



VA Outpatient Clinics located in Beaumont, Conroe, Galveston, Lake Jackson, Lufkin, Richmond, and Texas City

Veteran Family Safety: Free Gun Locks

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center is participating in a Gun Safety Lock Program that has made thousands of free gun safety locks available to Veterans and their families.

Firearm safety has become an increasingly high priority in the Veteran population. While it is true that Veterans are well-trained in the care and use of firearms during military duty, making sure the guns in their homes are secured when they return is a family safety concern. Many Veterans of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have young children who could potentially discover unlocked firearms.

To protect Veterans and their family members, the Under Secretary for Health signed an executive decision memo in 2008 that endorsed Project ChildSafe. The executive memo required the project be implemented in VA medical centers across the country. This program is the nation's largest and most comprehensive
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"I think the free Gun Safety Lock Program is a great deterrent," said VA Police Chief Stanley Staton, above demonstrating how to use a gun lock. "It gives someone who is thinking of ending their life extra time to think about it and hopefully, realize tomorrow might be a better day."

New Parking Garages in the Works

HOUSTON - New parking structures are in the future for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC). The project, scheduled to begin in February, is expected to provide much-needed parking relief for a medical center that logged more than one million outpatient visits last fiscal year.

"The DeBakey VA currently has a parking deficit of about 1,200 parking spaces," said Mouris K. Ibrahim, MEDVAMC Planning and Construction chief. "New parking garages will tremendously improve Veteran access to their health care providers."

With the number of outpatient visits to the Houston VA campus
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Expansion of Conroe VA Outpatient Clinic Approved

See page 2!

Caring Enough to Recover Lost Keepsakes

Nurses at DeBakey VA Medical Center practice Human Caring Theory of Nursing every day.

HOUSTON - A nurse at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) recently helped recover an important piece of Viet Nam War history while treating a patient using a special nursing technique.

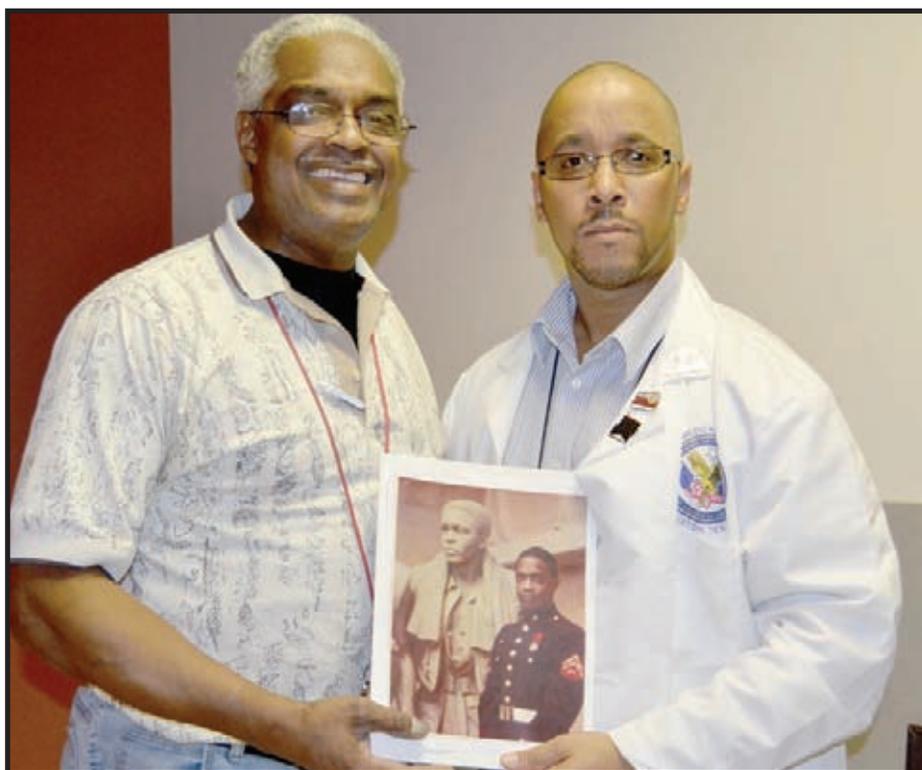
"I was a charge nurse in Nursing Unit 3D when a patient called to say he could not find his things," said Duane Branscomb, R.N., B.S.N. "I was very busy, but I told him I would see what I could do and call him back."

"That day, I had just finished reading a Caritas Nursing book," said Branscomb. "In the book, the author talked about being 'authentically present' when dealing with patients. I decided to use that technique right then since it was fresh in my mind. I stopped everything and focused on the patient."

Nurses at the MEDVAMC have been using the Human Caring Theory of Nursing pioneered by Dr. Jean Watson for the past year. The theory includes such techniques as going beyond the outer appearance of the patient and taking care of one's self in order to take better care of the patient. Using this technique, Branscomb put aside what he was doing and concentrated on helping the patient.

"I called all of the supervisors and asked if anyone had seen an unidentified bag," said Branscomb. "One said they had found a bag without a name on it and it matched what I was looking for. I called the patient and informed him that his bag had been found."

"Once at the hospital, the patient came to my station and said: 'Let me show you what I had in the bag,'" said Branscomb. "He pulled out these official military pictures. A few showed him standing in front of the famous Three Soldiers Statue. He told me he was the
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Charge Nurse Duane Branscomb, R.N., B.S.N. took the time to help find Marine Corps Veteran Terrance Green's missing bag of historical Vietnam Veterans Memorial Three Soldiers Statue photographs and documents.

Houston VA Pulls Nail from Vietnam Veteran's Coffin

A few months ago, Veteran Jackie Gildon found himself in dire straits; he had survived triple bypass surgery, back surgery, and a recent stroke.

HOUSTON - Recently, cancer experts at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) successfully treated a patient's liver cancer using a medically advanced, fully laparoscopic, anatomic liver resection technique. Just days later, the Veteran left the hospital cancer-free with a new outlook on life.

A few months ago, Army Vietnam War Veteran Jackie Gildon, 61, found himself in dire straits. He had survived triple bypass surgery, back surgery, and a recent stroke. Because of his health problems, his diagnosis of liver cancer looked as if it might be the final nail in the coffin.

"No doubt about it - I was scared," said Gildon. "The doctors at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center were hesitant to operate on me because of my pre-existing conditions."

For Gildon, other options for treating cancer were out of the question. His wife recalls what happened after the diagnosis.

"After he was told that a transplant surgery would not be possible, he told the doctors he did not want chemo or radiation," said Laquetta, Gildon's wife for more than 39 years. "His position was if you can't get to it, then just leave it alone."

Faced with limited options, the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center referred Gildon to Daniel Anaya, M.D., a surgical oncologist and the Liver Tumor Program director at the MEDVAMC.

"Mr. Gildon had several medical conditions which precluded him from undergoing surgery at a medical facility that did not offer anything but the highest level of care and a distinctively experienced cancer care team," said Anaya.

When Gildon arrived at MEDVAMC, Anaya and other staff at the MEDVAMC Cancer Center ran various tests to determine what type of treatment would work best. After an



"Traditionally when a patient undergoes liver surgery, he is still in pain many weeks later and very uncomfortable," said Daniel Anaya, M.D., a surgical oncologist and the Liver Tumor Program director with Army Veteran Jackie Gildon. "After just a few days, Mr. Gildon was not only at home and back to normal activities; but more importantly, cancer-free and pain-free."

intensive work-up, it was determined Gildon would be good candidate for a relatively new type of minimally invasive surgery.

"With a fully laparoscopic anatomic liver resection, only the cancerous portions of the liver are cut out," said Anaya. "Surgeons reach the liver by making small incisions into the abdomen and insert a tiny camera to guide the surgical instruments."

Unlike traditional abdomen surgeries, a large incision is not needed and recovery time is quite rapid. Additionally, the stress placed on the body is minimized; thus, making surgery a possible treatment when it would otherwise be considered too risky.

"Traditionally when a patient undergoes liver surgery, he is still in pain many weeks later and very uncomfortable," said Anaya. "After just a few days, Mr. Gildon was not only at home and back to normal activities; but more importantly, cancer-free and pain-free."

A Veteran of not only multiple military conflicts but multiple medical procedures as well, Gildon knew that recovery time after surgery could be

difficult. However, due to the talent and experience of Anaya and his team, the recovery time of Gildon's most recent surgery was not difficult.

"Jackie had surgery on October 6 and was back home in Oklahoma on October 12," said Laquetta. "In my opinion, Dr. Anaya, the other great doctors, and all the caring nurses at the Houston VA saved his life. I am so happy that God gave them the skill and talent to perform that operation. I am also thankful to them for taking a risk when nobody else would."

This surgery represents another step in MEDVAMC's never ending fight to find better and easier ways to treat cancer - all with the individual patient and his or her needs in mind.

"We are proud the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center has some of the best doctors and nurses in the country and offers the latest, minimally invasive alternatives for our Veterans," said David H. Berger, M.D., M.H.C.M., Operative Care Line executive at the MEDVAMC and also a professor of Surgery at BCM. ♦ *Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)*

A Word from the Director . . .

Get Involved with National Salute Week

HOUSTON - February 12 through 17, 2012 is a special time at Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers across the nation. Established as an official VA program in 1978, this week is known as National Salute to Veteran Patients and is an annual event designed to increase awareness of Veterans and the sacrifices they have made for our nation. It is an opportunity for the public to visit the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) and its outpatient clinics, meet America's Veterans, and explore the various aspects of our facility's volunteer program.

Columnist Ann Landers initiated a movement several years ago encouraging school children and adults to write a special note of thanks to hospitalized Veterans in a Valentine's Day greeting. We take great care in distributing these cards to Veterans and displaying them throughout our hospital during this particular week.

It is touching to see how much effort young children put into making special Valentines to brighten the lives of our nation's Veterans. Cards come in every shape and size - and are made with everything from tissue paper, stickers, and colored doilies to crayons, construction paper, and stamps. One thing all of these cards have in common is they are made with love and respect for our nation's Veterans.

In addition to cards from school children, hospitalized Veterans and those with outpatient clinic appointments receive visits and enjoy



*Adam C. Walmsley, MA, MHA, FACHE
Medical Center Director*

special programs provided by community and area Veteran Service Organizations, Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and Junior ROTC members, elected officials, celebrities, and local personalities throughout the week. These visits have traditionally included personal time together sharing stories and interests, playing cards or board games, and distribution of U.S. flags.

National Salute also draws awareness to the role of the MEDVAMC in the community, as well as the many important volunteer opportunities at the facility.

I encourage you to send a Valentine to a Veteran or support one of the many special activities during this week at the MEDVAMC. I know you will enjoy the wonderful atmosphere created by staff and volunteers to honor our Nation's heroes. The cheer and well wishes spread to hospitalized Veterans is quite 'contagious' and is a 'prescription you can fill!'

Contact our Voluntary Service Office at (713) 794-7135 or vhahonvolunteer@va.gov for more information and how to get involved. ♦

Conroe VA Clinic Expansion in the Works

HOUSTON - On November 15, 2011, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced an expansion of its Conroe VA Outpatient Clinic to handle the growing Veteran demand for health care in the area.

The Conroe VA Outpatient Clinic, currently located at 100 Riverwood Court, is about 9,000 square feet, slightly larger than its original size of 7,600 square feet when it opened in 2007. In fiscal year 2007, the facility had 11,447 outpatient visits. Last year, that number increased to 40,266.

"The Conroe Clinic is extremely popular with our Veterans who live north of Houston and want to avoid

Houston's traffic," said Adam C. Walmsley, M.H.A., M.A., F.A.C.H.E., Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center director. "We are excited to soon have an enhanced facility to meet this tremendous need."

VA will now prepare a bid solicitation for approximately 29,000 square feet of clinic space and 225 parking spaces in the Conroe area.

The expanded VA-staffed facility is expected to provide primary health care, mental health care, and women's specialty care in addition to laboratory, X-ray, telemedicine, teleretinal imaging, pharmacy, optometry, and audiology services. ♦

New Parking Garages

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doubling in the last ten years, parking has become a serious problem for Veterans, volunteers, visitors, and staff. Efforts have been made in the past few years to increase parking availability, but a more dramatic strategy had to be taken to address the issue.

“The facility already expanded surface parking with an additional 480 parking spaces,” said Ibrahim. “However, this new parking project will provide vertical expansion, and is a better option to reduce walking distances and use our property more efficiently.”

The parking project will be completed in two phases.

Phase one includes the construction of a four to six-story parking structure near the Alameda gate that will house 200 cars. This garage is scheduled to be completed in December 2012. Phase two is an expansion to phase one with an additional 400 spaces. It is expected to be completed by September 2013.

Future plans include the construction of a second parking garage near the Old Spanish Trail entrance to house 600 cars. It is scheduled to begin construction in 2017.

Some parking spaces will be displaced while construction takes place; however, steps have been taken to mitigate this situation.

“We are in the process of leasing 300 off-site parking spaces,” said Ibrahim. “The leased parking will be nearby and a free shuttle bus service will be provided.”

The parking project is yet another demonstration of MEDVAMC’s commitment to provide the best care anywhere to our Nation’s heroes.

“The new parking garages will definitely increase patient satisfaction,” said Ibrahim. “Going to the doctor usually is not something to look forward to; so, we want to make the visit as easy and trouble-free as possible.” ♦ *Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)*



“The facility already expanded surface parking with an additional 480 parking spaces,” said Mouris K. Ibrahim, MEDVAMC Planning and Construction chief. “However, this new parking project will provide vertical expansion, and is a better option to reduce walking distances and use our property more efficiently.”

Homeless Veteran Success Story: “I Came To the Houston VA and the World Was Opened Up To Me”



Photo by Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)

“I feel really fortunate to have witnessed Larry’s transformation and success. He overcame a great many hurdles,” said Jeri Gates, L.C.S.W., a Housing and Urban Development VA Supportive Housing case manager who creates comprehensive treatment plans for homeless Veterans with substance use or misuse, or mental health problems and coordinates vocational rehabilitation services.

HOUSTON – Navy Veteran Larry knows, in the minds of many, the thought of a homeless person conjures up images of someone who is disheveled, addicted, and destitute. Unfortunately, Larry was all of those things and more, but with the help of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC), he was able to turn his life around and become a productive member of society.

“The Houston VA played a major part in getting me back on track,” said Larry. “Ms. Gates helped me find a job and a place to stay.”

Ms. Gates is Jeri Gates, L.C.S.W., a Housing and Urban Development VA Supportive Housing case manager. Her job is to get homeless Veterans off the street and back on their feet.

“I think Larry’s story is amazing,” said Gates. “I feel really fortunate to have witnessed his transformation and success. He overcame a great many hurdles. I am glad I have been here to watch him maintain his recovery.”

Larry’s path to recovery started by first humbling himself and admitting that he had a problem.

“I had to admit I had a problem that I could not solve by myself,” said Larry. “I knew I had to go somewhere to get a plan of action to stay sober because mine wasn’t working.”

Larry went to the McGovern Drop-In Center for Homeless Veterans located at 1418 Preston Avenue in downtown Houston. This facility is the key entry point for assistance and resources for homeless Veterans. When a Veteran

comes in, a comprehensive individual assessment is performed by the staff.

“This assessment helps determine the next best step for the Veteran,” said Gates. “It may be the Veteran has a mental health or substance abuse problem and may benefit from residential substance abuse treatment in coordination with the VA Substance Dependence Treatment Program and a community partner such as the Salvation Army Harbor Lights Program or for women Veterans, the Santa Maria Hostel.”

After his initial assessment, Larry was immediately referred to a social worker who creates comprehensive treatment plans for homeless Veterans with substance use or misuse, or mental health problems and coordinates vocational rehabilitation services.

“I walked in, on my own, and I told them I was in desperate need of housing and a job,” said Larry. “The guy at the front said to wait one minute and that is when Ms. Gates appeared. She took the time to find out all about me and told me about a VA program called TWE.”

The Transitional Work Experience Program (TWE) is a VA work therapy program where Veterans enter a 90-day on-the-job training program. Some Veterans receive a certificate documenting their proficiency in hospital linen processing duties while other Veterans may receive one in general housekeeping.

Others with the desire to develop more advanced skills receive classroom and on-the-job training in hospital safety, body mechanics, patient room cleaning, equipment operation, proper handling of biohazard trash, customer service standards, infection control, special procedures for transporting wheelchair and stretcher patients, and techniques to clean critical care areas.

“It’s a great program,” said Gates. “A lot of Veterans transition into it from

our Incentive Therapy program. The program helps Veterans who have not worked in a while. It gives them a chance to work on things like showing up to work on time, keeping a schedule, having a boss, and having to wear a uniform every day.”

Larry was also given information on the Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUDVASH) program where a Veteran participates in case management with a VA social worker in regards to housing. From there, if eligible, they receive a voucher subsidizing their rent from a housing authority. The Veteran pays about 30 percent of their income to rent. The housing is considered to be permanent as long as the Veteran continues to qualify financially and participates in case management.

“After she got me the TWE job, Ms. Gates let me know that, as a homeless Veteran, I would be eligible for a housing voucher through HUDVASH,” said Larry. “She gave me a list of places where I could move. Since I knew that I would be working at the VA, I chose an apartment close by.”

“We are fortunate to have more than 700 housing vouchers,” said Gates. “I think we have made a positive change in many Veterans’ lives by providing a stable living environment. Once they have that, then they have time to address other things that may be going on in their lives like family issues, education, and job training. Being off the streets and out of a shelter can make a big difference.”

Once he found work and had a stable place to live, Larry was able to turn his TWE position into a permanent, full-time position in the Houston VA’s Food and Nutrition Department. He has worked his way out of the HUDVASH voucher program and now goes to work every day and pays his own rent. ♦ *Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist*

Telemedicine Connects Veterans to Critical Medical Care

Where distance and travel are critical, telemedicine allows patients to see their health care providers and receive immediate care.

HOUSTON - Patients of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) who live far away have better options when it comes to medical care thanks to a new telemedicine program being used in its Anesthesiology Pre-Operative Evaluation Clinic (POEC).

"Telemedicine is an invaluable tool in health care. Where distance and travel are critical, telemedicine plays a big role in delivering effective health care services to our Veterans, utilizing modern technology and communications," said Prasad Atluri, M.D., Anesthesiology Service Line executive and professor of Anesthesiology at Baylor College of Medicine.

Telemedicine is the ability to provide interactive health care using modern, video technology. It allows patients to visit with their health care providers and receive immediate care.

Using a special computer connected to a large monitor, a high definition camera, a microphone, and headphones, Anesthesiology POEC staff members perform pre-surgery exams from Houston while the patient is comfortably located in an exam room at a remote outpatient clinic.

"We want to make sure patients are appropriately evaluated and prepared for surgery," said Sandi-McBean, R.N. "With anesthesia, the most important things we check for are the heart, lungs, and airway. In a telemedicine visit, we listen to their heart and lungs through headphones. With the help of a nurse at the remote

clinic, we are able to check the patient's airway by focusing the camera inside their mouth."

Decreasing the patient's commute reduces his or her stress.

"For many patients, telemedicine saves the patient the time and aggravation driving into Houston from outlying areas," said Belinda Hadnot, POEC Program specialist. "For out-of-state patients, this saves significant time and money previously spent on air fare and lodging."

Telemedicine visits at the Anesthesiology POEC started last July at the Beaumont VA Outpatient Clinic, but plans are in the works to have it available at all seven Houston-area VA clinics.

The decision to fund this project was made because of the myriad of benefits the telemedicine program provides.

The POEC assists patients with pre-operative work-up prior to being admitted to the hospital. This helps patients prepare for a safe surgery process so they can quickly return to normal activities of daily living and family.

"Telemedicine allows health care providers to spend more time on continuity of care," said South Central VA Healthcare Network Director George "Buzz" Gray at a recent MEDVAMC Town Hall Meeting. "It decreases parking headaches and waiting times. Care delayed is not the type of care that we want to provide."

Patients have noticed the difference



Legi Abraham R.N., B.S.N. uses the new telemedicine program to prepare Navy Veteran Lawrence Elliott for surgery. "I would recommend it to other Veterans," said Elliot. "I live in Port Arthur and there is no evening bus that goes from Houston to Port Arthur. I would have had to pay \$50 for a cab ride back home if it wasn't for this telemedicine visit."

and are letting VA staff know.

"Telemedicine has made getting health care easier for me," said Marine Corps Veteran Ronald Broussard, who recently took part in a telemedicine visit. "The service I received today was great; I would do it again."

Members of the POEC staff say the time saved by conducting telemedicine visits has proved invaluable in continuing to make the VA the health care provider of choice.

"The telemedicine visit today saved Mr. Broussard a entire day of driving to and from Houston," said Leslie Yarmush, M.D., Anesthesiology POEC director. "It saved him not only the time and stress of driving, but also eliminated the problem of finding a place to park. He is the 23rd patient we have conducted a telemedicine visit with and all of the patients have absolutely loved it." ♦ *Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)*

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



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

(Located conveniently near the intersection of the Grand Parkway and US-59)

22001 Southwest Freeway, Richmond, Texas 77469
832-595-7700 or toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12800

Free Gun Locks at VA for Veterans and Their Families

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firearm safety program.

"In the last few years, we have distributed a significant number of free gun locks to Veterans and their families," said Adam C. Walmus, M.H.A., M.A., F.A.C.H.E., Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center director at a recent Town Hall Meeting. "Last year, we learned of 12 Veterans who committed suicide; the majority of those Veterans killed themselves with a gun. If they had a gun lock, maybe this would have provided them a few seconds to think about what they were going to do and stopped them from doing it."

Gun safety locks not only protect the lives of Veterans, but also their family members. The device distributed in the Project ChildSafe program is a cable-style gun lock that requires that many types of firearms be unloaded before the cable lock is installed, providing an extra level of safety.

"The main idea is for Veteran family safety. The newspaper reported last week that a child accidentally shot his friend with his dad's gun. If a gunlock had been installed on the weapon, this might not have happened," said Suicide Prevention Coordinator Kathy Molitor,

LCSW. "As a suicide prevention tool, having a gun lock reduces the impulsivity of the action. It creates an extra step that might prevent a suicide from occurring."

Gun safety locks are available from VA primary care physicians, mental health providers, administrative officers, and patient advocates. Gun safety locks are also available at all seven Houston-area VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics.

The gun safety locks are simple to use and can be demonstrated by any member of the DeBakey VA Police Service upon request.

"It is very easy to use the locks," said VA Police Chief Stanley Staton. "The gun locks can also be used on many types of weapons, whether they are magazine-fed or revolvers."

Also, the program has received favorable reviews and the fact that Veteran privacy is respected is a positive feature.

"I think the program is a great deterrent," said Staton. "It gives someone who is thinking of ending their life extra time to think about it and hopefully, realize tomorrow might be a better day." ♦ *Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)*

World's Smallest Heart Pump Offers Veterans New Hope

HOUSTON – A miniature pump, so small that it can be inserted through an artery and placed inside the heart within a few minutes, offers new hope to critically ill heart attack and heart failure patients at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and is a major cause of disability. Almost 700,000 people die of heart disease in the U.S. each year.

The Abiomed Impella 2.5 catheter-based heart pump is considered to be the smallest heart pump in the world. The ventricular assist device replicates the natural function of the heart by assisting the heart's main pumping chamber to drive blood through the body.

"This new technology is helping us save lives by providing temporary support for patients who are experiencing advanced cardiac failure or shock in recovering from heart attack or other injury," said David Paniagua, M.D., F.A.C.C., F.S.C.A.I., co-director, Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. "The device allows the patient's heart to rest and recover in some cases, or it can sustain the patient's life for hours or days until a heart transplant or more

permanent support device is implanted."

"We can also use this pump for high-risk, critically ill patients who need to undergo angioplasty or stenting procedures to open blocked arteries," said Biswajit Kar, M.D., F.A.C.C., Interventional Cardiology director and also an assistant professor of Medicine-Cardiology at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM).

The pump is inserted through the skin in the catheterization laboratory (cath lab) via the main artery in the leg and is threaded up into the left ventricle or main pumping chamber of the heart. It is a brief, minimally invasive procedure that takes the physician about ten minutes to perform.

Approximately two and a half liters of blood are delivered per minute by the pump from the left ventricle into the ascending aorta, providing the heart with active support five times faster than other devices.

Traditionally, treatment involves the standard intra-aortic balloon pump, also inserted with a catheter, which has been in use since the 1950s. This high-tech ventricular assist device provides a new advanced treatment option that can be implanted in the cath lab unlike most ventricle heart assist devices that require

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and is a major cause of disability.



Photo by Bobbi Griner, Communications Director

"This innovative catheter-based heart pump is helping us save lives by providing temporary support for patients who are experiencing advanced cardiac failure or shock in recovering from heart attack or other injury," said David Paniagua, M.D., F.A.C.C., F.S.C.A.I., co-director, Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory, (left) with the device and Irakli Giorgberidze, M.D., Electrophysiology Laboratory director.

open-chest surgery to be implanted.

"This innovative device can also be used to assist the heart during ablation procedures when a patient experiences a life threatening arrhythmia," said Irakli Giorgberidze, M.D., Electrophysiology Laboratory director and assistant professor of Medicine at BCM.

"It is a significant breakthrough that we can implant this cutting-edge device using a minimally invasive approach in the cath lab," said Paniagua, who is also an assistant professor of Medicine at

BCM. "It can pump faster and provide a much greater blood flow than the standard balloon pump."

"We strive to offer our Veterans the latest and the best in the field of cardiology," said Biykem Bozkurt, M.D., F.A.C.C., Cardiology Section chief and a professor of Medicine at BCM. "We are proud the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center has some of the best doctors in the country and offers the latest, minimally invasive alternatives for our Veterans." ♦

Million Veteran Program: A Partnership with Veterans



Discovery → Innovation → Advancement

MVP IS NOW ENROLLING

What is the Million Veteran Program (MVP)?
MVP is a national, voluntary research program conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research & Development, that collects genetic and health information to help lead to new ways of preventing and treating illness. MVP will provide a better understanding of how genes affect health and illness, with the goal of improving health care for Veterans.

Who can participate?
Any Veteran enrolled to receive care in the VA healthcare system can participate.

How do I enroll?
If you are interested in participating today, please see below for directions to the MVP clinic located within your center. You can also call the MVP Information Center at the toll-free number below to schedule an appointment.

Participation involves:

1. Filling out surveys through the mail
2. Completing a one-time, approximately 20 minute, study visit to provide a blood sample for genetic analysis at a VA Medical Center
3. Permitting authorized MVP staff to access information in your medical record on an ongoing basis
4. Agreeing to future MVP contact

Our highest priority is protecting your right to privacy. MVP has extensive safeguards in place to keep your personal information secure and confidential.

Your decision to participate in MVP will not affect access to health care or benefits.

Houston MVP Representatives:
Tammy Natividad, Doralene Smith, Emily Boeckman, and Dr. Rayan Al Jurdi
Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, Room 6B-310



Veterans & Health Administration
Research & Development
Improving Veterans' Lives → www.research.va.gov

For information, visit www.research.va.gov/MVP or call toll-free 866-441-6075.

Caring Nurses in Practice

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model for the African-American soldier on the right."

The patient was Marine Cpl. Terrance Green, who almost thirty years ago, while stationed at the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C., met Sculptor Frederick Hart by happenstance.

"I don't know why he picked me," said Green. "Mr. Hart had actually picked another African-American model first. But, he wasn't quite right so he started looking for someone else.

"He went to the 8th and I Barracks and the public affairs chief recommended me," said Green. "Mr. Hart asked if I was free that afternoon and asked me to go over to his studio. I got paid \$7.30 an hour to model for the sculpture that he was commissioned to create. I had no idea the effect on people that the statue was going to have.

"The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall is great because it has all the names of the Veterans who sacrificed their lives," continued Green. "But with the Three Soldiers Statue, here was a memorial that Veterans could look at and see themselves. No matter what their ethnicity was, they could see themselves."

This famous Three Soldiers Statue is now part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. honoring U.S. service members who fought in the Vietnam War, service members who

died in service in Vietnam/South East Asia, and those service members who were unaccounted for during the War.

The bag that Branscomb recovered included the only known photos of the Three Soldiers Statue in clay, before it was cast in bronze.

"It felt good to return his belongings, especially knowing it contained such rare items," said Branscomb. "This situation is a perfect example of what happens on a daily basis at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. When everyone works together and has the same goals, great things happen."

In addition to the rare photos, the recovered bag also contained a sketch of the African-American soldier statue that Hart had drawn using Green as the model. Hart signed the sketch with a personal message to Green.

"It is amazing to think that Mr. Green's most valuable possessions were in that bag," said Nurse Manager Mary Anne Reese, R.N., M.S.N. "I am so glad Duane took those few minutes to listen, because that's what it is really all about."

The goal of nursing with Dr. Watson's Human Caring Theory is centered around helping the patient gain a higher degree of harmony within the mind, body, and soul. It is achieved through caring transactions and involves the transpersonal caring relationship. ♦
Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)

New Report Recommends Americans Reduce Salt Intake

HOUSTON - According to a Dietary Guidelines for Americans report released earlier this year, it is recommended that most Americans reduce daily salt (sodium) intake to less than 2,300 mg. For Americans aged 51 years or older, African-Americans, and those with hypertension, diabetes, and chronic kidney disease, the report recommends reducing daily salt intake to 1,500 mg.

Sodium is an essential nutrient needed by the body in small quantities, provided that substantial sweating does not occur.

Generally, the higher a person's salt intake, the higher their blood pressure. Most evidence suggests that as salt intake decreases, so does blood pressure.

Blood pressure is categorized as normal (less than 120mmHg over less than 80mmHg), prehypertensive (120-139mmHg over 80mmHg – 89mmHg), or hypertensive (140mmHg and above over 90 mmHg and above).

Prehypertension and hypertension increase the risk for different diseases such as heart attack, stroke, dementia, and chronic kidney disease.

Virtually all Americans consume more salt than they need. The estimated average intake of sodium for all

Americans is approximately 3,400 mg per day.

Most of the sodium Americans consume does not come from the salt shaker. About 75 percent of the sodium in the typical American diet is added to commercial foods during processing or during preparation of restaurant foods.

Only about 25 percent occurs naturally or is added at the table or in cooking by the consumer

In order to lower salt intake, it is important to know which foods are high in salt content. Canned foods,

American cheese, and instant noodles are among the many foods that contain high sodium content.

Alternatives to these foods include using fresh vegetables instead of canned vegetables, choosing cheese with less than 140mg sodium per serving (this can be found on the Nutritional Facts Label), and using regular noodles instead of instant noodles.

It is important to reduce intake of foods that are high in sodium, but the problem of excess sodium intake is often due to the frequent consumption of foods that contain lower amounts of sodium, such as bread. Other sources of sodium include chicken, pizza, and

Most medical evidence suggests that as salt intake decreases, so does blood pressure.



Dietetic Intern Kimberly Jacobson discusses the benefits of a healthy diet with Army Vet Darrell Krump. If you want to learn more about eating better, call 713-791-1414, ext. 4295.

pasta.

Most of these foods can be prepared to be lower in sodium. For example, chicken naturally contains little salt. Chicken dishes can be prepared by purchasing chicken without sodium added to it and by not adding salt before preparation. Alternatives to adding salt include Mrs. Dash, lemon juice, sweet

or hot peppers, onions, garlic, and various herbs.

You can also lower your salt intake by rinsing and draining canned foods; limiting smoked, cured, or processed meats; reading the nutrition label of the foods you purchase; and asking for foods with no or low salt at restaurants.

It is often difficult at first; but eventually, taste buds get use to less salt. Many people report that after a few weeks of living on a reduced salt diet, they don't realize any difference.

For more information, visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's website, www.dietaryguidelines.gov. ♦ Kimberly Jacobson, 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.

**Michael E. DeBakey
Veterans Affairs Medical Center
2002 Holcombe Blvd.
Houston, Texas 77030
713-791-1414
www.houston.va.gov**

Adam C. Walmus, MHA, MA, FACHE, Director
Bryan Bayley, MHA, FACHE, Deputy Director
J. Kalavar, MD, Chief of Staff
Thelma Gray-Becknell, RN, MSN, Associate Director for Patient Care Services
James W. Scheurich, MD, Deputy Chief of Staff
Francisco Vazquez, MBA, Associate Director
Bobbi Gruner, MSBA, APR, Communications Director
Frances M. Burke, Public Affairs Specialist
Nikki Verbeck, Social Media Specialist
Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)
Mike Spratt, BSCE, PE, AudioVisual Supervisor
Shawn James, AudioVisual Specialist
Mike Lane, AudioVisual Specialist
Mike Nichols, MS, AudioVisual Specialist
Regit Sasser, AudioVisual Specialist
Deborah Williams, AudioVisual Specialist

This publication is funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs and is an authorized publication for Veterans of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. Contents of the newspaper are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the United States Government or the Department of Veterans Affairs. *VA Star* is produced bi-monthly by Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center Communications Office, Room 4A-310, mailcode 580/00A-C, telephone number 713-794-7349, e-mail address bobbi.gruner@va.gov. Your comments, suggestions, ideas, and questions are always appreciated. All submissions are subject to editing and will not be returned to the sender.

Outpatient Pharmacy Reducing Wait Times



Marine Veteran Colin Doyle picks up an urgent prescription from Pharmacist Annie Truong.

HOUSTON - The Outpatient Pharmacy at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center fills almost 2,000 prescriptions at its window every day. Many of these are for routine refills and non-urgent medications; consequently, creating long wait times for Veterans who have critical medication needs, are being discharged from the hospital, or were seen in the emergency room.

To help solve this problem and to avoid running out of medicine, Veterans are urged to order their next refill as soon as they receive a delivery. There are several easy and quick ways to refill prescriptions.

Internet (Fast & Easy) - Use VA's My HealthVet website at www.myhealth.va.gov. It is fast, easy, convenient, and secure.

Automated Telephone Refill Hotline (Fast & Easy) - The Automated Prescription Refill Hotline is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. The telephone number is 713-794-7648 or toll-free 1-800-454-1062. The prescription number is located on the top left corner of a prescription container.

Mail - Mail the computerized refill form that came with the prescription. This method takes longer because of postal delivery processing times.

In an effort to reduce unacceptable, long waits for urgent medication needs, the Outpatient Pharmacy will not accept routine refill requests or fill new, non-emergency medications at its window beginning April 2, 2012. Refills and non-urgent medications will be mailed to Veterans.

The Outpatient Pharmacy will make exceptions for emergency situations such as lost or stolen medications, or if a Veteran has run out of critical medications such as insulin or blood pressure medications.

To obtain a new prescription, Veterans must talk with their health care providers or contact the 24-hour VA Telecare Center at 713-794-8985 or toll-free 1-800-639-5137. ♦

Free Meal for Eligible Veterans

HOUSTON - VA is reaching out to homeless Veterans by providing free meals and spending money to eligible homeless Veterans.

The free meals will be offered at Veterans Canteen Service cafeterias to homeless Veterans going to their first VA medical appointment.

New Veterans participating in the Housing and Urban Development and VA Supportive Housing program, who present signed leases, will also receive a \$20 coupon to be used in VCS retail stores located at every VA medical center.

"A free meal and a few free items may not seem like much, but it can be a world of difference to a person getting back on their feet and seeking recovery and independence," said Dwayne Finklea, Houston Veterans Canteen manager. "I know all of our staff members are committed and we can literally bring something to the table when it comes to meeting VA's goal of ending Veteran homelessness for good."

For more information, call 713-791-7133. ♦

Healthy Lifestyle Equation: Eat Better + Move More

HOUSTON - The new Dietary Guidelines for Americans includes a number of tools to help Americans achieve a healthy lifestyle. One is balancing calories to manage weight.

How can you control your weight? There are numerous tips and tricks; however, it all comes down to energy balance.

What is energy balance? Energy or fuel is the power needed to work. Our bodies need fuel to perform vital body functions. Our bodies use that fuel to keep every part working right. Furthermore, our body burns more fuel with more movement and exercise.

When we consume more energy than we use, our body stores this energy in the form of fat. This results in weight gain. When we use more energy than we consume, our body gets rid of stored energy or fat, and we lose weight.

When the energy we consume is equal to the energy expended, we maintain our weight. The simple math equation is **Energy Balance = Calories (In) - Calories (Out)**.

To tip the energy balance and lose weight, we need to decrease the calories consumed, increase the calories expended, or both at the same time for best results.

What can you do to decrease what you consume? Start by looking at the foods, drinks, and portion sizes you eat and drink. Keep a daily food log of what you are eating. Then, think about changes you can make to decrease the calories.

Calories In (Diet)

➔ **Change to Low-Calorie Foods:** These foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean meats such as chicken, turkey, and fish.



To achieve a healthy lifestyle, Navy Veteran Crystal Sasser has added more fruit to her diet. If you want to learn more about eating better, call 713-791-1414, ext. 4295.

Low-fat dairy contains less fat and calories and also provides the protein, calcium, and vitamin D needed to maintain lean body mass. These foods also provide more nutrition than higher calorie foods such as pastries and high-fat meats.

➔ **Watch portion sizes:** To help with right portion sizes for different foods, keep this in mind:

- ✓ A deck of cards equals three ounce portion of meat, poultry, or fish.
- ✓ Two dice equals two ounce portion of cheese.
- ✓ One CD equals one small pancake.
- ✓ A hockey puck equals a bagel.
- ✓ One baseball equals one cup serving of raw vegetables, dry cereal, or low-fat yogurt or milk.

✓ A tennis ball equals one medium piece of fruit.

✓ A computer mouse equals one-half cup cooked vegetables, cooked pasta, cooked beans or a small baked potato.

➔ **Limit sugar-sweetened drinks:** Drinking sugar-sweetened drinks adds excess fuel and sugar. Sugary beverages include juices, punch, drink mixes, sweet tea, sports drinks, and sodas. Therefore, replace these with diet drinks or use sugar substitutes to make your own drinks. Be sure to drink enough water. Adults should drink about eight cups of water a day.

➔ **Do not skip meals:** Not eating is not the best way to lose weight. Our

bodies need fuel throughout the day. The best way to keep your engine revved up is by eating regular meals and healthy snacks. Eating breakfast within 90 minutes of waking helps your body burn fuel throughout the day. Missing meals may trigger excess eating later.

Calories Out (Exercise)

➔ **Exercise:** The best way to increase the fuel our body uses is to move more! Exercising not only helps you maintain or lose weight, but also has many health benefits, such as decreasing your risk of disease and helping you sleep better at night. People between the ages of 18 and 64 years of age should get about 75 to 150 minutes of exercise a week.

➔ **Move more:** Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Use a bicycle to visit a nearby store instead of driving.

➔ **Be creative and have fun:** Think of ways to be active that you enjoy and do them more often. For example, walking, biking, dancing, playing a sport, or swimming. Have fun and vary your activities throughout the week.

➔ **Find an exercise group or a friend:** Find someone you can exercise with. Exercising with someone will motivate you to start or continue an exercise plan.

Finally, taking control of your weight is a life-time effort. Start by making small changes. Building upon small changes can bring about a big change. A weight loss of half a pound to two pounds a week is healthy. For more information, visit www.cnpp.usda.gov. ♦ Nidia Delgado, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern

Veterans' Questions

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

Q: What is the Fisher House Program and can it help families of Veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan?

A: Fisher Houses are temporary lodging facilities designed for the use of families of hospitalized Veterans and active duty service members. They are constructed on military installations and VA facility grounds by the Fisher House Foundation, and then donated to the Department of Defense or VA.

For more information about the Houston Fisher House and criteria for staying there, visit www.houston.va.gov/docs/pres.release/Fisher_House.mbt.

The Fisher House Foundation has asked that family members of hospitalized active duty service members and Veterans be given high priority for lodging at VA Fisher Houses. There is no cost to a family for staying at a VA Fisher House. Each VA Fisher House has a full-time manager, who arranges admissions and who is the point of contact for referrals.

For questions about the VA Fisher House Program, contact the Houston Fisher House Manager at 713-794-8095.

Q: Can I get a hearing aid from VA?

A: To receive hearing aids through VA, you must first enroll for VA health care. The following documents are usually needed at the time of registration: a copy of your DD214, your driver's license, and health insurance (if available).

Once registered (or if already registered), a referral to the Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic may be requested through your assigned VA Primary Care Provider. The audiologist will complete an evaluation and make a clinical determination on the need for

hearing aids and/or other hearing assistive devices. If you are eligible, your hearing aids, repairs, and future batteries will all be at no charge to you.

Q: What is the difference between VA compensation and severance disability?

A: Disability severance pay from the military is granted for a disability received or acquired while in the military and is usually paid in a lump sum. VA compensation is unlike severance pay because it is not paid in a single lump sum, but is paid out over time. If VA were to pay you compensation and severance pay for the same disability, you would be getting paid twice for the same disability. According to law, this is not allowed.

If you filed for other disabilities not related to your disability severance, VA could possibly pay you for those disabilities. For all current information about compensation and pension benefits and requirements, visit www.vba.va.gov/VBA and click on the applicable links.

Q: How do I get more news about the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and Veterans' health care?

A: Send an e-mail to bobbi.gruner@va.gov to sign up to receive news releases and information. You can also visit www.houston.va.gov and click on the "News Center" symbol.

Q: Does VA bill Medicare if I am hospitalized?

A: By law, VA cannot bill Medicare. The VA is obligated to bill private health insurance carriers for services provided

to treat non-service connected conditions. This includes health insurance companies that provide Medicare Supplemental insurance policies such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Cigna, etc.

Q: Is it true that newly-separated Veterans can receive free dental care from VA? What is the eligibility for this service?

A: Recently discharged Veterans whose discharge record (DD214) clearly indicates either that dental services were not provided within 90 days of discharge or that dental treatment was not completed, who served on active duty 90 days or more, and who apply for VA dental care within 90 days of separation from active duty, may receive a one-time treatment for dental conditions and follow up treatment for that specific dental condition.

For more information regarding services available to returning Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve service members of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom visit www.oefoif.va.gov.

Q: Are former Prisoners of War entitled to any special benefits?

A: Former POWs receive special priority for VA health-care enrollment, even if their illness has not been formally associated with their service. Former POWs are exempt from making means test co-payments for inpatient and outpatient medical care and medications; but, they have the same co-pay rules as other Veterans for extended care. They also are now eligible for dental care without any length-of-internment requirement.

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
Lake Jackson VA Outpatient Clinic	979-230-4852
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)
Caregiver Support Hotline	toll-free 1-855-260-3274
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
Vet Center (990 IH 10 North, Ste. 180, Beaumont) ...	409-981-8576

Patient Advocates

Houston/Lake Jackson	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

National Salute to Veteran Patients

February 12-17, 2012

National Salute to Veteran Patients is a great opportunity for community members and organizations to visit the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, meet America's Veterans, and explore various aspects of the facility's volunteer program.

Don't forget to send your Valentine's Day cards and letters to Veteran inpatients by mailing them to MEDVAMC, Mailcode: 580/00X, 2002 Holcombe Blvd., Houston, TX 77030. For more information, call 713-794-7135.