

VETERANS' ADVANTAGE

WINTER 2004

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE

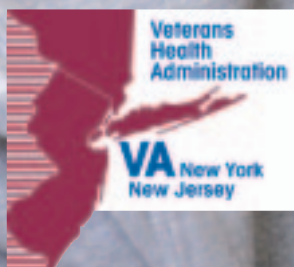
FOR NEW YORK / NEW JERSEY VETERANS



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Reaching out to America's newest veterans

One of our most visible opportunities is to make a positive first impression on the young men and women returning to our shores from Afghanistan and Iraq. They are the vanguard of the new generation of veterans who will define the twenty-first century—for us and for America.

In our VA network and across the VA system, we have identified coordinators to reach out and assist these young men and women who find themselves in need of VA healthcare and benefits. Every VA employee has been made aware of this special duty we have to these newest veterans.

Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, reiterated this commitment in a recent speech to all VA employees:

“I have been to the army and navy medical centers at Walter Reed and Bethesda and talked with many of these soldiers and marines. Many of them are severely wounded. If it weren't for modern body armor and dramatic improvements in battlefield medicine, they would be dead. But they return to us with amputated limbs and severe head injuries. Their stories will melt your heart. Their courage will inspire you for life. I am grateful that Providence still blesses our nation with young men and women made of the same strong fiber that sustained the troops at Valley Forge and pioneered the settling of a great nation. I know that you share my commitment to them. And I am confident that you understand that a young man or woman who turns to us after returning from battle defines our core mission.”

We are proud of all veterans who enter a VA medical center or clinic—proud of their service, proud of their heroism, proud of their love for this nation. Our newest veterans deserve nothing less than the best a grateful nation has to offer.

See page 7 of this issue for a listing of returning veterans coordinators at each medical center in the VA New York/New Jersey Healthcare Network.

James J. Farsetta, FACHE
Network Director

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

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**.

Editor: Gerald Culliton

Joseph Sledge, Northport VA

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Peter Juliano, NY Harbor HCS

Al Hong, Bronx VA

Sandra Warren, NJ HCS

Nancy Winter, Hudson Valley VA

Healing the emotional scars of breast cancer

CONTRIBUTIONS BY SUSAN SPECTOR, M.S., R.D., C.D.N., BRONX VA MEDICAL CENTER

Breast cancer survival involves more than follow-up chemotherapy and watching the surgical incisions heal. Even after oncologists reassure survivors that their prognosis is excellent, many women feel more vulnerable than ever. Following treatment, many women wonder, “How did this happen, and what can I do so it doesn’t come back again?”



The challenge of adjustment

Fact is, life’s never the same after a woman survives breast cancer. While her victory gives her a proverbial new lease on life, it transforms her into a different person, too. Many breast cancer survivors travel the same road in the months after acute medical treatment ends. Emotional conflicts include:

- **A damaged self-image.**

However, new reconstructive surgeries recreate natural, comfortable breasts for women who require a mastectomy. Breast reconstruction is often completed during the same surgery as mastectomy, and many women report feeling they “never lost a breast.”

- **Self-blame.** Many women ask, “What did I do to cause this?”

- **A feeling of betrayal.** Many women feel betrayed by the body they took care of and nurtured.

- **Disillusionment.** Susan Spector, M.S., R.D., C.D.N., Clinical

Nutrition Coordinator/Dietetic Internship Director at Bronx VA Medical Center, is a five-year survivor of breast cancer who recalls feeling betrayed by her good health habits. Although she’s a nutritionist and healthcare professional, she felt ignorant about the risk factors and prevention of breast cancer.

- **Weight gain.** VA doctors report it’s the extra weight many women gain from treatment that disturbs them most.

Rediscovering ‘normal’

Left untreated, the pain and emotional conflicts surrounding breast cancer prevent complete recovery. Fortunately, a wide range of resources are available to help survivors target and overcome their emotional issues. Spector now counsels VA breast cancer survivors on nutrition, helping them transform guilt to empowerment. “We need to nurture and

take care of our whole bodies and our lives,” says Spector.

Mary Williams, program assistant in the VA Police at Bronx VA and a breast cancer survivor, says, “I feel as beautiful today as in the past, perhaps even more so, because I have overcome cancer.”

Breast cancer survivors may consult organizations such as the American Cancer Society, SHARE (self-help for women with breast or ovarian cancer) and Latina SHARE, as well as support groups that help survivors rejoin life. Survivors should also discuss follow-up and therapy with their VA providers.

Emotional healing helps survivors achieve a more fulfilling life and greater inner strength in which they can accept any challenge—especially to enjoy their second chance. Talk to your VA primary care physician or VA mental health provider for additional information. ■



cause the flu. About one quarter of people who get the vaccine have a sore arm for a day or two after the shot—a small price to pay for protection.

Who should get vaccinated

Physicians strongly recommend you receive a flu shot each year if any *one* of the following is true:

- you are 50 years old or older
- you have heart disease, lung disease (such as emphysema or asthma) or diabetes
- you see a doctor for another serious medical condition
- you live in a nursing home
- you are an adult who lives with a person who has a serious medical condition
- you are an adult who wishes to avoid an influenza illness
- you are a healthcare worker or have frequent contact with a high-risk person

Do not get the flu shot if you have had a severe allergic reaction to one in the past or if you are allergic to eggs or thimerosal (a mercury derivative used in contact lens solution). Also, check with your doctor before getting a flu shot if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant in the next three months, or if you have ever been paralyzed by Guillain-Barre syndrome.

If you haven't had a flu shot this year, consider contacting your healthcare provider for an appointment. And if you do come down with the flu, see your VA healthcare provider to prevent your condition from worsening. ■

Get vaccinated! It's key to avoiding the flu

Each year more than 20,000 people in the United States die from the flu. Most are over 65 years old. Yet, you can avoid the flu by getting vaccinated.

What you need to know about the flu and vaccination

The flu, also called influenza, is caused by a virus and is highly contagious (easy to catch). It usually affects the respiratory system, causing fever, a cough, a sore throat and extreme tiredness. The flu lasts for about a week and can be a very serious

illness, especially for older people who have other health problems.

More people die from the flu than any other vaccine-preventable disease. To protect yourself, get a flu shot each fall. The flu shot is very effective. While it doesn't prevent regular colds, it can prevent the flu.

Rest assured that today's vaccine is safe. The virus given in the vaccine is dead, so it *cannot*

**A flu shot
can help
you enjoy
a healthier
winter.**

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM—ENDURING FREEDOM



ENDURING AND IRAQI FREEDOM VETERANS

VA CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH HEALTH CARE AND BENEFITS ASSISTANCE IF YOU HAVE SERVED IN A RECENT THEATER OF COMBAT OPERATIONS.

If you are a recently discharged veteran with service in a theater of combat operations, VA can provide you free medical care for two years from your discharge from active duty for conditions possibly related to your service, regardless of your income status.

Bronx VAMC

Carol Allen, M.D.
(718) 584-9000, ext. 3777

Mr. Mark Benson, L.C.S.W.
(718) 584-9000, ext. 5223

Hudson Valley VAMC

Trudy O'Dell
(914) 737-4400, ext. 2413

Northport VAMC

Thomas E. Ross, Sr.
(631) 261-4400, ext. 7037 or 7039

New Jersey VAMC

Michelle Stefanelli, M.S.W.
(973) 676-1000, ext. 1727

New York Harbor VAMC Manhattan Campus

Robert S. Greene, M.S.W.
(212) 951-5422

Brooklyn Campus

Michelle Woodward
(718) 630-2965

St. Albans Campus

Dennis Farley
(718) 526-1000, ext. 8655



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

*"To care for him who shall have borne the
battle and for his widow, and his orphan,"
President Abraham Lincoln*



New VA website teaches youth about America's heroes

The VA New York/New Jersey Health Care System has created "VA Kids"—a Web page for children and young adults to become more aware of what VA is and whom it serves. Kids can go to the site for activities and information relating to patriotism and history of veterans and VA. The site also offers a teachers' section with suggested classroom tips.

Visit www.va.gov/visns/visn03/ to see what the kids are learning about your valuable contributions to America.

Study reveals 9/11 impact

Although the September 11 terrorist attacks profoundly impacted Americans, their effect on mental health service utilization remains unclear.

Mental health researchers E. Weissman, M. Kushner, D. Davis and S. Marcus—from the New York/New Jersey Healthcare System—used aggregate data on service utilization and found the number of veterans treated for post-traumatic stress disorder in the New York metropolitan region VA facilities increased significantly following the attacks. The increase was most evident in the third quarter after 9/11—consistent with trauma research that shows symptoms often do not occur until months or even years after a traumatic event.

These results conflict with studies conducted outside of VISN 3, which detected no change in mental health service utilization after the 9/11 attacks. In an article printed in the Psychiatric Services December 2003 edition by the *Journal of the American Psychiatric Association*, the researchers identify several variables that could have contributed to their results. Yet, the study's outcome shows that clinicians and administrators need to ensure that patients who suffer from traumatic events receive proper care. ■



VA MEDICAL CENTER
BRONX, NEW YORK

Welcoming home our returning veterans

BY JIM CONNELL, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST

In the past few months, an increasing number of veterans returning from combat zones in the Middle East have come to our facility for help. We proudly provide these medical services to these brave Americans.

We have developed a program to help these veterans make the transition from active duty to active civilian life:

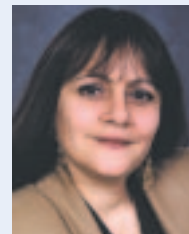
The Welcome Home Veteran Program. As soon as a staff member becomes aware that the person with whom they are working is a recent returnee from a Southwest Asia operations area (Iraq, Kuwait or Afghanistan), he or she notifies our official Medical Center Point of Contact (POC) for recent returnees.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi has made it clear that we are to give these returnees every possible consideration and help make their transition to VA healthcare and other services “seamless.” Our Medical Center POC communicates with the Veterans Benefit Administration and other VA entities who are part of the Secretary’s Seamless Transition Plan.

It is our privilege to serve these veterans and make them as comfortable as possible. If you are a recent combat returnee interested in seeking benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, contact Dr. Carol Allen at (718) 584-9000, ext. 3777, at the Bronx VA Medical Center. ■

Greetings from the director, Bronx VAMC

As the joyous holiday season draws near, I would like to wish all veterans, employees and their families a happy holiday season and a happy, healthy new year.



Maryann Musumeci
Bronx VAMC Director

I want to take this opportunity to remind you that you should get your annual flu and pneumonia vaccines if you haven’t done so already, especially if you are over 65. Your long-term prospects for good health depend on such preventive measures. See your primary care provider here at the Bronx VA Medical Center or at one of our easily accessible Community-Based Outpatient Clinics.

Other news: You may be aware that the Bronx VA Medical Center was reviewed by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) last October. The JCAHO reviewed our practices, procedures and policies against the highest state-of-the-art standards of care. We prepared diligently for many months before this visit, seeing this as an opportunity to self-assess our individual areas and to continue to take measures to ensure our veterans receive the best possible care.

I am pleased to report to all our stakeholders that JCAHO has judged us to be among the very best healthcare providers in the nation.

I am grateful to our employees and the Bronx VA family members for this proud and remarkable achievement. We have promised our veterans the highest level of compassionate care, and I’m pleased that the JCAHO agrees the Bronx VA is delivering that promise.

Sincerely,
Maryann Musumeci
Bronx VAMC Director



See your doctor faster with Advanced Access

BY SARAH GARRISON, M.D., PRACTICE CHIEF,
AND ERIC LANGHOFF, M.D. PH.D., CHIEF OF STAFF

At the Bronx VA Medical Center, we continually strive to provide better healthcare services to our veterans. Our recent movement toward **Advanced Access** helps us accomplish this mission.

The word *access* refers to healthcare provider availability—in other words, how easily you can get an appointment. Advanced Access helps improve your wait time, making sure you get the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

How does Advanced Access benefit you?

We know from patient satisfaction surveys that many of you have difficulty getting appointments when you need them. Some

of you have had to wait weeks, even months, for one.

Each practice will develop its own plan to improve patient access, but in short, if you need to see a doctor you can call for an appointment and receive one quickly. For follow-up appointments, you'll receive a general timeframe.

How can you help make the initiative successful?

You and your primary care provider must work together to make Advanced Access successful. If your primary care provider

knows he or she needs to see you, he or she should encourage you to call for an appointment.

In turn, if you feel you need to be seen immediately, call your primary care provider and speak with the triage nurse. The triage nurse will work to get you an appointment as soon as possible.

Advanced Access has been shown to work very effectively, significantly reducing wait times for appointments. But it will take some effort to shift from a “walk-in” to a “call-in” mentality. Help us achieve that goal so we can best meet your and your fellow veterans' needs. ■

Advanced Access helps get and keep you on track to good health—quickly.



How to lose the holiday blues

BY MARIA L.A. TIAMSON, M.D.

The mad rush begins in September when stores break out the holiday decorations and goodies. Traditionally, we associate the holiday season with times of good cheer and family togetherness. But the reality is the holidays create stress for many people, causing physical and emotional difficulties that often exacerbate depression symptoms, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The holidays not only worsen symptoms in people who already have psychiatric problems but also affect those who generally feel happy during this time of year.

Know the symptoms

- Signs of depression include:
- an overwhelming feeling caused by commitments
 - frequent headaches
 - a loss of interest in activities

- a poor appetite
- a poor energy level
- irritability
- difficulty sleeping

In severe cases, some people may contemplate suicide.

Understand the causes

Many factors can cause holiday depression. A key one is



Maria Tiamson, M.D., psychiatrist at VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, helps patients cope with a variety of mental health concerns.

unrealistic expectations, such as gift spending and family issues. Loneliness, financial worries, grief, distance from loved ones, poor physical health and the lack of light can also play a role.

Holidays can also trigger sad memories. For many veterans, the season reminds them of holidays spent away from their families. Facing the holidays can also be challenging to those who have lost loved ones.

Choose to enjoy

What can you do to prevent feeling depressed during the holidays? First, lower your expectations to prevent disappointment.

Then, make a plan as to how you will spend the holidays.

Choose what traditions you want to observe and even start new ones if you like. If you start to feel depressed, don't dwell on it. Instead, discover joy in interacting with others. Visit a nursing home, sing carols or help the needy. Also minimize alcohol consumption—a dangerous reaction to depression—and do what you can to reduce stress.

Don't be afraid to get professional help, particularly if you are suffering from extreme depression. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness; *it's a sign of strength*. Depression often responds well to treatment. To speak with a mental health professional at VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, call (914) 737-4400, ext. 2330. ■

Understanding diabetes

BY SU-ANNE R. WHITE, R.N., C.D.E.

Here's some good news if you are one of the many Americans who suffers from diabetes: You can control it and feel better with proper diet, regular exercise and weight maintenance.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes, the seventh leading cause of death in the United States, occurs when glucose, or blood sugar, piles up in the bloodstream. Here's what happens when we eat: The food we consume turns into sugar and mixes with insulin that the pancreas produces. The food then enters the cells and gives us energy. Without enough insulin, all the sugar can't enter the cells, and some remains in the bloodstream. This leads to diabetes.

You may have heard of two types of diabetes: type 1 and type 2. Type 1 results when the pancreas doesn't produce enough insulin. In type 2, the body resists its own insulin.

How does diabetes affect the body?

Long-term complications arise when sugar roams around the bloodstream, causing wear and tear on the vessels. The vessels start to close, which means the body parts don't get sufficient oxygen or nutrition. As a result, the body begins to shut down.

Complications can affect every organ of the body since sugar



Su-Anne White, registered nurse and certified diabetes educator at VA Hudson Valley Health Care System, teaches classes to help patients manage diabetes.

resides everywhere in the blood. The most common complication is neuropathy—when tiny vessels close, preventing the nerves from getting proper oxygen or nutrition. This in turn causes nerve damage that affects the hands, legs and feet. If you have diabetes, your healthcare provider can help you save your feet by teaching you how to practice good foot care.

Diabetes can also affect your heart. Men who have diabetes and are overweight have a 100 percent chance of developing heart disease; women, a 99 percent chance. Other complications include diarrhea or constipation, which occurs when diabetes affects the stomach. Blindness can occur, too, if the condition affects the eyes. And diabetes is the number one cause of kidney disease.

Knowing the facts about diabetes and taking steps to control your blood sugar will help you manage the condition. Your

healthcare provider will work closely with you to establish the right diet and exercise plan so you can pursue a long, healthful life.

Patients who would like additional information should contact Su-Anne White, R.N., C.D.E., at (845) 831-2000, ext. 5800. ■



The VA New Jersey Health Care System can help you fight the flu

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the VA New Jersey Health Care System (VANJHCS) physicians strongly recommend that you receive a flu shot each year to stay well.

If you are due to see your primary care provider anytime through January 2004, you can receive the vaccine at the time of your visit.

For all other veterans, visit a special walk-in flu vaccination clinic, available at the Lyons and

East Orange Campuses as well as the Community-Based Outpatient Clinics. You do not need an appointment to get the flu shot at these sites.

Lyons Campus Flu Walk-In Clinic

- Building 4, basement
- Weekdays, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

East Orange Campus Flu Walk-In Clinic

- A Level
- Weekdays, 8 a.m.–3 p.m.

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Brick: Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 1–4 p.m.

Elizabeth: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1–4 p.m.

Fort Monmouth: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2–3:30 p.m.

Hackensack: Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 1–4 p.m.

Jersey City: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1–4 p.m.

Morris: Mondays and Fridays, 1–4 p.m.

New Brunswick: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1–4 p.m.


Newark: Tuesdays, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

Trenton: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 1–4 p.m.

Remember, good health practices include a yearly review of your health. If you wish to schedule a physical exam, call your primary care clinician or call 1 (800) 315-7909. ■



Joint Commission acknowledges our commitment to quality health care

Our latest results from the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) Survey continue to reflect on our remarkable group of dedicated employees at the VA New Jersey Health Care System. 

Every three years, we go through the JCAHO Survey process. This year, our preliminary scores for our areas included 97 for the Behavioral Health Program, 97 for the Opiate Treatment Program, 94 for the Hospital Accreditation Program, 93 for the Long-Term Care Program and 93 for the Home Care Program.

These high marks compliment our organization and every employee who takes pride in making certain that we meet our mission every day: to provide quality, compassionate and accessible services to veterans while achieving excellence in health care, education and research.

The surveyors also noted our staff's generous hospitality and spoke with many veterans who praised the health care services they received from both clinical and administrative employees.

We seek accreditation for our organization to prove our commitment to quality and excellence in comparison both within VA and in the private health care community. It is our veterans to whom we dedicate this high level of achievement, and we look forward to continuing in this effort. ■

—Kenneth H. Mizrach, Director, VANJHCS

New Monmouth CBOC opens



Left to right: James J. Farsetta, Network Director, VISN 3; Kenneth H. Mizrach, Director, VANJHCS; Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Christopher H. Smith, Congressman, 4th District, N.J.; Frank Pallone Jr., Congressman, 6th District, N.J.; Rush Holt, Congressman, 12th District, N.J. (partially hidden); Theodore Narozanick, Monmouth County Freeholder; and Kevin Kiley, Major General, Commander General, North Atlantic Regional Medical Command, help celebrate the Fort Monmouth CBOC's opening.

The Fort Monmouth Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) opened on July 21 with a celebratory ribbon-cutting ceremony. Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, gave the keynote address.

The new clinic offers you many benefits:

- The CBOC has an annual budget of \$1.735 million, with an additional \$250,000 allocated for start-up costs.
- The CBOC has 11 full-time personnel, including two full-time M.D.'s and one full-time nurse practitioner.
- The CBOC encompasses 6,200 square feet on the third-floor wing of the Fort Monmouth Patterson Army Health Clinic.

- The CBOC operates Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

- The CBOC is expected to accommodate about 10,000 patients in its first year.

- Half of the CBOC's expected patients will be new to VA health care and half will come from the Ocean County Brick Clinic or the East Orange VA Medical Center.

- The CBOC provides primary medical care, mental health, nutritional and social work services.

- Additional services and specialty care are provided by the East Orange VAMC or through future sharing agreements with the Patterson Army Health Clinic.

- Future sharing agreements with the Patterson Army Health Clinic could include lab, radiology

and limited specialty services, such as audiology, orthopedics or mental health.

You can locate the CBOC in the Patterson Army Health Clinic, Building 1075, Stephenson Avenue, Fort Monmouth, New Jersey 07703. For more information or to make an appointment, call (732) 532-4500. ■

Pin ceremony honors servicemembers



Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, recently issued commemorative pins to employees in VA Central Office who are members of the Reserves or National Guard. The pins honor individuals who were activated or were ready to be activated to serve in the Middle East. Secretary Principi signed the back of each pin.

Veterans Health Administration purchased the commemorative pins based on Department of Defense (DoD) information that lists VA staff

who are members of the Reserve or Guard and retirees who are subject to reactivation.

On September 29, more than 80 employees from the VA New Jersey Health Care System were honored in a special Commemorative Pin Ceremony at the East Orange Campus. James J. Farsetta, Network Director for VISN 3, and Kenneth H. Mizrach, Director of the VANJHCS, presented pins to our staff members, recognizing their service to our nation. ■



Preparing for discharge

One of the major questions patients ask is, “What will happen when I am ready to leave the hospital?” Northport VA Medical Center caregivers understand veterans’ concerns and want to help them achieve the highest level of recovery possible. We encourage veterans and their families—as partners in continuing care—to ask questions about medical conditions, treatments and needs that may arise following discharge.

Why is it important to plan for discharge?

Patients recover faster when they know what will happen to them—from the time of admis-

sion, through discharge, to their return home. And, patients and family members feel reassured when they know how needs will be met as they move from one level of care to another.

It’s never too early to begin thinking about hospital discharge. Advanced planning lets patients think about and adjust to changes that may become necessary following illness. It also helps them make informed decisions and involves those closest to them.

An interdisciplinary group of social workers, doctors, nurses, dietitians, pharmacists and other healthcare staff help patients plan for discharge. These team members work closely together to

address the total care needs of the patients.

How does each team member help patients?

As the coordinator of veterans’ discharge plans, the social worker assists patients with social, emotional, family and financial problems related to illness and refers patients and their families to community agencies if needed. VA social workers have professional training and knowledge about community services as well as alternative-living situations. They can help patients obtain these services and also address any financial concerns they may have.



Help fellow veterans get around

If you want to make a positive difference in the lives of fellow veterans, consider becoming a volunteer driver. Northport VA Medical Center volunteer drivers use DAV vans to transport outpatients who have difficulty traveling to and from Northport VA Medical Center appointments. To volunteer, call Mary O'Sullivan, Northport VA Voluntary Service Officer, at (631) 261-4400, ext. 7183 or 7184.

Dennis Krulder Jr., Vice Commander of the NYS Disabled American Veterans and a Vietnam veteran, now coordinates Northport's DAV Transportation Program. Korean War Veteran and faithful DAV/VA volunteer Raymond Desmond spearheaded the program and served, until recently, as its coordinator.

The VA doctor discusses patients' illnesses and treatment plans with them and their family members and determines a time frame for discharge. He or she will:

- decide if patients will need to return to the outpatient clinic for follow-up visits after discharge
- write the discharge orders
- explain how patients need to care for themselves after leaving the hospital
- provide phone numbers for patients to call if they have questions after going home
- write prescriptions and send them to the pharmacy

The VA nurse teaches patients to practice as much at-home self-care as possible. If a patient requires nursing care after discharge, the Community Health Nurse Coordinator will:

- discuss home-care services with a home-nursing agency
- review the care plan after hospital discharge, including medications and treatments
- provide written information about the discharge plan

The VA dietitian teaches patients about special diets they need to follow after discharge. He or she may also refer patients to groups, classes or the Nutrition Clinic for outpatient follow-up visits.

The VA pharmacist teaches patients how and when to take medications, what to do if side effects occur and what foods, drinks or other medications to avoid.

What if patients need help after they go home?

The Treatment Team decides when patients may go home. Prior to discharge, patients should be sure they understand all aspects of their illness, including self-care, medications, diet and exercise. They should also ask questions about other health-care concerns and write down follow-up appointment times.

Patients who have questions after they get home should call the VISN 3 toll-free NURSE HELPLINE at 1 (800) 877-6976, available 24 hours a day. ■



Kids reach out to Northport patients

Thanks to the students who wrote to express their appreciation to America's heroes for Veterans' Day 2003. Below are some samples that show their heartfelt thanks.

"I am very proud you risked your life for our country. You are very brave and I look up to you. I am so proud to be an American. I hope you have a great day!"

—Samantha

"Thank you for serving our country while you were in the military. You risked your life and left your home. Your patriotism helped our country. Happy Veterans' Day!"

—Daniel

"Thanks for putting your life on the line for freedom."

—Tyler

"I am very proud of you. Thank you for defending our country. When I hear 'The Star-Spangled Banner' or 'God Bless America,' I think of you. Happy Veterans' Day!"

—Brooke



Healthcare Happenings

Information for Veteran Patients of the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System



VA New York Harbor Healthcare System makes the grade

VA New York Harbor Healthcare System continues to show its commitment to provide quality healthcare to New York City veterans, earning top marks in its recent survey by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) during the week of October 29.

JCAHO is the nation's predominant standards-setting, accrediting body in healthcare. An independent, not-for-profit organization,

JCAHO evaluates and accredits nearly 20,000 healthcare organizations and programs in the U.S. These include general hospitals, nursing homes, behavioral healthcare and home care programs and ambulatory care centers.

To earn and maintain accreditation, organizations must undergo a comprehensive on-site survey by a Joint Commission survey team at least every three years.

VANYHHS earned near-perfect to perfect scores in all areas. ■



John J. Donnellan Jr.,
Director, VA New
York Harbor
Healthcare System

Message from the Director

The New York Campus continues to serve you

You may have seen recent news coverage or heard rumors that the VA New York Harbor Healthcare System's New York Campus is closing and that its buildings are being sold.

I want to ensure all of you that this is *not true*. The New York Campus is not closing, buildings are not being sold, nor are patients

being transferred to another facility.

These rumors have resulted from the recently published Draft National CARES Plan, which recommended that an independent study be conducted to consider moving all inpatient services to the Brooklyn Campus. Comprehensive primary and specialty outpatient services would remain in Manhattan.

This study has not been completed, nor have we been informed as to

when it will be. No decisions have been made, nor will they be made until all analysis is complete. Please keep in mind that CARES is a *20-year VA national strategic plan*.

We encourage you to visit the CARES website, www.va.gov/cares, for a national perspective of CARES.

Our most important mission at VANYHHS is to provide quality healthcare to you, our veteran patients. ■

Pharmacy upgrades provide better medication safety and education

VA New York Harbor Healthcare System aims to provide the best quality pharmaceutical care to veterans—with safety as its number one goal. We are pleased to offer improved services to help protect your health and keep you informed:

➤ Each time you pick up a prescription at the window or receive it by mail, you'll now receive a written medication instruction sheet.

➤ Our automated dispensing machine, **OPTIFILL-II**, now communicates with the pharmacy section of the hospital's computer information system and prints medication information with each prescription filled. Also, as a safety upgrade, **OPTIFILL-II** now uses bar-code identification (similar to scanning used at large grocery store checkout counters) and digital photography technology to ensure that each prescription is double-checked and filled correctly.

➤ You can now get prescription medication information from **CMOP**, our prescription mailing operation. **CMOP** includes the information with each medication dispensed and mailed to patients.

Take advantage of our latest pharmaceutical services that better care for your health.



Charles Baptiste, R.Ph., Staff Pharmacist, and Ruby Baena, Pharmacy Technician, oversee pharmacy operations at the Brooklyn Campus OPTIFILL-II.

➤ When requesting refills using the Automated Telephone Refill Request System, **1 (888) 207-2004**, you can now get complete medication information on each prescription using a push-button telephone.

➤ You can now get the latest information on medications, herbal products and over-the-counter products—as well as answers to general health questions—by visiting a **Health-Point Patient Information Kiosk**. You can find one at each **VANYHHS** campus. ■

10 things you should know about your medication

1. the medication's name
2. the medication's purpose
3. how long you need to take the medication
4. how to use the medication
5. what side effects you should expect from taking the medication and when you should expect those effects to occur
6. what to do if you experience side effects
7. what to do if you miss a dose
8. the significant interactions that could occur (for example, mixing drug and herbal products) and how to avoid them
9. any special precautions you may need to know
10. proper storage and disposal of unused medication

Where YOU CAN FIND US—ANYTIME

Bronx

Medical Center:

130 West Kingsbridge Road
Bronx, NY 10468
(718) 584-9000

Community Clinics:

23 South Broadway
White Plains, NY 10601
(914) 421-1951

124 New Main Street
Yonkers, NY 10701
(914) 375-8055

41-03 Queens Boulevard
Sunnyside, NY 11104
(718) 741-4800

953 Southern Boulevard
Bronx, NY 10459
(718) 741-4900

VA NY Harbor Health Care System

Medical Centers:

Brooklyn Campus
800 Poly Place
Brooklyn, NY 11209
(718) 836-6600

New York Campus
423 East 23rd Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 686-7500

VA Primary and Extended Care Center

179th Street & Linden Boulevard
St. Albans, NY 11425
(718) 526-1000

Community Clinics:

40 Flatbush Extension—8th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 439-4300

21 Water Street
Staten Island, NY 10304
(718) 630-3550

55 West 125th Street—11th Floor
New York, NY 10027
(212) 828-5265

245 West Houston Street
New York, NY 10014
(212) 337-2569

1413 Fulton Street
Brooklyn, NY 11216
(718) 636-4500

VA New Jersey Health Care System

Medical Centers:

East Orange Campus
385 Tremont Avenue
East Orange, NJ 07018-1095
(973) 676-1000

Lyons Campus
151 Knollcroft Road
Lyons, NJ 07939
(908) 647-0180

Community Clinics:

970 Route 70
Brick, NJ 08724
(732) 206-8900

654 East Jersey Street—Suite 2A
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
(908) 994-0120

171 Jersey Street—Building 36
Trenton, NJ 08611-2425
(609) 989-2355

385 Prospect Avenue
Hackensack, NJ 07601
(201) 487-1390

115 Christopher Columbus Drive
Jersey City, NJ 07302
(201) 435-3055

317 George Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
(732) 729-0646

540 West Hanover Avenue
Morris Plains, NJ 07950
(973) 539-9791
(973) 539-9794

20 Washington Place
Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 645-1441

Patterson Army Health Clinic
Stephenson Avenue—Building 1075
Fort Monmouth, NJ 07703
(732) 532-4500

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System

Medical Centers:

Montrose Campus
Route 9A/P.O. Box 100
Montrose, NY 10548-0100
(914) 737-4400

Castle Point Campus
Castle Point, NY 12511
(845) 831-2000

Community Clinics:

275 Broadway
Monticello, NY 12601
(845) 791-4936

150 Pike Street
Port Jervis, NY 12771
(845) 856-5396

20 Squadron Boulevard
New City, NY 10970
(845) 634-8942

110 Crystal Run Road
Middletown, NY 10949
(845) 692-0551

488 Freedom Plains Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603
(845) 452-5151

1875 Route 6
Warwick Savings Bank—2nd Floor
Carmel, NY 10512
(845) 228-5291

VA Mobile Clinic
(845) 452-5151

Northport (Long Island)

Medical Center:

79 Middleville Road
Northport, NY 11768
(631) 261-4400

Mental Health Clinics:

235 Merrick Road
Lynbrook, NY 11563
(516) 887-3666 (Mon. & Thurs. only)

98 Hubbard Avenue
Riverhead, NY 11901
(631) 727-7171 (Thurs. only)

560 N. Delaware Avenue
Lindenhurst, NY 11757
(631) 884-1133 (Tues. only)

39 Nassau Avenue
Islip, NY 11751
(631) 581-5330 (Wed. only)

4 Phyllis Drive
Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 475-6610 (Tues. & Fri. only)

Mt. Sinai Community Center
North Country Road
Mt. Sinai, NY 11766
(631) 473-4068 (Mon. only)

1425 Old Country Road
Plainview, NY 11803
(516) 572-8567 (Tues., Wed. & Fri. only)

Primary Care Component:

4 Phyllis Drive
Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 758-4419
(Mon., Wed., Thurs. & Fri. only)

1425 Old Country Road
Plainview, NY 11803
(516) 694-6008 (Mon.–Fri.)

Westhampton Air Base
(by appointment only)
150 Old Riverhead Road
Westhampton, NY 11978

NY/NJ Veterans Integrated Service
Network 3
130 W. Kingsbridge Road
VISN Office
Bronx, NY 10468

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

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