



## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VA

On July 21, 1930, President Herbert Hoover signed Executive Order 5398, which brought together the U.S. Veterans Bureau, the Bureau of Pensions and the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers into a single new agency—the Veterans Administration.

The important of that Executive Order was not lost on Hoover. “The new establishment [I create today] becomes one of the most important functions in the Government,” he said. Just a few facts can illustrate the wisdom of Hoover’s prediction.

In seventy-five years, VA has gone from an independent

federal agency to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the second-largest department after the Department of Defense. VA’s budget is substantially larger than in 1930—\$69 billion, up from \$800 million. Our staff has increased to 237,000 from 31,000. And the five million veterans who received VA health care last year are a vast increase from 640,000 patients treated three-quarters of a century ago.

But, despite the passage of years, the start and finish of several wars, the rise of technology and the advent of a new century, our sacred mission has not changed. It is rooted in Abraham Lincoln’s 1965 promise to “care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan.”

Nationally, VA’s health care system has become what one prestigious medical journal called “a bright star” within the U.S. health care industry. The VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country, with 157 hospitals and more than 860 clinics that expect to treat 5.2 million veterans this year.

More than half of the physicians practicing in the United States receive some of their professional education at VA medical centers. Three winners of the Nobel Prize in Medicine have worked for VA.

All of this expertise exists for the sole purpose of caring for our veterans. Special efforts are underway to reach out to the veterans of the Global War on Terrorism. The Department has started hiring programs for newly returned combat veterans and placed VA staff on military facilities for early counseling about veteran’s benefits, in addition to providing the world-class medical care that wounded veterans deserve.

As a new generation of combat heroes now turns to VA for health care, disability compensation, home loan guarantees, educational assistance and a variety of other benefits, we commit ourselves to keeping, for the next seventy-five years, President Hoover’s prediction and President Lincoln’s promise.

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## OIF/OEF Activities

*"Foremost among the challenges we face in 2005 is our continuing effort to improve the service we provide to our Nation's newest veterans, especially those who return ill or injured from Iraq and Afghanistan."*

That is an excerpt from a letter, dated January 4, 2005 to all Veterans Health Administration employees from Jonathan B. Perlin, M.D., Acting Under Secretary for Health (the top ranking medical official in VA). In this issue are some of the things taking place across the Network.

### Seamless Transition at Madison VA

The William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, WI is participating along with all other VISN 12 facilities to welcome home newly returning veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Since 2004, over 600 veterans have been enrolled into the hospital system. Of those, nearly 400 have already received at least one visit of care. Approximately 150 have continued with regular appointments.

In addition, as a component of the national VHA/DoD "Seamless Transition" effort, the Madison VA has received referrals directly from military treatment facilities, such as the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD, or Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington D.C. for active duty personnel in need of follow-up or transition care. To date, 10 referrals have been received and treatment provided. Clinicians at the Madison VA have been sought out for information on the issues of re-adjustment for returning veterans. Most recently, Susan Knoedel, LCSW, Mental Health Service Line, was interviewed by National Public Radio for a 10 minute feature that played on June 2, 2005 on the "Morning Edition" program profiling a Madison VA OIF veteran with PTSD. The Madison Vet Center received funding for a full-time outreach specialist. David Hosking has retired from the Wisconsin National Guard and is a Persian Gulf War veteran who has enthusiastically stepped into this position, attending every demobilization meeting he can as well as direct outreach to discharged active duty personnel.

Finally, VISN 12 is seeking input on the process of receiving and providing care to this newest generation of veterans and has chartered a sub-group from its Leadership Development Program to investigate the best practices within the VISN for procedures to conduct outreach, facilitate enrollment and treatment, and analyze data regarding this population. Kristi Rietz, OTR, Mental Health Service Line at Madison, is participating in this workgroup. A VISN-wide fall training program is being considered to share information and ensure a uniform readiness and response to all VISN 12 returning soldiers.

### Tomah VA Aides In Seamless Transition For Returning Soldiers

The Seamless Transition Team (STT) at the Tomah VA has aggressively reached out to returning soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As of early June, the Tomah VA and its Community-Based Outpatient Clinics has seen a total of 254 combat soldiers. These soldiers are coming to the VA for medical care, dental services, and mental health issues. To date, six individuals have been admitted to the Tomah VA.

Tomah's STT has conducted several outreach events, such as a health fair in nearby Sparta, as well as events in Wausau and a "Veterans' Supermarket" sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs in La Crosse. Soldiers are provided information on benefits available to them, services provided by the facility, and other pertinent information.

The Tomah VA is fifteen minutes away from Fort McCoy, a major Army base from which 40,000 troops have been mobilized and demobilized since September 2001. Representatives from the Tomah VA have been going to Fort McCoy once a month to meet with soldiers on medical hold, or who are being demobilized and explaining VA benefits to them. There is also a support group that meets twice a month at Fort McCoy at which readjustment issues are discussed. In addition to meeting with returning soldiers at Fort McCoy, there is also a combat soldiers' group that meets twice a month at the Tomah VA.



*The Tomah VA received five quilts to be given to needy Iraqi veterans made by members of the Platteville (Wisconsin) Military Project. Holding the quilt are Jeanne Button, Addition Therapist, and Stefhanie Schulz, Social Worker, both members of Tomah's STT.*

County veterans' service officers, parents, spouses and military facilities refer soldiers.

"I think we're way ahead of the game," stated Jeanne Button, one of four members of Tomah's STT and also one of two points of contact for the returning Iraqi and Afghanistan soldiers. "We are really getting the word out to our returning soldiers, and it is paying off for them."

## **Appreciation Gifts for Women Combat Veterans of Current Conflicts**

The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation recently presented appreciation gift bags to women veterans returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan as a special event held at the Madison VA. The Foundation received donations from 30 companies and is working in partnership with the Women's Health Program at the Madison VA to distribute 75 appreciation gifts to women veterans.

Although women have been serving in the military for many years, more women are serving in direct combat in the Iraq war than at any time in history. One in seven troops in Iraq is a woman, and there are over 17,000 women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We wanted to do something to help these brave women transition back to civilian life, as well as to raise awareness about the unique physical and emotional challenges women in the military face," says Sue Ann Thompson, Foundation President and former

Wisconsin First Lady, when asked why the Foundation decided to initiate such a project.

Women veterans are the fastest growing segment of the veteran population. Though 7% of veterans currently using the VA are women, that number is expected to grow to over 14% by 2010. "There are many relevant research questions to be asked about our women combat veterans," according to Dr. Molly Carnes, Director of the VA Women Veterans Health Programs, Director of the University of Wisconsin (UW) National Center for Women's Health Research, and a Professor at the UW Department of Medicine. "For example, will exposure to toxins or chemicals affect reproduction? Will post-traumatic stress syndrome predispose women to lifelong mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety? Will service in the military have a beneficial effect on women's health? And, how will women re-integrate into civilian life – especially those who left small children for long periods of time?"

The Madison VA has a number of specialty treatment options for serving women veterans including the Women Veterans Health Program, which was established in 1994 and the new Women's Stress Disorders Treatment Program that serves the Madison and North Chicago VA facilities. The Madison VA is also one of eight VA sites in the country with a Women's Health Fellowship and is a satellite clinic for the UW National Center of Excellence in Women's Health.

"In addition to dealing with the emotional and physical effects of being in combat, many of the women feel 'de-feminized' after serving in a very male-dominated environment for so long," according to Thompson. "We hope these appreciation gifts will help women veterans to make self-care a priority, and we are very grateful to the 30 companies who so graciously donated to the project." Each gift bag is filled with certificates for items such as facials, haircuts, and frozen custard, as well as a variety of products – a hair dryer, slippers, perfume samples, cosmetics, hair care products, vitamins, and lotions.

The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation is an independent, statewide non-profit organization that presents women's health education programs around Wisconsin, as well as supports women's health

research in Wisconsin. The Foundation was established by Sue Ann Thompson with the mission of helping women to become better advocates for their health; connecting women with the information, resources and tools they need to be healthy; and improving the quality of life for women and families in Wisconsin.

## Network News

### HINES

#### Volunteers Honored

Two Hines volunteers were honored last week at the VA Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee (NAC) meeting in Phoenix, AZ.

Student volunteer Jennifer Kelly received the James H. Parke Youth Scholarship worth \$15,000 and Chester Olszewski was awarded the NAC Male Volunteer of the Year Award. In her acceptance speech Jennifer thanked her grandfather for getting her involved in volunteering.

For Hines, the award ceremony was truly a family affair, for you see, Chester is Jennifer's grandfather. Congratulations to both of them for their accomplishments and for making Hines VA Hospital so very proud.

### JESSE BROWN

#### Jesse Brown VA Celebrates Juneteenth



Employees from the Jesse Brown VAMC and VBA Regional Office have formed a gospel choir, which sang several musical selections at the medical center's recent *Juneteenth* program. Employees at the medical center decided to start the choir after the Hines VAH Choir was invited to perform at JBVA's Black History Month program in February.

### Jesse Brown VAMC Opens Patient Health Education Resource Center (PHERC)



Acting Director Stan Johnson (from left) is joined by Library and Education staff, including James Pilarski, Beverly Speer, Levi Laroco and Susan Koval as the Patient Health Education Resource Center was officially opened on April 4<sup>th</sup>. Staff and veterans can visit the center weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. for easy access to health information through its extensive collection of books, magazines, pamphlets and audiovisuals. PHERC staff can also assist veterans to access the HEALTHeVET website, which provides patients with a wealth of health information and the ability to print out their own personal medical records and make physician appointments.

### MADISON

#### VA Leader to Retire

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, Jeffrey Jones, M.D., Ph.D., retired as Chief of Staff at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital after 31 years of dedicated federal service. Honesty, warmth, humor, compassion, and modesty best describe this uncommon man. He is respected by all for his leadership as well as his intelligent, fair-minded, rational, and responsible approach to managing a complex tertiary hospital. His commitment to patient care is hallmarked by his approachability, kindness, and expertise.

Dr. Jones was appointed Madison VA Chief of Staff in 1997. His career began with his attaining a B.S. Degree in Biology from the University of Illinois in Urbana in 1969, followed by receiving his Medical Degree from the University of Illinois, College of Medicine in 1971. He received a Ph.D. Degree in Microbiology from the University of Illinois at the

Medical Center, Chicago, in 1972. Dr. Jones served as an Intern in Internal Medicine at the University of Wisconsin Hospitals, Madison, in 1972 to 1973. He served in the United States Public Health Service 1973 to 1975, attaining the rank of Lt. Commander. Dr. Jones was a Resident in Internal Medicine at the University of Wisconsin Hospitals, Madison, 1975 to 1977. This was followed by his completion of the requirements for fellowship in Infectious Diseases 1977 to 1980. He was board certified in Internal Medicine in 1977 and in Infectious Diseases in 1980.



*Dr. Jeff Jones, Madison VA*

Dr. Jones went on to serve in progressively responsible positions at Madison VA, beginning with his appointment as a Staff Physician and Assistant Chief, Infectious Diseases, from 1977 to 1997. He was a Staff Physician and Chief, Infectious Diseases from 1997 – 1998. During the years 1984 – 1993, Dr. Jones also served as Director of the Medical Intensive Care Unit as well as Assistant Chief of Medical Service 1986 – 1992. In 1993, he became Chief of Medical Service and served in that post until he was appointed Chief of Staff in 1997.

Faculty appointments at the University of Wisconsin Medical School for Dr. Jones began in 1977 as an Assistant Professor of Medicine. He was an Associate Professor of Medicine 1982 – 1987, and was appointed Professor of Medicine in 1987. Dr. Jones has been the Graduate Faculty Authority, Department of Medical Microbiology, University of Wisconsin-Madison from 1979 to present as well as Graduate Faculty Authority, Department of Molecular Biology 1981 to 1996. In 1997, he became an Assistant Dean for VA Clinical Affairs.

Dr. Jones joined the VISN 12 Clinical Advisory Council in 1997 and has been Chair of that group from 1998 to the present.

Madison has been truly fortunate to have such a distinguished Chief of Staff who has been a true friend and supporter to so many patients and staff. Dr. Jones will be dearly missed by all.

## **MILWAUKEE**

### **A Summer Salute**

*Suburban H.O.G. Chapter goes the extra mile*

Saturday, July 16, the Milwaukee VA medical center will look like a page from the infamous Sturgis Bike Week program. Well, maybe it won't be quite the same, but the members of the Suburban Chapter of the Harley Owners Group are pulling all the stops to honor the sacrifices of veterans and those who care for them.

This will be the fourth year the Suburban Chapter members have treated the medical center patients, not only to a picnic at the Lake Wheeler pavilion on the medical center campus, but also to a parade. The parade begins at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the shoreline of Lake Michigan, winds through downtown Milwaukee, past the Wood National Cemetery, circling the medical center and ending at Lake Wheeler where the picnic begins. In the parade, the Harleys with sidecars will have smiling patients beaming brighter than the bike's headlights.

The picnic is not only for patients but includes staff and volunteers. This year the chapter members are planning to serve food for 600 to 800 guests. They go even further as they bring food to those who cannot leave their hospital bed and to the staff on duty.



Chapter coordinator Bill Dooley explained, "We want to let the veterans and their families know they are truly remembered and there are people who truly are thankful for all their sacrifices and for those who did not return. Our goal is not only to thank them but also to do something extraordinary. We as a chapter are humbled by this experience, and of all the giving events we do during the year, this is by far our most satisfying."

Their gesture of kindness will be repaid simply with a smile, a thank you and memories that will last a lifetime.

## Patriotism Runs Strong

The historic Soldiers Home district at Milwaukee's VA medical center was painted red, white and blue the first weekend of June. The event was the fourth annual Reclaiming Our Heritage hosted by the medical center and sponsored by the Soldiers Home Foundation.



The Foundation with partners from community, educational and veteran organizations, is dedicated to the protection, preservation and renovation of the historic Milwaukee Soldiers Home District and grounds located on the Medical Center campus. The members seek every opportunity to educate the public on the historical, cultural and architectural significance of the historic district and its veteran-related history and legacy. This is their time to shine.

The Milwaukee VA is one of the few that has an intact historic district according to John Brecheisen, who acts as the liaison between the Medical Center and the

organization. Mr. Brecheisen was pleased with the turn out of 10,000 for the two-day happening. He points to the numbers that show substantial growth of the event over its four-year history. "In 2001 we had about 2,500 attend." He also is enthusiastic about the increased number of reenactors of all military eras participating. "This has made the event even more compelling. These 'living historians' raise consciousness and educate people about the sacrifices our military have made in every era in our history." He explained that many take on the role of an individual who lived in that time and listening to their stories is fascinating. This year over four hundred reenactors participated in the two-day event.



*A Sunday afternoon visit to the Wood National Cemetery during Reclaiming Our Heritage for Carla Brockman, Lydia Matthews-Flynn VA employees in Civil War period dress who volunteer each year for the event. Officers David Flynn (a VA employee) and Rodney L. Dary in Union Army uniforms represent the 29th Infantry Regiment of Quincy, IL. There were 400 reenactors who took part in weekend event. photo credit Alex Sukys*

The Civil War School Day, which was held on Friday, has been such a success that attendance was limited this year to 400 students in fifth and sixth grades. The students have a unit on the Civil War at this point in their school year. Mr. Brecheisen said that Civil War reenactors set up early for the opportunity to share skills and demonstrate different aspects of Civil War history.

There were activities that kept guests busy for the day starting with a Positively Patriotic Parade on Saturday morning. Three Marines, recently returned from Iraq, were the guests of honor for the parade. Special activities on Saturday included the cemetery-by-lantern tours through the Wood National Cemetery. Sunday was dedicated to honoring veterans of the Korean conflict.

This year author Andrew Carroll introduced his new book — *Behind the Lines: Powerful and Revealing American and Foreign War Letters and One Man's Search to Find Them* — at the event. Mr. Carroll is best noted for his New York Times Bestseller, *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*.

The event's many venues provide an opportunity to see up close the buildings of the historic district and interact with the reenactors. It is not history in a book; it is interactive history; it's real time. Reclaiming Our Heritage is an opportunity to see your inheritance. It will unfold again next year on June 3 and 4.

### Getting Ready

Staff members at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center were not just waiting patiently for the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in 2007. They were actively involved by their attendance at the Minneapolis games on June 27 through July 1.

They went to observe but that didn't last long. The 40 staff members decked out in fashionable attire promoting the 2007 Milwaukee Games were very busy. You can only observe for just a little while.

Milwaukee is in a unique situation: The Games in 2006 will be held in Anchorage, Alaska. That is not a short drive (or flight) and will limit the number attending because of the distance. Minneapolis is a short (relative) six-hour drive away so it made the best site to get experience. And, experience is what they got. Not only did they cheer for the home team but also learned from the Minneapolis staff that had been in the preparation mode for over a year.

The Games in Milwaukee are June 18-24, 2007, and most of the events will be held at the Midwest Center in downtown Milwaukee. The commitment is large but so is the enthusiasm for the *Great Games on a Great Lake*.

## TOMAH

### Veterans Go Fishing!

Tomah VA held their 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Fishing Tournament on May 18.

The American Legion provided a picnic lunch for the patients; they also sponsored the bait and prizes for the tournament. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stocked the pond with about 1,000 perch, trout and other pan fish and provided a fish fry. The Fish and Wildlife Service also came out the week before the tournament to clear the pond of excess vegetation and brought personnel to weigh and measure the fish at the fishing tournament.



*"Captain Bob" Minshall shows a seventh grade student how to remove a hook from a fish's mouth.*

This year, 110 seventh grade students from Tomah Middle School escorted patients to the pond, helped them fish, ran their catches to the measuring booth, served refreshments and helped in other ways to make the day a success. This intergenerational activity is a win-win event for all. The veterans enjoy the assistance from and interaction with the students and the students learn from and about the veterans.

## PATIENT FINANCIAL SERVICES

### Morale Brigade

An Employee Action Committee was established in PFS back in 2002. The EAC is responsible for the selection of the PFS Employee of the Month and Quarter. In addition, they work with PFS managers and supervisors to address issues negatively impacting morale and performance. They also are involved with change management.

A sub-group of the Committee is the "Morale Brigade" working on special projects meant to improve morale in the service and promote activities providing assistance and recognition to those with special needs.

Most recently they held their second annual "Spring Food Drive" where PFS employees come together and create food baskets for less fortunate veterans and their families.



*(Right to Left~ Corina Bianchetti, Tracy Thiede, Ralph Geiger, Kathie Kaus, Kathleen Beld, Robert Owen, Tom Matteson, Arlene Dresen, Terry Scott, Lucy Mullikin, Kari Hauger)*

Once again they exceeded the goal set by the Morale Brigade, and brought relief to many North Chicago VAMC veterans.

In the past two years PFS employees have decorated mini artificial pine trees, donating them to facilities within the VISN. Each tree is unique, created to brighten the holiday season for our veterans.

They have participated in project "Any Soldier". Hundreds of personal hygiene items, snacks and cards

were packaged, sent to soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq with well wishes expressing our thanks.

Employees continue to show support sending "cards with well wishes" periodically to our soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq, reminding them they are not forgotten. PFS employees embrace each project with tons of enthusiasm doing their very best.

## Network Awards

### Streff Receives National Recognition

Joseph O. Streff was honored recently at the American Academy of Physician Assistants Conference in Orlando, Florida with the AAPA's Federal Services PA of the Year Award – the PARagon Award. Mr. Streff was cited for his outstanding community and patient service. It was noted by the organization's president, Julie A. Theriault, that he was an "inspiration to the entire Academy."

Mr. Streff joined the VA in September of 1991 as the coordinator of cardiothoracic surgery at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. In 1996, he moved to primary care and several years later moved on to the dSs Operations Manager position for VISN 12. He was accepted as the PA Advisor to the Under Secretary position where he remained until being called to active military duty in February of 2004. Upon learning of being retained for a second year, he resigned the PA advisor position to allow the VA to fill the position with a full-time PA advisor in VACO.



*Lt. Col. Joseph O. Streff Receives PARagon Award*

LTC Streff is now serving his country as a medical officer for the Army's new Community Based Health Care Organization located in Madison, WI. This program brings injured National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers home for their care instead of being located on a distant post.

## **Nursing Excellence Awards At VAMC Iron Mountain**

Three nurses at the VA medical center in Iron Mountain were honored with Excellence in Nursing Awards during the National Nurses Week celebration.

Laura Aderman-Small, a registered nurse, is assigned to the inpatient medical/surgical unit on 4-East. She was cited for her ability to effectively deal with day-to-day problems that arise recently evidenced by her development of a discharge call plan to determine patient satisfaction. She also inspires staff with her upbeat attitude, sense of humor, and ability to handle difficult situations.

Teresa Bryant is a licensed practical nurse who is also assigned to the inpatient medical/surgical unit. She was cited for her consistent delivery of excellent patient care and her willingness to always go "the extra mile." It was noted that she is very creative in ideas to ensure quality care to benefit the patients. Co-workers described her as being very conscientious, a patient advocate, good communicator, and true professional.



*Janice M. Boss (left) Director at the VA medical center in Iron Mountain, presented Excellence in Nursing Awards to (L-R) Laura Aderman-Small, RN; Teresa Bryant, LPN; and Catherine Driscoll, RN, during the National Nurses Week celebration. Also pictured (right) is Cynthia L. Gordon, RN, Nurse Executive.*

Catherine Driscoll, registered nurse, works in the Performance Improvement department. A long-time member of the VA staff, she was cited for her commitment and devotion to veterans, both in the clinical and administrative services of the medical center. She is an active member of many committees and has made significant contributions to the community through volunteering with the American Red Cross, Boy Scouts of America and others. She has also spearheaded several endeavors in Emergency Management, including Smallpox Response Team, Disaster Training and Crisis Response Team.

"These nurses are outstanding members of our health care team and demonstrate the skill and compassion that makes VA health among the best on an active inpatient care unit. Her commitment to veterans was in America," noted Janice M. Boss, Medical Center Director. It is obvious that their commitment is to our patients and the nursing profession. We're proud of them, and we are glad they are on the Iron Mountain VA team."

## **JBVA Nurse Receives Lifetime Achievement Award**



The Chicago Metropolitan Chapter of the Society of Urological Nurses and Assistants (SUNA) presented Carol J. Einhorn, RN, Gerontological Nurse Practitioner at the Jesse Brown VAMC, with a Lifetime Achievement Award. This is only the second time the Chapter has bestowed a Lifetime Award, which is given to a member who fosters the goals and objectives of the organization, has served as a

mentor and has made significant contributions over time to the field of nursing and, particularly, urological nursing. Ms. Einhorn, who came to the Jesse Brown VAMC in 1994, has been a member of the national SUNA since 1975 and has held various offices, including President from 1984 to 1985.

## CARES UPDATE

### Hines Dedicates Blind Rehabilitation and Spinal Cord Injury Centers.

The dedication ceremony on May 20<sup>th</sup> in celebration of the new Hines Blind Rehabilitation and Spinal Cord Injury Centers was a big success. More than 650 people were in attendance at the ceremony, which was held in a large tent outside between the two new buildings.

Highlights of the ceremony included inspiring speeches by VA's top leaders, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson and Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin, as well as Illinois Lt. Governor Pat Quinn. Dr. Joan E. Cummings, former Network Director of VISN 12, Tom Miller, Executive Director of the Blinded Veterans Association, and Del McNeal, Executive Director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, also participated as guest speakers in the day's festivities.



*Ribbon Cutting Ceremony at Hines*

All major Chicago media outlets were in attendance at the event and stuck around afterwards to interview Secretary Nicholson. "I am proud of the extraordinary services that the VA will provide to veterans out of

these two new facilities," Secretary Nicholson told reporters during a media availability. "These buildings are examples of what is right about the VA and services we offer our veterans."

Harry Porterfield, a well-known Chicago television personality, served as master of ceremonies for the dedication event. Other distinguished guests at the event included Vice Admiral Daniel J. Cooper, VA Under Secretary for Benefits, Roy Dolgos, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and Richard Braley, Assistant Director of the Chicago VA Regional Office. Following the formal ceremony and ribbon-cutting, staff from the Blind Rehabilitation and Spinal Cord Injury Centers hosted receptions in both of the new buildings and took interested employees and veterans on tours of the new facilities. Travel coffee mugs, key chains and other giveaways were offered to those who attended the ceremonies.

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*"I am proud of the extraordinary services that the VA will provide to veterans out of these two new facilities," said Secretary Nicholson*

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Each of the two new buildings feature a private courtyard area lined with bricks inscribed with names or messages from veterans, family members or employees who have donated money in support of the new facilities. Hines Voluntary Service continues to accept donations for the new buildings. A number of service organizations have even chosen to Adopt-A-Room in the new building, by donating funds specifically for that purpose.

The week after the dedication ceremony, staff and patients began the move to the new buildings. The Blind Center moved first and the program was up and running in the new buildings immediately. The Spinal Cord Injury Unit moved to the building the following week and staff report many positive comments from patients and their families about the new accommodations. Thanks to everyone who supported Hines and our two new programs by coming out for our dedication ceremony or donating money in support of the new buildings.

## Welcome Catholic Charities

After several years of planning and gaining VA Central Office and HUD approval, the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago is working on renovating Building 14 on the Hines campus for the purposes of transitional living for our veterans.

The renovation of the building is being funded by Catholic Charities; an initiative that will greatly enhance our ability to serve the needs of our homeless veterans. Completion of the construction of Building 14 is scheduled for July of this year.

The project will involve Catholic Charities using their own funding to create 40 units for our veterans to reside (100% veteran occupancy). We are most proud

Charities and we have formed a positive relationship in serving the needs of our veterans. Future plans with Catholic Charities also include converting Building 51 and 53 into an assisted living center and a senior housing/transitional living center for veterans.

The purpose of this new initiative is to assist Hines in strategically enhancing its mission linking primary and long-term care with advanced tertiary care, while emphasizing outpatient and preventive services. The commercialization of these properties is in concert with VHA directives to pursue enhanced-use initiatives that supplement VHA costs by utilization of outside resources. The Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital will utilize the financial returns from the commercialized property to support the mission of VHA.

## VA In The News

### *Vaccine Reduces Risk of Shingles*

An experimental vaccine cuts in half the risk of developing shingles, a painful skin disease that about 1 million Americans contract each year, according to an extensive new study.

Even when it does not prevent the disease, the vaccine still reduces by two-thirds the chance that a shingles sufferer will be left with tormenting chronic pain that can make even the touch of clothing unbearable.

Those are among the conclusions of an expensive experiment that tested the vaccine in more than 38,000 men and women cared for through the Department of Veterans Affairs' health system. The findings are published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 13 years after the study was conceived. The project's initial cost estimate was \$31 million, but its final cost is assumed to be much higher. The leaders of the research did not know its final price tag.

Shingles is a reawakening of the virus that causes chickenpox in childhood and then lies dormant for decades in nerve cells. The condition is most common in old age, when immunity declines. Half of people who live to 85 develop shingles.

The new vaccine, if approved by the Food and Drug Administration, is likely to find a huge market in the

### A FACE YOU SHOULD KNOW



Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin was sworn in as Under Secretary for Health in the Department of Veterans Affairs on May 5, 2005, having served as acting in that role since April 6, 2004. As the Chief Executive Officer of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Dr. Perlin leads the nation's largest integrated health system.

burgeoning population of people older than 60, the group in which it was tested. It is part of a growing effort to make vaccines that protect against the diseases of adulthood, not just childhood.

The vaccine may turn out to be a boost for its maker, Merck & Co., which is facing financial losses from the withdrawal of its blockbuster analgesic Vioxx. The new product is an ultra-potent version of Merck's 10-year-old chickenpox vaccine, now one of the routine immunizations of childhood.

"Shingles is rarely a life-threatening disease. But it is frequently a quality-of-life-threatening disease," said Stephen E. Straus, an infectious diseases physician at the National Institutes of Health, who helped run the study. "We estimate that if all individuals over 60 in the United States and who are otherwise healthy were vaccinated, we would prevent a quarter of a million cases."

One problem with the long-lasting pain known as postherpetic neuralgia is "that it is so isolating. People have the fear that anything they do may trigger it," said Paula W. Annunziato, a physician and official at Merck Research Laboratories, which provided vaccine for the study.

Someone with shingles develops small, painful blisters on red, inflamed skin on a part of the body's surface that is served by one nerve. Typically, the rash begins at the spinal column and fans out in a wedge across the face, chest or an arm or a leg. If the affected nerve is the one serving the surface of the eye, the blisters can cause blindness.

Antiviral drugs can help suppress the eruption, whose medical name is herpes zoster. (The inciting microbe is called varicella-zoster virus, a member of the large family of herpesviruses.) That treatment, however, doesn't decrease the risk of long-lasting pain. About 40 percent of shingles sufferers in their sixties and about 50 percent in their seventies experience pain lasting more than a year.

The researchers found that although the vaccine did not prevent shingles in very old people as often as in younger subjects, it was more effective in the old in preventing the feared complication of long-lasting pain.

"Although we didn't reduce the incidence [of shingles] as much, we reduced the severity. We all know that you can put up with almost anything if it doesn't last too long," said Michael N. Oxman, an infectious diseases specialist at the VA San Diego Healthcare System, in California.

The researchers, led by Oxman, enrolled 38,546 volunteers at 22 VA hospitals. The volunteers' average age was 69; 7 percent were older than 80 and 40 percent were women. They were randomly assigned to get a single injection of vaccine or a placebo shot. They were followed, on average, for just over three years, with every rash even remotely suspicious evaluated for shingles.

Over the course of the experiment, 3.3 percent of the people who got placebo shots developed shingles -- a rate of about 1 percent of the population a year. Among the vaccine recipients, 1.6 percent -- or about one-half of 1 percent annually -- developed the condition.

The vaccine prevented only half the cases of shingles that otherwise might have occurred, but it reduced the rate of postherpetic neuralgia by 66 percent, and slightly more in people older than 70.

The vaccine is a "live" but extremely weakened strain of varicella-zoster virus. It contains about 14 times as much virus per dose as the childhood chickenpox vaccine.

Less than 5 percent of people who get shingles once get it again. That's because the reappearance of the virus stimulates the immune system to suppress it once again. The shingles vaccine does the same thing. It boosts the immune system through a mild, controlled infection.

People with clearly weakened immunity (such as people with cancer or AIDS) were excluded from the trial. However, people with diabetes, emphysema and other chronic illnesses that can cause mild suppression of the immune system were not. There were no major complications from the vaccine.

The FDA will probably decide early next year whether to license the vaccine for sale. Merck has not yet announced a price for it. The company sells the chickenpox vaccine to physicians for about \$70.

An analysis by the research firm A.G. Edwards & Sons last month estimated that the vaccine, which would be sold as Zostavax, could generate \$150 million in revenue by 2009.

## Best Practices Report: Creating Same Day Access for New Patients in Mental Health and Addictive Disorders

The William S. Middleton Mental Health Service Line staff developed a centralized intake and evaluation team as an advanced access initiative in January 2005. Wait times for new patients are completely eliminated. Everyone was a bit nervous at first with thoughts that the clinic would be overrun with demand; however that did not happen. There are still some very hectic days and sometimes patients have to wait until a clinician is free but, overall, veterans and staff like the process. Since its inception, the average number of intakes completed per day is 3-4, but sometimes reaches 6-7. Each intake takes about 2 hours to complete.

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*... it is important to get services today rather than an appointment in a week, a month, or more.*

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Primary Care clinicians are often the first to identify patients who need mental health services. A divorce, loss of a job or other serious event in a veteran's life can precipitate the need for mental health services. It is difficult to bring up these issues and, when they do, it is important to get services today rather than an appointment in a week, a month, or more. Veterans can go directly from their primary care appointment to the outpatient mental health clinic, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. If they arrive later than 1:00 p.m. they will still see someone from mental health but they may need to return to complete the entire intake, the next day, or at their convenience.

The centralized intake and evaluation team includes reception staff, LPN, social worker or RN, and psychiatrist or clinical nurse specialist. Schedules are cleared so they can cover intakes for the day. Sometimes there are a couple of hours to catch up on other things or to return phone calls; other days there are 2 or 3 people waiting at the same time.

Mental Health clinicians use some of the unscheduled time to see patients from their caseload needing an open access appointment. Provisions are made each day for additional staff to back-up the intake team when there are several patients at once.

Veterans first meet our reception staff that create and check-in the appointment and verify demographic information. All veterans are asked to complete a series of assessment screening measures administered or assisted by the LPN: Mini-Screen and Mini-Tracking, PHQ-9, Audit-C, and DAST-10. The social worker or RN sees the veteran next and has all of the screens in front of them to help with the evaluation. The social worker or RN, using a template, takes a complete social history, psychiatric and substance abuse history, and presenting problems and makes a provisional diagnosis. At the end of the hour-long meeting, the psychiatrist or clinical nurse specialist is paged to join and help complete the evaluation. The social worker or RN summarizes the presenting problems, symptoms, and history so the veteran does not have to repeat everything over again. The psychiatrist or clinical nurse specialist spends about a half hour clarifying symptoms and problems when a joint treatment plan is developed with the patient. The patient leaves the intake with the initial treatment plan, medications, and all follow-up appointments. The system was designed to make the veteran's first mental health appointment effective in getting them started along the path to recovery.

A "recovery coordinator" (social worker) is assigned to each new patient to help him or her work toward their goals, which may include resolving family problems, financial problems, legal problems, or any other psychosocial stressor. The recovery coordinator functions as a primary contact for the patient to help connect them with needed resources. Recovery coordinators serve as a kind of case manager to help mobilize the appropriate team members to make the system work well for the veteran.

In this process of change, addictive disorders treatment programs and mental health programs were combined. Instead of duplicating intakes for addictive disorders treatment and mental health, one now serves the purpose. This means veterans receive requested

treatments much quicker and with a fewer number of appointments. It is easier on the veteran and saves staff time and effort. The recovery coordinator can help the veteran access both addictive disorders treatment and mental health services based upon their goals for recovery.

Recovery Coordinators from both the addictive disorders treatment program and the mental health clinic met for their first day of retreat on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Recovery coordinators need to cross-train and learn from each other. One identified need is for each recovery coordinator to become proficient in motivational interviewing to help enhance the likelihood of veterans being able to stick to their recovery plan. Social workers with expertise in areas such as trauma counseling, anger management, eating disorders, and addictions will be identified so other recovery coordinators can consult with them, or help veterans access this expertise across the mental health service line. There is no need to “reinvent the wheel” when we have resident experts.

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*Veterans are asked to complete a short survey at the end of their appointment to determine their satisfaction with the services. So far, 95% rated their visit as excellent or very good.*

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Quality control is very important. Veterans are asked to complete a short survey at the end of their appointment to determine their satisfaction with the services. So far, 95% rated their visit as excellent or very good. A sampling of intakes is reviewed each month to determine how many veterans keep their follow-up appointments or refill their medications, as prescribed. In the data gathered since January, only 9.6% of patients failed to keep follow-up appointments or refill their medications, and 50% of those were patients with primary addictions.

Change is ongoing as staff members find better ways to increase open access for all patients, not just our new veterans. By combining services and avoiding duplication of efforts the mental health service line continues to work toward implementation of all the advanced open access strategies.

## MEMORIAL DAY MEMORIES

### Tomah Initiates New “Hall of Heroes”

Tomah VA honored the first two veterans selected for the “Hall of Heroes” at an induction ceremony on May 27 in conjunction with the facility’s Memorial Day Program.

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*The ‘Hall of Heroes’ is intended to serve as a reminder of the hardships and bravery our veterans have endured for our nation*

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“We at the Tomah VA are pleased to pay tribute to America’s heroes who have showed exceptional courage while in service to our country,” said Jerry Molnar, Acting Medical Center Director. “The ‘Hall of Heroes’ is intended to serve as a reminder of the hardships and bravery our veterans have endured for our nation.”



*The Hall of Heroes is displayed in a main corridor at the Tomah VA. Two veterans will be honored at a time with a framed photograph and information about their personal award exhibited beside the plaque. This will be a continuing tribute as two new veterans will be inducted each year.*

The Hall of Heroes came together very quickly for planners at the Tomah VA. Sandy Gregar, Acting Associate Director, presented the idea to the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) Committee at their meeting in February.

“When I made the presentation to the VAVS Committee, I thought we would be doing the project

several months down the road, not thinking that a group would offer to donate the money the day after my presentation," recalls Gregar. "The Elks of Marshfield donated \$3,600 and designated the funds for the Hall of Heroes. It was great to receive the money immediately and allow us to do our first induction on Memorial Day."

Staff at Tomah worked with Dr. John Hofer, Chief, Dental Service at the Madison VA Hospital, as they planned Tomah's Hall of Heroes. Dr. Hofer envisioned a "Hall of Heroes" years ago, and started such tributes at the Chillicothe, Ohio and Madison VA facilities.

"It helped to be able to utilize the best practices of Madison VAH to implement our program and to have the person who established the first Hall of Heroes be an employee at Madison was a real asset for us," said Gregar, who served as master of ceremonies for the Tomah VA's Memorial Day program.



*Einar H. Ingman, Jr. was the first veteran inducted in the Tomah VA's Hall of Heroes. Ingman received the Congressional Medal of Honor for action in combat in Korea. Mrs. Mardelle Ingman, front and left, accepted the commendation as Mr. Ingman's health prevented his attending the program. Sergeant First Class Patrick Street, far right, read Ingman's Medal of Honor citation. Also pictured, left to right, are Jerry Molnar, Acting Director; John Hofer, guest speaker at the ceremony; and Sandy Gregar, Acting Associate Director.*

"It was an awesome experience to emcee our first induction ceremony and see the emotional response of the inductees as their citation was read," Gregar admitted. "Seeing them on the street, you would have no idea of the true heroes these individuals are. I'm so pleased that we were able to implement this so quickly and look forward to our next induction ceremony."

To be considered for the Hall of Heroes, veterans are eligible if they have been decorated with a personal award and citation for heroism or valor. Awards are ranked following military ranking, i.e. Congressional Medal of Honor being the highest possible decoration. Multiple awards for bravery, receipt of a Purple Heart, and prisoner of war status are also considered. A selection committee reviews the nominations and determines who will be inducted.

## **Bikers and Cyclists Visit Jesse Brown VA During Cross-country Trip**

Approximately 75 bikers stopped by to visit Jesse Brown VAMC patients on May 24 as part of the annual "Run for the Wall" motorcycle trip from California to Washington, DC, where a rally is held each Memorial Day at the Viet Nam Memorial

Most of the "Run for the Wall" members are also veterans who live in the Chicago area and are deeply involved in veteran's issues, including providing up to 600 lunches each Sunday for homeless veterans.

One of their purposes for this annual cross-country trip is to call attention to veterans who are former POW's or MIA. The group's motto is "Veterans Riding for Those Who Can't."

JBVA hosted on June 29 a group of 8 - 10 (mostly amputee) bicyclists riding from Los Angeles to New York. They are known as the "Soldier Ride" and are riding to raise funds and call attention to the plight of wounded military troops. One of the cyclists - Danielle Green - is a native of Chicago.

Upon their arrival, they visited with patients and were entertained by veterans in the Jesse Brown VA Chorus. After leaving the medical center, the cyclists received a Chicago Police escort to City Hall to meet with Mayor Richard M. Daley.



*The Jesse Brown VA Chorus entertained members of the "Run for the Wall" Motorcycle Club, who encircled soloist Thaddies Holloway and sang along with him during a highly emotional rendition of "God Bless the U.S.A."*

The "Soldier Ride" has been generating positive media attention throughout its cross-country journey. Members of the group even threw out the first pitch at a LA Dodgers game before leaving Los Angeles.

## **Hines and Jesse Brown Proud To Be In Parade**

Hines was a proud participant in this year's Memorial Day Parade in downtown Chicago. The Hines float, which featured an "It's All About the Vet" theme, was decorated with numerous flags. Thanks to all staff and volunteers who participated in the Chicago parade, which was the largest in the country. The float was funded through the Hines VAVS Committee and Cook County AMVETS.

Over 50 veterans and staff from the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center also participated in the Chicago Memorial Day Parade on May 28. Each year, the medical center has t-shirts printed for the event, which are sold to raise funds for VAVS. Associate Director Michelle Blakely was invited to sit in the parade reviewing stand along with Mayor Richard M. Daley and a number of other local and national dignitaries.



## **Memorial Day Poem**

"Conquering Heroes"

They died among the trenches, the hills, and the fields,  
Upon the waters and beyond the sky revealed;  
They served and sacrificed for the nation to last,  
We remember their brave souls of now and the past.

Memories are recalled of their life we relate,  
Where our loss through the years every time feelings awake  
The bugler playing taps for every service woman and man,  
Moving us tranquil within mind while we stand.

They carried the nation's flag now at half-mast,  
Everyone bringing honor where respect is remembered to last;  
Buried in the cemeteries of the nation salute them highly,  
Conquering the wars they all served proudly.

Soldiers within faith inscribed across the lines,  
Everyone's loss is remembered a special time;  
Departed us remembering their honor uphold the way,  
We made them all heroes by the rights of Memorial Day.

John E. Jones  
Zablocki VA Medical Center

## IN MEMORY



John A. Frahm, D.O. FACOI

October 14, 1950 to

May 4, 2005

Chief of Staff

VAMC Iron Mountain, MI

Born in Sioux Falls, SD and raised in Ottumwa, Iowa, Dr. John A. Frahm received his medical degree in 1975 from the College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery in Des Moines, Iowa. He was certified in Internal Medicine by the American Board of Osteopathic Internists and became an Advanced Cardiac Life Support course provider and instructor.

After performing his Internal Medicine Residency at Mount Clemons General Hospital (Michigan) from 1976-1979, he went into private practice there until 1985.

Dr. Frahm joined the VA Iron Mountain Medical Center as a staff physician in 1985. He was appointed Chief of Medical Service in 1990, and served in that capacity until his promotion to Chief of Staff in 1993. Dr. Frahm remained the Chief of Staff until his death on May 4, 2005. He also held an appointment as Clinical Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine at Michigan State University from 1991-1992.

During his tenure at VA, Dr. Frahm made significant contributions as physician, educator, mentor and administrator. He participated on a variety of key committees at the local and regional level and helped transition the medical center from a hospital-based system to a managed care model. He pioneered tele-imaging and tele-pathology programs along with the electronic medical record. He continued to carry an active inpatient and outpatient caseload until his death at age 54.

Dr. Frahm was widely respected and admired as a superb physician and highly capable health care executive. A well-known member of our community, John was also an avid outdoorsman. He exemplified the best of the medical profession, as well as the best in personal character. John Frahm will be sorely missed and long remembered for his dedicated service to America's veterans and his leadership at the Iron Mountain VA Medical Center.

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**Contributors for this issue:**

Linda Schmidt, Webmaster; Maureen Dyman, Hines VA Hospital; Rita Bond, Iron Mountain VA Medical Center; Hal Rhein/Ray Leber, Jesse Brown VA Medical Center; Scott Krueger, Madison VA Hospital; John Zewiske, Milwaukee VA Medical Center; Douglas Shouse, North Chicago VA Medical Center; Laura Bishop, Tomah VA Medical Center; Kevin Rys/Judy Brown, VISN 12 Office