

ALL STAR NEWS

Winter 2012



Veterans Day
Honoring All Who Served

VA ALL STAR NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter
Winter 2012 Edition

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"All Star News" is a publication produced by the Public Affairs Office for the employees of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. We thank the medical center staff for their never-ending commitment to the care of our Nation's Heroes."

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center's Veterans Day Ceremony



Ms. Whitehead delivers a very moving speech during the Veterans Day Ceremony

The Tuscaloosa VA celebrated Veterans Day in a packed Sports Atrium of Bldg. 137, with Quincy Whitehead, Director of the Alabama National VA Cemetery in Montevallo, serving as the keynote speaker. Winning students from the Ar-

cadia Elementary “What Veterans Mean to Me” essay contest were also announced. Holt High School JROTC provided ceremonies including the presentation and posting of the colors, a ceremony for the fallen, and the playing of Taps.

Damon Stevenson, Public Affairs Officer, served as the master of ceremonies, and the event also included welcoming remarks from Alan J. Tyler, Medical Center Director, the Pledge of Allegiance by SSgt. Jeff Munford, employee and Army Veteran/Purple Heart Recipient, and the National Anthem performed by Stephenie Wallace, Administrative Assistant to the Chief of Staff.

Veterans Day has been held since 1919 but was originally known as Armistice Day, to commemorate the end of the First World War on Nov. 11, 1918. Since that time, Americans are asked to pause on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month and remember the men and women who are fighting for freedom.



Buttons produced by the Veterans and staff of the Print Clinic to commemorate the day we given to those in attendance



1st place essay winner Michael Riches



So What's This "Systems Redesign" All About?

Systems Redesign (SR) is all about improvement in the way our system works. Since "quality is a system property," the level of performance of the system is pretty important to our precious customers! SR is about how the parts of the system work with each other and a way to IMPROVE OUR WORK (IOW) and do it well consistently! And what a dramatic effect it can have! The "secret" of SR is that small improvements in a process get repeated over and over again and result in big changes in systems. SR offers every employee an opportunity to Improve Our Work (IOW) and thus our mission.

Systems Redesign Principles:

- *Expands on the concepts established in Advance Clinic Access to broaden the scope to include all clinical and administrative processes.*
- *Provides a team approach for VA staff to plan, redesign, map, measure and integrate processes and systems to deliver real-time improvements in VA Health care systems*
- *Excellence in healthcare can only be achieved in a model of care designed to meet the needs of the customer*
- *Process improvement must be deployed across the entire organization and become part of the workforce culture*
- *The workforce must be empowered to rapidly initiate continuous improvement*

We have learned that following a systematic process greatly increases the chances for successful systems redesign. To that end, VHA offers VA-TAMMCS, as a SOLID framework for success:

VA - TAMMCS

***Vision:** Role of leadership at the outset of process /performance improvement and identifying the project's mission.*

***Analysis:** The analysis portion of the framework covers establishing priorities to identify the most important areas on which to focus improvement efforts and in evaluating performance.*

***Team:** Teams work best when they have clear sponsorship, consist of front-line staff, are passionate around improvement, possess a facilitator, and are unified around a common aim or goal.*

***Aim:** An aim is an explicit statement summarizing what the team hopes to achieve during the project.*

***Map:** Mapping serves to identify a process clearly by clarifying the start, end, and key decision points.*

***Measure:** Measurement is important in order to know if changes teams make are really an improvement and fulfill our obligation to manage by fact not feel.*

***Change:** All improvement requires making changes, but not all changes result in improvement.*

***Sustain / Spread:** Improvements that can be sustained will continue to provide value to veterans and employees who serve them.*

The staff of Tuscaloosa VA has worked really hard to make system improvements that have resulted in a 'win-win' for veterans and staff. Two areas to highlight are the Acute Psychiatric and 3South Inpatient Units. By working together, they have improved internal processes so that veterans can expect a shorter length of stay. We saw a significant reduction in a veteran's average length of stay on the acute unit from 22 days in the 1st QTR FY2011 to 14 days in 1st QTR FY2012 and on 3 South unit from 2nd QTR FY2011 with 85 days to 67.5 days in 1st QTR FY2012. This has come about in large part, by improving the hand-offs, communication, and in planning for care beginning with the first day of admission. There has also been significant improvement within Primary Care services with the implementation of Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT). Here the veteran can expect same-day access to his/her primary care team and/or an appointment when the veteran wants and needs it. VHA has strived to make access to care a priority and the Tuscaloosa VAMC has been recognized as one of only five facilities in the nation to achieve same-day appointment availability!

As these examples indicate, we expect everyone at the Tuscaloosa Veterans Affairs Medical Center to ask and act on the following:

- What are you personally doing to create a culture of continuous quality improvement?
- What projects are you and your team working on that meets the definition of process improvement?
- What are you personally doing to model a commitment to continuous quality improvement?

COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN - EXCEEDING THE GOAL

Tuscaloosa VA hosted a Combined Federal Campaign celebration at the medical center on December 14, where federal employees from different agencies joined the medical center in celebrating the efforts that raised about \$1.3 million to charities this year that will be distributed in 2012.

The money will go to charities selected by employees from about 2,000 organizations, including international, national and local charities.



Kenneth Law, TVAMC CFC Coordinator, and Xavier Lews, Heart of Alabama CFC, unveil the grand total collected during the campaign

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center employees pledged \$46,509.83 which was 102 percent of the VA's goal, and the most in the Tuscaloosa subregion.



Ms. Kelly Noland, Social Security Administration, gives remarks



Pictured Left to Right: Douglas Grice, Camellia Eatmon, Patricia Hill, Sonja Wainwright, Kenneth Law, Tina Oden, Carolyn Williams, & Kristen Gibson

New "Guardian" Positions Open for The Cottages

Tuscaloosa VAMC is recruiting for 10 Health Technicians for Geriatric and Extended Care's new Cottages that are expected to open around June 2012.

Assignment or Promotion into these new positions will not be effective until April 2012 and may be delayed depending upon construction completion. The announcement was open beginning January 24 to current employees of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

The incumbent of the position serves as the universal worker in the cottage setting. He/she is a member of a self-managed work team that provides and assists with the care of 10 elders residing in the cottages.

He/she assist with direct care, light housekeeping duties, recreational duties, food preparation and service, escort and other duties as needed involving the care of this population of Veterans.

As part of a self-directed work team, the Health Technician is expected to work with the resident and interdisciplinary team in autonomous roles without constant and direct supervision. The incumbent plans and carries out recreational activities in the homes, outdoors and off station. The incumbent performs rotating coordinator responsibilities to facilitate accountability for specific duties communications, and reporting. The

coordinator duties will rotate among each Health Technician every three to four months.

The incumbent is responsible for the proper use, cleaning and storage of the equipment. The incumbent is responsible for transporting residents to various appointment and/or events.

Responsibilities include ensuring the safety of all passengers, observing medical center, local, state and federal traffic regulations, inspecting assigned vehicle prior to use and reporting vehicle deficiencies to the operations supervisor.

Residents will be able to enjoy a safe and secure beautifully landscaped outdoor courtyard. The cottages will be situated around a common gated courtyard adjacent to the existing Nursing Home.

Each cottage will include screened-in porches, and access to the courtyard. The courtyard will be beautifully landscaped with patios, sidewalks, and shaded gardens for the enjoyment of the residents. The cottages will be built to conform to the latest "green" building standards in order to increase energy and resource efficiency while limiting indoor pollutants.



Million Veteran Program: Partnering with Veterans to Revolutionize Health Care

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is one of 50 VAMCs selected across the nation to serve as an enrollment site for the Million Veteran Program (MVP), a research program that will help us better understand how genes affect Veterans' health and illness. The ultimate goal of the program is to transform health care.

The Million Veteran Program (MVP): A Partnership with Veterans is a national, voluntary research program conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research & Development. MVP aims to enroll as many as one million Veterans over the next five to seven years. Participants will be asked to complete a one-time study visit (approx. 20

minutes in length) to provide a blood sample for genetic analysis. Participation also includes filling out health surveys, allowing ongoing access to medical records and agreeing to future contact. This research program will establish one of the largest databases of genes and health history. The results of MVP may lead to new ways of preventing and treating common illness.

By participating in MVP, Veterans will help contribute to the knowledge base that may result in developing personalized treatments for military-related illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as more common illnesses, like diabetes and heart dis-



A Partnership With Veterans

ease. Results from MVP will help improve health care for Veterans and all Americans. MVP has extensive safeguards in place to keep Veterans personal information secure and confidential. Participation will not affect access to health care or benefits. Visit the website of the

Million Veteran Program at www.research.va.gov/mvp to learn more. For more information or to participate, call toll-free 866-441-6075, or visit the MVP clinic in Building 2, Room G25. Dedria E. Smith, B.S., Health Science Specialist, is heading up the local effort.

Unit Being Renovated for Female Veterans

Last year, the Tuscaloosa VA opened Patriots' Pavilion, a clinic specifically for female Veterans. Now, the VA is renovating a unit on the 4th floor of Bldg. 137 that will be dedicated to female Veterans who are going through its residential rehabilitation programs.

The \$300,000, eight-bed unit will be designed with feminine decor and will include a living room/lounge area, laundry room and a spa that includes a whirlpool and a salon area where the women can receive spa treatments or have their hair done.

The female Veterans' rooms at the VA are not grouped together, said Rebecca Meyer, associate chief nurse for mental health. That's not necessarily what is best for them, Meyer said.

"As we've been working with our female Veterans,

we've identified that they prefer to be grouped together with other female Veterans," Meyer said. "As they are under treatment, they said they really prefer to be together with just females."

Mental Health Holds Recovery Fair

The Mental Health Service Line at Tuscaloosa VA held a Mental Health Recovery Fair in the Sports Atrium of Building 137 in October to help provide information about resources available to anyone working at mental health recovery. Different groups from the medical center, as well as community partners set up information booths to provide flyers, brochures and other general information to anyone interested. The event was well attended from both Veterans of the medical center and others from the community.



Veteran-Student Academic Wellness Program

Tuscaloosa VAMC, UA team up to administer program for Veteran-Students

Courtesy of The Tuscaloosa News

More Veterans who are returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan are choosing to go back to college or get a graduate degree.

But sometimes the transition from military life to student life is a difficult one.

“A lot of these Veterans who are coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan are not your typical students,” said Damon Stevenson, spokesman for the Tuscaloosa Veterans Affairs Medical Center. “They are dealing with things they have never dealt with before, they may be older than your typical student and will be going through a readjustment to civilian life.”

Sometimes, Veteran students don’t feel as

though they fit in on campus and end up wanting to quit college, Stevenson said. But the Tuscaloosa VA, along with the University of Alabama, is starting a program that will better assist Veteran students to stay in school and have a successful academic experience.

The program, called the Veteran-Student Academic Wellness Program, began this fall and is currently enrolling participants.

The local VA was one of only five in the country recently chosen to host the program.

“Because of us being in Tuscaloosa and being near all the institutions in our area, the Tuscaloosa VA is the perfect place for a program like

this,” said Velda Pugh, a psychiatrist and assistant chief of the mental health service line at the Tuscaloosa VA.

The program will offer peer-mentors to pair Veteran students with other people who have also gone to college after time in the military. Counseling will also be available and the program will work closely with the Veteran Campus Association to offer group discussions that focus on coping skills, study skills, peer support and communication skills.

“We are hoping that, at the end of each semester, to have a celebration for the accomplishments for the Veterans who stick with the program,” Pugh said. “We are also hoping that this

program will help these Veterans be successful at the college level, but also the graduate level or help them move on to whatever their heart desires. It’s about being a bridge to help them be the best they can be.”

The initial program will start with an enrollment of 20 to 25 Veteran-students, said LaWanda Van Horn, project coordinator at the Tuscaloosa VA. Eventually, the Tuscaloosa VA hopes to expand to other area colleges, including Stillman and Shelton State. The program is free and funded through the federal U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

For more information about the program or to enroll, contact Van Horn at 205-554-3791.



Connect to the Wi-Fi Service:

Find and Connect to the “VA Guest WiFi” Network on Your Device. Open Your Web Browser and Accept the Terms and Conditions to be Connected.

Wi-Fi Service Areas:

Patient Waiting Rooms Throughout the Facility; Canteen Dining Area; Library; Bldg. 137 Multipurpose Room, Serenity Garden, Inpatient Unit Dayrooms, and Cyber Cafes.

For Connection Issues: Contact 1-888-472-0796

Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center held its annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on December 2, in front of Building 1.

The event included train rides on Mr. Jackie's Magic Choo Choo Train, and a ceremony held afterwards. Chaplain John Bailey led the ceremony and the crowd in singing Christmas carols. Mr. Tyler also spoke at the event and led the crowd in the count down to the official lighting of the tree on the front of Building 1.



Kids and adults alike enjoy the Magic Choo Choo Train rides

From the VA Mailbag

Dear Mr. Tyler,

On December 5, 2011, my son C.B. came to visit the Tuscaloosa VA. While at the Medical Center he had a genuine seizure. Your staff and employees came to my rescue within seconds. There were doctors and nurses all around us. I saw people checking blood pressure while I was there holding his hand to let him know everything was going to be okay. During this process one of your employees had already phoned the Rapid Response Team. Your staff made me feel very happy because they are so caring and supportive. I was absolutely impressed with the genuine concern of each person and how they made us feel as if we were the most important customer that day in their presence. We felt like we had a second family that truly cares. Once again thank you from the bottom of our heart!

Sincerely,

A.B.

Dear Mr. Tyler:

I'm writing to express my gratitude and thanks for Mr. Carlton Aaron. Mr. Aaron has assisted me at the Selma VA Clinic and he also assisted me with transportation getting to my appointments in Birmingham and Tuscaloosa VA. My wife and I are very grateful because I had trouble with my vehicles and I had missed several appointments. Mr. Aaron explains everything to me so I can understand how important my appointments are and what it means to get the help that I truly need. He uplifted me in spirit and he made me feel good about myself. In October 2010, I had an altercation with my son and I tried to hurt him and anyone that stood in my way. My wife called Mr. Aaron and he came from Tuscaloosa and talked with me and he took me to get help in Gadsden, AL. He took me wherever I needed to go and he took my family to an appointment I had in Tuscaloosa when I didn't have transportation. I just wanted to let you know that you have a talented man working to assist all veterans in need and he even listens.

Sincerely,

W.C.

