

From the Director

Shirley Bealer, MS, RN, CNA, BC, CPHQ

This is my initial foray in writing to you as an Acting Director. While I admit it takes a little bit of getting used to, I want to thank you all for working so hard to make Dr. Ratliff's detail to VAMC Birmingham while they go through the hiring process of their new Director, as seamless as it has been.

I hope you all had an opportunity to attend one of our two Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday observances. Our EEO Diversity Advisory Committee scored a huge coup by scheduling Rev. Michael F. Thurman, Pastor of the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery, which of course, was also where Dr. King served as he lead our nation's historical civil rights struggle.

Our observations were first class from top to bottom. They not only reflected the personal understanding and compassionate concern associated with Dr. King's messages of nonviolence and equality, but literally displayed some amazingly uplifting talent. Our "Internationally known," choir is filled with amazing talent.

We will be having some equally poignant events in the near future. On February 7 we are scheduled to dedicate new flags outside our Community Living Center in a ceremony that will include our veterans as well as active duty personnel.

On February 12 we will gather to celebrate 85 years of continued serve in Tuskegee. Our celebration will feature a respect for our past, while looking squarely at the future. We also have plans for some special recognition, but we'll wait to unveil the specific at the event itself.

We're still making strides to opening our new Primary Care Clinic in Lyster Army Health Clinic, Fort Rucker, Ala. Spaces have been made ready and we're moving ahead with the planning process for further expansion as we strive to deliver more services to veterans...where they live. Once we have a definite grand opening date we'll share it with everyone.

I'd like to thank all of you who have taken the time to make a difference in the workplace by taking the Aggressive Behavior Prevention Survey. And for those of you who have not yet taken the time to take it...I'd like to encourage you to take the 15 minutes to make a difference. The workplace is a vital environment needed for all staff to cooperate in caring for our Veterans.

The purpose of the Aggressive Behavior Prevention Survey is:

- To measure the rates of violence (physical assault, verbal abuse, passive-aggressive behavior)
- Compare these rates with those from the 2001 survey
- To assess whether individuals actually had access to training and to what kind;
- To assess whether and how facility-level program implementation affected assault rates.



Ms. Bealer addresses the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Observation as CAVHCS EEO Coordinator Loretta McCloud looks on.



No wonder they're smiling!

Congratulations to CAVHCS Holiday Party Winners pictured here. Bill Harris (L-R), Velma McDonald, Felicia Ivory, Barbara Cotton and Tanya Early.



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The CAVHCS Salute

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American Journal of Public Health: VA's Health Care Successes

The December issue of The American Journal of Public Health includes an editorial and articles commending the Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system, saying VA has emerged as a national health care leader.

An editorial headlined, "The Veterans Health Administration: A Domestic Model for a National Health Care System," states that the VA system has several unique aspects that distinguish it from the private sector health care system:

- a centralized health care administration;
- an emphasis on preventive (primary) care as the foundation for the system;
- an automated health information system that includes a national electronic patient record system; and
- an affordable, evidence-based medication prescription plan.

"These are qualities that are clearly lacking in most American market-based private health care systems," the editorial states. It points out that the transformations have taken place even though the VA patient population has a disproportionately lower income and is older, sicker and more likely to suffer from mental and behavioral issues than the private sector.

The editorial is authored by Dr. Said Ibrahim of the Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion at VA's Pittsburgh Health Care System and the Division of General Internal Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh.

Dr. Ibrahim also cites recent studies on the performance of the VA health care system that show marked improvements in the performance of the VA health care system compared with the market-based, private health care system. He says the private health care system "is increasingly seen as too costly and too inadequate in its performance."

The editorial points out, however, that VA faces some critical challenges, such as the need for reforms in the management of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and it points out there a large number of veterans with health care access problems unable to receive care at VA medical centers.

A separate article in the same December issue, praises VA leadership, saying changes made in the 1990s such as instituting a nationwide electronic health record and accompanying quality measurement approach led to the transformation of VA to become a national leader.

The article, "Designing a Model Health Care System," also cites several academic studies which show that VA care outperforms non VA care on various areas, and that patient satisfaction appears to be higher within the VA than among those who receive care in the private sector.

The author, Dr. Kevin Volpp, is with the Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion, VA Hospital in

Philadelphia and the Department of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Dr. Volpp concludes that VA could enhance its impact by reaching out more actively to recently discharge military personnel to ensure they receive the care they need, though he notes there has been recent improvement in this area.

He also states it is important for VA to continue to invest heavily in research for physical and mental health problems resulting from intense combat as well as to enable VA to understand what it does well and what areas need improvement.

"By many metrics, the VA has established itself as a leader in health care delivery within the United States," Volpp concludes. "However, more can be done to show the way for the rest of the country in using data-driven approaches to design and test innovative efforts to improving health."

CAVHCS All-Stars

From a Veteran: This is concerning the recognition of Mr. Everett Cole, Military Order Of Purple Heart Service Officer. Mr. Cole was very instrumental in my award for a service-connected condition. I was denied twice by the Veterans Administration for this condition, but I felt in my heart that my condition was related to injuries incurred while on active duty.

Then, the Office Of The Military Order Of Purple Heart opened at CAVHCS and I asked Mr. Cole to represent my case on appeal. Mr. Cole was able to immediately identify an issue in my claim, which resulted in my claim being awarded after four years on appeal.

Mr. Cole displays an attitude of genuine concern and professionalism for and to the veteran, he might even share a war-story or two. It is my sincere desire to see Mr. Cole recognized at the highest level.

Team A and the Pain Clinic at VAMC Tuskegee (below) recently received dozens of letters from veterans, and a celebration, praising them for outstanding customer service.



Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Images by:
Eric Johnson,
Robin Johnson

MyHealtheVet Recognized in Elite Company

The computerized personal health record for veterans created by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) — My HealtheVet — has been named a national finalist in the “Consumer Empowerment and Protection Awards” given by a national accreditation organization.

VA is one of 19 finalists in the “Best Practices” first-time awards from URAC (formerly the Utilization Review Accreditation Commission), an independent health care accreditation commission. The contest attracted entries detailing innovative and proven programs to enhance patient safety and give consumers control over their health care. Winners represent health plans, pharmacy benefit management organizations, health care management firms and health information technology companies. The finalists will present their programs at a conference in March.

“This award is further evidence VA is a proven leader in using the latest technology to ensure America’s veterans receive world-class health care,” said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “America’s veterans deserve the best this country has to offer, and VA is achieving that high standard.”

Peake noted the number of registrants for My HealtheVet, which offers veterans their own private medical records and data, has topped 500,000.”

According to URAC’s president and CEO, Alan Spiel, the Best Practices awards are an opportunity for leaders in health care management to find out what others are doing to advance consumers’ control of their health care. He called the competition the first of its kind, including entries from both large and small health care management organizations.

“We keep adding features to My HealtheVet to give veterans the tools they need to manage their care as partners with their VA medical providers,” said Under Secretary for Health Dr. Michael J. Kussman. “We are proud of this technology and pleased to be recognized for it.”

A distinguished panel of judges selected the finalists. Entries were blind-reviewed and scored based on objective criteria.

More information about My HealtheVet can be found at www.myhealth.va.gov. My HealtheVet was a winner of the 2007 “Top 5” Excellence.Gov Awards for innovative technology from the private-sector Industry Advisory Council. URAC promotes health care quality through accreditation and certification programs. More information about the “Consumer Empowerment and Protection Awards” can be found at <http://www.urac.org/>.

In another recent honor, the Web site for VA’s health care system was recognized for outstanding achievement by the Web Marketing Association.

The Web site received a “Government Standard of Excellence” award by the association, which is a nonprofit, volunteer organization made up of Internet marketing, online advertising, public relations and Web site design professionals.

The Web Marketing Association’s awards were established in 1997 based on seven criteria for a successful Web site. The entries are evaluated by a professional judging panel for design, innovation, content, technology, interactivity, copywriting and ease of use. Entries cover a range of categories, including a government division.

‘Engineer’

From Page 1

different cultures. Working there prepared me for coming here shortly after CAVHCS’ combining of the two Medical Centers in Tuskegee and Montgomery. In fact - after I found out that I’d been selected as Engineer of the Year, I contacted several of my co-workers in New Jersey to let them know how important their mentoring has meant to me.”

Challenging expectations in what has historically been recognized as a male-dominated Engineering field; Griffin talked about two women that have had a positive impact on her career and life.

“When I arrived here Mrs. Linda Watson was the Director,” explained Griffin. “I admired her strength. People may not have always agreed with her, but I was compelled to appreciate her conviction for serving our

veterans. It gave me a strong outlook on my ultimate role of being here to serve. She showed me firsthand that overcoming any glass ceiling is sometimes simply a matter of opportunity and oftentimes favor.”

While her opportunity at CAVHCS may have been offered by a relative stranger, Griffin considers her success to also be a tribute to her family.

“My family instilled within me a strong sense of faith during my upbringing,” said Griffin. “Plus, since I was young my parents and grandparents told me that I WAS going to college, and that I was going to realize the American Dream; that each of our generations was going to deposit more into the world than the generation before.

“But there’s one person that I will share this recognition with more than anyone else,” added Griffin. “My

mother is 80 years old. She’ll be with me when I go to Washington in February for the ceremony. This is her award just as much as mine. She earned it a long time ago.”



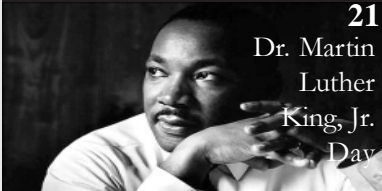
CAVHCS’ Leah Griffin combines proven know how with tools of the trade like her ever-present phone and keys to ensure things go as planned.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. displays his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize medal in Oslo, Norway, December 10, 1964. The 35-year-old Dr. King was honored for promoting the principle of non-violence in the civil rights movement. (AP Photo)



January

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
National Poverty in America Awareness Month National Volunteer Blood Donor Month — www.aabb.org		1	2	3 110 th Congress Assembles	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16 Religious Freedom Day	17	18	19
 21 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	22	23	24	25	26	26
27 Vietnam Peace Agreement Signed 35 th Anniversary (1973)	28	29	30	31	National Glaucoma Awareness Month National Thyroid 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.