Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center

VA Star

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Beaumont VA Outpatient Clinic • Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic, Lufkin • Conroe VA Outpatient Clinic
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New Housing for Homeless, Female Veterans

HOUSTON – In order to meet the growing needs of homeless, female Veterans in southeast Texas, the Department of Veterans Affairs has awarded a VA Per Diem Project to the Santa Maria Hostel, a 501©(3) non-profit organization located in Houston.

Officially launched on April 18, 2011, the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program (HCHV) at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) runs a program titled, "New VIEWS," at the Santa Maria Hostel to provide services for 29 homeless, female Veterans.

"We are committed to the struggle against chronic homelessness among our Nation's Veterans," said Laura Marsh, M.D., Mental Health Care Line executive. "This new program is another way for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center to bring Veterans in need of assistance together with the wide range of programs and services VA provides. Many times, people forget that females comprise 15 percent of the total Veteran population."

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Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

Army Veteran Vivian Unce, Navy Veteran Victoria Lewis, and Navy Veteran Veronica Vernon developed a strong friendship during their participation in the New VIEWS Program. "Having a program just for female Veterans is so important because we can identify with what each other is going through," said Vernon.

Lake Jackson VA Clinic to Open This Fall

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center will open a new VA outpatient clinic in Lake Jackson this fall.

"Opening the Lake Jackson VA Outpatient Clinic will bring medical care closer to where our Veterans live and greatly expand VA health care access south of Houston," said Adam C. Walmus, MEDVAMC director.

The approximately 10,000 sq. ft. clinic will be located at 208 South Oak Drive, Suites 700 and 800, Lake Jackson, 77566 near the Brazosport Regional Health System complex.

"An outpatient clinic in Lake Jackson is great, great news for Veterans living in Brazoria County," said John Jerabeck, Brazoria County Veterans Service Officer. "Veterans here are really looking forward to having easy access to local VA health care."

(continued on page 3)

Veteran Finally Cancer-free After Advanced, Laparoscopic Liver Surgery

HOUSTON – Cancer experts at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) recently removed a patient's liver tumor using a medically advanced, laparoscopic technique.

Roy Mikel, a 67-year-old Army Veteran from Houston, is now free of cancer. He was among the first patients treated at the hospital using this minimally invasive approach.

Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

Less than two weeks after surgery, Army Veteran Roy Mikel checks in with Daniel A. Anaya, M.D., surgical oncologist, director of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Liver Tumor Program. "I have been very impressed with the medical care and the amazing technology at the VA," said Mikel, who is looking forward to getting back to his family and shooting pool, his favorite hobby.

Daniel A. Anaya, M.D., surgical oncologist, director of the DeBakey VA Liver Tumor Program, and an assistant professor of Surgery/Surgical Oncology at Baylor College of Medicine, removed Mikel's liver tumor using an innovative procedure that reduces blood loss, improves wound healing, decreases infections and the chance of complications, and shortens a patient's recovery time, compared to traditional, open liver surgery.

"Mr. Mikel's case was especially difficult because he had two previous open surgeries for colon cancer and there was an extreme amount of scar tissue," said Anaya, a member of a multidisciplinary team of experienced and knowledgeable cancer care specialists at the DeBakey VA.

To perform a laparoscopic procedure, doctors insert a laparoscope – a flexible, fiber optic instrument - through a small incision in the patient's abdomen. To treat Mikel's liver tumor, Anaya and his team completed a major hepatectomy through a three-inch incision, rather than the standard 30-inch long incision made during traditional liver surgery. Additional instruments, specifically designed for performing

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Free Valet Parking

Parking on red or yellow curbs at the Houston VA may result in fines and/or towing. Use free Valet Parking at the Main Entrance or new parking lots instead.

Depression vs. Anxiety: Symptoms, Similarities, and Differences

HOUSTON – The connection between depression and anxiety is stronger than what was previously thought. However, an expert at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) cautions that medications for the two cannot necessarily be used interchangeably.

"There is an overlap between depression and anxiety, but the medications for the two are not the same," said Sanjay Mathew, M.D., the medical director of the Comprehensive Mental Health Program at the MEDVAMC. He is also listed as one of the best doctors in the nation in the field of psychiatry by the medical knowledge company, Best Doctors, Inc. "It's important to recognize how the two are related and treated."

The first step is to determine a diagnosis. Anxiety is defined as an excessive, future-oriented worry about outcomes. There is intolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Physical symptoms of anxiety can include muscle tension, poor sleep, fatigue, headaches, and several gastrointestinal symptoms such as irritable bowel or irritable bladder. Anxiety can result in a panic attack, which is a sudden and unexpected event during which physical symptoms include a racing heart, dizziness, and shortness of breath.

Depression symptoms include a sad mood and a loss for zest in life and can cause impairment in sleep and appetite, guilty ruminations, and even thoughts of suicide. However, many people view anxiety as a subtype of depression, said Mathew, who is also an associate professor in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor College of Medicine.

"If you look at a lifetime of someone with depression, more than 50 percent of them will suffer some kind of anxiety disorder," he said. "The two tend to run together more often than not. When we treat depression, we want to address symptoms of residual or persistent anxiety and vice versa."

Anxiety in childhood is a well established risk factor for depression in adulthood, said Mathew.

If a patient is being treated for worry, fear, post-traumatic stress disorder or any other anxiety disorder, the possibility of a mood disorder such as depression should also be addressed.

After a diagnosis is made, physicians look at the severity of the problem and to what extent it is disrupting a patient's daily life.

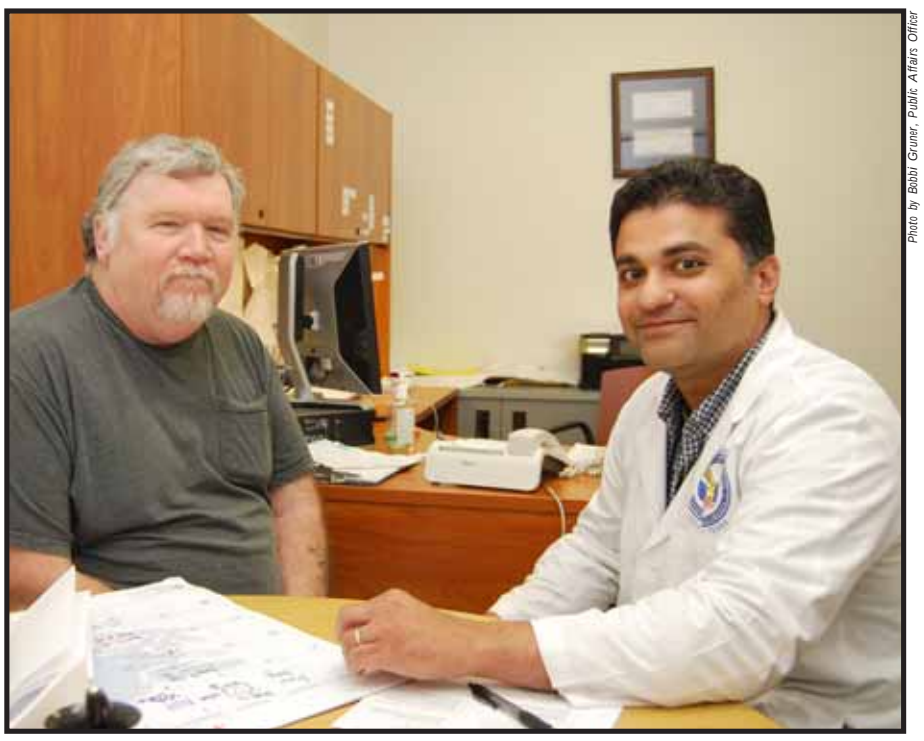


Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

Sanjay Mathew, M.D., the medical director of the Comprehensive Mental Health Program, talks with Army Veteran John Campbell. Mathew is listed as one of the best doctors in the nation in the field of psychiatry by the medical knowledge company, Best Doctors, Inc.

For mild depression or anxiety, psychotherapy is recommended for the initial treatment. This can include cognitive behavioral therapy in which patients learn to manage their anxiety through relaxation, facing fears, and regulating emotions during stressful situations.

Medication can be helpful at this point, but therapy has a better long-term outcome for preventing a relapse. Benzodiazepines are the most commonly prescribed medications for treating anxiety and can be taken on an as-needed or daily basis. However, these cannot be used as antidepressants.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs, are commonly used to treat depression. Because it takes about one month to feel the effects of SSRIs, a patient who is acutely depressed and anxious can start out with a short course of benzodiazepines and then slowly taper off of them.

Although anti-anxiety medications do not treat depression symptoms, all antidepressant medications have benefits for anxiety disorders. The recommended course of action is to treat depression and anxiety with therapy along with medication, said Mathew. The learning and adaptation skills taught in therapy will have good durability throughout the years. ♦

A Word from the Director . . .

You Get Both Quality Health Care and Transparency at the VA

Adam C. Walmus, MA, MHA, FACHE
Medical Center Director

HOUSTON - With Medicare data revealing that infections are a top safety issue for community hospitals, I believe it is important to highlight the breakthroughs the Department of Veterans Affairs has made in the area of infection control.

A VA initiative that reduced the global health care issue of methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infections by more than 60 percent in intensive care units across the Nation is featured in the April 14, 2011 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM). It reports data from the first three years of the initiative that is now in its fourth year of implementation, and which continues to be associated with decreased rates of MRSA infections.

This is a landmark initiative for VA and health care in general. No one, but especially not our Nation's heroes, should have to worry about acquiring an illness or infection from the place they trust to deliver their care.

The NEJM article reviews a bundle of four infection control practices that marked a dramatic improvement in preventing hospital-acquired MRSA infections. MRSA infections are a serious global health care issue and are difficult to treat because the bacterium is often resistant to many antibiotics.

The prevention practices consist of patient screening programs for MRSA, contact precautions for hospitalized patients found to have MRSA, and hand hygiene reminders with readily available hand sanitizer stations placed strategically in common areas, patient wards, and specialty clinics throughout medical centers. The strategy also involved creating a culture that promotes infection prevention and control as everyone's responsibility.

VA, proudly serving more than six million Veterans a year, is the only health care system in the world known for its commitment to innovative quality and safety programs and for its transparency in being accountable for the results achieved by those programs.

We voluntarily provide a comprehensive snapshot of the quality of care VA provides at each of 153 medical facilities across the nation. The report, posted online at *www.va.gov/health/HospitalReportCard.asp*, shows we are providing high quality overall and identifies the areas where we have opportunities to improve. ♦

Live southwest of Houston and tired of driving into the city for VA Primary Care appointments?

Call today to transfer your care to the NEW Richmond VA Outpatient Clinic.

832-595-7700 or toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12800

22001 Southwest Freeway, Richmond, Texas 77469

Bipolar Disorder – My Personal Journey to Understanding

By Army Veteran Cheryl Jefferson

Bipolar disorder. What is bipolar disorder? It is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, and the ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. The symptoms can be severe. People experience feelings that are different from the normal ups and downs everyone goes through from time to time.

According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, people with bipolar disorder experience unusually intense emotional states that occur in distinct periods called "mood episodes." There are two types of mood states. First, there is the manic state, when a person experiences an abnormally expansive, elevated, or irritable mood. Second, there is the depressive state, where someone is extremely sad or hopeless.

"Bipolar disorder is a constant roller coaster of feelings and emotions that have taken a lifetime to learn how to manage."

There are times when a person with bipolar can experience symptoms of both mania and depression at the same time, called a mixed state. During an episode, one can display behaviors of explosiveness and irritability, extreme changes in energy, activity, and sleep patterns. Functionality depends upon the severity of the symptoms.

I suffer with this disorder. For me, bipolar disorder is a constant roller coaster of feelings and emotions that have taken a lifetime to learn how to manage. At times, it is very difficult; almost impossible to control my emotions. I can be having a very good day; and then suddenly, there are tears coming out of the blue. I often experience instant changes in emotions and uncertainty in my decisions.

Bipolar disorder does not discriminate - it can affect anyone. The onset of the illness can happen quickly. For instance, I was attending my junior year of college. All of a sudden, my life took a turn for the worst. I dropped out of school and my life was in a tailspin.

This often happens because people do not understand the illness or what is happening to them. The signs and symptoms are not recognizable. The person urgently needs help from health care professionals who have experience treating this illness.

I have asked myself is this disorder hereditary? Studies have shown a person with one parent with the illness has a 15 to 30 percent chance of having bipolar disorder. If both parents have it, then the chances rise to 50 to 75 percent.

Bipolar disorder can be displayed as early as the teen years, often it shows up in the 20s and lasts your entire life. The disease can be onset by traumatic events in life such as the loss of someone important in your life, divorce, or losing a job. Also, a person can develop such conditions without any warnings and without having a family history. It can cause severe damage to relationships and many people have thoughts about ending their lives.

Bipolar disorder impacts all of a person's relationships. It can result in the chaotic and dysfunctional rearing of children. This disorder carries a significant burden for family and friends.

Treatment can improve relationships and daily living. However; when left untreated, the impact can have severe negative consequences on every part of life — relationships, work life, school performance, and spiritual life. It can damage emotional ties.

Some people with manic episodes can manifest irritability and become verbally abusive. During a manic episode, one can create financial problems by going on spending sprees; buying many things that are not necessary. When depressed, one may not be able to meet job responsibilities; creating financial struggles for the entire family.

Someone with untreated bipolar disorder may also struggle with communication problems; a combination of being overly sensitive during a manic state and uncaring during a depressive state. Family members start avoiding communicating altogether. This often leads to further misunderstanding and conflicts within the family unit.

Many dysfunctions may occur within the family when there is someone with untreated bipolar disorder. The healthy choice is for both the individual and the family to seek out as much information as possible about bipolar disorder and get the help they need. Getting the right care can support a healthy and more productive lifestyle for everyone.♦

Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

"The Psychosocial Rehabilitation & Recovery Center offers a variety of skill groups like social skills, illness management and recovery, and clear thinking, as well as activities in the community, such as a volunteer group," said Social Worker John Dietrich, L.C.S.W., L.C.D.C. meeting with Army Veteran Cheryl Jefferson. "Veterans meet with their coaches to develop individualized goals and develop a plan to reach them."

Building a Safe Foundation for Veterans with Mental Illness

HOUSTON - The Psychosocial Rehabilitation & Recovery Center (PRRC) is an outpatient, multidisciplinary treatment program at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center that provides mental health services for Veterans suffering from severe and persistent mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, schizoaffective mood disorder, bipolar disorder, major affective disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder) with significant functional impairment.

Veterans are referred for PRRC from health care providers throughout the Mental Health Care Line. The PRRC implements a recovery model to help Veterans recover from their mental illness so they are able to reach their self-defined recovery goals and become fully functioning members of their communities.

Veterans receive individual recovery coaching sessions and group sessions focused on skills building and rehabilitation, with the goal of Veterans reintegrating into the community.

Mental health services are available to Veterans as long as needed, with successful discharge from PRRC being mutually agreed upon by the Veteran and his or her treatment team. The PRRC staff provides individual therapy; facilitate skills training and psycho-educational classes; and participate in interdisciplinary treatment team meetings.

"The Psychosocial Rehabilitation & Recovery Center offers a variety of skill groups like social skills, illness management and recovery, and clear thinking, as well as activities in the community, such as a volunteer group," said Social Worker John Dietrich, L.C.S.W., L.C.D.C. "Veterans meet with their coaches to develop individualized goals and develop a plan to reach them."

For more information about available services, contact the PRRC at 713-791-1414, ext. 6712. ♦

Lake Jackson Clinic Opens This Fall

(continued from page 1)

The clinic with 12 exam rooms will be open Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. The VA-staffed facility will provide primary health care, mental health care, and women's health services; in addition, to phlebotomy, X-ray, and telemedicine services. Emergency medication needs will be met on a local contract basis.

Veterans who wish to transfer their primary health care to the new Lake Jackson VA Outpatient Clinic should call 713- 791-1414, press 1, then dial ext. 4989.♦

Advanced, Laparoscopic Surgery for Liver Cancer Saves Lives of Veterans

(continued from page 1)

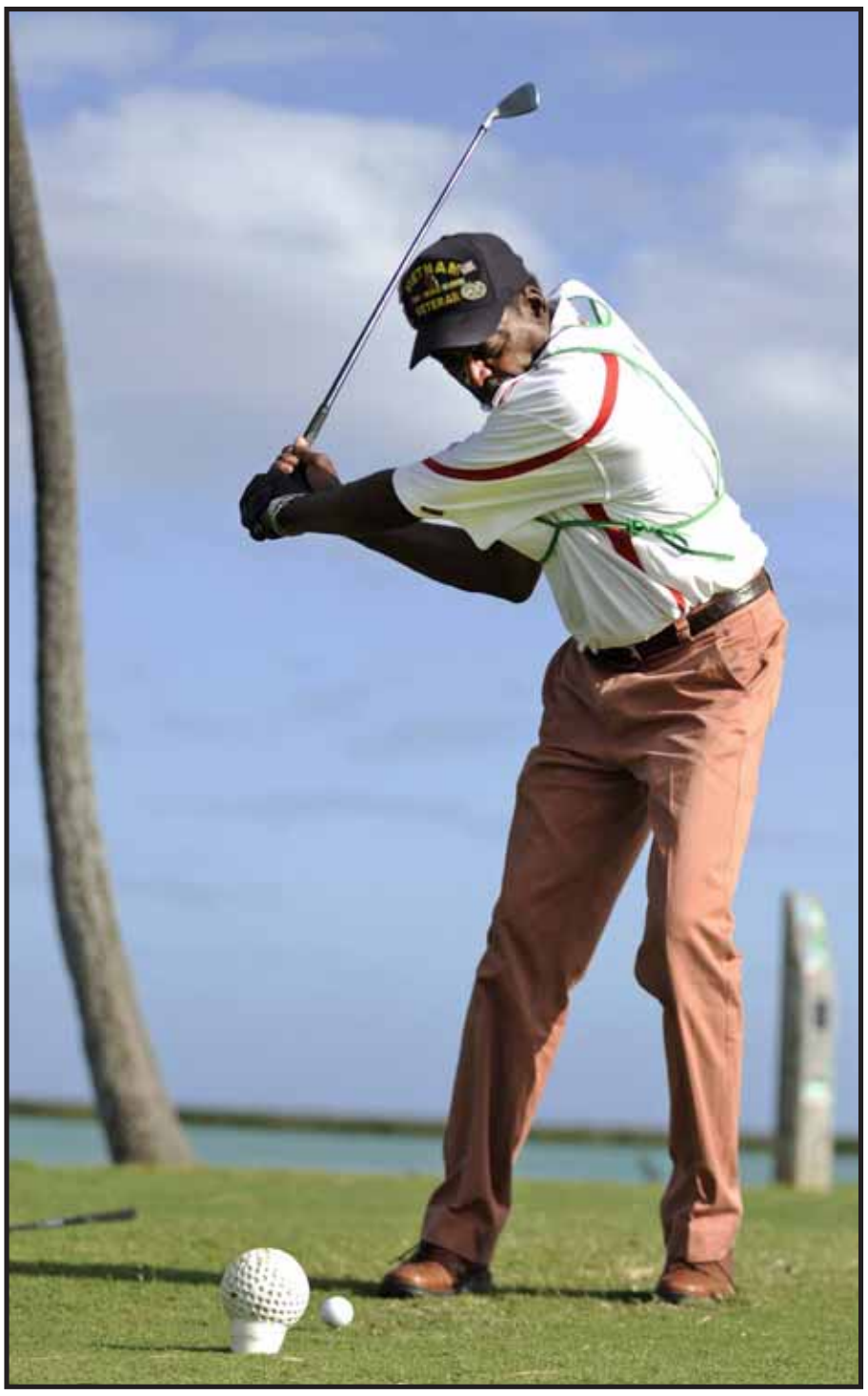
liver operations, were introduced through four, less than one half-inch incisions. This allows physicians to safely and efficiently perform the surgery.

While the first laparoscopic liver surgery was performed elsewhere in 1992, surgeons throughout the country have only recently begun using laparoscopes to remove large portions of patients' livers to treat cancer.

Mikel had an uneventful recovery, and less than two weeks after surgery, returned for a postoperative follow-up revealing adequate healing and a speedy recovery. He now has a new outlook on life.

"I have been very impressed with the doctors and nurses, the overall care, and the amazing technology at the VA," said Mikel, who served in the Army in the 1960s. "Today, I have a very positive prognosis and look forward to getting back to my family, enjoying my retirement, and shooting pool, my favorite hobby."

"The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center offers Veterans in southeast Texas the latest medical and surgical treatments available for cancer," said David H. Berger, M.D., M.H.C.M., Operative Care Line executive at the MEDVAMC and professor of Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine. "Our entire staff constantly strives to open new doors and make new medical alternatives available for our Nation's heroes. They deserve only the best." ♦



Army Veteran Billy Lacy, who won a bronze medal in golf, competes during the 25th National Veterans Golden Age Games held in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Event encourages older Veterans to continue leading active lives and serves as an example for all Americans that age doesn't have to slow you down.

36 Local Veterans Compete in 25th National Veterans Golden Age Games

HOUSTON – Thirty-six Veterans from the Houston area recently participated in the 25th National Veterans Golden Age Games held in Honolulu. The team brought home five gold, ten silver and nine bronze medals. The Games are open to all U.S. military Veterans age 55 or older who receive care at a Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility.

More than 800 Veterans from across the United States came to compete and demonstrate the warrior spirit. For six days, Veterans competed in events like horseshoes, air rifle, nine-ball, golf, croquet, and swimming.

"The Games demonstrate the true spirit of an athlete's competitive determination and passion that reflects their competitive drive and resolve to accept challenges and accomplish the mission," said Marilyn Iverson, director, Veterans Canteen Service. "These same qualities were evident when these Veterans served our nation."

"We are thrilled 17 Veterans brought medals home for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center this year," said Recreation Therapist and Golden Age Games Coach Stacey Spicer. "Everyone had a great time during the competitions, plus the Veterans thoroughly enjoyed visiting Pearl Harbor, attending a luau, and participating in the outrigger canoe exhibition."

The other coaches for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center were JeMarques Handy; Kelly Roux, R.N.; Billie Jean Sanders; and Solomon Green.

Veterans who brought home medals include:

Army Veteran Billy Lacy -
Bronze in Golf
Navy Veteran Wilbert Boson -
Silver in Golf
Army Veteran Clarence Brownlow -
Bronze in Nine-Ball
Air Force Veteran Eddie Winn -
Silver in Nine-Ball
Bronze in Dominoes
Navy Veteran Jewel Armstrong -
Bronze in Horseshoes
Army Veteran Jacqueline Hall -
Gold in Bowling
Gold in Horseshoes
Army Veteran Carlton Tucker -
Silver in Horseshoes
Army Veteran Margarita Dozier -
Silver in Horseshoes
Air Force Veteran JoAn Lance -
Bronze in Checkers
Gold in Bowling
Army Veteran Joe Ruiz -
Silver in Bowling
Air Force Veteran James Williams -
Silver in Bowling
Army Veteran Marvin Zalesky -
Gold in Bowling
Army Veteran Basil Morehead
Silver in Discus
Navy Veteran Sergio Lavilla -
Bronze in Swimming
Army Veteran Joseph Robert
Bronze in Shuffleboard
Air Force Veteran Marvin Weatherspoon -
Bronze in ¼ Mile Cycling
Bronze in ½ Mile Cycling
Navy Veteran Sam Hughes -
Silver in Dominoes

The Golden Age Games are co-sponsored by the VA, Help Hospitalized Veterans (HHV), and Veterans Canteen Service (VCS). This year's event was hosted by the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System.

Participating Veterans said they will always remember this event's athleticism and the beauty and wonder of the Hawaiian Pacific. Those who raced in the outrigger canoe exhibition were captivated to see whales, porpoises, and other sea life.

"HHV is extremely proud to continue its support of this outstanding therapeutic recreation and social event for Veterans 55 and older," said Mike Lynch, president and CEO of HHV. "VA's use of cutting edge sports and rehabilitation are making a huge difference in the lives of Veterans who participate. Through the efforts of VA's superb staff and hundreds of volunteers, Veteran's lives are being touched in dramatic ways."

The St. Louis VA Medical Center will host the Games next year. For more information about the National Veterans Golden Age Games, log onto the game's Web site at *www.va.gov/opa/speceven/gag/index.asp.* ♦*Fran Burke, Public Affairs Specialist*

FYI: Beneficiary Travel Pay

Did you know if you do not live within the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center's Clinic of Jurisdiction (COJ) and are requesting Beneficiary Travel, you will only receive reimbursement to the VA facility closest to your home?

VHA Beneficiary Travel Program (VHA Handbook 1601B-05, 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 70 and 38 United States Code (USC) 111) directs the VA to pay a Veteran only to the nearest VA facility where care needed can be rendered. The exception is the use of an "Inter-Facility Consult (IFC)." An IFC allows one VA health care facility to request another VA health care facility to accept a Veteran for specific medical care that it does not offer.

For example, a Veteran living in College Station, who decides to come to Houston to receive primary care, will only receive travel pay from his residence to the VA medical center in Waco or Temple. The Veteran would not receive travel pay to Houston, unless the Waco or Temple VA had submitted an IFC to the Houston VA.

For more information, pick up a copy of the Veterans Information Packet (VIP) or visit *www.va.gov/healtheligibility/Library/FAQs/BeneTravelFAQ.asp*.

New Tips to Lose Weight and Improve Your Health

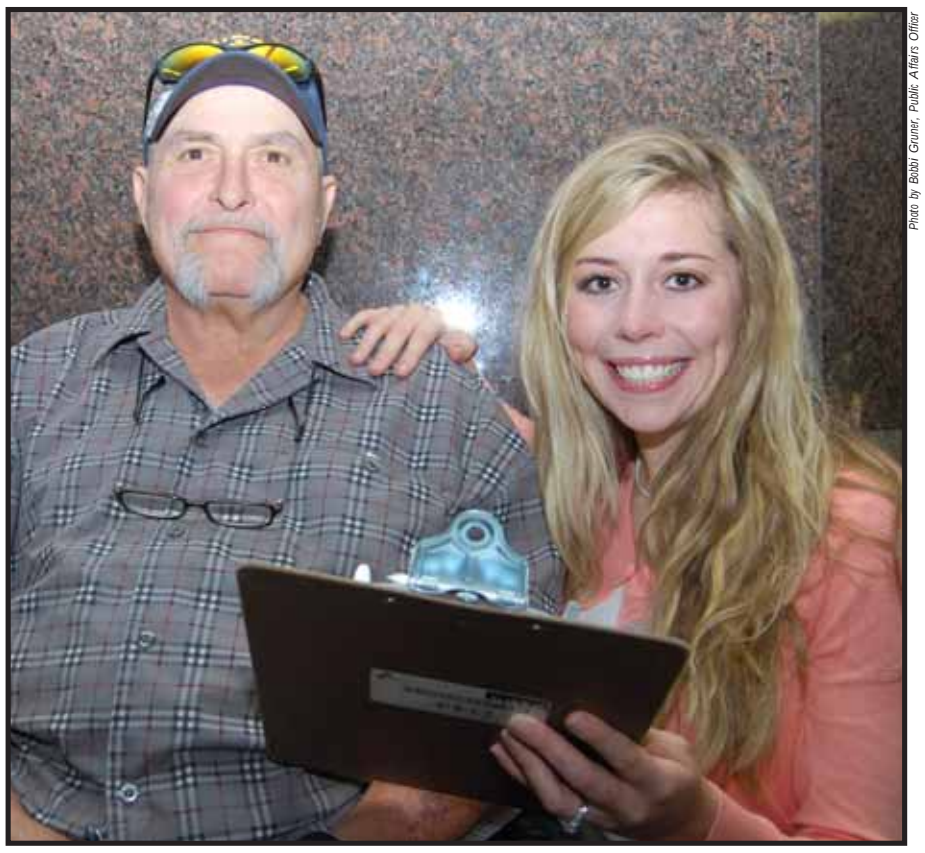


Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

Dietetic Intern Gayle Larsen discusses the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans with Veteran Rodney Darden. To meet with dietetian, call the Nutrition Office at 713-791-1414, ext. 4295/3976/6166.

HOUSTON - New Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) were released recently by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services. The guidelines are the government's nutrition advice to promote health and help reduce the risk of diseases and rates of obesity.

Since 1980, the new DGA have been released every five years and are based on the latest scientific research. The guidelines are used for many programs; for example, "Meals on Wheels," school meals, and nutrition education.

In the United States, 72 percent of men and 64 percent of women are overweight or obese. Thus, the 2010 DGA focused on decreasing calories and increasing exercise. The Secretary of Agriculture said the obesity rates are "a crisis that we can no longer ignore."

Most Americans need to lose weight so they can reduce the risk of developing diet-related diseases. A healthy diet can reduce the risk of major chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and some cancers.

The new guidelines focus on balancing calories with physical activity, and encourage Americans to consume more healthy foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, and seafood, and to consume less sodium, saturated and trans fats, added sugars, and refined grains.

Many Americans do not eat the variety of foods that will provide all needed nutrients while staying within calorie needs. Several key nutrients – potassium, dietary fiber, calcium and vitamin D – are of public health concern for both adults and children.

Some tips to help consumers translate the Dietary Guidelines into their everyday lives include enjoy your food, but eat less; avoid oversized portions; make half your plate fruits and vegetables; switch to fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk; compare sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals – and choose the foods with lower numbers; and drink water instead of sugary drinks.

Try using smaller, salad-size plates; ordering an appetizer and a salad instead of an entree; cooking at home, where you are apt to stick with more reasonable portions; and wrapping up leftovers right after you serve yourself so you cannot go back for seconds.

Start with small steps and build physical activity into your day. Park farther away from the store, use the stairs instead of the elevator, vacuum a room, or walk in the park or around the mall. You can also make it fun with music, dance, videos, or a Wii.

The new guidelines are a great place to start if your goal is a healthier you. For more information, visit this website: *www.dietaryguidelines.gov.*♦*Gayle Larsen, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern*

El Campo Mom of Two Named Volunteer of the Year

Photo by Nikki Verbeck, Voluntary Services Specialist

As a volunteer van driver for seven years, Georgia Mican drives from El Campo to Houston so Veterans, who are unable to drive themselves for a variety of reasons, may obtain health care at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) recently selected El Campo, Tx. resident Georgia Mican as its Volunteer of the Year.

As a volunteer van driver for seven years, Mican drives from El Campo to Houston so Veterans, who are unable to drive themselves for a variety of reasons, may obtain health care at the MEDVAMC. Drivers for the Veterans Transportation Network transport more than 10,000 Veterans between Houston and Woodville, Beaumont, Angleton, Bay City, El Campo, Willis, and Cleveland each year.

"Georgia's get-up-and-go attitude is infectious and everyone around her feels it," said Bryan Dyck, Voluntary Service Program Manager. "Her volunteer work at the DeBakey VA is especially important for Veterans who need medical attention and have no means of transportation or are apprehensive about driving in overcrowded Houston traffic."

Most Veterans spend the hour and a half drive to Houston sleeping; however, on the way back to El Campo, Mican says the group comes to life talking about such favorite topics as food, where to eat, and who is barbecuing.

"We are like one big family and I can't help but love them," said Mican, who is known for her compassion and big heart. "You just try to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Sometimes, a kind word can help someone get through a rough day and make them feel like the most special person in the world; you never know what it can do."

Mican and her husband of 30 years have two sons, one who served in the Navy. They know she enjoys volunteering at the VA and serving our Nation's Veterans.

"If my son, and so many others like him, can make such a sacrifice for our country, then I feel like I need to do my part. Veterans have served and now they need our care and support," said Mican. "That might mean driving a van, helping them find their appointment, or a few words of encouragement. I say think positive and everything will be okay."

"Georgia can make people smile by just walking into a room," said Army Air Corp World War II Veteran Joe Leslie. "Her upbeat, energetic attitude gives Veterans who ride in her van a cheerful ride to and from Houston."

When asked what her favorite part of volunteering is, Mican answered, "Just being with the Veterans! And the conversation - I love to hear their stories."

Mican enjoys being with people and her riders appreciate her company, often asking her to sit with them during their medical appointments. She does not mind, saying she wants to be there for them and hopes if her son ever needs help, someone will be there for him.

It is because of her incredible attitude and for her dedication to Veterans that Mican was chosen as the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center Volunteer of the Year. For more about volunteering, contact the MEDVAMC Voluntary Service Office at (713) 794-7135 or send an e-mail to *vhahouvolunteer@va.gov.*♦*Nikki Verbeck, Voluntary Services Specialist*

Don't Be A No-Show.

A Veteran who does not show up for his or her VA medical appointment is a "No Show." Please call the Appointment Center at **713-794-8985 or toll-free 1-800-639-5137** at least 24 hours before to cancel or reschedule your appointment so it may be used by another Veteran.

Add Color to Lose Inches: How Fruits and Vegetables Help to Manage Weight

HOUSTON - Take a minute to think about the colors of the food you eat. Do images of red, dark green, yellow, blue, purple, green, and orange come to mind?

No? Then, you may not be getting all the nutrients you need for good health.

To obtain the widest range of nutrients, we need to consume a variety of food. Variety also helps add color to our daily intake. One simple way to accomplish this change is by eating more fruits and vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables are full of vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Therefore, they benefit our health in many ways. Research has revealed that a diet high in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of developing diabetes and certain cancers. Stroke and heart disease risk also decreases with higher fruit and vegetable intake. Because these foods are low in fat and calories, they are also great for weight control.

It is estimated 68 percent of Americans are overweight or obese. In addition, only 24.4 percent of Americans eat the amount of fruits and vegetables they need each day. Therefore, eating more fruits and vegetables may be one way to reverse the rising obesity trend.

To lose weight, we must consume fewer calories than our bodies utilize. This may be difficult if our diets are full of fried or fast food. However, by replacing such food with colorful fruits and vegetables, we consume fewer calories and even lose weight. Besides, fruits and vegetables are full of water to fill up without the extra calories.

So, how can we add more fruits and vegetables to our diet? The answer may be easier than you realize. Small changes in our meals is the first step. For instance, put less cereal in your breakfast bowl to make room for a sliced peach or some strawberries. Add color to your sandwich by adding lettuce and carrots in place of cheese or extra meat. Try replacing pasta or rice with green beans.

High-calorie snacking is another way we add pounds to the scale. Skip the chips and candy; instead eat an apple, banana, or celery. Small changes in each meal and between meals can help us reduce calories and lose weight.

But, will these changes require extra time and money? Not necessarily. Food such as cherry tomatoes and grapes are an easy snack on the go. Fast food may not be as tempting when you have healthy snacks available. Also, buying fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables in bulk saves money. Extras can be frozen for later use. By adding more color to meals, you can also reduce the amount of high-priced meat.

Finally, how many fruits and vegetables do we need each day? The amount of fruit and vegetables you need depends on your age, sex, and activity level. Men should aim for two cups of fruit and two and a half to three cups of vegetables each day. Women should aim for one and a half to two cups of fruit each day and two to two and a half cups of vegetables.

But, be aware of portion sizes as well. Even low-calorie food can add up if eaten in large portions.

Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

Dietetic Intern Katie Meismer discusses adding color to his diet with Army Veteran Santiago Vasquez, Jr. If you want to learn more about eating better, call 713-791-1414, ext. 4295.

For a more detailed plan, visit *www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramid/index.aspx*. Losing weight can seem like a tough battle, but it does not have to be hard. To lose inches, just add more color. ♦*Katie Meismer, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern*

SUPPORT GROUP LISTING

Amputee Support Group
Meets 4th Wednesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Dining Room. Facilitators: Stacy Flynn, 713-794-7819 & Betty Baer, 713-791-1414, ext. 4195

Breast Cancer Survivors' Support Group
Meets last Tuesday every month, noon, Education Conference Room 4A-380H. Facilitator: Magdalena S. Ramirez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5289

Cancer Support Group
Meets 3rd Tuesday every month, 1-2 p.m., Cancer Center Family Room 4C-345. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

Depression & Bipolar Support Group for Veterans
Meets every Wednesday, 7 p.m., Homeless Domiciliary, 7329 Fannin Street, Facilitator: Anthony Morris, 713-791-1414, ext. 2323

Family Cares Mental Health Group
Meets 1st Monday every month, 5:30 p.m., 6th Floor, Room 6B-110. Facilitator: Dionne Crump, 713-791-1414, ext. 6650

"Mended Hearts" Support Group
Meets 3rd Thursday every month, 11 a.m., Nursing Unit 2A Dining Room. Facilitator: Rosa Lane-Smith, 713-791-1414, ext. 4034

Hepatitis C Support Group
Meets 1st Friday every month, 1:30 p.m., Primecare Clinic 5 (NASA). Facilitators: Edith Yeldell, 713-791-1414, ext. 3613 & Jodi M. Francis, ext. 3656

HIV Support/Educational Group
Meets 3rd Tuesday every month, 2 p.m., Clinic 4, Room 1A-442. Facilitator: Patricia Suarez, 713-791-1414, ext. 6177

Liver Transplant Support Group
Meets every Tuesday 3 p.m., Room 5B-166, Facilitator: Juleena Masters, 713-791-1414, ext. 6286

Lung Cancer Support Group
Meets 1st Tuesday every month, 1:30 p.m., Cancer Center Family Room 4C-365. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

***MOVE!* Weight Management Support Group**
Meets 1st and 3rd Friday every month, 9 a.m., Room 4C-122. Facilitator: Alicia Merritt, 713-791-1414, ext. 6166/3976

Parkinson's Disease Education & Support Group
Contact facilitators for more information: Naomi Nelson, 713-794-8938 & Shawna Johnson, 713-794-8410

Prostate Cancer Support Group
Meets 3rd Thursday every month, 1-2 p.m., Cancer Center Conference Room 4C-345. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

Stroke Support Group
Meets 3rd Tuesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Day Room. Facilitators: Kathryn Kertz, 713-791-1414, ext. 4192 & Laura Lawhon, 713-794-7816

Vet-to-Vet Support & Education Group
Meets every Wednesday, 6 p.m., Room 6B-118; every Thursday, 9 a.m., 6B-117; and every Thursday, 11 a.m., Room 6C-167. Veteran facilitator. info: Cristy Gamez-Galka, 713-791-1414, ext. 4378

TALK TO THE SOCIAL WORKER IN YOUR CLINIC FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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SUICIDE PREVENTION
LIFELINE™
1-800-273-TALK
(1-800-273-8255)
WEB SITE:
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

New Housing Option for Homeless, Female Veterans

(continued from page 1)

New VIEWS, which stands for Veteran Initiative Empowering Women's Stability, Skills, and Self-Determination, provides a comprehensive continuum of care through a wide variety of supportive services based on individualized needs. This includes transitional housing of between six months to one year, case management, referrals and information, educational and vocational services, life skills training, parenting classes, transportation assistance, integrated mental health services, and residential or outpatient substance abuse treatment.

"This is a place where a person must make a decision or choice on which direction to take," said one resident of the new program. "New VIEWS helps you choose to change your life direction and get on the road to recovery and positive living."

The Santa Maria Hostel has more than 50 years of experience serving women in crisis. In 1995, the organization was recognized as one of Texas' best-managed centers for the treatment and care of addicted women and their children. The Santa Maria Hostel features two residential facilities capable of providing a home-like environment for women alone and with their children while in treatment for addiction.

Five beds under the New VIEWS program are specifically reserved for homeless, female Veterans with substance use disorders. These individuals will participate in various substance dependence treatment programs after completing a 30-day Safety Net Program.

Veterans participating in New VIEWS must be medically stable, able to care for themselves, and remain alcohol and drug-free. Sex offenders and those requiring detox services will not be admitted.

VA estimates that about one-third of the adult homeless population served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Current population estimates suggest about 195,000 Veterans (male and female) nationwide are homeless on any given night and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year. Many other Veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing.

Family background, access to support from family and friends, and various personal characteristics rather than military service seem to be the strongest indicators of risk for homelessness. About 45 percent of homeless Veterans suffer from mental illness and, with considerable overlap, slightly more than 70 percent suffer from alcohol or other drug abuse problems.

For more information, contact Terri Riha, HCHV Grant & Per Diem Liaison at 713-791-1414 ext. 2848.♦

Think about Ignaz Semmelweis the next time you skip washing your hands.

In 1847, Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian doctor in the Maternity Unit of an Austrian hospital, realized the number of cases of puerperal fever (an infection of the uterus) was much larger at one of his wards than the other. He found the number of cases drastically reduced **if the doctors washed their hands carefully** before dealing with a pregnant woman. The risk was especially high if the doctor had been in contact with corpses before they treated the women. The germ theory of disease had not yet been developed at the time. Semmelweis lectured about his results; however, the reception by the medical community was cold. At the time, diseases were blamed on basic "humors" in the body and doctors were not eager to admit they had caused so many deaths. Semmelweis spent 14 years developing his ideas without success. In 1865, he suffered a nervous breakdown and was committed to an insane asylum. Only after Dr. Semmelweis' untimely death was the germ theory of disease developed, and he is now recognized as a pioneer of antiseptic policy.

Expert's Corner

Anthony Zollo, M.D. is the medical director of the Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic in Lufkin. Located on approximately seven acres of land on the west side of Lufkin just off Loop 287, this 37,000 square-foot facility has a staff of approximately 55 providing primary care, laboratory, radiology, pharmacy, social work, nutrition, and mental health services to Veterans in the area. In fiscal year 2010, there were 49,423 outpatient visits to the clinic.

How well you and your doctor talk to each other is one of the most important parts of getting good health care; but, it is not always easy. It takes time and effort on the patient's part as well as the doctor's. In the past, the doctor typically took the lead and the patient followed. Today, a good patient-doctor relationship is more of a partnership, working as a team along with other health care providers such as the nurse and pharmacists to solve your medical problems and keep you healthy.

A basic plan can help you make the most of your first appointment as well as your future appointments with the doctor you have been seeing for years. The following tips will make it easier for you and your doctor to cover everything you need to talk about.

1 Share Information - Talking about your health means sharing how you feel physically, emotionally, and mentally. Knowing how to describe your symptoms and bringing up other concerns will help you become a partner in your health care.

2 Make a List - If you have more than a few items to discuss, put them in order and ask about the most important ones first. Take time to make notes before your visit about your concerns and problems. Be clear and concise when describing them. It is your information that points the doctor in the right direction. Don't put off the things that are really on your mind until the end of your appointment — bring them up right away.

3 Have Medication Information - Put all of your prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal remedies or supplements in a bag and bring them to your appointment. It is possible for medications to interact causing unpleasant and sometimes dangerous side effects. Always carry with you a list of medications and things you are allergic to.

4 Bring a Family Member or Friend - Sometimes it is helpful to bring someone with you. Your companion can remind you what you planned to discuss with the doctor if you forget. They can take notes for you and help you remember what the doctor said.

5 Make Good Use of Your Time - Be honest. It is tempting to say what you think the doctor wants to hear. While this is natural, it is not in your best interest. Your doctor can decide on the best evaluation and treatment only if you say what is really going on. Being honest is much better for your health than avoiding the doctor.

Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic
2206 North John Redditt Drive
Lufkin, TX 75904-1776
936-671-4300 or toll-free 1-800-209-3120

Veterans' Questions

Answers provided by Patient Advocates in Consumer Affairs Room BA-200 (Basement) (713) 794-7884 or e-mail vhahougeneralquestions@va.gov

Question: I am a Veteran with a small business. Does the VA offer any networking or education opportunities?

Answer: The Department of Veterans Affairs is hosting the National Veteran Small Business Conference and Expo on August 15-18, 2011 at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. This is the largest nationwide conference of its kind, providing Veteran-owned and service-disabled Veteran-owned small nusinesses an opportunity to learn, network and market their businesses.

To register or be an exhibitor, visit *http://nationalveteransconference.com,* or call toll-free 1-866-998-7734.

Question: Is spiritual assistance available at the VA?

Answer: Chaplains are on duty from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. Chaplains are available for crisis ministry 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To assure prompt response to your needs for a pastoral visit or consultation, indicate your request to the nurse or clerk on your nursing unit. The message will be promptly delivered to the chaplain.

The Chapel is located on the second floor. Protestant services are offered on Sundays at 9 a.m. Roman Catholic Mass is offered Monday through Saturday at 11 a.m. Sunday Mass is held at 10 a.m., with an ì anticipatory massî on Saturday at 4 p.m. All services may be viewed on television Channel 37 in patient rooms.

Question: Where can I smoke?

Answer: All VA buildings are smoke-free and smoking inside is strictly prohibited. This includes stairwells, machine rooms, boiler plant, the tunnel area at the main hospital, interstitial spaces, and roofs.

Smoking is only allowed in designated smoking areas. There is no smoking allowed within 35 feet of any entrance. Smoking on the main hospital grounds is only allowed in the gazebo/park area (south side), 2nd Floor breezeway (Community Living Center only), the Center atrium (9 p.m. to 5 a.m. only), and the Fisher House. (Porch located on North East side of Fisher House only).

All persons who smoke are expected to follow safe practices in the handling of smoking materials, and to dispose of such in proper receptacles. Discarding of smoking materials on the premises outside of receptacles may result in disciplinary action or monetary fines.

Individuals observed carrying lighted smoking material in other than designated areas may be served a Courtesy Violation Notice, VAF 10-6160, or will be cited for a violation of Title 38, Sections 901 & 902, in a U.S. District Court violation notice and be fined up to $500 and/or imprisoned for up to 6 months in jail.

For more information, contact the VA Police at 713-794-7106.

Question: I think I lost my sunglasses at the Houston VA. Where is the Lost & Found?

Answer: All articles classified as lost are sent to the Patientís Clothing Room, Room BA-203 in the basement, at the end of each workday. Individuals searching for any lost item should report to Room BA-203, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Question: How do I find out more information about obtaining care at the VA?

Answer: The Veteran Information Packet (VIP) is an easy-to-read handbook containing information about all aspects of medical care at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and its outpatient clinics. The contents, in a question and answer format, include Eligibility & Enrollment, Benefits & Services, Emergency Care in Non-VA Facilities, Prescriptions, Charges & Co-Payments, and much more.

If you would like a VIP mailed to you, call 713-794-7349 or e-mail *VHAHOUInform@va.gov*.

Question: What are current mileage rates for travel?

Answer: VA currently reimburses 41.5 cents per mile for all Veteran travel, including Compensation & Pension (C&P) exams. When VA has determined that a deficiency exists in relation to a C&P exam (need to repeat a lab test, X-ray, or through no fault of the Veteran not all exams in relation to the C&P were completed) reimbursement is 41.5 cents per mile. This is travel for the ì Convenience of the Government.î A ì per round trip deductible of $6î is automatically applied to most vouchers with a monthly cap of $18 (excluding VA pensioners and those coming for C&P exams). Unscheduled appointments are paid to eligible Veterans only as a one-way trip.

Question: What is a drug formulary?

Answer: A drug formulary is a list of medications that are readily available within our facility. The formulary helps to prevent duplication in the same medication class, reduces health care costs, and provides the best possible care to you. Drugs that are not on the VA formulary are generally not available; but in most cases, there is a drug on our formulary that can be substituted safely.

Important VA Telephone Numbers

Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center 713-791-1414
toll-free 1-800-553-2278
VA Network Telecare Center 713-794-8985
toll-free 1-800-639-5137
Beaumont VA Outpatient Clinic 409-981-8550
toll-free 1-800-833-7734
Conroe VA Outpatient Clinic 936-522-4000
toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 1949
Galveston VA Outpatient Clinic 409-761-3200
toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12600
Lufkin - Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic 936-671-4300
toll-free 1-800-209-3120
Richmond VA Outpatient Clinic 832-595-7700
toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12800
Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic 409-986-2900
toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12900
Pharmacy Refills 713-794-7648
toll-free 1-800-454-1062 or www.myhealth.va.gov
Pharmacy Helpline 713-794-7653
Veterans Crisis Line ..... toll-free 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Appointment Center ..... toll-free 1-800-639-5137
Automated Appointment Information 713-794-7648
toll-free 1-800-454-1062
VA Eligibility & Enrollment 713-794-7288
Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program 713-794-7848
Homeless Veterans Drop-In Center (1418 Preston St.) 713-794-7533
Hotline for Homeless Veterans ..... toll-free 1-877-4AID VET

Assistance for Returning Troops from Iraq/Afghanistan
Team Members 713-794-7034/8825/7928

Vet Center (701 N. Post Oak Road) 713-682-2288
Vet Center (2990 Richmond Ave.) 713-523-0884
Vet Center (14300 Cornerstone Village Dr.) 713-578-4002

Patient Advocates
Houston 713-794-7884
Beaumont ..... 1-800-833-7734, ext. 113
Conroe ..... 936-522-4010, ext. 1952
Galveston/Texas City ..... 713-791-1414, ext. 6586
Lufkin 936-671-4362
Richmond 832-595-7700

Houston VA National Cemetery 281-447-8686
Houston VA Regional Office 713-383-1999
toll-free 1-800-827-1000

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www.myhealth.va.gov

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To complete your in-person authentication, **contact MyHealtheVet Coordinator Curtis Bergeron** in Prime Care or ask for a Clinic Administrative Assistant. At the Outpatient Clinics, ask for the Administrative Assistant.

For more information, call 713-791-1414, ext. 6348 or e-mail *vhahoumyhealthevet@va.gov* TODAY!