The Biloxi Breeze

Winter 2015

A Publication of the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System

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Mission Statement

The mission of blind rehabilitation is to provide instruction to blind or visually impaired Veterans. The goal of blind rehabilitation is to promote independence, self-care and improve the overall quality of your life.

Produced By

The Biloxi Breeze is a publication of the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center (GCBRC).

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Comments or Subscriptions

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Message from the Chief

Wow! It seems surreal to me to see the word Chief above my picture, but I am honored to have been chosen in November as the next Chief of the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center. We have such an amazing group of nurses, specialists and support staff that I cannot think of a better place to come to work each day.

Our fall was really busy. Some highlights were our new gardening program through Manual Skills and Recreation Therapy in the Courtyard and our wonderful first staff and Veteran Thanksgiving feast where everyone contributed delicious dishes.

We also currently have a Veteran testing out a new mattress for our beds in hopes of finding a favorable replacement to the ones we currently have. So far he gives it “two thumbs up.”

We are also working on how we can integrate iCATS training into all areas of Blind Rehabilitation training.

As always, we are listening to the feedback of our Veterans and constantly looking for ways to improve our program. We want to make the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center the best center possible for our Veterans.

Keep in touch with us!
Take good care of yourselves!

Debra Gilley, M.Ed., COMS, CLVT
Chief, Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center

MEET OUR STAFF

Staff Updates

Things are always changing here and the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center! While we are always sad to see old staff members move on, new hires are always a reason to celebrate. Many Veterans will be sad to hear that our beloved Manual Skills instructor Thomas Wedemeyer has returned to Texas. We know the Central Texas Blind Rehab Center will benefit from the efforts of such a hardworking and dedicated instructor.

Now for the good news! After quite a wait, we finally have a new Chief. Karen Spruill retired this past spring, and we are pleased to announce that Debra Gilley, our previous Assistant Chief, has graciously taken over the position. We are all excited about the future of the Blind Rehabilitation program and are glad we have new, official leadership to take us forward.

Many of you may remember two of our previous interns in the O&M department, Randy Kohl and Molly Mather. We are delighted to have both of these specialists join our staff. Randy joins us from Kansas and Molly from Michigan. Let's hope they can get ready for the heat of the upcoming Gulf Coast summer!

Another new addition to our staff is Tiffany Moore. Tiffany, a native of Mobile, Ala., joins us from the Birmingham Blind Rehabilitation Center. Several of our Veterans are familiar with Tiffany, having received training from her in Birmingham. Tiffany joins our Living Skills department, but also teaches computers and iCATS. Welcome, Tiffany!

Staff Highlight

Nancy Shampo, M.ED, COMS
Blind Rehab Manual Skills Supervisor

Nancy Shampo was born and raised in Wisconsin. She attended Gresham High School and graduated in 1969. Nancy attended the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh from 1969 to 1974. She graduated with a B.S. in Secondary Education.

Nancy settled in Wisconsin and started her teaching career in 1974. After several years of working in the teaching profession, she turned her focus toward the United States Air Force. She enlisted in the Air Force in 1979 and was commissioned in May 1980. She served 13 years as a personnel officer and logistician and served in various bases in the continental United States and overseas.

In 1992, Nancy separated from the Air Force and focused her attention back on teaching. She settled in Lubbock, Texas, and returned to college and earned an M.A. in Special Education and Orientation and Mobility from Texas Tech University. She received her master's degree in 2000 and went to work for the Region 12 Education Service Center in Waco, Texas. Nancy worked as an itinerant orientation and mobility specialist and teacher of visually impaired people for 12 years. She served as the Region 12 representative on the statewide panel for students who are blind or visually impaired.

In October 2008, she turned her focus to the Veterans Health Care System, Blind Rehabilitation.

Always interested in returning to VA, she applied for a Blind Rehabilitation specialist position. She received the position and started another career.

She transferred to the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center in Biloxi, Miss., in 2011. Currently, Nancy is the Manual Skills Supervisor.

Nancy is married and has five children.

Manual Skills Update

Blind Rehab Specialists:
Nancy Shampo, M.Ed., COMS, TVI and Deanna Morehead, MA ED, COMS, TVI

Time has certainly gone by quickly! We were discussing the past events of this fall and late summer. As the manual skills staff reminisced about the events, we marveled over the transformation of the Veterans' courtyard. Many thanks to Tom

Wedemeyer for all his help in working in the garden, doing construction, planting and, of course, the endless task of weeding. Also, a world of thanks to our Veteran, Daniel Whichard, who went from student to weekly Master Gardener volunteer. Whichard has transformed a once drab and lifeless area into a beautiful retreat complete with birds, butterflies and tranquility.

As a sidebar, I would like to extend my thanks and well wishes to Tom Wedemeyer and his lovely wife Ruth as they make their way into a new adventure. Tom left in November to take a position at the Waco BRC and is deeply missed by staff and Veterans here at Biloxi. Best wishes and happiness to you, Tom and Ruth! We are grateful for your years of selfless service.

As we get ready to go embrace a new year at the Biloxi BRC, we pause to give thanks to the many Veterans who have graciously allowed us to serve them. The Manual Skills department, in particular, extends our thankfulness to the Veterans who have come through our area willing to learn new skills and adaptive techniques. Each Veteran we serve is unique – possessing special talents, needs and goals. We take pride in developing a program for our Veterans that is custom made to fit. We have enjoyed getting to know our Veterans and wish you all the best for the New Year!

New Staff and Interns

David Burke, MA ED, COMS
Orientation & Mobility Supervisor

Join us in welcoming two new staff members to Orientation and Mobility, Randy Kohl and Molly Mather. You may actually already know one or both of these new staff members. They were both previous interns at the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center.

Randy Kohl graduated with his master's degree from Texas Tech University in 2012 just after completing his internship. He was the very first intern at this facility.

Molly Mather graduated with her master's degree in 2014, also right after completing her internship at the GCBRC.

We are excited to have both of these new employees with us. Their teaching skills are resoundingly appreciated and enjoyed by all Veterans. In fact, both of these past interns had Veterans who were consistently talking about them, applauding their teaching style, suggesting they be hired when possible and inquiring about their current status.

In fact, the conclusion of 2014 brought the close to a very successful year for internships. Six interns passed through the doors of the GCBRC. All six graduated from their internship experience. All of them are excellent instructors and will positively affect the lives of the individuals with visual impairments for years to come.

The Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System and the GCBRC are committed to assisting affiliated universities and their students with their efforts in completing an extensive education program and preparation for a future in blind rehabilitation. Additionally, the GCBRC is proud of the impact it is having on the lives of individuals with visual impairments both inside the VA health care system and outside of it. Together with these affiliated universities, we are contributing to greater independence for people with visual impairments and for the future of blind rehabilitation.

News from the GCBRC Admissions Office

Michael "Andy" Amberson, M.Ed.
Clinical Coordinator

I hope all of you had a great holiday; it was very active the last couple of months at GCBRC. At Thanksgiving we had a big employee and Veteran meal that staff and Veterans prepared. We were all full of turkey and ham.

The week before Christmas Veterans went for a nice lunch in Ocean Springs. The day before Christmas Eve, we enjoyed a great outing at the Golden Corral with all our Veterans and our staff, about 30 people in our section of the restaurant. We express our gratitude for this last event to the Pensacola Florida BVA and to SAASOA - Southeastern Asian American Store Owners Association in Mobile, Ala.

On December 26, we held individual classes and some group classes, then we went to McElroy's restaurant for lunch. Upon our return, many gathered in the dining hall for games and football on the big screen while some ambitious Veterans joined Dave in the Fitness Center to work off all the food. I'm sure it was needed since Dave took some to get donuts first thing in the morning. We really enjoyed

spending time with our Veterans over the holiday season.

Our wait list is moving quickly. We are able to get Veterans scheduled within a month of the referral, and we look forward to seeing you in 2015.

I recently received an email from a VIST Coordinator who stated that his Veteran returned very happy and gave a lot of praise for his CATs instruction. Let us know when you get this kind of information. We love to know when we are doing well… and when we have issues that need to be resolved.

The GCBRC will kick off our Dog and CAT program in February. Anyone interested in obtaining a guide dog should contact his or her VIST Coordinator and contact David Burke to initiate a packet to be a part of the process. Dave will notify admissions of viable candidates. You may get in touch with David at (228) 385-6777.

Wishing all of you a happy and prosperous 2015.

Grilled Spaghetti Recipe

Randy Kohl, COMS

Ingredients:

1 lb. hamburger
1 lb. sausage
1 yellow onion
1 red bell pepper
1 green bell pepper
1 shallot
4 cloves garlic
Worcestershire sauce
Salt and pepper to taste
1 TBSP olive oil
2 jars of sauce (I use Ragu)
1.5 packages of spaghetti noodles

Directions:

In an aluminum pan, add 1 TBSP olive oil, then combine hamburger and sausage. Break apart and mix well, add Worcestershire sauce and seasonings; mix well.

Flatten out the meat in the aluminum pan and smoke the meat for 1.5 hours (225 degrees).

While meat is smoking, cut up yellow onion, red bell pepper and green bell pepper; roast the veggies in butter with 4 cloves of garlic and 1 shallot (minced) for about 10 minutes. Set aside when done.

Take the meat off the grill and break it into small pieces. Add sauce (I use 2 jars of sauce) and the veggies and mix well.

Return to the grill and cook for about 40-45minutes stirring occasionally (275 degrees).

Meanwhile, cook your noodles according to the package's instructions. (I use 1.5 packages of spaghetti noodles.)

After noodles are cooked, drain and add to the meat/sauce pan on the grill. Mix well and cook for another 20 minutes. Eat and enjoy.

A Letter from the Social Worker

Will Nail, LMSW
Gulf Coast BRC Social Worker

It has been an honor to continue to serve Veterans with visual impairments in 2014. As we move into 2015, I look forward to continuing to serve Veterans. I continue to challenge each Veteran to keep his or her bucket list full. Every time you remove an item from the bucket list replace it with a new one. Small obtainable goals are great starters for the start of the new year.

It doesn't matter if you are new to your vision loss or if you have been dealing with it for many years, it can remain a challenge every day to adapt. I encourage you to discuss your challenges with family, friends and Veterans in the same situation. Strong social supports have a positive impact on the way we face some of those challenges that confront us.

Encouraging words from General Patton, "Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory." I look forward to working with you all in the future. Thank you for your service!

Achieving Your Goals

Susan M. Guillory, LCSW, MVF-CSW, VIST Coordinator, GCVHCS

Giving up on your goal because of one setback is like slashing your other three tires because you got a flat. – Author Unknown

Sounds foolish, doesn't it, but we do it all the time! You didn't lose five pounds in two days as you wanted, so you binge and end up gaining weight. Or you didn't save the $100 you had set your mind to, so, in frustration, you spend the $70 that was put away. By the time you get this news-letter, I would bet that many of you have already given up on some of your New Year's resolutions! Sounding familiar? Yep, I thought so.

So, what is one of the most important things we can do to avoid these pitfalls? We must avoid just focusing on the larger goal and break it down into small, achievable steps. Michael Jordan, famous basketball player who achieved many goals in his life wrote, "I approach everything step by step…I had always set short term goals. As I reached those goals, they built on one

another. You have to perfect the first step and then move on…"

Whatever your goals are – whether they are small New Year's resolutions or larger life goals, approach that goal by determining the smaller steps (or goals) you need to achieve it, and then work on completing one step at a time. If you've already slipped up, just consider it as a detour in finding a new way to achieve your goal and get back on track. You can do it!

Remember, you first learned to turn over, then to get up on your hands and knees, then crawl, then walk, then run – so, you see, you already know what to do.

It is not enough to take steps which may someday lead to a goal; each step must be itself a goal and a step likewise.
– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

References: I Can't Accept Not Trying: Michael Jordan on the Pursuit of Excellence, Harper Collins Publishers.

Breaking Free From Salt

Jane Osowski, PhD, RD
Blind Rehab Dietitian

Has your medical provider recommended you "cut back on your salt"? If you have a condition called hypertension or high blood pressure you've probably heard it before. The reason for this recommendation is that several studies have shown that people who consume excess salt have a higher than average blood pressure (BP) and/or prevalence of hypertension. It's not just people who already have a hypertension diagnosis, but everyone as they age.

The statistics on the amount of salt or sodium consumed is surprising. The average daily intake of sodium for anyone over two years old is approximately 3400 mg. This amount is considerably more than the current Dietary Guidelines for

Americans which recommends American adults consume no more than 2300 mg sodium per day. There are stricter guidelines of 1500 mg per day if you are in the following groups:

- 51 years of age or older
- African American
- Have high blood pressure
- Have diabetes
- Have chronic kidney disease

In today's society it's hard to limit salt due to food processing techniques, the abundance of convenience foods, dining out and, of course, adding salt or salt containing flavoring agents to foods. And that doesn't even include foods that have naturally occurring salt, such as ham, cheese and milk to name a few.

The salt shaker that is a staple on the table in many households can be one of the biggest contributors to sodium intake. A mere teaspoon of salt (not much more than a salt packet you find in a restaurant) contains 2400 mg sodium. Think about this, if the salt shaker contributes that much sodium and the food you eat contains sodium as well, it becomes clearer to see how excess sodium is consumed regularly.

So, how can you make your food flavorful without adding salt? Experimenting with flavorings and seasonings that do not contain salt or sodium but add new flavors can help you reduce sodium in your diet. Some of the common flavoring that go well with meat products include: Mrs. Dash, basil, bay leaf, dry mustard, fresh garlic, garlic powder, fresh onion, onion powder, parsley, pepper and sage. There are others, but the key is to experiment and be careful not to overseason.

When you shop for flavor agents avoid any that contain the word salt or sodium in the name or ingredient list. Use the powder

form if it's available (such as onion powder instead of onion salt). Salt substitutes that contain potassium salt are good to use. Avoid salt substitutes that contain sodium chloride. You can also devise your own blend.

Spice Blend recipe:
3 teaspoons dry mustard
3 teaspoons onion powder
3 teaspoons paprika
1 teaspoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon white pepper
½ teaspoon ground basil

Mix thoroughly. Store in a salt shaker and use at the table in place of salt.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Be My Eyes

Robin Sniffen, M.Ed, COMS, CLVT

The instructors who teach smartphones and tablets like to keep an eye out for any new and exciting apps we can share with you. An app that has come to our attention is a new one called "Be My Eyes."

The purpose of this app is to connect visually impaired users with sighted volunteers. Having trouble identifying something? All you have to do is open the app and tap twice with two fingers. This notifies any sighted volunteers and they can respond if they are available. Using the iPhone camera, the sighted user can observe whatever conundrum has arisen and give verbal feedback to the visually impaired user. There are many situations where this could be helpful to our Veterans who want to maintain and improve their independence.

Be My Eyes is very user friendly, which we appreciate. For now, the app is free in the app store. We are interested to see what the future holds for this app. To get more information, visit the website for Be My Eyes: www.bemyeyes.org.

U.S. Currency Reader Program Application Now Available

Susan M. Guillory, LCSW, MVF-CSW. VIST Coordinator, GCVHCS

Currency readers will be widely available to all U.S. citizens, or persons legally residing in the U.S. who are blind or visually impaired, starting January 2, 2015, through the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP).

The currency reader device, called iBill Currency Identifier, provides a convenient means for blind or visually impaired individuals to identify all Federal Reserve notes (U.S. currency) in circulation. iBill uses one AAA battery which is included with the device. The denomination can be announced in one of three ways: a clear natural voice, a pattern of tones, or a pattern of vibrations for privacy. The vibration mode also assists people who are deaf and blind.

Eligible individuals who are currently patrons of the National Library Service (NLS) need only contact their NLS regional library or call 1-888-NLS-READ (1-888-657-7323). When prompted for regional library (third tone), say "library," and you will be connected to your nearest braille and talking book library. Ask for a currency reader, and someone will take your name and contact information so that you will be issued a currency reader when they become available.

Individuals who are not NLS patrons must submit an application, signed by a competent authority (for example, eye care specialist, VIST Coordinator, social workers, case workers, counselors, rehabilitation teachers) who can certify

eligibility. Applications are now available in English and in Spanish. All applications will be processed beginning January 2, 2015.

Download the required application from the BEP's website (www.bep.gov/) or contact your local VIST Coordinator for assistance in this application process.

Additional information about the U.S. Currency Reader Program and about the currency reader device can be found in the links below.

- Video Guide for Using the iBill® Talking Banknote Identifier
- U.S. Currency Reader Program Brochure [PDF]
- Print Guide for Using the iBill® Talking Banknote Identifier [PDF]
- Braille Guide for Using the iBill® Talking Banknote Identifier [RIGHT CLICK, SAVE TO DOWNLOAD THE BRAILLE FILE]
- Images of the iBill® Talking Banknote Identifier
- U.S. Currency Reader Application

For additional questions or comments about the U.S. Currency Reader Program contact your VIST Coordinator, call (844) 815-9388 toll-free or email meaningful.access@bep.gov

More about NLS: NLS administers a free library program of braille and audio materials available to U.S. residents and citizens living abroad whose low vision, blindness or physical handicap makes it difficult to read a standard printed page. More information about the program and other services provided by NLS can be viewed at http://www.loc.gov/nls/

Nursing Corner

Flu Vaccination

Bernice Mosley-McLean, LPN

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), vaccination against the flu is recommended each year for everyone six months of age and older.

The FAQs below can help you learn more about the flu vaccine:

The flu vaccine helps to protect people from the flu. The viruses selected for each seasonal flu vaccine are updated each year. This decision is based on:

- which influenza virus strains are circulating
- how they are spreading
- how well current vaccine strains protect against newly identified strains

Currently, 130 national influenza centers in 101 countries study flu activity and trends all year long.

The traditional (trivalent) flu vaccine protects against three flu viruses: two type A viruses and one type B virus. A quadrivalent flu vaccine protects against four flu viruses: two type A viruses and two type B viruses. Both types of vaccines are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are available in the US.

Chaplain's Corner

Measure of a Man

Not – how did he die?
But – how did he live?
Not – what did he gain?
But – what did he give?
These are the units
To measure the worth
Of a man as a man
Regardless of birth.
Not – what was his station?
But – had he a heart?
And how did he play his God – given part?
Was he ever ready with a word of good cheer,
To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?
Not – what was his church?
Nor – what was his creed?
But – had he befriended those really in need?
Not – what did the sketch in the newspaper say?
But – how many were sorry when he passed away?

Author Unknown

VIST Support Groups

Pensacola VIST Support Group

1 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month. For additional information contact Scott Turner, VIST Coordinator, at (850) 912-2552.

Biloxi, Miss., VIST Support Group

10 a.m. on the third Thursday of each month in the GCBRC Dining Room.

Mobile, Ala., VIST Support Group

10 a.m. on the second Wednesday of each month in the 6th floor group room.

For additional information on the Biloxi and Mobile support groups, contact Susan Guillory, VIST Coordinator, at (228) 385-6762.

Know Your VIST

The Visual Impairment Service Team Coordinators are your case managers for blind rehabilitation care and services and your first contact when you need to enroll or apply for a program. Whether it be your first admission to the BRC, a special program to meet unique needs or a refresher program, these representatives are important to your success. The following is the current updated list for the South Central VA Health Care Network VIST Coordinators.

VIST COORDINATOR	LOCATION
Adrienne Thompson (713) 791-1414 ext. 25398	Michael E. DeBakey VAMC 2002 Holcombe Blvd. (580/112-C VISOR) Houston, TX 77030
Marcia Harris (713)791-1414 ext. 25327	Michael E. DeBakey VAMC 2002 Holcombe Blvd. (580/112-C VISOR) Houston, TX 77030
Harold Miller (601) 364-1551	G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center 1500 E. Woodrow Wilson Dr. Jackson, MS 39216

John Laakman (405) 456-3915	Oklahoma City VA Medical Center 921 N.E. 13th St. Oklahoma City, OK 73104
Kara Aaron (501) 257-5070	John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital Central Arkansas Veterans Health Care System 4300 West 7th St. Little Rock, AR 72205-5484
Latrice Reaves 1-800-935-8387 ext. 7214 or 2671	Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System 1515 Poydras St., Suite 650 New Orleans, LA 70112
Scott Turner (850) 912-2552 ext. 32552	Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System 400 Veterans Ave. Biloxi, MS 39531
Susan Guillory (228) 385-6762	Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System 400 Veterans Ave. Biloxi, MS 39531
Marilyn Murray (318) 473-0010 ext. 1+2047	Alexandria VA Medical Center P. O. Box 69004 Alexandria, LA 71306
Melanie Shurden (601) 362-4471 ext. 5078	G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VAMC 1500 E. Woodrow Wilson Dr. Jackson, MS 39216
Kanyln Bodeharrison (918) 577-3666	Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center 1011 Honor Heights Dr. Muskogee, OK 74401
Paula Ellington (479) 443-4301 ext. 65364	Fayetteville VAMC 1100 N. College Ave. Fayetteville, AR 72703
Broderick Burks (318) 990-4839	Overton Brooks VAMC 510 E. Stoner Ave. Shreveport, LA 71101

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**FREE MATTER FOR
THE BLIND & PHYSICALLY
HANDICAPPED
POSTAL MANUAL
PART 135**