



## CAVHCS Conducts Pandemic Flu Exercise

The old adage to describe emergency response exercises goes – plan of the worst and hope for the best. And, that adage was well served recently when CAVHCS took part in a National Veterans Health Administration (VHA) exercise dealing with Pandemic Flu.

“The recent Pandemic Flu exercise was an extension of how we approach any emergency response,” explained CAVHCS Emergency Management Coordinator Debbie Morrison. “Of course executing a response that deals with influenza at a pandemic level is something none of us want to actually have to do, but we must prepare because if it happens...we’ll be needed.”

Because VA has 1,600 locations across the country providing services to millions of veterans a year, it has placed high priority on pandemic

flu planning and preparation. VA was one of the first cabinet-level departments to prepare a comprehensive plan for pandemic flu and the national exercise marked the plan’s full-scale test. The exercise was based on an influenza pandemic affecting all parts of the US and was carried out by VHA’s



CAVHCS leadership and staff recently took place in the VHA’s week-long national exercise to test planning and preparations in the event of influenza pandemic outbreak.

Emergency Management Strategic Health Care Group, along with a steering committee, coordinators at the medical centers and networks, and VHA and VA staff in Central Office.

CAVHCS started preparations for participation in the VHA’s nationwide exercise as far back as last year. The approach being taken when it deals with Pandemic Flu is to employ continued growth, preparation and planned revision. “Going into the exercise we had a plan that we knew we wanted to revise,” said Morrison. “We had a table top exercise last year and we revised our plan then to address identified needs. Our plan is constantly evolving and we decided to use this exercise to identify as many

Please see ‘Pandemic’

Page 5

## Peake: Expanding Women-centric Focus

### Meeting Women-specific Health Needs

WASHINGTON – An aggressive push to ensure women veterans receive the highest quality of care in VA medical facilities was pledged by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake at a recent VA National Summit on Women Veterans’ Issues.

Although VA already has services for women patients equal to those men receive, Peake told the audience of more than 400 women-veteran advocates, “We are reinventing ourselves by expanding our women-centric focus to initiate new programs that meet the needs of women veterans.”

Citing the demographic shift that brings increasing numbers of women to VA for care and the need for changes, Peake announced formation of a work group to focus on women’s needs in prosthetics and rehabilitation, hiring women’s advocates in VA medical centers, developing quality measurements specifically for

women patients, purchasing more state-of-the-art, specialized women’s health care equipment, and expanding medical education in women’s health for VA care providers.

Summit attendees also learned that VA recently established a work group whose goal is to ensure every female veteran enrolled in VA care has a women’s health primary care provider, especially to meet gender-specific needs.

The June 20-22 conference in Washington focused on how to ensure VA meets women-specific health needs and how to inform more women veterans of their VA benefits. It was the fourth women’s summit, which VA holds every four years.

Summit co-sponsors included the American Legion Auxiliary, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Other assisting veterans groups included the Blinded Veterans Association, Military Officers Association of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, the American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America and TriWest.

# From the Director

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

It's been a very busy period since last we spoke through the newsletter. And, coincidentally communication is something I'd like to take a moment to talk...well actually, write about. Our work centers are busy, dynamic environments that demand a great deal of our attention, commitment and of course time. More and more we are increasingly reliant on emails, voicemails, memos and other forms of non-personal communication. Of course, treating our nation's veterans requires a great deal of personal attention and interaction to ensure we're doing the right things at the right time - for the right reasons.

Technology is wonderful. It's impact upon productivity is immeasurable. But today...admittedly despite the fact that you're reading this as a result of technology...I'd like to encourage you all to take an extra moment to ensure our lines of communications are as dynamic and strong as our work centers.

We have products like the Salute to ensure we communicate the goings on around CAVHCS as well as providing a vehicle for recognition and notoriety for your hard work. Your work is indeed valuable and appreciated.

We have another, newer vehicle that hopefully is already serving to bolster our lines of communication - The

Plan of the Week. This is a single page document that is sent to you via email, but should be shared in a group setting, with supervisors ensuring the information is being passed. However, I am concerned this product is not being used to its optimal effect. We recently took place in a VHA-wide Pandemic Flu Exercise. This information was passed through the Plan of the Week for several weeks prior and even during the exercise, but still we had personnel that were unaware the exercise was being conducted.

Of course communication is a two-way process, and for an administrator one of the most liberating feelings is realizing that your people are not only buying into the direction you're leading toward, but that those same people are more than capable of leading as well. In other words - I've realized long ago that I'm not the only one with ideas. Allow me to challenge you to seek out our Nine-Point Plan. Digest it and - if you have suggestions or ideas on how we can arrive at our goals better or smoother - discuss them with your supervisors. Together we can accomplish anything.

Finally - it is with a very heavy heart that I offer condolences to staff who worked directly with and those of us who grew to know and love Ms. Catherine L. Wright who sadly passed June 6th. Catherine began her career as a Staff Nurse in Geriatrics in June 1990, and was serving as our Clinical Coordinator for PM&RS when she passed.

We will all miss her.

## CAVHCS All-Stars

**"Wow! How do I start? I've heard all the bad press about VA Hospitals. But I must say this: For the past 2 years I've been at about 5 hospitals in the area with a sister who has cancer. So I use this for my past experience and none can compare with you. When I checked in to the VA emergency room, it was a busy night. Everyone in there was hopping but they were still so friendly. I got in so quickly (that doesn't happen in a civilian hospital). I was taken to the third floor and admitted there. Everyone did their best to make me comfortable. I was given drugs, checked often during the night. The next day I saw a doctor and after a few days I was feeling better. This has been a pleasant experience in spite of my illness. The nurses here are exceptional and always pleasant while doing everything they can for you. Also this is a VERY clean Hospital! Thank you and please thank your wonderful staff!"**

**"I would like to highly commend your hospital staff, especially Dr. Ewell and Verdele Chambliss for the fine treatment they provide for their patients. Also I was very impressed with the cleanliness of the hospital and the fact that my appointment time was very prompt!"**

**"I must say or inform you of employee Mrs. Charlene D. Harris. She went above and beyond to assist me today, and I must tell you that means a lot to us veterans. Not only did she straighten out my appointments which will save me on gas prices, her total overall attitude and kindness is outstanding. I strongly commend her and her work efforts to help us veterans, which is outstanding.**

**Thank you for your time and Ms. Harris and staff."**

**"My husband, Colonel (name not published), (USAF, Ret.) and my self have received excellent service from Corine Raife, R.N. She has been a tremendous help to us. She is kind, patient, sweet and dear.**

**Thank her for us please."**



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### The CAVHCS Salute

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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## Employee of the Month



**June**  
Ms. Judy Mason

Mrs. Judy A. Mason, Social Work Associate in the Homemaker/Home Health Aide (H/HHA) Program is nominated for the June Employee of the Month for the Tuskegee Campus. She has been the only Social Work Associate in the H/HHA Program since August 2007. She collaborates with treatment teams in Ambulatory Care, Mental Health, Geriatrics, extended Care & Rehabilitation and Acute Care on a daily basis regarding referrals, resources and care needs of the veterans. Ms. Mason has been instrumental in the implementation of referrals via consult enabling the program to increase to 254 veterans being served, functioning within her scope of practice in an outstanding manner.

Ms. Mason maintains open communication with community agencies to facilitate a continuity of care. She maintains a “can-do” attitude and is willing to assist veterans, and their families as needed to promote satisfactory customer service. Ms. Mason has received numerous letters commending her performance in assisting our veteran population in the program.



**July**  
Mr. Shonnie Shepherd

Mr. Shonie Shepherd is an excellent worker and exemplifies exceptional customer service skills in working with both veterans and fellow employees. Mr. Shepherd’s commitment to service was demonstrated recently during a Mental Health workshop sponsored by Mental Health and Behavioral Health Services. It was anticipated that 100 people would be in attendance. However the attendance was more than expected and the number of handouts was instantly depleted. Mr. Shepherd was contacted and came through with more than enough copies to make the workshop a success, displaying his teamwork capabilities, spirit and willingness to prioritize to meet an urgent need and the dependability to get the job done.

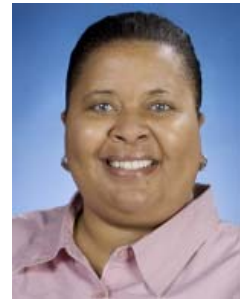
His cooperation is an excellent example of good customer service and it showed the visitors and veterans how the CAVHCS family works together. What is most appreciated about Mr. Shepherd is his positive attitude and genuine willingness to help. He is a model of what CAVHCS strives to achieve.



**June**  
Ms. Annie Talley

With a career that spans more than thirty-one years, Ms. Annie Talley has served in various roles including NOD, Nurse Manager and Performance Improvement Coordinator. She presently serves as a staff nurse in Ambulatory Care and works in the emergency room on an as needed basis. She is an active and vital team player who persistently demonstrates a high level of professionalism, compassion, courtesy and respect for her patients and the entire team. Ms. Talley is often referred to as the one with wisdom on the team and is sought out for advice.

Ms. Talley possesses exemplary skills and has a positive, cooperative “can do” attitude that goes a long way toward being able to achieve her goals. As a staff nurse in Ambulatory Care, Ms. Talley’s duties include, but are not limited to screening, nursing assessments and educating patients and families according to their needs and teaches them according to their level of understanding.



**July**  
Ms. Cynthia Davis

Ms. Cynthia Davis is assigned as the social worker to the Green Team on our Montgomery campus. She has provided social work services to the Yellow and Red Teams and provides coverage for the Emergency Department on a rotational basis as well. James A. Bell in the Veterans Industries Program says... “Ms. Davis’ support of quality patient care, access to care and timeliness of care epitomizes one who is well vested in providing quality customer service.”

He goes on to say that, “Ms. Davis has been a real trooper when it comes to assisting us in getting referral packets to Veterans Industries (VI) completed. In record time of our request for psychosocial assessments, Ms. Davis has them in the system and informs us that they are ready so that we can quickly process our veterans for services. Due to her outstanding work we are able to maintain a smooth process into VI Services for the veterans and meet our performance measures. Please acknowledge to Ms. Davis our sincere gratitude in her dedication to our veterans and to her fellow employees.”

Ms. Davis’ immediate recognition and attention to supporting the psychosocial recovery principals in getting veterans back to work, thus once again moving them into being productive tax payers and citizens is commendable.



# VA Employees to Test Pay for Performance

By **Brittany R. Ballenstedt**  
*GovernmentExecutive.Com*

The Veterans Affairs

Department is launching a pilot project that will replace the decades-old General Schedule pay system with one that more closely ties pay to performance. On June 18, VA announced that it would place 150 employees at the Veterans Health Administration under a pilot pay-for-performance system for at least the next five years. The plan will cover employees in the health systems administrator job series at the GS14 and 15 grade levels, with the first performance-based pay adjustments awarded in January 2010.

The Office of Personnel Management said in the Federal Register that the General Schedule has limited options for recognizing superior performance, and that VA would like to use the human capital accountability and assessment framework to tie annual increases directly to job performance.

The process would eliminate the fixed steps that give automatic pay raises to employees and instead make

annual pay adjustments performance sensitive, according to the OPM notice. Like other alternative pay experiments across government, pay pool adjustments would be funded from a kitty with money that would otherwise be used to fund the annual GS pay adjustment, quality step boosts and withingrade increases.

“By regularly rewarding better performance with better pay, the participating organization will strengthen the results oriented performance culture,” wrote OPM. “Among other things, they will be better able to retain their good performers and recruit new ones.”

Lawrence Bifareti, director of workforce planning and organization development at VHA, said in December that the agency already had implemented a five-tiered performance management system instead of the pass/fail systems many agencies use. At the time he said tying such ratings to pay was the agency’s next step.

According to OPM, federal agencies have the authority to place up

to 5,000 employees in pay for performance demonstration projects. OPM must approve the projects and cannot manage more than 10 at any one time.

Currently, pay for performance pilots are active in three federal agencies - the acquisition component at the Defense Department, and the Commerce and Energy departments. The Agriculture Department announced in May that it planned to test pay for performance for 2,900 employees at the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

A public hearing on the plan is scheduled for Aug. 5 at VA headquarters in Washington.



## Peake: ‘Solid record of success’

## VA Reaching out to Veterans with Mortgage Problems

WASHINGTON -- Many home owners have found it difficult recently to pay their mortgages, but quick intervention by loan counselors at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has actually reduced the number of veterans defaulting on their home loans.

“VA is reaching out to veterans - both those who use our home-loan guaranty program and those who don’t take advantage of our guaranties - to keep people in their homes,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “I’m proud of our solid record of success in helping veterans and active-duty personnel deal with financial crises.”

Accounting for much of this success are VA counselors at nine regional loan centers who assist people with VA-guaranteed loans avoid foreclosure through counseling and special financing arrangements. The counselors also can assist other veterans with financial problems. VA counselors have helped about 74,000 veterans, active-duty members and survivors keep their homes since 2000, a savings to the government of nearly \$1.5 billion.

Depending on a veteran’s circumstances, VA can intercede with the borrower on the veteran’s behalf to pursue

options - that would allow a veteran to keep a home. To obtain help from a VA financial counselor, veterans can call VA toll-free at 1-877-827-3702. Information about VA’s home loan guaranty program can be obtained at [www.homeloans.va.gov](http://www.homeloans.va.gov).

Since 1944, when home-loan guaranties were offered with the original GI Bill, VA has guaranteed more than 18 million home loans worth \$911 billion. Last year, about 135,000 veterans, active-duty service members and survivors received loans valued at nearly \$24 billion.

About 2.3 million home loans still in effect were purchased through VA’s home-loan guaranty program, which makes home loans more affordable for veterans, active-duty members and some surviving spouses by protecting lenders from loss if the borrower fails to repay the loan. More than 90 percent of VA-backed home loans were given without a down payment.

April data shows that foreclosures are down more than 50 percent from the same months in 2003. VA attributes this to prudent credit underwriting standards, its robust supplemental loan servicing program and VA financial loan counselors.

## MyHealtheVet Honored

My HealtheVet - the web-based portal that enables veterans to create and maintain a personal health record - has received two major awards from organizations that focus on effective use of Internet Technology.

My HealtheVet has been selected to receive one of the prestigious 2008 "CIO 100 Awards" in recognition of its innovative use of information technology. The CIO 100 award program recognizes organizations around the world that exemplify the highest level of operational and strategic excellence in Information Technology.

VA developed My HealtheVet to be a one-stop location for veterans of all eras to receive critical medical and benefits information and to provide ways for veterans to input and view some of their own medical records online.

Earlier this year, My HealtheVet was also selected as the Gold Award winner for Best Practices in Consumer Empowerment and Protection Awards by the Utilization Review Accreditation Committee (URAC).

Recent upgrades to the web-based portal include an Active Duty Center for newly discharged veterans, a new calendar option, and Military Health System (MHS) learning modules which feature three online courses developed in concert with the Department of Defense. Another upgrade will be added soon enabling veterans to view their lab results for certain tests and view appointments.

## Recognizing your Commitment to Service



Ms. Bealer presents a certificate and pin to Nicole Sharpe to commemorate 25 years of service.

Images by:  
Eric  
Johnson,  
Robin  
Johnson



Dr. Lance Davis (left) and Ms. Bealer recently celebrated 15 years of service during a recent Director's Staff meeting.



Ms. Bealer presents a certificate and pin to Mark A. Howard to commemorate 25 years of service.

## 'Pandemic'

*From Page 1*

needs as possible to improve the response to protect our staff and veterans."

Each day of the five-day exercise corresponded to different points in a pandemic time line, starting with Day One equaling two weeks after pandemic flu is first reported in the US (and 3-1/2 months after it starts overseas). At Day Three of the exercise the pandemic wave was at a peak. The exercise ended with Day Five equaling three months after the first US report and more than six months after the worldwide start.

Incorporating identified needs/improvements into a plan is the desired end result from any exercise, but key to that growth process is participation. "We had a lot of people who were really engaged and focused in the process," said Dr. Lance Davis who served as CAVHCS' Acting Associate Director, who was actively involved in the day-to-day participation. "I think the level of participation will go a long way toward leading us to a vastly improved plan. It was easy to recognize the level of commitment and professionalism."

If a Pandemic actually does occur that same commitment and professionalism will be tested in many ways - by everyone. "Operating in a Pandemic environment will be a challenge for

everyone," said CAVHCS Chief of Staff Dr. Cliff Robinson. "This is serious business that requires planning, education and communication to carry out."

Education about the nature of pandemics is already available to staff and veterans. The website [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) is a clearinghouse of information that provides background into pandemics as well as insight to the planning being developed at a national and international level.

"I don't want to sound like an alarmist, but the fact is that according to the World Health Organization, we're already in a Pandemic Alert Period," said Robinson. "I think everyone should get acquainted with the facts, our plan and consider what they would do if this actually happens."



Staff from all services provided input during CAVHCS' Pandemic Flu Exercise.

WASHINGTON (AFPN) --  
 At the Vietnam War Memorial people leave behind patriotic and sentimental symbols of a nation's gratitude for veterans' sacrifices. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Jim Varhegyi)



# July

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4 Fourth of July 	5
<b>Cord Blood Awareness Month</b> <a href="http://www.cordblood.com">www.cordblood.com</a>						
<b>Fireworks Safety Months</b> <a href="http://www.preventblindness.org">www.preventblindness.org</a>						
6 <b>Air Force Cross</b> Created (1960)	7	8		10	11	12
	National Therapeutic Recreation Week- <a href="http://www.nrpa.org">www.nrpa.org</a>					
13	14	15	16	17	18 <b>Dental Awareness Day</b> <a href="http://www.agd.org">www.agd.org</a>	19
						
20	21		23	24	25	26 <b>Department of Defense</b> (1947)
	National Hospitality House Week- <a href="http://www.nahhh.org">www.nahhh.org</a>					
27 <b>Korean War Armistice</b> (1953)	28 <b>28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games</b> <a href="http://www.wheelchairgames.va.gov">http://www.wheelchairgames.va.gov</a>	29	30	31	Hemochromatosis Screening Awareness Month <a href="http://www.irondisorders.org">www.irondisorders.org</a>  UV Safety Month <a href="http://www.aao.org">www.aao.org</a>	

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.