they are in patient care, support or administrative areas are maintained. While cleaning the veterans' rooms, he is always courteous and exemplifies a warm, loving attitude towards the veteran and their family members. It has been observed that the veterans' enjoy Mr. Cook's conversation and company. In recognition of his many special attributes and untiring commitment to providing the best possible care, for our veterans Mr. Cook is deserving of the honor of being the Employee of the Month.

October

CEDRIC THOMAS, Police Officer Police Service

Officer Cedric Thomas has excelled in the commission of his duties. Recently Officer Cedric Thomas arrested a reckless driver (in a potentially dangerous situation) on the Montgomery Campus during the wee hours of the morning. Officer Thomas successfully apprehended the suspect after he tried to elude the police vehicle.



Also, with the help of another officer, Officer Thomas arrested an alleged rapist who was wanted by the Macon County Sheriff's Department. The suspect was allegedly involved with an incident that happened over a year ago with a CAVHCS employee. Officer Thomas reacted appropriately and kept the subject under surveillance until the appropriate paper work was received. The subject who had been a fugitive since January was turned over to the Macon County Sheriff and is now housed in the Macon County Detention Center.

Officer Thomas is being recognized for his bravery and is deserving of the Employee of the Month.



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200,000 on any given night, though accurate numbers are impossible to pin down, according to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans in Washington . Locally, while numbers are equally difficult to determine, the Wiregrass Region’s homeless veterans are being actively supported.

“We are in our second year of operation,” said Jones who was born and raised in Dothan . “We began working with CAVHCS almost four years ago, while we were providing drug treatment support within the community. As we’ve grown, so has our relationship with the VA.”

While the notion of a Homeless Stand Down may be relatively new in the Wiregrass Region, veterans helping veterans has a long and strong tradition. “We’ve been developing the idea of a Stand Down for awhile,” explained Jones. “But, this year once we came up with a more definitive plan, the Veterans Service Organizations stepped up and have been a tremendous help in pulling this together.”



Wiregrass Vets to see Increased Flu Shot opportunities

CAVHCS is kicking off the Flu Season Prevention by offering veterans in the Wiregrass Region an opportunity to receive their Flu and Pneumovax vaccinations on identified Saturdays throughout the months of October and November.

“Every year we try to think of as many ways to make getting these life saving vaccinations easier for our veterans,” explained CAVHCS Director Robert Ratliff. “This year, we decided we’d try to increase their opportunity to be vaccinated, by going to the Wiregrass on Saturdays.”

Each year CAVHCS vaccinates more than 10,000 veterans with the flu vaccine, but this year there’s a decided push to educate and vaccinate veterans with the Pneumovax vaccine as well. “The Pneumovax vaccine bolsters the body’s ability to fight off pneumonia,” said Ratliff. “One shot lasts for several

years, and considering the age group of most of our veterans, being better able to fight off pneumonia could save someone’s life.”

The Flu Season Prevention Outreach program will also offer Wiregrass Region veterans the opportunity to sign up for something new. “We announced our sharing agreement with Army Lyster Health Clinic last month,” said Ratliff. “So, veterans will also be able to sign up to receive their primary care services at the VA Clinic on Fort Rucker, when it opens shortly after the New Year.”

CAVHCS’ Flu Season Prevention Outreach program will be offered in the Wiregrass Region on the following dates:

- October 20, in Enterprise at Enterprise Schools Service Center, 1648 E. Park Ave - Highway 84 East, Enterprise
- November 3, in Ozark at the

Veterans Lodge, 226 Williams Street, Ozark.

- November 17, in Dothan at the VA Mental Health Clinic, 3753 Ross Clark Circle, Dothan.

These opportunities – all scheduled between 10 am and 2 pm - are offered in addition to regular vaccination opportunities. Veterans can still receive their vaccinations through their Primary Care team during routine visits.



Ms. Valerie DuBose, RN administers a flu shot to an Ozark veteran and DAV driver Wilbur Sullivant during CAVHCS’ recent Flu Season Prevention Outreach program.

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commitment to evaluate a veteran within 24 hours after the veteran has asked for or been referred for mental health or substance abuse treatment. If there is an emergency, VHA will conduct an immediate assessment and provide appropriate intervention. VHA is also working to ensure that emergency departments have mental health professionals available around the clock, seven days a week.

“We are committed to bringing to the fore a full complement of services and programs that will improve mental health and the quality of life for the men and women who protect and defend this great country,” Nicholson said.

Dr. Ira Katz, Deputy Chief Patient Care Services Officer for Mental Health, told the attendees that VA is in the midst of successfully implanting its five-year Mental Health Strategic Plan, which includes four primary areas: expanding access and capacity to mental health care for all veterans; integrating mental health and primary care; transforming the system to focus on recovery & rehabilitation; and implementing evidence-based care.

The conference focused on increasing recovery oriented services by transforming the VA system to a recovery oriented practice; integrating care between mental health and primary care for better access and treatment rates; and promoting a national model for suicide risk identification and prevention, which requires ready access to high quality mental health services, supplemented by programs that directly address the risk of suicide.

According to Dr. Katz, the conference was an

overwhelming success, Dr. Katz said, and VA plans to hold a similar conference on an annual basis. Additionally, the conference enhanced collaboration with Vet Centers and other community partners in the promotion of a more veteran and family-focused mental health care program.

Dr. Michael J. Kussman, Under Secretary for Health, told those attending he is proud of VHA’s work in mental health, adding that VHA providers continue to learn and improve programs.

“Good mental health care can improve veterans’ emotional well being, and change the everyday realities of their lives,” Dr. Kussman said. “It can improve the way our patients function in society. It can improve productivity in the workplace and it can improve the way they function in their families.”

October is Pharmacists Month

After celebrating National Pharmacy Week for nearly eight decades, 2004 marked the launch of American Pharmacists Month. In 2005, U.S. President George W. Bush acknowledged the important role pharmacy professionals play in the lives of Americans.

This year’s theme, “Know Your Medicine – Know Your Pharmacist,” was crafted to help consumers understand that pharmacists are a medication resource. As the medication expert on the healthcare team, pharmacists are poised to help patients establish better medication use and improve health outcomes.

Officer Candidates from Maxwell AFB adorn the POW/MIA table during a recent ceremony commemorating POW/MIA Recognition Day.



October

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6 Flu Season Prevention Outreach, Ozark
7	8 Columbus Day	9	10 World Mental Health Day	11	12	13 US Navy Established 1775 
14	15 Cinemagic! Re-Creation Show Montgomery 1000 am Tuskegee 2 pm	16	17	18	19 Breast Cancer Awareness Walk-a-Thon Montgomery Noon	20 Flu Season Prevention Outreach, Enterprise
21	22	23 White Cane Program Montgomery MPR 10 am	24 Pastoral Care Week Respiratory Care Week	25	26 Breast Cancer Awareness Walk-a-Thon Tuskegee Noon	27
28	29 Internet Created 1969 	30	31 	* Breast Cancer Awareness Month * National Medical Librarian Month * National Physical Therapy Month * National Disability Employment Awareness Month		

The CAVHCS Community 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.