



Voice Of The Northwoods



Focused on Excellence—Putting Veterans First

A PUBLICATION OF THE
OSCAR G. JOHNSON VA MEDICAL CENTER
February—March 2013

Inside This Issue:

- Service Spotlight 2
- Spouses' Peer Support Group 3
- Caught on Camera 4
- Suicide Prevention Outreach 5
- Mission ReDefined 5
- Kudos 6
- Employee Spotlight 7
- Calendar of Events 8

Health Tip Of The Day!



Managing Stress. Face it, we all have stress in our lives. Not all of it is bad (life would be boring), but too much stress can create problems— difficulty concentrating, anxiety, irritability, tense muscles, exhaustion, etc. – which over time can put your health at risk. It is important to recognize when you stress levels are building and to take action to reduce it. For more information and links for tips from a variety of reputable sources see: www.prevention.va.gov/Manage_Stress.asp

PEER SUPPORT GROUPS HELPING VETS

Rhineland VA Clinic Leading the Way

“Shell shocked,” “battle or combat fatigue,” and “PTSD” are some of the evolving terms for the impact that war has had on troops throughout the last 100 years.

Much is made in the press and in health care circles recently of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In reality, war has always impacted the mental health of soldiers and sailors. However, mental health professionals are much more knowledgeable of disorders like PTSD, and treatments are more varied and effective.

“Recovery groups change the emphasis from ‘What is wrong with you’ to ‘What is right with you.’”

One of the effective treatments used today by the VA in its Mental Health Recovery program is peer support recovery groups, and the VA’s Outpatient Clinic in Rhineland, Wisconsin, is leading the way.

“The peer support groups provide opportunities for the Veterans to take control of their own recovery,” said Tim Bahr, the clinic’s certified Peer Support Specialist. Bahr is a long-serving Marine Corp Veteran who, himself, is recovering from PTSD and is currently facilitating fourteen peer support groups.

“These groups teach and support the learning of skills needed to facilitate one’s recovery as well as help the Veteran develop a sense of wellness and self-worth,” he added.

Two of the peer groups are for spouses. “I was asked by the spouses of our group participants if they could have

a one-time group so they could understand what was happening to their spouses,” said Bahr. “This one-time group turned into a weekly spouses’ group, and now we have two spouses’ peer groups going,” he added.

Studies have demonstrated the positive impact peer support has in improving social functioning and quality of life for Veterans while reducing hospitalizations and use of crisis services.

“One Vietnam combat Vet had isolated himself from pretty much everyone since returning from the war,” said Bahr.

“He wanted little, if any, interaction with others. After being fired from his long time job, and with the insistence of his wife, the Veteran joined one of the clinic’s peer led, peer support recovery, ***See Peer Support Group, page 2***



Marine Corp Veteran Tim Bahr (left), a VA Peer Support Specialist, has deployed to hotspots around the world, including Iraq (above).

Service Spotlight: Administrative Officer of the Day (AOD)



OGJVAMC AODs

(above from left to right): Deb Miilu, M. Fran Swailes, Kelly Eldridge, and Mike Johnson.
(right): Dawn Rompalski and Sam Parr.



AODs are the “Jack of All Trades” in the VA

The position of AOD is a unique and intricate part of the Oscar G. Johnson Medical Center. AODs are responsible for representing the medical center director in all administrative matters occurring during other than normal tour of duty hours. They maintain continuity of functions by providing full administrative authority, guidance, and support to clinical and administrative health care staff. More or less the “Jack of All Trades” within the VA, they deal with a vast array of duties to include: Determining Veteran’s eligibility to VHA benefits * checking in patients * approving and coordinating patient transfers and non-VA care * administering hospital admissions * initiating emergency management plans * coordinating telephonic communication between physicians and veterans’ family members * consoling and working with families to process beneficiary death paperwork, and coordinating with funeral homes.

They also respond to all off-tour inquiries from media, families, and general public and serve as patient advocates. In addition, AOD’s provide support to various PAS services such as ROI, Travel, Eligibility, Call Center, Fee Basis, and VTS, and perform all customer service related functions. ♦

Nutrition Tip Of The Day!



A critical part of healthy eating is keeping foods safe. Individuals in their own homes can reduce contaminants and keep food safe to eat by following safe food handling practices. Four basic food safety principles work together to reduce the risk of foodborne illness—**Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill.** These four principles are the cornerstones of Fight BAC!®, a national public education campaign to promote food safety to consumers and educate them on how to handle and prepare food safely. For 10 tips to reduce the risk of foodborne illness please go to:

www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/DGTipsheet23BeFood-Safe.pdf



Peer Support Groups (continued from page 1)

and today he is getting out and socializing with members of the group,” Bahr added.

As a result of Rhinelander’s success, OGJVAMC has started two peer support groups in Iron Mountain. “We mentor and educate our fellow service members by using our own recovery stories,” said Patrick Flynn, certified VA Peer Support Specialist for the Iron Mountain groups. “We allow our Veterans to attend as many groups as they wish.”

“It is not uncommon for participants in peer support groups to say that they are glad the group is being led by someone who knows where they have been or understand where they are coming from,” said Bahr.

Peer support groups and evidenced-based therapies are both part of the VA’s mental health recovery model. “Mental health recovery is about the Veteran finding his or her way in the world – the way that works best for them so they can live the best life possible,” said Karen Krebsbach, Recovery Coordinator at OGJVAMC.

“Recovery groups change the emphasis from ‘What is wrong with you’ to ‘what is right with you,’” said Krebsbach. Veterans interested in peer support groups or other mental health treatments may call the Rhinelander VA Outpatient Clinic at 715-362-4080 or the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center at 800-215-8262, extension 32777. ♦

Veteran Spouses' Peer Support Group a Dream Come True

By Barbara Bergman, Veteran Spouse

The existence of this peer support group for Veterans' spouses or significant others is the dream of one veteran's wife, Lelani Von Bober. She felt families needed to heal their relationships, and education was the way to begin. Because of her, we have taken that step forward to help ourselves. We have learned that we are not alone, that there are people who will listen, and who understand without judging us.

The advice we used to get was "divorce him, leave him, you don't have to take this, you are better off without him, and get out before he hurts you and the kids." Those of us in the peer support group did not make those choices. We kept the hope that the boy that went to war would someday come back. We love our spouses and have stood by them to become their best advocates. That is why this peer support group for Veterans' spouses and significant others is so necessary.

When our world was crashing down on us, and when we thought there was nothing more we could do, this peer support group gave us life. We are learning to support our veterans not enable them.

A vital component in a peer support group is the Veteran facilitator. Our Veterans have a difficult time talking about their demons.

They don't want us to think less of them for the things they had to do. They feel no one understands them. Our veterans trusted releasing their demons to a fellow vet and their peers. They were not judged nor their emotional pain dismissed. In our group the Veteran facilitator (Tim Bahr) was a source of knowledge. He answered our questions and helped us understand why our veterans acted the way they did. He emphasized to us that it was not our fault. We were not to be blamed or feel guilty. Through him we began to understand why certain days were so bad or why large gatherings were so upsetting. He is helping us put the pieces of our fragmented relationships into perspective and work towards a common goal with our veteran.

I have never set foot in Vietnam. Yet I consider myself a casualty of that war. I have lived, breathed, slept, and fought that war for all of my married life. I reluctantly went to the first meeting. I went because



A peer support group for Veteran spouses meeting last summer with Tim Bahr, VA Peer Support Specialist.

"I have never set foot in Vietnam. Yet I consider myself a casualty of that war. I have lived, breathed, slept, and fought that war for all of my married life."

my husband made me feel guilty (again). I went feeling angry, skeptical, and doubtful. It was just one more thing we were going to try, and it was not going to

work. I was tired of working so hard at something that never was going to make us "normal". I was tired of being careful of what I said, what I did or how I looked. I was tired of having to explain my husband's behavior. I didn't want to have to shelter my grandchildren from their grandfather as I had had to shelter my sons. I did not want to go

through another night worrying about where my husband was. So, I did not want to go! At this point, after 43 years I was ready to give up.

Amazing things happen. I am learning to let go of the past. I am learning to not waste my time being upset about something I can't change. I am not to be blamed for my husband's behavior. I should not feel guilty. It is not my fault. Here I am with the most fantastic, and determined women I have been blessed to call my friends. Our greatest strength lies not in how we are different but in how much we are the same. If the VA is committed to supporting the soldiers when they come home, it needs to realize that some things work together: a dedicated medical team, supervised medication, and peer support for the veteran, spouse and family.

Barbara Bergman is the spouse of a Viet Nam Veteran and co-facilitator of the Spouses' Peer Support Group. ♦

Caught on Camera: Night Shift at OGJVAMC



So what do people look like on night shift? No different than people on day shift ☺. But do you know who they are? Here is one night's staffing.



Sleep Lab: Pam Dubrow, RPSGT



ED: Matt Kempa, HT, and Annie Frey, RN/NOD



CLC: (back l-r) Cindie Trevillian, RN; Brent Secrist, LPN; (front l-r) Mary St. Onge, CNA; and JoJo Sauld, CNA.



AOD: Fran Swailes



4E: Daniela DenBoer, RN, and Dee Schroeder, RN



Lab: Sharon Malburg



Boiler Plant: Frank Siewiorek



ICU: Amanda Rudnick, RN, and Akemi Joyce, RN



RT: Danita King, CRT



VAP: Tom Unger and Jeff Aalto



Housekeeping: Norm Miilu

Suicide Prevention Outreach

By Sharon Anastas, OGJVAMC Suicide Prevention Coordinator

Suicide prevention programming in the VA formally began in June 2005 with the publication of the VA Mental Health Strategic Plan. As part of this important initiative, each VA Medical Center in 2007 was mandated to create the position of Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC).

One aspect of the SPC role is to provide suicide prevention education and awareness to staff and veterans within the hospital as well as to the communities we serve.

Being able to reach out to organizations and individuals in our communities that work closely with veterans and active duty soldiers provides a tremendous opportunity to get the VA's message out that 'Suicide Prevention is Everybody's Business.'

As part of these outreach efforts, I had the opportunity to meet with Sergeant Joseph Battisfore, Operations Sergeant for the 1431st Engineer Company of the Calumet/Baraga armory. He was preparing for the National Guard's Suicide Prevention Stand Down Training that required all soldiers to receive eight hours of suicide prevention education.

Sgt. Battisfore discussed the impact this training and others related to suicide prevention awareness have on sol-

diers.

"Before there was this big push for suicide prevention, we didn't recognize or know what some of the risk factors were," said Sgt. Battisfore. "Now we have more of an awareness as do our leaders. We get suicide briefings more often, and there is less of a stigma to report difficulties."

"We get suicide briefings more often, and there is less of a stigma to report difficulties."

Sgt. Joseph Battisfore, USANG

Sgt. Battisfore credits advancements in social technology (i.e., Facebook, Blogs, Twitter, etc) as well for soldiers reaching out for help. "I think soldiers, especially the younger ones, are more comfortable to make referrals, and

one of the main ways they do this is through social media," he said. "I think it makes it easier for them to express themselves, especially when they are having difficulties, and for soldiers to stay connected and recognize when one of their own is struggling."

Sgt. Battisfore's experiences highlight the significance that suicide prevention education and awareness can have in the lives of our soldiers and veterans.

As Sgt Battisfore closed with, "Even if it helps just one person, it's been worthwhile." ♦

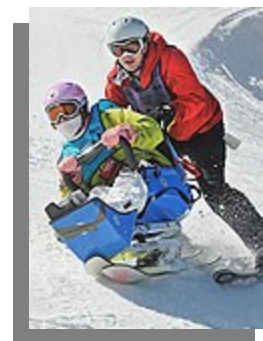


Thanks to advances in battlefield medicine and surgical procedures, troops are surviving their wounds at a higher rate than ever before.

That's why VA created a number of rehabilitative programs to help disabled Veterans get out of the house and get active.

Every year, VA holds events like the *National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic*, *Winter Sports Clinic*, *Wheelchair Games*, *Creative Arts Festival*, *TEE Tournament*, and the *Golden Age Games*.

Check out the list of rehab programs/events and learn how disabled Veterans can benefit from adaptive sports at www.va.gov/adaptivesports/



The **Winter Sports Clinic**, co-sponsored by the VA & DAV, will be held this March at Snowmass, CO. Nearly 400 disabled Veterans will be participating. For more information go to the link above and click on *Winter Sports Clinic* in the right hand menu.

IT'S YOUR CALL
Confidential help for Veterans and their families

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

Confidential chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net
or text to 838255

Kudos!

Employees of the Month

November



Marilou Cazzola, CNA, assigned to the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS). Marilou is recognized for going above and beyond in providing a nurse escort for Veterans using VTS, often rearranging her schedule to meet the needs of Veterans. Marilou recently joined OGJVAMC in 2012.

December



Sue Kerr, RN, Behavioral Health Service. Sue is recognized for her ability to multitask and take on problems that bring others to a dead end, and diligently works them until they are resolved. She does all this with a smile on her face and kind words to patients and staff. Sue has been employed with the VA since 1982 and at OGJVAMC since 1985.

Leadership Training Certificate



Congratulations to **Mary Bertucci, LMSW**, Home Based Primary Care Service, for completing all eight course modules of the VA Social Work Leadership Training entitled *The Legacy of Leadership: A Roadmap to Success*.

OGJVAMC BH Initiatives Selected as StrongPractices

Congratulations to **Behavioral Health staff** for the selection of their *Evidence Based Psychotherapy via Telemental Health Program* and *Circle of Care Clinic* as "Strong Practices" by the VA Office of Mental Health (OMHO). These practices were nominated by site visit team members, then vetted by the appropriate VISN Mental Health Lead, followed by a review of submitted information by members of the Strong Practices Workgroup. To be nominated the practices had to meet at least one of the following criteria: Clinical innovation, Evidence of good clinical outcomes, and/or Adaption of a standard practice to meet a local need. OGJVAMC's Evidence Based Psychotherapy via Telemental Health Program was selected as a Strong Practice for 3 categories: PTSD, Military Sexual Trauma, and Evidence Based Treatment. The Circle of Care Clinic was also selected for 3 categories: Transformation to Recovery-Oriented Care, Integrated Care Service, and Evidence Based Treatment.

Employee Spotlight!

Welcome To OGVAMC!

Audiology

Krista Frick

Behavioral Health

Pamela Aalto

Logistics

John Grayvold

Pharmacy

Kenneth DeGroot

Nursing & Patient Care

Donna Pryor-Foote
(Manistique)

Ginger Cudnohufsky

Samantha Micheau

Diane Biscobing (RHI)

Lillian Gerhart

Patricia Bruders

Farewell Wishes! (*retired)

Primary Care

Dr. Raul Montante

Nutrition & Environmental

Support

Michael Patterson*(36 years)

Raymond Balkum*(30 years)

Logistics

Michael Karle

Surgery

Nancy Bauman

Nursing & Patient Care

Brian Despins*(35 years)

Patricia Sydmark* (28 years)

Kathleen Nedeau*(33 years)

Amy Hilsabeck

Patient Admin Service

Richard Page

OI&T

Gordon Person*(29 years)

VA Police

Ronald Laduron*(31 years)

Service Pins



Jim Rice (Medical Center Director, far left) presented service pins to (left to right): Brent Freeman (BioMed, 25 years), Brenda Kelly (PAS, 10 years), Sharon Curnow (PAS, 10 years), Mitzi Metzler-Baker (NESS, 25 years), Cynthia Gannon (Geriatrics/Extended Care, 10 years), Carolyn Holt (PAS, 10 years), and Kathy Jo Anderson (Nursing, 35 years).



Jim Rice (Medical Center Director, far left) presented service pins to (left to right): Andrea Collins (Nursing, 30 years), Beth Hoffman (Nursing, 25 years), Holly Schroeder (NESS, 10 years), Sharon Lies (Behavioral Health, 10 years), Kathy Truax (Nursing, 20 years).

Inset: Tereasa Teuteberg (PAS, 30 years)



Upcoming Events & Observances

February:

African American History Month

Heart Health Month

Cancer Prevention Month

1 National Red Wear Day

3 Four Chaplains Memorial Day (1943) see: www.fourchaplains.org/story.html

4 USO Founded (1941)

1-7 Women's Heart Week

10 Chinese New Year

10-16 National Salute to Veterans Week

**13 1st Medal of Honor Awarded (1861)
Marine Corps Women's Reserve founded (1943)**

14 Valentines Day

17-23 National Engineers Week

18 Presidents' Day (Clinics Closed)

**23 Desert Storm Ground War Begins (1991)
Iwo Jima Day Anniversary (1945)**

March:

Women's History Month

National Nutrition Month

National Social Worker Month

Ethics Awareness Month

3-9 Patient Safety Awareness Week

15 VA Became Cabinet Status (1989)

15-17 American Legion/Auxiliary Est.(1919)

17 St. Patrick's Day

19 Operation Iraqi Freedom Begins (2003)

22 Tuskegee Airmen Activated (1941)

25 Passover Begins (3/25-4/2)

29 Good Friday

30 Doctors' Day

30 Disabled Vets Winter Sports Clinic Begins

31 Easter

Visit us online at www.ironmountain.va.gov and follow us on:



Comments? [Email bradley.nelson@va.gov](mailto:bradley.nelson@va.gov)

Voice Of The Northwoods