Invest the time, improve your VA: Take the SHEP

By JERRON BARNETT
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Public Affairs

Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration officials work tirelessly each day to improve the quality of health care for Veterans across the nation. Veterans deserve the best possible care VA can provide.

The engine for VA health care is fueled by VHA policy, budget and manpower resources, but an often overlooked, yet equally important part, of shaping the current and future quality of VA health care is customer service feedback from Veterans about their experiences in VHA facilities.

That’s where the Survey of Health Care Experiences of Patients takes center stage. This detailed survey is sent to Veterans after an appointment and asks them about various aspects of the previous visit.

Using the Ambulatory Care 2017 SHEP as an example, the survey asks Veterans about their provider, clerks, the Veteran’s overall experience, and the Veteran’s demographic information (for example, main language spoken, rating of their overall health, etc.) participation is voluntary and answers to the survey won’t affect the health care a Veteran receives or their VA benefits eligibility. Veterans may receive other variants of the SHEP, such as those that cover Community Care, Inpatient, and Specialty Care.

Just as the title page of the Ambulatory Care SHEP says, in order for VA to carry out its mission to provide the best possible medical care and services to all Veterans, it’s extremely important that Veterans complete and return the survey.

The survey data will be used to make improvements to the quality of VA health care. This puts Veterans in the pole position to make VA the provider of choice for themselves and their fellow Veterans in the future.

There are banners on display, and flyers and pocket cards are available in GCVHCS facilities, reminding Veterans to complete and return the survey. There’s also an on-hold message on GCVHCS phone lines.

“I talk to Veterans who say they receive great care here, but they throw the survey away. We need feedback from Veterans regarding their experiences in our facilities,” said Mary Nelson, GCVHCS Patient Centered Care Coordinator and Chair of the Patient Satisfaction Committee.

If you receive a SHEP, invest a little of your time and complete and return it. Help improve GCVHCS health care services.

For Our Veterans & Family Members
Your Voice Matters

After your appointment or hospitalization, you may receive a confidential survey in the mail that takes only 10 to 15 minutes to complete. We invite you to take the time to complete and return the survey. Your feedback and comments help us to continually improve. Let us know when there are concerns so we can fix them.

AMS 18-050B, 11/18Cm
Gulf Coast VA announces nursing winners, celebrates National Nurses Week

The Department of Veterans Affairs Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System’s Nursing Service announced its annual award winners during a ceremony in Biloxi, Mississippi, Wednesday, as part of the system’s week-long celebration of National Nurses Week, May 6-12.

VA, the nation’s largest single employer of nurses, joins the American Nurses Association in honoring America’s nurses, who are dedicated to saving lives and maintaining the health of millions of individuals, including our nation’s Veterans.

During this year’s Nurses Week, VA honored more than 98,000 VA nurses and their unique ability to “Inspire, Innovate, and Influence.” As clinicians and leaders, VA nurses have a strong commitment to ethical standards that directly impacts the high-level of care they provide our nation’s heroes.

“VA nurses are the backbone of our world-class health care system,” said GCVHCS Director Bryan C. Matthews.

Annually, National Nurses Week begins on May 6, which is RN Recognition Day, and ends on May 12, the birthday of Florence Nightingale who is credited as the founder of modern nursing as a profession. During this week, GCVHCS nurses participated in various theme days, an award ceremony, and more.

National Nurses Week is devoted to highlighting the diverse ways in which registered nurses, the largest health care profession, work to improve health care. From bedside nursing and long-term care to research and teaching the next generation of nurses, nursing professionals are leading the way in meeting the expanding health care needs of American society and our Veterans.

For more information about VA nurses, visit http://www.va.gov/nursing.
...know your sacrifices, along with those of your fellow Veterans, have helped secure democracy, liberty and freedom for people throughout the world.

VA holds Vietnam Veteran Commemoration event

By JERRON BARNETT
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Public Affairs

PENSACOLA, Fla. — The Department of Veterans Affairs Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, Barrancas National Cemetery, and the Pensacola Vet Center partnered together to hold a Vietnam Veteran Commemoration event at the Joint Ambulatory Care Center in Pensacola March 29.

The event kicked off with the Pledge of Allegiance, led by JACC Health Technician Jim Kite, a Navy and Vietnam Veteran.

With dozens of Vietnam Veterans and loved ones in attendance, along with a flag detail from the Patriot Guard, GCVHCS Director Bryan Matthews and Barrancas Director Intern Raymond Dann shared emotional and personal reflections about their service, members of their family, and deep appreciation for the Veterans in attendance. Emotional prayer from GCVHCS Chaplains Gary Morris and Gary Yarberry bracketed the speakers.

Florida Senator Bill Nelson sent a personal letter to GCVHCS that thanked the Veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice. It was read aloud to the audience.

Nelson wrote: “...know your sacrifices, along with those of your fellow Veterans, have helped secure democracy, liberty and freedom for people throughout the world.”

The event concluded with a special commemorative wreath presentation by Barrancas National Cemetery and the Patriot Guard. Each Veteran in attendance also received a special lapel pin.

Last year, President Trump designated March 29 each year as National Vietnam War Veterans Day.
New initiatives should increase access to care for prosthetic patients

By JERRON BARNETT
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Public Affairs

Department of Veterans Affairs Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Prosthetic and Sensory Aids officials started off the new year giving their Veteran patients increased access to care in the Biloxi and Joint Ambulatory Care Center (Pensacola, Fla.) VA medical facilities.

GCVHCS PSAS Chief Michael Bennett and his staff have started to implement several initiatives aimed at improving access to care for Veterans. They are:

- **Self-referral initiative for amputee and wheelchair clinics:**
  - Patients no longer have to get a consult from their GCVHCS primary care provider; instead, Veterans can now contact GCVHCS PSAS directly (Biloxi: 228-523-5641; JACC: 850-912-2173) to request a referral to those clinics

- **Scheduled appointment by Veteran request:**
  - 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday (at the JACC only)

- **Increased walk-in hours for orthotics and prosthetics:**
  - **Biloxi VAMC:** 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday
  - **JACC/Pensacola:** 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Thursday, and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday and Friday

GCVHCS PSAS staff also support VA patients from the Mobile, Eglin and Panama City Beach Community-Based Outpatient Clinics.

Bennett said he’s excited for Veterans to see the fruits of his staff’s labor and their approach to increasing access to care for Veterans.

“We are trying to be creative and think outside the box to serve our Veterans,” Bennett said. “It’s very exciting to see what the future holds with the changes already in place. Some of these changes are a direct result of staff stepping up in their tours of duty to increase access.”
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System leaders were joined by active duty military, contractor representatives and VA volunteers to officially cut the ribbon to the Eglin VA Clinic expansion April 26.

Gulf Coast VA expands Eglin clinic to meet patient growth

By JERRON BARNETT
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Public Affairs

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Department of Veterans Affairs Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System leaders officially cut the ribbon on the expansion of the VA outpatient clinic near Eglin Air Force Base during a ceremony April 26.

In front of an enthusiastic crowd of employees, volunteers, Veterans, active duty military and congressional representatives, GCVHCS Director Bryan Matthews expressed his excitement with the opening of the 17,722 square-foot addition to the Eglin VA Clinic.

“I’m extremely glad that we are here today celebrating this expansion,” Matthews said. “A lot of people put a lot of hard work into getting us to this point.”

The facility originally opened in April 2008, and Veterans have
visited the facility for care more than 414,000 times since its opening. Nearly 9,000 unique Veterans received care from the facility in Fiscal Year 2017, up from 5,166 in the clinic’s first full year of operation in Fiscal Year 2009.

The expansion adds 11 primary care exam rooms which allows the system to increase the number of Patient Aligned Care Teams to 12, with a dedicated float team.

A subsequent renovation project of primary care’s old space will expand space for the facility’s current behavioral health services.

The expansion also offers two new fully-functioning minor procedure rooms for increased service such as dermatology, multiple dedicated tele-health exam and shared medical appointment spaces, as well as increased education space for staff and patients. Additionally, all exam spaces are completely outfitted with new medical equipment including state-of-the-art vital signs monitoring that will connect to VA’s network.

The system relies on VA and Department of Defense resource sharing agreements with nearby military treatment facilities, such as the Eglin Air Force Base hospital, to provide additional health care services for Veterans along the Gulf Coast.

Air Force Colonel Pamela Smith, 96th Medical Group commander, spoke about the importance of that partnership during her remarks.

“The Eglin Air Force Base hospital is looking ahead to the very bright future of our collaborative partnership with the VA,” Smith said.

Other speakers who gave remarks were Adam Taylor, ESA South Inc.’s Community Based Outpatient Clinic project manager, and MaryLouise Hester, representative from Florida Senator Bill Nelson’s office. Hester read a letter from Nelson, which congratulated VA and its partners on the momentous occasion. ESA South Inc. is the contractor who built the expansion.
I took my husband to the ER for coughing up blood. The ER was busy and my husband’s nurse was swamped. I am a healthcare professional, so I understand this. Rachel went over and beyond for us. She was pulled from ICU to help the ER. (I hate getting pulled.) She came in the room just to start an IV, draw blood, and move on to the next patient. When she realized how stressed and upset we were, she sat down with us and listened to our concerns. She ended up talking to the doctor, bringing us to X-ray and even getting us lunches because we had been in the ER all day with no food. She encouraged my husband to quit smoking and drinking in a positive, humorous way he related to. Would you believe he wants to quit now? I’ve never really had a “bad” experience at the VA, but I’ve never had an experience as good as with Rachel. I hope she knows how much she impacted us. I hope other nurses take note of her.

Letter from a Veteran’s Wife
New massage chairs provide immediate comfort, health benefits for Veterans

By JERRON BARNETT
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Public Affairs

The Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System’s Whole Health team continued its program implementation locally with the arrival and delivery of medical massage chairs across the five GCVHCS clinic sites. The chairs are in the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center at the Biloxi VA Medical Center (Building 25); Behavioral Health (sixth floor) at the Mobile VA Clinic in Alabama; Charlie and Kilo sections of the Joint Ambulatory Care Center, Pensacola, Florida; Primary Care at the Eglin VA Clinic; and Primary Care Mental Health Integration in the Panama City Beach VA Clinic. Early reviews of these chairs should have Veterans eager to try one out. Patients at the JACC reportedly have shown a decrease in depression and anxiety, and a VA employee said that a quick massage from a chair helped relieve her migraine symptoms.

Laura Pistey, GCVHCS Health Promotion and Disease Prevention program manager, called the chairs “amazing.” “The 10-minute health cycle gets rave (reviews) from everyone who has used it, including me,” Pistey said. “The chair is fully adjustable to fit your body size, type, and comfort level.”

The Veterans Health Administration’s Whole Health program is designed around asking Veterans the question “What matters most to you?” instead of the traditional provider-to-patient approach of “What’s the matter with you?” The idea behind this is to put the Veteran, not the disease, at the center of their health and health care.

From Mary Nelson’s perspective, GCVHCS Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation Coordinator, these massage chairs are just the ‘tip of the iceberg’ in a larger Whole Health effort to create wellness centers within GCVHCS facilities. “We plan to add more features to the Whole Health program such as tai chi, yoga, and kiosks where you can take your blood pressure and manage your weight,” Nelson said.

Pistey said Veterans who are interested in using one of the chairs should simply ask their primary care/behavioral health provider about them. She added that some of the other health benefits Veterans get from use of the chair are relaxation, improved function and decreased anxiety and stress.
Several GCVHCS clinic pharmacies transition to prescription first-fill contracts

By JERRON BARNETT
Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System Public Affairs

Prescription pick-up operations at the Eglin Air Force Base, Panama City Beach, and Mobile community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC) pharmacies have ceased or will cease. Prescriptions will be transferred to a community pharmacy for emergent/immediate needs and a mail-based prescription system for maintenance-type prescriptions for Veterans receiving VA care from those facilities.

The pharmacies at the Eglin and Panama City Beach VA Clinics have already transitioned. The Mobile VA Clinic pharmacy is slated to transition later this summer.

“Our clinics (in Mobile, Eglin, Panama City Beach) will be providing pharmacy services similar to most CBOCs nationwide, utilizing a first-fill community contract for immediate prescription needs,” said Bryan Matthews, GCVHCS director. “The Veteran’s primary care physician will provide full instructions about filling prescriptions.”

The first-fill contract allows Veterans to use a network of retail pharmacies in the community for initial prescriptions determined by clinical staff to be emergent/immediate (for example, antibiotics). All other medications will be mailed from Biloxi or from the VA centralized mail-out pharmacy (the current process).

A pharmacist will always be available at the CBOCs; however, this transition allows the pharmacists to be able to offer more assistance in the management of chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and dyslipidemia, resulting in an increased number of daily appointments.

“We believe changing the way we do business will help us provide better service to our Veterans,” Matthews said.

Mobile VA construction project gains progress

MOBILE, Ala. — Good news for Mobile Veterans and VA staff! The new Mobile VA Clinic construction project is moving right along! With the new facility behind him, GCVHCS Director Bryan Matthews is seen here giving an update on the project to media representatives in Mobile at the construction site March 29. Matthews said the 65,000 square-foot facility is about 30 percent complete.

“We’ll offer expanded primary care, mental health, tele-health, pathology, radiology and a whole host of other services,” Matthews said. Matthews also said that patient care should begin in the new facility in the spring of 2019. The new Mobile VA Clinic will be located on Demetropolis Road, in Tillmans Corner.

(VA photo by Jerron Barnett)
SPECIAL GUESTS

Thomas G. Bowman
Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs
March 16; Eglin VA Clinic

Andrew “FoFo” Gillich
Mayor of Biloxi
April 19; Biloxi VAMC

Congressman Steven Palazzo
R-Miss., 4th District
April 20; Biloxi VAMC

Randy Reeves
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
May 15; Biloxi VAMC

VA2K 2018

Biloxi VA Medical Center and JACC/Pensacola, Florida

HONORING OUR VETERANS CAR SHOW 2018
Join more than 5,250 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

The Inspire! newsletter is published on the GCVHCS home page. 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!

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on the cover...

Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System hosted a POW/MIA Chair Dedication ceremony on May 15, 2018. The event was sponsored by American Legion Post 42 from Ocean Springs, Mississippi, and it’s Auxiliary group. Special guest of honor for the ceremony was Randy C. Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. For the Veterans, staff, and special guests, one message was clear: To any Veteran that is unaccounted for: we will remember you.

The Memorial Chair, now on display in the Biloxi VA Medical Center outpatient clinic area, is a chair in which no one will sit as a reminder of those who never made it home from battle.

“This chair that we dedicate at this memorial will be a reminder to all that come here to the clinic at the VA to never forget POWs and MIAs,” said Tom Adams, American Legion Post 42 Commander and organizer of the event. “We have a commitment to both POWs/MIAs, as well as their families, to make sure that we are relentless in our pursuit to make sure that they are appropriately accounted for.”

Another part of the ceremony is a table setting, where a wine glass is turned over meaning there’s no toast. The setting also included a candle which represented lighting the way home, a lemon slice representing the bitter taste of war, and salt on a plate as a reminder of the tears that are cried.

“This is not only a way to say that those folks are not forgotten, it is our way to make sure we bring this to the nation’s consciousness,” said Randy Reeves, VA Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. For every one of our POWs/MIAs, there is a family, a father, a mother, and extended family member who waits for their return.”