



Office of Dentistry

Homeless Veterans Dental Program

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2006

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1

HVDP HAS NEW DIRECTOR



Dr. Elizabeth Nuñez,
HVDP Director

As spring approaches, I am excited to celebrate the season as the new director of the Homeless Veterans Dental Program (HVDP). 2006 promises to bring innovative developments to the program. The many projects in the works will expectantly have a positive effect on homeless veteran health care. We'll keep you abreast of the latest news...

First, though, I'd like to express my gratitude and respect to my predecessor, Dr. Gretchen Gibson and her assistant, Ms. Tracy King, for their commendable work with the HVDP. Their research efforts brought awareness to the serious issues that face homeless veterans. Dr. Gibson's research highlighted the fact that dental care has consistently been one of the top 3 unmet needs of homeless veterans. Clearly, there is much work to be done to address this need that affects thousands of veterans.

One of the HVDP's goals is to increase the awareness of VA staff and the Federal government of the importance of oral care in the rehabilitation process for homeless vets. Our job is to facilitate these veterans in re-entering society as productive, self-sufficient people.

How likely is it for a veteran, graduating from a homeless rehabilitation program, to obtain decent employment when he or she has dental pain or is missing several anterior teeth? Obviously, dental problems, coupled with diminished self-esteem, can be tremen-

dous barriers in seeking and obtaining employment.

As dentists, we frequently do not see the effect that our work has on people, but, believe me, the extraction or composite resin or acrylic partial you provide for one of these veterans may very well change the course of their lives! How wonderful is that?

I would also like to take the opportunity to introduce Carol Yakimo, the new Assistant Director for the HVDP.

Carol comes to the VA with more than 20 years experience in the dental field. She began her career as a dental hygienist in Pennsylvania and continues with a dual license in Florida. She served the U.S. Coast Guard as a civilian dental hygienist and has worked in private practice as well.

Ms. Yakimo was a dental hygiene instructor at Manatee Community College teaching both didactic and clinical subjects. At Manatee Technical Institute, she taught various dental topics in the Dental Assisting Program. At the University of South Florida,

she graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in business.

Carol is eager to begin her new position with the Veterans Administration and looks forward to the rewards and challenges as Assistant Director.



Dr. Robert T. Frame,
Assistant Under Secretary
for Health for Dentistry

I would like to welcome Dr. Nunez and Ms. Yakimo to their new roles in the VA Homeless Veterans Dental Program. They bring energy and enthusiasm to this program as you will read in this newsletter. The Office of Dentistry is committed to improving the oral health of this important population of veterans, and looks forward to continuing VA homeless projects and initiatives.

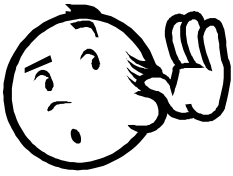


Carol Yakimo, RDH
Assistant Director



Department of Veterans Affairs

Patient Care Services



HAVE YOU HEARD???

The Homeless Veterans Dental Program is newly located at Bay Pines VA Healthcare System in Bay Pines, Florida.

ACTINIC KERATOSIS *and the* HOMELESS



Facial Actinic Keratosis

Cutaneous disease is a frequent cause of morbidity in the homeless population. Malnutrition, exposure to hazardous environments, psychiatric disease, physical injuries, and

limited access to health care all contribute to their increased risk of a variety of skin conditions. Actinic Keratosis (AK), also known as *Solar Keratosis*, is a condition that can be commonly found in homeless patients.

Typically, AK begins on the face, lips, ears, and any skin areas exposed to ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun. Lesions may vary in color from normal to white, brown, gray, or yellowish-black. They may also appear superimposed on an erythematous skin surface. Sizes can vary from 7mm to 2 cm. Perhaps many of us have seen these types of lesions on our homeless veteran patients in the past but assumed they were benign.

“*Actinic cheilitis*” is the term used when AK presents on the lips. Lesions appear as crusted, scaly and diffuse on the lower lip. Lips have the tendency to dry and crack. Oftentimes, we can overlook these anomalies and pass them off as merely dry lips or angular cheilitis.



Actinic Cheilitis

Lesions can usually be found easier by palpation, rather than by visual inspection. The skin will feel rough and scaly, having a sandpaper-like coarseness. Sometimes lesions will produce an overabundance of keratin, causing raised areas on the skin called keratin or “cutaneous horns.”

Etiology is due to sun exposure, particularly in

fair-complexioned people. Homeless people, especially those in warmer climates, may be more prone to AKs because of their exposure to the sun on a daily basis. However, it must be noted that people in other climates are not completely safe from AKs as water, snow and sand can also reflect the sun.

Left untreated, AK can progress into squamous cell carcinoma - one of the deadliest forms of cancer. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, approximately 40% of squamous cell carcinomas begin as AK.

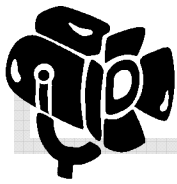
Due to its precancerous predilection, preferred treatment recommendations primarily include removal of actinic keratotic lesions. Various methods can be used to destroy AK lesions including: cryotherapy with liquid nitrogen, curettage, electrodesiccation, topical application of 5-fluorouracil, and surgical excision.

Follow-up and preventative treatments for our homeless veteran patients should include education on the following:

- ◆ Obtaining vitamin D safely through a healthy diet including vitamin supplements. Dietary education as part of your clinic’s overall healthcare plan can be very helpful, not only to prevent AK, but for overall health.
- ◆ Staying out of the sun as much as possible.
- ◆ Application of sunscreen to all exposed skin areas especially ears, face, neck and hands. Sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 broad-spectrum protects against both ultraviolet (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. While outdoors, sunscreen should be re-applied every two hours, even on cloudy days, and after perspiring.

(continued on page 6)





“TRI-STATE PERIODONTIST” Displaced By Hurricane Katrina



Dr. Georgia McDonald, New Orleans VA periodontist, knows first-hand the devastation hurricanes can cause.

From July to September 2005, three wicked witches - Hurricanes Cindy, Katrina, and Rita – hit her both literally and figuratively.

Dr. Georgia McDonald

While biking one day last summer, Dr. McDonald noticed

that the birds were “acting weird.” Little did she know that it was a forewarning that the levy surrounding her hometown would soon break and her home would be demolished.

Later that day, her family was forced to evacuate, by way of an M-16 pointed at them. She and her three children were told to leave their home immediately. Her husband, who is an ER physician, was working at a nearby hospital. He learned later that his family had left New Orleans.

When Dr. McDonald returned to her home to evaluate the damage, she had to trek through 30 inches of water. Frogs, snakes and maggots were living in the previously cozy spaces they called home. The stench was unimaginable; the McDonald house was totally wrecked. She and her family were displaced for 4-1/2 months.

Structural damage to the New Orleans VA prevented Dr. McDonald from practicing dentistry as usual. In fact, many of the 650 dentists, who previously practiced in the city, lost their offices.

As a quick responder, the *Volunteers of America*,

working with VISN 8 providers, set up a mobile service center in Hammond, LA. The van was used not only for dental treatment, but also for minor emergency medical purposes.

Inside the van, Dr. McDonald provided palliative dental treatment to patients, including several extractions. Outside the van, she helped the homeless and displaced by writing scripts and treating minor scrapes and cuts for patients who could not find their medical doctors.

When asked what Dr. McDonald learned from her experience, she states that she never realized how wonderful people can be. Overall, the victims of Hurricane Katrina were grateful for any help they could get.

Don't take anything for granted and realize what is really important...not material things, but people.

Church groups came to the aid of many. Dr. McDonald and her family themselves wore donated clothing - something she never dreamed she would have to do.

Dr. McDonald now refers to herself as the “Tri-State Periodontist.” On a rotational basis, she travels from Louisiana to Mississippi to Florida. Her tour of duty includes working in the cities of Baton Rouge, Biloxi and Pensacola.

Does she offer any advice from her experience? Don't take anything for granted and realize what is really important...not material things, but people.



Florida Veterans Mobile Service Center Van



Where Are They Now?

Hurricane Katrina devastated the lives of thousands in the Gulf Coast. The magnitude of personal property lost and/or damaged has never before been seen in our country's history. Fortunately, many are on the road to recuperation with the help of family, friends, and a lot of determination.

There is a small group that is remarkably overcoming hardship even though, ironically, they had little to begin with. The homeless veterans who were in VA-sponsored transitional housing in New Orleans felt that all-too-familiar feeling of being without a place to call home.

All 61 veterans, who were in grant and per diem programs, were immediately bused to Hous-

ton. Mr. George Castillo, Program Director of the Houston VA Homeless Program, took them in with open arms. He coordinated their placement in *Mid-Town Terrace Suites*, a transitional housing facility sponsored by the US Veteran's Initiative.

The unintentional move, for most, has been a positive one. Of the 61 displaced vets, only one returned to New Orleans. The remainder have transitioned into permanent housing with the aid of FEMA vouchers.

Kudos to all the social workers, outreach specialists, and homeless coordinators who worked long hours to help these and hundreds of other displaced veterans!

National Observances

March 5 - 11 ~ National Patient Safety Awareness Week

National Patient Safety Foundation
1120 Massoca Way
North Adams, MA 01247
(413) 663-8900 / (413) 663-8905 Fax
info@npsf.org www.npsf.org
Materials available
Contact: none available

April 1 - 30 ~ Counseling Awareness Month

American Counseling Association
5999 Stevenson Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22304-3300
(800) 347-6647 / (800) 473-2329 Fax
jgaskins@counseling.org
www.counseling.org
Materials available
Contact: Jean Gaskins

April 3-9 ~National Public Health Week

American Public Health Association
800 I Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-3710
(202) 777-APHA (2742) / (202) 777-2500 TTY
nphw@apha.org www.apha.org/nphw
Materials available
Contact: Lakitia Mayo

May 1 - 31 ~ Melanoma/Skin Cancer

Detection and Prevention Month

American Academy of Dermatology
930 East Woodfield Road
Schaumburg, IL 60173
(888) 462-DERM (3376)
(847) 330-0230
mediarelations@aad.org
www.aad.org
Materials available
Contact: Aisha Hasan



What is a Stand Down ???

Stand Downs are a part of the Department of Veterans Affairs' efforts to provide services to homeless veterans. Historically, they are one to three day events providing services such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, VA and Social Security benefits, counseling, and referrals. Other necessary services include: dental treatment, housing, employment, and substance abuse services. Stand Downs are collaborative events, coordinated between local VAs, other government agencies, and community agencies who serve the homeless. They are also excellent opportunities to volunteer!

~2006~

SCHEDULED VA-SPONSORED STAND DOWNS

Date	# of Days	Location	Contact	Phone #
3/25/06	1	Cocoa, FL	Bill Vagianos	321-637-3610
4/29/06	1	St. Louis, MO	Evelyn Paul	314-289-7611
6/06*	2	Hines, IL	Mary Ann Romeo	708-202-8387
8/10/06	4	San Francisco, CA	George Gibbs	415-551-7312
9/08/06	1	Cheyenne, WY	Larry Melka	307-778-7353
9/9/06	1	Billings, MT	Pamela Mann	406-447-7309
9/15/06	1	Titusville, FL	Bill Vagianos	321-637-3610
9/16/06	1	Ft. Harrison, MT	Pamela Mann	406-447-7309
10/19/06	3	Dixon, CA	Jeffrey Jewell	925-680-4526
10/06*	1	Albuquerque, NM	Catin Brown	505-265-1711 ext. 5921
10/06*	2	Libby, MT	Pamela Mann	406-447-7309
10/06*	1	Louisville, KY	Todd Dedas	502-581-1171
10/19/06	3	Dixon, CA	Jeffrey Jewell	925-680-4526
11/03/06	1	Salt Lake City, UT	Irene Wallingford	801-582-1565 ext. 4222
11/06*	1	Hines, IL	Mary Ann Romeo	708-202-8387

* Indicates event planned for that month, exact date not determined.

For additional information on Stand Down dates and locations, please contact the National Homeless Veterans Programs Office at (202) 273-5764.



ACTINIC KERATOSIS (cont'd from pg. 2)

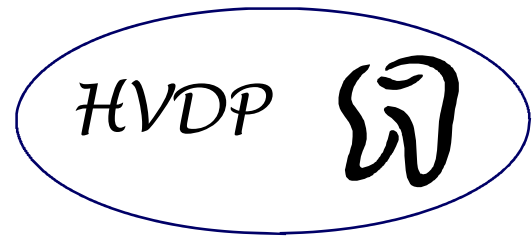
- ◆ Protection of the lips with lip balm (SPF of 15 or higher).
- ◆ Covering up exposed skin areas when they must be in the sun. Wearing long sleeves and long pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses that protect against both UVA and UVB rays.
- ◆ Using extra caution near water, snow, and sand. These elements reflect the damaging rays of the sun, which can increase chances of sunburn even in cold climates.

Dermatologists agree that most people do not apply enough sunscreen to help protect against harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation. This is especially true for the homeless whose primary concern is not cancer prevention, but mere survival.

Help may be needed with the purchase and distribution of free sunscreen products, proper clothing, and sunglasses, as few may be able to afford them.

As homeless veteran health providers, we need to be aware of the special needs in the population we treat. The prevention and treatment of actinic keratosis is a serious concern. With proper prevention methods and diagnosis, we can provide our patients with the proper referrals and treatment they need and deserve. ☞

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REFERENCES:

American Academy of Dermatology. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Actinic Keratoses and Skin Cancer. 3Jan.2006. <http://www.aad.org/public/News/DermInfo/ActKerSkCancFAQ.htm#what>

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McDonald, Dr. Georgia. Personal Telephone Interview. 10 Jan. 2006.

Neville, Brad W., Douglas D. Damm., Carl M. Allen, Jerry E. Bouquot. Oral & Maxillofacial Pathology. Second Edition. New York: W.B. Saunders, 2002. 351-2.

United States. Dept. of Veterans Affairs. Homelessness Among Veterans: Stand Down 2006. 5 Jan. 2006. <http://www1.va.gov/homeless/page.cfm?pg=6>






PLEASE

Let Us Know if you...

- ◆ have an interesting story to be featured in an upcoming article.
- ◆ know someone who should be featured in our spotlight column.
- ◆ have suggestions, comments, or requests.



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