inside....
- Meet your VA provider
- Growing Whole Health from the ground up
- NVGAG Veteran athletes tell their stories
- How to improve your sleep
...and more
The *Inspire!* newsletter is published on the GCVHCS homepage. You can contribute your inspirational story to *Inspire!* Tell us about a day in your life and why you are passionate about your work at GCVHCS. Contact the editorial staff for guidelines. To submit your inspiring patient story, click on the Tell Your Story icon.

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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!

*VA Photos by Medical Media Service*  
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**Dr. Louis Nardella**  
Staff Physician  
Primary Care Service  
Biloxi VA Medical Center  
U.S. Army Veteran

**What is your patient centered care philosophy?**  
My patient centered care approach is for our Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) to provide holistic care, that is, address the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our vets.

**What have you learned from your patients?**  
I have learned from my patients that they are willing to partner with their PACT to improve their health and learn about their medical conditions.

**What are your strengths?**  
My strengths are being a good listener and having over 40 years of experience as a doctor.

**What are you most grateful for?**  
I am most grateful for having the opportunity to have our veterans share their medical and military experiences with me.
Speak life with compliments!

By MARY A. NELSON, MHA
GCVHCS Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation Coordinator

Paying someone a compliment is a simple gesture that could have a profound impact on a person’s life. Here are seven reasons why you should complement someone daily:

1 **Compliments are free!** They don’t cost a dime, yet they are invaluable. A recent study published by Forbes revealed that to the brain a compliment is as much a social reward as being rewarded money.

2 **What goes around comes around.** This old proverb simply means that you get what you give. Imagine that! Some call it karma. Another common phrase is “as you sow, so shall you reap.” If we start living in a complimentary mindset, that same aura will come back at you. Isn’t that exciting?

3 **Sincere compliments build trust.** We want to improve the levels of trust in our organization. We all need someone in our lives we can trust, and the more we build up others, the more we’re also building up ourselves and our organization.

4 **The giver of compliments lives longer.** I didn’t believe this at first, but think about it for a moment before you pass judgment. Studies show that a positive outlook may provide increased life span, better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease. A person who practices positive thinking has better coping skills during hardships and times of stress. A person who is good at giving compliments has a positive outlook.

5 **Compliments spark creativity.** Compliments make all of us feel better. When people feel better, they are more creative.

6 **Compliments strengthen the immune system.** Okay, so I’m stretching this a bit, but hear me out. Compliments have been shown to increase happiness. A compliment also strengthens the immune system, reduces pain and lowers stress. It triggers the release of endorphins, promoting an overall sense of well-being. How does it do all of that? Easy. Compliments are generally associated with laughter, and it’s laughter that does all of that. A cheerful heart is good medicine.

7 **Compliments create an atmosphere of gratitude.** When we are sincere and generous in our compliments, it can do wonders to the recipient. It creates an atmosphere of gratitude to the offerer, too. Being specific in compliments or recognition encourages the repeat of a good behavior.

Anything that gets rewarded gets repeated. One of my best days at work is when we laugh out loud in a meeting and keep from throwing someone under the bus by paying them a compliment instead. While a compliment may not run your clinic, it will certainly help you appreciate the employees who work for you and help your employees repeat good behavior.

Mark Twain’s quote now takes on a new light:

“I can live for two months on a good compliment.”
Growing Whole Health from the ground up

By MARY THERESE HANKINSON, MBA, MS, RD, EDAC
Chief, Office of Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, VA New Jersey Health Care System

Eight facilities from around the country convened in Biloxi, Mississippi, for the first ever Whole Health workshop which offered consultation for building a Whole Health Program from the ground up. Each participating facility completed an assessment and gap analysis of their organization’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to implementing a whole health program.

The workshop laid out five pillars for execution: Coaching, Whole Health Partnership courses, Complementary Integrative Medicine, Outreach, and Staff Education.

The Healthy Living team developed the Growing Whole Health from the Ground Up Workshop which was, in my opinion, the most “near perfect” of any educational event I have attended.

The Healthy Living team faculty included Raymond Bowne, Veterans Health Education Coordinator; Marvin Everest, Volunteer; Mary Nelson, Patient Centered Care Coordinator; Laura Pistey, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program Manager; and Dr. Kellee Porter, Behavioral Health Coordinator. The team developed a comprehensive curriculum relative to the VA vision for Whole Health, application at GCVHCS, education requirements, complementary and integrative medicine integration, outreach and marketing, coaching, evidence-based practice; and access, documentation and coding issues.

The Healthy Living team also provided opportunities for participants to experience whole health using

Ray Bowne, Mary Nelson, and Laura Pistey enjoy the patio on the Back Bay side of Building 1 at the Biloxi VA Medical Center.
the components of proactive health and well-being. From the standpoint of personal development and recharge, attendance at this workshop provided participants with the knowledge and toolbox to achieve the VA vision for implementation of whole health at VA facilities.

The GCVHCS campus exemplifies a healing environment. The interior design team has created an ambiance and innovative environment for each building that is a model for other VA facilities. We had opportunities to work the body while walking the beautiful grounds of GCVHCS.

The program included opportunities to experience power of the mind through a mindful activity. We visited the chapel which afforded an opportunity for spiritual renewal while reading the story about the Four Chaplains.

The Four Chaplains, also referred to as the “Immortal Chaplains” or the “Dorchester Chaplains,” were four United States Army chaplains who gave their lives to save other civilian and military personnel as the troop ship U.S. Army Transport Dorchester sank on Feb. 3, 1943, during World War II. They helped other soldiers board lifeboats and gave up their own life jackets when the supply ran out. The chaplains joined arms, said prayers, and sang hymns as they went down with the ship.

The Healthy Living Team was also concerned that our day involve some nourishing food and drink. The faculty and participants at this workshop were warm and engaging individuals striving to role model whole health and pave the way for veterans to experience whole health throughout the VA system.
The agony of defeat:
Two veteran athletes turn disappointment into hope

By MARY A. NELSON, MHA
GCVHCS Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation Coordinator

No one remembers the people who almost made it to the Olympics; the people who spent just as much time, money and energy to be the best in their sporting event as the Olympic athletes did. But this was not the Olympics. This was the National Veterans Golden Age Games, hosted by the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System May 7–11. This article honors two veteran athlete heroes who were unable to play due to illness or injury.

Irving A. Jennings
World War II, 1943–1946
U.S. Navy
9th Naval Construction Battalion (USS Case DD370);
Fire Control School
Service Locations: Brooklyn Naval Yard, New York; Iwo Jima and Okinawa, Japan; Tinian Island; Saipan Island
Rank: fire controlman third class

WWII veteran Irving Jennings, 92, from Barstow, California, came prepared to participate in boccia, horseshoes, nine ball and pickle ball exhibitions in the Ambulatory 90-to-100-age group. Jennings is assigned to the VA Loma Linda Health Care System. He arrived Saturday night, May 6, and by the next night, he was in the hospital receiving care for a large wound he sustained from fainting and falling in his hotel room.

Jennings recovered quickly, made a compression bandage out of one his socks, and showed up at the boccia games on May 8, ready to compete. Fortunately, someone from the NVGAG medical team noticed he was bleeding, disqualified him from the games, and transported him to the Biloxi VA Medical Center for care and treatment.

“I wasn’t happy at the time because I came a long way and really wanted to play,” Jennings said. “This would have been the second year that I participated in the NVGAG. I hope to be able to compete next year.”

While receiving care, Jennings mesmerized Biloxi VA Medical
Center staff with his President Truman story. He said he was stationed at Iwo Jima, Japan, when his task was to pick up the incoming kamikaze when President Harry Truman dropped the atomic bombs on Japan. He states that his ship sailed from Japan to New York City (11,386 miles) to celebrate Navy Day in 1945. Jennings was there when President Truman recognized his unit. He said they sailed up the Hudson River and he saw the Statue of Liberty, his “most magnificent experience ever.” Jennings said that he had never been east of Globe, Arizona, in his entire life and here he was at the age of 20, three years in the Navy, now in New York City’s Times Square, “surrounded by pretty girls.”

Carlos M. Colon Baez

U.S. Air Force  
Material Specialist  
Service Locations: Hanscom AFB, Boston, Massachusetts; Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas; Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, Texas; Columbus, Ohio; Kadena AFB, Okinawa, Japan;  
Rank: airman first class  

Carlos M. Colon Baez, 65, from Margade, Florida, came prepared to participate in air pistol, archery, air rifle, bowling, badminton and cycling competitions. Colon was able to participate in the exhibition games on May 7, but became very ill by Sunday night with a traveling virus that caused him to be hospitalized. This was Colon’s sixth National Veterans Golden Age Games, and he was confident he would have brought home a gold medal in horseshoes this year because he had been practicing with his coach at the horseshoe clinic at the Miami VA Medical Center.

Colon came with 12 other athletes and two coaches. He was understandably disappointed about being unable to compete. “After all the hard work, I was defeated by a traveling virus,” Colon said. “My friends are participating, and I couldn’t cheer them on, but lots of positive thoughts were sent their way. I’ll be ready for next year.”

Colon won a bronze medal at the games in Detroit, Michigan, last year, and he had worked hard and participated in sports clinics at the Miami VA Medical Center for badminton, bowling, horseshoes, boccia, archery and air pistol.

Despite their medical setbacks during the 2017 National Veterans Golden Age Games, Jennings and Colon are winners because they served our country so honorably.
Sleep is as essential as the food we eat or the air we breathe, yet for many people, getting quality sleep is challenging. Many of us forget that lack of adequate, restful sleep has serious consequences. Untreated sleep disorders and poor sleep habits contribute to accidents, impaired work productivity, reduced quality of life, poor health, and even death. Sleep hygiene is defined as behaviors that one can do to help promote good sleep with behavioral interventions.

Here are some simple sleep hygiene steps you can try to maximize the quality of your sleep:
• **Maintain a regular sleep routine.** Try to go to bed around the same time each night, and wake up around the same time each morning. The goal here is consistency!

• **Avoid naps if possible.** While naps may seem like a good idea when you are struggling to stay awake during the day, they actually contribute to poor sleep that night. Your body requires a certain number of hours of sleep per night, so naps actually decrease the amount of sleep that we need the next night. This may cause sleep fragmentation and difficulty initiating sleep, which may lead to insomnia.

• **Don’t stay in bed awake for more than 5–10 minutes.** If you find yourself lying awake at night staring at the ceiling or worrying about work the next day, it is important to get out of bed. Try to go into a different room and sit in a chair, or read a boring book. Don’t watch television or use the Internet. This will stimulate your mind and make it more difficult to fall back asleep. The goal is to train yourself to associate lying in your bed with sleep and nothing else.

• **Don’t watch TV or read in bed.** When you watch TV or read in bed, you associate the bed with wakefulness. Again, you only want to associate your bed with sleep!

• **Have a quiet, comfortable bedroom.** Set your bedroom thermostat at a comfortable temperature. Generally, a little cooler is better than a little warmer. Background *white noise*, like a fan, is okay, but, remember, no TV! Your bedroom should be dark, so turn off those bright lights. It also helps if you have a comfortable mattress.

• **Drink caffeinated drinks with caution:** The effects of caffeine may last for several hours after ingestion. Caffeine can fragment sleep and cause difficulty initiating sleep. If you drink caffeine, use it only before 2 p.m.

• **Avoid inappropriate substances that interfere with sleep.** Cigarettes, alcohol, and over-the-counter medications may cause fragmented sleep.

• **Exercise regularly.** Exercise promotes continuous sleep, but you want to avoid rigorous exercise before bedtime.

Rigorous exercise circulates endorphins into the body which may cause difficulty initiating sleep, so try not to exercise too late in the evening.

• **Have a comfortable pre-bedtime routine.** Creating a routine can also signal your body when it’s bedtime. Try taking a warm bath or shower, spend time meditating, or reading a book.

Just remember, sleep needs vary across ages and are especially impacted by lifestyle and health. Obtaining healthy sleep is important for both physical and mental health, and it can also improve productivity and overall quality of life. Everyone can benefit from practicing good sleep habits, and these are just some simple suggestions to improve your quality of sleep.
The medical-surgical unit in the hospital recently rolled out the Welcome H.O.M.E. (Hospitality On Med-Surg Every day) initiative.

The HOME program was created by acute care nursing leadership to address facility metrics of veteran satisfaction through increased communication and engagement. The goals are to create a welcoming environment for veterans and their families who are away from their true home, identify and address veteran and/or family concerns in real time, and utilize existing technology to its fullest potential to provide additional educational opportunities to patient and family regarding disease and/or medications using the health care educational videos located on the Voice of the Veteran monitors.

The team also developed a way to receive feedback from veterans using the new HOME survey. Veterans can give their opinion on the overall level of kindness shown by their health care team, recognize any staff members, and offer suggestions or improvements. This process will allow the medical-surgical unit to identify areas of improvement in real-time.

At the core of the program is the opportunity to thank veterans and their loved ones for allowing us to provide for their health care needs.
As envisioned by Mary Jane Nelson, a World War II veteran who served as a U.S. Navy WAVE, this garden is dedicated to all women veterans in grateful appreciation and recognition of their service to our country.

Women Veterans Memorial Garden Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

Tuesday | June 27, 2017 | 9 a.m.
Garden located adjacent to Building 25
Biloxi VA Medical Center
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System

TOP: Mary Jane Nelson (center), assisted by her daughter Nancy Pfeiffer and son-in-law Mike Jackman, cuts the ribbon officially dedicating the Women Veterans Memorial Garden.

ABOVE: Dr. Betty Dillon, GVCHCS Women Veterans Program Manager, speaks during the ribbon-cutting ceremony.
Veterans from across the country competed in the 2017 National Veterans Golden Age Games hosted by Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System May 7-11.

VA Photos by Medical Media Service