



## CAVHCS SOARS during Readiness Visit

The Systematic Ongoing Assessment and Review Strategy (SOARS) is an internal review initiative utilized by the VA as a learning system that exports and disseminates information to all segments of the VA health care system so that providers can learn how to deliver care that is not only safe, efficient, cost-effective, but clinically measurable and evidence-based.

If you visit the VA web site you're read this official definition, and while it is of course accurate - what does it really mean?

"The SOARS process is designed to promote continued readiness," said Ms. Crystal Lindaman, who served as the Team Leader for the recent SOARS visit to CAVHCS. "Our visits ensure we're all staying focused on IG (Inspector General), Joint Commission-driven standards, as well

as, well...common sense issues."

SOARS is operated out of Central Office in Washington, D.C. The program is administered by a number of program managers, who ensure that



Pharmacy Chief, Dr. Lance Davis (left) reviews current CAVHCS Pharmacy practices with one of the SOARS consultants who visited recently. SOARS team members travel from VA positions throughout the United States. This internal review strategy provides the VA with an efficient, cost-effective means of ensuring continued readiness.

everyone in the VA understands and has access to standardized criteria as well as providing consultant training. "They have training, and people receiving that training start out as a consultant," said Lindaman who has served as a SOARS Team Leader as many as 15 times. "Then, once trained, you usually participate initially as a consultant, then maybe an Associate Team Leader, a Co-team Leader and then eventually a Team Leader."

One of the unique characteristics of the SOARS program is that teams are made up of members of the VA from throughout the nation. "The first time I saw some of the members on this team was the first day we all arrived here at CAVHCS,"

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### *Patient Centered Care*

## Stakeholder Meeting exhibits concepts of Pilot Program

Building upon the momentum of October being Customer Service Month, and September's announcement that VSIN 7 is serving as the pilot program for implementing a recharged Patient Centered Care program, CAVHCS leadership joined Network Director Larry Biro and stakeholders from throughout Alabama at a VHA Stakeholders meeting in Birmingham recently to discuss the inclusive process of Patient Centered Care.

"I think the brochure everyone got this morning really describes this program well," said Biro talking to stakeholders ranging from members of Veterans of Foreign Wars

and American Legion to the Military Order of The Purple Heart as well as Congressional Staffers. "The core concepts of Dignity and Respect; Information Sharing; Participation and Collaboration will be the areas you'll hear about this morning, and they'll also be the areas we will be focusing on and asking for your help as we move forward."

While not entirely new, Patient-and family-centered care is an innovative approach to the planning, delivery, and evaluation of health care that is grounded in mutually beneficial partnerships among health care patients, families, and providers. Patient-and family-centered care applies to patients of all ages, and it

may be practiced in any health care setting.

"We're going to exercise those concepts of participation and collaboration this morning," explained Biro. "We're going to break-up into focus groups and ask you to work with us as we define what Patient Centered Care means to you and see if we can identify some priorities."

Stakeholders in attendance provided facilitators with feedback on three main questions:

- 1) What does Patient Centered Care mean to

Please see 'Stakeholders'

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# From the Director

**Shirley Bealer, MS, RN, CNAA, BC, CPHQ**

It's been an event-filled month here at CAVHCS and I am pleased to say your commitment to our goal of increased accountability has been readily evident. That same commitment, was clearly behind what can only be described as a successfully, positive out brief following our recent SOARS visit .

Commitment and accountability are two traits that will also play key roles as we move forward and implement our newly revised Nine-Point Plan, and especially as we develop the framework for the VISN's Patient Centered Care program.

Last month I listed the Patient Centered Care core concepts, and as we look forward to our Veterans Day celebrations, I hope each of you will readily recognize how

these concepts of Dignity and Respect; Information Sharing; Participation and Collaboration play such significant roles in providing care second to none to our nation's heroes.

During Veterans Day our appreciation and focus on what our veterans have done to secure our freedoms tends to be elevated. We naturally have a better understanding of why we should routinely thank a veteran for his or her service. However, I challenge each of you to take Veterans Day as an opportunity to reaffirm your commitment. Think about how you can ensure that appreciation is woven into your day-to-day activities throughout the year. Simply stated – our veterans deserve it.

They've paid the price. They've served on the tip of the spear of freedom. In peacetime they stood the watch, and in times of conflict they bravely ventured into harms way. They deserve being treated with unwavering dignity and respect if for no other reason than we all enjoy the fruits of their sacrifice...freedom.

## CAVHCS All-Stars

**This letter is being written to personally thank one of your employees. He is always professional, yet never fails to show compassion for his patients. Always ready to assist us with whatever is needed. I feel that his smile and caring spirit makes my visits so well.**

**Mr. Osborne should be commended for his care that he gives to all. We veterans wish that all our lab visits go smoothly all the time. We often share about our experiences especially when we go to the lab. He goes far and beyond the call of duty to make our visit easier. On my first visit, I had many questions, he not only gave me answers about the lab, but he also assured me that my visits here would go as smoothly as possible. Thanks Mr. Osborne for your service.**  
Ms. Mary F. -- Kellyton, AL

**I would like to take the time to say that Mrs. Charlene Daniels-Harris goes above the normal amount of service to the veterans. I have watched her several times go above the cause of duty, and (personally) speak for how she has served myself and other veterans. I wish we had more workers like her. Our stay would be enjoyable.**  
Robert W. -- Yellow Team

**This letter is being written as an expression of my sincere appreciation for the care I receive weekly at group and also at individual sessions with Dr. E. Blackshear. On several occasions he has taken the time to talk me down from a bad or dark situation and redirected me out of the kindness of his heart. I think these characteristics and acts of kindness are basics for potential employee of the months. Thank you for your time and consideration.** Willie D. -- U.S. Air Force

**During my trips to this hospital I've received nothing but the best of care from everyone, Doctors Bell & Associates, emergency room personnel: Bill Johnson, Eddie Scott, Barbara Geneux, Fiskisha Cooper ad Richard Weary...Excellent Personnel. Thank you Ernest. J. -- Montgomery, AL**

**I would like to say that Dr. Weatherly Tinglin the surgeon that did my harparoscopic cholecystectomy did an exceptional great job. He was very knowledgeable, consistent and caring as a doctor and surgeon. I would like to commend him for his hospitality. He is truly a doctor that knows his duties. I would like to say thank you for taking time out to explain event detail. This doctor has went far and beyond to make my surgery a success.** Shalawn R. — Enterprise, AL

### The CAVHCS Salute



Accredited by  
The Joint Commission

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

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## Employees of the Month



### Montgomery Campus Ms. Jacqueline Ross

I would like to nominate Ms. Jacqueline Ross as Employee of the Month for August 2008 for the Montgomery Campus. Due to an unexpected personnel shortage, Ms. Ross was asked to cover the Eligibility offices as well as the Emergency Department (Admissions Area) on a daily basis in August 2008.

Ms. Ross not only covered in these areas, but brought her eligibility work along so as to keep current with Veteran Enrollments and Means Tests assisting veterans with various questions, concerns, etc.

Ms. Ross demonstrates a "Team" attitude, assisting other co-workers on program applications and reporting; sharing her expertise and picking up the slack when needed. CAVHCS needs more employees like Ms. Ross and I hope after your review you will also see how valuable she is to this organization. Thank you in advance for your consideration.



### Tuskegee Campus Mr. Bobby Richardson

I would like to recommend Mr. Bobby Richardson, a Nutrition and Food service employee at the East Campus (EC) for Employee of the Month. Mr. Richardson is an outstanding employee. Without having to ask, he goes the extra mile by taking on extra duties to ensure the patients' meals are served on time and at the appropriate temperature. We have a new system (Cultural Transformation) set up in Building 129 which is serving residents from the hot line restaurant style.

When assigned to Bldg. 129 Mr. Richardson stays over for the breakfast meal has been served and set the dining room up for the lunch meal. On Saturday, July 20, 2008 we were short of staff and Mr. Richardson gave up part of his lunch break to return to the main kitchen to retrieve items needed to set the dining room up for the lunch meal thereby assuring that the meal service would start and the resident would be served on time. Mr. Richardson is truly a team player and therefore, it is with great pleasure that I recommend him for Employee of the month.

## Images

October was a great month for Fairs  
and a nice Walk



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## ‘SOARS’

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said Lindaman who works in Wichita, Kansas as an AA to the Chief of Staff. “All of the team members bring a level of expertise to the process. But, what especially rewarding to the VA, is that we as consultants come away from the process often having learned as much as those folks we’re consulting.”

SOARS Teams utilize core competencies when visiting a facility of system as in CAVHCS’ case. “We make it a point to discern between being inspectors and being consultants in the process of continued readiness,” explained Lindaman. “The criteria are available right on the SOARS web site (<http://soars.vssc.med.va.gov/Pages/default.aspx?sdupgwelredir=1>). We train on that criteria, and adapt when changes come down, but everybody knows what we’re looking for, so the most important thing is identifying ways to get there.”

Before starting the process of conducting a SOARS visit the team first goes through several hours of refresher training. “We talk about who will be supporting what areas and we remind the team that we’re here to consult vice inspect,” said Lindaman. “Of course when we go out into the spaces some of the staff don’t consider us as consultants. To them we’re inspectors. And, even though that might be stressful, it’s better they go through that process with us than when they get inspected by Joint Commission of the Inspector general. With us, it’s practice.”

Practice or not a SOARS visit means someone else examining how and why professionals do things the way they do. And, in the case of SOARS, they’re going to report to your boss! But, according to Lindaman, sometimes a fresh perspective is exactly what’s needed. “This process provides everyone with a fresh set of eyes. When we look at a process, it may make perfectly good sense to the person deeply involved in that process day-in and day-out. But, for us outside the process, it may not be as clear. If we occasionally ask questions about why and how, and that person makes the reasoning a little more accessible, then when it comes to Joint Commission or an IG inspection – those inspectors might have a greater understanding...quicker.”

Another unique aspect to SOARS is that since it’s designed to promote continued readiness, often all that’s needed is a recommendation. “We make recommendations, which is in keeping with the consultancy approach,” said Lindaman. “What’s remarkable about this program is that it’s free to the facility. We are trained professionals and colleagues with a clear understanding of established criteria. If each facility had to pay for consultants to come

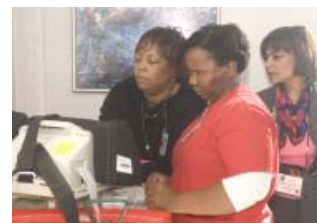
in it would be cost prohibitive.”

SOARS has evolved from a voluntary tool to prepare for Joint Commission inspections to a VHA process that not only assists in ensuring continued readiness, but serves as an effective teaching tool that is hugely cost effective. Now, based on the success of this program, all VA facilities participate in a SOARS site visit every three years. “I have a list of things that I’ve liked that CAVHCS does that I’m going to take back to Kansas with me,” said Lindaman. “And, I’m sure there are other members of the team that will be doing the same thing. Like I said earlier, we get just as much out of this process as anyone else.”

SOARS Team Members are not the only members of the VA with the opportunity to come away with ideas and new approaches to doing things as a result of a visit, but part of the process is to document best practices. “When a team finds something that they feel should be considered by the VA as a Best or Strong Practice we forward them directly to Washington,” said Lindaman. “In fact, we found a few processes here in CAVHCS that we’re sending up. Ultimately, all of the Best Practices are published right on the SOARS web site.”

The Systematic Ongoing Assessment and Review Strategy (SOARS) is an internal review initiative utilized by the VA as a learning system that exports and disseminates information to all segments of the VA health care system so that providers can learn how to deliver care that is not only safe, efficient, cost- effective, but clinically measurable and evidence-based.

Now – hopefully that makes a little more sense.



**SOARS has become a VHA process that not only assists in ensuring continued readiness, by reviewing processes ranging from Pharmacy and Mental Health to Logistics and Environment of Care, but serves as an effective teaching tool because consultants are VA employees too. Now, based on the success of this program, all VA facilities participate in a SOARS site visit every three years.**

# CAVHCS Woman of Excellence - Master of Time Management

Working in service of those who have served our nation is often considered to be rewarding in and of itself. However, for one staff member at Central Alabama Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHCS), this year's celebration of Women's Equality Day was something special.

"Serving veterans is something I love to do," said Mrs. Deborah Ellis, who was recently selected from a field of 12 other nominees as CAVHCS "Woman of Excellence" 2008/09. "I have six family members who are veterans, so I feel like I'm giving something back for their service. But today, being selected for this honor is simply overwhelming."

CAVHCS' Diversity Advisory Committee, Federal Women's Program sponsors the annual "Woman of Excellence," program. To be successful, a nominee must address at least two of five criteria that demonstrate individual accomplishments; overcoming specific barriers; a special story to tell; or demonstrated leadership characteristics and skills in balancing professional and/or personal life.

Nominated by her husband, Ellis more than satisfied the program's criteria. In her 9th year as a cancer survivor, Ellis is a volunteer for the American Cancer Society as a Reach to Recovery volunteer, Relay for Life and Advocacy. She was also chosen as an Ambassador for the American Cancer Society, Macon County, sent to Washington DC to speak to Congress, and was a recipient of the American Cancer Society Community Volunteer Award along with several other fund raising awards.

Working as a registered Kinesiotherapist in CAVHCS' Rehabilitation Service, Ellis works extensively with aging veterans who receive care in CAVHCS' Community Living Center. Her focus is to help veterans maintain a higher quality of life by stimulating their range of motion and abilities to remain ambulatory.

But wait – there's more. Ellis also;

- Works part-time with the University of Alabama as a Coordinator for Deep South Network for Cancer Control for Macon County, which is an outreach program in research for underserved for breast and cervical and later, colorectal cancer to promote screening and advocacy for promoting physical activity and good nutrition.

- Assisted 22 Community Health Care Advisors – Research Partners

- Served on the Macon Cancer Coalition and Tuskegee University Outreach Project for Cancer and Healthy Lifestyles

- Is a member of the team that implemented the CAVHCS Health Marathon to promote physical activity and information for a healthy lifestyle focusing on prevention of cancer for the past two years in Tuskegee Network partner with B&D Cancer, REACH 2010,

and McRae's Prostrate Cancer groups.

- Is a member of the American Board of Kinesiotherapy, where she served as past president SEC-AKTA and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority.

- Is a member of Greater St. Mark Missionary Baptist church, where she serves in the choir and on the praise team.

Already boasting an exhaustive schedule, Ellis' selection as CAVHCS' "Woman of Excellence" 2008/09 is hardly a culmination of her service. "I truly believe in the adage – "To whom much is given, much is expected,"" said Ellis. "I believe in service. God has given me an opportunity to overcome adversity in my life, so I have to give back."

## 'Stakeholders'

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- you?
- 2) What are some of the priorities when implementing Patient Centered Care?
  - 3) How to you the attendee feel you can help implement Patient Centered Care?

Stakeholders provided insight into all of these areas to individual facilitators and additional VA personnel from throughout Alabama quickly wrote down what was said. Afterward each of the facilitators and scribes presented what their specific group discussed before opening the discussion to further questions and answers. All of the input will be provided to the Medical Center Directors to see how best to implement veteran ideas.

"One of the nice things I noticed was that many of the veteran ideas were things we'd either considered or are already in the

process of making them happen," said CAVHCS Acting Director, Ms. Shirley Bealer. "It means we're on the right path, but it also means we might get Patient Centered Care integrated at CAVHCS as fast as possible."



**Ideas of how best to implement Patient Centered Care were exchanged at a recent All Alabama Stakeholder meeting in Birmingham.**





### The Patient Centered Care Bear

Given in recognition and appreciation of efforts to improve Patient Satisfaction across the VA Southeast Region, this cuddly reminder has a new home in the CAVHCS Director's Office. Presented by Network Director Dr. Larry Biro, the bear represents an improvement of 11 percent in in-patient scores from FY 2007 to FY 2008.

# November

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
		American Diabetes Month— <a href="http://www.diabetes.org">www.diabetes.org</a> Epilepsy Awareness Month— <a href="http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org">www.epilepsyfoundation.org</a> Lung Cancer Awareness Month— <a href="http://www.alcase.org">www.alcase.org</a> National AIDS Awareness Month — <a href="http://www.ppsinc.org">www.ppsinc.org</a> National Alzheimer's Disease Month— <a href="http://www.alz.org">www.alz.org</a>				1	
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
		National Diabetes Education Week— <a href="http://www.aadenet.org">www.aadenet.org</a> National Health Information and Technology Week— <a href="http://www.ahima.org/hitweek/">www.ahima.org/hitweek/</a> Medical-Surgical Nurses Week — <a href="http://www.medsurgnurse.org">www.medsurgnurse.org</a> National Radiologic Technology Week— <a href="http://www.asrt.org">www.asrt.org</a>					
9	U.S. Marine Corps Established (1775)	10	11	12	13	14	15
				Perioperative Lung Cancer Awareness Week— <a href="http://www.ons.org">www.ons.org</a>	Perioperative Nurse Week— <a href="http://www.aorn.org">www.aorn.org</a>		
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
				Great American Smokeout <a href="http://www.cancer.org">www.cancer.org</a>			
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
							
Computer Security Day 	30	National American Indian Heritage Month— <a href="http://www.indians.org">www.indians.org</a> National Family Caregivers Month— <a href="http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org/about">www.thefamilycaregiver.org/about</a> National Hospice Month— <a href="http://www.nahc.org">www.nahc.org</a> National Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month— <a href="http://www.pancan.org">www.pancan.org</a>				 The Combined Federal Campaign is still underway	

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](mailto:alan.bloom@va.gov). Submissions are not guaranteed to be published. Considerations will be made for propriety, promptness and print space.