



# Office of Dentistry Homeless Veterans Dental Program NEWSLETTER

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## From the Director's Desk...



**Elizabeth Nuñez,  
DMD, MST  
Director, HVDP  
VACO Office of Dentistry**

Recently, while on maternity leave, I did something I normally don't get much of a chance to do: watch TV. As any parent of an infant or an insomniac will tell you, there's not much playing on TV at 1 a.m., 3 a.m., 5a.m...you get the picture. So, I started looking for programs to record. I found myself drawn to shows that were all about change: remodeling, re-landscaping, personal makeovers. I especially like the personal makeovers.

One show in particular, *Style By Jury*, selects people who request a makeover, and they are "judged" by a jury on what kind of first impression they make.

After one week with the "transformation experts," they appear before a new jury and are critiqued again. What I found interesting about this show is that they not only address the outward appearance of the contestant, but help to identify and mend more personal flaws.

For example, one extremely shy and unsightly woman, who made beautiful, unique jewelry pieces, was struggling to make ends meet but had a dream of having her pieces sold at upscale boutiques around her city. She received lessons from a life coach that helped her learn how to increase her confidence in herself and her product and overcome her fear of speaking to potential buyers. Of course, the Lasik eye surgery, dermatological treatment of her face, 8 upper and 6 lower porcelain veneers to correct misaligned, yellow teeth, and trendy new clothes, hair and makeup she received didn't hurt either! At the end of the week, she presented herself with a new-found self assurance and poise that radiated from the inside out.

After watching more episodes of this show than I care to say, I thought to myself, "What draws me to this so much?" The answer: I love to see positive change in people; I like the feel-good endings. I think that is one of the reasons that we, who work with Veterans that have experienced homelessness, keep doing what we do. We are part of the team of "transformation experts" that helps change lives in a very dramatic way. Unlike *Style by Jury*, we can't help facilitate this change in 1 week, but through comprehensive care and treatment, I'd say society's first impression of Veterans graduating from VA-sponsored rehabilitation programs will be one of respect and admiration.



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Helping Veterans Become Tobacco Free | 2 |
| Central Arizona Shelter Services     | 4 |
| Fargo – Quality Care with a Smile    | 5 |
| All in the Family—Minneapolis        | 6 |
| Veteran Blog                         | 7 |
| Success Story                        | 7 |
| New Homeless Initiatives             | 8 |



Department of Veterans Affairs

Patient Care Services



# Helping Veterans Become Tobacco Free

By Carol Yakimo, RDH, MA

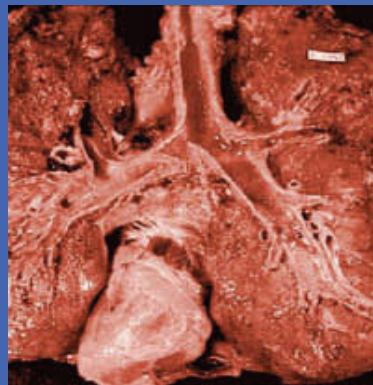
According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2009), tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death globally, killing 5 million people annually.<sup>1</sup>

Although smoking has decreased in the United States from 42% of the total population in 1965 to approximately 21% in 2008, it is estimated that 46 million adults presently smoke cigarettes.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, tobacco use in the U.S. alone causes 1 in 5 deaths each year exceeding more fatalities than HIV, alcohol use, illegal drugs, motor vehicle injuries, suicides, and homicides combined. As if those statistics were not enough, adult cigarette smokers also shave off 14 years of their lives, as compared with non-smokers, succumbing to cancer of the lungs, esophagus, larynx, and oral cavity.<sup>2</sup>

Smokeless tobacco has its demons as well, causing problems ranging from tooth staining to cancer and even sudden death from ventricular arrhythmias.<sup>4</sup>

Ramifications from tobacco use do not end with the user. Secondhand tobacco smoke is responsible for 50,000 deaths each year and approximately one-third of all adults are exposed to it on a regular basis. Similar to smokers, non-users are jeopardized as well with a 25 to 30 percent increase in coronary heart disease from breathing in secondary smoke.<sup>5</sup>



Pink, Healthy Lung



Dark, Smoker's Lung

Photos from [JAHVH website](#)<sup>3</sup>

## Tobacco Use in Military and Veteran Populations

The Veterans Affairs News Briefing on March 4, 2010 reported that tobacco use is a "growing, deadly and expensive problem for the military." A 2009 study by VHA reported that 50% Veterans come back from Iraq and Afghanistan with tobacco addictions, and statistics were released by the Institute of Medicine showing that the DoD spends in excess of

\$1.6 billion annually on tobacco related illness and loss of productivity.<sup>6</sup>

Among Veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system, the prevalence of smoking is 22% vs. 20.9% in the general population. Variability between VISNs (Veterans Integrated Service Networks) is significant, though, ranging from 16.5% to 27%.<sup>6</sup>

Other statistics show that Veterans with mental illness, who are treated through Veterans Health Administration (VHA), smoked almost twice as much as those without mental disorders. They also tended to smoke more heavily, have more disease and premature death, and utilize medical services more than their non-smoking counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

Stuart Bondurant, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Dean Emeritus at the School of Medicine-University of North Carolina and chair of the Committee on Smoking Cessation in Military and Veteran Populations stated, "The state of the art in tobacco control is such that with well-managed programs, DoD and VA could eventually be tobacco free with minimal disruption, and with substantial benefit to military personnel and veterans."<sup>8</sup>

Bondurant proposed that the military set a deadline for becoming a tobacco-free





environment and believes this goal could be attained within 20 years.

Given the fact that VA and DoD had already begun tobacco-use management strategies in 1999, this may be more of a realization than previously imagined. One of the major strategies implemented is in prevention and is used with all new military recruits, who have the highest overall prevalence for using tobacco.

Numbering over 200,000 annually, new recruits are required to be tobacco free for the entire six weeks of initial training. Recognizing that this strategy may help prevent new military personnel from using tobacco, VA and DoD acknowledge that there is still much to be done with habitual tobacco users already in the military and with Veterans.<sup>7</sup> Thus, came the adoption of the 5As program.

## The 5As

The 5As process originated within the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, and has been borrowed by VA. It is so simple that the procedure can be incorporated by any healthcare

**“Quitting smoking is easy. I’ve done it a thousand times.”**

*- Mark Twain*

### Helping Smokers Quit Pocket Guide

Quitting smoking may be one of the hardest things that your patients may ever have to do. Let them know that they don't have to do it alone.

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>1. <u>ASK</u></b>     | <b>about tobacco use at every visit.</b> |
| <b>2. <u>ADVISE</u></b>  | <b>tobacco users to quit.</b>            |
| <b>3. <u>ASSESS</u></b>  | <b>readiness to quit.</b>                |
| <b>4. <u>ASSIST</u></b>  | <b>tobacco users with a quit plan.</b>   |
| <b>5. <u>ARRANGE</u></b> | <b>follow up visits.</b>                 |

provider. The practice consists of five words, all beginning with the letter “A” – **ASK, ADVISE, ASSESS, ASSIST** and **ARRANGE** - making it easy to remember, and *The Pocket Guide* makes it convenient to use. For more detailed information on the 5As, please visit the website at [http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=2007](http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2007).

Although it is well known that tobacco products can cause serious complications, users still have difficulty stopping. As Mark Twain once said, “Quitting smoking is easy. I’ve done it a thousand times.” Realizing the immense task that tobacco users face with attempting tobacco cessation, it is imperative that we, as VHA healthcare and social workers, do our part in assisting our Veterans. By consistently using the 5As process, we can help our Veterans and VA’s mission to combat tobacco use and its resulting illnesses.

The VA Office of Dentistry

(OOD) is helping too. OOD is a strong partner in the battle against tobacco use and has obtained a grant through the work of its Oral Health Quality Group. Grant funds will be used to provide tobacco cessation materials for both clinicians and patients. There is no need to place an order; shipments will be mailed to all VA facilities around late summer or early fall.

Also, the OOD Dental Education Program (DEP) will be hosting a 1-hour webinar on tobacco cessation Wednesday, September 1st. Dr. Pamela Belperio, Clinical Pharmacist from the Greater Los Angeles VA facility, will be the featured speaker. Watch your e-mail boxes in August for more information. You can also visit the DEP sharepoint site at <http://vaww.teamshare.va.gov/ood/ed/default.aspx> for details on this and other dental education webinars.

Please see page 10 for references and quick links to other useful websites.



# CASS Provides Excellent Dental Services

By **Debby Kurtz-Weidinger, RDH, M.Ed.**

Starting out in a cramped, two-room dental trailer staffed entirely by volunteers, Dr. Kris Volcheck has turned a fledgling effort into one of the

largest volunteer dental clinics treating the homeless population in the nation. between the Phoenix VA Health Care System and CASS.

The CASS Dental Clinic is impressive — eight top-of-the-line dental operatories with

patients is free.

Over 500 dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants and dental lab technicians, including students in these professions, volunteer their time and services to the CASS Dental Clinic every year. Comprehensive care is provided to all qualifying homeless Veterans to ensure they will have optimal oral health.

“We’re very proud that we’re able to provide care to homeless Veterans,” says Dr. Volcheck, CASS Dental Director. “I feel like we’ve let these Veterans down and it’s difficult to see how much they have sacrificed and they’re now homeless. I feel that we’re doing our part to help them get back on their feet and that’s very exciting. When our patients get a new smile, they are overwhelmed. They never thought they would have a beautiful smile again!”



**Dr. Kris Volcheck and Annette Chun,  
CASS Dental Director & Dental Office Manager**

largest volunteer dental clinics treating the homeless population in the nation.

The Central Arizona Shelter Services (CASS) Dental Clinic offers comprehensive dentistry for approximately 150 homeless Veterans each year, comprising 25% of the overall homeless population served by CASS. Veterans found eligible for the Homeless Veterans Program are eligible for dental services through a contract

high-end equipment contributed by local and national dental supply companies are the showpieces of the clinic. Thanks to Dr. Volcheck’s dynamic personality and creativity in securing donations, everything from the dental materials, to the operatories and dental equipment, to the roof overhead has been donated. The clinic is 100% non-profit and all treatment provided to



**Deborah Kurtz-Weidinger,  
RDH, M.Ed.,  
Phoenix VA Staff Dental Hygienist**



# Fargo VA...Providing Quality Care with a Smile

By Diana Hall, MSW, LICSW

Dr. Kasson and the staff of the Fargo VA dental clinic have been instrumental in providing outstanding dental service to homeless Veterans.

The Homeless Veterans Dental Program (HVDP) provided services to about 30 Veterans in 2008. Dr. Kasson has provided leadership and direction, the staff have initiated the program, overcome access barriers, and collaborated with the Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program in serving a population with extreme need for dental care. He and his staff have to manage within a budget, refer to and collaborate with community providers and fee basis, and take on an ever increasing workload.

There were initially some barriers that limited Veteran access to this dental program, and homeless Veterans often have not had access to dental care for years or have never received dental care in their lifetimes. They come with a myriad of dental hygiene issues that require time and attention.

Dr. Kasson communicated



**Fargo Dental Team (L-R)**

Robert Vogelwede, DDS; Judith Vorachek, RDH; Tom Neihart, DDS; Brenda Mikkelsen, CRDA; Jackie Safranski, RDA; Darla Laubach, CRDA; Janice Krenz, RDH; Bradley Kasson, DDS; Beth Bergseid, RDA

directly with HCHV staff on numerous cases to ensure that Veterans received all the care needed. He worked with

*“... they are grateful for the respectful way they are treated, the genuine caring of the staff, and the quality of care they have received.”*

the Homeless program supervisor, financial office, and support staff and led the way in revamping the referral process to remove barriers to access of care, thus more than tripling the number of Veterans served through his clinic in the next year.

Referrals this year are already expected to exceed previous years.

HCHV has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the Veterans who have been served and whose lives have been changed dramatically. Most frequently, they are grateful for the respectful way they are treated, the genuine caring of the staff, and the quality of care they have received.

Our HVDP is growing and serving more Veterans because of the great role that the entire dental clinic staff have played in accomplishing the goals of the program.



# All in the Family in Minneapolis

**By Dr. Paul Peterson**

The holidays are nearly everyone's favorite season. Family gatherings help celebrate the season through heritage, tradition, generosity and cheer. But for the

among the residents of Building 47, which houses some of the participants of the homeless Veteran's rehabilitation program.

Such camaraderie is imperative to succeed in this program as participation is

Minneapolis. Veterans from both Minnesota and Wisconsin were seen, most of whom reside in our designated Minneapolis or Chippewa Falls facilities. By devoting two days per week and utilizing a private lab for part of the year, we were able to prioritize our homeless Veterans and eliminate any wait for them.

A hands-on approach to disease control and oral reconstruction has helped many of our homeless Veterans not only understand the importance and fundamentals of oral health, but has also provided drastic cosmetic and self-esteem enhancements. Most of our Veterans in the Minneapolis and Chippewa Falls transitional facilities have shown remarkable diligence in rehabilitating their oral health and their lifestyles.

Without question, the confidence and camaraderie provided by these two remarkable programs have assisted these brave individuals in rehabilitating their lives this holiday season. With the New Year approaching, we are excited to continue serving those who served us and helping them make the best of 2010.



L-R: Paul, David, Dr. Paul Peterson, Robert, Gary, and Ed (bottom row) enjoy some time together during a holiday dinner gathering.

Veterans who live in Building 47 on the Minneapolis VA Medical Center campus, the word "family" extends beyond the typical boundaries of heritage. "We are all a big family. We live together, help each other out, and even ride to church together every Sunday morning," one Veteran told me as he described the camaraderie

rigorous, the rules are strict and their focus is tireless. And yet, they never cease to greet you with a large grin as you pass them in the hospital. These friendly grins are what make my job so rewarding as a providing dentist for the Homeless Veterans Dental Initiative (HVDI).

2009 was a successful year for the HDVI here in



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# Veteran Blogs

With modern dentistry, we should all try to save any tooth that we can. I did that for 70 years. Then over a year ago, I fell under financial hardship and became homeless. But to make matters worse, my front teeth started falling out. Missing teeth give others a terrible first impression and make it difficult to find work when you're unemployed.

Fortunately the VA was able to provide housing and support while I got back on my feet again. So, when I found out that I was eligible for the new VA Dental Program, it was a godsend. I had to opt for the complete prosthesis. This procedure was a dramatic change in my life. For over a year, I didn't smile but now I'm smiling again -- I'm determined to make the best of this situation.

Bad teeth can affect your overall health. The dentist advised me that I had some minor gum

infections which could possibly be elevating my blood pressure. A bonus for me was that after the extractions, my blood pressure returned to normal. I had no idea how important our teeth are!

I'm proud of the extraordinary service that my family has given to this country. My father was a POW in WWI. Four of my older brothers honorably served in WWII. One of the things that they were fighting for was that we could have programs like this so that more Americans could live healthier and happier lives.

United we can accomplish anything. Most importantly, a healthy country is a strong country. Let's all keep smiling!

Sincerely,

- Ron B.

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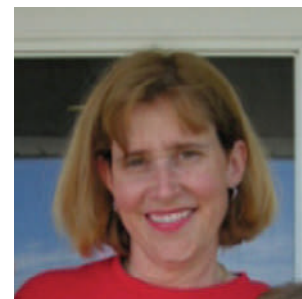
## One of My Many Success Stories...

**By Sharon S. Vetter, DMD**

I just wanted to let you know how rewarding it is to work on the homeless vets and how I feel that fixing their smiles and helping them be healthier is a great thing.

Recently I had a vet in this program that actually had a healthy dentition but had lost one of his front teeth from trauma (a sucker punch if I remember correctly). He had been living without a front tooth for some time. When I saw him and asked what he'd like us to do for him he said, "If I could only have a front tooth I'd be happy."

After an exam and cleaning and no other cavities, I got to replace that front tooth, and the prosthesis looks so natural. The patient is happy with it and so grateful. He now smiles every time I see him!



Dr. Sharon S. Vetter is a part-time dentist at the Leestown, KY VAMC facility.



# Did you KNOW...

## ... that there are two new Initiatives to help end homelessness among Veterans???

### National Call Center for Homeless Veterans

1-877-4AID VET

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has founded a National Call Center for Homeless Veterans hotline to ensure that homeless Veterans or Veterans at risk for homelessness have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. The hotline is intended to assist homeless Veterans and their families, VA Medical Centers, federal, state and local partners, community agencies, service providers and others in the community. To be connected with a trained VA staff member, call **1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838)**.

Homeless Veterans or their families can call this free and confidential hotline. When they call in, the hotline staff will conduct a brief screening to assess their needs. Homeless Veterans will be connected with the Homeless Point of

Contact at the nearest VA facility. Family members and non-VA providers, calling on behalf of a homeless Veteran, will be provided with information regarding the homeless programs and services available. Contact information will be requested so staff may follow-up.

### National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans

The mission of the Center is to promote recovery-oriented care for Veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness. It is designed to assist programs to meet the VA's five-year plan to end homelessness among Veterans.

Some of the goals of the Center are to:

- ◆ Promote the development of policy and practice such as *Housing First* which will promote rapid and direct placement of homeless

Veterans into housing and offer treatment and supportive services;

- ◆ Support implementation of relevant research findings into clinical practice; for example, the creation of *Geographic Risk Profiles* will develop national, state, and city maps of at-risk veterans thus allowing more precise geographic targeting of resources;
- ◆ Provide education / training for VA and community partners and disseminate evidence-based and emerging best practices;
- ◆ Develop new empirical knowledge in all areas of homelessness, including prevalence of homelessness among different population groups and cost analysis of programs.

More information on these initiatives can be found on VA's Homeless Veterans website at <http://www1.va.gov/HOMELESS/index.asp>.

- Dr. Elizabeth Nuñez





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## Quick Links to Useful Websites

**American Cancer Society** <http://www.cancer.org/docroot/home/index.asp>

**American Lung Association**  
<http://www.lungusa.org/>

**Bodies : The Exhibition**  
<http://www.bodiestheexhibition.com/>

**Electronic Cigarettes** [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/NWS/content/NWS\\_1\\_1x\\_E-Cigarettes\\_Contain\\_Toxins\\_FDA\\_Analysis\\_Shows.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/NWS/content/NWS_1_1x_E-Cigarettes_Contain_Toxins_FDA_Analysis_Shows.asp)

**NIDCR—National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research**  
<http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/>

**Smokeout Challenge**  
<http://www.cancer.org/docroot/subsite/greatamericans/Smokeout.asp>

**Smoking & Tobacco Use Data & Statistics**  
[http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/index.htm)

**VA Office of Public Health-Envir. Hazards**  
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/healthinfo.asp>

### WE WANT YOU !!!

Don't delay... Send us your articles and photos for the next newsletter now.



Elizabeth Nuñez, DMD, MST  
Carol Yakimo, RDH, MA  
James A. Haley VAMC  
10770 N. 46th Street, Suite A-300  
Tampa, FL 33617  
(813) 972-7060 or (813) 972-7065

[elizabeth.nunez@va.gov](mailto:elizabeth.nunez@va.gov)  
[carol.yakimo@va.gov](mailto:carol.yakimo@va.gov)



Carol Yakimo,  
RDH, MA  
Assistant Director, HVDP  
Publisher

