



With 6 Months to Live, Virtual Tumor Board Gives Navy Veteran Second Chance at Life

HOUSTON – Navy Veteran Roy Whitehead was told he had six to 12 months to live when he saw doctors near his small hometown of Morgan City, La. But his oncologist at the New Orleans VA Outpatient Clinic, Nancy Vander Velde, M.D., told him because he was a Veteran, he had access to a new pilot program in Houston that might save his life.

“The South Central VA Health Care Network recently established a Virtual Tumor Board at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center using state-of-the-art telemedicine technology to ensure Veterans have direct and immediate access to a multidisciplinary team of experienced and knowledgeable cancer care specialists,” said Daniel A. Anaya, M.D., surgical oncologist, director of the DeBakey VA Liver Tumor Program.

Each cancer case is different, and most cancers can be treated in a variety of ways. The goals of the VA Virtual Tumor Board Pilot Program, funded by the Rural Health and Telemedicine Office of the South Central VA Health Care Network, are to improve the quality of cancer care, increase patient and physician satisfaction, and extend expert medical care to rural areas.

“Mr. Whitehead’s medical case represents the typical patient, and one of the first of many, who will benefit from such a collaborative effort of VA



Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

The Virtual Tumor Board allows VA physicians throughout the South Central United States to tap into the specific and unique expertise of a team of cancer experts at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. Daniel Anaya, M.D., surgical oncologist and director of the DeBakey VA Liver Tumor Program, meets with Navy Veteran Roy Whitehead and his daughter during a follow-up appointment.

health care professionals,” said Anaya, also an assistant professor of Surgery/Surgical Oncology at Baylor College of Medicine.

Already deemed a success, the

Virtual Tumor Board, using advanced videoconferencing equipment, allows VA physicians throughout the south central

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Adapted Sports Exposition Held

HOUSTON – In October, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center held an all-day exhibition of adapted sports targeting amputee, polytrauma, and spinal cord injury Veterans. The event’s goal was to show newly injured patients that life is not over just because they lose the use of their legs or arms.

“It’s important to introduce inpatients and outpatients to the wide variety of activities, sports, and leisure activities that are out there,” said Recreation Therapist Jemarques Handy. “Getting involved not only improves your physical condition, but also your mental and emotional status. I have seen Veterans who were hanging their head down, get involved, boost their self-esteem and confidence and reduce their stress levels and depression.”

The purpose of the Adapted Sports Expo was to increase leisure awareness, enhance leisure participation, and familiarize Veterans with VA resources, ultimately promoting wellness and improving quality of life. Many community

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New Women’s Health Center Opens



Photo by Shawn James, Media Section

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center celebrated the opening of its new Women’s Health Center with a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on September 29, 2010.

“I was really impressed because I didn’t actually know they had a separate clinic, and I don’t think a lot of soldiers know that, so I’m actually going to pass that on,” said Army Reserve Sgt. 1st Class Anita Gilliam, who visited the new women’s center for an evaluation and dental work after returning from a deployment to Kuwait.

Prior to the celebration, the Women’s Clinic moved in mid-September into the new, completely renovated space located on the 1st floor, east side of the building near the Spinal Cord Injury Entrance. The new clinic boasts its own private entrance from outside the building, and additional health care providers and support staff.

The new clinic is 2,800 sq. ft. with seven exam rooms as well as a larger waiting room to accommodate women in a comfortable, friendly atmosphere.

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From left: Pamela Swope, Women Veterans Program manager; Amy Smith, D.N.P., F.A.A.N.P., South Central VA Healthcare Network deputy chief medical officer; Betty Moseley Brown, Ed.D., associate director of VA Center for Women Veterans; Navy Veteran Joan Tulich; Adam Walms, DeBakey VA director; Air Force Veteran Emily Ojeda; Army Veteran Arlene Nash; J. Kalavar, M.D., DeBakey VA chief of staff; Edward M. Emmett, Harris County Judge; and Rola El-Serag, M.D., Women’s Health Center medical director.



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Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic Scheduled to Reopen Early Next Year

See page 7 for details!

It's Time Again for Your Flu Shot - Only 1 This Year!

HOUSTON – This year, a plentiful supply of influenza vaccine is available at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) and its outpatient clinics.

While flu is unpredictable, it is likely the 2009 H1N1 viruses and the regular seasonal viruses will cause illness in the U.S. this flu season. The 2010-2011 flu vaccine will protect against three different flu viruses: an H3N2 virus, an influenza B virus, and the H1N1 virus that caused so much illness last season.

In addition, a high dose flu shot is available this year for people over 65. This is the same vaccine as the usual flu vaccine, but four times as concentrated. It is the first time a high dose flu vaccine has been offered for seniors. The reason is they are the ones who most often die from the flu because of weakened immune systems.

Vaccinations at the MEDVAMC and its outpatient clinics will continue through March 2011.

Veterans who should seriously consider vaccination are:

- Over 50 years of age.
- Residents of long-term facilities.
- Veterans with long-term health problems of the heart, lungs, asthma, kidneys, or diabetes and other metabolic diseases.
- Veterans with muscle or nerve disorders involving swallowing or breathing.
- Veterans with weakened

immune systems.

→ Women Veterans who may be pregnant during the flu season.

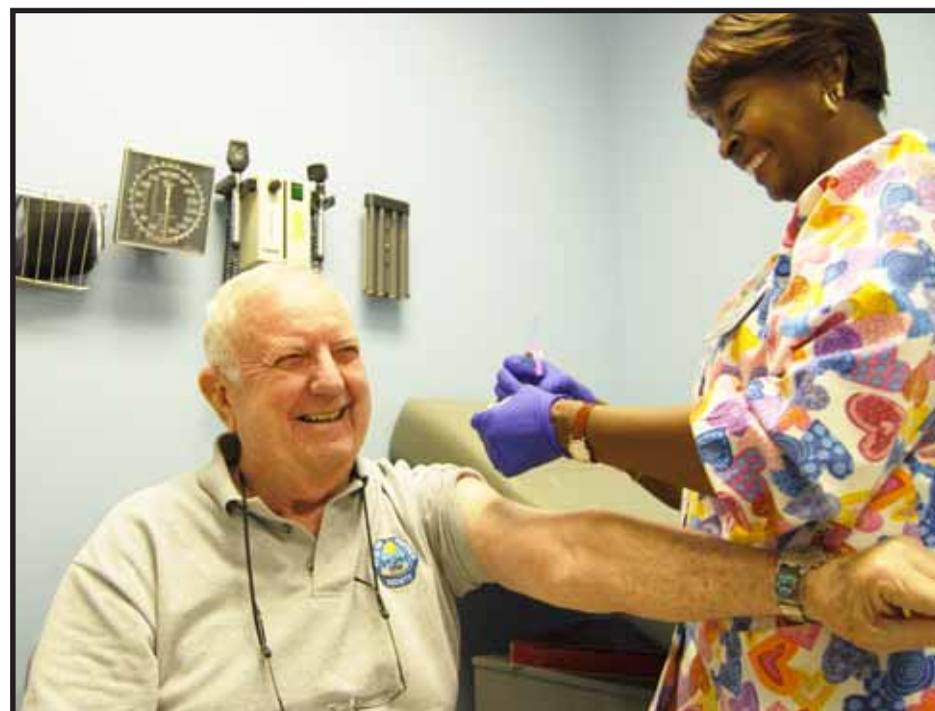
An average of 36,000 Americans die each year from influenza and many of them are the unvaccinated elderly. No vaccine is 100 percent effective, but the flu vaccine very clearly decreases the chance of severe illness, death, hospitalizations, and lost work days.

The decision to get vaccinated is also very important and recommended for Veterans 50 to 64 years of age because of their increased risk of flu complications and early development of chronic illness; and for physicians, nurses, family members, or anyone else in close contact with people at risk of serious influenza.

All Prime Care Clinics at the MEDVAMC will vaccinate Veterans on a walk-in basis. Last year, 66,342 Veterans and MEDVAMC health care workers were vaccinated at the VA or other places. The MEDVAMC plans to vaccinate even more this year.

Although the flu may arrive earlier, the first cases of flu usually arrive in urban Houston in mid-December with most cases appearing in early January. For this reason, it is important to get vaccinated by late November, if possible.

Some Veterans have asked why the MEDVAMC continues to vaccinate as late as March. The experts at MEDVAMC have noticed influenza continues spreading in the rural areas of



An average of 36,000 Americans die each year from influenza and many of them are the unvaccinated elderly. Primary Care Nurse Bettye Greer-Dandridge, L.V.N. gives Navy Veteran Jack Owens his annual flu shot. The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center wants to vaccinate 95 percent of its Veterans this year.

east Texas as late as March.

Another reason for vaccination until March is a second, very different strain of flu, known as Flu B, often appears in late winter or early spring. This strain of flu virus is less severe than the earlier flu, but it can still make you feel sick enough to miss work or see a doctor. In fact, the two flu strains are so different that getting the first one does not mean you cannot get the second. The vaccine the MEDVAMC administers is effective against both types of flu, and for that reason, we continue to vaccinate Veterans through March.

Whether vaccinated or not, it is important to know about personal hygiene practices that can lessen the severity of a flu illness to help prevent the spread of this infection. When you

are sick, keep your distance from others. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs, especially after coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth to prevent germ transmission.

Stop smoking. Did you know that some scientific studies show an increase in influenza infections among smokers compared to non-smokers? There is a higher mortality rate for smokers than non-smokers from influenza.

For more information about influenza and the flu vaccine, contact the MEDVAMC Preventive Medicine Program at (713) 794-8768 or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.cdc.gov/flu. ♦

A Word from the Director . . .

Urgent: Update Your Contact Info Today

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

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

I ask you to take the time during your next VA appointment to check the accuracy of your contact information. Make sure the best telephone number to contact you is listed in our database. Also, our clinic clerks are trying to reach you to make corrections.

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

Wrong telephone numbers also affect other aspects of your health care. This includes patient wait times. Why? Because we recently began using



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

a new computerized telephone system to get in touch with you. This system calls and reminds Veterans about upcoming appointments, and allows you to cancel or confirm.

When our telephone system runs into a bad telephone number, it is unable to complete the call. We don't know if you are going to make your appointment, so we automatically save it. If you are a "No Show," another Veteran has missed a basic opportunity to receive medical care. This increases your wait times for appointments.

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

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



Call today to transfer your care to the NEW Richmond VA Outpatient Clinic. 832-595-7700 or toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12800 22001 Southwest Freeway, Richmond, Texas 77469

Pivotal Study Finds Link between PTSD and Dementia



“We found Veterans with PTSD had twice the chance for later being diagnosed with dementia than Veterans without PTSD,” said Mark Kunik, M.D., M.P.H., a psychiatrist at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and senior author of the article. “Although we cannot at this time determine the cause for this increased risk, it is essential to determine whether the risk of dementia can be reduced by effectively treating PTSD. This could have enormous implications for Veterans now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.”

The study included 10,481 Veterans at least 65 years of age who had been seen at the VA at least twice during a two year period.

Subjects who had received a Purple Heart (with and without a PTSD diagnosis) were also identified to provide a group with confirmed injuries and combat experience. A group with two visits, but no PTSD or Purple Heart, was identified for purposes of comparison. Outpatient data were gathered for all identified patients from 1997 through 2008.

“Despite the increased risk for those with PTSD, it is noteworthy that most Veterans with PTSD did not develop dementia during the period we studied,”

said Salah Qureshi, M.D., a staff psychiatrist and investigator with the Houston VA Center of Excellence and first author of the article. “It will be important to determine which Veterans with PTSD are at greatest risk and to determine whether PTSD induced by situations other than war injury is also associated with greater risk.”

The authors note there could be several explanations for their findings. It could be that cognitive impairment in PTSD is an early marker of dementia, having PTSD makes one more likely to get dementia, or PTSD and dementia have some characteristics in common. They emphasize the need for further study with a broader sample in the civilian population.

Learning more about PTSD is currently a targeted goal of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as estimates of affected Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are as high as one in five. PTSD can have long-term consequences and affect individuals for many years after the combat experience. It is also associated with many of the same changes to memory and thinking as dementia.

For more information about PTSD, visit www.ptsd.va.gov.

“It will be important to determine which Veterans with PTSD are at greatest risk and to determine whether PTSD induced by situations other than war injury is also associated with greater risk,” said Salah Qureshi, M.D., a staff psychiatrist and investigator with the Houston VA Center of Excellence and first author of the article.

HOUSTON – Results of a study reported in the September issue of the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society suggest that Veterans with post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have a greater risk for dementia than Veterans without PTSD, even those who suffered traumatic injuries.

Do You Qualify for Beneficiary Travel Benefits?

If you meet the criteria below, you may be eligible for mileage reimbursement or special mode transportation associated with obtaining VA health care services.

You qualify if:

1. You have a service-connected (SC) rating of 30% or more, or
2. You are traveling for treatment of a SC condition, or
3. You receive a VA pension, or
4. Your income does not exceed the maximum annual VA pension rate, or
5. You are traveling for a scheduled compensation or pension examination.

You qualify for Special Mode Transportation if:

1. Your medical condition requires an ambulance or a specially equipped van as determined by a VA clinician, and
2. You meet one of the eligibility criteria in 1 through 4 above, and
3. The travel is pre-authorized (authorization is not required for emergencies if a delay would be hazardous to life or health).

At the Travel Reimbursement Window, you will need:

1. Your VA Identification Card, Driver's License, or State-issued Identification Card.
2. A list of the appointments for which you are claiming reimbursement for days other than the current day. This is referred to as “Back Travel Pay.”
3. You must be completely checked-out from your clinic appointment.

Mileage Rates:

General Travel = \$0.415 (41.5 cents) per mile

Scheduled appointments qualify for round-trip mileage. Unscheduled visits may be limited to return mileage only.

Deductible (effective January 9, 2009) = \$3 one-way (\$6 round trip)

Deductible requirement is subject to a monthly cap of \$18. Upon reaching \$18 in deductibles or 6 one-way (3 round) trips, whichever comes first, travel payments made for the balance of that particular month will be free of deductible charges.

Note: Mileage is calculated from your residence to the nearest VA facility where care *could* have been provided.

Waiver of Deductible:

A waiver of the deductible will be provided if you are eligible for travel and you:

1. Are in receipt of a VA pension or;
2. Are a nonservice-connected Veteran and your previous year's income does not exceed, or your projected current calendar year's income, in the year of application will not exceed the applicable VA pension rate, or
3. Are a service-connected Veteran and your previous year's income does not exceed, or your projected current calendar year's income, in the year of application will not exceed the applicable national means test income threshold or,
4. Are traveling for a scheduled compensation and pension exam.

For more information, visit www.va.gov/healtheligibility/Library/FAQs/BeneTravelFAQ.asp.



VA Helps Navy Veteran Get Second Chance at Life

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United States to tap into the specific and unique expertise of a team of cancer experts at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, explore many options for clinical therapies, expedite and improve the quality of care for patients, and continuously expand their knowledge base and refine their expertise to advance care.

Veterans, especially those with complex cases, benefit from the collective experience of a large group of specialists and the research prowess of a nationally renowned academic medical center. Along the way, they gain improved opportunities for remission or cure while their physicians agree on the best treatment plans.

"While he had chemo, we thought it would be months before my father received any other treatment," said Amy Stratton, Whitehead's daughter. "But, there was no waste of time. In just two weeks, the doctors told us their plan, we were in Houston, and my father had surgery. I was amazed how quick the entire process was."

Whitehead underwent liver resection, the surgical removal of a portion of his liver, in July. This operation removes various types of liver tumors located in one part of the liver.

The goal of liver resection is to completely remove the tumor and the appropriate surrounding liver tissue without leaving any tumor behind. When a portion of a normal liver is removed, the remaining liver can grow back to the original size within one to two weeks.

"The DeBakey VA is one of the few VA hospitals in the Nation to offer this complex surgery," said Anaya, who is also the principal investigator for the VA Virtual Tumor Board Pilot Program and a research scientist at the Houston Health Services Research and Development Center of Excellence.

"The Virtual Tumor Board, Dr. Vander Velde, and Dr. Anaya have been a gift and I am so grateful," said Whitehead who served aboard guided missile destroyers near Cuba in the 1960s. "We stayed at the Fisher House in Houston and I was treated like a V.I.P. by all the doctors, nurses, and staff. Today, I have a very positive prognosis and a new outlook on life."

"We want to give Veterans access to the best hospitals and doctors anywhere in the world; I believe we have that right here in Houston," said David H. Berger, M.D., M.H.C.M., Operative Care Line executive and professor of Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine. "The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center constantly strives to open new doors and make new medical alternatives available for our Veterans." ♦

New Technology Removes Uncertainty for Family Members of Surgical Patients

HOUSTON – In July, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) introduced a computerized, operating room control system called OR•Control. One feature of the new technology allows family members and friends to follow the progress of their loved ones through surgery.

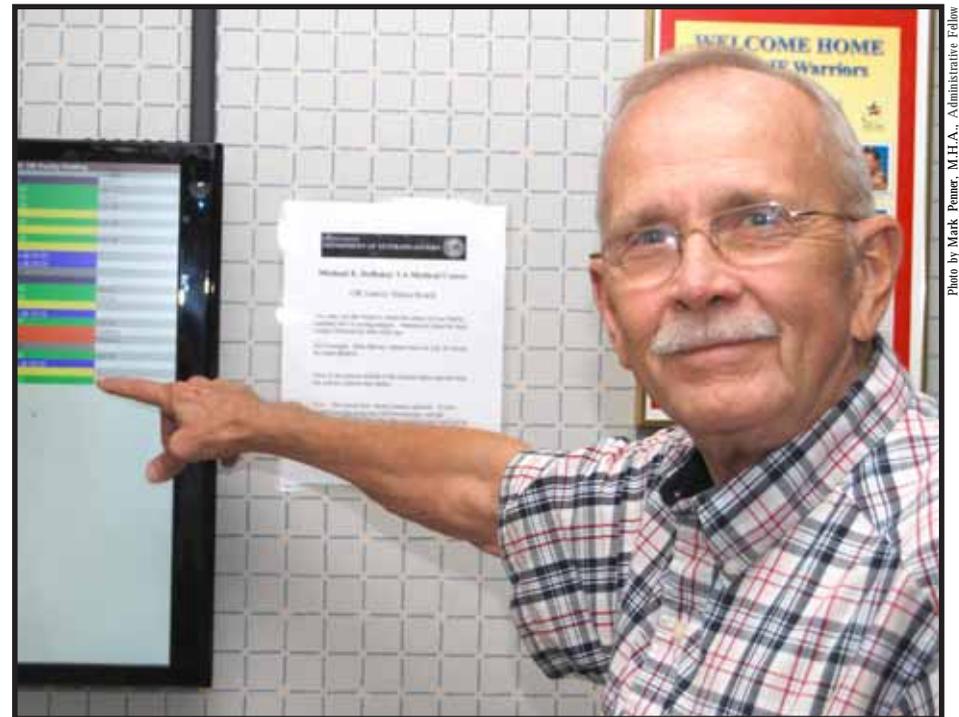
"It's great to know how the surgery is coming along and that he's doing okay," said Jerry Osborn, a friend of a Veteran who recently underwent surgery. "I like that you can see when they are going in and coming out of surgery, without pulling the doctor or nurse away from patients."

The system's goal is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of surgeries by coordinating and supporting members of the medical team. Using real-time location tracking technology, such as ultrasound, the control system automatically tracks and displays the status of all personnel, activities, and equipment related to a particular surgical procedure and then, continuously updates the facility's surgical schedule.

The system creates a simple way for clinical staff to communicate in coordinating and prioritizing their activities to maintain schedules. This coordinated care and communication results in more timely operations and better results for Veterans undergoing surgery.

Information displays and alerts are available throughout the facility and remotely via e-mail, cell phones, and other Web-enabled devices. Another important benefit of the system is that family members and friends are kept informed.

"This control system moves our operating room from after-the-fact, manual tracking processes of the 1970s



A new computerized, operating room control system at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center allows family members and friends to follow the progress of their loved ones through surgery. "It's great to know how the surgery is coming along and that he's doing okay," said Jerry Osborn, a friend of a Veteran who recently underwent surgery.

into the 21st century," said David H. Berger, M.D., M.H.C.M., Operative Care Line executive. "When schedules change, it is difficult to immediately calculate and then convey cascading effects to everyone who needs to know. This lack of real-time communication results in frustrated staff, late schedules, and unnecessary stress for Veterans and their family members."

When delays occur, the system automatically adjusts the scheduled start time of the effected procedure, as well as calculates the ripple effect of these changes on the rest of the day's schedule. The impact on staff and anesthesia

assignments, future procedure times, and use of equipment are all determined automatically. Those changes are immediately displayed for everyone to see.

As a result, the system enables the facility to increase throughput and provide every Veteran with the medical care they need faster.

Seated in the waiting room near the operating room, Osborn kept a close eye on the OR•Control system monitor and his friend's progress. "It keeps me more at ease, having this information and being informed," he said. ♦ Mark Penner, M.H.A., Administrative Fellow

New Women's Health Center Opens

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This "One-Stop Shop" for women includes routine primary care, gynecological services, patient education, and preventive medicine.

The keynote speaker for the Ribbon Cutting was Betty Moseley Brown, Ed.D., associate director of VA Center for Women Veterans. Moseley Brown's passion for Veterans began during her United States Marine Corps service from 1978 to 1992. Her VA career began at the San Diego Regional Office, where she was a Veterans Benefits Counselor and served as the Women Veterans Coordinator. She is a 2004 Leadership VA alumna and 2009 graduate of the Federal Executive Institute.

Women who have served in the Armed Forces are eligible for a variety of Veterans benefits. VA actively encourages women to utilize the benefits and services due them including breast exams and mammography, reproductive health care, Pap Smears, contraceptive services, menopause management and hormone replacement therapy, cancer screening, osteoporosis evaluation and treatment, prosthetic services, infertility evaluation and limited treatment,

maternity care benefits, counseling and treatment for sexual trauma and assault which occurred during military service, PTSD and substance abuse treatment and counseling, and readjustment counseling.

"In Houston, about 11 percent of Veterans treated at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center are women, up from about 5 percent a couple of years ago," said Pamela

Swope, F.N.P., Women Veterans Program manager. "As a whole, the VA is really trying to address the needs of our women, so I think you will find more and more of these clinics being opened."

For more information about programs and services available for women Veterans, contact Swope at 713-791-1414, ext. 5783 or e-mail pamela.swope2@va.gov. ♦



Don't Be A No-Show.

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

VA Discovers Solution for High Blood Pressure

HOUSTON - A Department of Veterans Affairs quality-improvement initiative report published on September 14, 2010 in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes* shows group clinics implemented in the primary care setting can be extremely effective in helping individuals get their blood pressure under control.

"This effort is important because, in the United States, hypertension affects one in four adults, including two thirds of people over 60 years of age," said Anand D. Naik, M.D., first author of the study, a physician and researcher at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC). "Most studies show more than half of those treated do not have their blood pressure under control."

The program, which relies on existing resources and personnel, uses group clinics, intensive appointment scheduling within a brief period, and standardized measurement techniques to focus efforts of patients and staff on lowering blood pressure.

Implemented in 2006 at the MEDVAMC, the percentage of patients with their hypertension under control increased significantly from 54 percent

in 2005 to more than 75 percent today.

"Most patients who followed our program achieved control within six weeks and maintained it for the next year," said Naik.

In the study, 504 Veterans with treated but uncontrolled hypertension attended group clinic visits every other week for six weeks (less if they achieved control sooner).

Blood pressure measurements were taken at each session and compared against targeted levels and, if uncontrolled, treatment was escalated by clinicians. The mean reduction in systolic blood pressure was just over 20 mmHg for all patients and 53 percent achieved and maintained control through the following year. In all, two thirds of patients without diabetes achieved hypertension control.

Analyses performed to evaluate the results showed that following the protocol (attending group clinic appointments every two weeks until blood pressure fell within the controlled range) was the most important factor influencing a patient's success.

"As Medicare and private insurers move to pay-for-performance reimbursement systems, the rapid-induction



Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

Dian Teinert, Primary Care Nurse Executive, M.S., R.N., C.N.S., F.N.P-C., N.E.A-B.C. (seated at head of table) played a key role in the study, collecting data, implementing the group support programs, and monitoring the progress of the study. Nurse Maryservice Jewettetahoo-Suter, L.V.N. (standing), takes group members' blood pressures.

group clinic may be an effective method of improving the quality of routine hypertension care," said J. Kalavar, M.D., MEDVAMC chief of staff and an initiator of the project. "The results of

this important study suggest this approach can be implemented into a primary care practice and produce results similar to those described in clinical trials." ♦

Living with Celiac Disease



Photo by Bobbi Gruner, Public Affairs Officer

Dietetic Intern Jodi Pearce provides nutrition information to Army Veteran William Patton. To talk with a registered dietitian at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center at (713) 791-1414, ext. 4295 or ext. 6166.

HOUSTON - Did you know one in 133 Americans have celiac disease? Three million Americans across all races, ages, and genders suffer from celiac. More than 95 percent of celiacs are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed with other conditions. Usually, a person waits an average of 10 years to be correctly diagnosed.

Celiac disease is a genetic autoimmune digestive disease that damages the small intestine and interferes with absorption of nutrients from food. It is characterized by intolerance to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley. This disease causes the body to view gluten as a toxin.

Continued gluten consumption may result in diarrhea, bloating or gas, abdominal pain, constipation, discolored teeth, poor weight gain, itchy skin rash, and pale mouth sores.

Celiac disease can also mimic other conditions such as anemia, Crohn's Disease, gastric ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome. As a result, celiac disease has been misdiagnosed in some people.

Unfortunately, the only current treatment available for celiac disease is sticking to a gluten-free diet. This seems to be a difficult task considering gluten is found in so many common food products such as pasta, cakes, and breads.

However, until there is a cure, there are dietetic alternatives to manage and minimize the symptoms. Adherence to this a gluten-free diet will stop symptoms, allow healing of existing intestinal damage, and prevent further damage in most people.

Following a gluten-free diet consists of avoiding foods containing wheat (einkorn, durum, faro, graham, kamut, semolina, spelt), rye, barley, and triticale.

New Hotline for Homeless Veterans

1-877-4AID VET

Veterans in need, or concerned families and friends, can find food, shelter, and assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

VA Web site: www.va.gov/HOMELESS



People with celiac disease should be diligent about reading ingredient lists on food labels to make sure the food does not contain gluten.

Eating out does present a challenge, but celiac disease does not mean you cannot have a social life and enjoy food prepared outside your home. Make sure you are educated about your available gluten-free choices. If you are not sure, ask the waiter or manager about the preparation of menu items.

Even though the dietary restrictions are quite extensive, people with celiac disease can eat a variety of foods and have a well-balanced diet. For example, potatoes, rice, soy, and quinoa can be used instead of wheat flour. There are many products on the market that are gluten-free and may be found at most major grocery stores.

For more information, talk with a registered dietitian at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center at (713) 791-1414, ext. 4295 or ext. 6166. ♦ MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern Jodi Pearce

Infection:

Don't Pass It On!

Wash your hands before eating, after using the restroom, after coughing or sneezing, after blowing your nose, before and after handling food, after being near someone sick, or after touching trash.



Prevent flu this year - Get your Flu Shot today!

Vets Compete at 1st Annual Adapted Sports Expo



Photo by Michael A. Nichols, Media Section

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organizations, such as the West Gray and Pasadena Multi-Purpose Recreation Centers, SIRE Houston's Therapeutic Equestrian Centers, Dive Pirates, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), also participated.

"When you get them out of the bed, and get them in the wheelchair, and you get them doing trap shooting, fishing, sky diving, scuba diving, then they realize that life has no limits," said Greg Joyce of the PVA. The PVA is the only Congressionally-chartered Veterans organization dedicated solely to serving the needs of Veterans with spinal cord injuries or diseases.

The Expo also included demonstrations of martial arts, bowling, billiards, wheelchair slalom, power soccer, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair soccer, and quad rugby.

"The first year after my injury I didn't want to do anything," said Army Veteran Dillon Cannon, who was paralyzed by an enemy sniper's bullet in Iraq in December 2006. "I eventually decided I needed to turn it around."

Therapeutic Recreation is based upon a holistic framework that allows the focus to be on all aspects of improving an individual's health and functioning.

By providing structured and unstructured therapy-driven services, Therapeutic Recreation may be used for

improving physical abilities, building confidence, promoting greater self reliance, development and/or enhancement of leisure skills, strengthened interpersonal skills, and development and/or enhancement of leisure awareness. It also empowers Veterans to advocate for positive self growth and change, and enrichment and creation of a meaningful, quality of life for themselves and their family.

"This kind of event is great with the camaraderie and hanging out with guys coping with what I'm going through," said Cannon, who enjoys playing quad rugby. "It feels good to be out of breath again and get pumped up."

"The Adapted Sports Expo at the DeBakey VA was about showing military Veterans, whose bodies and lives were changed forever while serving their country, all the things they can do to live their lives to the fullest despite their disabilities," said Handy.

To get involved with adaptive sports or learn more, contact Recreation Therapy at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center at 713-794-7872 or send an e-mail to jemarques.handy@va.gov. ♦

"This kind of event is great with the camaraderie and hanging out with guys coping with what I'm going through. It feels good to be out of breath again and get pumped up," said Army Veteran Dillon Cannon (left) who was paralyzed by a sniper's bullet in Iraq. Cannon played quad rugby during the Adapted Sports Expo at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.

SUPPORT GROUP LISTING

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) "Starting from Scratch"

Meets every Tuesday and Thursday, 7 p.m., Room 6C-117; and every Wednesday, 7 p.m., Room 6C-105. Facilitator: Bo Cook, 713-791-1414, ext. 6987

Amputee Support Group

Meets 4th Wednesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Dining Room. Facilitators: Betty Baer, 713-794-7793 & Stacy Flynn, 713-791-1414, ext. 4441

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

Breast Cancer Support Group

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

Cancer Support Group

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

FamilyCares Mental Health Group

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

Fibromyalgia Support Group

Contact facilitator for information: Gabriel Tan, 713-794-8794

Hepatitis C Support Group

Meets 1st Friday every month, 1:30 p.m., Primecare Clinic 5. Facilitators: Edith Yeldell, 713-791-1414, ext. 3613 & Jodi M. Francis, ext. 3394

HIV Support/Educational Group

Meets every Tuesday, 2 p.m., Clinic 4, Room 1A-442. Facilitator: Patricia Suarez, 713-791-1414, ext. 6177

Liver Transplant Support Group

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

Lung Cancer Support Group

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

Heart Disease Support Group

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

Pain Coping Skills Training Group

Meets every Tuesday, 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

Pain Support Group

Meets every Wednesday, 1 p.m., Room 5C-215. Group facilitator: Gabriel Tan, 713-794-8794

Parkinson's Disease Education & Support Group

Contact facilitator for more information: Naomi Nelson, 713-794-8938

Prostate Cancer Support Group

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

Stroke Support Group

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

Vet-to-Vet Support & Education Group

Meets every Wednesday, 6 p.m., Room 6B-117; 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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Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic Scheduled to Reopen Early Next Year



The new Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic will be located at 9300 Emmett F. Lowry Expressway, Suite 206 next to the Mall of the Mainland. Veterans who wish to transfer their primary health care to the new Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic may call 409-761-3200.

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) plans to reopen a VA outpatient clinic in Texas City before March 30, 2011.

“Opening the Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic will bring medical care closer to where our Veterans live and greatly expand VA health care access south of Houston,” said Adam C. Walmus, M.H.A., M.A., F.A.C.H.E., MEDVAMC director.

The approximately 10,000 sq. ft. outpatient clinic will be located at 9300 Emmett F. Lowry Expressway, Suite 206, Texas City, 77591 next to the Mall of the Mainland.

It will occupy space in the Mainland Crossing Shopping Center next to Sam’s Club, the University of Texas Medical Branch Family Healthcare Center, and other retail establishments.

“An outpatient clinic in Texas City is

great news for Veterans living in not only Galveston County, but also nearby Brazoria County,” said Frank Furleigh, Galveston County Veterans Service Officer. “It will dramatically cut the drive times Veterans face going to see a primary care provider in Houston and take some of the pressure off the Galveston VA Outpatient Clinic.”

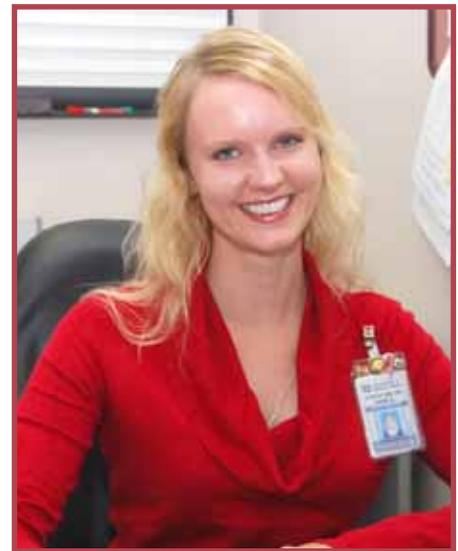
The clinic with 12 exam rooms will be open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

The VA-staffed facility will provide primary health care, mental health care, and a women’s clinic in addition to laboratory, X-ray, telemedicine, teleretinal imaging, and audiology services. Emergency medication needs will be met on a local contract basis.

Veterans who wish to transfer their primary health care to the new Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic may call 409-761-3200. ♦

Expert’s Corner

Anne Utech is the Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Program Manager at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. Health promotion is the process of encouraging healthy behaviors such as healthy eating, exercise, stress management, and responsible alcohol use. Disease prevention refers to activities such as health screenings, risk assessments, vaccinations, safety, and patient care that aim to reduce or delay the onset of illnesses.



1 Eat Wisely - Less than 25% of Americans eat the recommended amount of fruits and veggies each day. Strive for at least two fruits and 1½ cups of colorful vegetables each day. Breakfast is a great place to add both whole grains and low fat dairy in a bowl of high fiber cereal. On the other hand, you only need 3-6 oz of protein (meat, eggs, cheese, etc.) daily. Think about replacing some of this meat with cholesterol-free beans, lentils, or peanut butter.

2 Strive for a Healthy Weight - About 2 out of 3 Americans are overweight or obese. One small change every day can get you moving in the right direction. Set an initial goal to lose 5 pounds in a month by making one little change today. Try eating slowly to see if you are full and can quit after 20 minutes. Switch to diet soda or water, instead of regular soda or juice. Ask your health care provider about VA’s MOVE Program or visit www.move.va.gov.

3 Be Less Sedentary - Our bodies need exercise. We all need regular, moderate physical activity like brisk walking each week. If you cannot walk or have other limitations, ask your health care provider what kinds of exercise are appropriate. To start, try something you can do for 10 minutes daily, then increase by 5 minutes each week until you are doing 30 minutes at a time.

4 Manage Stress - While some stress can keep you motivated to do things well or try new things, sometimes we cannot handle too much. Do not be afraid to talk to your health care provider about stress in your life. There are many techniques to “time out” of a situation to relieve stress, such as deep breathing or counting to 10 slowly. Exercise also helps you relieve stress in a healthy way.

5 Be Tobacco Free - You probably know you should quit smoking or chewing tobacco. The challenge is deciding to quit. Set a “quit date” when you feel ready. Ask your health care provider for information on smoking cessation information and medications.

6 Drink Alcohol Responsibly - One drink is 12 oz (1 can/ bottle) of beer, 1.5 oz (1 shot) hard liquor, or 5 oz (1 glass) of wine. Men should have no more than 2 drinks per day. Women, no more than 1 drink per day. Many people should not drink at all, including patients taking medicines that interact poorly with alcohol. Talk with your health care provider about your drinking habits; they want to know so they can provide the best care possible to you.

7 Be an Expert about Your Health - You are the most important person on your health care team! Be sure to talk to your health care provider about what is bothering you. Be honest about what medications you are taking and problems you are having. Ask questions. Make sure you understand instructions and any changes. Talk about screenings like colonoscopies and mammograms. Visit www.myhealth.va.gov to take charge of your VA health care.

Avoid the Parking Hassle at the Houston VA.



Use the Free Valet Parking at the Hospital’s Main Entrance!

Just show your VA I.D. card or appointment letter. This free service is provided by the VA to make your visit more pleasant. *No tipping allowed.*

Veterans' Questions

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

Question: What is an Advance Directive and why do I need one?

Answer: As a VA patient, you have a say in the health care you receive. Your doctor will explain what treatments are available so you can decide which one is best for you. But, if you are too ill to understand or make decisions for yourself, you want to make sure your wishes are known.

An Advance Directive is a legal form you create that helps your doctors and family members understand your wishes about health care. It can help them decide about treatments should you become mentally or physically unable to make those decisions yourself. Your VA health care team (nurse, social

worker, or chaplain), primary care doctor, or attorney can assist you in completing the required paperwork. Contact the Chaplain Service at 713-794-7125 if you have questions.

Question: Am I eligible for dental treatment at the VA?

Answer: Veterans are eligible for outpatient dental treatment if they are determined by VA to meet one of the following criteria:

- ✓ Those having a VA service-connected compensable dental disability or condition are eligible for any needed dental care.

- ✓ Those who were Prisoners of War and those whose service-connected disabilities have been rated at 100 percent or who are receiving the 100 percent rate by reason of individual unemployability are eligible for any needed dental care.

- ✓ Those who are participating in a VA vocational rehabilitation program under 38 U.S.C. chapter 31 are eligible for limited dental care necessary to: enter into a rehabilitation program, achieve the goals of the Veteran's vocational rehabilitation program; or prevent interruption of a rehabilitation program of a Veteran in interrupted or leave status; or hasten the return to a rehabilitation program of a Veteran placed in discontinued status because of illness, injury or a dental condition; or secure and adjust to employment during the period of employment assistance; or

to achieve maximum independence in daily living.

- ✓ Effective January 28, 2008, recently discharged Veterans with a service-connected noncompensable dental condition or disability who served on active duty 90 days or more and who apply for VA dental care within 180 days of separation from active duty, may receive one time treatment for dental conditions if the dental condition is shown to have existed at the time of discharge or release, and the Veteran's certificate of discharge does not indicate that the Veteran received necessary dental care within a 90-day period prior to discharge or release. This includes Veterans who reentered active military, naval, or air service within 90 days after the date of a prior discharge and Veterans whose disqualifying discharge or release has been corrected by competent authority.

- ✓ Those having a service-connected noncompensable dental condition or disability resulting from combat wounds or service trauma are eligible for repeat care for the service-connected condition(s).

- ✓ Those having a dental condition clinically determined by VA to be currently aggravating a service-connected medical condition are eligible for limited dental care to resolve the problem.

- ✓ Those with nonservice-connected dental conditions or disabilities for which treatment was begun while the Veteran was in an inpatient status in a VA medical center, when it is clinically determined to be necessary to complete such dental treatment on an outpatient basis.

- ✓ Those receiving outpatient care or scheduled for inpatient care may receive dental care if the dental condition is clinically determined to be complicating a medical condition currently under treatment.

- ✓ Certain Veterans enrolled in a VA Homeless Program for 60 consecutive days or more may receive necessary outpatient dental services on a one time basis.

For more information, call the VA Health Care Hotline at 1-877-222-8387.

Question: I heard the VA is getting rid of the requirement for an online signature so Veterans can get health care faster. Is this true?

Answer: Yes, the VA has removed the signature requirement for Veterans who electronically submit an online 10-10EZ "Application for Health Benefits."

Previously, Veterans filling out the online application were required to print a copy, sign it, and send to their local medical center or wait for a copy to be mailed to them for signature and mailing before enrollment into the VA health care system could occur.

For additional information, go to www.va.gov/healtheligibility or call VA's toll free number at 1-877-222-VETS (8387). The online form is available at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez/.

Question: Where can I smoke on hospital grounds?

Answer: The Michael E. DeBakey VAMedical Center is a smoke free facility. The designated smoking area is the ground floor terrace facing Old Spanish Trail. If you wish to stop smoking, talk with your Prime Care Provider.

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

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

Important VA Telephone Numbers

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

Operations Enduring Freedom & Iraqi Freedom Support Team
Team Members

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

Patient Advocates

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

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



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For more information, contact MyHealthVet Coordinator Curtis Bergeron at 713-791-1414, ext. 6348 or e-mail curtis.bergeron@va.gov TODAY!