Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center

VA Star

Vol. 11 No. 6 A Newspaper for the Veterans We Serve in Southeast Texas November/December 2012

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

New Clinics in Katy and Tomball Move Forward

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) will open new outpatient clinics in Katy and Tomball next year.

"We are excited about the progress being made on the new VA outpatient clinics for Katy and Tomball," said Adam C. Walmus, M.H.A., M.A., F.A.C.H.E., MEDVAMC director. "Our goal is bring medical care closer to where Veterans live and eliminate the hassles they face fighting traffic and parking in Houston."

The new Katy VA Outpatient Clinic will be located at 750 West Green Blvd. across from the James E. Taylor High School, while the new Tomball VA Outpatient Clinic will be established at 1200 Main Street, the closed Klein's Super Market.

Each health care facility will be approximately 30,000 square feet and provide health care for about 8,000 Veterans.

"For Katy, construction began in July and we are estimating a May 2013 opening. For Tomball and the challenges of converting a former grocery store, we are looking at a July 2013 opening," said Bryan T. Bayley, M.H.A., F.A.C.H.E.-B.C., MEDVAMC deputy director. "We eagerly anticipate cutting the ribbon and opening these new clinics."

The VA-staffed facilities will provide primary health care, mental health care, and women's specialty care in addition to phlebotomy, X-ray, telemedicine, teleretinal imaging, optometry, and audiology services to area Veterans.

☆*Bobbi D. Gruner, Communications Director*

Photo by Larry Steward, Health Systems Specialist

In October 2012, construction workers began hanging drywall at the site for the Katy VA Outpatient Clinic. The 30,000 square foot clinic is expected to open in May 2013.

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It's **FREE** from Your Primary Care Provider!

49 VA Docs Working at Houston VA Listed on U.S. News Top Doctors Roll

Nine physicians are also among the top 1% in the nation in his or her specialty.

Photo by Regit Xauer, AV Specialist

Among the top one percent of doctors in the nation in the field of urology, Dov Kadmon, M.D. is the assistant Urology chief at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. With special expertise in prostate cancer. Kadmon is the co-leader of the Prostate Cancer Program for the Cancer Center at Baylor College of Medicine, has won CapCure Awards for Research in Prostate Cancer, and is a consultant to the NCI Study Section on Clinical Oncology.

HOUSTON – U.S. News & World Report has included 49 physicians who provide patient care at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) on its Top Doctors list.

"I am very pleased with this recognition of our physicians' clinical excellence by U.S. News," said J. Kalavar, M.D., MEDVAMC chief of staff. "This is yet another indicator the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center continually strives to offer the highest quality health care possible for Veterans living in southeast Texas."

U.S. News Top Doctors was developed by U.S. News & World Report in collaboration with Castle Connolly Medical Ltd., publisher of *America's Top Doctors*® and other guides, and was built upon data from *Castle Connolly's Top Doctors*™. Physicians on this list are determined to be in the top 10 percent in their region.

The MEDVAMC boasts 24 staff physicians, along with 25 physician consultants and attending physicians, on the U.S. News Top Doctors list.

In addition, nine physicians (indicated by an asterisk) are also, in Castle Connolly's estimation, among the top one percent in the nation in his or her specialty.

(List available on page 7)

Flu Season - It's Time Again for Your Flu Shot!

HOUSTON – Each year, people at risk of severe, even life-threatening influenza refuse the flu shot. The reasons vary, but among the most frequent excuses health care providers hear are 'I never get the flu;' 'the shot gave me the flu;' or simply, 'I don't like shots.'

If you say you have not had the flu, count yourself lucky. Frequently, younger people have less severe cases of flu and misdiagnose the symptoms as a cold or a few sniffles. But as we age, our immune systems become slower to respond to attacks by fast-growing viruses.

Within 24 hours, each flu virus multiplies into a billion equally aggressive and dangerous flu viruses. The virus continues to reproduce and spread, destroying new cells in your upper respiratory tree at an astonishing rate. After two days, enough damage has been done that you get a sore throat and feel achy. Your body also responds by raising your temperature and increasing sinus and pulmonary secretions.

"As we age, our immune systems become slower to respond to attacks by fast-growing viruses."

During the next two weeks, the virus in your system is the most dangerous. This is especially true for people whose immune systems are not fully developed; children, the elderly, those who are weak, tired, or rundown, and individuals who are immune-compromised or immune-suppressed.

The fevers and sputum production at this time requires a lot of energy and liquids. Even worse, it is at this point that bacteria can invade the lungs causing dangerous bacterial pneumonia. This places an even greater strain on the body as the temperature again rises, lungs become congested, and respiration becomes difficult.

For someone whose body is already suffering chronic lung, metabolic, or heart disease, the body does not have extra energy to fight this new, very aggressive bacterial attack. It is during this time that people need to go to an emergency room, be admitted for hospital care, or die. Around 40,000 Americans die of flu each year and more than 100,000 must be hospitalized. There is no count of how many miss work, school, or perhaps important social events.

After two weeks, you begin to improve as your immune system finally fights back against the invading virus with very specific antibody. But while the acute flu symptoms subside, your body now starts to rebuild tissues and the energy reserves. Recovery can take another two to three weeks during which you feel unmotivated, weak, and tired.

Photo by Regit Vaser, AV Specialist

Prime Care Nurse Mary Jewettetahoo-Suter, L.V.N. gives Army Veteran Enrique Caballero his flu shot. Free flu shots are now available for Veterans, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston and its outpatient clinics in Beaumont, Conroe, Galveston, Lake Jackson, Lufkin, Richmond, and Texas City.

People who have suffered with the flu can testify to those who refuse the vaccine that they do not know how bad it really is.

VA health care professionals are charged with the responsibility to protect Veterans against the flu with the best that health care science has to offer. Vaccination is very effective in shortening the duration of illness, decreasing the severity of illness, decreasing the need for hospitalization, decreasing work time lost; and most importantly, decreasing deaths from flu.

For people who believe the vaccine gave them the flu, there are basically two ways this can appear to happen. First, vaccinations are generally given during the fall. Every year in September, three major viruses spread through southeast Texas before the flu even arrives.

These viruses cause colds that can at times appear to be flu. But, those who have had the real flu know that common colds are much milder by comparison. It is impossible for the vaccine material to give you the flu. It is a "dead" vaccine and cannot make anyone sick.

Second, some people may have a reaction to the vaccine as if it was "live." The body responds to the invasion of vaccine material by increasing the body temperature as well as nasal and lung secretions.

This may be interpreted as the flu, but is it really the flu? No, this mild response only lasts a few days. Once the body reacts to it, the material is consumed and the body relaxes. The vaccine is definitely not transmissible and will definitely not make anyone else sick.

However, experts agree if you have this type of response to a "dead" vaccine, your body will react strenuously to the real flu and suffer a very serious flu infection. These individuals really do need to be vaccinated.

When you are not vaccinated, the flu can attack and destroy upper respiratory tissue unchallenged for nearly two weeks. Hospitalizations and death occur during this time.

How does the flu vaccine work and why is it the best way to protect against the flu? With a natural flu virus infection, it takes two weeks for the body to build enough immunity. During these two weeks, the body is being attacked by a growing number of flu virus. But, when a person is vaccinated, the vaccine kick-starts the body into producing specific antibody supported immunity.

After two weeks, the body has not only produced antibody that can specifically attack the flu virus; but, it has also made factory-like cells that can produce huge amounts of antibody in a couple of days when needed.

The good news is that when the body is exposed to real flu virus, the body fights back very effectively from the time of viral invasion. The virus rarely gets enough of a head start to make the patient sick for even a day. Most people do not even know that they have been exposed to flu. Vaccine-produced antibody is a very effective first line defense for the body.

This year, an abundant supply of influenza vaccine is available at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) and its outpatient clinics. Vaccinations will continue through March 2013. Veterans who should seriously consider vaccination are:

- ✓Over 50 years of age.
- ✓Residents of long-term facilities.
- ✓Veterans with long-term health problems of the heart, lungs, asthma, kidneys, or diabetes and other metabolic diseases.
- ✓Veterans with muscle or nerve disorders involving swallowing or breathing.
- ✓Veterans with weakened immune systems.
- ✓Women Veterans who may be pregnant during the flu season.

For more information, contact the MEDVAMC Preventive Medicine Program at (713) 794-8768 or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at *www.cdc.gov/flu.*

Charles E. Wright, Ph.D., Preventive Medicine Coordinator

A Word from the Director . . .

Help Us Remove the Roadblocks

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

HOUSTON - Every day, our doctors, nurses, health techs, and support staff attempt to contact patients about such critical health care issues as prescriptions, lab and test results, and follow-up appointments only to run into roadblocks. These roadblocks are in the form of outdated and wrong patient contact information.

Specifically, I am talking about bad telephone numbers and addresses. This fundamental breakdown of communication creates unnecessary delays and frustration in providing timely, critical medical care to you.

Please take the time during your next VA appointment to check the accuracy of your contact information. Make sure the best telephone number to contact you is listed in our database.

You may also call our Patient Access Center at 713-794-7748 to make updates.

Wrong telephone numbers affect other aspects of your health care. This includes patient wait times. Why? Because we use a computerized telephone system to get in touch with you. This system reminds Veterans about upcoming appointments, and allows you to cancel or confirm.

When our telephone system runs into a bad telephone number, it is unable to complete the call. We don't know if you are going to make your appointment, so we automatically save it.

If you are a "No Show," another Veteran has missed a basic opportunity to receive medical care. This increases your wait times for appointments.

Please don't be a "No Show." Call the Appointment Center at 713-794-8985 or toll free 1-800-639-5137 to cancel or reschedule your appointment so it may be used by a fellow Veteran in need. Besides, you might be that Veteran next time.

Vietnam Veteran and Descendent of Famous American Indian War Chief Wins Cancer Fight

Photo by Bobbi Grover, Communications Director

The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center is one of the few hospitals in the country offering groundbreaking Transanal Endoscopic Microsurgery to treat rectal cancer. "I was only in the hospital overnight and didn't even know I had surgery when I woke up," said Marine Veteran Leland Parker with Staff Surgical Oncologist Avo Artinyan, M.D.

HOUSTON – The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) is one of the few hospitals nationwide offering Transanal Endoscopic Microsurgery (TEM), a minimally invasive alternative to radical abdominal surgery for the excision of certain rectal polyps and early stage rectal tumors.

Marine Veteran Leland Parker, 64, discovered he had rectal cancer after a routine fecal occult blood test and colonoscopy at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Serving 13 months in Vietnam (1967-1968) with the 3rd Marine Division, Parker believes he has angels watching over him.

"I had quite a few close calls in Vietnam and lost some good buddies," said Parker, the great grandson of Quanah Parker, the last chief of the Quahada Comanche Indians. "After Vietnam, I had a bad car accident and almost died. When I heard about the cancer, I didn't let it bother me."

The American Cancer Society reports that colorectal cancer, defined as cancer that starts in the large intestine or the rectum, affects more than 103,000 Americans each year. Colorectal cancer is currently the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Bee Gees' Robin Gibb, Audrey Hepburn, Eartha Kitt, and Milton Berle all died from colorectal cancer. While more adults are being screened, one in three adults still ignore the disease.

TEM has revolutionized the treatment of this type of cancer. Performed through the rectum with specially designed microsurgical instruments, TEM has made it possible to excise lesions high inside the rectum that otherwise would be accessible only by major abdominal surgery.

"While not appropriate for every patient with rectal cancer, the benefits of TEM for patients with early cancers or pre-cancers can be dramatic compared to radical rectal resection," said Staff Surgical Oncologist Avo Artinyan, M.D., who is also an assistant professor of Surgery/Surgical Oncology at Baylor College of Medicine. "No abdominal surgery, no large incision or scar, no intra-abdominal infections, no risk of hernia, no temporary or permanent colostomy, no leaks, almost no discomfort, faster recovery, and a shorter hospital stay.

Performed under general anesthesia, TEM is a relatively painless method of completely removing abnormal rectal growths from inside the rectum. Dissolvable suture and clips are either absorbed or expelled from the body naturally, so there is no need for follow-up suture removal.

Parker underwent TEM in September and is now cancer-free. He is looking forward to getting back to wood carving, playing the flute, and spending time with his grandchildren and great-grandson.

"I was only in the hospital overnight and didn't even know I had surgery when I woke up," said Parker, who enjoys wood carving and playing the flute. "The nurses were great, took care of me, and really did their job. I can't say enough about Dr. Artinyan and his expertise. Everyone told me the Houston VA was the best place."

TEM requires a minimal access surgeon who possesses advanced laparoscopic skills since it is a technically demanding form of endoscopic surgery performed in a very confined space.

"It is immensely gratifying we are able to save the lives of our Nation's heroes like Mr. Parker," said Samir S. Awad, M.D., Operative Care Line executive and associate professor of Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine. "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."

Photo courtesy of Leland Parker

Marine Veteran Leland Parker served 13 months in Vietnam (1967-1968) with the 3rd Marine Division. "The nurses were great, took care of me, and really did their job. I can't say enough about Dr. Artinyan and his expertise. Everyone told me the Houston VA was the best place," said Parker.

Houston National Cemetery Gravesite Locator

Access the gravesite locator from any smart phone or tablet pc by scanning this QR Code:

or visiting the mobile website:
http://m.va.gov/gravelocator/#N851

Family Caregiver Workshop

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) will hold a Family Caregiver Workshop on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2012, 10 a.m. at the Houston Fisher House located on Sheehan Drive on the VA complex.

More than 65 million people, 29 percent of the U.S. population, provide care for a chronically ill, disabled or aged family member or friend during any given year and spend an average of 20 hours per week providing care for their loved one.

If you are the family caregiver of a Veteran who was injured post-9/11, you may be eligible for additional services through VA, including a stipend, comprehensive training, and medical coverage through VA if you are not already covered by a plan.

With VA's Caregiver Support Line, toll-free 1-855-260-3274, assistance is just a quick phone call away. Whether you are in need of immediate assistance or have questions about what services you may be eligible for, the caring licensed professionals who answer can tell you about the assistance available from VA, help you access services, or connect you with a VA caregiver support coordinator.

The Workshop's special guest speaker is Jo Clancy, L.C.S.W., a social worker who has extensive training and experience in working with Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

For more information, LaShanta Dorsey-Lee, M.S.N.-R.N. at 713-791-1414, ext. 3319 or Tommie Espinosa, L.C.S.W. at 713-791-1414, ext. 5047.

VA Psychiatry Research: Making a Real Difference in the Lives of Veterans

HOUSTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ranks as one of the nation's leaders in health research. Each year, dedicated researchers and volunteers work together on thousands of studies at VA medical centers, outpatient clinics, and nursing homes. These studies have contributed significantly to advancements in health care for Veterans and other Americans.

Research studies are important, because they can help provide an organized, methodical way to learn more about a specific concern; answers about whether or not a treatment is effective; a better understanding about which health care services are effective and efficient; opportunities to test whether a drug or piece of equipment is safe and effective; and answers to questions about the best way to treat or prevent an illness.

If you are asked to participate or are interested in participating in a research project, try to learn as much information as you can about the study.

Here are some questions that may help you decide whether volunteering is right for you. Who is doing this study and what information might it provide that will be helpful to me? Will my health be affected in any way if I take part in this study? Is there a cost to participate in this study or will I be paid to participate? How long will this study last? What happens after the study ends? What other options do I have if I decide not to take part in this study? Is the information collected from me secure and will it be kept confidential?

Most studies compensate you for your time. You may withdraw from a study at any time without penalty and without it negatively affecting your VA benefits in any way.

Supported with more than $26.8 million annually, research conducted by Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) staff ensures Veterans access to cutting-edge medical and health care technology. With 643 active research projects, the MEDVAMC Research & Development Program is an integral part of the medical center's mission and plays a very important role in the health care Veterans receive.

Psychiatry research studies taking place at the MEDVAMC include:

Photo by Kelly Gerald, Communications Director

"My primary care doc told me about the Million Veteran Program and I got involved because I think the program will help other Veterans," said Navy Veteran Gerald Blankenship pictured with Research Assistant Tammy Natividad.

Million Veteran Program
"Million Veteran Program (MVP): A Partnership with Veterans" conducted by VA Researcher Al Jurdi: A study designed to provide a better understanding of how genes affect health and illness, with the goal of improving health care for Veterans. *For more information, contact Tammy Natividad, 713-791-1414, ext. 6911.*

Bipolar & Schizophrenia
"Genetics of Functional Disability in Schizophrenia and Bipolar Illness" conducted by VA Researcher Al Jurdi: An outpatient study requiring one 2-4 hour visit to better understand genetically-based disability within Veterans diagnosed with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact Emily Boeckman 713-791-1414, ext. 6938.*

Depression
"Efficacy and Tolerability of Riluzole in Treatment Resistant Depression" conducted by VA Researcher Mathew: An outpatient medication-based study testing the effectiveness of an investigational drug in treating depression. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact Alexandra Foulkes, toll-free 1-877-96-226-6663.*

Methamphetamine Dependence
"An Ace Inhibitor or an Angiotensin Receptor Blocker as a Treatment for Meth and Cocaine Dependence" conducted by VA Researcher Newton: A 10-day inpatient medication-based study for non-treatment seeking individuals with stimulant addictions. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact James Mahoney, toll-free 1-877-228-5777.*

Tobacco Dependence
"Neuroimaging of the Reward System in Tobacco Smokers" conducted by VA Researcher Salas: A neuroimaging study requiring two, one hour, visits to investigate the effects of nicotine on the brain. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact Asassia C., 713-798-3502.*

Tobacco Dependence
"Doxazosin XL as a novel Pharmacotherapy for Smoking Cessation" conducted VA Researcher Yoon: A 2-week medication-based outpatient study for patients who want to quit smoking cigarettes. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact Dr. Yoon, 713-791-1414, ext. 4153.*

Cocaine Dependence
"Pharmacogentics of Doxazosin for Cocaine Dependence" conducted by VA Researcher Kosten: A 17-week medication-based study testing the effectiveness of an investigational drug for cocaine dependence disorders. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact Dr. Domingo, toll-free 1-877-807-3072.*

Cocaine Dependence
"Exercise as a Behavioral Treatment for Cocaine Dependence" conducted by VA Researcher De La Garza: A 4-week study investigating exercise as a potential treatment for cocaine and nicotine dependence disorders. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact James Mahoney, toll-free 1-877-228-5777.*

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder & Traumatic Brain Injury
"Exposure therapy for Veterans with PTSD" conducted by VA Researcher Teng: A 6-week outpatient psychotherapy technique to treat patients with PTSD and Panic Disorders. *For more information, contact Lonique Pritchett, 713-791-1414, ext. 6149.*

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder & Traumatic Brain Injury
"Doxazosin as a Treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome" conducted by VA Researcher Newton: A one week outpatient medication-based study to treat PTSD in Veterans. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact James Mahoney, toll-free 1-877-228-5777.*

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder & Traumatic Brain Injury
"Evaluation of the Efficacy of the CRF1 Antagonist GSK561679 in Women with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" conducted by VA Researcher Mathew: An outpatient study testing the effectiveness of a new investigational drug for treating PTSD in women. (Compensation provided.) *For more information, contact Alexandra Foulkes, toll-free 1-877-96-226-6663.*

For more information about VA Research and additional research studies, visit *www.research.va.gov*

Have you been ABUSED, ATTACKED, or INJURED?

Have you experienced a traumatic event such as:
- rape
- physical assault
- child abuse
- a severe car accident
- a natural disaster

Does this event continue to affect you?
- Upsetting memories
- Irritability
- Bad dreams or difficulty sleeping
- Trouble concentrating

You may be eligible to participate in a study of an investigational medication for PTSD conducted by the Mood and Anxiety Program of Baylor College of Medicine, the major affiliate of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

There is no cost for participation.

1-877-96-BCM-MOOD
1-877-96-226-6663

If you are a WOMAN between 21-64 years of age

Homeless Veterans find Essential Services at Stand Down

For resources available to homeless Veterans, call 713-794-7848 or toll-free 1-877-4AID VET.

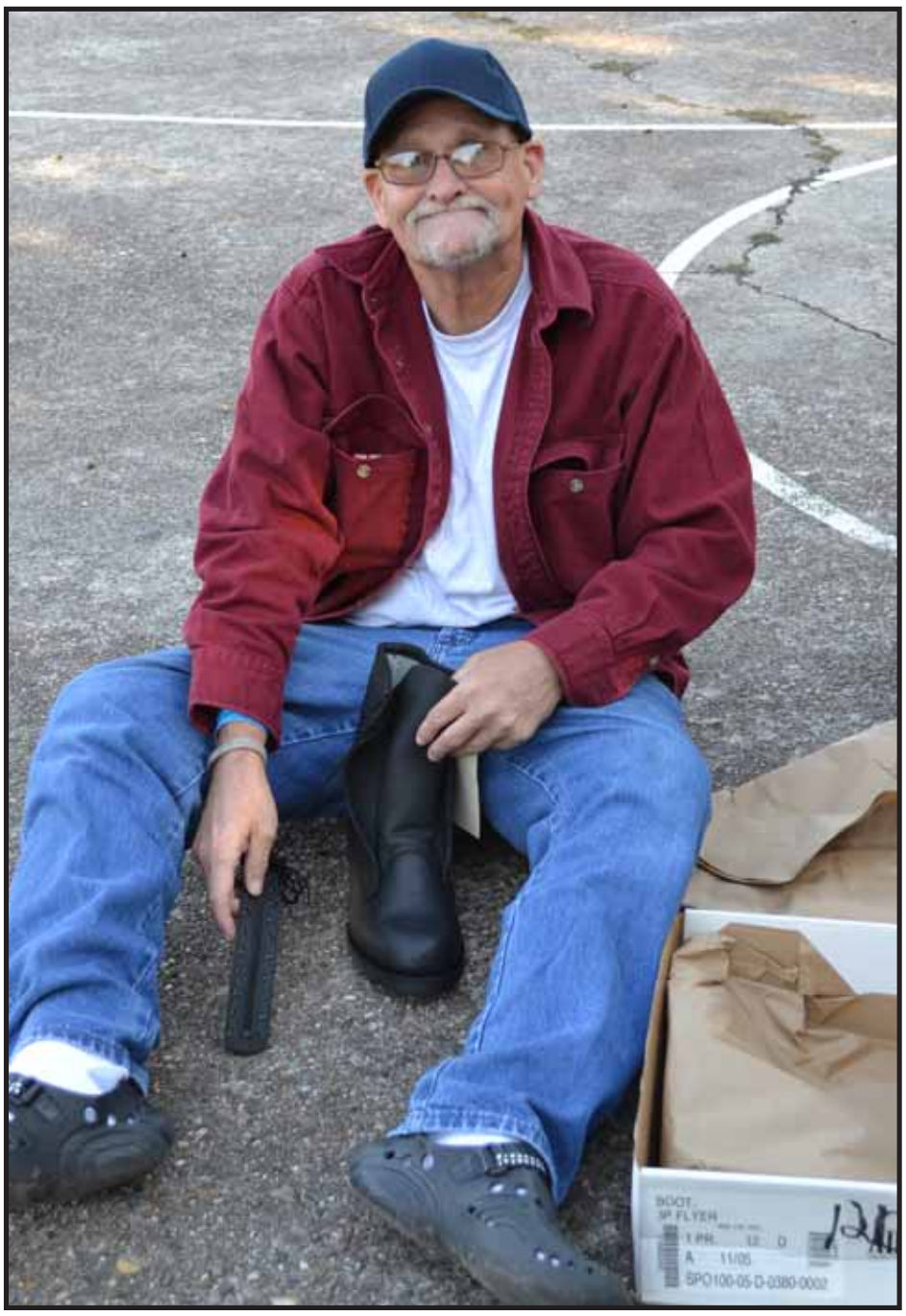


Photo by Fran Burke, Public Affairs Specialist

"I think this is wonderful! I was able to get a blanket, warm coat, and boots," said Marine Veteran Jack R. "This is going to help me survive the winter." The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center provided homeless services to approximately 2,000 Veterans in 2011, and is increasing efforts to reach individuals who traditionally avoid assistance.

HOUSTON - The Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, in cooperation with more than 75 VA and community agencies and programs, held the 12th Annual Houston Stand Down for homeless Veterans on October 4, 2012 at the Emancipation Park Community Center

The Annual Stand Down provided homeless Veterans with the opportunity to access a broad spectrum of services at one convenient location and to create a plan for re-entry into mainstream society. The event brought a wide range of specialized resources together to provide homeless Veterans with comprehensive medical and psychosocial services. It also offered programs specific to women and Veterans of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The 2012 Stand Down was a tremendous success," said Luis Paulino, HCHV director. "A record number of 75 VA and community programs provided information and services to 527 male Veterans and 38 female Veterans which included 26 Veterans from Iraq/Afghanistan. We also enrolled 15 new Veterans into VA health care."

"This is my first Stand Down. Coming out here, seeing people and agencies that want to help you no matter what, just blows my mind," said Army Veteran Frank W. "This has gotten me connected with a lot of services that will help me get back on my feet."

B.P.O. Elks provided approximately 700 hot meals along with sack lunches. Veterans were also provided clean clothes, health screenings, laundry, and shower services. Rapid HIV testing was provided to Veterans along with VA and Social Security benefits counseling, legal aid, and referrals to a variety of other necessary services, such as housing, employment, and substance abuse treatment from a variety of community agencies.

"I think this is wonderful! I was able to get a blanket, warm coat, and boots," said Marine Veteran Jack R. "This is going to help me survive the winter."

In 2009, VA set a goal of ending homelessness among Veterans by 2015. Here in Houston, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center is doing its part through partnerships with city, state and federal agencies, a wide-array of programs and services, and through this annual Stand Down.

The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center provided homeless services to approximately 2,000 Veterans in 2011, and is increasing efforts to reach individuals who traditionally avoid assistance.

The HCHV Program is committed to assisting homeless Veterans with chronic mental illnesses to reach their highest level of functioning. HCHV staff assists Veterans with securing safe housing reflective of their abilities and preferences, as well as assistance with obtaining desired skill development services.

"The dedication of our community partners and 100 volunteers added to the success of this year's Stand Down," said Jeri Gates, 2012 Stand Down coordinator. "Their dedication, commitment and support in assisting Veterans in need is immeasurable."

VA offers a toll-free telephone number, staffed around the clock by trained professionals, to help homeless Veterans, their families and at-risk people. The number is 877-4AID-VET (or 877-424-3838).

More information about VA's homeless programs in Houston is available at *www.houston.va.gov/Homeless_Programs.asp*. ☆ *Frances M. Burke, Public Affairs Specialist*

On average, Americans gain one to two pounds during the holidays

Surviving Holiday Food Indulgences

HOUSTON - The holidays are finally here; Thanksgiving, Hannukkah, St. Nicholas Day, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and New Year's and all the parties and get-togethers that go along with them. But, all these celebrations sometimes means over-eating and weight gain.

On average, Americans gain one to two pounds during the holiday season. Eating healthy is difficult this time of year; a cookie here and some pie there.

If you have settled into an exercise routine and healthy diet and are worried about undoing all the good you have done all year long, here are some tips to make healthy choices this holiday season.

Don't Skip Meals in preparation for a feast. Do not attend a party hungry so you don't overeat. Have a snack such as a piece of fruit or vegetable beforehand to make you feel full. Try balancing larger, higher calorie meals with lighter choices the rest of the day.

Avoid Appetizers, which can become an opportunity for mindless eating. Instead, choose vegetables, chicken, and fish without cream sauces, fiber grains, and beans. You are at a party so socialize to minimize the temptation.

Limit Alcohol intake because alcohol adds calories and contains no nutrients. Drink in moderation and hydrate with water between adult beverages. Non-alcoholic beverages can also be high in sugar and calories.

Leave the Table when you are finished. If you linger, you may be tempted to eat even though you are not hungry. Offer to help with dishes, clear the table, or play a game with the kids.

Bring a Healthy Dish to a holiday gathering. This is your time to show how healthy foods can be just as good.

Modify Your Recipes. Substitute an equal amount of fruit puree like applesauce for oil in cake, brownies, or bread. The fruit will add flavor and keep your baked goods moist.

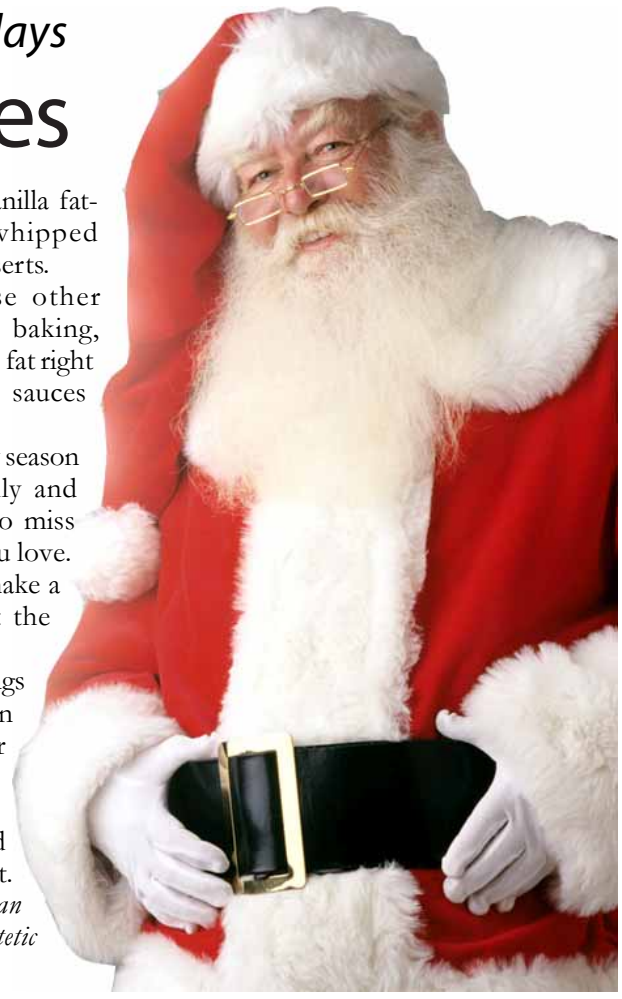
Use fat-free milk, yogurt, sour cream, and cream cheese instead of the whole-fat products. Try vanilla fat-free yogurt instead of whipped cream on your favorite desserts.

Instead of frying use other cooking methods such as baking, grilling, or roasting. Skim the fat right off the top of gravies and sauces with a slotted spoon.

Finally, enjoy the holiday season by focusing on your family and friends. You do not have to miss out on the holiday foods you love. Small cuts in calories will make a big difference throughout the entire holiday season.

The most important things are moderation and to return to your regular routine after the holidays.

For more information, contact a VA registered dietitian at 713-792-1414, ext. 6616/4295/3976. ☆ *Megan Erickson, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern*



Diets: Quick Won't Stick!

HOUSTON - Weight is a tough issue. The majority of us realize how important it is to keep our weight in check. However, when we set our minds on something, we usually want it now and fast. Our idea of wanting something fast is understandable because in today's world, calorie-packed food comes fast and easy.

Unfortunately, quick weight loss usually does not work in the long term. In addition, losing weight too fast may result in re-gaining more weight than you lost. This creates frustration and discourages you from trying to lose weight.

To be successful, a steady, healthy, and sustainable weight loss is one to two pounds per week.

In order to have a successful weight loss, you should strive for a slow and steady loss. Besides, reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is important for overall health and can help prevent and control many diseases and conditions.

When setting a weight loss goal, starting off with a small achievable goal can go a long way. Aiming to lose ten pounds initially may seem less intimidating and more realistic than aiming to lose sixty pounds. Smaller goals can be tracked and evaluated sooner.

Keep in mind that once your initial goal is met, you can always start a new one. When setting a goal, ask yourself: "What should my initial weight loss goal be?" and "How fast should I plan to lose this weight?"

A good starting point is to set an initial weight loss goal of ten percent of what you currently weigh. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, set a weight loss goal of 20 pounds. If you weigh 180 pounds, try to lose 18 pounds.

How fast should this weight loss occur? A steady and healthy weight loss is one to two pounds per week. This could lead to a weight loss of eight to 16 pounds in two months.

Losing weight is twofold: eat less and move more. One pound of weight equals 3,500 calories. This means in order to lose one pound per week, you only need to cut back 500 calories per day.

To accomplish your goal of cutting 500 calories each day may actually be easier than it sounds. This goal can be achieved by eating healthy foods, eating smaller portions which will cut down on the calories consumed, and increasing your physical activity which will increase the calories you burn.

Why starve yourself if you can lose weight by simply cutting back on a few calories and increasing your activity level? Your best friends when it comes to losing weight and keeping the weight off are healthy foods and eating smaller portions, slowly.

Photo by Regit Sasser, AV Specialist

From left, Food Service Worker Aaron Failey, Dietetic Intern Kalyn Layton, and Food Service Worker Joseph Butler make patient lunches using whole wheat bread. If you want to learn more about healthy diet options, speak with a registered dietitian at 713-791-1414, ext. 6616.

Remember, if you want to lose weight, quick will *not* stick! Aim for a slow and steady weight loss and start with a realistic, achievable goal. Do not be afraid to set a goal. *You* are in control of your diet, your exercise, and your weight.

The bottom line for achieving a healthy weight is to exercise, forget the trendy diets, turn off the television, skip the sugared drinks, and think before you eat.

Finally, the health benefits of staying at a healthy weight are huge and worth the effort. So, move more, choose smaller portions, and eat more slowly.

For more information about making diet and physical activity changes visit *www.choosemyplate.gov* or talk with a VA Registered Dietitian at 713-791-1414, ext. 3976, 4295, or 6166. ✰ *Lucia Hisse, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern*

Veterans are never alone . . . Support Groups are Available

Amputee Support Group
Meets 4th Wednesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Dining Room. Facilitators: Stacy Flynn, 713-794-7819 & Rosa Lane-Smith, 713-791-1414, ext. 4034

Breast Cancer Survivors' Support Group
Meets last Tuesday every month, noon, Cancer Center Family Room 4C-365. Facilitators: Magdalena S. Ramirez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5289 & Gail Menchaca, 713-791-1414, ext. 3936

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

Cardiac ICD Support Group
Meets 3rd Friday of every Month, 2 p.m., 3rd Floor Cardiology Department Patient Education Room. Facilitator: Regina Bell, 713-794-7363

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

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

Talk to the Social Worker in Your Clinic or on Your Unit for more information.

Parkinson's Disease Education & Support Group
Contact facilitator for more information: 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, Room 2B-210. Facilitators: Kathryn Kertz, 713-791-1414, ext. 4192 & Laura Lawhon, 713-794-7814

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

Michael E. DeBakey
Veterans Affairs Medical Center
2002 Holcombe Blvd.
Houston, Texas 77030
713-791-1414

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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
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Mike Lane, AudioVisual Specialist
Regit Sasser, AudioVisual Specialist
Deborah Williams, AudioVisual Specialist
Kenneth Davis, Communications Assistant

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Houston VA Docs Among the Best in the Country

(continued from page 1)

Horacio J. Adrogue, M.D.
Nephrologist
Special Expertise: Transplant Medicine-Kidney, Hypertension, and Fluid/Electrolyte Balance

Timothy Boone, M.D., Ph.D.*
Urologist
Special Expertise: Incontinence, Neuro-Urology, and Urinary Reconstruction

Blase A. Carabello, M.D.*
Cardiologist
Special Expertise: Heart Valve Disease

Anita Deswal, M.D.
Cardiologist
Special Expertise: Echocardiography and Heart Failure

Donald T. Donovan, M.D.*
ENT - Otolaryngologist
Special Expertise: Head & Neck Cancer, Thyroid Disorders, Vocal Cord Disorders, and Voice Disorders

Hashem B. El-Serag, M.D.
Gastroenterologist
Special Expertise: Barrett's Esophagus, Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, and Liver Cancer

Aimee Garcia, M.D.
Geriatrician
Special Expertise: Wound Healing and Wound Care

Fae H. Garden, M.D.
Physiatrist
Special Expertise: Musculoskeletal Disorders, Spinal Rehabilitation, and Stroke Rehabilitation

John A. Goss, Jr., M.D.
Surgeon
Special Expertise: Transplant-Liver

Richard J. Hamill, M.D.
Infectious Disease Specialist

Teresa G. Hayes, M.D., Ph.D.
Medical Oncologist

Michael H. Heggeness, M.D., Ph.D.
Orthopedic Surgeon

Dov Kadmon, M.D.*
Urologist
Special Expertise: Prostate Cancer

Thomas A. Kent, M.D.*
Neurologist
Special Expertise: Neuro-Psychiatry and Stroke

Thomas R. Kosten, M.D.*
Addiction Psychiatrist
Special Expertise: Alcohol Abuse, Cocaine Addiction, Opiate Addiction, and Psychopharmacology

Panagiotis Kougias, M.D.*
Vascular Surgeon
Special Expertise: Carotid Artery Surgery, Endovascular Surgery, Stroke, and Vascular Reconstruction

Mark E. Kunik, M.D.
Geriatric Psychiatrist
Special Expertise: Dementia

Ida F. Orengo, M.D.*
Dermatologist
Special Expertise: Melanoma, Mohs' Surgery, and Skin Cancer

Yasser H. Shaib, M.D.
Gastroenterologist
Special Expertise: Endoscopic Ultrasound, Gastrointestinal Cancer, Pancreatic/Biliary Endoscopy, Interventional Endoscopy, and Encoscopic Therapies

Christopher P. Smith, M.D.
Urologist
Special Expertise: Incontinence, Neuro-Urology, and Voiding Dysfunction

Stephanie F. Sneed, M.D.
Physiatrist
Special Expertise: Botox for Pain and Brain Injury Rehabilitation

Samuel Stal, M.D.*
Plastic Surgeon
Special Expertise: Cleft Palate/Lip, Craniofacial Surgery, and Maxillofacial Surgery

George E. Taffet, M.D.
Geriatrician

Daniel Yoshor, M.D.
Neurosurgeon
Special Expertise: Brain Mapping, Brain Tumors, Endoscopic Surgery, Epilepsy, Pituitary Tumors, Skull Base Surgery, and Stereotactic Radiosurgery

For more information about health care providers at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, visit *www.houston.va.gov* and search the "Our Doctors" section.

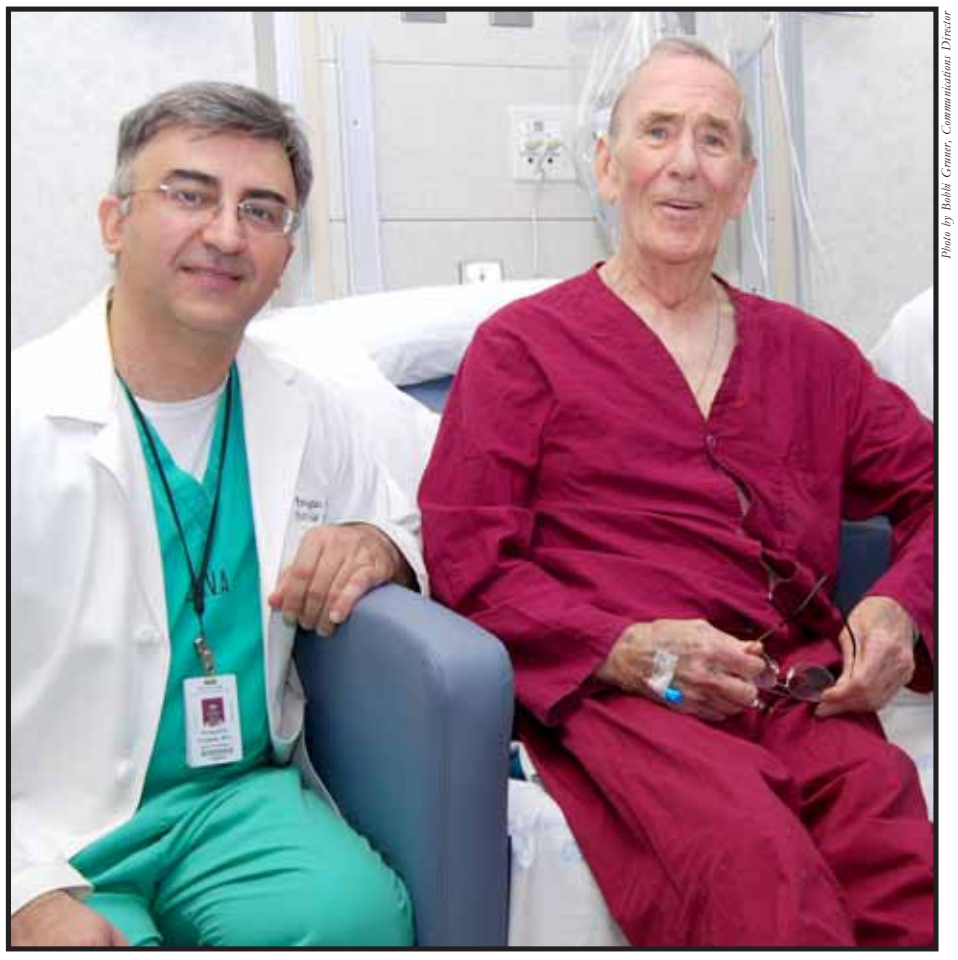


Photo by Bobbi Cruner, Communications Director

Among the top one percent of doctors in the nation in the field of vascular surgery, Panagiotis Kougias, M.D. is the Vascular Surgery Section Chief at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. Above, Kougias is pictured with one of his patients, Medal of Honor Recipient David McNerney. Board certified in surgery and vascular surgery, he has special expertise in carotid artery surgery, endovascular surgery, stroke, and vascular reconstruction.

Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-8255
PRESS 1

The Veterans Crisis Line is a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs resource that connects Veterans in crisis and their families with qualified, caring VA professionals through a confidential toll-free hotline and on-line chat.

SPRINT
Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial

If you join the SPRINT Research Study, you will receive at no cost:

- ✓ Blood Pressure Medication(s)
- ✓ Physical Exams
- ✓ Lab Tests
- ✓ Memory Tests
- ✓ EKGs (Electrocardiograms)

You must be at least 50 years old; have high blood pressure, with systolic (upper) number of at least 130; and have no history of diabetes or stroke.

To learn more about this study, contact Cathy Anderson at 713-794-8912.

Supported by:

VA HEALTH CARE Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century
National Heart Lung and Blood Institute
NIDDK National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
National Institute on Aging

Veterans' Questions

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

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: My father served during World War II. Is he eligible for nursing home care?
A: Veterans requiring nursing home care for a service-connected condition or a Veteran rated 70 percent or more have mandatory eligibility. All other Veterans are eligible on a resource and space-available basis. For more information, ask to talk to a VA social worker.

Q: What is an Advance Directive and why do I need one?
A: As a VA patient, you have a say in the health care you receive. Your doctor will explain what treatments are available so you can decide which one is best for you. But, if you are too ill to understand or make decisions for yourself, you want to make sure your wishes are known.

An Advance Directive is a legal form you create that helps your doctors and family members understand your wishes about health care. It can help them decide about treatments should you become mentally or physically unable to make those decisions yourself. Your VA health care team (nurse, social worker, or chaplain), primary care doctor, or attorney can assist you in completing the required paperwork. Contact the Chaplain Service at 713-794-7125 if you have questions.

Q: Is there a good website that contains Veteran benefit information?
A: Yes, the National Resource Directory is a comprehensive, free, online tool for wounded, ill, and injured service-members, Veterans, and their families.

Visitors can find an extensive range of information about Veterans' benefits, including disability and pension benefits, VA health care, and educational opportunities. The site also provides information for those who care for Veterans, such as access to emotional, financial, and community assistance.

A recent addition to the Web site is a specialized section where users can find help for homeless Veterans. Other enhancements include a fast, accurate search engine; a "bookmark and share" capability that allows users to share valuable resources on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites; and a news feature. Resources are added daily: *www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov.*

Q: Can I email my doctor?
A: Yes. With secure messaging through VA's My Health*e*Vet website, patients can contact their physician and health care team and communicate with them about any health-related questions or concerns.

Patients can also request lab and test results, receive a doctor's explanation, renewals of medications, consultations, and appointments. Gaining access to secure messaging is easy.

First, enroll in My Health*e*Vet by going to *www.myhealth.va.gov* and click on register. Print and complete the form to get an IPA (In-Person Authentication). Bring the form to any VA medical facility to be verified by a VA staff member.

Q: Is it okay to ask my doctor or nurse to wash their hands?
A: Yes. It is your right to ask each and every one of health care providers to clean their hands or wear gloves. Doctors, nurses, dentists, and other health care providers come into contact with lots of bacteria and viruses. So, before they treat you, ask them if they have cleaned their hands. Health care providers should wear clean gloves when they perform tasks such as taking throat cultures, taking blood, touching wounds, and examining any part of your body.

Q: Any advice on how to encourage my husband to seek mental health care?
A: The VA offers a free Telephone Call Center providing assistance to family members and friends who are trying to encourage their Veteran to seek care for possible mental health issues.

The "Coaching Into Care" service offers free coaching to callers with the goal of connecting Veterans with VA care. Callers are coached on solving specific logistical problems and ways to encourage the Veteran to seek care while respecting his or her right to make personal decisions.

The Telephone Call Center is available toll-free at 1-888-823-7458, 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, and online at *www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching*.

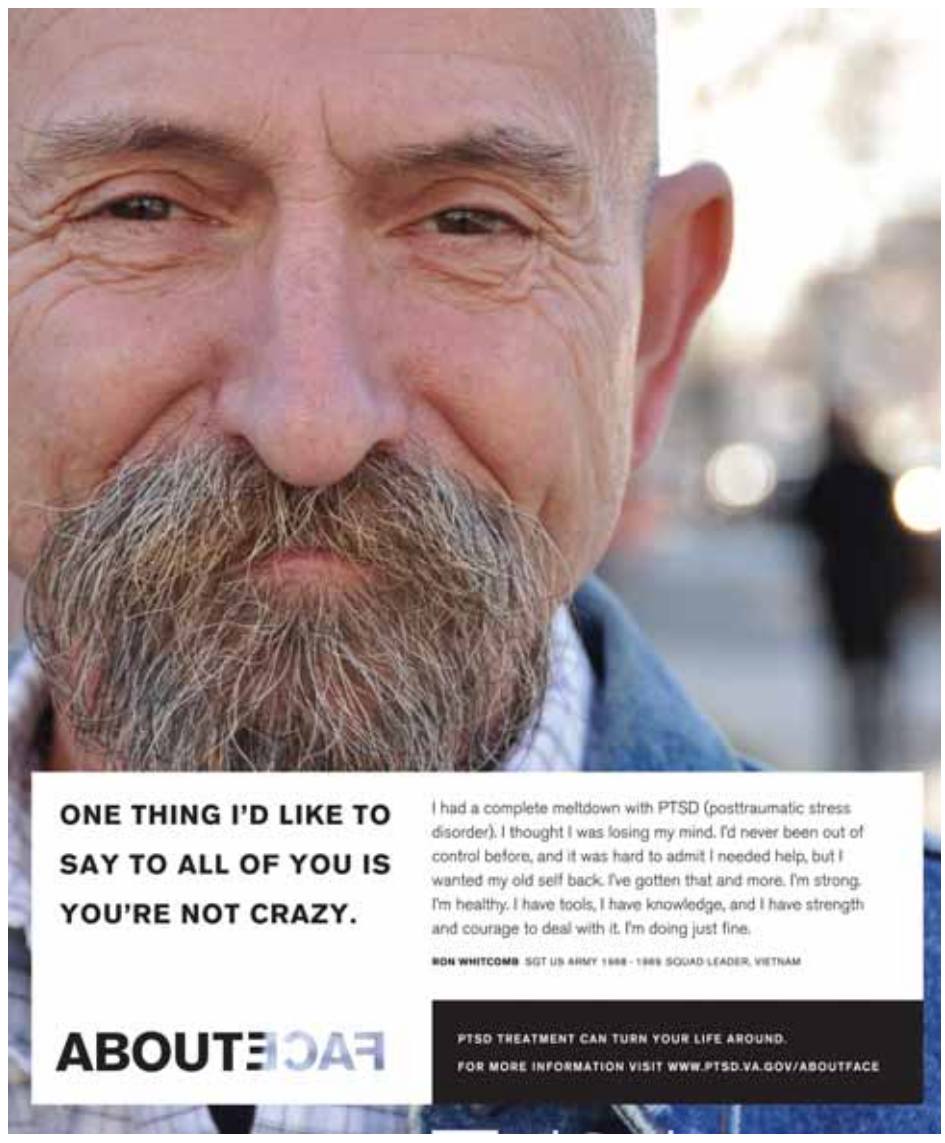
Q: How do I get more news about the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and Veterans' health care?
A: Send an e-mail to *bobbi.gruner@va.gov* to sign up to receive news releases and information. You can also visit *www.houston.va.gov*, like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter.

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
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