



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

2nd Fisher House for Houston Breaks Ground

HOUSTON - With the approved use of land and resources by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center broke ground for a second Fisher House on November 12, 2012. With this highly anticipated event, the Houston community now has a unique opportunity to support our Nation's heroes.

Fisher Houses provide a comforting "home away from home" for families of seriously ill Veterans and active duty military personnel receiving specialized, lengthy medical care at VA or military hospitals. The presence of family members plays an important role in recovery; especially, when the loved one is in an unfamiliar environment.

Fisher House Foundation, a not-for-profit organization under section

501(c)(3) of the IRS code, has built 58 houses on the grounds of military and VA hospitals. The Foundation annually provides short-term, no cost, convenient, quality housing to more than 18,000 families. Each house features cozy guest suites with private baths, a modern, shared kitchen, laundry facilities, a spacious dining room, and an inviting living room with library.

VA provides the land and is responsible for daily operation and maintenance of the homes. However, Fisher Houses are built using donations from local community businesses, foundations, organizations, and individuals. Those funds are then matched by Fisher House Foundation.

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Photo by Sharon James, AV, Specialist

Ivonne Thompson, wife and primary caregiver of U.S. Navy Veteran Anthony Thompson, Operation Iraqi Freedom, stayed at the Fisher House at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, Florida with her son, A.J., for more than three years.

Houston VA Expands Surgery Services with New Kidney Transplant Center

VA currently only has four hospitals that perform kidney transplantation.



Photo by Audrey Umbride, Public Affairs Specialist, Houston

HOUSTON - In November, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) received final approval from the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a Kidney Transplant Center. There are currently only four centers within VA that perform kidney transplantation for Veterans (Iowa, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and Oregon).

"Currently, we are training and hiring staff, analyzing patient data for transplant suitability, and putting medical processes in place. We believe we will perform our first kidney transplant in 12 to 18 months," said Samir S. Awad, M.D., MEDVAMC Operative Care Line executive, who is listed as one of the best doctors in the nation in the field of critical care medicine. "Once our program matures, we estimate our Kidney Transplant Center will perform 40 to 60 transplants a year, limited only by the availability of organs."

With the prevalence of chronic kidney disease among Veterans, an increasing number are being referred to the existing VA kidney transplant centers. There are an estimated 8,000 Veterans with chronic kidney disease within 400 miles of Houston; 75 Veterans are currently on waiting lists at local community hospitals. In addition to

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It's FREE from Your Primary Care Provider!

5,000th Houston Enrollee in Million Veteran Program

Voluntary research program helps health care providers understand how genes affect Veterans' health and illness.

HOUSTON – Last October, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) reached the milestone of enrolling 5,000 participants in the Million Veteran Program (MVP): A Partnership with Veterans, and is leading the nation in enrollment efforts.

Air Force Veteran Robert Arrington was not showered with balloons and confetti when he was told he was the 5,000th Veteran to enroll from the Houston area, but the Houston MVP staff did thank him with an "Ask Me About MVP" pin and an enthusiastic round of applause.

"I received a pamphlet about the Million Veteran Program from the Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic in Lufkin and decided to participate in the study because I thought it might be beneficial to other Veterans," said Arrington. "The more informed the

doctors are, the better they can do their job."

This was Arrington's first time to participate in any type of research program. He woke up at 3 a.m. and drove from Lufkin to Houston so he could participate.

"I didn't know much about VA research before. I was surprised to learn VA invented the cardiac pacemaker and performed the first liver transplant," said Arrington as he provided his blood sample. "With this study, I think understanding the genetic makeup will have a positive impact on reducing side effects from certain medications."

The MEDVAMC is one of 40 VA medical centers serving as an enrollment site for this national, voluntary research program conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research &



Photo by Holly Gentry, Communications Director

"I received a pamphlet about the Million Veteran Program from the Lufkin VA clinic and I decided to participate in the study because I thought it might be beneficial to Veterans," said Air Force Veteran Robert Arrington, who woke up at 3 a.m. and drove from Lufkin to Houston so he could participate. Arrington is thanked by Rayan Al Jurdi, M.D., a psychiatrist and the co-primary investigator of the MVP at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

Development. The knowledge gained will help better understand how genes affect Veterans' health and illness, with the ultimate goal of transforming health care.

Participants are asked to complete a one-time study visit (approximately 20 minutes in length) to provide a blood sample for genetic analysis. Participation also includes filling out

may help to prevent and improve treatment of disease."

"In only ten months with the help of our primary care teams and laboratory staff, we are making great progress toward reaching our goal of enrolling 20,000 southeast Texas Veterans in the next five years," said Laura Marsh, M.D., Mental Health Care Line executive and co-primary

investigator of the MVP in Houston. Marsh is also a professor at the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor College of Medicine.

"The ultimate goal of this VA research program is to transform health care for Veterans."

hospital staff has been working together to encourage patients to participate," said Al Jurdi. "That is why the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center won the MVP title of the Million Veteran Program for most valuable player in this research effort."

Results from MVP will help improve health care for not only Veterans, but all Americans. MVP has extensive safeguards in place to keep Veterans' personal information secure and confidential. Veteran participation does not affect access to VA health care or benefits.

Tammy Natividad, Doralene Smith, R.N., and Emily Boeckman are the Houston MVP representatives. They are located at the MEDVAMC in Room 6B-310. Walk-ins are also welcome.

Visit the website of the Million Veteran Program at www.research.va.gov/mvp to learn more. For more information or to participate, call the MVP information center toll-free 1-866-441-6075. ☆

A Word from the Director . . .

Get Involved with National Salute Week



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

HOUSTON - February 10 through 16, 2013 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 special programs provided by community and area Veterans 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 vahouvolunteer@va.gov for more information and how to get involved. ☆

2nd Fisher House for Houston Breaks Ground

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Since opening in 2005, the average length of stay in the current Houston Fisher House is 11 days and the average number of guests is about 34 per night. Even with 21 suites, it has an occupancy rate of more than 98 percent.

"A second Fisher House in Houston will help accommodate these demands," said Adam C. Walms, M.H.A., M.A., F.A.C.H.E., MEDVAMC director. "We want to ensure Veterans and their families can concentrate on health and healing in a welcoming and calm environment close to the hospital."

Taking the lead in fundraising for the second Houston Fisher House, Air Force Veteran Richard E. Wainerdi, P.E., Ph.D., president emeritus of the Texas Medical Center, has again accepted the challenge to work with the community to raise the necessary funds.

"The Fisher House is much more than just a place to stay," said Fisher

House Manager Frank Kelley, a VA employee. "It also serves as a haven for many families."

Recently, an active duty airman became severely ill. The Houston Fisher House helped coordinate his transfer and within days, the young man and his family were at the MEDVAMC and staying at the Fisher House. Originally from Hawaii, their extended family was far away. Other guests at the Fisher House helped out, provided support, and made the difficult times more bearable. This scene is repeated daily at the Fisher House and is enormously beneficial for the families of Veterans and active duty Servicemembers.

"We're giving families help at a time when they need it the most," said Dave Coker, president of the Maryland-based Fisher House Foundation. "Health care professionals say families play an important role in recovery, so we want to help them be near their loved ones." ☆



Photo by Julia Greer, Communications Director

Operation Iraqi Freedom Army Veteran Bradley Thomas and his mother, Veronica, meet with Rehabilitation and Extended Care Line Executive Helene Henson, M.D. The Thomas family stayed more than a year at the Fisher House in Tampa.

Expanded Services: Telecare & Appointment Center

HOUSTON - To meet the needs of Veterans in southeast Texas, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) is enhancing and expanding its Telecare & Appointment Center.

The staff at the Center already handles pharmacy questions and issues, offers medical advice, helps with medical health concerns, and provides general health and wellness information. These health care professionals are also ready to address a variety of mental health concerns and homeless issues.

To improve customer service, the MEDVAMC is adding new services, improving others, and dramatically increasing staff at the Center. This includes the number of appointment schedulers, registered nurses, and pharmacy technicians.

Currently, the Telecare & Appointment Center answers about 60,000 calls every month. This plan will increase the Center's capacity to more than 100,000 in the next few months.

By February 2013, the Telecare & Appointment Center will also be able to reschedule or cancel appointments for the majority of MEDVAMC clinics. Some complex, specialty clinics will still handle their own appointments.

The access goal for not only the Telecare & Appointment Center, but all clinics in the medical center, is to answer all telephone calls within 30 seconds. In addition, the objective is to have less than five percent of callers hang up while waiting.

These standards are set by URAC, a Washington, DC-based health care accrediting organization that establishes quality standards for the health care industry.

By shifting calls about scheduling

appointments from the clinics to the Telecare & Appointment Center, front line clerks will be able to completely focus their attention on the patient in front of them.

Another part of the plan is expanding Audio Care, the facility's automated appointment reminder system.

The Audio Care system electronically pulls all patient appointments three days in advance and calls the patient to remind them about an upcoming appointment. This system allows patients to confirm, cancel, or request to reschedule an upcoming appointment.

In October, the MEDVAMC upgraded software and hardware to double the Audio Care system's capacity. This upgrade improves timely notification of appointments and adds the option of Audio Pharmacy.

The Audio Pharmacy feature allows patients to request medication refills or renewals instead of driving to the MEDVAMC or a outpatient clinic to wait to see their primary care provider.

The Telecare & Appointment Center expansion initiative will significantly improve VA health care services for Veterans. It will make access to medical attention more efficient and expand user options. Each component of this initiative is intertwined and integral to delivering excellent customer service.

The Telecare & Appointment Center phone number is 713-794-8985 or toll-free 1-800-639-5137. The Center is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week to serve Veterans.

Remember help is just a call away! Take a moment right now to add the Telecare & Appointment Center's number to the favorites on your phone.

☆ Chris Pawlak, Health System Specialist



Help is
just a
telephone
call away.

VA Telecare Center

- Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week -

Make, cancel, change your appointments or
talk with a Nurse, Pharmacist, or Clerk!

**713-794-8985 or
toll free 1-800-639-5137**

Remember to cancel your appointment if you can't make it so another Veteran can get medical care. Also, make sure we have your correct telephone number so we can call you about critical health care issues like prescriptions, lab and test results, and follow-up appointments.

Houston is the only VA Medical Center in the country to offer Veterans this cutting-edge medical device.

Chosin Reservoir Marine Back on Dance Floor after Catheter-based Heart Valve

HOUSTON – The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) is the first VA, and only one to date, to offer an innovative, artificial heart valve. Recently approved for commercial use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Sapien heart valve made by Edwards Lifesciences is implanted through a catheter as an alternative to open heart surgery for patients with inoperable aortic valve stenosis disease.

Korean War Veteran Werner Lee Anderson, 81, of League City, Tx., received this transcatheter aortic valve in April 2012. A survivor of the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, Anderson vividly remembers feeling "10 feet tall and bulletproof" when he joined the U.S. Marines.

In the battle, his teeth were knocked out during hand-to-hand combat and a large machete cut his hand. Anderson also injured his back when he fell on top of a dead comrade's helmet. He recalls of the 96 Marines in his unit, only six came back alive.

Previously, Anderson had five cardiac stents and two triple bypass operations. Due to his age, it was deemed too risky for conventional surgery. "In addition to his advanced age and aortic valve stenosis, Mr. Anderson suffers from coronary artery disease, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, osteo-

arthritis, and has had colon and knee surgeries in the past," said Biykem Bozkurt, M.D., Ph.D., MEDVAMC Cardiology chief and professor of Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM). "We were able to offer him this life-saving device, and he was ready to go home within a week."

Aortic valve stenosis is an age-related disease caused by calcium deposits in the valve that cause it to narrow and stiffen. As it becomes harder to pump the blood out to the rest of the body, the heart weakens. Patients experience fainting, chest pain, heart failure, irregular heart rhythms, and cardiac arrest. Without treatment, symptomatic patients usually die within two years. It affects approximately 300,000 Americans.

Many older or sicker patients suffering from aortic valve stenosis are considered poor candidates for conventional surgery, which requires cutting open the chest and temporarily stopping the heart.

"With the aging population, the potential impact of this procedure is enormous," said David Paniagua, M.D., co-director of the Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory at the MEDVAMC and assistant professor of Surgery at BCM. "People can literally gain a new lease on life overnight."



Korean War Veteran Werner Lee Anderson and his wife, Norma, take a spin after a follow-up appointment at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. "I feel like I am 30 again! All because of the Houston VA, a good cardiologist, and my beautiful wife," said Anderson.

"Before this operation, I couldn't walk from my garage to the street without having chest pain and difficulty breathing," said Anderson. "I had to take frequent rest breaks."

The valve, made of bovine tissue and stainless steel, is about the width of a pencil when it is deployed through a catheter in the femoral artery in the groin. Once it arrives at the correct spot, the valve is released, replacing the diseased one. Patients generally stay in the hospital for an average of three days, compared to seven days with open heart surgery, Paniagua said.

"Surgeons and cardiologists are part of a whole team unified for this one

disease process," said Faisal Bakaean, M.D., chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the MEDVAMC and associate professor of Surgery at BCM. "There is very little tissue trauma and in experienced hands, it can take approximately 60 minutes."

Anderson, with his cheery personality, now leads a very active life with his wife of seven years. They enjoy attending football games in support of their favorite team, the Houston Texans.

"I feel like I am 30 again! All because of the Houston VA, a good cardiologist, and my beautiful wife," said Anderson, who looks forward to taking an upcoming cruise and spinning his wife on the dance floor.

Besides Bozkurt, Paniagua, and Bakaean, the MEDVAMC Heart Valve Team is a multidisciplinary team that includes Cardiothoracic Surgeon Loraine Cornwell, M.D.; Cardiologists Blase Carabello, M.D., Biswajit Kar, M.D., Nadir Ali, M.D., Hani Jneid, M.D., Alvin Blaustein, M.D., and Glenn Levine, M.D.; Vascular Surgeons Panagiotis Kougias, M.D. and Carlos Bechara, M.D.; Anesthesiologist Prasad Atluri, M.D.; radiologists; Nursing Coordinator Maryrose Ruma; and other nursing and auxiliary staff. All are specially trained to take care of this unique and complex patient population.

"It was immediately apparent that this VA medical center had the teamwork to make this program work and to be successful," said Blase A. Carabello, M.D., the Medical Care Line executive and vice chair of the Department of Medicine at BCM. "Everyone from nurses and rehabilitation specialists to imaging technicians and housekeepers focuses on the health and well-being of the patient."

"This new technology could add years to the lives of our patients," said Samir S. Awad, M.D., Operative Care Line executive at the MEDVAMC and associate professor of Surgery at BCM. "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." ✧

How to Stick with an Exercise Program

HOUSTON - You always hear about the benefits of exercise (weight loss, disease prevention, stress reduction, and improved overall health), but making regular exercise a part of life is usually not easy.

Maintaining an exercise program is easier if you are having fun and reaching

your goals. If you are thinking of starting to exercise or are already exercising, here are three things you can do to increase your chance of success.

Make It Fun!

Exercise can be a social activity. Working out with friends or family

makes it more enjoyable. They can provide encouragement. Choose an activity you enjoy. Change the activity often to avoid boredom. Do not tackle more than you can do. You are more likely to stick with a program if it is not too hard at the beginning.

Set Goals!

Goal setting helps you check your progress; especially, if you put them in writing. Keeping a workout log helps track how long you walked or how much weight you lifted. Your goals should be practical, specific, and easy to measure. For example, if you start by walking 10 minutes, set your goal to walk 15 minutes the next week.

Find Time!

You can find time in your busy schedule by blocking out a regular time each day or week to exercise. Develop a plan that suits your schedule and personality. If you are a morning person, exercise then. Make it convenient for you. You make time for your health when you are sick; why not make time for your health when you are not?

Finally, consult your VA health care provider before starting any exercise program. ✧ *Kent J. Probst, R.K.T., Staff Kinesiotherapist*



Staff Kinesiotherapist Kent J. Probst, R.K.T. works with Coast Guard Veteran John Meador. "It helps if you create a realistic routine that takes in consideration your fitness level and the amount of time you have available in your schedule," said Probst.

"Clever Surgical Technique" Saves Lives



Photo by Rick Carter, Communication Director

"I did not think much about this technique when I first performed the procedure except that it was an obvious solution for a complex problem," said Carlos Bechara, M.D., M.S., F.A.C.S., a staff vascular surgeon at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. "I have already been told by other surgeons that they have had great success using this technique."

HOUSTON – A staff vascular surgeon at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) recently developed and published a new endovascular technique to treat a complex vascular problem.

Flush iliac artery occlusion refers to blockage of an artery where it splits into two. This condition is difficult to treat with minimally invasive surgery because

there is no room for a wire and catheter to go through the blockage in order to place a stent. A stent is a wire mesh stainless steel tube that holds an artery open and keeps it from closing again. This problem is most often treated with open bypass surgery.

However, Carlos Bechara, M.D., M.S., F.A.C.S., a staff vascular surgeon at the MEDVAMC and the program

director of Vascular Surgery Fellowship at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM), overcame this obstacle by placing a balloon at the fork of the artery to allow passage of the wire through the blockage, allowing insertion of a stent. With this clever technique, surgeons are able to avoid the potential morbidities associated with open surgery.

"I did not think much about this technique when I first performed the procedure except that it was an obvious solution for a complex problem," said Bechara. "Since publishing the article in the Journal of Vascular Surgery, I have already been told by other surgeons that they have had great success using this technique."

Bechara's effective, new technique will be featured during the VEITH 39th Annual Symposium on Vascular and Endovascular Issues in New York this year. The VEITH Symposium is one of the world's largest gatherings of vascular surgeons and vascular specialists to discuss groundbreaking research, updates on clinical trials, and advances to treat vascular disease.

"I am proud the technique that I developed will be featured at one of the most prominent vascular meetings in the world. Something like this is a dream come true for a young surgeon like myself," said Bechara.

"Dr. Bechara has successfully treated 12 patients with this technique; hopefully, we will present our data at other national meetings to help spread the word," said Panagiotis Kougiass, M.D., Vascular Surgery Section chief and associate professor of Surgery/Vascular Surgery at BCM. "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." ✨

New Kidney Transplant Program

(continued from page 1)

southeast Texas, the MEDVAMC's new Kidney Transplant Center will serve Veterans throughout the southeastern United States.

Kidney transplant candidates must undergo detailed physical, laboratory and psychological evaluations to ensure proper selection and therapy. Tests are done to confirm the diagnosis, and to assess the candidate's ability to tolerate surgery.

"A couple of the key reasons the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center was selected to become a Kidney Transplant Center are our outstanding surgery program, our talented, top-notch staff, and our successful Liver Transplant Program," said Adam C. Walmsley, M.H.A., M.A., F.A.C.H.E., MEDVAMC director.

Managed by the surgical director of the MEDVAMC Liver Transplant Program, John A. Goss, M.D., F.A.C.S., the goal of the new Kidney Transplant Center is to provide the same high level of care to the Veteran population. Goss has performed many surgical "firsts" in Houston, including the first split liver adult and pediatric transplants, the first adult living donor liver transplant, the first dual organ lung-liver transplant, and the first dual organ heart-liver transplant. He is also chief of the Division of Abdominal Transplantation at Baylor College of Medicine, and the program director of the liver transplant programs at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital and The Methodist Hospital.

The MEDVAMC launched its Liver Transplant Program in 2007; 44 successful transplantations have been performed to date without complications. Many patients with liver disease also develop renal failure as their disease progresses. Having the ability to perform kidney transplantation eliminates the need to refer Veterans facing this added complication to another medical facility; thus, improving overall quality of care.

The VA National Transplant Program started providing solid organ transplants to Veterans in 1961. Thomas E. Starzl, M.D. performed VA's first kidney transplant in Denver. Since then, the VA National Transplant Program has expanded services to provide Veterans with heart transplant services in 1980, liver in 1989, and lung in 1991. Most transplants are performed in specific VA medical centers across the country. VA also utilizes several VA sharing agreements with University affiliates and local emergency contracts for critical heart and liver cases. ✨

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:



Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-8255
PRESS 1

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

Easy Answers to Important, But Confusing Dietary Fiber Questions

HOUSTON - You have probably read lots of articles about the benefits of eating more fiber. But, why is fiber good for your health?

Fiber is the part of plant-foods our body cannot break down. There are two main categories of fiber: soluble and insoluble.

Soluble fiber dissolves part way in water making a gel. That gel coats the colon and helps with carrying food through your body. **Insoluble fiber** does not dissolve in water; therefore, it passes through our body unchanged. This aids in keeping your body "regular" by creating bulk and helping to move food through the digestive tract.

Why do we need fiber in our diet? Dietary fiber helps to prevent and treat many disorders and diseases. Soluble fiber can help lower low-density lipoprotein, or "bad," cholesterol which prevents heart disease. It also helps to regulate blood sugar by slowing digestion so sugar enters your body slowly. This is helpful for diabetics.

Insoluble fiber prevents diarrhea and constipation. It also lowers your chances of colon cancer, diverticular disease, hemorrhoids, and colitis. Dietary fiber can help to prevent or treat obesity because it helps you feel full longer and does not add calories.

How much fiber do we need in our diet? Dietary recommendations are 21-25 grams daily for women and 30-38 grams daily for men. However, the

majority of Americans consume only half of the recommended amount.

Foods high in soluble fiber include oat bran, fruits, vegetables, brown rice, nuts, flax seeds, legumes, and barley. Foods high in insoluble fiber include skins of fruit and vegetables, as well as wheat bran, whole grain breads, and cereals. The majority of foods have both kinds of fiber, but rarely in equal amounts. Do not be concerned about which type of fiber you are eating, and focus on the fiber intake.

Selecting tasty foods that provide fiber is not difficult. Add an apple, banana, orange, or pear to every meal. Leave the skin on fruits and vegetables, because removing the skin decreases the fiber content. Eat a variety of beans; for example, kidney, pinto, navy, garbanzo, or black-eyed peas. Replace your "white" foods with "brown" ones.

White pasta and breads are made with only part of the grain called the endosperm. The bran and germ (the rich vitamin and fiber containing outer lining of the grain) has been removed during processing. Choose "brown" products that list 100 percent whole wheat, rye, oats and bran as the first or second ingredient on your food label.

For breakfast, choose a high-fiber breakfast cereal and choose cereals with "bran" or fiber in the name. Some high-fiber snacks are fresh and dried fruit, raw vegetables, low-fat popcorn, and whole-grain crackers. Add pre-cut fresh or



"Fiber is an important part of any healthy diet," said Dietetic Intern Kalyn Layton. "It helps to prevent and treat many disorders and diseases." If you want to learn more about healthy diet options, talk with a registered dietitian by calling 713-791-1414, ext. 6616.

frozen vegetables to soups and sauces. For example, mix chopped frozen broccoli into your prepared spaghetti sauce. Add kidney beans to canned soup or a green salad. Another good idea for a meal is to make nachos with refried beans, fresh vegetables, whole-wheat tortilla chips, and salsa.

High-fiber foods are good for your health, but adding too much fiber too

quickly can cause intestinal gas, abdominal bloating, and cramping. Therefore, you will need to increase your water intake as you increase your fiber intake. Drink at least eight glasses of water a day.

Check with your health care provider if you feel you need fiber supplements. Whole foods rather than fiber supplements are generally better.

To learn more, contact a VA Registered Dietitian at 713-791-1414, ext. 3976, 4295, or 6166. ☆ Kalyn Layton, 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, 11 a.m.-noon, Cancer Center Conference Room 4C-435. Group is also available via telephone. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273/5641

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

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Female Veterans Wanted for Innovative PTSD Study



Photo by Beth Crane - Communications Director

Women's Inpatient Specialty Environment of Recovery Psychiatrist Wendy Leapoulos, M.D. counsels an Air Force Veteran. For more information about the WISER program at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, call 713-791-1414, ext. 6700.

HOUSTON - Researchers at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) and Baylor College of Medicine are currently looking for female Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) who are interested in participating in a study examining the role a neuropeptide called corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF) plays in causing PTSD symptoms. The results may help to identify and develop potential medications to treat PTSD.

PTSD can be caused by any traumatic event such as war, a car accident, abuse, or a natural disaster. People who have these kinds of experiences sometimes begin to suffer flashbacks, bad memories or dreams, extreme irritability, trouble sleeping, along with other difficulties.

Not all victims of trauma suffer from PTSD, but those who do may begin to experience these symptoms immediately after the event, several

months, or even years later. Either way, the symptoms of PTSD can seriously disrupt a person's life.

Originally, researchers believed that when a person experiences a threatening situation, the brain produces cortisol, a stress hormone that tells the victim to fight or run away. Cortisol is known as the "fight or flight" hormone. Research has shown higher levels of cortisol may actually hurt the brain and be linked to PTSD symptoms.

Over the years, researchers have studied PTSD to try to understand the underlying brain processes. New studies have shown symptoms may be caused not only by cortisol, but also by elevated levels of a CRF. CRF acts as a chemical messenger in the brain and controls the release of cortisol and other hormones named catecholamines.

It is believed that varying levels of CRF in the brain have an effect on the stress symptoms experienced by those suffering from PTSD. This is likely because abnormal levels of CRF also result in abnormal levels of catecholamines and cortisol. Though these processes are thought to play an important part in the development of PTSD symptoms, their exact role is not entirely understood.

Researchers have also found women may be at higher risk for developing PTSD than men. Some studies suggest this is because women are more likely to experience traumatic events, like abuse and sexual assault. Other studies disagree and report that after a traumatic event, women are more likely to ruminate over

the event and become more stressed.

Studies have shown women are two times more likely to develop PTSD than men. Since PTSD symptoms can be so disabling, potentially causing depression or even suicide, it is important that researchers develop effective PTSD treatments.

Treatment options currently available for PTSD are limited. The most common and effective treatment involves a combination of talk therapy and psychotropic medications, such as anti-anxiety and antidepressant medications. With information about CRF and PTSD symptoms, researchers are trying to develop medications that incorporate these findings.

Researchers at MEDVAMC and Baylor College of Medicine are currently looking for female Veterans with PTSD who are interested in participating in this important study. If you are a woman between the ages of 21 and 64 years, have experienced PTSD symptoms in the past month, and do not have any current substance abuse, you may be eligible for the study.

The study lasts six weeks and is conducted at MEDVAMC and Baylor College of Medicine. It involves taking an investigational drug intended to change CRF levels; thereby, reducing the severity of the symptoms of PTSD. Participants may receive compensation for their time.

If you are interested in participating in the study, contact the research team at 1-877-96-BCM-MOOD (226-6663) or email mood@bcm.edu ✧

Processing VA Travel Claims Using Electronic Funds Transfer Method

HOUSTON - On October 1, 2012, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center transitioned to electronic processing of travel reimbursement claims. Veterans were asked to submit an Electronic Funds Transfer form designating which banking institution to direct their payment.

The benefit of the new Electronic Funds Transfer method is to streamline the travel claim process, improve VA's ability to track the status of a claim, cut down on long lines at the Agent Cashier, and make your VA visits more convenient.

VA initially believed Veterans would receive payment within three to five business days; however, processing claims has taken

longer than expected. Veterans should allow seven to 10 business days to receive their funds.

Veterans, who are filing a travel claim for the first time or have not submitted an Electronic Funds Transfer form, unfortunately must wait at least 14 business days for their funds. These types of payments are made in the form of a U.S. Treasury check. Payments cannot be made to the Direct Express Debit MasterCard, the card used for VA Compensation and Pension benefits, Social Security, etc.

Electronic Funds Transfer forms are available in a kiosk between the Patient Travel Office and the Agent Cashier on the first floor of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center or on the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center's website, www.houston.va.gov/features/Beneficiary_Travel_Change.asp.

If you have a question about travel claims, filling out an Electronic Funds Transfer form, or wait times for payment, stop by the Agent Cashier's Office, call 713-794-7498, or submit your question via MyHealthVet Secure Messaging at www.myhealth.va.gov ✧

It took strength to serve.
It can seem even harder to ask for help.



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If you served in the U.S. military and are now facing tough times or don't have a place to call home, VA can help.

Call VA's toll-free hotline:
1-877-424-3838
(1-877-4AID-VET)

or visit www.va.gov/homeless for help with housing, jobs, health care, education and other Veteran benefits.

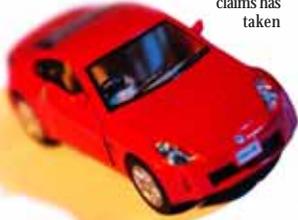


U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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Working together to eliminate Veteran homelessness.



Veterans' Questions

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

Q. How does enrolling in VA Health Benefits affect my Medicare and/or private insurance?

A. If you have health insurance, or eligibility for other programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, or CHAMPUS, you may continue to use services under those programs. You are not required to use VA as your exclusive health care provider. Whether or not you have insurance does not affect your eligibility for VA health care benefits. But, if you

do have insurance coverage, we would like to know. The law requires us to bill private health insurance companies for all care provided for Veteran's non-service connected disabilities. Keep in mind that you will not be responsible for any unpaid balance that the insurance company does not pay, except for VA co-payments. In addition, many insurance companies will apply VA health care charges toward the satisfaction of your annual deductible.

Q: I served on active duty and was honorably discharged. Do I automatically qualify for VA health care?

A. Not necessarily, any of the following statements would need to be true in order to qualify: You were discharged or separated for medical reasons, early out, or hardship; you served in theater of combat operations within the past 5 years; you were discharged from the military because of a disability (not preexisting); you are a former Prisoner of War; you received a Purple Heart Medal; you receive VA pension or disability benefits; you receive state Medicaid benefits; you served in the Republic of Vietnam from January 9, 1962 to May 7, 1975; or you served in

the Persian Gulf from August 2, 1990 to November 11, 1998.

However, your eligibility for VA health care benefits may be based on special factors such as military history factors or household income. Submitting an application is the best way to find out if you qualify. For more information, call 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

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.

Q. Does VA provide gynecologic care for menstrual problems and services such as Pap smears and birth control? What about breast care such as mammograms and breast cancer treatments?

A. VA provides women Veterans with a full range of reproductive health services necessary for optimal health throughout their lives, including the services above and more. Gynecology and maternity care are available either at a VA facility or through referrals to appropriate providers in the community. This referred care is covered by VA.

Q. What is the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP)?

A. VRAP offers up to 12 months of training assistance to unemployed Veterans who are at least 35 but no more than 60 years old; are unemployed on the date of application; received an other

than dishonorable discharge; are not eligible for any other VA education benefit program (e.g.: the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Employment Assistance); are not in receipt of VA compensation due to unemployment; and are not enrolled in a federal or state job training program.

For more information, call the Houston VA Regional Office at toll-free 1-888-442-4551.

Q. Does VA provide pregnancy care?

A. VA covers pregnancy care typically through arrangements with community providers. VA can pay for prenatal care, delivery, and postnatal care for eligible women Veterans, as well as care to newborns for the first seven days after birth for all eligible women Veterans. Call Women Veterans Program Manager 713-791-1414, ext. 5783 for details.

Q. Am I expected to leave a tip if I use the Valet Parking Service?

A. Valet parking is available free of charge to Veterans with appointments at the main entrance of the Houston VA hospital. This service operates Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. - 6:30 p.m., except for federal holidays. A "No Tipping" policy is strictly enforced.

Q. What if I can't afford to make co-payments for my VA health care?

A. There are options. The first option is to set up a repayment plan. The second option is to request a hardship determination. Contact the Health Revenue Center at toll-free 1-866-802-6381 for help.

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

National Salute to Veteran Patients

February 10-16, 2013

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.