

Helping Our
HEROES



Dear OEF/OIF Veterans, Family and Friends,

The Global War on Terrorism has dramatically increased the number of veterans that we support. In order to provide the quality of healthcare that these warriors deserve, VISN 4 has implemented new programs and added numerous positions to support these heroic veterans. Some of these men and women are not aware of the many services and benefits that are available to them throughout the VA system.

We are obligated to ensure that our newest veterans, those of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) utilize our facilities and take full advantage of all services that we provide.

Access to quality care for veterans continues to be a top priority for us at VISN 4. We have been able to ensure that 99% of veterans are able to receive primary care appointments within 30 days of their desired date and even more impressive is 98% of all veterans have received a specialty care appointment within the same time-frame. It is my goal that all VISN 4 employees strive to ensure that 100% of all veterans receive appointments within 30 days of their desired date.

To meet the specific needs of our OEF/OIF veterans each medical center has created an OEF/OIF support team that includes a program manager and case manager with a myriad of primary care and mental health support staff. These OEF/OIF coordinators are available at each of the 10 facilities within VISN 4 to help you navigate your way through the VA system. Our OEF/OIF outreach services include Transition Patient Advocates (TPA) who will travel to your home and meet with you to discuss what the VA can and will do for you! We at VISN 4 are doing everything we can to get the word out to our Nation's newest heroes that if you can't come to us—we will come to you!

This publication will provide you an overview of the programs and services we offer, please take the time to review it and register with the VA if you haven't already done so.

Sincerely,



Michael E. Moreland, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 4

Michael Moreland, VISN 4 Director, speaks with Clay Rankin about his service dog and the assistance he has received from the Clarksburg VA as an OEF/OIF veteran.



VA Healthcare VISN 4
323 North Shore Drive
Suite 400
Pittsburgh, PA 15212
412.822.3316 phone
412.822.3275 fax
www.visn4.va.gov

Michael E. Moreland, FACHE
Network Director

Bradley P. Shelton
Deputy Network Director

David S. Macpherson, MD, MPH
Chief Medical Officer

William E. Boyle
Chief Financial Officer

Dorothy Steele
Executive Assistant

David E. Cowgill
Public Affairs Officer

Barb L. Forsha, RN, MSN, ET
Quality Management Officer

This special publication is published for the employees, volunteers, patients and friends of VA Healthcare—VISN 4. To submit articles, editorials, letters or story ideas for possible inclusion in future publications, please contact David Cowgill at 412-954-4828 or via email: david.cowgill@va.gov.

Editor
David E. Cowgill
Public Affairs Officer, VISN 4

Assistant Editor
Heather L. Frantz
Public Affairs Specialist, VISN 4

Design & Layout
Rodney E. Boyce
Creative Director, Square Peg Design

Front cover:
Jose Gallo with daughters Blana, 7 and Dana, 8 and wife Jackie.

Back cover:
(top left) **David Emery Jr. "D.J." with daughter Carlee, 17 months.**

(bottom left) **Edward J. Walls and wife Tammy.**
(right) **Devore Barlow with son Devorin Barlow, 11.**

Am I Eligible?

You may be eligible for VA benefits if you are:

- a veteran
- a veteran's dependent
- a surviving spouse, child or parent of a deceased veteran
- an active duty military servicemember
- a member of the Reserve or National Guard

OEF/OIF Veterans Eligibility for VA Healthcare Benefits has been Extended to 5 Years!

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of Fiscal Year 2008 (Public Law 110-181) was signed by President Bush on January 28, 2008. This Act extends the period of enhanced enrollment opportunity for health care eligibility provided a veteran who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998 (commonly referred to as combat veterans or OEF/OIF veterans) as follows:

- Currently enrolled combat veterans will have their enhanced enrollment period automatically extended to 5 years from their most recent date of discharge.
- New enrollees discharged from active duty on or after January 28, 2003 are eligible for this enhanced enrollment health benefit for 5 years after their date of their most recent discharge from active duty.
- Combat Veterans who never enrolled and were discharged from active duty between November 11, 1998 and January 27, 2003 may apply for this enhanced enrollment opportunity through January 27, 2011.

NOTE: *Combat veterans who applied for enrollment after January 16, 2003, but were not accepted for enrollment based on the application being outside the previous post-discharge two year window will be automatically reviewed and notified of the enrollment decision under this new authority.*



Elsie Baker, OEF/OIF veteran, receives assistance in understanding and filling out paperwork at the Butler VA where she receives PTSD counseling.

Toll-Free Service Benefits Information & Assistance

For more information about specific benefits, visit the nearest VA regional office or call 800-827-1000

Special Toll-Free Numbers

Health Care	877-222-8387
Education & Training	888-442-4551
VA Life Insurance	800-669-8477
Office of SGLI	800-419-1473
CHAMPVA	800-733-8387
Direct Deposit	877-838-2778
Headstones (status of claims only)	800-697-6947
Telecommunication Device for Deaf (TDD)	800-829-4833

Internet

For detailed information about all VA benefits and services, visit www.va.gov

Survivors: Information specific to survivors is available. Select "Benefits," then "Survivors' Benefits."

Applications: Apply for Compensation, Pension, Health Care, Education, or

Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment benefits by selecting "Apply Online."

Inquiries: A "Contact VA" link is available for e-mail inquiries.

What am I Eligible For?

Compensation

VA can pay you monthly compensation if you are at least 10% disabled as a result of your military service.

Devore Barlow, who received assistance with finding employment and housing from the Wilmington VA, assists her son, Devorin, 11, with his homework.



Health Care

VA provides a number of health care services for OEF/OIF veterans to include:

- Hospital, outpatient medical, dental, pharmacy and prosthetic services
- Domiciliary and community based residential care
- Sexual trauma counseling

- Specialized health care for women veterans
- Health and rehabilitation programs for homeless veterans
- Readjustment counseling
- Alcohol and drug dependency treatment
- Medical evaluation for disorders associated with military service in the Global War on Terrorism

Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment

VA provides assistance to veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment. For veterans with serious service-connected disabilities, VA also offers services to improve their ability to live as independently as possible. There are five service delivery options available:

- Reemployment
- Rapid Access to Employment
- Self-Employment
- Employment through Long Term Services
- Independent Living

Assistance to veterans may be provided in the form of job search, vocational evaluation, career exploration, vocational training, educational training and supportive rehabilitation services.

Education & Training

VA pays benefits to eligible veterans, reservists, and active duty servicemembers while they are in an approved education or training program. Call your local VA OEF/OIF coordinator to see what you may be entitled to or call the VA National Education & Training Hotline at 888-442-4551.

Home Loans

VA offers a number of home loan services to eligible veterans, some military personnel, and certain surviving spouses to include:

- **Guaranteed Loans:** VA can guarantee part of a loan from a private lender to help you buy a home, a manufactured home, a lot for a manufactured home, or certain types of condominiums. VA also guarantees loans for building, repairing, and improving homes.
- **Refinancing Loans:** If you have a VA mortgage, VA can help you refinance your loan at a lower interest rate. You may also refinance a non-VA loan.
- **Special Grants:** Certain disabled veterans and military personnel can receive grants to adapt or acquire housing suitable for their needs.

Life Insurance

There are several life insurance options available through the VA, please contact your local OEF/OIF coordinator to learn more.

Dependents & Survivors

DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION (DIC) is payable to certain survivors of:

- Servicemembers who died on active duty
- Veterans who died from service-related disabilities
- Certain veterans who were being paid 100% VA disability compensation at time of death.

DEATH PENSION is payable to some surviving spouses and children of deceased wartime veterans. The benefit is based on financial need. Parents' DIC is payable to some surviving parents. The benefit is based on financial need.

VA CIVILIAN HEALTH AND MEDICAL PROGRAM (CHAMPVA) shares the cost of medical services for eligible dependents and survivors of certain veterans.

DEPENDENTS & SURVIVORS EDUCATION & TRAINING: Some family members of disabled or deceased veterans are eligible for education and training benefits.

HOME LOANS: Certain surviving spouses may be eligible for this benefit.



Jose Gallo holds a replica of the damage he received to his skull when he was shot in the back of the head by a sniper while deployed to Iraq. Gallo receives treatment for paralysis and PTSD at the Wilkes-Barre VA and is also receiving assistance in furthering his education.

Burial

VA offers certain benefits and services to honor our Nation's deceased veterans.

- **Headstones and Markers:** VA can furnish a monument to mark the grave of an eligible veteran.
- **Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC):** VA can provide a PMC for eligible recipients.
- **Burial Flag:** VA can provide an American flag to drape an eligible veteran's casket.
- **Reimbursement of Burial Expenses:** Generally, VA can pay a burial allowance of \$2,000 for veterans who die of service-related causes. For certain other veterans, VA can pay \$300 for burial and funeral expenses and \$300 for a burial plot.
- **Burial in a VA National Cemetery:** Most veterans and some dependents can be buried in a VA national cemetery.

We'll Come to You!

Transition Patient Advocates Assist OEF/OIF Veterans

VISN 4 has four Transition Patient Advocates that serve as the point of contact to assist transitioning Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and/or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans and their families.

Hillary Ferguson receives treatment for her PTSD at Butler VA.



“We help veterans navigate the VA and we can assist with financial issues such as back bills, car payments and mortgages. We can also assist with finding employment and housing. Anything they need we are going to follow it through until the end and what we don't know we'll find,” said Maria Williams, VISN 4 Transition Patient Advocate.

The Transition Patient Advocates serve as the VISN 4 Network Director's liaison

between the medical centers, the patients, employees of the medical centers and the community regarding patients' rights and advocacy. The transition patient advocate acts as a communicator, facilitator and problem solver. They are dedicated to ensuring that OEF/OIF veterans have a personal advocate as they move throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare system.

Hillary Ferguson Butler VA Medical Center

Hillary Ferguson served our nation in Operation Iraqi Freedom for 14 months and was psychologically wounded during combat. Ferguson states that after returning from combat her “relationships with her family and friends were completely changed and she didn't even know herself.” Ferguson suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and is being screened for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). She first started going to the Butler VA Medical Center when she couldn't sleep well at night and everything seemed to be chaotic. Ferguson says that Butler VAMC has been a great experience for her and has aided in her recovery process with all the help she has received from her social worker, primary care physician and psychologist. An OEF/OIF coordinator at Butler VAMC continues to check on Ferguson to ensure that she has her prescriptions, everything at home is stable and to be sure that she is handling school well.

William Smathers, Transition Patient Advocate for VISN 4, says, “VA goes beyond just providing healthcare; we help with VBA benefits, Social Security benefits, and education. Wherever our veterans need us, that is where we will go.”

Ferguson is currently enrolled at Sharon Regional Nursing School and upon graduation she wishes to return to Butler VAMC as a nurse to help other wounded veterans. She believes that she would be able to relate to the VA patients and that this would be the key to good nursing.

Richard Bryan and William Smathers, VISN 4 Transition Patient Advocates, visit OEF/OIF veteran Edward Walls and his wife, Tammy, at their home in Altoona, Pa.

VISN 4 Transition Patient Advocates:

*Stationed at the VISN 4 Office,
Pittsburgh, Pa.:*

WILLIAM A. SMATHERS,
Transition Patient Advocate

RICHARD “BUZZ” BRYAN,
Transition Patient Advocate

*Stationed at the VA Medical Center,
Philadelphia:*

MARIA WILLIAMS,
Transition Patient Advocate

STEVE WILSON,
Transition Patient Advocate

OEF/OIF Coordinators

Each facility has OEF/OIF staff and/or a coordinator who you may contact directly to assist you in your transition to the VA medical center located nearest to you:

ALTOONA
877-626-2500, ext. 7215.

BUTLER
800-362-8262, ext. 2493
or 724-285-2493

CLARKSBURG
304-623-3461, ext. 3711

COATESVILLE
610-384-7711, ext. 6840

ERIE
814-860-2965

LEBANON
800-409-8771, ext. 5954
or 717-228-5954

PHILADELPHIA
215-823-5915

PITTSBURGH
412-594-4186

WILKES-BARRE
877-928-2621, ext. 7803 or 4297

WILMINGTON
800-461-8262, ext. 4763 or 4576



Edward J. Walls

James E. Van Zandt (Altoona) VA Medical Center

Edward J. Walls was wounded in combat when an insurgent shot and shattered both of his femurs during a patrol he was conducting during Operation Iraqi Freedom. His right leg is still intact but causes him a lot of pain. Walls lost his left leg due to the bullet hitting an artery and creating too much damage and he also suffers from short-term memory damage.

Initially, Walls refused to use a stair climber, but due to a few recent falls he has now accepted the one the VA offered to provide for him. The stair climber is used to take Walls from the first floor of his home to the second floor allowing him to safely move about his home. Physicians from the VA have thoroughly examined Walls legs for nerve damage and an OEF/OIF coordinator has set up appointments for Walls to see a neurologist to assess his memory problem.

“The Transition Patient Advocates always check up on me and would even hunt me down to cater to any of my needs,” said Walls. He also never imagined that VA employees would be visiting and checking in on him so much. Walls said that he can see that the Transition Patient Advocates are not just helping wounded veterans like himself because they have to; they are doing their job because they truly care about each soldier.

Walls has two sons and a wife in Altoona, PA.

What to Expect from your VA Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service

Our medical, technical and therapeutic services are offered to:

- Evaluate needs
- Design custom devices
- Re-fit and adjust the item
- Perform gait analysis
- Recommend physical therapy intervention
- Communicate with the primary care provider to assist with ongoing medical care

Programs

Automobile Adaptive Equipment Program

This program provides equipment and training necessary for certain service-connected patients to enter, exit and operate a motor vehicle, once they have been awarded an Automobile Grant by VBA (Form 4502) and completed Driver's Training with an approved driver's evaluator. If a patient does not meet the service-connected criteria to operate a vehicle (loss of or loss of use of a limb or ankylosis of one or both hips or

knees), they can still be approved for equipment to enter and exit a vehicle.

Home Improvement & Structural Alterations (HISA) Grant Program

The HISA grant is provided for the improvements and structural alterations a veteran needs to access his/her home and essential bathroom facilities. Examples include ramps, railings, lowered countertops, flooring, widened doorways and handicap accessible bathrooms. The one-time monetary limit (\$1,200 for non-service-connected patients and \$4,100 for service-connected patients) is dependent upon the veteran's service-connected rating.

Clothing Allowance Program

The Clothing Allowance Payment is paid annually to veterans with a service-connected condition who, because of the condition, must wear a device that causes the outer clothing to wear or tear; or if a veteran uses topical ointments prescribed by a VA provider for a service-connected skin condition that causes irreparable damage to outer garments.

David Emery Jr. "D.J." James E. Van Zandt (Altoona) VA Medical Center

David Emery Jr., more commonly known as D.J., is a wounded veteran who served our country in two tours in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Emery says that he was severely injured when a man entered his area to be searched, the man was wired and when he lifted his arms to be searched he blew himself up. In March 2008 an infection resulting from his injuries took his left leg and two to three days later the doctors had to take his right one as well. Emery has also suffered nerve damage to his right arm and wrist from the explosion.

Emery was sitting at his home in Bellefonte, PA when the VISN 4 Transition Patient Advocates (TPAs), Richard Bryan and William Smathers, arrived at his doorstep. The TPAs sat down with Emery and explained specifically what services were available to him through the VA and offered to help him in every way possible. Emery told the TPAs that he was having a difficult time not being able to drive. The Transition Patient Advocates proceeded to speed along the process to get a wheelchair lift for Emery's truck as well as hand controls





to enable Emery to drive and gain back some of his independence.

The driver seat of Emery's truck extends out to a couple of inches above his wheelchair seat allowing him to hoist himself into the driver seat of his truck. Then, Emery's wheelchair lift picks up his wheelchair and places it into the flatbed of his truck with the push of a button and he is ready to drive.

"I am thankful for the [VA] helping me out because there is a lot of stuff I don't know about or I don't understand," said Emery.

"Most of the veterans we see do not have direct, easy access to healthcare," Smathers

said. This was the case for Emery who lives out in the country in Bellefonte, PA. "Many veterans, mothers, and fathers can't believe that there are VA employees coming out to their house to specifically reach out to them."

Emery said that he originally thought the VA would be like any other hospital with a lot of paperwork and people to go through to get anything accomplished. However, he feels that the VA hospitals within VISN 4 have helped him out tremendously and that it hasn't taken a long time to get things accomplished.

The VA will also be providing Emery with a hand cycle in the near future.



VA Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Services

Hearing Aids & Eyeglasses

Hearing Aids are provided to patients who are at least 10% service-connected or POWs, Purple Heart recipients, Housebound (HB) and/or Aid & Attendance (A&A) recipients or those enrolled in vocational rehabilitation. Exceptions include patients

with multiple sclerosis, ear diseases and those who are rated 0% for hearing loss.

Eyeglasses are provided to patients who are at least 10% service-connected or POWs, Purple Heart recipients, HB and/or A&A recipients. Exceptions include patients who have/have had a stroke, diabetes, glaucoma, multiple sclerosis, cataract surgery or who need eyeglasses to actively participate in their medical treatment.

Leroy Scott Jr. received assistance from Chris Nowak (pictured in the background), VISN 4 Prosthetics Chief, with his prosthetic and with finding employment at the Philadelphia VA.



Prosthetic & Orthotic Devices

Prosthetic appliances, or prostheses, are external items that are custom fabricated and fitted to patients who have had an amputation of a lower or upper limb. Prescriptions are developed in the VA Amputee Clinic by a multidisciplinary team consisting of a Physician, Prosthetist, Therapist and Prosthetic Representative. Each prescription is carefully formulated to the patient's specific needs, taking into consideration factors that include vocation, recreational needs (swimming, skiing, archery, etc.), physical health in general and home environment. Based on this information, prostheses can be designed, often using new and emerging technologies as they become available. Some examples include:

- microprocessor knees (C-Leg, Rheo Knee, Power Knee)
- microprocessor ankles (Proprio Foot)
- myoelectric and electric upper limb components

Other items and programs that VA Prosthetics support through our service teams are:

- Artificial Limbs (C-Legs, myoelectric arms, etc.)

Leroy Scott Jr.

Philadelphia VA Medical Center

Leroy Scott Jr. was a combat medic in the Army stationed in Telefar, Iraq who was injured during an assault mission while trying to treat the injuries of a fellow soldier who had been shot in the stomach and neck during the assault. Scott was inside an armored personnel carrier trying to administer an IV to the injured Soldier when the APC was hit by a bomb causing the vehicle to flip. Scott remembers very few details immediately following the explosion and three months later he woke up in Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Karar "Al" Alabsawi received prosthetics assistance from the Erie VA.



- Blind Aids (talking watches/alarm clocks, magnifiers, CCTVs, etc.)
- Communication devices (GPS systems, medical alert devices, Environmental Control Units, etc.)
- Computers for the Blind and/or Disabled
- Durable Medical Equipment (DME)
- Home Respiratory Therapy including Home Oxygen, CPAPs, BiPAPs, Nebulizers
- Hospital Beds
- Items for Daily Living (blood pressure monitors, TENS Units, reachers, long-handled sponges, canes, crutches, walkers, etc.)
- Orthotic devices (shoes, braces, inserts, compression stockings, etc.)
- Patient Lifts (wheelchair, seat, etc.)
- Recreational/Rehabilitative Equipment (swimming legs, handcycles, archery arms, Braille dominoes, etc.)
- Surgical Implants (pacemakers, ICDs, Orthopedic hips and knees, ocular lenses, cochlear implants, etc.)
- Wheelchairs (manual, powered, iBOTs, scooters, etc.)

Scott's right leg had been amputated and his left leg was shattered. He endured two 13-hour surgeries on his left leg to save it—he has 36 screws and 2 plates in his left leg. Scott had broken all of his ribs, had a skull fracture and two collapsed lungs and a broken hip.

Scott decided that traveling back and forth to Walter Reed for his prosthesis was burdensome and after experiencing pain from the socket fit of his prosthesis Scott made the decision to give Philadelphia VAMC a try. Scott went to the prosthetics clinic at PVAMC and after meeting with Chris Nowak, VISN 4 Prosthetics chief, Scott was able to get a great prosthesis and a career.

"I'm very fulfilled helping the veterans and

their families here at the Philadelphia VA.", says Scott of his current position as a prosthetics purchasing agent working with and for veterans just like himself. "The important thing for any veteran is not sit on the couch feeling sorry for yourself and drink your life away—get back into life. Keep yourself busy, you'll thank yourself in the morning—trust me I know."

"Transitioning to VA Prosthetics Care from DOD Prosthetics care can be a difficult time for OEF/OIF veterans. Sometimes veterans receive misinformation about the services they can expect to receive from the VA and we are here to provide the correct services and ensure these veterans that they will get everything they need

from us and that we can fulfill their prosthetic requirements and needs," says Nowak.

Nowak, as an amputee himself, knows firsthand the frustrations that a veteran can experience when trying to get the equipment they need. He says, "Sometimes people don't understand what it's like to be disabled how frustrating it is to be a veteran who can't get up and do something that they want to do or go where they want to go because they're waiting on a form to get some adaptive equipment." This is where Nowak intervenes to ensure that veterans are getting what they need without all the frustration.

Philadelphia is the Polytrauma Network Site for VISN 4

Philadelphia VA Medical Center has been designated as VISN 4's Polytrauma Network Site. This Network Site provides a high level of expert care, a full range of clinical and ancillary resources, and serves as a resource to other facilities within the network. The facility coordinates the care and level of services required to meet the needs of the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and amputee populations, and ensure that patients have access to the same high level of care across the network.

While serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, military service members are sustaining multiple severe injuries as a result of explosions and blasts. Polytrauma is defined as injuries to physical regions or organs systems, one of which may be life threatening, resulting in physical, cognitive, neuromuscular, psychological, or psychosocial impairments and functional disability.

TBI frequently occurs in polytrauma in combination with other disabling conditions such as amputation, auditory and visual impairments, PTSD and other mental health conditions.

"What's exciting about this particular time is that we have a tremendous amount of knowledge that we didn't have in previous wars. We have a much better understanding of mental health issues and we have pharmacology that can be used to help people with their mental health issues," said Susan J. Holton, PVAMC Polytrauma, Traumatic Brain Injury and Spinal Cord Injury, CRNP. "Our goal is to get veterans functioning in their community—it's getting people back in the game of life."

"They gave me the confidence to do the physical and cognitive therapy that was needed to help me," said Jorge Rodriguez, who is being treated by the Philadelphia Polytrauma Team.

Injury to the brain is the impairment that primarily guides the course of the rehabilitation in patients admitted to the Polytrauma Network Site.

Services provided at the Philadelphia Polytrauma Network Site:

- Neuro Rehabilitation
- Cognitive Rehabilitation
- State-of-the-art Prosthetics
- Visual Rehabilitation
- Psychological Services
- On going Case Management Services
- Psychosocial Services
- Physical Rehabilitation

John McCool receives physical therapy at the Philadelphia Polytrauma unit from Kerri Butler, Philadelphia VAMC Physical Therapist.



Susan J. Holton, Philadelphia VAMC Polytrauma, Traumatic Brain Injury and Spinal Cord Injury, CRNP with Jorge Rodriguez, who is being treated by the Philadelphia Polytrauma Team.





Attend an OEF/OIF Welcome Event to Find Out More!

Each VA Medical Center has at least one OEF/OIF Welcome Home event a year for their local OEF/OIF veterans. At each event VA staff are on hand to speak about the VA benefits and healthcare services for OEF/OIF veterans as well as the services provided by the OEF/OIF Program Manager, Transition Patient Advocates, and OEF/OIF Case Managers. VA Staff will also provide more information about the supportive services that are available for families and/or significant others.

“I’ll never forget, specifically Gretchen Roberts [Lebanon’s Acting OEF/OIF Program Manager], who put a VA coin in my hand, and it brought me to tears,” said Steve Gerke, an OEF/OIF veteran, who attended the Lebanon Welcome Home Event.



Visit Your Local Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)

There are 44 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics located throughout the VISN 4 Network service area. The clinics are staffed by caring professionals who provide primary care services including general medical care, physical exams, laboratory and X-ray services. Some clinics also offer mental health services to include counseling and dietary and podiatry services. Please contact the VA medical center nearest to you to find out which community-based outpatient clinic may be in your neighborhood.

“Our veterans deserve not only the best health care available but also care that is easily accessible and convenient,” said Michael Moreland, VISN 4 Network Director.



1. Steve Gerke found out about the VA benefits he was eligible for by attending an OEF/OIF Welcome Home Event at Lebanon VA.
2. Butler VA held a career fair for OEF/OIF veterans.
3. Erie VA held their welcome home event at the Seawolves baseball game along with a picnic for OEF/OIF veterans and their families.
4. Lebanon VA had a picnic style lunch for OEF/OIF veterans and their families with informational table for veterans to learn more about what they may be eligible for.

The Coatesville Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Inpatient Treatment Program

*There is hope and help...
for those who have borne
the brunt of battle*

What Is PTSD?

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a reaction to intense, traumatic events that

threaten or cause death or injury to you or other people. It can be caused by natural disasters, fires, and accidents; but the fear, horror, and helplessness of war is tailor-made for the development of PTSD.

Some of the symptoms are:

- recurring painful thoughts and memories
- nightmares and sleep problems
- painful feelings when confronted with reminders
- feeling alienated from and distrustful of others
- difficulty with intimacy and feeling love
- irritability or outbursts of anger
- painful guilt and grief feelings



Paul Delle Coatesville Inpatient PTSD Program

Paul Delle worked as a paramedic in New York City during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack and was in the world trade center when it collapsed, which is what he says prompted him to join the U.S. Marine Corps. Delle served with the USMC in Fallujah, Iraq as a machine gunner in 2006.

Delle says that after returning home from Fallujah he went through a lot of difficult times and was hospitalized involuntarily a few times and just didn't know where to go. Finally, he found himself in the Manhattan VA and was transferred from there to the Coatesville Inpatient PTSD program.

"I don't know where I'd be without this program, honestly, I was in a vicious cycle when I was home, of being medicated, being normal on my medication, running out of my medication, being unable to refill it because of work and my schedule and because of the hours of the VA back home. I was having episodes of anger and panic attacks," said Delle. "This program is good for me because I am with veterans that do the same exact stuff that I do. It's amazing—you don't feel like you are alone anymore, you don't feel like you are weak. When I came here I didn't feel worthless anymore—I felt like I was part of something."

"This program has helped me tremendously with my social skills and how I relate to people. My depression is not near what it was, my sleep is much better, it's given me a lot of tools to deal with anxiety and not just quick fixes, whereas before I would just take medication. I've learned so many different ways to control it without medication, ways that are going to stay with me for the rest of my life. It's improved me tremendously as a person," said Delle.

The Program

The PTSD Program at the Coatesville VA Medical Center was established in 1982 and is ranked as the #1 program in the country for treating PTSD. It is one of the oldest PTSD programs in the country and continually seeks to improve effectiveness based on the latest PTSD treatment research. It is open to women and men veterans of all American wars and combat operations who are dealing with combat-related PTSD.

The program provides a safe, supportive environment in an open-ward setting, and lasts from four to ten weeks providing a wide range of therapeutic services and classes, including:

- Individual Psychotherapy
- Group Psychotherapy
- Family and Marital Therapy

CLASSES ON:

- Stress Management
- Anger & Assertiveness
- Depression
- Family Issues
- Guilt & Grief
- Relapse Prevention including Alcohol and Drug Education and AA and NA Groups

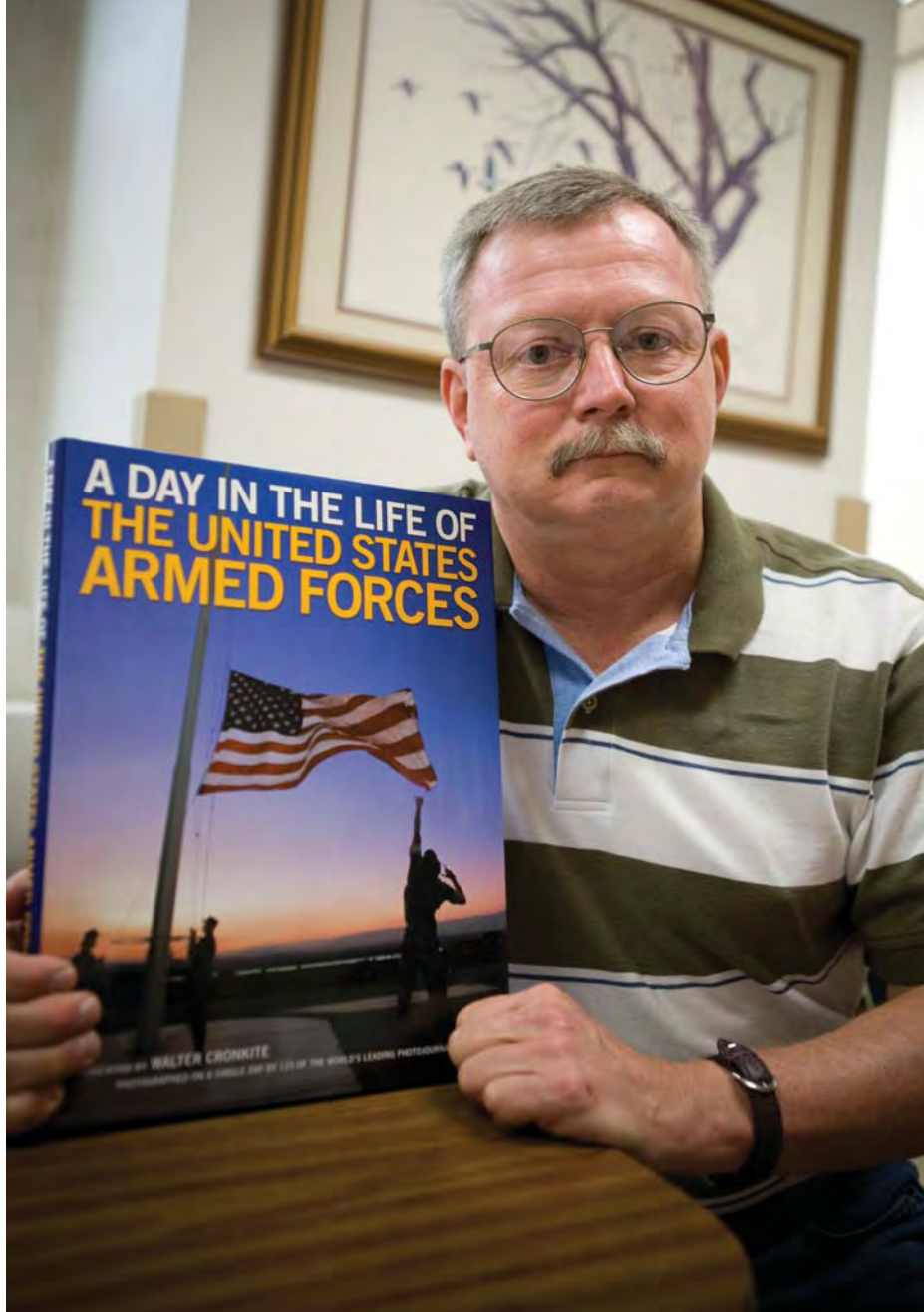
Does It Work?

If you work hard in the program, yes. Past research shows that most of the veterans who have been in the PTSD Program have not re-entered a hospital for treatment of PTSD, alcohol, drugs, or other problems.

Eligibility

The PTSD Program is open to honorably discharged men and women veterans of all American wars and combat operations who are suffering from combat-related PTSD.

For more information or for an appointment, please call (610) 383-0267 between 9am and 4pm.



Gary Kiefer

Coatesville Inpatient PTSD Program

Gary Kiefer is completing a 10-week stay at the Coatesville Inpatient PTSD program to receive treatment and counseling for his issues with anger, memory loss, flashbacks, avoidance and short-term memory loss. Kiefer is the editor of a newspaper and began having problems concentrating on his job when thoughts of the death and destruction he had witnessed during his time in Iraq kept creeping into his mind and disrupting his productivity and seriously affecting his ability to do his job.

"I couldn't concentrate on my job, on living and was having a hard time associating with those that I loved," said Kiefer. "You have a hard time associating with people you love and that love you because you want to distance them because it hurts, there's a lot of pain involved and you don't want them to feel that pain so it's easier to push them away."

Kiefer says the inpatient program is good for people like him because you are surrounded by professionals who are there to help you and by other veterans who have been through what you are going through and they can help you out. "Your treatment and medication can be constantly monitored and adjusted to meet your needs. You get the treatment right away and you get the treatment you need," says Kiefer. "The harder you work in this program the more you are going to get out of it."



323 North Shore Drive
Suite 400
Pittsburgh, PA 15212

phone 412.822.3316
fax 412.822.3275

www.visn4.va.gov