Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Nurse Delia Potee describes herself as a nervous flier. When she set out on an American Airlines flight in support of Hurricane Florence disaster relief, little did she know, her assistance would be crucial to the safe resolution of an in-flight medical emergency.

Ms. Potee serves as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) on Biloxi VA’s Primary Clinic Green Team. In the aftermath of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Florence, Nurse Potee graciously volunteered to relieve personnel at VA’s facility in Fayetteville, North Carolina, so local personnel could focus on the recovery of their own homes and families. En route to Fayetteville on an American Airlines flight between Gulfport, Mississippi, and Charlotte, North Carolina, a 20-year-old Air Force serviceman suffered a medical crisis that could have become very serious had it not been for quick action from Nurse Potee.

A passenger, looking pale and unstable, began to make his way to the restroom. Noticing how slow the young serviceman was moving, a flight attendant asked if he was alright. The flight attendant found the service member listless and unresponsive. When the call for medical personnel on board came, Nurse Potee responded, stating the service member, “looked bad.” She observed that his eyes were dilated. She noted that he appeared blanched and sweaty. Suspecting the likelihood of low blood sugar, Nurse Potee asked if anyone on board had a blood sugar monitor. When an elderly lady offered hers, Nurse Potee tested the serviceman and confirmed his blood sugar to be extremely low.

Nurse Potee concluded he was likely having a hypoglycemic event.

To stabilize the serviceman’s blood sugar, Nurse Potee and Pharmacist Jennifer Linton-Olk, who was also deploying in support of Hurricane Florence recovery, began administering orange juice, crackers, and cheese. The serviceman was soon fully recovered and able to return to his seat. Without the quick thinking and medical aid of Nurse Potee and Pharmacist Linton-Olk, the serviceman may have gone further into crisis, potentially diverting the flight. Everyone, especially the Air Force service member, showed their appreciation.

For quickly providing care where needed, Nurse Delia Potee received a nomination by Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Emergency Manager, Scott S. Thresher, for the DAISY Award. Administered by the DAISY Foundation, The DAISY Award is an international recognition program that “honors the compassionate care nurses provide every day.” Quarterly, Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System celebrates an extraordinary nurse who demonstrates compassionate care founded on VA core values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. Nurse Potee’s quick, selfless, and thoughtful care represented VA and its values admirably.
VA wait times for new appointments equal to or better than those in private sector

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) shows VA had significantly reduced wait times for Veterans in primary care and three specialty care services between 2014 and 2017. Average wait time in 2014 for a VA appointment in one of three specialties was 22.5 days, compared with 18.7 days for private-sector (PS) physicians. In 2017, the average wait time was 17.7 days, while the private-sector average was 29.8 days. This translates to a shorter average wait time of 12 days in VA, compared with the private-sector.

VA wait times (days) for new appointments as of March 4, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2017</th>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Care</td>
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<td>Orthopedics</td>
<td>14</td>
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Let’s all celebrate National Recreation Therapy Month with a call for health and wellness.

For over a hundred and fifty years, recreation therapists have created an environment that inspires Veterans to explore physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual aspects of their lives for healing. Over the years, the field has expanded from an inpatient clinical model to a holistic approach for total wellness. Instead of weeks or months spent practicing what they learn in a rehabilitation setting, Veterans can receive care taking advantage of home-based programs.

As an incentive to exercise, VA provides alternative therapies, such as tai chi and yoga groups, for relaxation, to...
improve flexibility and mobility, strengthen muscles, and manage pain. As recreation therapists, we see power in developing a strong mind-body connection and offer programs for both inpatient and Medical Foster Home Veterans. Massage therapists are a regular sight at the Joint Ambulatory Care Center (JACC) giving chair massages to Veterans in the waiting area. The MOVE Program is a weight loss and healthy lifestyle class that meets weekly to help Veterans meet their goals.

There are several national events sponsored by VA that promote physical activity and mental stimulation. These enable Veterans to network and socialize with others who have similar backgrounds and interests. They also create fantastic opportunities to be exposed to new activities.

One such event is the annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games (nvg.org). Events, such as wheelchair basketball, power soccer, and boccia, as well as track, give athletes opportunities to excel and adapt to challenges. This year, the event will be in Louisville, Kentucky on July 10–17, 2019.

Another competition is the National Veterans Golden Age Games (nvgag.org), for Veterans over 55, pickleball, javelin, bowling, golf, shuffleboard and bike racing are just a few of the options the event offers. 2019’s location will provide an exciting venue: Anchorage, Alaska, June 5–12. Encourage and support local Veterans attending the Golden Age Games this year!

Veterans, who want to increase their activity level, become more involved in their community, and reach their health and fitness goals, should check with their primary care manager before starting an exercise program.

So, let’s get out and move!

For more information about National Veterans Wheelchair Games, contact Bobbi Hakanson, CTRS: (228) 233-7348.

For more information about the Golden Age Games, contact: Scarlet Cox, CTRS: (228) 523-5198
Aja Guice, CTRS: (228) 523-8352
Elks lodge donates sound machines

By LAURA THROOP, CTRS

Biloxi Elks Lodge #606 bingo players raised money to purchase recreation therapy equipment for our Biloxi VA Blind Rehabilitation Center. With this donation they bought sound machines that make it possible for the visually impaired to play sports. The Biloxi VA Blind Rehabilitation Center is one of only eight in the United States. We are pleased to accept this donation on behalf of our Veterans.

Members of the Biloxi Elks Lodge #606 donated sound machines to the Biloxi VA Blind Rehabilitation Center. Pictured during the presentation are (left to right): Allan Shaw, Preston Peterson, Darleen Poulos, David Burke, Laura Throop, Bob Davis, Mike Gordon, Jimmy Poulos. (Submitted Photo)
Got questions? We’ve got answers.
Veterans Creative Arts Competition
The local contest for the annual National Veterans Creative Arts Competition was held this year, on March 6 and 7, in the Biloxi VA Medical Center’s Recreation Hall.

Veterans showcased their talents in art, music, dance and drama as well as creative writing categories. Many Veterans learned new ways to express their creativity, while increasing their self-esteem. There is always a sense of excitement among staff and Veterans as they wait to see what will be displayed and performed each year.

For more information about the event contact Kaitlin Borri, CTRS: (228) 385-6786.
2019 VA2K Walk & Roll coming soon

- This year our 9th annual VA2K Walk & Roll event is scheduled on May 15, 2019, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at all five locations. Biloxi VA Medical Center’s Walk & Roll event will be held at Hiller Park which is right outside of their back gate. Mobile will be held in their new clinic’s parking lot. Pensacola will hold their event at the fountain and flag pole. Eglin and Panama City Beach will hold their event in their clinic parking lots. The event will be held indoors if the weather condition does not permit an outdoor event. Indoor routes will be posted on the homepage.

- The purpose of this yearly event is to encourage employees at all levels of fitness to join in a fun, short walk benefiting homeless Veterans. A 2K is short enough that even slow walkers could complete it within a 30-minute lunch break.

- Several of our Veteran Service Organizations will be sponsoring booths with healthy food and snacks.

- Donations are optional, but we always get plenty of donations (monetary and non-monetary) to benefit our homeless Veterans. Some suggested donations include: coats, clothing, underwear, toiletries, boots, shoes, blankets, and bus passes. All items must be new and in original packaging.

- This year we are giving away t-shirts to the first 200 employees that register online, at: https://vaww.visn16.portal.va.gov/sites/bil/PubAffairs/SitePages/VA2K.aspx

Hey Siri...

You can now reach the Veterans Crisis Line directly with an iPhone. Simply say, “Hey Siri, call the Veterans Crisis Line,” and it will connect you automatically, even if you don’t have the number 1(800) 273-8255 already saved in your contacts. See screenshot below.
WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2019
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Please register at this link:
https://vaww.visn16.portal.va.gov/sites/bil/PubAffairs/SitePages/VA2K.aspx

For more information contact:
Try Truong, Public Affairs Volunteer, at 228-523-5959
Do it with a passion for success

By MARY NELSON
Patient Centered Care Coordinator

Most of us have heard the expression, “The front-line is the bottom line,” as it pertains to an organization’s employees. I’m changing that up a bit: “The call center is the lifeline.” The job of our call center staff is to serve and satisfy each individual and their needs closely. And that’s not easy.

We recently recognized one of our call center employees after receiving a letter from a Veteran’s spouse:

“After leaving the VA yesterday I had to call back several times and experienced several blind transfers and finally reached the call center to a rep by the name of Chris Barnes. Mr. Barnes gave excellent customer care and resolution to my inquiry! Chris listened, answered all my questions in reference to a letter my husband received. Chris explained why the letter was sent, verified contact information and made my day! Excellent employee!”

Chris Barnes is a Veteran who served in the U.S. Navy for over 20 years. He enjoyed a great career while traveling domestic and abroad, meeting new people, and experiencing new places. He learned how to manage under continual pressure to perform nonstop, while earning his Master of Business Administration degree and working at the Veteran Employment Division of the Maine Department of Labor. Mr. Barnes began to see the real struggles that Veterans face when their tour-of-duty ends during military service. He took notice of this during one of our nation’s great recessions in 2008, when companies were relocating or closing, and Americans were being laid off. While working with Veterans, Mr. Barnes could see and identify with their struggles, providing the genuine assistance they needed.

Mr. Barnes has worked in many business sectors and helped organizations achieve outstanding customer service by putting people first, no matter the odds or circumstances. He wholeheartedly believes that problems are solved by being aware of the great position you are put in to help someone seeking answers. Mr. Barnes says he lives by the following statement:

“If you are placed in a position of helping someone, do it with a passion for success. I have the greatest pleasure of taking care of my mother who lives with Alzheimer’s disease. I am humble to have the opportunity to care for the person that has cared and given me the tools needed for my success.”
Power of the mind: Mindfulness

By DR. MICHELLE SPRINGFIELD
Clinical Psychology Postdoctorial Fellow

If you would like to practice mindfulness on your own, below are a few quick exercises to get you started and several resources you may find helpful. All of these practices can be done sitting or lying down. If your mind wonders or you become distracted while practicing, which is normal and inevitable, bring your attention back to the breath.

**Breathing exercises:** Practice deep breathing (or belly breathing) exercises to become calm and to help treat conditions related to stress.

- Sit upright with shoulders relaxed. Take one regular breath and notice where it goes; into the chest or abdomen. Inhale through the nose and imagine the air filling the abdomen; exhale. On subsequent breaths, increase the rise of the belly while inhaling more deeply. Repeat as many times as desired.

**Meditation:** In meditation, you train your mind to focus on your breathing, a word, or an image. You do not pay attention to things going on around you. This helps your mind and body relax. Through regular practice, meditators learn distress tolerance through letting go of the struggle with their internal experiences.

- Sit, stand, or lay down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes or focus on a spot with a soft gaze. Mentally scan your body for tension, simply noticing what is there to feel. Follow your breathing, observing each breath come in and go out of the body. You can choose to focus your attention on your breath, your body, a sound, a mental image, or repeat a mantra if desired.

**Progressive muscle relaxation:** In progressive muscle relaxation, you relax all the muscles in your body in order, one group at a time. Start by first tensing a single muscle and then relaxing it. This helps teach you how muscles feel when they are tense. A second way, called progressive relaxation, is to focus on relaxing the muscles without tensing them first.

Other types of mindfulness practice include yoga, walking meditation, or mindfully engaging in daily activities such as showering, doing dishes, or gardening. Don’t worry if you have trouble completing the exercise above without distractions or judgments. Being mindful gets easier with practice. Audio files may also be helpful to your practice.
Know Your Provider

Mandy Spiers, RN, MSN, FNP-BC
Certified Family Nurse Practitioner
Women’s Health
Biloxi VA Medical Center

How long have you worked for VA?
I have been with the VA for three years. Last August, I moved back here from McAllen, Texas where I worked there in the outpatient clinic with Valley Coastal Bend VA.

How does serving Veterans each day impact you personally?
Being the daughter of a disabled veteran and the granddaughter of a Korean War Veteran makes me appreciate the servitude that we give. I look forward to treating patients and connecting with them on a personal level. I understand the sacrifices that they made and can relate through dealing with these issues with my father and grandfather.

In your opinion, why should Veterans choose VA for their health care?
I feel that nobody knows Veterans and their illnesses and qualified to take care of them better than those who have served or have family members that served. Likewise, VA has many resources available in one location for patients that they might not have in the community.

What are you most grateful for?
That I have an education and experience that allows me to work with female veterans and provide the best care possible. I enjoy hearing their stories about their families and their life endeavors. I am grateful to have a career that allows me that opportunity.
Doing a favor for future you

By HOLLY E. DREGER, MSW, LCSW

At the beginning of a new year, many people start out with new resolutions, goals they want to work on to make the year meaningful. Unfortunately, what starts with good intentions often ends up with stalled progress, and the goals are not reached.

Many of the Veterans I work with in therapy will tell me they, “don’t have the motivation” or “don’t feel like” doing something they should be working on.

This is a challenge so many people struggle with! But what if there was a way to start working on goals without waiting for ‘the feeling’ or ‘the motivation’? What if there was a way to envision how the small choices you make today contribute to the bigger rewards and benefits of your future?

I’ve introduced to Veterans the idea of, “doing a favor for future you,” when you are trying to make positive changes in your life. For example, many set weight loss as a goal. This is a wonderful goal since maintaining a healthy weight is connected to so many benefits for your health. The problem is that if the focus is on something you are losing, like weight, you aren’t necessarily aware of what you are gaining in the process. It starts to seem like you are being deprived of something and the gains are not noticeable. People get discouraged and stop working on their weight loss.

It’s important to have goals that are grounded and centered in what you value. It’s also important to keep ‘the Big Picture’ in mind when setting goals. It doesn’t seem rewarding in the moment to skip the sweet tea, but down the road a few years, skipping the sweet tea could reap many benefits, such as keeping blood sugars healthy, maintaining a healthy weight, perhaps even experiencing less pain in your joints and bones because you’ve reduced the likelihood of inflammation in the body—all by making small, measurable choices such as reducing the amount of sugar you take in each day.

I call this, “Doing a favor for future you.” I ask Veterans, “Would future you thank you for what you are doing today?” If the answer is no, then it’s important that you do something different, something for which future you would be grateful.

If you’d like to explore ways to help future you, consider scheduling an appointment with one of the wonderful providers in our Mental Health Clinic at the Biloxi VA Medical Center, Building 25. Let’s work together towards a thankful future you.

“What if there was a way to envision how the small choices you make today contribute to the bigger rewards and benefits of your future?”
Join more than 6,493 Veterans and family members who are first to receive the Inspire! newsletter by subscribing at the link below.

Enjoy the convenience of having it delivered to your email address:

https://www.biloxi.va.gov/inspire.asp

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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

To provide a forum for employees, volunteers, patients and families to communicate ongoing progress with patient centered care and cultural transformation (PCC/CT) within the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System (GCVHCS); to foster a climate that reflects the health care system’s creativity and diversity. You can find out more about the Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation on the SharePoint site. We are playing a part in transforming VA’s culture!

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**Photo on the cover...**

Myra Ancheta performs during the local portion of the 2019 National Creative Arts Competition.