

VVA ALL STAR NEWS

Spring 2009

National Salute to Veterans

Big Al and others visit
our Veterans

2009 National Salute to Veterans



Along with guests from various groups and organizations, Big Al came to bring special recognition to our many veterans here at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

February 2009 marked a special time for our veterans at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. The 2009 National Salute to Veterans, formerly known as National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans, was coordinated by Stakeholder Relations staff. The event encouraged members of the community to come out and show our veterans how much they appreciate them. During the week of February 8-14, celebrities, veteran service organizations and other community groups came out to visit our residents and give them valentines and hugs.

Some of the guests included: Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox, Northport Mayor Bobby Herndon, several American Legion members, the Commandant from the Marine Corps League, Commander for the Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter #2211, VAMC Veteran of the Month, Big Al and The Crimsonettes, as well as many others interested in honoring our veterans.

As the activities proceeded, the smiles grew larger and we were reminded of just how much these visitors mean to our residents.

The event concluded on Saturday, February 14 with the American Legion Auxiliary #123 Valentine Day Party. We would like to extend a special thanks to everyone involved for making the 2009 National Salute to Veterans a success.



Honoring America's Veterans



TUSCALOOSA VA STARTS NEW FAMILY SUPPORT TEAM

Dr. Bettina Schmid, psychologist for the Family Support Team, speaks to a group of counselors at the University of Alabama Counseling Center about what to expect from veteran students who return to the University from Iraq and Afghanistan.



Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center began a new initiative in November 2008 to reach out to family members of returning combat veterans. The program involves utilizing a team consisting of a psychologist, a chaplain and a social worker. The program is designed to help not only the veterans transition back into their everyday lives, but also to help professionals notice the warning signs of depression and thoughts of suicide among our veterans.

Dr. Bettina Schmid, psychologist for the Family Support Team; Mike Culver, the Transition Patient Advocate; and Dr. Kendall Thomas, chaplain; all spoke to a group of counselors at The University of Alabama's Counseling Center about what to expect from veteran students who return to Alabama from Iraq and Afghanistan. The members of the team are Dr. Bettina Schmid, Rev. Dr. Kendall Thomas and the social worker position is currently vacant.

Many of the problems that our veterans face upon returning home involve silent issues such as these that if gone unnoticed can lead to many problems involving veterans and their families. Many veterans find themselves facing depression, divorce, and even thoughts of suicide, due to difficulties of dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The Family Support Team is designed to help our veterans cope with these issues and to lessen the problems that veterans and their families face related to deployment.

TVAMC Director, Alan J. Tyler, is concerned with the problems our veterans face and said the TVAMC's main initiative was to reach out to veterans suffering alone in our local area.

The program has three parts:

- 1) VA chaplains are reaching out to community clergy to provide training in recognizing the symptoms of the invisible wounds of war, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and traumatic brain injury, and are providing guidance on when to refer veterans to the VA.
- 2) A Family Support Team made up of a psychologist, a chaplain, and a social worker, will be available to meet families in their home for an assessment. Once the assessment is completed, appropriate referrals to the VA and community programs will be made.
- 3) The Family Support Team is reaching out to organizations and professionals in the community to provide education about the issues and challenges faced by veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who served in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom and let them know that they can refer veterans and family members to the Family Support Program.

Persons interested in more information about the program or how to refer a veteran can contact The Transition Center Family Support Team at 205-554-2000 ext.2500.

Rural Health Initiative

TVAMC is working in collaboration with the University of Alabama's College of Community Health Sciences to develop a Rural Health Resource Center (RHRC) that will support VHA and the Office of Rural Health (ORH) to enhance health care delivery for veterans residing in rural areas. The Center will support initiatives that address ORH areas of focus, to include access, quality, technology, workforce, education/training, and collaboration strategies, which will be used to guide VHA policy at a national level.

Reaching Out

Outreach Clinic in Selma, Alabama

In alignment with the VA Central Office, Office of Rural Health's goal to improve access and quality of care for enrolled veterans in rural areas, TVAMC has been approved to develop an outreach clinic in or near Selma, Alabama. Medical Center staff are in the planning process for this endeavor. The location would provide better access to healthcare for veterans in the central counties of Alabama, including: Dallas, Perry, Chilton, Autauga and Wilcox. As of the end of FY 2006, only 26% of enrollees living in the five-county area reside within the 30 minute drive time standard for access to Primary Care in rural counties. The new outreach clinic will significantly improve access to Primary Care services for veterans living in this area, and should increase enrollment and use by all eligible veterans living nearby. The medical center ran an ad in the Selma community to solicit bids for potential properties. A total of eight properties were identified, and then that list was narrowed down to two properties. One property was then selected and we are currently working to get a lease finalized to begin necessary construction to adapt the property to the needed specifications. A committee, headed by the Associate Director, meets every two weeks to for discussion of the plan. The goal is to have the clinic operational by late FY 2009.

TUSCALOOSA VA OFFERS BUILDING AND LAND FOR ENHANCED USE LEASE



Building 33 is being offered as a transitional housing facility for the homeless.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is offering a vacant 30,000-square-foot building (33) and/or seven acres of land to any organization that is willing to use the facility to help reduce homelessness locally.

The VA does not want the building or land to be used for a one-night stay shelter, said Alan J. Tyler, medical center director, during a March 3 public hearing to discuss the VA's plan.

"We want some true rehabilitation, not just a shelter or overnight stay," Tyler said. "We expect [a program] that provides good, supportive, ongoing care to break the cycle of homelessness."

The building and/or land would be available free under a 40 to 75-year lease in exchange for opening a 'transitional housing' facility on the site.

About 50 people gathered on the evening of March 3 at the VA to learn more about the VA's proposal and how it might have an impact on Tuscaloosa's homeless.

Ideally, the VA would like the building to serve as a transitional housing for homeless women and children. It's really not something that is being offered in Tuscaloosa at this time.

The veteran's using the transitional housing could receive their medical and rehabilitation needs through the VA on-site, Tyler said. But the VA also hopes that if there are non-veteran homeless participants living on the site, that their rehabilitation needs will also be met, but by outside sources.

The 70-year-old building that the VA is offering has been vacant for several years. It would need significant renovation, including the removal of asbestos and lead paint. The building would also need work on its electrical, heating and air conditioning.

"There are federal tax incentives, grants and other programs that could help pay for the transitional housing," said Jay Halpern, national director of the VA's Homeless Initiative. "But it would take the work of an organization that has experience in similar programs to find the funding."

Hospital Hero!



Marilyn Belcher, RN, restorative nurse coordinator, TVAMC

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is proud to announce that Marilyn Belcher, RN, restorative nurse coordinator, was selected as one of Alabama's "Hospital Heroes."

Ten hospital employees from across the state were honored as "Hospital Heroes" for their dedication to the health care industry on February 6 at a luncheon hosted by the Alabama Hospital Association (AlaHA). The association's sixth annual statewide "Hospital Heroes" contest is an effort to honor the dedication of hospital employees and to highlight health careers.

Ms. Belcher is an ordained minister and a nurse of 28 years. She helped implement the restorative care program at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, a program that helps individuals suffering with chronic diseases related to prolonged inactivity. The program offers a number of resources to assist patients in regaining their independence and returning to their daily activities.

Employees believe much of Ms. Belcher's dedication to restorative nursing was gained through the care she provided to her sister who suffered brain damage as an infant.

Through Ms. Belcher's determination, her sister was able to live in a group home and maintain gainful employment for a number of years.

In addition to her work at the Medical Center, Ms. Belcher supports a regular prison ministry through her church.



"Ms. Belcher is determined to assist our residents gain and/or maintain the respect and dignity they deserve."

--Valeria Rudolph-Rivers
Home and Community-based Care Programs Supervisor

Service...

TVAMC Recognizes Employees for their Years of Service

Leon Williams, Nursing Service
25 Years of Service

Ethel Johnson, Network Business Office (Prosthetics Service)
25 Years of Service

Billie J. Crow, Health Administrative Service
30 Years of Service

Henry Cunningham, Nursing Service
35 Years of Service

From the VA Mailbag

Hospital Administrator
RE: Father

In November, I brought my father to the hospital for the first time. I just wanted to let you know what a fantastic experience it was. Everyone, from the janitor to the doctor, was so friendly and helpful. My father continues to tell everyone what a great experience it was. He tells them that the hospital treated him like "he was somebody." He is eighty years old and we never thought to apply before. Since the initial visit, every appointment needed has been made and communicated to him.

I know that the attitudes of all of the employees reflect leadership. In regards to any complaints you may have received, I just wanted to make sure that you knew I appreciated all of the care that you provide for my father and to ALL of the other veterans. Sincerely,

S.H.

November 2008

Dear Sir,

I am a 100% service connected veteran of the Air Force. I am a former resident of the TVAMC nursing home. I am a C-5 Quad and due to my medical condition, I needed 24-hour care. I am writing to thank the staff for the job that they do daily. The staff's dedication and professionalism must be noted. I love this country and I am proud to call myself an American. I want to thank those who work in the VA system. I am humbled by their dedication.

Sincerely,
R.N.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES TVAMC

Tuscaloosa VAMC is currently meeting 42 out of 48 clinical performance measures. There are six areas we are not currently meeting, but we are close to the target. The six areas are as follows:

Substance abuse disorder– Patients in substance abuse programs have specific requirements for follow-up within the first 90 days of treatment.

Pneumonia vaccine for patients age 65 and above – A one time vaccine is required.

Diabetic eye exams – These are required annually. If you see a diabetic eye exam due, call Optometry to work in the patient. Dr. Thompson has some early morning walk-in slots available.

Cervical cancer screening – All females age 18-65 are required to have a PAP smear every three years unless they have had a hysterectomy.

Diabetic renal testing – All diabetics should receive an annual urinalysis including a microalbumin. If you see a patient and the reminder is due, encourage the patient to go to the laboratory to get this test completed. The urine micro albumin can be ordered by the nurse as a policy order.

Diabetic patients with LDL less than 100- This is a tough measure, and this measure is mission critical for the facility. Patients with high LDL levels (above 100) should be started on lipid lowering medication and followed up at regular intervals to ensure the LDL is less than 100. If you see a patient with a LDL >100, check to make sure they are taking their medication as prescribed. If they have not had a recent LDL level, the nurse can order these via a policy order. (Go to other add/order screens and select diabetic screening).

With regard to access, TVAMC is effective in ensuring that veterans get most appointments when they want them. However, there are problems which have been identified and TVAMC is working hard to make improvements.

It is essential for veterans to understand the importance of their personal responsibility to call TVAMC when cancelling or rescheduling appointments.

The TVAMC recognizes that the out-dated telephone system is a large part of the problem, regarding scheduling and rescheduling appointments. The TVAMC plans to replace the current system at the end of FY09 in order to relieve some of the problems associated with communication.

Beginning in April 2009, the TVAMC will utilize a central call-in area to assist veterans with communicating with the appropriate staff in a more efficient manner until the telephone system is replaced.

The Recall Reminder System, that sends post cards to veterans to remind them to schedule their appointments at a time and date that is convenient for them, is now improved and operational. Veterans who have been advised by the doctor to return in two or more months will receive a reminder card advising them to call and schedule an appointment. Letters will also be mailed out to veterans regarding appointments and should help to reduce the problems with communication between TVAMC and our veterans.

For the five SHEP Performance Measures, TVAMC currently only has a score of 75% for Provider Wait Time. Patient Satisfaction is an area where all employees must continue to make efforts to improve our scores as a facility.

CUM FY 2009 thru Nov. 2008	OPT. QUALITY OVERALL	INPT. QUALITY OVERALL	PROVIDER WAIT	ESTABLISHED PC APPT. AS SOON AS WANTED	NEW PC APPT. AS SOON AS WANTED
TVAMC	M	M	M	M	M
VISN	71%	78%	75%	76%	79%
NATIONAL	76%	76%	73%	80%	79%
THRU SEPT. 2008	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
TVAMC	68%	70%	82%	86%	88%
VISN 7	75%	77%	72%	83%	85%
NATIONAL	78%	79%	77%	86%	88%

TUSCALOOSA VA MEDICAL CENTER
 *PATIENT SATISFACTION SHEP PERFORMANCE MEASURE RESULTS FY 2009 CUMMULATIVE THRU NOVEMBER 2008
 *OFFICE OF QUALITY & PERFORMANCE (VAWWW.OQP.MED.GOV)
 M--LESS THAN 30 RESPONDENTS TO SURVEY, INSUFFICIENT TO COMPUTE SCORE

Alan J. Tyler, MS MPA, FACHE
Director

Gary D. Trende, FACHE
Associate Director

Patricia T. Green, MSN, RN, CNA-BC
AD for Patient Care Services

Mark B. Nissenbaum, MD, MM
Chief of Staff

Damon A. Stevenson
Chief, Stakeholder Relations

April Jones
Photography

Gregory S. Young
Intern-Public Affairs, Design

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