

VVA ALL STAR NEWS

Spring 2010



Women's Clinic Grand Opening

NEWLY RENOVATED WOMEN'S CLINIC OPENS MARCH 29

The waiting room in the Women's Clinic "Patriot's Pavilion" offers women veterans a comfortable area to relax while waiting for their appointment time.



The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center celebrated Womens' History Month on March 29. The celebration marked a special time for women veterans and staff. The celebration was followed by an Open House for the new Women's Clinic, a newly renovated clinic designed to offer women veterans a more comfortable health care option.

Today, more than ever, organizations are concerned with addressing health care for women veterans. With the rising number of women veterans serving today, the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center wants women veterans to know about the care we offer them through this specialized program.

The Women's Clinic, also known as Patriot's Pavilion, recently reopened its doors in hopes of providing excellent health care to women veterans by creating a comfortable atmosphere conducive for patient/physician interaction.

The Women's Clinic offers the same services provided by Primary Care, but the services are more gender specific for women veterans. Women Veterans' Program Manager Dana Stephens said the services provided are expanding due to the age of women veterans today and the number of female veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The number of women veterans is expected to grow," said Stephens. "We will expand to meet

the needs of our veterans. We currently have one provider, but if the need arises, we will expand the number of staff to accommodate their needs."

The women's clinic hopes to add staff specializing in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to work with women veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The clinic works closely with mental health to address the needs of female veterans.

"The front lines of combat have changed when compared to the past," Stephens said. "We have women driving combat vehicles and experiencing the same situations as male veterans. These same women have to face the possibility of road-side-bombs as well as other traumatic experiences, which normally would have involved male veterans in past combat situations."

Many of the returning female veterans are young and have families. The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center also offers outside OB/GYN services on a fee basis. Stephens felt that focusing on the needs of younger women veterans was key to treating our women veterans today.

"You can't use traditional ways to treat women today," said Stephens. "We have veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who are at the age where they are interesting in having children. Some of them already have children. You

have to be able to offer the services important to the female veterans who are younger and have different needs from our older women veterans."

Lakisha Anthony last served in the Army National Guard in 2004 and has received services from the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center's Women's Clinic since 2005. Anthony believes the clinic is important to female veterans young and old.

"I think the clinic is convenient for women veterans," said Anthony. "They basically offer the same type services as medical care facilities in the private sector, but the main difference is the one-on-one care you receive from the Women's Clinic. You are not just a number; the medical personnel at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center are caring and compassionate. If I have a question about my health, they will answer my question, even if I don't have an appointment."

Anthony said other facilities aren't quite as compassionate and offer less encouragement to communicate with the physician. She also felt it was important to have female doctors and nurses providing care at the Women's Clinic.

"When those treating you are female, the environment is more comfortable and you feel they really care about you, and you feel more comfortable talking with your doctor about your health," said Anthony.

Even though many services offered may be similar in nature, Anthony said women veterans are very appreciative of the services offered and the climate in which the clinic operates.

"Women veterans seem to be very appreciative of the services offered by the Women's Clinic at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center," said Anthony. "I hear women talking about how satisfied they are with the Women's Clinic in the hallways every day."

The clinic staff members are more familiar with health care issues faced by returning veterans than other medical care options. Staff members receive specialized training about how to treat returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

OEF/OIF Program Manager Stephanie Massey said many of the women returning from abroad face the same issues as male veterans, but in a different way.

"Female veterans tend to address health care issues differently from male veterans," said

Massey. "Women are more vocal than men when dealing with the issues faced by veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The Women's Clinic staff members are specially trained to meet the specific medical and mental health needs of these returning women veterans."

Women veterans at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center can rest assured they will receive health care specifically designed to care for their individual needs. Women veterans enrolled with the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center can ask their Primary Care physician to schedule a consult with the Women's Clinic.

Women veterans who have not enrolled with the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center should contact eligibility at the medical center. Once enrolled, women veterans will automatically become enrolled in the Women's Clinic for their Primary Care services.

Women veterans interested in receiving general information about the Women's Clinic can contact Dana Stephens at 205-554-2000 ext. 4250.



Women Veterans Program Manager Dana Stephens



THE WALL THAT HEALS UPDATE



The Wall That Heals

The Wall That Heals, a replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, will be making a stop in Tuscaloosa on June 9 and will be available until June 13.

Opening Ceremony will be held on June 9, at 6:00 p.m. On June 10, there will be a Wreath Laying Ceremony at 10:00 a.m. This ceremony is specifically for TVAMC veterans and staff members. On June 11, a Candlelight Ceremony will be held in honor of our Nation's Heroes. Closing Ceremony will take place on June 13, at 5:00 p.m.

The Wall That Heals helps to educate the public about the Vietnam War through the Traveling Museum. Information can be found about those who lost their lives and how the Vietnam Veterans Memorial helps to heal those in the community who have lost loved ones over the years.

You can find more information about The Wall That Heals and volunteer opportunities at <http://www.tuscaloosa.va.gov>, <http://tuscaloosamarines.org>, <http://vvmf.org> or by calling the Tuscaloosa Visitor's Bureau at 205-391-0957.

TVAMC employees can find out more information about volunteering by contacting Connie Booth at 205-554-3673.



GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY BLD. 61 RENOVATIONS



Director Alan J. Tyler Participates in the Groundbreaking Ceremony for Bld. 61 Renovations

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center held a groundbreaking ceremony on April 14 to mark the beginning of construction for the renovation of Building 61, which is expected to begin in June. The residents of Building 61 were the special guests at this ceremony, which included refreshments in their honor.

This construction project, with a cost of approximately \$10 million, will involve a complete renovation of the building to create a more home-like environment for the residents.

Specifically, the project includes conversion of semi-private rooms to private rooms for each resident, remodeling of day rooms, conversion of nursing stations to living rooms, and updating of furniture.

The event began with an invocation by Chaplain Kendall Thomas and was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance, led by one of the residents of Bldg. 61. Director Alan J. Tyler provided welcoming remarks, during which he explained the significance of the project

as part of our overall cultural transformation efforts. The event was also attended by Mark Anderson, Deputy Network Director for the VA Southeast Network (VISN 7), who also offered remarks to the residents.

Damon Stevenson, Chief, Stakeholder Relations Service, emceed the event and thanked the residents for their attendance and participation.

“If not for the service and sacrifice of our honored guests -- the residents of Bldg. 61 -- we would not be here today celebrating the ground breaking of this new project,” Stevenson said.

The event concluded with photo opportunities for the residents and their families “breaking ground” with the special hard hats and shovels commemorating the occasion.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION CEREMONY



Lewis Mathews receives recognition from Director, Alan J. Tyler

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center recognized many volunteers for their hard work at the facility. The Volunteer Recognition Ceremony was held at Hotel Capstone on April 20.

With more than 200 active volunteers, the TVAMC logged more than 120,000 cumulative combined lifetime volunteer hours representing years of volunteering. Each year the TVAMC honors the volunteers with the most lifetime volunteer hours with the 10,000 Hour Gold Achievement Award, the 13,000 Hour Exceptional Achievement Award and the 17,000 Hour Extraordinary Honor Award.

This year's top three volunteers recognized were Lewis Mathews -- 28 years of service and more than 17,000 lifetime hours; Chris Haynes -- 13,923 lifetime hours; and Grover House -- 10,565 lifetime hours.

Randy LeSturgeon, master of ceremonies and volunteer program manager, expressed gratitude to all volunteers for their continued efforts.

"It's a pleasure to honor our volunteers who give so much of themselves to enhance the lives of our veteran residents," said LeSturgeon.

Eight-year-old Caleb Bryant played the National Anthem on his violin just before the memorial and invocation led by Chaplain John Bailey.

Jason Rice, 2009 Student Volunteer of the year and recipient of the James H. Parke Scholarship, was the guest speaker. Rice highlighted his experiences as a student volunteer and how volunteering impacted his life and career.

Those presenting awards included Sara Gray, Barbara Porter, Damon Stevenson and Director Alan J. Tyler. A total of 82 volunteers were recognized at the ceremony.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center would like to thank each volunteer for the compassionate service they provide and the unselfish devotion and caring concern they express for our veterans.

News and Events

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center Supporting 2101st Transportation

On January 9, the 2101st Transportation Company held a Deployment Ceremony to honor its soldiers as they depart for Iraq. The unit has stations in three communities in West Alabama: Demopolis, Aliceville, and Butler. This is the second deployment for the 2101st.

Staff from the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, Mr. Mike Culver (Transition Patient Advocate), Ms. Angela Edwards (Family Support Team Social Worker), and Dr. Bettina Schmid (Family Support Team Psychologist), attended this ceremony which was held in a packed gymnasium at Demopolis High School. They were present to offer support and provide information about VA services, including information on how the VA can help families during their deployment and assuring soldiers that the VA is there for them when they return home.

Two families in need of assistance were referred to the TVAMC Family Support Team. To contact the VA regarding services for military members, veterans, or their families call 205-554-2000 x2500.



CSI Team visits with veterans on St. Patrick's Day

The Customer Service Improvement (CSI) Team at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center treated patients at the facility to a St. Patrick's Day celebration. Dressed for the occasion, members of the CSI Team visited the Outpatient Pharmacy, giving veterans the opportunity to win prizes while playing games. The CSI Team also entertained veterans in the Community Living Center. The CSI Team focuses on promoting a more pleasant wait time for veterans and their families during visits.



TVAMC Completes SOARS and Joint Commission Reviews



The SOARS Team Visits the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center

The focus of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center (TVAMC) is ensuring quality care which is second-to-none. In preparation for assessments by The Joint Commission, the Systematic Ongoing Assessment and Review Strategy (SOARS) Team noted several strong practices of the TVAMC staff.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, through donations from our veterans, created a mini museum - A Tribute to America's Veterans - displaying uniforms from the five uniformed services of the Armed Forces. This mini museum is on display in Building 135.

The use of a five item tool used to communicate pain has helped to assess pain in advanced dementia patients. Using pamphlets to educate patients about pressure ulcer prevention was also noted as a strong point. Recognition programs such as the Veteran of the Month and Employee of the Month feature those who go above and beyond the call of duty to assist our veterans and their families on the "Wall of Pride."

The Veteran Mental Health Self Report Pilot provides veterans more control over the care they receive. Patient satisfaction is constantly measured through ICE kiosks for patient satisfaction surveys. Red Socks Alerts and a Zone Defense system are helping to reduce the number of falls and assaults on units.

These strong practices are evidence of a dedicated staff, who strive to provide excellent care to our Nation's Heroes. Without the dedication of each member of our team at the TVAMC, our facility would not be able to provide this great care to our veterans.

Joint Commission preliminary findings were positive for the medical center. The outstanding survey included only five direct impact and 11 indirect impact findings. The Joint Commission found no Behavioral Health findings.

WWII Veterans Honor Flight

WWII veterans recently had the chance to participate in an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. The flight was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Tuscaloosa.

The flight departed from Tuscaloosa Regional Airport around 6:30 a.m. and returned the same day around 8:00 p.m.

Approximately 102 WWII veterans and 70 support staff, who were mostly veterans, had the opportunity to visit the WWII Memorial, Changing of the Guards at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Vietnam Memorial and the Korean Memorial.

TVAMC volunteer and WWII veteran Clint Youngblood served in the Naval Air Corp from 1943 to 1945. He participated in the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. Youngblood talked about the different experiences the trip provided.

"We visited memorials in Washington and I had the chance to meet special people along the way," said Youngblood.

Youngblood visits with one of his close friends here at TVAMC on a regular basis and was able to deliver pictures he had taken of his friend to a relative in Washington.

"It was a special time," Youngblood said. "I was able to give her the pictures of my close friend. They have been unable to visit with one another for more than 35 years.

"On one of the stops, I remember hearing someone say, Youngblood, Youngblood; has anyone seen Youngblood," Youngblood said. "It was my friend's sister. I was able to take a picture of her to bring back to my friend in Tuscaloosa."

From the VA Mailbag

Dear Mr. Tyler,

A few months ago I had my right leg amputated and somehow my leg became infected and would not heal. My primary care physician recommended that I see a wound care nurse. This is when my wife and me was introduced to Nurse Sharon McKinney. Ms. McKinney was one of the most caring and compassionate medical persons we had ever met in the system. We were blessed to have met Ms. McKinney and we would not want this opportunity to pass without thanking her in some meaningful way.

The VA is a better place because of persons like Ms. McKinney, we thank the VA and we thank Ms. McKinney.

God Bless,
H.W.

March 22, 2010

To: VA Staff

I just must express to all of you how much I appreciate the kind and helpful service received from all of you during my almost four months stay at the center. The medical, therapy, social and spiritual care were superb.

The food service was excellent and the social activities made the long stay a pleasure.

This old soldier wants to thank you so much for your kindness. I will always remember all of you with much gratitude.

Yours forever,
G.H.

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