



VA Pride

Vol. 5 No. 3 An Information Guide for the Veterans We Serve in Southeast Texas May/June 2006

Beaumont VA Outpatient Clinic • Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic, Lufkin • Galveston VA Outpatient Clinic
New Orleans Houston-based VA Outpatient Clinic • Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic

Houston VA's Major Affiliate Ranked 10th on National List of Medical Schools

HOUSTON – For more than 50 years, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) has provided clinical training for health care professionals through its major affiliate, Baylor College of Medicine (BCM). BCM has now been ranked 10th among the 125 U.S. medical schools in an annual survey published by U.S. News & World Report, moving up three positions from its 13th ranking last year.

In October 1948, Michael E. DeBakey, M.D., the father of modern cardiovascular surgery and the MEDVAMC's namesake, accepted the position as chairman of Surgery at the Baylor University College of Medicine, the predecessor of BCM in Houston. That same year acting on orders from President Truman to assume operation of the old Houston Navy Hospital, Warren Magnuson, M.D., the medical director of the Veterans Administration in Washington, D.C., called upon DeBakey to organize and direct staffing at the hospital. DeBakey, with the help of the full-time faculty at Baylor University College of Medicine, provided the medical staff and established the Dean's Committee. As chief surgeon at the Houston Veterans Administration Hospital, DeBakey also created an accredited residency program for the facility.

Today, the MEDVAMC operates the largest residency program in the Department of Veterans Affairs with more than 180 slots accounting for 600 residents per academic year. The vast majority of MEDVAMC physicians are on the faculty of BCM and contribute to its achievements in tertiary care, and biomedical and health services research. Each academic year, 1,400 students from fields such as nursing, dietetics, social work, physical therapy, and a wide variety of medical specialties are trained at the MEDVAMC through 110 affiliation agree-

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The goal of this new clinic is to decrease the amount of time veterans wait for primary care appointments . . .

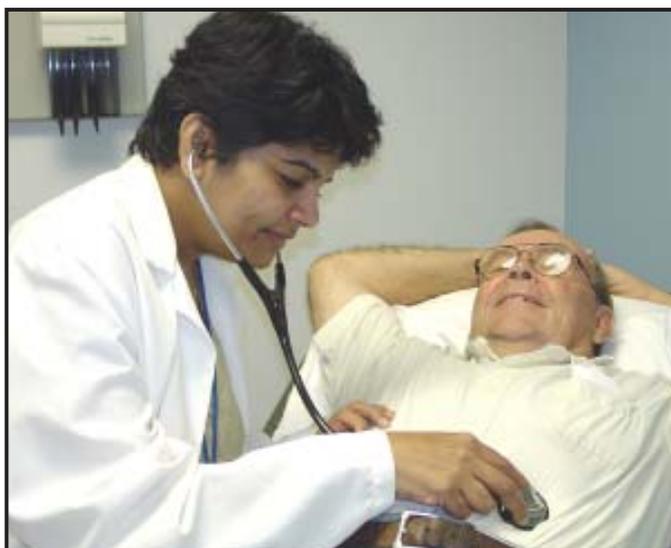
5th Primary Care Clinic Opens at Houston VA to Decrease Wait Times

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) opened a fifth Primary Care Clinic inside its main hospital building in Houston this month. The goal of this new clinic is to decrease the amount of time veterans wait for primary care appointments.

The new clinic is currently staffed with three physicians and a physician assistant in addition to nursing and related support staff. Recruitment continues for additional physicians, nurses, and a pharmacist. The new Primary Care Clinic is located next to the Consumer Affairs Office and Mental Health Consult Clinic on the 1st Floor (East) of the MEDVAMC. Veterans may use the Spinal Cord Injury entrance for easy access to the clinic or go to the Information Desk in main lobby for directions.

"We are doing a number of things to address wait times - reallocating resources, hiring additional staff, improving processes, and opening new clinics. Last year, we opened two new

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Vinodini Krishnan, M.D., team leader for the new Primary Care Clinic, examines veteran Jesse West, Jr. during a recent appointment. The new clinic is currently staffed with three physicians and a physician assistant in addition to nursing and related support staff. Recruitment continues for additional physicians, nurses, and a pharmacist.

Houston Only VA with Consistently Low Mortality Rates for 6 Consecutive Years

HOUSTON – The Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center (MEDVAMC) recently received notification from the National Veterans Affairs Surgical Quality Improvement Program (NSQIP) Executive Committee that it has demonstrated consistently low observed-to-expected mortality rates in general surgery, all surgery, and all non-cardiac surgery six years in a row. The MEDVAMC is the only VA hospital with this record.

"The entire surgical team, including surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, and our support staff, should be proud of their hard work in providing consistent, outstanding care to our veterans," said David H. Berger, M.D., MEDVAMC Operative Care Line executive.

The Committee reviewed the accrual, workload, and outcome information on major surgery procedures performed at the MEDVAMC in fiscal years 2000 through 2005. The intent of the NSQIP is to provide reliable, valid data about

comparative risk-adjusted outcomes of major surgery in the VA and to provide reliable data about workload and length of stay. The ultimate use of these data is to improve the quality of surgical care to all veterans.

Annually, the NSQIP Executive Committee carefully reviews the risk-adjusted observed/expected (O/E) mortality ratios in each VA hospital for all surgical operations combined and each surgical subspecialty. An O/E ratio statistically significantly above one indicates that mortality is higher than what would be expected on the basis of the patient characteristics. An O/E ratio statistically significantly below one indicates that mortality is lower than what would be expected on the basis of the patient characteristics.

NSQIP is the first national, validated, outcome-based, risk-adjusted, and peer-controlled program for the measurement and enhancement of the

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Special Event:
Memorial Day Ceremony
May 29, 2006, 9:30 a.m.
Houston VA National Cemetery
10410 Veterans Memorial Dr.
(281) 447-8686

Houston Only VA with Consistently Low Mortality Rates for 6 Consecutive Years

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quality of surgical care. The NSQIP incorporates 128 Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) and 14 sites from the private sector.

Prompted by the need to assess comparatively the quality of surgical care in VA hospitals, the Department of Veterans Affairs conducted the National VA Surgical Risk Study (NVSRS) between 1991-1993 in 44 VA medical centers.

The study developed and validated models for risk adjustment of 30-day morbidity and 30-day mortality after major surgery in eight non-cardiac surgical specialties. Similar models were developed for cardiac surgery by the VA's Continuous Improvement in Cardiac Surgery Program (CICSP).

Based on the results of the NVSRS and the CICSP, the VA established the NSQIP in 1994 in all the medical centers performing major surgery. A NSQIP nurse at each center oversees collection of data and electronic transmission for analysis at one of two data coordinating centers.

Feedback to the providers and managers is aimed at achieving continuous quality improvement. It consists of (1) comparative, site-specific, and outcome-based annual reports; (2) periodic assessment of performance; (3) self-assessment tools; (4) structured site visits; and (5) dissemination of best practices. The NSQIP also provides an infrastructure for VA investigators to query the database and produce scientific presentations and publications.

"The Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center continues to stand out as a pre-eminent institution,

providing the best of care to our nation's veterans," said Peter G. Traber, M.D., president and CEO of Baylor College of Medicine. "This important recognition is well-deserved for Dr. Berger as well as his team of surgeons, nurses, and staff. Baylor takes great pride in its partnership with the DeBakey VA." For more than 50 years, MEDVAMC staff has provided clinical training for health care professionals through affiliations with Baylor College of Medicine and 110 other educational and research institutions.

Since the inception of the NSQIP data collection process, the 30-day postoperative mortality after major surgery in the VA has decreased by 27 percent, and the 30-day morbidity by 45 percent. The future of the NSQIP lies in enhancing its capabilities by incorporating additional measures of outcome, structure, process, and cost, and in expanding it to the private sector.

In 2001, the private sector initiative was extended to 14 non-VA hospitals through a grant from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. These activities have enabled for the first time a comparison of risk-adjusted postoperative outcomes between the VA and the private sector.

"I am very proud the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center has achieved such an important objective," said Thomas B. Horvath, M.D., F.R.A.C.P., MEDVAMC chief of staff. "Our surgical service staff and its practices are top-notch. I also want to mention the contributions the staff of our Anesthesiology Service has made toward the care and well being of our



The Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center recently received notification from the National Veterans Affairs Surgical Quality Improvement Program Executive Committee that it has demonstrated consistently low observed-to-expected mortality rates in general surgery, all surgery, and all non-cardiac surgery six years in a row. The MEDVAMC is the only VA hospital with this record. Above, David H. Berger, M.D., Operative Care Line executive (right) performs surgery with David Chafey, M.D., resident (left) and Kostas Votanopoulos, M.D., chief resident.

veterans. Their role with the Operative Care Line is critical in reducing mortality rates in our medical center. This acknowledgement for continuous surgical excellence is very much earned and deserved. I am pleased we serve as such a positive example for other hospitals both inside and outside the VA health care system."

In 2005, there were 631,989 outpatient visits at the MEDVAMC's

Houston facility, 60,088 outpatient visits at the Beaumont Outpatient Clinic, 45,244 outpatient visits at the Charles Wilson Outpatient Clinic in Lufkin, and 15,358 outpatient visits at the new Galveston/Texas City Outpatient Clinics. During the same timeframe, 11,854 veterans were admitted as inpatients to the MEDVAMC and 237 veterans were admitted to the Transitional Care Center. ♦

A Word from the Director . . .

VA Working to Improve Emergency Preparedness

HOUSTON - Once again, hurricane season is upon us. After the terrible impact of last year's storms, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, along with many other local and national organizations, spent the last eight months reviewing our emergency preparedness plans and working to improve them.

Locally, we have analyzed all aspects of our facility's action plans to enhance our readiness for the next disaster or emergency. We have worked closely with our health care partners in the Texas Medical Center to improve our ability to respond. We have joined officials from the city of Houston, Harris County, and other Federal agencies in Houston to enhance the coordination and communication essential in a crisis situation. Over the next several weeks, the MEDVAMC will participate in joint exercises to ensure our improvements work as designed.

In addition, we have collaborated with regional and national VA emergency response and relief

specialists to assess our performance during last year's storms and develop additional strategies for strengthening our response capability.

We learned a great deal from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Our challenge is to take those valuable lessons learned, use that knowledge to adapt our plans, and then practice, practice, practice. We do not know what the upcoming hurricane season will bring, but we will make every effort to enhance our ability to respond.

On an individual basis, there are many things you can do to prepare your family for the unexpected, such as putting together an emergency supply kit including water, food, a first aid kit, medications, and special needs items; developing a family communications plan; plotting your evacuation route; and becoming more informed about both man-made and natural disasters.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Web site, www.ready.gov, contains suggestions, facts, and information on a wide variety of



Edgar L. Tucker, Medical Center Director

emergency situations. If you do not have access to the Internet, call toll free 1-800-BE-READY. The Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management's Web site, www.hccom.org, includes evacuation maps and zones for Brazoria, Galveston, and Harris Counties, weather information, helpful telephone numbers, and safety checklists. Their telephone number is (713) 881-3100. Planning what to do in advance is an important part of being prepared. ♦

Tetanus Shot Reminder

HOUSTON - Most people do not think about getting a tetanus shot until they step on a rusty nail or suffer another injury. But do not wait for an emergency to get protected.

Tetanus is a condition that affects the nervous system and causes painful, uncontrolled muscle spasms. Another name for tetanus is lockjaw.

Tetanus is caused by a toxin (poison) produced by spores of the bacterium *Clostridium tetani*. Tetanus spores can enter the body through a wound that is contaminated with soil, dust, or animal waste. Spores can get into the body through even a tiny scratch, but they usually enter through deep puncture wounds or cuts, like those made by nails or knives.

If ten years have passed since your last tetanus shot, or you just do not know how long it has been, you probably need a booster. Ask your Prime Care Provider to check your electronic medical record during your next appointment. ♦

How Can Social Workers at the Houston VA Help Me?

HOUSTON - Social workers assist veterans and their families resolve emotional, psychosocial, and economic problems. These health care professionals assist in dealing with the stress of illness, provide information about the VA and community resources, and facilitate a veteran's aftercare from the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC).

The MEDVAMC employs Masters-prepared social workers who are state licensed, independent practitioners.

What does that mean?

The MEDVAMC employs social workers licensed by the state of Texas. This means the social worker working with you is professionally trained and attends continuing education classes to stay informed about the latest resources, benefits information, and treatment options for you and your family.

At other VA Medical Centers, there is a Social Work Service led by a social work chief. The MEDVAMC does not have a Social Work Service. All social workers here report directly to a supervisor in their work area. We believe this makes them more responsive to your needs.

The MEDVAMC does have a social work practice executive whose job it is to make sure all social workers are licensed and performing their jobs at the highest level of professionalism.

Social workers at the MEDVAMC routinely provide a variety of services including:

Assessments

Social work assessments help your health care providers understand you as a person. Knowing your personal history and situation will help us make sure the care you receive meets your individual needs.

If a social worker asks you personal questions about your income or family, it is only because it helps them assess what programs and services you will need and qualify for. All you have to do is ask us and we will tell you why the information is important.

We also want to assure you all information you give us is confidential and we only share with your health care providers what they need to know to work with you and always with your permission.

Crisis Intervention

Counseling is available at times of crisis, new diagnoses, chronic illness, loss of a loved one, etc. This intervention can also include getting you emergency services during times of extreme need or working with the families in the Intensive Care Units waiting rooms.

Discharge Planning

Social workers help veterans, and their families, to plan for their return to the community or their home after a hospital stay or even after a clinic visit. Social workers help you get services you need by working with those agencies that provide them. They can also provide patient/family education on an individual basis or through support groups.

Case Management

Social workers provide on-going

individualized care plus individual, family, and group counseling.

Advocacy and Education

Social workers work on behalf of veterans both within and outside the MEDVAMC. These health care professionals also work to educate veterans and their family members through caregivers' support groups and staff consultation.

What types of services do Social Workers at the MEDVAMC provide?

Social workers at the MEDVAMC provide a variety of services including information on Advance Directives; assistance with alternative living arrangements such as emergency shelters, assisted living, boarding homes, nursing homes, and veteran's homes; chemical dependency assessments, treatment, and referral; information on financial assistance and benefits programs; HIV counseling; and home assessments.

They can make referrals to community resources such as financial assistance, benefits programs and services, and individual, family, and group counseling and therapy. Additionally, you can be referred for legal assistance related to family law (divorce, custody, child support, etc.), wills and probate, consumer, landlord/tenant, and immigration law, if you meet certain income requirements.

What types of community services can MEDVAMC Social Workers help me with?

Social workers at the MEDVAMC can provide information about such community services as adult and child protection, adult day care, community mental health, community case management services, and domestic violence assistance. These health care professionals can also advise you about emergency response systems; financial resources such as Social Security, SSI, and food stamps; homeless shelters; hospice care; legal assistance; Meals-On-Wheels; medical equipment; senior centers; and support groups.

How do I find a Social Worker?

Each clinic or unit has a social worker assigned to it. Just tell your doctor, nurse or clinic/unit clerk you would like to see a social worker. They can either direct you to the social worker's office or contact them for you.

What if my Social Worker is not in?

When a social worker is on leave, there is another social worker assigned to provide coverage. If the staff in your clinic or unit is unaware of the temporary replacement, contact the Clinic director or Care Line Executive's office. The staff there will contact the appropriate social worker for you.

How can I be sure the MEDVAMC Social Work Services are high quality?

The quality of Social Work services is the responsibility of the Social Work Practice. Because social workers are an important profession providing services to veterans, it is important to hire and



Social workers assist veterans and their families with the stress of illness, provide information about VA and community resources, and facilitate a veteran's aftercare from the MEDVAMC. Each clinic or unit at the MEDVAMC has a social worker assigned to it. Just let your doctor, nurse, or clinic clerk know that you would like to see a social worker. They can either direct you to the social worker's office or contact him or her for you. Above, Neurology Care Line Social Worker Lisa Whipple, LCSW meets with veteran Warren Howery.

train the best social workers available. Social Workers are committed to providing you with the best care and services.

How is the Social Work Practice organized and how does it operate?

The Social Work Practice Council and practice executive oversee the practice of social work at the MEDVAMC. The Social Work Practice Council, through its committees, provides counsel and assistance to each social worker, Care Line executive, and the medical center leadership regarding

all facets of professional social work practice within the MEDVAMC.

Who can I contact for more information or to ask questions?

If you cannot locate your social worker at the MEDVAMC, check with the Information Desk in the Main Lobby or the Main Hospital Switchboard at (713) 791-1414, ext. 0. At the Beaumont, Galveston, Lufkin, or Texas City outpatient clinics, check with the Information/Registration Desks or ask your health care provider. ♦ *Miguel Ortega, LCSW, Social Work Practice Executive*

Gray-Becknell Selected as New Houston VA Chief Nurse Executive

HOUSTON – Thelma Gray-Becknell, R.N., M.S.N. was recently selected as the new chief nurse executive for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC). In her new post, Gray-Becknell is a key member of the medical center top management team providing leadership and expert knowledge for the VA's state-of-the-art Houston medical facility and four community based outpatient clinics in southeast Texas. She will also offer professional guidance and accountability for nursing clinical practice, research, advances, and related issues.

A nurse with VA since 1972, Gray-Becknell served as the nurse executive from 2001 to 2006, the Clinical Affairs associate director from 1997 to 2001, and the Cardiac Care Unit head nurse from 1983 to 1997, all at the New Orleans VA Medical Center. She is the president of New Orleans Area Organization of Nurse Executives, the assistant director of the Institute for Therapeutic Wellness,

and a member of the American Association of Nurse Executives and the Advanced Practice Advisory Council for Loyola University Graduate School of Nursing.

"Thelma's experience in ensuring continuity of nursing care for our veterans, demonstrating effective team building among staff members, and developing successful nurse recruitment strategies will allow our medical center to continue providing world-class care to the veterans in southeast Texas," said Edgar L. Tucker, MEDVAMC director.

Gray-Becknell received a bachelor's degree in nursing in 1967 from Dillard University in New Orleans and a Master of Science in nursing in 1995 from the University of South Alabama in Mobile, Alabama. She is also the recipient of a gerontology certificate from the University of New Orleans in 1994 and the Great 100 Nursing Award of Excellence from Metropolitan New Orleans in 1992. ♦

New Primary Care Clinic at Houston VA

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outpatient clinics in Galveston and Texas City, plus another just for veterans displaced by Hurricane Katrina. This fifth Primary Care Clinic located at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston is just another step toward our goal of increased access to health care for veterans in southeast Texas," said Edgar L. Tucker, MEDVAMC director.

In FY 2005, the MEDVAMC served more than 112,000 enrolled veterans. There were 631,989 outpatient visits at the Houston facility, 60,088 outpatient visits at the Beaumont Outpatient Clinic, 45,244 outpatient visits at the Charles Wilson Outpatient Clinic in Lufkin, and 15,358 outpatient visits at the Galveston/Texas City Outpatient Clinics. During the same timeframe, 11,854 veterans were admitted as inpatients and 237 veterans were admitted to the Transitional Care Center.

According to a 2004 study by RAND, an independent think-tank, patients in the health care system operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) receive significantly better care than private-sector patients. The study found VA patients were significantly more likely than non-VA patients to receive needed preventative care. The study also found VA patients with chronic medical problems received the treatment they needed more often than private-sector patients. Researchers found about 51 percent of non-VA patients received care that met the latest standards of the health care profession, compared with 67 percent for VA patients. For preventative care, such as pneumonia vaccination and certain cancer screenings, 64 percent of VA patients received the appropriate care, compared to only 44 percent in the private sector. ♦

Notice to Patients

The Veterans Health Administration is pleased you have selected us to provide your health care. We want to improve your health and well-being. We will make your visit or stay as pleasant for you as possible. As part of our service to you, to other veterans and to the nation, we are committed to improving health care quality. We also train future health care professionals, conduct research, and support our country in times of national emergency. In all of these activities, our employees will respect and support your rights as a patient.

Houston VA Wait Time Success Story: Urology Section Turnaround

HOUSTON - Decreasing the amount of time veterans wait for health care appointments remains a high priority for administrators at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC). Solutions to this complex problem range from reallocation of resources, hiring additional staff, improving processes, and opening new clinics, while providing special attention to service-connected veterans and veterans recently returned from conflicts overseas.

MEDVAMC administrators continuously analyze staffing, resources, and processes in individual clinics and have appointed a full time employee to concentrate on problem areas. One area where significant progress has been made is the MEDVAMC Urology Section.

Urology is a surgical specialty that covers the male and female urinary tract including the bladder, the kidneys, the prostate, and the urethra. The clinicians in the Urology Section perform a full range of urology surgeries involving the kidney, the bladder, the urinary stone, and the prostate (both benign and malignant) and conduct a variety of laboratory procedures including cystoscopy, transrectal ultrasounds, biopsy, catheterizations, bladder irrigation, and other genitourinary procedures.

In the past, patients routinely complained about long wait times. In late 2004, the MEDVAMC hired a new Urology chief and completely restructured all Urology clinics.

"Urology health care providers are now responsible for specific groups of Urology patients. This has resulted in improved coordination of care in



The changes made in the Urology Section have "resulted in improved coordination of care in addition to increased satisfaction of our veterans and referring providers," said Donald Griffith, M.D., chief, MEDVAMC Urology Section. Above, Zaneta Romain, M.D., urology resident and Griffith answer veteran Felton Edward, Jr.'s questions about an upcoming procedure.

addition to increased satisfaction of our veterans and referring providers," said Donald Griffith, M.D., chief, MEDVAMC Urology Section.

The complete restructuring of all Urology clinics has more than doubled the number of appointments slots each month, from 776 to over 1,700. The clinic's hours were also expanded to five days a week, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. The clinic's no-show and cancellation rate has dropped from 28 percent to 16 percent since the change. Most importantly, appointments are made within 30 days

for virtually all patients and within a week for many.

"Complaints regarding access to Urology dropped from 45 in fiscal year 2004 to just seven in fiscal year 2005. The Urology Section is just the first of many success stories to come. Right now, we are piloting a new program in Phlebotomy, moving phlebotomists into the Prime Care Clinics with the goal of reducing wait time for veterans who need blood drawn for laboratory tests," said Kathy Salazar, MEDVAMC Clinic Access Coordinator. ♦

Houston VA's Major Affiliate Ranked 10th on National List of Medical Schools

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ments with institutions of higher learning in 14 states. This responsibility serves to enhance the quality of care provided to the veterans in southeast Texas.

"Baylor College of Medicine is an internationally respected medical and research institution known for excellence in education, research, and patient care. We value our long-term affiliation with this superb organization and offer our sincere congratulations. This recognition by U.S. News & World Report confirms our belief that our health care professionals are among the best in the country and provide the highest quality of health care for our Nation's most deserving, our veterans," said Edgar L. Tucker, director, MEDVAMC.

U.S. News & World Report also listed BCM as 11th in primary care, moving up from its 22nd ranking last year. Primary care includes internal medicine, family practice, and gynecology. BCM, Duke University, the University of California - San Francisco, and the University of Washington are the only medical schools in the country to achieve top 10 percent ranking in both research and primary care medical school

categories and a top 10 percent ranking in their biological sciences program.

The MEDVAMC significantly contributed to this achievement through its excellent primary care clinics and its outstanding results in preventive medicine and chronic disease management, and in the integration of mental health services in primary care. According to a 2004 study by RAND, an independent think-tank, patients in the health care system operated by the VA receive significantly better care than private-sector patients. The study found VA patients were significantly more likely than non-VA patients to receive needed preventative care. The study also found VA patients with chronic medical problems received the treatment they needed more often than private-sector patients. Researchers found about 51 percent of non-VA patients received care that met the latest standards of the health care profession, compared with 67 percent for VA patients. For preventative care, such as pneumonia vaccination and certain cancer screenings, 64 percent of VA patients received the appropriate care, compared to only 44 percent in the private sector.

"Having our medical school ranked in the top 10 percent of both categories and our graduate school also ranked in the top 10 percent shows that we have outstanding faculty training our students and that we have achieved broad-based excellence at BCM," says Peter G. Traber, M.D., president and CEO of BCM. "It also shows the tremendous strength of our affiliated teaching hospitals that collaborate with BCM to educate the next generation of physicians and scientists."

The medical school rankings survey by U.S. News & World Report included 125 medical schools fully accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, plus the 19 schools of osteopathic medicine fully accredited by the American Osteopathic Association. The rankings are based on a weighted average of eight "indicators" that includes average undergraduate GPAs, average Medical College Aptitude Test scores, faculty-to-student ratio, and total medical school enrollment. In addition, peer-assessment surveys of medical and osteopathic school deans, deans of academic affairs, and heads of internal medicine rate program quality on a scale of one-to-five. ♦

Disabled Veterans from Houston Ski and Compete in the Rocky Mountains

ASPEN, CO - Five disabled veterans who receive treatment at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center will be among 400 other disabled veterans from across the country, including more than 60 who were recently injured in Iraq and Afghanistan, to ski the Rocky Mountains at the 20th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village at Aspen, Colo., April 2 - 7, 2006.

The local veterans attending this year include David Fowler, 45, an Army veteran from Katy; Kenneth Adams, 24, an Army veteran from Katy; Kevin Kuddes, 36, an Army veteran from College Station; Evo Marini, 61, an Air Force veteran from Bailey Prairie; and Chris Post, 26, a Coast Guard veteran from Jacksonville.

Sponsored by VA and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the Clinic is hosted each year by the Grand Junction (Colo.) VA Medical Center and VA's Rocky Mountain Network.

"I look forward to this every year," said Fowler, a combat veteran of Grenada. "Power wheelchair soccer and skiing are two things I am passionate about. I played soccer and skied before my injury, and now I can do them both again. I have been attending this clinic for seven years and I love it. It feels fantastic to be able to ski again. I enjoy meeting the new guys just as much as I enjoy the skiing."

The clinic is open to all U.S. military veterans with spinal cord injuries or diseases, visual impairments, certain neurological conditions, orthopedic amputations or other disabilities, who receive care from the VA.

"The Winter Sports Clinic is the best time of the year for me," said Marini, a combat veteran of Vietnam. "I enjoy seeing the other veterans I met during previous events. Participating in the Clinic helps restore the confidence I lost during the year and really picks me up. I love attending this event and everyone who comes to it to take care of us."

At the event, participants will have the opportunity to learn adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing and be introduced to a variety of other adaptive activities and



Operation Enduring Freedom Army veteran Kenneth Adams skis with two guides during the 20th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic held in Aspen, Colorado. "This is my first time attending the Winter Sports Clinic," said Adams. "I have been nervous and excited about coming. This is my chance to show myself and the world that being blind or disabled doesn't stop you from climbing mountains. If anything, it helps drive your determination. I hope to take home a renewed sense of pride and accomplishment."

sports, such as rock climbing, scuba diving, snowmobiling and sled hockey. The U.S. Secret Service will also teach a course on self-defense designed for people with disabilities.

"For 20 years, the Winter Sports Clinic has been a shining example of VA's commitment to help disabled veterans recover from their serious injuries and illnesses," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson. "The determination, courage and grace displayed by hundreds of veterans who participate in this exciting event are a true testament to their character and the resolve of the human spirit."

Known for inspiring "Miracles on the Mountainside," the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic shows that the lives of veterans with disabilities can be changed forever when they discover the challenges they can

overcome.

"The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic has provided me with new friendships and freedom from my physical disabilities," said Kuddes. "There are no words to describe how downhill skiing makes me feel. I encourage other disabled veterans to attend and enjoy this event. It is the experience of a lifetime."

VA is a recognized leader in rehabilitation, with recreational therapy programs at each of its 158 hospitals. DAV, which has co-sponsored the event since 1991, is a nonprofit, congressionally chartered veterans service organization, with a membership of more than one million wartime disabled veterans.

For more information about the VA's Winter Sports Clinic, visit www.wintersportsclinic.org. ♦ Fran Burke, MEDVAMC Public Affairs Specialist

Are you a Small Business Owner Who Wants to Do Business with the Government?

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In 2004, Executive Order 13360 was issued to assure all Federal agencies develop a strategy to increase federal contracting and subcontracting opportunities for service-disabled veteran business owners. Here are a few tips to start your small business on the way to success:

Question: Where should firms wanting to do business with the government go to register?

Answer: Visit the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) Web site at www.ccr.gov.

Question: In addition to the CCR Web site, where should veteran-owned small businesses register?

Answer: Click on the "Register Your Business" at the VA's Vetbiz Web site: <http://vip.vetbiz.gov/>.

Question: What are the benefits of registering at the Vetbiz site?

Answer: Your company will receive special consideration for federal contracting opportunities from prime contractors and federal government agencies, notices of contracting opportunities, and information and news affecting Veteran-Owned and Service-Disabled businesses.

Question: When is a firm considered Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned (SDVO)?

Answer: Not less than 51 percent is owned by one or more service-disabled veterans, or in the case of any publicly owned business, not less than 51 percent of the stock is owned by one or more service-disabled veterans; and the management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more service-disabled veterans, or in the case of a veteran with a permanent and severe disability, a spouse or permanent caregiver.

Question: I am small business owner who is looking to team with other small businesses for specific contracting opportunities. Where can I find more information?

Answer: All prime contractors interested in teaming should register at <http://web.sba.gov/subnet/>.

Question: How do I identify pending procurements?

Answer: Check the VA's forecast of contracting opportunities at <http://www.va.gov/osdbu/opp/busops.htm> and monitor the Federal Business Opportunities Web site, www.fedbizopps.gov. ♦

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM - ENDURING FREEDOM



ENDURING AND IRAQI FREEDOM VETERANS

VA CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH HEALTH CARE AND BENEFITS ASSISTANCE IF YOU HAVE SERVED IN A RECENT THEATER OF COMBAT OPERATIONS.

If you were recently discharged from the military, with service in a theater of combat operations, VA can provide you free medical care for two years from your discharge from active duty for conditions possibly related to your service, regardless of your income status.

Please contact Fern A. Taylor, Manager, Patient Access Center at (713) 794-7034.

Free Educational Classes for Veterans

2006 Brown Bag Veteran Education Program Schedule

May 11, 2006, 11 a.m.
"Nosocomial Infections: What, When, Where & Preventive Measures"
by Paula Abraham, Infection Control Nursing Unit IC Dining Room

August 10, 2006, 11 a.m.
"Know your Diet"
by Nutrition & Food Nursing Unit IC Dining Room

November 9, 2006, 11 a.m.
"Know Your Patient Rights"
by Russell Martineau, Social Worker Nursing Unit IC Dining Room

Bring your lunch and join us.

For more information, call Yvonne S. Mack RN, MS, CHES, Patient Educator at (713) 791-1414, ext. 4082.

New Heart Disease Support Group

HOUSTON - *The Mended Hearts* Support Group offers hope for recovery and hope for a rich, full life. For more than 50 years, Mended Hearts has been offering the gift of hope and encouragement to heart patients, their families, and caregivers. Mended Hearts brings together patients, spouses, family members, friends, and medical professionals - all who are faced with the realities of heart disease - to form a network of caring individuals.

The first support group meeting, in collaboration with Mended Hearts, was held on Thursday, April 6, 2006 at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in the Nursing Unit 2A Dining Room.

Patients, spouses, family members, friends, and medical professionals are invited. Contact Tommie Gonzalez, LMSW at (713) 791-1414, ext. 5254 or Patricia Suarez, LCSW (713) 791-1414 at ext. 6101 for more information or a schedule of upcoming meetings. ♦

Texas Veterans Commission: A Staunch Advocate for Texas Veterans

HOUSTON - The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) works along side the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) assisting veterans and their survivors in obtaining entitled benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the State of Texas.

The TVC has four counselors located on the 2nd Floor of the MEDVAMC, ensuring veterans have easy access to experts about available benefits. The counselors at the MEDVAMC serve an average of 40 walk-in veterans per day providing assistance with both health and benefits eligibility and claims processing. Counselors educate veterans, both on an inpatient and outpatient basis, and widows of veterans on their entitlements, assist them with completing necessary forms, and on many occasions, aid in obtaining the necessary documents for processing.

"The TVC counselors have helped me tremendously. I have been displaced from New Orleans and they have been very understanding and helped me in any way they can," said veteran Michael Brown.

The TVC was created by the Fortieth Texas Legislature in 1927 as the Veterans State Service Office and later renamed in 1985 as the Texas Veterans Commission. TVC counselors, whose



Texas Veterans Commission Senior Counselor Wolf Biedenfeld (right) discusses available benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the State of Texas with veteran Michael Brown. Biedenfeld and his co-workers work along side staff at the VA Medical Center in Houston.

mission is to guarantee that Texas veterans and their families receive all the rights and entitlements provided for veterans by law, are located at all medical centers, outpatient clinics and VA Regional Offices.

"Since we have seen an increase of five percent in the number of female veterans, we are fortunate to have a female counselor who assists them if

they prefer," said Wolf Biedenfeld, TVC senior counselor. "We strive to be the very best veterans' advocacy agency we can by providing claims counseling, assistance with educational benefits, and by training county service officers.

The Texas Veterans Commission is a state agency that is completely funded by the state of Texas. TVC serves 1.7 million veterans in the state of Texas and has recovered approximately \$1.2 billion in benefits.

"My greatest personal reward is helping veterans and their families see an improvement in their lives by receiving health or pension benefits," said Biedenfeld.

Veterans can make an appointment with a TVC counselor at the MEDVAMC by calling (713) 794-7785 or toll free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 7785, or by stopping by the TVC office and signing in. ♦ *Fran Burke, MEDVAMC Public Affairs Specialist*

Support Group Listing . . .

Talk with a social worker about available support groups for veterans and family members.

MS Self-Help Group

Meets 2nd Wednesday every month, 2 - 3:30 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Dining Room. Facilitators: Lisa Whipple, (713) 794-7951 & Fe Runtanilla, (713) 791-1414, ext. 4559

Parkinson's Disease Education/Support Group

Meets 1st Friday every month, 10 a.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Dining Room. No meetings in April or September. Facilitators: Naomi Nelson, (713) 794-8938 & Lisa Whipple, (713) 794-7951

Cancer Support Group

Meets 1st Tuesday every month, 1-2 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 4D Dayroom. Facilitators: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, (713) 791-1414, ext. 5273 & Chaplain Douglas Ensminger, (713) 794-7200

Better Breather's Club

Meets last Wednesday every month, 1:30 p.m., Room 3C-371, Home Oxygen Clinic. Facilitator: Paula Denman, (713) 794-8979

Hepatitis C Support Group

Meets 1st Friday every month, 1:30 p.m., Primecare Clinic 4 (NASA), Room 1A-442. Facilitators: Lauri Burke & Michelle Ray, (713) 791-1414, ext. 3613/3394

Pain Management for Opioid Medication Maintenance

Meets every Tuesday, 1 p.m., Room 5C-215. Facilitator: Gabriel Tan, (713) 794-8794

Renal Support Group

Meets 1st Tuesday every month, 9 a.m., Dental Conference Room 2A-312. Facilitator: Juanita Ibarra, (713) 791-1414, ext. 4834

Prostate Cancer Support Group

Meets 3rd Thursday every month, 2 p.m., Room 4C-122. Facilitators: Lillie Sonnier, (713) 791-1414, ext. 5919 & Tonjala Seals, ext. 6227

Pain Management for Women

Meets every Friday, 1 p.m., Room 5B-224. Group facilitator: Gabriel Tan, (713) 794-8794

Pain Management Pre-Pain Screening Group

Meets every Thursday, 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., Room 5C-215. Facilitator: Gabriel Tan, (713) 794-8794

Dementia Caregivers Group

Meets 3rd Tuesday every month, 5 p.m., Room 1C-270. Facilitator: Yvonne S. Mack, (713) 791-1414, ext. 4082

Amputee Support Group

Meets 4th Wednesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Day Room. Facilitators: Anna Bracero, (713) 794-7816 & Betty Baer, (713) 794-7793

Bereavement Support Group

Meets 4th Thursday, quarterly, 2 p.m., Room 1C-270. Facilitators: Catherine Clancy & Mattheon Mcneil, (713) 794-7373

HIV Support/Educational Group

Meets every Tuesday, 2 p.m., Clinic 4, Room 1A-442. Facilitator: Kathy Molitor, (713) 791-1414, ext. 4161 & Belinda Rainer, (713) 791-1414, ext. 6177/5292

Pain Support Group

Meets every Wednesday, 1 p.m., Room 5C-215. Facilitator: Gabriel Tan, (713) 794-8794

Pain Education Group

Meets every Wednesday, 2 p.m., Room 5C-215. Facilitator: Gabriel Tan, (713) 794-8794

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Meets every Wednesday, 7 p.m., Room 6C-105. Facilitator: Bo Cook, (713) 791-1414, ext. 6987

Breast Cancer Support Group

Meets last Tuesday every month, 12 noon, Women's Health Center, Room 5B-224. Facilitators: Magdalena Ramirez & Shirley LaDay Smith, (713) 794-7926

Lufkin Hypertension Classes

Meets 1st Thursday every month, 2 p.m. Ask your nurse or your primary care provider, or stop by the front desk at the Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic to register.

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Eating Your Fruits and Veggies May Help Lower Your Cancer Risk



Veteran Maurice Davis discusses the benefits of eating a variety of fruits and vegetables with MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern Jean Park. Five to nine servings per day of these nutritional powerhouses will fill your body with antioxidants, phytochemicals, and fiber.

HOUSTON - Making the right choices about the foods you eat is a great way not only to improve your overall health, but to help reduce your risk of cancer. By eating more fruits and vegetables, you may be able to help your body protect itself against various types

of cancers including stomach, colon, esophagus, bladder, pancreas, lung, breast, cervical, and prostate cancers.

Eating your fruits and vegetables has never been more important. The more colorful the fruit or vegetable, the more beneficial nutrition it contains. Aim for

five to nine servings per day of these nutritional powerhouses to fill your body with antioxidants, phytochemicals, and fiber.

Although this may sound like a mighty task, one serving size is actually pretty small. A serving for vegetables is 1/2 cup of cooked vegetables, one cup of raw vegetables such as lettuce, or 3/4 cup of vegetable juice. For fruits, a serving consists of 1/2 cup of fresh fruit, a medium piece of whole fruit about the size of a tennis ball, 3/4 cup of fruit juice, or 1/4 cup of dried fruit. Research has shown the following fruits and vegetables to be especially important in the prevention of cancer:

- ✓ Vitamin C works as an antioxidant and can be found in citrus fruits, strawberries, kiwi, broccoli, spinach, bell peppers, tomatoes, and white potatoes

- ✓ Beta-carotene rich foods, another source of powerful antioxidants, include dark green and yellow fruits and vegetables such as apricots, broccoli, carrots, cantaloupe, sweet potatoes, spinach, and romaine lettuce

- ✓ Phytochemicals in cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, sprouts, cabbage, kale, and turnips may have cancer protective benefits

- ✓ Lycopene is an antioxidant found in tomatoes, especially tomato products such as tomato sauce, tomato paste, and ketchup, and may help protect against the development of prostate cancer

By including some of these foods in your diet, you will receive a myriad of health benefits far beyond helping protect yourself against cancer. Start slowly and make small changes.

Fresh, frozen, or canned – they all contain the same great nutrition. Rinse the liquid off of canned vegetables to decrease the excess sodium.

Focus on seasonal produce. As the seasons change, so do the fruits and vegetables on our grocer's shelves. Choosing fresh produce in season is a good way to make sure your grocery dollars are going further.

Some tips to help you incorporate more fruits and vegetables in your diet are:

- ✓ Try adding more vegetables to dishes you already prepare such as chopped frozen spinach to lasagna, onions and tomatoes to scrambled eggs, or chopped bell peppers and corn to fajitas

- ✓ Bring fresh fruits or veggies such as baby carrots, celery sticks, cherry tomatoes, apple slices, or grapes along for snacks

- ✓ When eating out, ask if you can replace a starchy side dish such as rice, bread, pasta, or potatoes with a vegetable side

- ✓ Always keep washed fruits and vegetables on hand to make them an easy choice

- ✓ Experiment with a new fruit or vegetable every week, you may find a new favorite

If you have additional questions or would like more assistance, visit the American Cancer Society Web site at www.cancer.org or call the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center Nutrition Clinic at (713) 791-1414, ext. 4295 or ext. 6166. ♦ Jean Park, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern

VA Receives Major Award for Electronic Medical Records Sharing

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The continuing success of its industry-leading electronic medical records have earned the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) a prestigious national award in information technology.

The award cites VA's collaboration with the Department of Defense (DoD) on electronic medical records for patients receiving care from both departments. The award was given by the American Council for Technology, an organization of industry and government executives who work together to improve the government's computerized programs.

"VA patients see the benefits of our electronic patient records every time a lab test isn't repeated because the results were lost, when health care professionals can see x-rays on their laptops, when pharmacy prescriptions don't conflict with other medication," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "The VA-DoD partnership will provide the same high-quality records for all the patients treated by both departments."

Called the Bidirectional Health Information Exchange, the VA-DoD system permits the secure exchange of medical records; thereby, avoiding duplicate testing or even surgeries. Currently, nine military medical centers are able to accept data from VA. All VA facilities can receive the military's health care information electronically.

The kinds of data exchanged so far includes demographic information on patients, outpatients' pharmaceuticals, laboratory and radiology test results and drug and food allergies.

"An integrated health technology system that allows for the real-time transfer of patient information is the future of medicine," said Jonathan B. Perlin, M.D., Ph.D., M.S.H.A., F.A.C.P., VA's under secretary for health. "We will continue to collaborate with DoD and all our federal health care partners until that future becomes reality."

The Excellence.Gov award is for collaborative technologies proven effective in meeting objectives in business and service improvements and using accepted best standards and practices for shared information. ♦

Do You Suffer from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)?

HOUSTON - Veterans have often been exposed to significant stress and trauma during their military service. Many veterans have reported a number of health problems during or after their military service that are quite distressing and do not go away. These may include chronic abdominal discomfort or pain accompanied by changes in their stool frequency and form such as diarrhea and constipation. If you have these symptoms, you may have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Two treatments that may help relieve the symptoms of IBS are hypnosis and biofeedback. The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and Baylor College of Medicine are conducting a small study of the effect of hypnosis and biofeedback on the symptoms of IBS.

For more information, please call Neil Fiess at (713) 794-7468. ♦

Refill Your Prescriptions Online

It's fast, easy, convenient, and secure!

Visit
www.myhealth.va.gov
on the
Web and
register today.

If you aren't sure about the Internet or the computer, the Library at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center offers free, introductory computer classes for veterans. Call (713) 794-7856 to schedule your training today.





**Answers
provided by the
Consumer Affairs Staff
Room 1B-270
(713) 794-7883
(713) 794-7884
or email
vhaugeneralquestions@med.va.gov**

Question: How quickly can I be seen at the Emergency Room?

Answer: The MEDVAMC Emergency Room functions under an Emergent Care Triage Protocol System. This means critical cases such as cardiac emergencies, pneumonia, and difficulty breathing are seen before non-critical ones – no matter when a patient came in. This may result in very long waits for patients with non-life threatening illnesses such as colds, ingrown toenails, rashes, minor cuts, prescription refills, or minor illness that have been present for several days.

The MEDVAMC ER is not designed to serve as a primary care provider for patients. Patients are assigned a Primary Care Team at the MEDVAMC to ensure continuity of care. Prime care providers are supported by a team of nurses, clerks, social workers, dieticians, pharmacists, and other skilled professionals to assure patients receive well-coordinated medical care. If you have not been assigned a Primary Care Team, call the VA Network Telecare Center at (713) 794-8985 or toll-

free 1 (800) 639-5137.

If you have a medical problem after hours and cannot wait until your next appointment, call the VA Network Telecare Center at (713) 794-8985 or toll-free 1 (800) 639-5137. Professionally trained, registered nurses are ready to help answer health care questions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The VA Network Telecare can also put you in touch with your Primary Care Team.

If you are at home and have a life-threatening medical emergency, immediately call 911.

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

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

Question: When is the next New Patient Orientation Clinic?

Answer: New Patient Orientation Clinics are held the first Wednesday of every month except for November and December. Instead, the clinics for these months are November 8, 2006 and December 13, 2006. For more information, call (713) 791-1414, ext. 5644.

Question: I heard the Moving Wall is coming to Houston. Is this true?

Answer: The VA has been told the Dignity Memorial "Vietnam Wall Experience" will return to the Houston-area, July 7 - 9, 2006. It will be on display at Brookside Cemetery located at 13401 Eastex (59 north) Freeway.

The "Wall," a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial located in Washington, D.C.,

is an opportunity for the community to remember those whose names are located on the memorial and to educate others on this powerful legacy to those who paid the ultimate price.

If your organization would like to be involved with the planning committee or take part in any of the ceremonies planned for this event, contact Lynda Greene at degeorgeatunionstation@juno.com.

An opening ceremony will be held on July 7, 2006, a POW candlelight ceremony on July 8, 2006, and a closing ceremony at dusk on July 9, 2006.

Question: Is there transportation available to the Houston VA?

Answer: Transportation to and from the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center from outlying areas is available by way of vans operated by various veteran service organizations and local government offices. The vans are operated as a free service for veterans seeking medical care at the MEDVAMC. Veterans are advised to call at least a week before their appointment, as several vans require reservations. Reservations are made on a first-come, first-serve basis. Call for availability, pick-up points, and schedule information:

- Bay City Van, (979) 323-9235
 - Beaumont Vans, (409) 981-8550
 - Brazoria County Van, (979) 864-1289
 - Conroe Van, (936) 756-7614
 - El Campo Van, (979) 578-8387
 - Harris County Precinct #2 Van, (281) 452-6071
 - Harris County Social Services Transportation, (713) 696-1985
 - Lufkin Vans, (936) 633-2750
 - Montgomery County Vans, (936) 756-5828
 - Willis Van, (936) 856-5224
 - Woodville/Tyler County Van, (409) 283-2493
- The Houston METRO offers

discount fares to persons with disabilities and senior citizens. These discounts are available for both local and commuter fixed-route buses, which are all wheelchair accessible. Riders age 62 through 69 may apply for the senior citizen discount. Riders age 70 and over may travel for free using the 70+ lifetime pass if eligible. METRO's RideStores are located downtown at 1001 Travis and 1900 Main Street. They are open Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Call METROline at (713) 635-4000 for more information on discounts or METRO RideStores.

Question: What is VA Disability Compensation and who is eligible?

Answer: Disability Compensation is a benefit paid to a veteran because of injuries or diseases that happened while on active duty, or were made worse by active military service. It is also paid to certain veterans disabled from VA health care. The benefits are tax-free. You may be eligible for Disability Compensation if you have a service-related disability and you were discharged under other than dishonorable conditions. The amount of basic benefit paid ranges from \$112 to \$2,393 per month, depending on how disabled you are. You may be paid additional amounts, in certain instances, if you have very severe disabilities or loss of limb(s); have a spouse, child(ren), or dependent parent(s); or have a seriously disabled spouse.

You can apply by filling out VA Form 21-526, Veterans Application for Compensation or Pension. If you have any of the following material, attach it to your application: dependency records such as marriage and children's birth certificates and medical evidence such as doctor and hospital reports. Contact the Houston VA Regional Office at 1 (800) 827-1000 or (713) 383-1999.

Important VA Telephone Numbers

- Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center Main Line (713) 791-1414 or toll-free 1-800-553-2278
- VA Network Telecare Center (713) 794-8985 or toll-free 1-800-639-5137
- Beaumont VA Outpatient Clinic (409) 981-8550 or toll-free 1-800-833-7734
- Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic (Lufkin) (936) 637-1342 or toll-free 1-800-209-3120
- Galveston VA Outpatient Clinic (409) 741-0256 or toll-free 1-800-310-5001
- Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic (409) 986-1129 or toll-free 1-800-310-5001
- Pharmacy Refills (713) 794-7648 or toll-free 1-800-454-1062
- Pharmacy Helpline (713) 794-7653
- Appointment Information (713) 794-7648 or toll-free 1-800-454-1062
- VA Eligibility & Enrollment (713) 794-7288
- Patient Education Resource Center (PERC) (713) 794-7856
- VA Police (713) 794-7106
- Vet Center (Post Oak Road)** (713) 682-2288
- Vet Center (Westheimer)** (713) 523-0884
- Patient Representatives**
- Houston/Galveston/Texas City (713) 794-7884
- Beaumont 1-800-833-7734 extension 113
- Lufkin (936) 633-2753
- Houston National Cemetery** (281) 447-8686
- VA Regional Office**
- Main Number 1-800-827-1000
- Compensation/Pension 1-800-827-1000
- Home Loans 1-888-232-2571
- Education 1-888-442-4551



Flag Day Program

*Wednesday
June 14, 2006
10 a.m.*

*4th Floor
Auditorium*

*Michael E.
DeBakey VA
Medical Center*

*2002 Holcombe
Boulevard,
Houston, Texas*

*Contact Public Affairs
at (713) 794-7349
for more information.*