

VETERANS' ADVANTAGE

SUMMER 2007

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE

FOR NEW YORK / NEW JERSEY VETERANS

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VA: The best healthcare anywhere

Dear Veteran,

The media has highlighted the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, a Department of Defense military treatment facility, reportedly because of poor environmental conditions in a building occupied by active-duty service members receiving outpatient care. This has raised concerns that VA Medical Centers and VA Community Clinics have similar problems. This is not the case!

VA's accomplishments are reported by Harvard Medical School, American Customer Satisfaction Index, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, The National Council of Quality Assurance, the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. VA's achievements in quality and patient safety have also been featured by CBS News, *Time* magazine, *Business Week*, *Fortune* magazine, "NBC Nightly News" and *U.S. News & World Report*. Just this February, the book *Best Care Anywhere: Why VA Health Care Is Better Than Yours* was published detailing VA successes.

VA's healthcare and environment are undergoing rigorous reviews by several independent agencies and commissions including the Joint Commission, the Commission on Cancer of the American College of Surgeons, the College of American Pathologists, the Commission on Rehabilitation Accreditation, the American College of Radiology and the American College of Radiation Oncology.

Rest assured that our VA Medical Centers, Community Clinics and nursing homes meet the highest healthcare standards. You can continue to rely on VA to provide high-quality care in safe and well-organized facilities!

James J. Farsetta, F.A.C.H.E.
VA Network Director

Veterans' Advantage Editorial Directors

John Mazzulla, Editor

Raymond Aalbue, VA New York Harbor HCS

Jim Connell, James J. Peters VAMC

Al Hong, James J. Peters VAMC

Peter Juliano, VA New York Harbor HCS

Joe Sledge, VA Northport

Sandra Warren, VA New Jersey HCS

Nancy Winter, VA Hudson Valley HCS

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>



Get your prescriptions online

You asked for it, and you got it! You can now use My Health@Vet—VA's online service for veterans—to refill your prescriptions and view your prescription history online. To take advantage of this service, you must be a registered user of My Health@Vet. As a registered user, you'll also have access to a Personal Health Journal, where you can record and track your health statistics online. To register for these important benefits, visit www.myhealth.va.gov.

We're just a phone call away

Veterans, do you need information about medication dosages or prescription interactions, or do you have questions about your general health? Day or night, get answers to all your healthcare questions by calling the VA Nurses Helpline, 24 hours a day, at 1-800-877-6976.

Veterans: It's time to get healthy



In the United States, 64 percent of the population is overweight or obese, including more than 70 percent of those receiving VA medical care. One consequence of being overweight is diabetes—and 20 percent of those receiving VA medical care have diabetes.

HealthierUS Veterans, a program from VA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is working to improve the nation's health and reduce obesity and diabetes by increasing healthy eating and physical activity among veterans, their families and their communities.

HealthierUS Veterans has four main components:

Fit for Life Volunteer Corps

In the Fit for Life Volunteer Corps, veterans, their families and community members become physical fitness and nutrition ambassadors. They exemplify a healthy lifestyle and represent all races, ethnicities, genders and levels of physical ability, including those with disabilities.

Steps to a HealthierUS Program

HealthierUS Veterans brings together communities participating in Steps to a HealthierUS, states participating in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Nutrition and Physical Activity Program and VA

facilities. The Steps Program implements chronic disease prevention activities to reduce diabetes and obesity and address related risk behaviors, including physical inactivity and poor nutrition.

MOVE! Weight Management Program

The VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention has developed the **MOVE!** Weight Management Program to address overweight and obesity among veterans receiving VA healthcare. **MOVE!** offers minimal to intensive intervention services; involves a multidisciplinary team; is based in primary and ambulatory care settings; and features computerized patient assessment, treatment planning and a comprehensive focus on behavior, nutrition and physical activity.

Prescription for Health

Prescription for Health activity prescription pads help patients understand their body mass index (BMI). The pads explain how an elevated BMI puts patients at risk for health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. The prescriptions also recommend increasing physical activity. Providers can prescribe pedometer use and set a daily walking goal or prescribe odometer use with a wheelchair and a goal for distance rolled. ■



Learn more

For more information about HealthierUS Veterans initiatives, including **MOVE!**, call:

James J. Peters
VA Medical Center (Bronx)
(718) 584-9000, ext. 6641

VA New York Harbor HCS
Brooklyn Campus
(718) 836-6600, ext. 4432

VA New York Harbor HCS
Manhattan Campus/St. Albans
Primary and Extended Care
Center
(718) 630-3614

VA New Jersey HCS
(973) 676-1000, ext. 2876

VA Hudson Valley HCS
(845) 294-6927

Northport VA Medical Center
(Long Island)
(631) 261-4400, ext. 5787



Michael J. Kussman, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health

Introducing the new Under Secretary for Health

On May 25 the U.S. Senate confirmed Michael J. Kussman, M.D., as Under Secretary for Health for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Dr. Kussman joined VHA in 2000 following a distinguished 25-year career in the U.S. Army in which he served as commander of the Europe Regional Medical Command and command surgeon for the U.S. Army in Europe. As commander of the Walter Reed Army Health Care System in Washington, he received the rank of Brigadier General.

With VA, Dr. Kussman has served in a number of progressively responsible positions, including Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health. At the time of his confirmation, he held the title of Acting Under Secretary for Health. ■

Attention women veterans

Heat disease is the leading cause of death in women. Heart attack signs and symptoms include:

- **Chest discomfort or pain.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath.** This may occur with or without chest discomfort.
- **Breaking out in a cold sweat.**
- **Nausea.**
- **Light-headedness.**

If you have any of these warning signs, call 9-1-1 immediately. ■



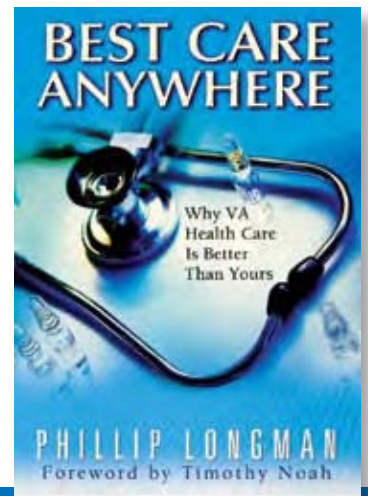
Suggested reading

Best Care Anywhere: Why VA Health Care Is Better Than Yours
By Phillip Longman; February 2007; Polipoint Press.

While researching the healthcare industry in preparation for a *Fortune* magazine writing assignment, Phillip Longman discovered that on several measures of quality, VA is actually providing the best healthcare anywhere!

In this recently published book, Longman describes how VA healthcare transformed itself over the years and provides a historical context for VA's growing leadership in quality, patient safety, patient satisfaction and access to care. Longman discusses several important aspects of healthcare such as cost, access to care, patient safety and quality. He also reviews some of the problems with America's healthcare system.

This book provides an excellent review of American healthcare and VA's leading role of how healthcare should be practiced and delivered. ■



Understanding compensation and pension benefits

Confused about the compensation and pension process? Aren't sure if you're eligible or how to apply? Read on to find out if you qualify for benefits and what you need to do to receive them.

Eligibility requirements

Veterans discharged from the active military are entitled to a service-connected disability if a disease or injury occurred or was aggravated while on active duty. The disease or injury does not have to be combat or wartime related. Examples of disabilities include torn knee ligaments, amputations, heart disease, skin conditions such as psoriasis and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

To receive pension benefits, at least 90 days of active military service are required for enlistments after September 2, 1980, or at least one day of wartime service. Combat service is not required. Veterans must be within specific income limits to qualify for a pension benefit.

How to apply

Contact your local Veterans Benefits Office and ask for VA Form 21-526. This form is also available online at www.va.gov.

For New York area veterans, the Veterans Benefits Office is



located in Manhattan at:
245 West Houston St.
New York, NY 10014

For New Jersey area veterans, the Veterans Benefits Office is located in Newark at:
20 Washington Place
Newark, NJ 07102

You may also contact your local VA facility and ask for the Compensation and Pension Unit for assistance.

It's important to provide any and all supporting medical records and documentation from VA and non-VA providers who have provided treatment for the condition(s) you're claiming.

There's no time limit to submit a claim for compensation and pension; however, compensation benefits will only be paid retroactively to the date of

separation or retirement if the claim is submitted within one year of the separation or retirement from the active military. Otherwise, benefits are effective no earlier than the date VA received the veteran's application. ■

For more information

If you have questions about the compensation and pension process, call your local VA facility.

James J. Peters

VA Medical Center (Bronx)
(718) 584-9000, ext. 3777

VA New York Harbor HCS
(212) 686-7500, ext. 3721

VA New Jersey HCS
(973) 676-1000, ext. 3005

VA Hudson Valley HCS
(845) 831-2000, ext. 5399

Northport VA Medical Center (Long Island)
(631) 261-4400, ext. 2626

Bronx VA doctor named state chairman



Tomas M. Heimann, M.D.

Tomas M. Heimann, M.D., a highly regarded surgeon at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center, was selected in March as the New York State Chairman of the Commission on Cancer (CoC) by the American College of Surgeons.

The State Chairmen serve as members of the CoC Cancer Liaison Program, which guides the activities of the 1,600 Cancer Liaison Physicians (CLPs) appointed in cancer programs across the country. CLPs are responsible for fostering CoC initiatives and communicating these initiatives at the facility level; accessing and using data provided by the CoC to assess care patterns and outcomes to improve cancer care quality; and working with the American Cancer Society (ACS) on cancer control projects in the community.

The State Chairmen communicate and coordinate the programs of the CoC to reduce cancer incidence, morbidity and mortality in each state. Other State Chairman responsibilities include working with the ACS, the state cancer registry and Department of Health to support data-driven comprehensive cancer control planning. In addition, they're responsible for communicating with the CLPs in their state at least twice a year and hosting an annual meeting.

The State Chairmen and CLPs actively participate in and utilize data generated by the CoC's National Cancer Database. This database currently contains patient demographics, tumor characteristics, treatment and outcomes for 20 million cancers diagnosed and treated in hospital cancer programs in the United States between 1985 and 2004. The State Chairmen work regularly with this program in presenting, utilizing and interpreting generated reports for their individual states.

MaryAnn Musumeci, Director of the James J. Peters VA Medical Center, notes Dr. Heimann's many years of dedicated service to America's veterans. "Dr. Heimann is a skilled surgeon with a reputation for high quality healthcare," says Ms. Musumeci. "We're fortunate to have him here on our staff and congratulate him on this important new assignment."

Dr. Heimann's three-year appointment will run until January 2010, after which he'll be eligible to serve a second term. ■

The first No Man Is an Island computer training graduation class.



No man is an island

Congratulations to the 21 veterans who recently graduated from the first No Man Is an Island (NMIAI) computer training course. The course was provided by Vocational Rehabilitation Services, initiated here by social worker Thomas Brennan and sponsored by the James J. Peters VA Medical Center in Bronx, New York.

NMIAI is an innovative, six-month program that uses the "Recovery Model," a training model that emphasizes and develops an individual's abilities for

the purpose of overcoming their disabilities. The NMIAI class helps service-connected disabled veterans rediscover their potential for learning through the computer. The program has excellent therapeutic value as it reduces isolation, increases self-esteem, widens an individual's communication networks and exposes unrealized skills.

NMIAI has grown in popularity, and the James J. Peters VA Medical Center currently has three classes with more than 100 applications pending. ■



VA MEDICAL CENTER
BRONX, NEW YORK

Learn more about computers!

Another NMIAI computer training class begins soon. If you have questions about your eligibility for the program or for more information, call Thomas Brennan at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center at **(718) 584-9000, ext. 5881 or 3761.**



Patient safety

Our mission at VA Hudson Valley Health Care System (HCS) is to honor America's veterans by providing exceptional healthcare safely and following the National Patient Safety Goals. These goals stem from previous adverse events that occurred in other healthcare facilities. We use these goals to decrease the likelihood of adverse events happening at our facility. Many of our safety precautions may not be obvious, but they're used daily, monitored frequently and improved continuously.

Here are some examples of "safety in action" at VA Hudson Valley HCS and ways you can help us provide the safest care:

- To ensure you're receiving the

correct treatment, your healthcare provider should ask you for two different forms of identification, such as your full name, social security number, date of birth or Veteran's Identification Card (VIC) before you have any test or surgery or receive any medications. If you're a hospital patient, your provider will scan your ID band for barcoding. Before surgery, your provider should confirm what surgery you're having and what part of your body is to be operated on.

- You're the most important member of your healthcare team. Participate in all treatment decisions or have a family member be your advocate. Know your medications' names, why they're being

prescribed and ask about any side effects. If you have questions or concerns, ask your physician. If you don't understand, ask again.

- Infections can be reduced by proper hand hygiene. Don't be afraid to ask members of your healthcare team if they washed their hands or used antibacterial hand gel before providing your care. Make sure you wash your hands before eating, after using the bathroom and if they're visibly soiled.

Safety is everyone's responsibility. We all need to work together to ensure that VA Hudson Valley HCS is the safest healthcare facility possible. Safety doesn't happen "by accident!" ■

Treating our veterans with respect

When you live with your nerves on edge, it can be maddening to go to a business where the employees talk to customers without looking at them and treat questions as an annoyance. For someone who risked his or her life for the country and still suffers, experiencing this at a VA facility may be even more painful.

So for 11 years, the VA Hudson Valley Health Care System (HCS) has held Ex-POW Sensitivity Training delivered by former POWs to assure that these veterans are treated with the respect they're due. The former POWs' message helps VA employees understand the special needs of patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and applies directly to the country's newest veterans. The most recent sessions were held at the Montrose and Castle Point Medical Centers in late March.

"We don't expect to be coddled," says former POW Norman Bussel. "We would be satisfied if we were treated with the same courtesy and respect that VA

staff members show to their fellow employees. It's impossible to detect what's going through the mind of PTSD sufferers who seek help, because they disguise their feelings. They may be in the throes of despair, depression or even suicidal ideation, but their faces are inscrutable. The last thing anybody should do is add to their woes by being discourteous."

"This training is a perfect opportunity to learn from the former POW group in preparation for the group that's coming back now," says VA Hudson Valley HCS Director Michael A. Sabo.

"After years of not coming to our VA facility, we now have guys who are 85 years old coming through snowstorms for support group meetings," says Anxiety Disorders Clinic Director and psychologist Ken Reinhard, Ph.D. "We want to offer the same support to the men and women coming home today so no matter what's happening in their lives, there's a place for them at VA where they can get their needs met." ■

A former POW speaks out

"Former POWs lead lives of controlled rage," says Norman Bussel, 83, a World War II veteran who spent a year as a Nazi prisoner in Germany. "We suppress it, but it still smolders, at constant risk of being reignited. We rage that we were forced to submit to our enemy ... to our enemy's inhumanity ... that we were starving ... cold ... that our wounds and illnesses went untreated, that we were constantly scratching at sores and lice. We even rage at God for allowing us to be captured in the first place."

Mr. Bussel authored the upcoming book, "Liberated Body ... Captive Mind: A Repatriated POW's Struggle to Set Free His Mind," his harrowing account of being a POW and his decades-long battle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He believes all former POWs suffer from PTSD. For this reason, it's especially important to treat POWs—and all veterans—with respect and courtesy.



Norman Bussel

Images on pages 3, 6 & 7 © 2007 Jupiterimages Corp.



The Ex-POW Sensitivity Training group, from left, Norman Bussel, Bill Libasci, Anthony Torrieri, Vincent Logiudice, Harvey Horne, Melanie Bussel, VA psychologist Ken Reinhard, Ph.D., Doc Yablonsky, Howard Harvier, Charles Johansen and VA Hudson Valley HCS Director Michael A. Sabo.



Learn more about My Health_eVet

If you have any questions about My Health_eVet, contact Kyllene Cox, Patient Health Education Coordinator, at (973) 676-1000, ext. 2876.

My Health_eVet: Better than ever

In February, the Industry Advisory Council named My Health_eVet a Top 5 Excellence.Gov program winner for its innovative use of technology. This prestigious award is given annually to federal, state and local government agencies. And now My Health_eVet will

get even better with new features to be added throughout 2007.

“My Health_eVet will provide exciting new features that registered veterans can add to their personal health records throughout the year,” says Aiden Barr, Acting Program Manager for My Health_eVet. “These upgrades

will allow veterans, their families and clinicians to partner in improving the management of their healthcare.”

A wealth of features

My Health_eVet allows veterans to register and record personal health information such as blood pressure readings, cholesterol counts and temperatures. Veterans can also refill their VA prescriptions and access medical information from reliable online health libraries.

One new feature will enable veterans to add electronic copies of portions of their VA medical records to their personal health records, creating an online health history. Other new features include screening tools for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and alcohol use. The Healthy Living Centers provide medical information and tips on healthy eating, physical activity and smoking and tobacco use cessation. The Diseases and Condition Centers offer information on diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and stroke, plus tips for managing those conditions. Information about support groups is also available. Veterans' VA appointments, co-pay balances and copies of chemistry and hematology lab reports will be available as well.

Veterans can register for My Health_eVet at www.myhealth.va.gov. They then must complete an In-Person Authentication (IPA) at their medical facility. A demonstration account is available to view what the site has to offer. The demonstration User ID is mhvuser; the password is mhvdemo#1. ■

A sensory solution

A new Snoezelen Room creates serenity



The Snoezelen Room stimulates the senses with lights, sounds and fragrance.

Sight, sound, touch, taste and smell—it has been found that stimulating the five primary senses has an effect on behavior. As a result, the senses have become an important focus of therapy for those suffering from

dementia, reduced mental capacity or attention span, traumatic brain injury, autism and those in a minimally conscious state. This type of therapy, called Snoezelen, was developed in the

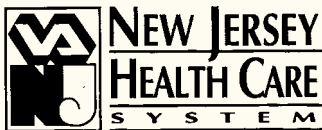
Netherlands in the 1970s.

Snoezelen therapy uses a contained area specially designed to stimulate the primary senses. The new Snoezelen Room in the Healthy Aging Recovery Program (HARP) Unit at the VA New

Jersey Health Care System features a vibrating, acoustic water bed that moves gently to the rhythm of the music playing in the room. The scent of lavender, a relaxing fragrance, lingers in the air while fiber-optic lights fascinate the eyes and beg to be touched.

Recreation therapists are bringing patients to the Snoezelen Room to experience its calming and stimulating sensory aspects. “Our patients have found the experience to be relaxing, enjoyable and serene,” says Amy Merriman, Recreation Therapist. ■

Volunteer today!



The VA Voluntary Service Program at the VA New Jersey Health Care System has a wide variety of volunteer activities available just for you! The program fulfills a national commitment to care for and enhance the lives of America’s veterans.

Our devoted volunteers and corporate participants offer ongoing support to brighten the lives of our special men and women who fought so bravely to preserve our freedom. Many of our volunteers bring their diverse backgrounds

and unique skills to their volunteer assignments, while others bring a desire to learn and explore, finding the experience beneficial.

You’re encouraged to join our VA Voluntary Service team and discover the satisfaction you’ll receive by “earning your stripes!” Your participation makes a difference, and we guarantee volunteering will be memorable and rewarding. ■

For more information

If you’re interested in becoming a volunteer, contact Mary Beth Hynoski, Voluntary Service Program Manager at the Lyons Campus, at **(908) 604-5814** or Tyrone Steed, Voluntary Service Program Manager at the East Orange Campus, at **(973) 395-1597**.

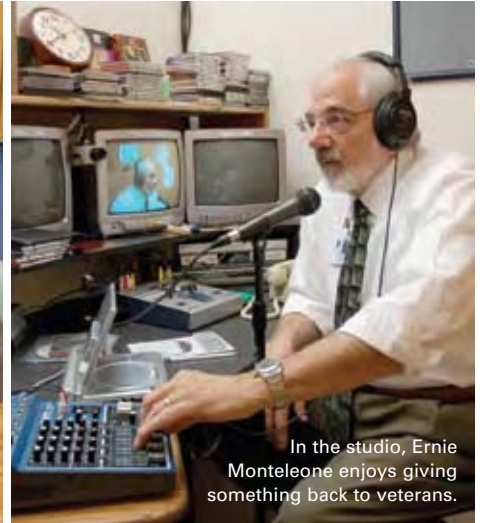


Healthcare Happenings

Information for Veteran Patients of VA New York Harbor Healthcare System



Ernie Monteleone (right) interviews volunteers Bill Kosel and Melanie Wagner, who helped put "Good Day VA" on the air.



In the studio, Ernie Monteleone enjoys giving something back to veterans.

'Good Day VA' at St. Albans

BY RAYMOND P. AALBUE, PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

Five years ago, Ernie Monteleone, St. Albans General Engineer, had an idea to start a cable show for hospitalized veterans. Premiering about a year ago, "Good Day VA" has become an important part of life for veterans at the St. Albans Primary and Extended Care Center in Queens.

Volunteers save the day

A local contractor was upgrading the nurse-call system, so Monteleone seized the moment. He put together a crew of volunteers who ran cable wire for more than 350 televisions throughout the facility. And it didn't cost VA a dime. "We used conduits that were no longer needed," says Monteleone. Initially, Wide Area Commu-

nications loaned the equipment Monteleone needed to run the show. "They were very generous," he says. "But we were going to have to return the equipment if we didn't find a benefactor. We needed to buy our own equipment." The local VA Voluntary Service Executive Committee donated the money to buy the equipment and the rest is history.

Monteleone didn't do this entirely on his own. Volunteers Bill Kosel, Sally Bright-Philpot, Melanie Wagner, Arlinda Rose and Mary Ann Regazzi-Riedl all pitched in.

What's on 'Good Day VA'

"Good Day VA" is broadcast two times a day, five days a week, at 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. You can catch the show anywhere in the

hospital—patient rooms, waiting rooms and solariums. You can even watch the show in the cafeteria.

The show runs for two hours. The first 15 to 20 minutes are devoted to the weather, safety issues, hospital programs, interviews and general information. The rest of the show is a smorgasbord of music mostly from the 40's and 50's (patients can send in musical requests). And if you watch the entire show, you may win a prize if you answer the hidden question correctly. Prizes are donated by the Voluntary Service.

Monteleone has a great time entertaining the veterans. "If I can make one person smile and forget the hardship he or she is going through, it's worthwhile and a blessing," he says. ■



This is no game:

Using virtual reality to treat PTSD

In an Iraqi city, a soldier moves through desolate streets and ramshackle buildings. Helicopters fly overhead. A reservist walks down a road strewn with battle wreckage. From behind the wheel of a Humvee, an officer dodges debris. Sharpshooters appear on overpasses and children run across the road. The smells of war are everywhere—garbage, diesel fuel and body odor.

This isn't a typical day in Iraq, however—it's a state-of-the-art virtual reality therapy session used to treat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Reliving a moment

Conventional PTSD therapy involves veterans undergoing "prolonged imaginal exposure" by visualizing a feared object or situation and then describing traumatic experiences in painstaking detail. "One problem with imaginal therapy is the patient must have excellent visual abilities," says Michael Kramer, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at VA New York Harbor's New York Campus.

"During Virtual Reality Training Therapy, the sensations created by the console are as close to actually being there as is possible."

With the lights off and the headset on, the veteran becomes an active participant in a computer-generated, 3-D replica of an Iraqi city or a desert road convoy. The therapist can activate gunshot sounds, vibrations that simulate explosions or other stimuli. "I treat veterans who say, 'Right before the accident I smelled diesel fuel,' or who were

trapped for days in trucks reeking of sweat," says Dr. Kramer. "I can replicate the smell of diesel fuel or sweat to bring the veteran back to an important moment."

The New York Campus of VA New York Harbor is one of seven sites to provide Virtual Reality Training Therapy. VA New York Harbor secured financing for the virtual reality console through a mental-health fund administered by VA.

Investing in this treatment modality reaffirms VA New York Harbor and VA's commitment to providing the latest and highest quality care available to the veterans we're so proud to serve. ■



Clinical psychologist Michael Kramer, Ph.D., introduces a reporter from a local newspaper to Virtual Reality Training Therapy.



Attention Vietnam veterans

VA has a comprehensive Agent Orange Registry program to respond to the medical problems and concerns of veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975. Approximately 20 million gallons of herbicides including Agent Orange were used in Vietnam between 1962 and 1971 to remove unwanted plant life and leaves that provided cover for enemy forces.

Eleven diseases presumed by VA to be service-connected for

these veterans include chloracne (acne caused by exposure to chlorine) or other acneform diseases similar to chloracne; porphyria cutanea tarda (skin lesions); soft-tissue sarcoma (malignant tumors other than osteosarcoma [tumors involving bone tissue], chondrosarcoma [tumors containing cartilage cells], Kaposi's sarcoma [a skin and mucous membranes disease] or mesothelioma [cancer of the lung lining or abdominal cavity lining]); Hodgkin's disease or non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (lymphatic

cancer); multiple myeloma (bone marrow disease); respiratory cancers involving the lung, bronchus, larynx or trachea; prostate cancer; acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy (disease of the peripheral nervous system); Type 2 diabetes mellitus; and chronic lymphocytic leukemia (abnormal blood cells in the marrow and lymph nodes). ■

Learn more

For information about VA's Agent Orange Registry examination or to file a claim for an Agent Orange-related condition, contact Aida Vasquez, Northport VA Medical Center's Agent Orange Coordinator, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., at (631) 261-4400, ext. 2657.



Helping veterans with recovery

Northport VA Medical Center maintains its commitment to veterans' recovery from mental illness. The Federal Action Agenda, "Transforming Mental Health Care in America," notes that "recovery is the single most important goal for the mental health service delivery system."

At Northport VA, the recovery concept is incorporated into all of our mental health programs to better serve those who have served our country. ■



Not eligible? Think again!

changes in VA eligibility over the years, eligibility for most veterans' healthcare benefits is still primarily based on active military service in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard (or the Merchant Marines during WW II) and discharge under other than dishonorable conditions. Reservists and National Guard members who were called to active duty by a Federal Executive Order may qualify for VA healthcare benefits. Returning service members, including Reservists and National Guard members who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations, have special eligibility for hospital

care, medical services and nursing home care for two years following discharge from active duty.

Tell your veteran neighbors and friends that they're encouraged to apply for VA healthcare benefits and to speak with a VA eligibility specialist about their unique circumstances. ■

If you know former service members who think they're ineligible for VA healthcare because they didn't serve during wartime, in combat or because they earn too much, they may be wrong.

While there have been some

Find out if you're eligible today!

For information or to request an application for care, call Marge O'Malley, Northport VA Medical Center's Community Relations Coordinator, at (631) 261-4400, ext. 7239.



Services for homeless veterans

VA offers a wide array of special programs and initiatives to help homeless veterans live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible, including:

- aggressive outreach to veterans living on streets and in shelters who otherwise wouldn't seek assistance
- clinical assessments and referrals for needed medical treatment for physical and psychiatric disorders, including substance abuse
- emergency and transitional housing assistance, case management and rehabilitation

- employment assistance and linkage with available income supports
- assistance in finding independent community housing ■

Get help today

If you or someone you know is homeless or at risk for becoming homeless, contact any VA social worker or physician or Carol Krishnamoorthy, LCSW, Northport VA Medical Center's Homeless Veterans Coordinator, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., at (631) 261-4400, ext. 2204.

Drivers wanted

Make a difference in your fellow veterans' lives—become a volunteer driver with the DAV Transportation Program at Northport VA Medical Center. Volunteers use DAV vans to transport patients to and from their medical appointments. To volunteer, call (631) 261-4400, ext. 7183. ■

