



Great Lakes VA Healthviews



The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12

Volume 1, Issue 3

Summer 2003

Making “Mouse Calls” Up North

by Maria Grenfell, BSN, RN

Home Health Coordinator, VAMC Iron Mountain, MI

VAMC Iron Mountain is now able to provide closer management of veterans' health by using “Telehome Care visits.” Telehome Care is an exciting new field of medicine that allows nurses and doctors to monitor patients from a central station. The central station has a special computer with a ‘mouse.’ The patients get to remain in the comfort of their own homes. The equipment allows the doctor, nurse, or other health care provider, and patient to talk and see one another. This happens through the use of a normal telephone line using a videophone contact.

Veterans and their family members are taught how to use the equipment in their homes. The equipment is very easy to learn. There are two buttons, a blood pressure cuff, and a stethoscope. There is also an easy to follow chest and heart chart to show you where to place the stethoscope when the doctor listens to your heart. The Telehome Care can monitor your heart and lung sounds, blood pressure, oxygen content of your blood, and weight, as ordered by the doctor.

Veterans with health problems such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Congestive Heart Failure (CHF), and diabetes may be checked by Telehome Care visits. Your doctor will decide if Telehome health visits are right for your health conditions. The goal is for the nurse or doctor to do a house (‘mouse’) call to a veteran without having the veteran leave his or her home. Veterans in rural areas now have another way of being served! Social workers, dietitians, and other hospital staff can do ‘mouse’ calls also. They can use the same equipment to teach a patient or check a patient.

At this time, Iron Mountain has three patient units and one Telecare manager unit. We are doing a six-month pilot program. Veterans in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Northern Wisconsin will be included in this project. At the end of the six months, the veterans and their doctors will decide if the system is helpful for the veterans. If it is, more units may be bought.

‘Mouse’ calls are one of the newest ways of providing care to the veterans. No driving long distances to the hospital for a clinic visit, just connect to the system!

LifeLine Pilots: Helping Veterans in Need

Karen Burrell, R.N. and Troy Cruthoff, R.N.
ICU Staff Nurses
VAMC Iron Mountain, MI

Recently, my father had what was supposed to be a “simple surgery.” It became very complex. After surgery on the cervical spine in his neck, he was discharged home. All seemed to be going well. But within 24 hours of being home, he was taken by ambulance to the local hospital. The spine in his neck, where the surgery had been done, was unstable. The pain was so bad he was passing out. He was examined in the emergency department. Then, he was admitted to the hospital.

Studies were done to see if he needed more surgery on his neck. The tests showed that he did need more surgery. He needed to go to Mayo Clinic in Minnesota for the surgery. He was medically stable at that point. The question was how would he get there? He could go by ambulance, but he did not need to be monitored by medical staff. Also, the cost would be very high. We could drive him, but that would take a full day. He could fly there, but that too would cost a lot.

We were lucky to find out about LifeLine Pilots. They give free flights to people needing medical care. They flew my father to Mayo Clinic. The service from Lifeline removed many obstacles for my family. The burdens and cares had been so heavy! Here was genuine kindness, compassion and concern! This was a priceless offer, not soon to be forgotten.

History of LifeLine Pilots

Wanda Whitsitt, a private pilot, established LifeLine, Inc. in 1980. It was made up of a small group of pilots in central Illinois. They offered transportation to people needing to travel far distances for health care. When it began, the group was only in the state of Illinois. Several years later, the service expanded to 15 Midwest states. It is now called LifeLine Pilots.

LifeLine Pilots is a non-profit organization. It now serves the people of Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. LifeLine provides free air transportation on small private planes for people, including veterans, in need of health care. The people can't afford to get there, but can't afford NOT to go.

LifeLine also provides humanitarian flights. For example, they have flown people with terminal illnesses whose last wish was to visit home and family. Also, they have flown children with life-threatening illnesses to special camps. During the 9-11 national crisis, these pilots flew emergency missions to help in relief efforts. They transported blood, tissues, and emergency medical personnel.

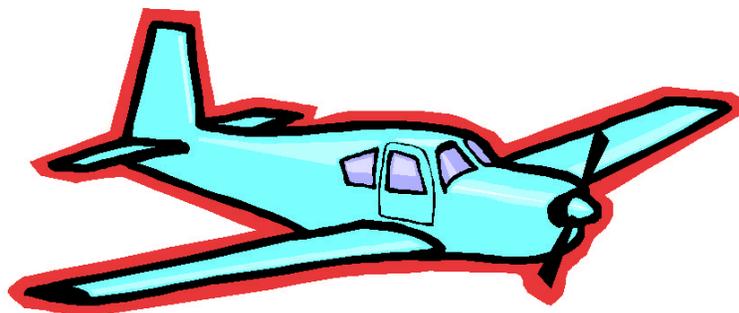
LifeLine pilots are volunteers from all walks of life. They are FAA-certified. They donate their time, small aircraft, and flying expenses. The cost of the project is supported by gifts from individuals, corporations, businesses and community organizations. Tax-deductible donations cover operating costs.

Lifeline services are meant for people with limited financial need. It is important to know that Lifeline is NOT an air ambulance or an air taxi. Passengers must be medically stable. They must be mobile enough to enter the aircraft with little or no assistance. They also must be able to wear a seatbelt in an upright position. The aircraft are light planes and are not equipped to accommodate stretchers or wheelchairs. The planes and pilots cannot handle life support or monitoring equipment.

Many veterans and families may not have been aware of this service. Larry Nazimek, of LifeLine Pilots, and a veteran himself, has informed us that this service is available to veterans and families. This service may be needed when a veteran has to travel to obtain treatment or in times when veterans must travel to be at the bedside of a dying relative.

For more information or to schedule a flight call 1-800-822-7972 or log onto their website at www.lifelinepilots.org.

Thank you to Larry Nazimek, V.P. of Public Relations LifeLine Pilots, for his input.



BUG OFF

Keeping the Summer Pests at Bay

Laurie Aderman-Small, RN
Staff Nurse, 3West
VAMC Iron Mountain, MI



Picture yourself sitting on your front porch. The warm summer breeze caresses your face. You hear the chirping sound of frogs in the background. Then, you feel a sting as the persistent buzz of mosquitoes circle your head! There have been recent concerns about insect-transmitted diseases, such as West Nile virus and Lyme disease. But what can we do to reduce the risk of getting an illness from a bug bite?

How do mosquitoes and ticks find us?

Mosquitoes, recently in the news for bearing the West Nile virus, use sight and smell to locate a victim. Mosquitoes that are up to 100 feet away, can detect carbon dioxide. We give off carbon dioxide when we breathe. Another thing that attracts mosquitoes is lactic acid. This is a chemical given off by muscle activity. Mosquitoes can detect heat, which is why they prefer biting around our head, neck, ankles, and feet. The blood vessels are close to the skin surface in those places. Also, these parts of the body have the most sweat gland activity.

Ticks are another insect known to carry disease to humans. Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever are well known. Ticks are tiny, so to them our blood is like eating gelatin. In order to thin their meal enough to eat it, the tick secretes blood-thinning saliva. The saliva can contain disease-carrying bacteria. This is how Lyme disease or other insect-borne diseases are transmitted. Ticks are “questing” parasites that will climb on tall grasses and shrubs. They will attach themselves by grabbing with their extended front legs as the animal or person walks by.

What can we do to prevent insect bites?

Other than to stay inside a building all summer, there are some things people can do to reduce the number of insect bites that they will get over the summer.

Applying insect repellent with DEET is the most effective way to keep mosquitoes and ticks from biting. DEET works by masking the telltale odor of carbon dioxide and lactic acid, so the insects can't smell a fresh meal.

Permethrin repellent can be applied to screens, tents or clothing. Stretchy bands and bandanas containing Permethrin are also effective against mosquitoes and ticks and can be purchased at most department or sporting goods stores.

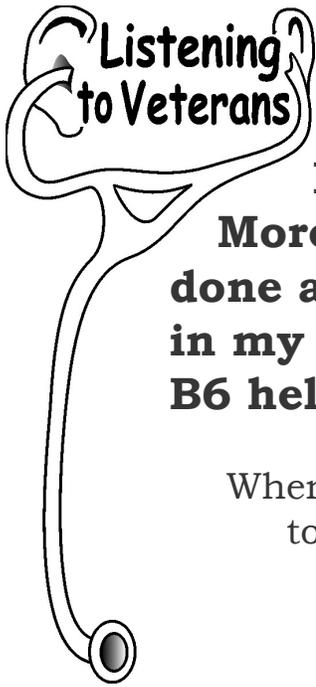
Wearing long sleeves and pants tucked into socks can prevent the bugs from getting to your skin. But in the summer heat, this is often not practical.

Keeping the grass trimmed and removing standing pools of water will reduce the places insects live and breed. Old tires or buckets with standing water should be emptied since mosquitoes need water for their larvae.

You can also “recruit” some of our native wild animals to help with insect control. Typical “garden-variety” snakes, such as copperbellies, garter snakes and fox (pine) snakes are serious predators for wood ticks. They are non-venomous and will not “attack” people or pets. Snakes will keep the number of ticks and rodents down and, if left alone, can live in harmony in our gardens and woods. Snakes are wary of people. They only wish to be left to the business of eating insects and small rodents.

Brown bats, which are found in the Great Lakes area, are another major predator of insects. One little brown bat will eat 600 to 1000 mosquitoes every hour during the night. That’s a lot of bugs that won’t be biting us! Contrary to myth, rabies occurs in bats no more often than it occurs in any other wild animal. Plus, they will not fly into your hair. They may fly around us, but this is because they are using us as a living “bait pile.” We are the bait for the mosquitoes, since our human odor attracts them. Then the bats feed on the mosquitoes. Brown bats live 20-30 years. They will return to the same place summer after summer. You can encourage them to stay by having a bat house or sheltered habitat, such as under eaves or bridges. Even though they look creepy, remember that these creatures are really helping us out. They rid our yards of unwanted biting pests.

So enjoy the summer weather, use insect repellent, and monitor any bug bites for signs of infection. Contact your health care provider if you notice an insect bite with excess swelling, redness, or pain and you have a fever. By outsmarting the bugs and getting a little help from our snake and bat “friends,” we can have a safe and healthy summer!



Ask An Expert

How do I deal with leg cramps at bedtime?

More specifically the veteran asked, “What can be done at the time the pain starts? Is there something in my meals that can help? I have found that Vitamin B6 helps some.”

When “Charlie’s horse” kicks someone else it may be humorous to watch, but when it’s YOUR leg it’s no laughing matter.



According to the International Classification of Sleep Disorders, nocturnal (nocturnal means nighttime) leg cramps is the medical term for these painful feelings of muscular tension or tightness. They are usually in the calf, but can also be in the calf and foot, and occur during sleep.

Most people call these “charley-horses.” Sources report that 16% of healthy adults suffer from nocturnal leg cramps. This problem increases with age. It has been reported as high as 70% in people over 50 years old.

Ways to Prevent Leg Cramps at Night:

Always remember when experiencing any persistent health problem, find out what is causing it before trying to cure it. Talk to your health care provider to be sure that these leg cramps are not caused by disease or medicine. Next, follow the old saying, “Prevention is better than cure.” Here are some ways to prevent nocturnal leg cramps:

- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day. The best fluid is water. How much? - Between six to eight - 8 ounce glasses a day. (For those of you who like math, here’s a formula to remember. Drink $\frac{1}{2}$ your body weight converted to ounces. Example - if you weigh 140 pounds, you should drink 70 ounces of fluid).

- Wear good, proper fitting shoes and avoid standing on hard surfaces for long periods of time.
- Keep blankets loose at the foot of the bed to prevent your toes from pointing downward while you sleep.
- Do gentle leg-stretching exercises throughout the day. Ask your healthcare provider to give you advice on exercises and how to do them.

Vitamin B6 and Prevention:

According to the drug reference, Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database, people using vitamin B6 (which is also called pyridoxine) have found it to be helpful to prevent muscle cramps. As with any other vitamin, you need to ask your healthcare provider if it is safe for you to take, how much you should take, and if it is the right B vitamin to take.

How to Stop Leg Cramps Once They Start:

- Move the leg - walk on it, jiggle or straighten the leg. Hold onto your toes and pull them forward. "Pull your toes toward your nose."
- Use ice to massage the cramped muscle
- Take a hot shower or bath.

We hope that these measures stop your leg cramps and help you get a good night's sleep.

For More Information on This and Other Health Topics:

- Stop in at the PERC (Patient Education Resource Center) or Patient Library at your VA hospital
- Speak to your healthcare providers
- For those of you who use the web, run a search on either of these sites:
 - > www.mayoclinic.org
 - > www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/

Ask An Expert answered by:

Phillip Leaf, MS, CS, NP
 Primary Care Nurse Practitioner
 VAMC Iron Mountain, MI

Judi Bjork, MSN, RN, CS
 Patient Education Coordinator
 VAMC Iron Mountain, MI

Your best source for information on your health will always be your doctor or health care provider. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to talk to your health care provider and ask questions about your health concerns.

Main Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals

Hines: 708-202-VETS (8387)
Iron Mountain: 906-774-3300
Madison: 608-256-1901
Milwaukee: 414-384-2000 or 1-888-469-6614
North Chicago: 1-800-393-0865 or 847-688-1900
Tomah: 1-800-USA-TOMAH, 1-800-872-8662, or 608-372-3971
VA Chicago: 312-569-VETS (8387)

“Ask An Expert” Question or Idea for Future Articles

Do you have an “Ask An Expert” question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed, mailed, or faxed to the Senior Editor.
E-mail address: SrEditorGreatLakesVAHealthviews@med.va.gov
Mailing address: Kathleen Ford, Hines VA Hospital, Mail Route 152,
5th and Roosevelt Road, Hines, IL 60141
Fax number: 708-202-2259

You can subscribe to this newsletter electronically through the VISN 12 internet site at <http://www.vagreatlakes.org>

Great Lakes VA Healthviews Editorial Committee:

Judi Bjork, Iron Mountain
Lance Davis, Madison
Kathleen Ford, Senior Editor, Hines
Jill Gennari, Milwaukee
Kathy Johnson, Tomah
Lourdes Nisperos, VA Chicago
Alfreda Rhodes-King, North Chicago
Beverly Speer, VA Chicago

