

Vision FOR Excellence

VISN 4
providing
world-class
health care
to every
generation
of veterans.

Director's Message

Vision
FOR
Excellence



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VISN 4's *Vision for Excellence* 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, please contact David Cowgill at 412-365-4052 or via email: david.cowgill@va.gov.

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DEAR FELLOW EMPLOYEES, VOLUNTEERS, VETERANS AND FRIENDS OF VISN 4,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the VISN 4 newsletter. Our network has been extremely busy continuing to make VISN 4 among the best of VA's 21 health care networks.

I've made a point of visiting the different facilities throughout the VISN and will continue traveling until I have been to each one to see firsthand the incredible work that is being done to serve our veterans.

We continue to make dramatic progress in decreasing the wait list for appointments for our service-connected and OIF/OEF veterans, but until that list is down to zero we will be hard at work. Our Transition Patient Advocates are working earnestly to make sure that our OIF/OEF veterans make the smoothest transition possible into the network healthcare system.



Mr. Moreland stands atop of the highest point of the nine-story parking garage being constructed at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System.



Jon Popovich, MD, Hospitalist, Babs Leamer, RN, Nurse Manager, and Mr. Moreland gown up to interact with an active MRSA patient at the James E. Van Zandt VAMC in Altoona, Pa.

It is extremely important to us at VISN 4 that we provide the most excellent care available to our veterans, which is why the facilities throughout the network are constantly being updated through our non-recurring maintenance program. Major construction at our Pittsburgh and Philadelphia facilities includes a nine-story parking garage and a new pedestrian bridge.

This issue also showcases some of the outstanding achievements of our staff and volunteers who make this network a success.

I've only mentioned some of what is featured in this issue of "Vision for Excellence", and I encourage you to read on to find out why I am truly proud to be the Director of such an outstanding healthcare network—A network that goes above and beyond to serve our Nation's heroes with pride.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL E. MORELAND, FACHE
NETWORK DIRECTOR, VISN 4



Macpherson Appointed as Chief Medical Officer for VISN 4

David S. Macpherson, MD, MPH, has been appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable R. James Nicholson, to serve as the Chief Medical Officer for VA Healthcare-VISN 4. In this position, he will be responsible for the oversight of all medical care within VISN 4.

“The VA is an amazing organization that has made huge strides in quality of care. I hope to help lead further jumps in quality and access to veterans in our region.”

Prior to this appointment, Dr. Macpherson served as Vice President of the Primary Care Service Line and as Section Chief of General Internal Medicine for the three-division VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System since 1996. He was responsible for overseeing the expansion of primary care services including the creation and growth of three facility-based primary care teams and five community-based outpatient clinics. Dr. Macpherson facilitated the expansion of health services research activities at VAPHS and helped lead educational programs for internal medicine trainees and medical students in his role as Section Chief of General Internal Medicine.



Dr. Macpherson received his medical degree from Northwestern University School of Medicine and he received his master's degree in Public Health from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

He completed an Internal Medicine Residency and Fellowship in General Internal Medicine at the University of Minnesota and then began his VA career at the Minneapolis VA and moved to the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in 1989. ★

Report Card

OUTPATIENT STATISTICS

Network wide for FY2007 to Date:

1,826,527

outpatient hospital visits

304,359

home and community-based visits

INPATIENT STATISTICS

Network wide for FY2007 to Date:

16,797

hospital admissions

3,881

nursing home and domiciliary admissions

VISN 4 UNIQUE PATIENT GROWTH (ESTIMATED)

FY2003

FY2004

FY2005

FY2006

FY2007 to Date

FY07Q2 - VETERAN SATISFACTION

(INPATIENT SATISFACTION, OUTPATIENT SATISFACTION AND PROVIDER WAIT TIME)

NOTE: VISN 4 is above the national average

	National	VISN 4 (Overall)
Inpatient Overall Quality (Mean)	78.1	80.7
Outpatient Overall Quality (Mean)	78.1	83.4
Provider Wait Time (Mean)	74.2	84.2

MEDICAL CARE COLLECTION FUND COLLECTIONS THRU Q3:

FY2006 Q3

FY2007 Q3

* All data for statistical information was collected in July 2007

VISN 4 Enhanced and Updated

VISN 4 has 8,034,097 square feet of space by which non-recurring maintenance must keep up with the building, equipment, structures, parking lots, exterior lighting and utilities. Non-recurring maintenance includes preventative maintenance, normal repairs, replacement of parts and structural components, and other activities needed to preserve the asset so that it continues to provide acceptable services and achieve its expected

useful life. More than 120 projects are planned for FY 2007 to include: security and parking upgrades at **Wilmington VAMC**, computer room updates and security enhancements at **Altoona VAMC**, 2nd floor lab remodeling at **Butler VAMC**, improvement of patient shower and restroom facilities at **Coatesville VAMC**, restoration of operating room surgical facilities at **Erie VAMC** and outpatient pharmacy improvements at **Lebanon VAMC**. ★

Philadelphia VAMC Constructs Pedestrian Bridge

Philadelphia VA Medical Center is constructing a \$5.6 million pedestrian bridge above University Avenue, connecting the nursing home care unit to the medical center. University Avenue is a busy four-lane street which separates the two buildings. Staff, patients and family members walk between these two buildings on a daily basis and there have been incidents involving the fast moving traffic. The bridge will allow staff, patients and family members to safely cross from one facility to the other without having to cross the busy street. The bridge is expected to be completed in October 2007.



VAPHS Parking Garage Nearing Completion

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System continues to make huge strides in the construction of the nine-story \$37 million parking garage at University Drive. The parking garage will provide nearly 1500 free parking spaces and reduce the traffic congestion and wait times for patients, visitors and staff. The construction of the parking garage is expected to be completed in December 2007.



Veterans' Access Improved in VISN 4

TIMELY access to care for all veterans is a primary goal for all facilities within VISN 4. A special emphasis is being placed on access to care for service-connected veterans and OIF/OEF veterans. VISN 4 has improved processes and systems to facilitate prompt access to care for all veterans. VISN 4's goal is to have every patient seen in a clinic within 30 days of their desired date and eliminate all veterans waiting on a waiting list (EWL). Over fiscal year 2007, the number of veterans waiting more than 30 days on the EWL has decreased by more than 99 percent. There are currently no OIF/OEF veterans or veterans with a service connection of 50 percent or greater waiting more than 30 days on the EWL.

Currently 98% of veterans in VISN 4 are seen in primary care within 30 days of their desired date.

95% of veterans in VISN 4 are seen in specialty care clinics within 30 days of their desired date.

VISN 4 leadership is striving to make sure that all veterans receive the care they deserve as soon as they need an appointment. ★

TRANSITION PATIENT ADVOCATES ASSIST RETURNING VETERANS

VISN 4 has four Transition Patient Advocates that serve as the point of contact to assist transitioning Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and/or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans and their families. Many of these veterans suffer from multiple complex health problems, including traumatic brain injury (TBI), amputation, burns, combat stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

VISN 4's 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 all veterans who are dedicated to ensuring that severely injured service members and fellow veterans have a personal advocate as they move throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare system. ★

Western Hub

Stationed at the VISN Office,
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System,
Heinz Division:



William A. Smathers
Transition Patient Advocate



Richard "Buzz" Bryan
Transition Patient Advocate

Eastern Hub

Stationed at the VA Medical
Center, Philadelphia:



Maria Williams
Transition Patient Advocate



Steve Wilson
Transition Patient Advocate

Cowgill Named OPM CFC Hero



DAVID COWGILL, Public Affairs Officer for VAPHS and VISN 4, was selected for the **National Office of Personnel Management's Combined Federal Campaign Hero Award** for his hard work and dedication to the 2006 Combined Federal Campaign. Nominations were received from all 50 states for consideration

for this prestigious award. Mr. Cowgill went above and beyond dedicating his time to lead a campaign that raised \$178,282.94 for local, national and international charities. The award was presented to Mr. Cowgill by the OPM National Director, Linda M. Springer, during a ceremony at the White House July 26.

“It is an honor to have been selected to receive the CFC National Hero award and to have had the opportunity to have made an impact toward this charitable campaign.”

Mr. Cowgill was appointed as the VAPHS CFC Chairperson and given the task of dramatically revitalizing the 2006 Combined Federal Campaign at VAPHS. Through an impressive fundraising and marketing campaign, VAPHS achieved the most successful Combined Federal Campaign in its history. \$178,282.94 in donations were collected for local, national, and international charities (a 145.3% increase from the 2005 campaign); 1,155 pledges were received (a 332.6% increase from 2005); and 38% of VAPHS employees contributed (only 8.8% contributed in 2005). More money was collected in the 2006 campaign than in 2005 and 2004 combined. ★

Rabold Named Social Worker of the Year

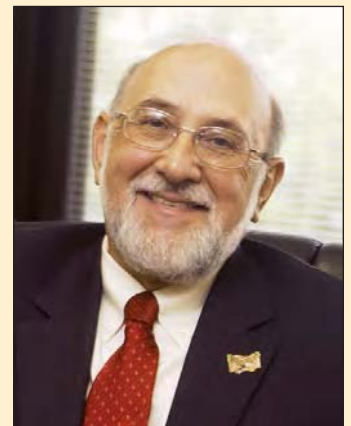
RONALD RABOLD, VAPHS Vice President of Community Based Care, was honored as **Social Worker of the Year**, during the 2007 Under Secretary for Health Awards for Excellence in Social Work Leadership. As Social Worker of the Year Mr. Rabold exhibited exemplary service in the performance of his job, built links between individuals and groups in the organization, thought and acted innovatively, exceeded the needs of internal and external customers and demonstrated outstanding competency in his job. He was presented the award July 30, 2007, by the Honorable Michael J. Kussman, Under Secretary for Health for VHA, in Washington, D.C.

MR. RABOLD HAS BEEN WORKING FOR THE VA FOR 33 YEARS AND SAYS, “There is no higher honor than taking care of our Nation’s heroes and heroes is what they are.”

He says that some of his proudest accomplishments have been being a mentor to students and staff and seeing them move on to success as well as assisting with the OIF/OEF initiative for smooth transition and continuing care of combat veterans.

At the core of Mr. Rabold’s outstanding performance as a clinician and administrator are his exceptional interpersonal skills. He is

both inspiring and uplifting in his daily interactions with veterans, their family members and members of their treatment team to assure the delivery of outstanding service individualized to each veteran. ★



'COOTIE BOB' GIVES 44,000 HOURS TO VETERANS

AMONG all of the hospital volunteers within VISN 4, only one has an amount of service totaling more than 44,000 hours. Bob Riethmiller, commonly known as "Cootie Bob" for his membership in the Military Order of the Cooties, a national honor organization of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, can be easily spotted around VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System sporting a hat with a cootie pin along with numerous service achievement pins he has been awarded.

Riethmiller started volunteering in 1972 with his wife, Doris. The Riethmillers and 11 other couples of the VFW Guyasuta, Post 709 started a Sunday program of activities for the veterans of VAPHS that continues today. "Over the years the veteran programs that we have implemented have continually changed based on the interests of the veterans," said Riethmiller.

After Riethmiller retired in 1980 as a department store floor installer, he started volunteering full-time at VAPHS. "I was a combat veteran who served in the Pacific during World War II. I can relate to these veterans because we went through the same thing," said Riethmiller. "Most of the veterans are lonely and need someone to talk to." That is where Cootie Bob comes in.

Riethmiller is the co-founder of Sharing and Caring Boat Ride, a week long Labor Day celebration for veterans that began in



Robert "Cootie Bob" Riethmiller and wife, Doris, began volunteering in 1972.

1985 and continues today. The celebration includes a ride on the Gateway Clipper in downtown Pittsburgh, awards are given and food is provided. "This day trip is the highlight of the year for most veterans and nursing home patients," said Riethmiller.

In 2005 Riethmiller was honored as "Pennsylvania Volunteer of the Year". He recently celebrated his 82nd birthday and is slowing down his volunteer pace. He used to travel to the three different divisions of VAPHS, however, he now mainly volunteers at the Heinz Division in Aspinwall. Riethmiller believes that he and his wife were "rewarded by the mighty ruler of the universe for being caregivers." ★



Robert "Cootie Bob" Riethmiller spends time in the ceramics room with one of VAPHS' veterans.

VISN 4's Pride

VISN 4 would not be the same without the vast number of volunteers that donate their time and energy!

These are the **top ten volunteers in VISN 4**. They have a combined total of 280,451 hours of service or a total that equals 135 Full Time Equivalent Employees.

1. Robert Riethmiller	44,255	VAPHS
2. Jack Barr	43,607	Philadelphia
3. Ralph Smith	40,179	Wilmington
4. Abie Abraham	33,468	Butler
5. Arthur Pekata	29,058	Wilkes-Barre
6. Virginia Greiner	21,579	Altoona
7. Doris A. Spenser	19,839	Coatesville
8. Gaye Werner	19,756	Erie
9. Kathryn Mick	18,288	Clarksburg
10. Paul Fetzer	10,422	Lebanon

Monetary donations throughout VISN 4 assist enormously when providing for our veterans:

DONATIONS

1. Pittsburgh	\$950,131
2. Coatesville	415,105
3. Wilkes-Barre	308,752
4. Lebanon	305,084
5. Wilmington	233,323
6. Erie	183,716
7. Clarksburg	175,554
8. Butler	141,185
9. Philadelphia	106,383
10. Altoona	57,566
Total	\$2,876,799

These donations provided for:

- Trips for nursing home residents and veterans
- New televisions, DVD players
- Newspapers for nursing home residents
- Canteen books
- Support for OEF/OIF
- Recreation Therapy supplies
- Admission kits
- Tokens for public transportation
- Exam tables
- VA Hoptel
- BBQ Grill, Picnic tables for veterans
- A serenity garden for nursing home patients
- Wheelchairs
- Personal hygiene items for new admissions

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT FUND INCREASED TO \$1.5 MILLION

In FY 2006 the Employee Development Fund provided financial assistance to 1,403 employees to continue their education and professional training across a broad cross section of the network. To further support the staff of VISN 4, Mr. Moreland has endorsed the recommendation by Mr. Curtis Jackson, 3rd District Representative, National AFGE, to increase EDF funding by 115 percent from \$700,000 to \$1,500,000 for FY 2008.

In addition, Mr. Moreland authorized the current FY 2007 funding to be increased from \$700,000 to \$1,500,000 to further support staff education, training and development. The increased funding must be spent during the remainder of this fiscal year ending September 30, 2007. ★

Location	FY 07 Amount	Additional Amount
Altoona	\$32,480	\$37,200
Butler	\$33,240	\$38,000
Clarksburg	\$43,990	\$50,200
Coatesville	\$77,790	\$88,900
Erie	\$32,000	\$36,600
Lebanon	\$70,840	\$80,900
Philadelphia	\$119,010	\$136,000
Pittsburgh	\$173,440	\$198,200
Wilkes-Barre	\$66,820	\$76,400
Wilmington	\$50,400	\$57,600
VISN 4 Total	\$700,010	\$800,000



Michael Moreland, VISN 4 Director, and Curtis Jackson, 3rd District Representative, National AFGE, discuss increased funding for Employee Development Fund.

VISN 4 #1 for All Employee Survey

CONGRATULATIONS VISN 4! VISN 4 was number one in participation for the All Employee Survey this year, finishing with an 87 percent response rate, the best in the nation! The VHA average was 79 percent.

The results will be incorporated into the VISN 4 Network Succession Plan as outcome based actions aimed at continuing to move VISN 4 forward as a world class employer of choice.

Your input will make a difference!!!



Location	Employees	Respondents	Response Rate
VISN 4 Total	10550	9170	87.00%
VISN 4 Office	49	41	83.67%
Altoona	500	451	90.20%
Butler	494	419	84.82%
Clarksburg	663	504	76.02%
Coatesville	1173	924	78.77%
Erie	526	526	100%
Lebanon	1068	919	86.05%
Philadelphia	1790	1580	88.27%
Pittsburgh	2505	2356	94.05%
Wilkes-Barre	1015	757	74.58%
Wilmington	767	693	90.35%

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