

Pulse

FEBRUARY 2013 EDITION 5

Paying it Forward

COVER STORY:

Supreme Care

Kinesiotherapist Tammie Beeler assists
Navy Veteran William Wolf.

PHOTO BY NANCY GRAY



Director's Message

Moving Forward: Bright Vision Ahead for 2013

Asking questions is a great way to prime the pump of better understanding. If something isn't working or if there are delays, we should all ask questions that lead to answers of how we can do it better. When it comes to problem solving, VA North Texas is moving full steam ahead to create solutions, ultimately allowing us to better serve our Veterans and each other.

ACCESS TO CARE: With a growing patient population and increased demand, we are faced with the challenge of creating more appointments and services. Some things we have done:

- **Increased Staff/Adjusting Schedules:** Mental Health and the Emergency Department are two of the main areas where we have added clinicians, and we are already seeing a decrease in wait times. As Veterans' needs change, we continue to adjust clinic schedules, adding evening and Saturday appointments when needed.
- **Telehealth:** With telehealth, patients are able to receive mental health, eye and spinal cord injury care without traveling long distances. We continue to add more services like dermatology and others coming soon.

SYSTEMS REDESIGN: We are on a problem-solving mission and Systems Redesign is giving us new energy to change and improve. Here are two of the many projects transforming the care we provide:

- **Huddle Boards:** Across the health care system, employees have a voice into process improvement. These visible posters allow everyone from frontline to management to huddle around the boards, writing notes about what isn't working. Teams in Medical Administration Service, Telenurse program and nursing units are among the 20+ areas taking charge, creating solutions and putting them into action.
- **Emergency Department:** There are several collaborations happening in the ED, all with the focus to improve wait times and processes in one of the busiest areas at Dallas VA. These projects offer a systematic approach to study the point from when a patient arrives to discharge. We are already seeing good results, and that is great news.

CUSTOMER SERVICE: Good customer service is a must. It's the right thing to do and we are all responsible for a friendlier environment.

- **Patient Feedback:** Using bedside and clinic reviews from patients, a system called Truthpoint gives us real-time data about our service. Questions range from wait times, cleanliness, noise and courtesy, and give VA staff and management more timely and data-driven answers.
- **Courteous Workforce:** Programs like Courtesy in Action, Mystery Shopper and the Points System will continue to reward employee good deeds and the outstanding service we hear about. Although these are not paybacks, we hope the incentives will serve as daily reminders of service with a smile.

PROMOTING OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Check out these simple ways to uphold our organization and help shape a great image:

- Share at least one positive thing happening at your VA with at least one person each day.
- Promote positive things and success stories in the community, to your family and friends.
- Be kind to other VA services/clinics. Speak kindly about their efforts. We are all in this together.

As we start the New Year, consider how you can get involved with strategies in your own work areas to better serve our Veterans. Just think, it could be your thoughts and actions that leap us forward with a momentum that makes 2013 one of the best years yet for VA North Texas.

Sincerely,
Jeffery L. Milligan



Best wishes for the New Year!

VA North Texas Executives - Front row (left to right): Peter Dancy, associate director; Julia Roberts, deputy associate director Patient Care Services; Jeffery Milligan, director; Alan Bernstein, associate director for Patient Care Services.

Back row (left to right): Eric Jacobsen, assistant director; Jennifer Purdy, assistant director for Outpatient Services; Dr. Clark Gregg, chief of staff; Dr. Stephen Holt, deputy chief of staff.

The Executive Office extends best wishes for 2013 to Veterans, families, employees, community partners and stakeholders. We thank everyone for their support and for making VA North Texas the great health care system it is. Here's to a great new year and continued great relationships!



4500 S. Lancaster Road, Dallas, TX 75216
www.northtexas.va.gov
Member of VISN17
VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network

EDITOR

Monica A. Smith

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Erikka D. Neroes

CONTRIBUTORS

Emmitte Hall, RN, BSN, MHA
Zach Harris
Penny Kerby
Erikka D. Neroes
LaDonna Saxon, Ph.D.
Monica A. Smith
Sheeba Thomas

PHOTOGRAPHY

Medical Media and Public Affairs

Pulse is published for the staff, volunteers and patients of VA North Texas Health Care System. We welcome your story ideas and suggestions. Send to ntxpublicaffairs@va.gov.



Get Social With Us!

www.twitter.com/NorthTexasVA
www.facebook.com/NorthTexasVA

inside

Pulse

VA NORTH TEXAS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Cover Story | 4

Our VA – A place where quality of care is supreme



SURVIVOR, VOLUNTEER GIVES BACK | 6

Your Health Matters

DIABETES EYE HEALTH | 7

Cutting Edge | 8

AN INTERVIEW LIKE NO OTHER

For ladies only

(below left) The da Vinci robotic surgery system arrives.

(below right) Volunteer support is priceless.



Employee Profile | 10

THERAPY WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH

Veteran Profile | 11

PAYING IT FORWARD

Feature Story | 14

THE CLIMB OF A LIFETIME



Mail Bag/Let's Talk About It | 15

Our VA

A place where quality of care is supreme

Bridget Bennett, M.D., assistant chief of Spinal Cord Injury and Navy Veteran Troy Scroggins.

- Veterans who receive health care from us are fortunate to have a personalized health plan where they sit down with their primary care providers to plan a health care regimen to achieve their life goals.
- Veterans who live in rural areas benefit from new technology like telehealth. This great advancement allows Veterans to receive faster diagnoses and decreases the inconvenience of driving a long distance to get VA care.
- We are a leader in preventive care measures like screenings for cancer, diabetes, depression, PTSD, alcohol and tobacco use and many of the things that can cause serious health concerns if not caught early.
- We are making great strides to ensure the care and interventions patients receive are delivered timely and matches or exceeds the national parameters that all hospitals, private and public, are judged on.
- VA North Texas Health Care System boasts one of the largest and most comprehensive patient safety programs in the country. In fact, we earned VA's prestigious Patient Safety Cornerstone Award in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012.

In addition to all of the other great things going on here, we set a high standard to provide patient care that is second to none and excellent customer satisfaction. We continue to push to provide advanced medical equipment and recruit and retain professionals who are at the top of their field.

You might ask why we and the Veterans we serve love our VA. Well, no one better understands Veterans and their strengths and challenges better than we do. More than 31 percent of VA North Texas employees are Veterans themselves, and that's why we can offer a specialized understanding to meet their needs. VA North Texas Health Care System is not just your average hospital. Our daily commitment to public service shows Veterans their service is honored here, and our warm family atmosphere is welcoming.

What makes VA North Texas one of the best places to care for Veterans?

- dedication to continually improve and enhance performance
- efforts to provide a safe, comfortable, healing environment
- transparency

There are many reasons why Veterans choose us for their health care.

Here are some factors:

- Unlike private hospitals, VA is held to a higher standard of performance that must be met. Our progress has remarkably improved over the years and we meet or exceed targets for 90 percent of clinical performance measures set by Veterans Health Administration.
- Over the past several years, we earned recognition by a number of external evaluators for being leaders and high performers among other VA medical centers and health care systems.

Our Veterans deserve our best – and we are honored to serve them.



Veronica Webb, M.D., chief of surgical service, demonstrates the da Vinci robotic surgery system.

Our Vets deserve the best

VA North Texas commits big investment to improve care.

VA North Texas invested \$70 million for new equipment last fiscal year, including a second generation clinical 3T MRI. The technological advances in the new magnet yield significant quality enhancement and improved comfort for patients. Image quality of the 3T MRI is at the pinnacle of what is currently available clinically.

Other equipment purchases, such as ultrasound and EKG equipment, digital radiology and defibrillators are now available and greatly enhance the quality of care we provide.

The most recent addition is the da Vinci robotic surgery system. Now Veteran patients can receive minimally invasive procedures and enjoy benefits like faster healing times and less pain associated with surgical procedures.



They vouch for VA

Veterans speak with confidence about their care.



Most Veterans are pleased with their health care at VA North Texas and would not consider going anywhere else. It's exciting to listen as they share life stories or military memories of how VA helped them. **Air Force Veteran Lisa Shirley** (top right) served at Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene from 1979-1983 as an accounting and finance technician. Shirley worked in security since leaving the military and became a certified nursing assistant. After some unfortunate circumstances, she was without a car or job and homeless. Living in a park or sleeping under a bridge at night, Shirley was homeless for two years. Life began to improve for Shirley after she entered a homeless shelter where she learned about her options for VA care and enrolled in 2009.

As Shirley's life began to improve, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a full mastectomy at Dallas VA Medical Center in 2010. She is doing remarkably well and said her surgeon did a wonderful job. Her cancer is in full remission, and she credits VA for the excellent health care she received.

"I could not have come this far without the assistance of VA North Texas Health Care System," Shirley said. Now she lives in her own apartment, thanks to VA supportive housing assistance.

She also entered college after completing a VA work therapy program. Shirley is a great example of how VA cares for the overall health and well-being of Veterans: not only to treat health conditions, but also to improve quality of life by helping with employment and working to end the cycle of homelessness.

Things will only continue to get better for Shirley who is studying to be a medical assistant and radiology technician at El Centro College where she maintains a 4.0 GPA. Well on her way to a successful home life and career she said, "To the Veterans out there struggling with medical and mental health problems, I just want to reassure you that there are people at VA who can help you get into programs and housing that will help put your life back together."



Army Veteran J.T. Lemley (left), who served in Vietnam in 1967-1968, is always bragging about the good care he receives at Dallas VA Medical Center. A routine trip to his private dentist in 2007 revealed something that was not quite right. Knowing he could not afford costly biopsies, he enrolled for VA care. VA North Texas Health Care System providers confirmed gum cancer and less than a month later, Lemley began radiation. He remains cancer-free today.

On another occasion, Lemley remembered a deer hunting trip where he began experiencing chest pains. He came to the Dallas VA facility and after getting checked, he learned he needed a triple by-pass surgery. Lemley said, "I have been to numerous other hospitals with my wife, and none were better than Dallas VA Medical Center."

Things are going well for Lemley who owns a produce and plant business. To his surprise, he was recently named 'Farmer of the Year' at the 18th Annual Dallas Farmers Market Hoedown.



Volunteers support our mission



PROGRAMS

Partnership with Community Organizations	Inpatient Ward Greeter Program
Student Volunteer Opportunities	Call Center
National Salute to Veterans	Voter Assistance
Transportation Network	Concierge Program
Corporate Volunteering	Fisher House
Ambassador Program	Musicians and Artists

Be sure to thank a VA volunteer for their service. We could not do this without them.

Total volunteers in fiscal year 2012 1,840
Total volunteer hours 172,649
Supplement to patient care 1,672,859
Value of VA volunteers PRICELESS!

Volunteers are the heartbeat of our organization. They are like thread which helps us weave our quilt of care to provide comfort and support to Veteran patients. VA North Texas Health Care System understands we would not be able to provide superior care without the unlimited assistance of our volunteers.

The VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) plan was designed and developed in 1946 for citizens and organizations to participate in VA's medical care and treatment program for hospitalized Veterans. VA North Texas Health Care System coordinates and integrates community volunteer participation as a way to add value to patients' health care experience and to assist VA staff in their daily functions. Men, women and youth from the community and local businesses open their hearts and give us a helping hand in all aspects to help us fulfill our mission.

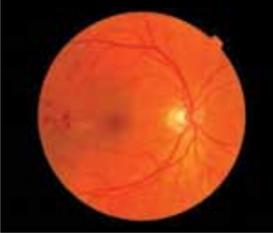


Image of diabetic retinopathy.

Don't let diabetes rob you blind

Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in America. It is estimated that over one million, or one in five, Veterans have diabetes, putting them at greater risk for vision loss. If you have diabetes, regular eye exams are vital to your eye health.

VA's Teleretina program is an important tool in helping combat eye disease.

"Diabetics are twice as likely to develop cataracts or glaucoma compared to non-diabetics. However, the most serious diabetic eye problem is retinopathy," said Brian A. Sullivan, M.D., Ophthalmology interim chief, VA North Texas Health Care System.

High blood glucose levels can weaken and damage the small vessels in the retina, which is the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. Bleeding or fluid leakage in that area is called macular edema. In the early stages of diabetic

retinopathy, a patient may not have any warning signs or symptoms, but damage is still being done. Later, they may have pain or pressure in the eye, redness, blurred or distorted vision, floaters or shadows across the vision field and difficulty seeing at night. As more damage is done to the blood vessels, a patient may experience decreased vision and eventual blindness.

"Drug or laser treatment administered by an ophthalmologist in an office setting has been shown to slow and sometimes halt the progression of the disorder, reducing the long-term risk of severe vision loss," said Dr. Sullivan. Sullivan wants Veterans to know that early treatment is essential to preserve good vision. It is extremely important for diabetics to get an eye exam every two years or annually if they are diagnosed with retinopathy. Almost half of those with diabetes will develop some form of retinopathy over 10 years.



Tamera Smith, ophthalmology technician at Dallas VA Medical Center, using the Topcon Teleretina Camera to shoot a picture of an eye.

As part of the mission to combat blindness, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implemented the Teleretina program. Beginning in 2006, special cameras were installed in VA locations throughout the country to screen patients for diabetic retinopathy. A specially trained and certified technician takes high resolution, digital pictures of the retina. The images are transmitted to a reading center where doctors evaluate the images and determine if retinopathy is present. Veterans are notified of the results and can be scheduled for follow up treatment if needed.

Teleretina imaging is fast and painless. It only takes a few minutes to be screened and could help slow or prevent blindness.

VA North Texas Health System offers eye care services in multiple locations to help Veterans. Dallas and Fort Worth offer ophthalmology and optometry care, while Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center in Bonham has a full time optometrist. Teleretina services are currently available in Dallas, Fort Worth, Bonham and Denton locations with plans to expand to Tyler, Greenville, Bridgeport and Sherman.

Don't let diabetes rob you blind. Keep your eye care in mind and get examined.

Survivor, volunteer gives back

As **Kay Merkel Boruff** looks back over her life, she's grateful not only for the great times, but also for the hardships, which she said, made her the person she is today. In the midst of her own struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), she finds time to give back to Veterans. In her words, "There are some people who can thrive under the auspices and challenges of war, but for those who can't, life can be difficult." That's why Boruff is a dedicated volunteer who helps Veterans.

Boruff is the widow of an Air America/CIA helicopter pilot. While married, she served as a civilian teacher while her husband served in the Vietnam War from 1968-1970. She embraced life during the war, teaching school in Saigon, and as a self-proclaimed thrill seeker, enjoyed living in Southeast Asia during the war. "It [war] was not difficult for me at all," Boruff said. "I was raised to be independent and do what's most interesting to me."

What was difficult was losing her husband during the war and her brother, also a Vietnam Veteran, many years after the war.

After her husband's death, Boruff returned to the United States and made Dallas her home where she taught more than 3,000 students over time at The Hockaday School before retiring in 2010. Boruff greatly missed being a caregiver and teacher. It was after her brother's death when she found the time to start volunteering. Boruff now teaches computer classes to Veterans including basic skills, social media and research, use of email, word processing, presentation and spreadsheet software.

Boruff views the Veterans she helps as intelligent and bright. "They speak several languages; they are educated on law and literature; they're from all walks of life," she said. "While most are struggling to regain their health, they are thankful for what I do. And I'm thankful too, for the opportunity."



In the midst of her own struggle with PTSD, Kay Merkel Boruff finds time to give back to Veterans.



An interview like no other

New clinical method calls for personal motivation to assist with behavioral changes.

Motivational interviewing session.

When you hear the word interview, your thoughts might include a person, the interviewee, sitting in a chair in a room opposite another person, the interviewer. It's not always a pleasant experience. Some people enjoy interviews while others feel 'put on the spot' and uneasy during the process.

Perhaps it's the unpredictable questions or unfamiliar person and atmosphere that cause nervousness. That's partly the theory behind a different kind of interview for some Veteran patients of VA North Texas Health Care System. Putting them in a familiar setting, with a person they can relate to (their provider), essentially allows them to control the outcome. It's called Motivational Interviewing (MI) and it's the next best thing.

MI is a clinical method for eliciting a person's own motivations for making behavioral changes that are in the best interest of his or her own health. It was developed by William Miller, Ph.D., and

Stephen Rollnick, Ph.D. The method has gained substantial support in research literature as an effective way of assisting patients in managing a wide variety of health concerns. For example, MI shows to be an effective intervention to assist with improvement in dietary choices, stress reduction, increased exercise and improved adherence to medical regimens. The chronic health conditions targeted in MI studies include high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and HIV.

MI's underlying spirit is collaborative and reminiscent, and it honors independence. The method recognizes that motivation is not something a provider can give to a patient. Motivation is also not a fixed entity or trait. At different times and in different situations, anyone can experience increased or decreased motivation for a particular behavior or outcome. In MI, the focus of provider-patient encounters is on evoking the patient's own needs,

goals and values, and connecting those to the patient's own natural desire for good health and well-being.

Providers do not use forceful speech with patients. They remain non-judgmental about whether or not patients choose to change a particular behavior, and remain available to assist with problem solving or support as the patient's goals and needs change.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is incorporating MI across the Nation and has committed resources to train staff through two mechanisms: 1) The Office of Mental Health Services (OMH) is training selected mental health staff 2) The National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP) is training 1-2

staff members at each health care system to be trainers or facilitators within their home facility. The two-fold approach helps incorporate service delivery via the incorporation of MI methods into mental health clinics, as well as primary care and specialty care clinics.

To date, four VA North Texas Health Care System clinicians completed OMH training: **Lynda Kirkland-Culp, Ph.D., Gloria Emmett, Ph.D., Tara Saia-Lewis, Ph.D.** and **Ken Farr, Ph.D.** The two providers who completed the NCP training are **LaDonna Saxon, Ph.D.** and **Harry Scher, APRN-BC.** Additionally, more than 100 staff members in Dallas, Fort Worth and Bonham received introductory MI training, with more being added in the coming months.

Veterans will not notice a direct change in programming, such as an MI clinic. Rather, they will notice staff members who use MI methods within the primary care and mental health clinics where they already receive care.

MI represents one of the many ways VA North Texas Health Care System is committed to patient-centered care.

Dr. LaDonna Saxon teaches health care providers the importance of motivational interviewing.



A sobriety chip is a visual, tangible symbol demonstrating a Veteran's rite of passage from substance abuse to sobriety.

Bonham Dom Expansion

You may not know, but there are Veterans who live on our campus while they are rehabilitated from homelessness, addiction and behavioral health issues. It's known today as VA's Domiciliary Care Program and started as the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers for Civil War Veterans in 1865.

Veterans at the 224-bed Bonham VA domiciliary are benefiting from expanded programs and enjoying the chance to be an active participant in their care. Some initiatives:

- **ACTION:** Realigned beds to create a 40-bed intensive substance abuse treatment program (not to exceed 28 days). **BENEFIT:** Previously offered only at Dallas VA, now more Veterans can get the care they need to treat addiction.
- **ACTION:** Streamlined the screening and assessment process by adopting an electronic system. **BENEFIT:** This one-stop tool helps providers determine candidacy. Approval time for admission was chopped from 7-8 days to 24-48 hours, and of course, quicker access means a faster road to recovery.
- **ACTION:** Increased late phase substance abuse program beds from 40 to 60. **BENEFIT:** The extended 7-week program helps maintain sobriety and build skills toward long-term recovery goals.
- **ACTION:** Started a monthly town hall meeting. **BENEFIT:** It's a great information exchange and patients are also celebrated once they reach certain milestones. Former patients come back to get a sobriety chip as current patients cheer on with their own aspiration to reach that same goal.
- **ACTION:** Created a Veteran suggestion box. **BENEFIT:** Promotes Veteran-centered care and gives residents a say in what happens and a chance to formally express their wants and desires.

New domiciliary chief Kimberly Coleman Prier is excited about their future.

"I am very grateful for the opportunity to be part of the dedicated domiciliary team here at Bonham VA. They are a dynamic group of professionals committed to providing the best services possible for our country's Veterans in need."

From Director's Message...

Systems Redesign in Action:
The ER team is energized and focused to make things better from the time a patient arrives to discharge.



Therapy *with* Personal Attention

Their service is powerful. They are interesting people. They have good hearts. And giving them great treatment repays, at least in some small way, the good deeds and sacrifices they have made for us. Take it from **Tom Wilhite, Ph.D.**, Mental Health Service, who shared these exact sentiments as he expressed why he loves Veterans.

It was in Fulton, Missouri, that Wilhite first became interested in being a clinician. While a senior in high school, his first psychology class directed his attention toward mental health where he could rehabilitate and offer hope. His desire was to change the stigma and shame often associated with seeking mental health treatment.

His love for the men and women who spent boots on the ground and who marched in greatness drew him to his destiny to help Veterans with the struggles they face. Wilhite's adoration and respect for Veterans continued to grow after a one-year internship at Pittsburgh VA Medical Center. He landed a position at Dallas VA Medical Center in 1990, the perfect start and ideal match for his quest.

Wilhite works for the largest mental health service in the Veterans Health Administration, right here at VA North Texas Health Care System. His home is now Fort Worth VA Outpatient Clinic where he offers a listening ear and therapy for Veterans and their families. Wilhite said he chose marriage and family therapy as a specialty because he believes it takes a combined effort to care for a wounded Veteran.

What Veterans face, like dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is not always easy for the family to understand. PTSD impacts relationships. "Sometimes what they need is space and unique solutions," Wilhite said. "And that isolation is sometimes hard for the spouse, partner or child to understand when someone they love is distressed."

His therapy doesn't focus on the trauma experience. In fact, most Veterans he works with are not as inclined to deal with their trauma while their family is there. Wilhite instead puts the trauma on the back burner and focuses solely on the Veteran and their relationship with their family.

Army Veteran John Paul described Wilhite as "the perfect psychologist" who is more interested in the patient as an individual. He knows how to spark conversation and he shares stories about himself to establish a bond. That is what makes him a better doctor.

"Although friendly, he's direct and to the point when he needs to let me and my wife know we really need to work on something," Paul said.

Married since 2003, his wife didn't initially know how his military experience affected his personality. It was the conversation and therapy with Wilhite which helped save their marriage. "We didn't have the tools, didn't know where to look," Paul explained. "Now we have a better personal relationship that has helped strengthen our friendship."

Wilhite's advice to fellow VA caretakers, "Make sure you take care of things and people on the outside," he said. "Your family, your interests and living in ways that are rewarding are important to keep a healthy work-life balance."

A balanced life is what renews Wilhite's energy and passion to care for patients and their families. Spend a few moments with him, and you will easily see why he is in the recovery business. His charm and wit make him a lovable kind of guy, one that Veterans and families adore. It's all because he offers therapy with a personal touch.

With his tall stature and approachable smile, he openly welcomes Veterans, their spouses and families, and the day-to-day concerns that bother them. His compassion and easy to talk to manner reaches a wide age range, from youth to golden-aged.



Jay Hodges encourages other Veterans to never give up.



Jay Hodges lives by what he believes – give back, when others give to you. Whenever and however he can, this mentor, motivator and friend, is

Paying it forward

When **Army Veteran Jay Hodges** was asked to speak to Veterans in the homeless program at VA North Texas, he accepted without hesitation. Since completing the program in 2011, Hodges gained success and stability. He said he gladly gives back because VA North Texas did so much for him.

Hodges is optimistic for other Veterans who go through the program. But the outcome, he said, is all up to the Veteran. His advice: "The rules to success are simple. Follow them and never give up."

The once homeless Veteran now lives in a high-rise apartment in the city. He owns a computer company and works from home. He also works with Companions for Heroes, an organization that matches pets with Veterans who primarily struggle with mental illness. Hodges is living a life he never imagined. His story of triumph was a long battle from the trials and scars of the life he left behind.

Hodges began what he thought would be a career in the military in the late 1960s. He started as a personnel specialist stationed in Germany and

before he knew it, he was in Vietnam serving in the war. Hodges worked on a mobile unit surgical team. The team flew out on helicopters, tended to the wounded and brought them back to areas for treatment and recovery. When he wasn't working with the mobile team, Hodges did graves registration, which included retrieving dead bodies. That made him frustrated and angry.

"I became upset and depressed," he said. "We were all so young and I was unable to help the deceased."

After the war, Hodges returned to the United States. Because he and others who served weren't well received, he thought he was a screw-up. He wandered around for many years with no home and no ambition.

Hodges finally went to VA for help. It was through VA where he was able to find hope and answers.

Hodges (right) at an event to assist homeless Veterans.

He met other Veterans who he could relate to. One day, a Veteran told Hodges something he had never heard before. "I think you have PTSD," the Veteran said. Since post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was not as recognizable in the early 1980s as it is today, many Veterans were unable to receive appropriate treatment for the disorder. It took many years for Hodges to understand and process his PTSD symptoms.

Today Hodges credits VA North Texas for his success. "The medical and psychiatric treatment I receive is top notch," he said. "I encourage other Veterans to hang in there and get the care they've earned."



Don't catch the flu, be proactive

It all starts with the simplest symptoms, so small they can be easily overlooked – a cough, headache or chills. Next thing you know, you're bedridden with body aches, fever and no appetite waiting for the medicine to kick in. Sound familiar?

The flu can sneak up on anyone, healthy or not. Fortunately, there's a proactive approach available to avoid that nasty bug. It only takes one shot to protect against the seasonal flu and H1N1 (swine flu).

More than 200,000 people in the United States are hospitalized every year from flu complications. Everyone, especially high risk groups including the elderly and people with certain health conditions, should receive a flu vaccination each year.

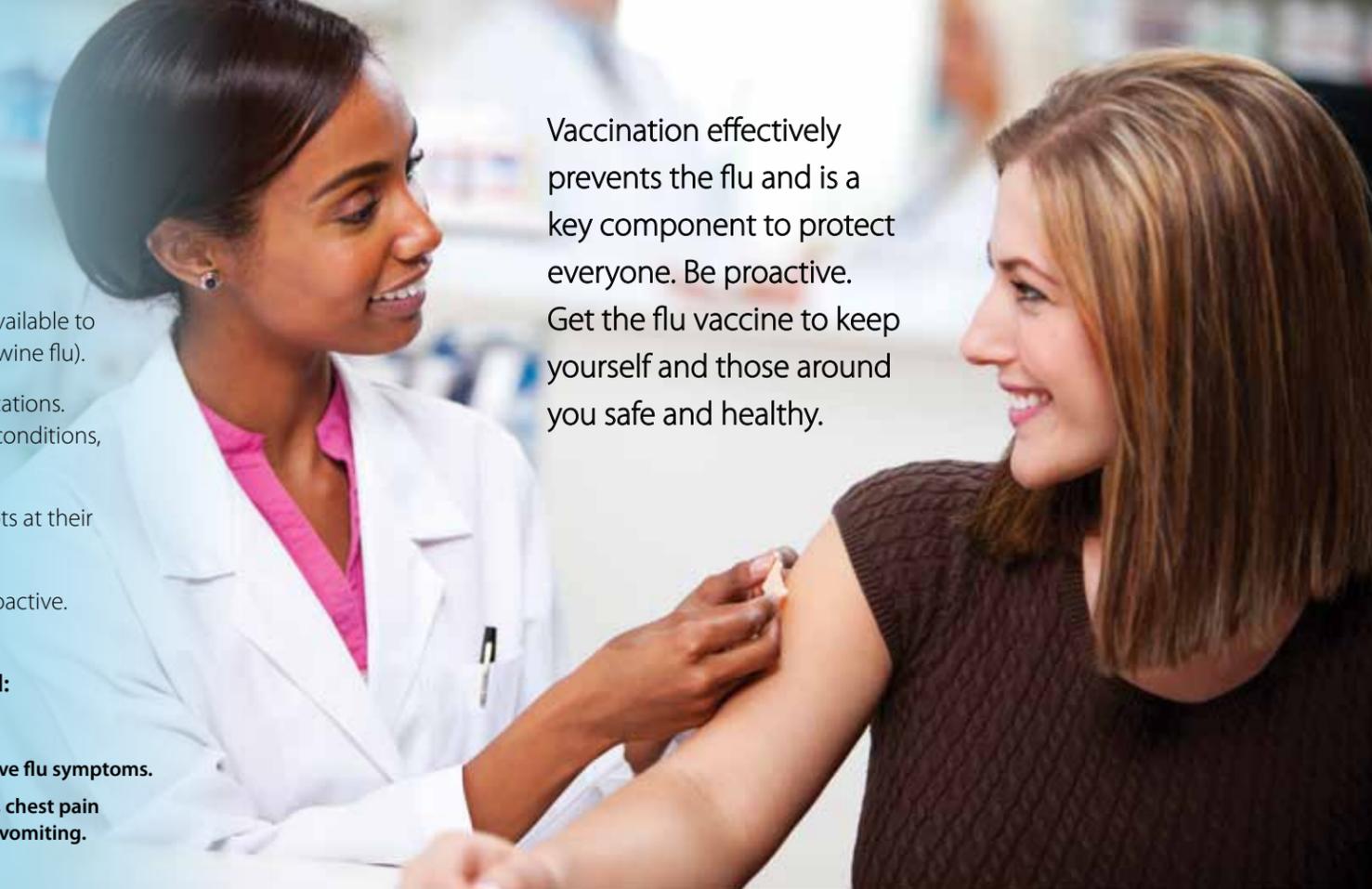
It's not too late. Veterans can still get the vaccine for protection. Patients can receive flu shots at their regular clinic appointments or at walk-in clinics.

Vaccination effectively prevents the flu and is a key component to protect everyone. Be proactive. Get the flu vaccine to keep yourself and those around you safe and healthy.

If you develop flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough and/or sore throat, you should:

- contact your health care provider immediately.
- avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
- stay home from work or school.
- take over-the-counter medications to relieve flu symptoms.
- get lots of rest.
- call 911 if you develop difficulty breathing, chest pain or pressure, dizziness, confusion or severe vomiting.
- drink plenty of fluids.

Vaccination effectively prevents the flu and is a key component to protect everyone. Be proactive. Get the flu vaccine to keep yourself and those around you safe and healthy.



Healthy chili for the winter blues

Chili is an ideal dish to eat in winter and many North Texans love it. Not only will it keep you warm, but it's good for you. The right recipe will have your family and friends wanting more. Here's one we hope you will enjoy.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb 93/7 lean ground sirloin or ground turkey
- 1 cup chopped onion
- ¼ cup chipotle jalapeno
- ½ cup chopped green pepper
- ¼ cup dry red wine or ¼ cup water
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 (15 ounce) can kidney beans
- 1 (14 ½ ounce) can Mexican-style stewed tomatoes
- Shredded reduced-fat sharp cheddar cheese
- Chopped green onions

DIRECTIONS

Cook ground meat in large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat until brown, stirring to crumble. Place ingredients in an electric slow cooker and stir in beans and tomatoes. Cover with lid and cook on low heat setting for 8 to 12 hours. You can start it in the morning and eat it for dinner. Serve in a bowl and sprinkle with a few chopped green onions and a little bit of your favorite cheese.

THE WOMEN'S BOUTIQUE AT DALLAS VA MEDICAL CENTER ~ BLDG 1, RM.162



The clothing boutique contains stylish and seasonal items for women Veterans.

For ladies only

Women Veterans have a place of their own at Dallas VA Medical Center. The women's boutique is operated by none other than, women Veterans. It's somewhere women can be as girly as they want.

Ladies can stop by for clothing, shoes, accessories and good conversation. Women looking for employment need something classic for their job interview, while some need to build up their wardrobe. There's no cost for purchases. All items are absolutely free!

So ladies, stop by, take some items home and bring some things over. The boutique is here just for you.

(Pictured above) Veterans Carolyn Morris (left) and C.B. Leary in the boutique.

Go Red For Women®

VA and the American Heart Association's Go Red For Women® movement are raising awareness of **heart disease as the No. 1 killer of women and women Veterans.** Create a profile, identify yourself as having served in the military and connect with other military women with similar experiences of heart disease in the Go Red Heart Match program.

SIGN UP: www.GoRedForWomen.org

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

The climb of a lifetime



The Office of Public Affairs receives many phone calls and questions, but a call from the National Park Service was a little out of the ordinary. The public information officer with the Guadalupe Mountains National Park was asking for help locating a Vietnam Veteran named **Joe Moss**. The park was in the process of organizing a 40-year anniversary and was trying to locate Moss to invite him to the celebration.

In July 1982, a group of six paraplegics from a Dallas-based organization known as Paraplegics on Independent Nature Trips (POINT), set out in wheelchairs to climb the 8,751-foot trek up Guadalupe Peak, the highest natural point in Texas. Joe Moss was part of the group. Park managers were aware of the potential dangers of the climb and foresaw a number of special difficulties for the climbers, including the need to carry enough water for a five day trip, and there were no suitable places along the trail where they could camp overnight. Park personnel suggested an easier route to a different destination, but the men refused and took on the challenge.

Illness reduced the original group of six men to five, and by the third day two others had to turn back because of physical difficulties. Joe Moss, Donny Rodgers and Dave Kiley continued and reached the top on the evening of July 16.

The last few hundred yards, the men had to leave their wheelchairs and push or drag themselves as they crawled to the summit. Moss said, "We made it all the way to the top."

The men spent the night on the peak and were air lifted off the next morning by three U.S. Army helicopters from Fort Bliss. The climbers were invited to press conferences and other receptions. They received national attention, including a phone call from then President Ronald Reagan and a telegram from then Texas Governor William Clements to congratulate their accomplishment.

So, where is Joe Moss today? You might recognize him from the most popular place at Dallas VA Medical Center - the popcorn stand. Moss is also a minister, a peer counselor and mentor alongside other Veterans at Dallas VA.



(left to right) Donny Rodgers (behind monument), Joe Moss and Dave Kiley in wheelchairs on Guadalupe Peak after a five-day climb, July 12-16, 1982. (National Park Service Photo)

Mail Bag

"I want people to know the VA doctors really, really care for their patients and I am very thankful for them. **Richard Finn, D.D.S., Christopher Morris, D.D.S., M.D.** and **Helaman Erickson, D.D.S., M.D.** all take great care of me. I know they have many patients, but they treat me as if I'm their only one."

Charles Gray, Army Veteran

"My husband and I are impressed with the facility and staff. All of the employees and volunteers in the Community Living Center are uplifting and that helps me deal with our situation every day. I would like to send praises to a few special nurses who are outstanding in doing their jobs and show concern for me and my husband. **Jennifer Davis, Suzie Garcia, Krista Livingston** and **Rosa Aldana** are all very professional. For the 12 years my husband has been a patient, he is always treated with respect. We haven't had any complaints."

Mary Thomas, wife of Vance M. Thomas Marine Corps Veteran

"I don't know what I would have done without VA health care. Thank you so much for the wonderful treatment. I have a great doctor named **Inder Khurana, M.D.**, who always takes time with me, which shows he really cares."

Garry Bowen, Navy Veteran

"I have other health insurance, but I use VA health care because of the great care I receive and my doctor is great. VA staff members are very helpful and courteous with me all the time."

Kenneth Kemp, VA employee and Army Veteran (Retired)



"As a health care system exclusively for Veterans, we're already set apart from others. What do we offer that no other health care system can match?"

"Our health care system offers an exceptionally diverse workforce that mirrors that of our entire Nation. That provides us with the niche of having a holistic environment in which our patients are truly cared for, the way they desire to be cared for."

Alonzo Price, Jr., Education, Dallas VA Medical Center

"We have more in-depth preventive health screening than other facilities."

Amanda Pendergrass, Primary Care Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center

"I feel privileged to be a part of VA North Texas Health Care System. Echoing our network director's commitment, we strive to provide high quality health care second to none. As a U.S. Army Veteran, I am a proud user of the system. I have not come across any other health care system that has such focus and drive to provide patient-centered care. Few can match the level of dedication and commitment to ensure that Veterans get the quality of care they deserve."

Dzung Le, DO, Ambulatory Care, Fort Worth VA Outpatient Clinic

"We offer a multitude of resources, which includes trained professionals who go above and beyond their line of duty to ensure Veterans' needs are met. We enjoy seeing our Veterans are highly satisfied with their overall care."

Roxie Griffith, Medical Administration Service, Polk Street VA Annex

"The staff understands my illnesses and injuries. VA offers an environment I feel comfortable in and not alone. It's great to be in a place where you don't feel like you're just a number or name on a list."

Brandon Lopes-Baca, Army Veteran

"Every time I go to a private doctor, I have to fill out several forms. At VA, they know me and understand my needs. The people here are very nice and compassionate. I really enjoy the camaraderie among the Veterans."

Guy Seid, Army Veteran

"There is a commonality in VA you will not find in any other health care system. As Veterans and those who provide care to Veterans, we speak a language no one else seems to understand. We share information and experiences to help other Veterans. You can't find that anywhere else."

Shirley Linwood, Marine Corps Veteran

"My experience with VA care is nothing short of extremely satisfying. I prefer medical care through VA than the private sector because VA truly cares for the Veteran as a 'whole' patient and not just their illness. I highly recommend VA health care services."

Sherri Thomas, Air Force Veteran



Surgical Service is a Cut Above

These energetic surgical professionals work diligently to ensure Veterans receive their care in a safe and comfortable environment. Last year, they performed more than 7,600 procedures including craniotomies, laryngectomies, and endovascular, bariatric and open heart surgery.

PHOTO BY NANCY GRAY

