TVAMC Opens Selma Outpatient Clinic
The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, in an effort to improve access and quality of care for veterans in rural areas, opened the Selma Outpatient Clinic on August 17. The Grand Opening was held September 3.

The new outpatient clinic, located at 206 Vaughan Memorial Drive, is staffed by VA employees, and designed to offer veterans in the Selma and surrounding areas access to primary care and basic mental health services.

The clinic operates Monday through Thursday, from 8 a.m. -- 4:30 p.m. and will provide the same continuum of care the medical center offers to veterans using the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

Having an outpatient clinic in Selma gives veterans the option of using the Selma Clinic instead of traveling to Tuscaloosa. Veterans can still use the main facility if they wish.

"There is a large population of veterans living in the Selma area and we are excited about the opportunity to bring health care closer to where they live," said Damon Stevenson, Public Affairs Officer for the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center was awarded approximately $1.1 million to help accomplish the task of reaching veterans in rural areas and developing a Home-Based Primary Care Team that would operate out of the Selma Clinic.

The medical center was also awarded approximately $334,000 to develop a Mental Health Outreach Team that would also operate from the Selma Clinic.

With both teams targeting veterans that may not be able to travel to the clinic or the medical center, the teams will travel to the veterans' homes and provide health care to eligible veterans.

"At the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, we are eager to extend our services to the rural communities of Alabama," said Kristin Petey, Alabama Rural Health Initiative program manager at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. "In addition to bringing health care to eligible veterans in their homes, we anticipate an exposure of barriers to healthcare and an establishment of ways to overcome such obstacles."

The medical center held an enrollment fair for the Selma Clinic on July 28 at the Selma Mall to encourage veterans to enroll early. The staff looks forward to serving veterans that are unable to receive access to local health care.

"Opening this clinic will provide health care to some veterans who have not been able to get the care they needed and that they have earned through their service to our nation." -- Damon Stevenson Chief, Stakeholder Relations Service
A welcome tea was held in honor of James R. Talton, PA-C, MBA, MS, FACHE, newly appointed Associate Director of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center on July 16, 2009.

Prior to his appointment as Associate Director, Mr. Talton served as Chief, Diagnostic Service and Rehabilitation Medicine Service at TVAMC since February 2008. Mr. Talton also served as Primary Care Service Line Chief at Beckley VA Medical Center in Beckley, WV from February 2006 to February 2008 and as Senior Physician Assistant from September 2000 to February 2006 at Salisbury VA Medical Center in Salisbury, N.C. In spring of 2008, Mr. Talton served as Interim Associate Director at Dublin VA Medical Center.

Mr. Talton served 21 years in the U.S. Army before joining the Department of Veterans Affairs. During his military career, Mr. Talton proved himself to be a distinguished leader through his work as a noncommissioned officer and a commissioned officer.

Mr. Talton received a Bachelor of Science Degree as a Physician Assistant from the University of Oklahoma in 1994 and in 2000 earned a Master of Science degree in Physician Assistant Studies from the University of Nebraska. In 2006 he completed a Master of Business Administration degree in Health Care Management at Brenau University.

Board Certified in health care management and as a physician assistant, Mr. Talton will be a valuable asset to the medical center and to the healthcare of our nation’s heroes. Mr. Talton is also a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is proud to have Mr. Talton as our new Associate Director and looks forward to exciting times as he contributes to the well-being of the entire facility. Congratulations Mr. James Talton from the entire staff of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center!
Patricia A. Mathis, RN, MSN, was appointed as Associate Director for Patient Care Services at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center on September 13, 2009.

Prior to this appointment, she served as the Chief Nurse of Off-Site Operations at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center. Ms. Mathis began her career as a Registered Nurse and Nurse Manager in the private sector with nine years of service. Ms. Mathis has more than 18 years of experience with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Cincinnati VA Medical Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Ms. Mathis’ VA experience includes the positions of Chief Nurse of Off-Site Operations; Chief Nurse of Acute and Tertiary Care; Nurse Manager of Peri-Operative and Specialty Care Nursing Programs; and Nurse Manager of Medical and Surgical Units.

Ms. Mathis has a Master’s of Science Degree in Nursing Administration from the University of Cincinnati. Her leadership and development accomplishments include the VA Nurses Executive Leadership Program, American Organization of Nurse Executives, and Ohio Organization of Nurse Executives. She completed the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Mentor Certification Program and achieved Residency Level. Ms. Mathis also completed the Federal Executive Institute for Nurse Executives (2008), and won the National Systems Redesign Group Award (2008).

Currently, Ms. Mathis is completing the new National Nurse Manager Orientation for the Office of Nursing Service in collaboration with the Nurse Executive from Erie, Pa. Prior to her appointment at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, she served on the VISN 10 Program Planning Committee for the Nursing Leadership Academy, VISN 10 TeleCare Committee, and as the Clinical Representative to the VISN 10 Logistics Council. Ms. Mathis provided leadership and expertise to the Advisory Council at Xavier University in the curriculum development for the Clinical Nurse Leader Program.

Ms. Mathis is a member of Sigma Theta Tau, the American Organization of Nurse Executives, and the American College of Health Care Executives.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is looking forward to what Ms. Patricia Mathis has planned for the upcoming months. An awards tea will be held in her honor on September 22 from 2-4 p.m. in the auditorium. Congratulations Patricia Mathis from the entire staff of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center!
The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center was rated as one of the top 60 psychiatric hospitals in the country by US News and World Report. A total of 4,861 hospitals were evaluated in 16 specialties, with psychiatry being one of them.

In order to be considered as a candidate for one of the 16 specialties that were judged, the medical center had to meet at least one of the following criteria: be a teaching hospital, have at least 200 beds or have at least 100 beds and at least four out of eight important medical technologies.

Reputation, death rate, patient safety and patient services were some of the deciding factors when rating most of the specialties. Psychiatry was rated on reputation alone. The US News and World Report was based on surveys collected from specialists in the field and their responses from the past three years.

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center offers Acute Psychiatry; Substance Abuse Psychosocial Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program; PTSD Residential Rehabilitation Program; Compensated Work Therapy/Transitional Residential Program; Domiciliary Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program for homeless veterans, Traumatic Brain Injury/PTSD Screening Program; general outpatient mental health services and specialty outpatient services for PTSD and Substance Abuse.

The medical center celebrated this great accomplishment on August 17 with a Celebration Tea to thank the staff for their hard work. Cake and punch was served as several key members commented on the progress of the medical center.

"We are very proud and honored to be recognized in this elite group by such a prestigious organization as US News and World Report," said Damon Stevenson, Public Affairs Officer at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. "The Tuscaloosa VA is committed to providing care second to none to our veterans suffering with mental illness and it is nice to be recognized for the outstanding work our staff are doing in that regard."

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center continues to strive for excellence in delivering the best healthcare to our nation's heroes and providing mental health care that is recognized so highly is a great accomplishment.

A special thanks to the entire staff for all the hard work and dedication that has helped the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center to be recognized for our efforts.
Construction Totaling $19 Million Coming to TVAMC

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center has been approved for $19 million to complete construction projects designed to improve long-term nursing care provided to patients at the medical center.

The first construction project, with a cost of approximately $10 million, is the renovation of two community living centers in Bldg. 61, which 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 purpose of the project is to create an environment as close to a home for the residents as possible. Design of the project begins this year, with construction expected to begin in 2010.

Each cottage is not meant to be "homelike," but to be a home. The purpose behind having 10 residents per home is because research has shown the number has been associated with reduced depression and anxiety, increased sociability, and improved mobility and independence. Residents will choose their activities, mealtimes, and degree of participation in household tasks.

The next project is Phase 1 of a plan to build a total of 12 homes over time, each with 10 bedrooms, a living room and kitchen, as well as the construction of a clubhouse for the residents of the 12 homes and Bldg. 61. Referred to as “The Cottages,” Phase 1 of this project, totaling approximately $9 million, will build two of these homes, and the clubhouse. Design for Phase 1 also begins this year with construction expected to begin in 2010.

The relationship of the private rooms to the living area will allow the residents to easily control their own level of social interaction. A key feature of the design of the home is the short distance from bedrooms to common space. This design feature helps to increase resident mobility and reduce their need for mobility devices. With each resident having a private bedroom and bathroom, the cottages will provide patients with the privacy similar to a private home.

“The cottages provide an environment where residents, including young veterans or service members who are recuperating from the effects of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, can receive assistance and support with activities of daily living and clinical care, without the assistance and care becoming the focus of their existence,” said Alan J. Tyler, medical center director.
Lillian Ledbetter, former Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. employee, spoke in honor of Women's Equality Day at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center.

Ledbetter retired from Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. and realized that she had received a lesser pay for performing the same job as other male employees and decided to stand up for the rights of women and other minorities in the workplace.

Ledbetter explained that the problem of equal pay for equal work was a problem that the entire world faces everyday.

After waiting for more than 10 years, her hard work paid off. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 was signed into law.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 allowed workers to be able to file pay discrimination complaints after 180 days of receiving the first unfair check. Prior to the law, a person could not file a claim if 180 days had passed after receiving the first unfair check.

We commend Ms. Ledbetter for all of her hard work and for her courage.

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Tuscaloosa Veterans Administration Medical Center Day

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center was recognized by Northport Mayor Bobby Herndon during the month of September.

To show the gratitude of the City of Northport to the employees of the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center for service and dedication to veterans and the community, Mayor Herndon proclaimed September 1 to be Tuscaloosa Veterans Administration Medical Center Day.

Mayor Herndon praised the medical center for its recent accomplishment of being recognized as number 52 of the top 100 psychiatric hospitals by US News and World Report.

With more than 900 employees serving our nation’s heroes, the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center has become a provider dedicated to excellence in service. Congratulations to all our employees for their hard work.

Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center hosts Suicide Prevention Week

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center hosted two events in honor of Suicide Prevention Week. On Wednesday, September 9, a free seminar was held at the medical center encouraging veterans and their families to learn the warning signs of suicide and how to prevent it.

Speakers included Dr. Kamal Raisani, psychiatrist; Elizabeth Hartley of Bradford Heath Services; Mary Turner of Survivors of Suicide support group; and Judy Thomas of Indian Rivers Mental Health Center.

The second event was held on Friday, September 11, at University Mall. Agency members of the Tuscaloosa Mental Health Association distributed information on suicide statistics and the warning signs.

With many veterans returning from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the medical center developed a Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline encouraging all veterans who are having suicidal thoughts to seek help by calling 1-800-273-Talk. Callers will gain the opportunity to talk with a caring person trained to provide assistance to them.

Common warning signs of suicide

- Depressed mood
- Substance abuse
- Running away or being incarcerated frequently
- Significant problems with parents and other family
- Expressions of suicidal thoughts
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Difficulties in dealing with sexual orientation
- Loss of desire to engage in activities
- Impulsive, aggressive behavior or rage
In April, the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center formed a team designed to help patients in waiting rooms feel more comfortable and to find ways to improve the overall satisfaction of the patients.

Some of the renovations around the hospital have included updating the waiting rooms to make them more comfortable, including adding couches and flat-screen TVs.

Games, snacks and other entertainment top the list of activities planned by the Customer Service Improvement Team, also known as the CSI Team.

The team, headed by Connie Booth, events coordinator at the medical center, interacts with the patients to look for ways to improve the service that the medical center provides to our veterans.

"We talk and visit with the patients, and ask them if they had any questions or concerns," said Booth. "They can always give us ways to improve."

The activities are provided for entertainment as well as social interaction. The team hopes to encourage responses from the patients by giving them more opportunities to interact with medical center staff.

In July, a local magician, Kurt Anderson, performed a magic show in the pharmacy waiting room. Many of the medical center staff and patients attended the show.

Apart from the magic that seems to take place everyday through the process of providing excellent health care here at the medical center, the CSI Team helps the medical center keep a finger on the pulse of the concerns of our nation's heroes.

The time that patients spend waiting for appointments can be transformed into an entertaining experience in a matter of minutes, helping to pass the time.

"If one waiting room is full, that is where we are going to hit," Booth said. "It has been a big hit. We have veterans who want to keep playing rather than rush out the door."

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The team plans to celebrate the opening of the new pavilion in Mental Health with a cookout. The pavilion was designed to help patients enjoy the outdoors. Working with mental health patients who do not normally get the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors is one way the project team is providing health care with personality.
The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center proudly recognizes Jason Rice as this year’s winner of the Student Volunteer of the Year Award. The recipient is chosen by the scholarship committee.

Each year students volunteer at the medical center performing various jobs. The students volunteered for more than 6,500 hours this summer and left a lasting impression on the medical center staff and veterans.

Many of the students worked with a fundraising project designed to provide interaction between the patients and the students while providing a valuable lesson in customer service.

"Our Summer Student Volunteer Program provides young adults structured activities in which they exercise principles, behaviors, practices and work ethics proven to be successful in a healthy business environment," said Randy LeStourgeon, Coordinator, Voluntary Services. "It is expected that students leave our program wiser and better prepared to succeed in life than when they arrived."

After a summer of hard work, the students and coordinators traveled to Six Flags Over Georgia to celebrate the success of this summer’s student volunteer program.

Dr. Avinash Nichani
July 27, 2009

Dear Dr. Nichani:

I trust that by now you have heard the sad news that my father died at DCH Regional Medical Center on July 4. I am writing to express the gratitude of our family for the wonderful care that you provided my father during the last several years of his life. He appreciated so much your phone calls, your visits and your efforts to improve the quality of his life. He was always telling all of us what a gentle and caring person you were. Thank you so much for taking such special interest in his well-being and for all that you did to keep him in good health.

Sincerely,
L.S.

May 27, 2009

Mr. Alan Tyler,

First off, I would like to thank you so much for being here for me. I was really hopeless when you took me in. The only thing that I remember was how "beat up" I was and totally lost! There was a time about a month ago when I met Bobby Gray. He could see where I was and gave me hope. I couldn’t talk without crying, but he listened. I really needed a friend and he was. Now I’m living on the fourth floor and feel a whole lot better. I can find my way around and I am starting to have hope. I’ll never forget when I was down and Bobby was there for me. I am terrible at writing, but I hope you understand.

Thanks again,
Feeling Better
"All Star News" is a publication produced by Stakeholder Relations Service 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."