

SPRING 2014 EDITION 7

Pulse



Clinic Updates:
Bonham
Fort Worth
Tyler

*whole
health
initiatives*

COVER STORY:

VA North Texas becomes first VA in the Country

with approved TAVR program

Air Force Veteran Carroll Payne jumped at the opportunity when the TAVR procedure became an option for his high-risk heart condition.

PHOTO BY BRUCE MORRIS



Our Roadmap to a High Reliability Organization

I am coming into my third year as Director of VA North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS). I have never been more proud to lead such an organization that is focused on our Veteran patients and on each other. This year I introduced the organization to the concept of The Three Pillars during the FY14 strategic planning process as the core organizational foundation. The Three Pillars provide strength and support for our decisions and actions. They consist of: Quality, Safety and Value, Patient Centered Care and Servant Leadership.



Quality, Safety and Value encompasses many familiar things like performance improvement and systems redesign initiatives, proactive risk management strategies, following applicable laws, regulations and standards. The key words are High Reliability Organization - organizations with systems in place that make them exceptionally consistent in accomplishing their goals and avoiding potential errors.

The journey to **Patient Centered Care** has evolved over the years to encompass: 1) patient centered environments of care; 2) a transformation from problem-focused medicine to personalized, proactive, patient-driven care; and 3) a patient centered approach to nurturing the nearly 5,000 VANTHCS employees who show up every day in service of Veterans' health and well-being.

The driving force behind **Servant Leadership** is service ~ leaders' service to employees. This includes a commitment to the growth of others and building a sense of community and cohesiveness within our organization. A servant leader is one who is focused on unleashing the energy and intelligence of others so that we engage staff at all levels to provide the best health care, second to none to our Veterans.

When I stop and think about the Three Pillars, it becomes very clear to me that they serve as the foundation for our health care organization. If we align our decisions and actions with these fundamental principles, we create a stronger organization and are better able to fulfill our mission to "honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being."

I look forward to leading VA North Texas in 2014 toward a true High Reliability Organization that will be "The health care provider of choice for our Veteran patients by ensuring a continuous focus on Quality, Safety and Value, Patient Centered Care, and Servant Leadership."

Sincerely,
Jeffery L. Milligan, Director



*Changing lives.
One Veteran at a time.*

VA North Texas served more than 115,000 Veterans in FY 13 with over 1.4 million outpatient visits. It is the second most complex VA facility in the nation, and our world-renown clinicians and researchers drive the technical quality of our health care services and programs. In this issue, you'll read about our new TAVR program that provides an alternative to traditional heart valve surgery. This issue also features research therapies for successful treatment of combat related PTSD.

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

EDITOR
Froylan Garza

CONTRIBUTORS
Cheryl Davis
Nicole Deal
Lehebron Farr
Froylan Garza
Brenda Greer, MS, RD
Jeffery Hastings, MD
Penny Kerby
Ashumi Merchant
Angela Nix
Rebecca Quinn
Bobbie Scoggins
Jennifer Sippel, PhD
Alina Suris, PhD
Kristyn Taylor
Alonzo Price, Jr.

PHOTOGRAPHY
Bruce Morris
Lynnette Lackey

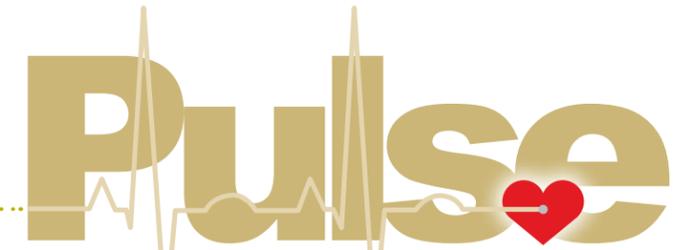
Pulse is published for the staff, volunteers and patients of VA North Texas Health Care System. We welcome your story ideas and suggestions. Send to ntxpublicaffairs@va.gov.



VA HEALTH CARE Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

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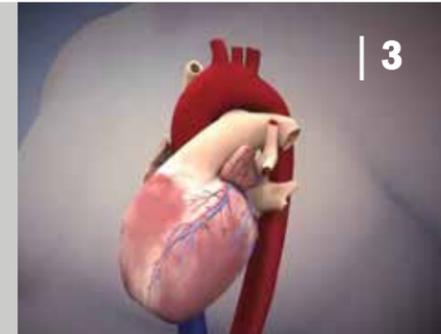
inside



VA NORTH TEXAS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Cover Story

VA North Texas becomes first VA in the Country with approved TAVR program



The Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement program builds on the robust interventional cardiology capabilities already available at VA North Texas.

Your Health Matters

IMPROVING FOOD CHOICES AND EATING HABITS

WHOLE HEALTH: CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

Cutting Edge

PROMISING THERAPIES FOR PTSD



I know how important Compensation & Pension (C&P) exams are to the C&P process so I try to work as fast and efficient as possible for our Veterans. My dad and uncle are Veterans, so every day I feel as if I am serving them and I am proud of it!

Shalonda Cotton, MAS C&P Clerk

Employee Profile

MAILBAG

New Leadership

Feature Story

REACHING BENEFITS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

REGINA BEST AT THE WHITE HOUSE

FACEBOOK TOWN HALL



Clinic Updates

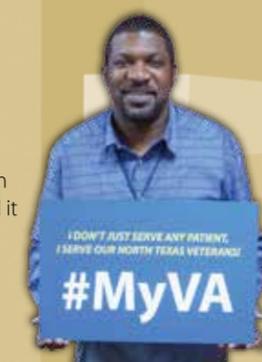
BONHAM
FORT WORTH
TYLER

Let's Talk About It



"Our Veterans are special, they always have a story to tell and I love hearing them. As a Veteran myself, I can see from their perspective and I find it my duty to inform and empower our Veterans."

Marcus J. Brown, Travel Clerk





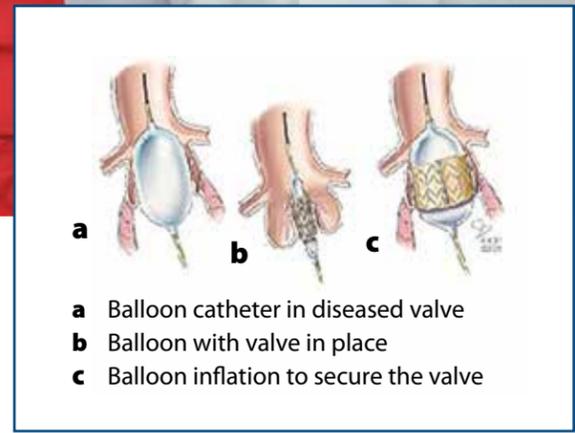
First VA Approved for TAVR Program

World renowned Cardiology team at VA North Texas includes Francisco Garcia-Morales MD, Jeffery Hastings MD, Jerrold Grodin MD, Mr. Payne, Subhash Banerjee MD, Emmanouil Brilakis MD, Elvie Ocampo, Shuaib Abdullah, MD

VA North Texas is advancing patient care for Veterans with aortic valve stenosis. For patients who were previously deemed unsuitable or at a high risk for open heart surgery, this may be a good option.

An innovative and less invasive procedure “transcatheter valve replacement (TAVR)” is now being offered at VA North Texas, making it the first VA facility in the country where the TAVR procedure was approved and the second VA in the country to perform the procedure.

Aortic valve stenosis affects approximately 300,000 Americans. Aortic valve stenosis occurs when the heart’s aortic valve narrows, preventing the valve from opening fully and allowing blood flow from the heart and into the rest of the body. As a result, the heart has to work harder to pump blood into the body causing the heart muscle to weaken. Symptoms of aortic valve stenosis are fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, and chest pain.



Benefits of TAVR?

Unlike traditional surgical aortic valve replacements with a “sternotomy” where the chest is actually opened, the TAVR procedure can be done by making small holes directly into the artery without a major operation. This is particularly beneficial for those patients with severe symptoms from calcified narrowed valves who are at a high-risk for open heart surgery. In addition to offering these patients an alternative approach, there is significantly less trauma to the body, a lower risk of major bleeding and less recovery time. Patients have reported significant improvements including reduced pain and anxiety and increased ability to take care of themselves and participate in everyday activities.

How does it work?

The TAVR procedure can be performed using one of multiple methods, allowing the heart team to determine which option offers the safest approach to accessing the valve. The most common is the transfemoral method, where the surgeon inserts the device through an artery in the groin. A second approach is the transapical method where the surgeon inserts the device at the tip of the heart, between the ribs. The procedure uses similar technology to having stents placed in an artery. The diseased aortic valve is replaced by a new artificial valve made from animal tissue. The valve enters into the body using a tube called a catheter. The heart team then positions the replacement valve inside the patient’s natural aortic valve and releases the valve into position.

Risks

Although it is a noninvasive procedure, TAVR has several risks of which patients should be aware. TAVR does carry a higher risk of stroke in the year following surgery compared to open heart valve replacement surgery. Other possible risks include infection, internal bleeding, injury to the access artery, allergic reaction to the anesthetic, heart attack, discharge of blood clots or air bubbles from the old aortic valve, kidney failure, and bruising at the puncture site. Veterans who are interested in the procedure should talk with their cardiologist to determine if they are good candidates.

Air Force Veteran is the first to receive TAVR at VA North Texas

At 83 years old, Carroll Leigh Payne says he “feels 19 again.” Mr. Payne, an Air Force Veteran, was the first patient at VA North Texas to receive the TAVR procedure. Prior to the procedure, Mr. Payne wasn’t able to walk even a few feet without gasping for air. He was considered a high-risk patient that could not undergo open-heart surgery because his aortic valve had become so narrowed and hardened. In other words, Mr. Payne was considered inoperable. When TAVR became an option for Mr. Payne, he “jumped” at the opportunity.

The TAVR procedure was performed with a multidisciplinary group of physicians under the leadership of Dr. Subhash Banerjee, Chief of Cardiology at the VA. His exceptional team of physicians include: Dr. Shuaib Abdullah, Dr. Mirza Baig, Dr. Emmanouil Brilakis, Dr. Jerrold Grodin, Dr. Jeff Hastings, and Dr. Michael Jessen. The patient undergoes the operation for approximately 1 hour under general anesthesia. According to cardiology nurse, Elvie Ocampo, who oversees and coordinates patients who receive TAVR, “having the procedure in the Dallas location allows patients to receive care in one place. They can receive better care from physicians who are extremely knowledgeable and dedicated to their patients.” Ms. Ocampo enthusiastically adds, “Before, the patients could hardly walk. Now they have more energy than me!”

When asked how he felt following the TAVR procedure, Mr. Payne responded, “I couldn’t even believe I had surgery. I had no soreness.” When leaving the VA, Mr. Payne said he will always be attached to this hospital but was looking forward to going home to Hilda, his wife of 57 years.

“Before, the patients could hardly walk. Now they have more energy than me!” — Elvie Ocampo, Patient Coordinator

Improving Food Choices and Eating Habits



(pictured above) Dinah Rose with Chester Lively III



Finally the long winter of ‘hibernation’ and comfort foods is over, and time to get active and enjoy the warm weather. As sports and recreational activities get cranked up for the summer, consider how food choices can fuel your body to better health and nutrition.

Breakfast is a meal many skip because they may not have time in the mornings or are saving the calories for a bigger meal later in the day. However, research suggests that those who eat a good breakfast rich in protein actually are more successful in maintaining a healthy weight.

Fruits and veggies are an important part of a healthy diet. Eating smaller portions of meats and filling up on a variety of fruits and veggies decreases the risk for heart disease, diabetes and some forms of cancer.

Finding time to cook may not always be possible, so freeze leftovers and make meals ahead of time. Keep the pantry stocked with foods that are quick to prepare such as lean lunch meats, eggs, bread and peanut butter, milk, cereal, yogurt and a variety of fresh or frozen produce.



“VA North Texas has great staff who help with wheelchair programs, especially convenient to get all services in one place.”

Jerry Hull, Air Force Veteran; **Freddy Tamez**, Army Veteran
Lot Lopez, Marine Corps veteran; **Robert Alonzo**, Navy Veteran

Whether you are consciously making healthier food choices or meals are prepared for you, everyone appreciates having a choice at meal time. Last year, Nutrition & Food Service began piloting a Select Menu in the Spinal Cord Injury Center, Hospice and Community Living Centers in Dallas and Bonham. Patients and residents prescribed a select menu can choose their meal items within their individual nutritional restrictions and requirements.

Food service hostesses have been trained on the new Computation Hospitality Suite to obtain select menu requests at the patient’s bedside within the pilot areas. The ultimate goal is to expand Select Menu to all nursing units at Dallas VAMC.

Patients may also call the Food Hotline at 7FOOD (extension 73663) 24 hours a day. Requests left on the hotline will be reviewed and addressed 5:30 a.m. – 7 p.m. Veterans may request a dietitian to visit them any time during their stay to discuss nutrition or food service related concerns.



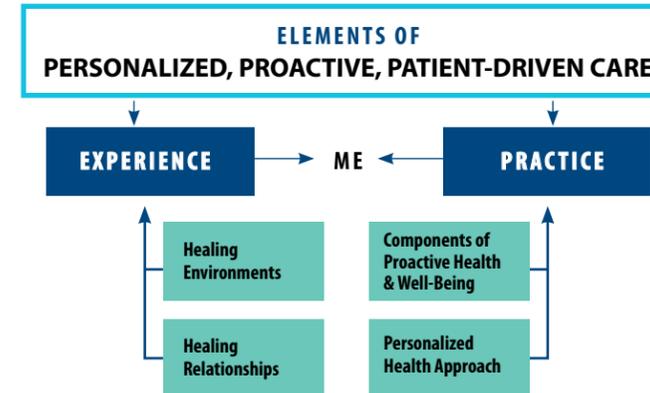
“Whole Health: Change the Conversation” about Healthcare

Change the Conversation” about Healthcare

This past February, ten primary care teams from the Fort Worth Outpatient Clinic (OPC) and the Bonham facility participated in an opportunity called “Whole Health: Change the Conversation.” The purpose of this office of patient centered care initiative is to create a personalized, holistic approach to Veteran healthcare through collaboration between our Veterans and clinical staff.

The program was developed by The University of Wisconsin’s Department of Integrative Medicine where faculty has integrated conventional and alternative approaches to medicine, focused more on creating health and well-being. The ultimate goal is to create a healthy lifestyle program specifically tailored to each individual Veteran’s needs and concerns. Departing from the traditional disease-oriented model of healthcare where patients are often viewed simply as “cases,” this new integrative model promotes a “conversation” between the patient and clinicians about realistic, practical health goals. The program allows the Veteran to be at the forefront of decision-making where they are empowered to take a proactive approach to creating health and making informed decisions on how to enhance their health outcomes.

The patient centered approach shifts the clinical conversation to a more personalized and unique experience of “illness” and honors the Veteran as a whole person – body, mind, spirit, and lifestyle. The “Whole Health” approach recognizes the importance of a Veteran’s interconnections with other people, communities, and their environment.



INTEGRITY • COMMITMENT • ADVOCACY • RESPECT • EXCELLENCE

Dr. David Raker of the University of Wisconsin explains that “we must change the health care conversation to center on what improves quality and cultivates resilience in Veterans’ lives.”

The pilot program employs several methods in order to achieve desired results. Among many factors considered, Veterans and clinicians look at nutrition, stress management, movement, and mindful awareness when developing a health plan. Clinicians also focus on manifestations caused by PTSD such as depression, sleep disorders, pain, and substance abuse. The “Whole Health” program aligns with the VA North Texas Health Care System’s commitment to providing a health care environment that supports respect for patients and protects their right to autonomous, informed participation in health care decisions.

The “Whole Health” program will be held at the Polk Street Annex Clinic, located 3 miles from Dallas VAMC. Training for the program is 2.5 days and includes 45 participants in each session. Thus far, the VA has held training sessions in October 2013, February, April and June 2014 at the Dallas VA Community Center. For more training information, please contact Dr. Jennifer Sippel, Clinical Director for Cultural Transformation.

Mission: Honor America’s Veterans by changing how VHA employees deliver care and patients experience VA care
Vision: All VHA employees understand personalized, proactive, patient-driven care and feel empowered to affect the Veteran care experience

Goals	Core Messages
<p>Inform • Educate Engage • Empower Who? VHA Employees, Veterans, and Key Stakeholders</p>	<p>We’re making a major cultural shift to make the experience of care as excellent as the quality of care. We are creating a partnership to empower Veterans to be proactive and personalized and let their desires drive the agenda to lead healthier lives based on their individual values.</p>
<p>Culture Shift: VHA employees change the way they look at what they do, and how they affect the Veteran experience</p>	<p>The foundation is already laid to take this transformative approach. The strategic plan lays out a vision for where we go as a system; field and program leaders will map out the steps.</p>
	<p>We’re changing how and where we allocate resources to ensure that our health care teams, and Veterans themselves, have tools and skill sets that align with this new approach. We’re changing how we measure and what we measure.</p>

VANTHCS is dedicated to creating life-long health and wellness plans that deliver excellence in every aspect of patient care. Dr. Raker’s book titled “Integrative Medicine” is available for free online at: <http://www.mdconsult.com>.



“I’ve never been to a place where they actually talk to you - and listen.”

Pam Fischer, Air Force Veteran

Research Studies Show Promising Results for Veterans with PTSD

Groundbreaking Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) studies are being conducted at Dallas Medical Center (VAMC). The script below is an example of an individual's trauma experience that was relayed back to a study participant during an experimental intervention designed to treat Veterans diagnosed with PTSD. PTSD is now classified as a "trauma and stressor related disorder" that can occur after you have been exposed to a traumatic event. Symptoms usually start soon after the event, but may not surface until months or years later. Symptoms of PTSD include reliving the event, avoiding places or things that remind you of the event, feeling numb, and feeling keyed up (also called hyper arousal). If you think you have PTSD, it is important to get treatment.

If we already have effective therapies, why do we need more research?

PTSD is characterized by avoidance. Convincing Veterans to come in and complete evidence-based therapies is often difficult. These therapies are time consuming; the Veteran must talk about their trauma for 30-45 minutes, take home a recording, and listen to their therapy session (Exposure Therapy). Patients often drop out because they feel like the therapy is too tough. A large majority of the patients that successfully complete the therapy do in fact have a decrease in symptoms; however, PTSD remains uncured.

Alina Suris, Ph.D., ABPP, Chief of Psychology, Mental Health, explains that there are additional innovative interventions

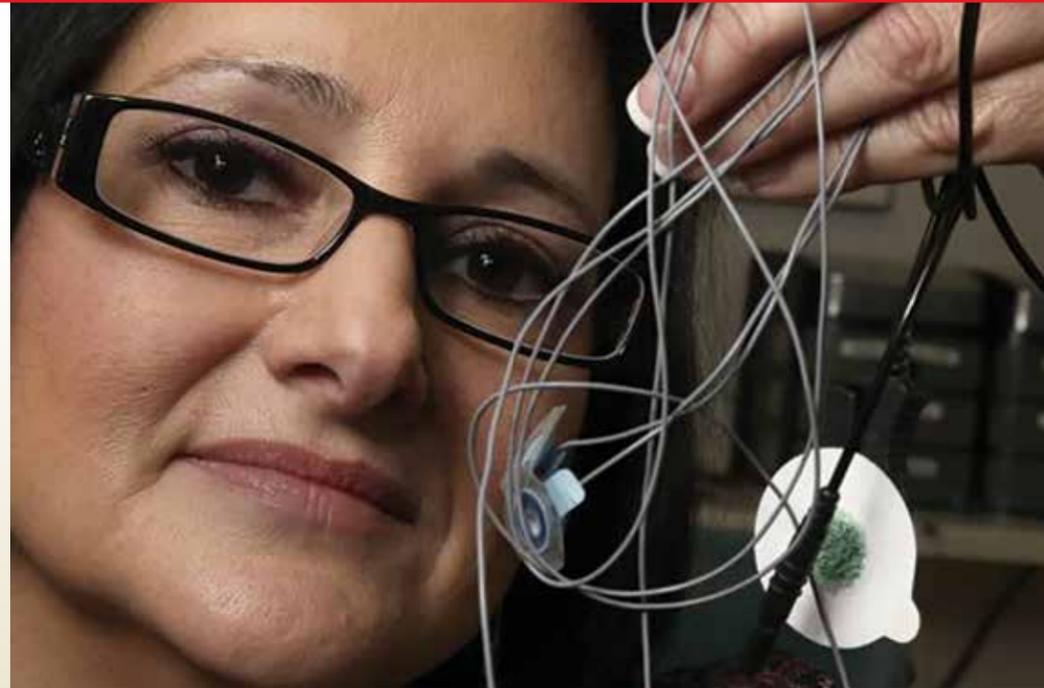
"It's 1990 and you recall being in Iraq. Your squad is mine sweeping, doing everything by the book. Your friend that you have known all your life is on point. Your heart pounds and your palms are clammy. He goes into the field and takes 3 steps. Your stomach is in knots. You hear an explosion. Your body feels heavy as you clench your fist. Over half of your friend's body is gone. Your hands are trembling and your eyes are closed. You were his squad leader and now he's gone. You want to scream."

Nationally, the Department of Veterans Affairs has rolled out several evidence-based traditional psychotherapies for treating PTSD. Two therapies used at the Dallas VAMC are Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure Therapy.

The therapies are usually done in person on a one-on-one basis, but can also be done via televideo or within a group setting. In a group setting, therapies are adjusted so specific traumas are not discussed in front of others. When successful in getting Veterans to agree to the required 12-16 therapy sessions, research shows these therapies are effective in reducing PTSD symptoms.

and novel treatments for treating PTSD beyond traditional approaches. "A lot of what we know comes from animal research. Translational studies, for example, takes what we've learned from animals and applies it to humans." Through a partnership with colleagues at UT Southwestern Medical Center, experiments on rodents are being done to model PTSD in animals by introducing trauma and measuring responses.

Dr. Suris is spearheading two therapies that are hypothesized to interfere with memory-based responses. The first therapy targets 'fear memory reconsolidation' and is based on an animal model. For example, trauma is introduced to a mouse by exposing it to



a natural predator such as a cat (without actually putting the mouse in danger). Once fear is established, chemicals are administered to the mouse that works on their brains to alter how they react to fear that is triggered by the cat. These studies pinpoint which chemicals can interfere with the mouse's fear memories. Dr. Suris uses analogous chemicals (medications) in her studies for Veterans who have PTSD. "When you have a traumatic memory and recall it, you become emotionally upset which creates a chemical process in the brain," explains Dr. Suris. By pairing exposure to the individualized trauma with a specific medication, fear memory reconsolidation is interfered with. The Veteran will recall the traumatic event, but the emotional valence associated with the event is no longer present and they do not become overwhelmed."

The second therapy also works on the memory at the cellular level, using a process called 'augmentation of extinction.' It is theorized that additional glucocorticoids are needed to mount an effective defense to cues that remind Veterans with PTSD of their traumas. This therapy helps to extinguish the memory connections that are solidified in PTSD to make them more balanced. In Iraq, for example, a trash bag on the road could be an improvised explosive device (IED) and you would need to take evasive action

to not be blown up. If you have PTSD and you see a trash bag in the states, you may try to take unnecessary evasive actions to not be blown up. This occurs automatically without planning in Veterans with PTSD. Augmenting extinction allows for a new memory connection to be associated with the bag: trash bag = trash; trash bag does not = danger.



Wondering if you have PTSD?

To develop PTSD, a person must have been exposed to a qualifying trauma. MyHealthVet offers a confidential, anonymous screen, which is a list of questions to see if a person needs to be assessed further by a mental health provider. A positive screen does not mean a person has PTSD. The results are not stored, but you can choose to print a copy of the results for your own records or give a copy to your physician or speak with a confidential mental health professional. If you are experiencing a crisis, please contact 1-877-273-8255.

Do YOU use MyHealthVet?

Veterans can enjoy interacting with their health care team without driving to the VA. Not every question or concern has to be handled face to face, and many patients are saving a trip to Dallas VAMC or other VA North Texas facility because of the secured messages option in MyHealthVet.

Different features are available depending on what level of security a Veteran completes, including Basic, Advanced and Premium. With a Premium account, Veterans have completed the authentication process and can access a secured portal to email their doctor and have private communication by email. Veterans can also send attachments with their secure messages.

One of the newest features available in Premium Account is VA Notes which means notes in your medical record from January 1, 2013 onward are available three calendar days after they have been completed and signed by all required members of your VA health care team.

VA North Texas encourages all Veterans to register for MyHealthVet and become an authenticated Premium user. Library staff and MyHealthVet booth at Dallas VAMC can help in addition to Quick Stops which are coming to Bonham, FWOPC and Tyler where patients can register and be authenticated in a one-stop shop. Over 60% of VA North Texas Veterans are registered in MyHealthVet. You can get started at www.myhealth.gov or ask MyHealthVet Coordinator Cathrine England for assistance at 214-857-1721.



VetLink ~ My VA Connection

VetLink kiosks at VA North Texas and CBOC locations simplify check-in and other tasks for Veterans.

From the VetLink touch-screen, patients can:

- Check-in for scheduled medical appointments
- Update demographic information including address and telephone numbers
- Update next of kin
- Update insurance information
- Print appointment schedule



Veterans swipe their Veterans Health Identification Card, use the barcode located on the Veterans Health identification Card or enter their full social security number and answer challenge questions to authenticate identity.

Information entered into VetLink is stored in a secured network, and privacy screens allow only the user to view his/her information. A proximity sensor resets the screen once a user steps away from the screen, and if a user takes longer than expected to complete a screen, VetLink will alert the user and ask if more time is needed.

Navigators will help patients become familiar with VetLink. Kiosks are also equipped with a scanner to accommodate ear buds of the visually-impaired.



"They do a good job. I like that I can have all my appointments in a one-stop shop." **Robert Montalvo**, Army Veteran



Deloris Clemons has left her own footprint at VA North Texas, forever impacting the way that women experience healthcare at the VA. She led the effort for the new CLC facilities and domiciliary to include a wing dedicated to women, which now holds her name as a tribute to all of her hard work and dedication.

Deloris Clemons at the Deloris F. Clemons Womens Wing Grand Opening in February

At 8:15 a.m. on any given work day for 37 years you would have found Deloris Clemons awaiting the start of the VA North Texas morning report. These days, you'll find her enjoying her 2nd cup of coffee and watching Good Morning America. After a long and successful career with the VA, Deloris decided to retire, but not after she made an everlasting mark on the Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center in Bonham.



Deloris Clemons in her early career as Staff Assistant to the Director

Besides being a wife, mother, and grandmother, Deloris is the daughter of a US Army Veteran who served in WWII. Her love for her country and the opportunity to serve Veterans who dedicated their lives to freedom and liberty led Deloris to a long career with the VA.

Deloris served in many different roles throughout her career at the VA, from Personnel Assistant to Voluntary Service Specialist to Staff Assistant to the Director and finally as the Bonham Administrative Service Manager.

Throughout her years with the VA, Deloris witnessed the significant changes that occurred in the hospital's structure and practices. She began her career when Bonham was a stand-alone facility and was a part of the merger with Dallas VA that ultimately became VA North Texas Health Care System. The merger changed the Bonham hospital from a full medical/surgical 78 bed hospital into an outpatient, long-term care and rehabilitative medical center.

Through all the changes she witnessed, Deloris was grateful that the VA always stayed true to their organizational mission and vision and although program names changed over time, the overall theme of providing high quality, patient-centered care to our nation's Veterans always remained steadfast.

Deloris says that she was blessed to have had the opportunity to work with the VA and all of its employees over the years. However, the blessing may lie with all of us who have been lucky enough to work with someone as inspirational and dedicated as Deloris. It is our duty to carry on her legacy.



Mail Bag

"After the first meeting with Dr. Aamir Mithani I knew that I had a wonderful physician and one who will be important to me. If I get this feeling, then all the other Veterans under his care can expect the very same Care. Judy and Ingrid who took care of me were some of the best nurses I have ever had. I recommend the VA to all Veterans that I meet at my business. After bragging about my care, I offer to bring them to VA North Texas to get enrolled."

Jeffery English, Army Veteran

"Please allow me to take the opportunity to congratulate the VA on the selection of your staff Audiology Director, Dr. David Peach. My experiences with him have been very satisfying. He is professional and very knowledgeable all rolled into a package of warmth and concern. I am so proud to have him as my doctor."

Winston P. Polley, Army Veteran

"Dr. Prakash Kagal in Dermatology has given my husband the best care we have ever received. No matter what question or problem we have had, he has always given us the answer. He is exceptional - so caring and informative that we don't know what we would have done without him."

Mary Badillo, Wife of Army Veteran

"My father was admitted to the Dallas VA hospital, and the level of care from the doctor, nurses and volunteers has been outstanding. As a manager, you need to be proud of how all three shifts represent the VA and the love they convey to Vets."

Mark Willard, Son of Navy Veteran



Raul A. Rivera, MD, FACP

Associate Chief of Staff for Ambulatory Care
VA North Texas Health Care System

A Magna Cum Laude graduate from the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine, Dr. Rivera arrives to VA North Texas as a bilingual professional prepared to make a difference in the lives of Veterans.

"Deployed as an Army Squadron Surgeon to the front lines of Iraq in 2007, I am honored now to be a Veteran serving other Veterans at VA North Texas."

Following a 15-month deployment to Iraq and a residency in Internal Medicine at Brooke Army Medical Center, Dr. Rivera most recently served as Chief of the Internal Medicine Clinic in San Antonio, playing an instrumental role in the transformation to the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) model.

Dr. Rivera has a passion for medical management and perioperative medicine and is thrilled about the opportunity to join VANTHCS as the ACOS for Ambulatory Care. As for play, Dr. Rivera is an avid computer hobbyist and enjoys playing guitar.



Kristyn J. Taylor

Operations Administrator
Fort Worth Outpatient Clinic

Originally from Chicago, Ms. Taylor completed a Bachelor of Science with an emphasis in Health Management from Howard University in Washington D.C., followed by a Masters in Health Administration from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri.

Taylor started college with ambitions of medical school, but soon learned she had a greater passion for operations. She shies away from the limelight, ironically asserting, **"I love operations, but prefer to work behind the scenes making sure the train stays on track."**

After a graduate fellowship at the St. Louis VAMC, she became an Administrative Officer in Path and Lab. Her relocation to Dallas as the Administrative Officer for Ambulatory Care for VA North Texas definitely brings her back to what she loves.

Taylor is a music enthusiast and modestly admits to playing both piano and saxophone.



Angela J. Nix, RHIA

Administrative Service Manager
Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center, Bonham

"This fantastic team truly cares about the mission and vision of the VA."

Although attracted to jobs in the private sector, Ms. Nix dug in her heels with the Department of Veterans Affairs to honor her father (Vietnam Navy Veteran) and grandfather (WWII Army Veteran and Bronze Star recipient). "I did not serve personally, but I've had my share of adventure sky diving over the Gulf of Mexico and bungee jumping from the "Bridge to Nowhere" in the Angeles National Forest.

She holds a Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Health Care Administration, both from the University of Houston at Clear Lake.



Latonia W. Arris, MSN, RN-BC/VHA-CM

Chief Nurse
Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center, Bonham

"As a child, I volunteered at the Bonham VA. My grandfather retired from the Bonham VA, and my parents worked at the Bonham VA, so in a way, I feel like I am coming home."

For the last 15 years, Ms. Arris has been helping Veterans at the Central Texas VA in Temple as a Nurse Manager and most recently the Chief of Patient Administration Services, before transferring to Bonham.

Arris holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and a Master of Science in Nursing, both from the University of Texas at Arlington. She will graduate with a Doctorate of Nursing Practice, DNP, in December.

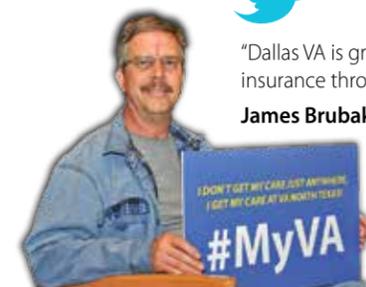
Married with 3 boys (including twins: age 9), she enjoys camping, baseball and hunting.

VA North Texas workforce diversity snapshot: Did you know?

65% of employees are of minority background; 57% are women; and over 31% are Veterans

"I am honored to be surrounded by innovative and dedicated staff in our leadership team who have a heart for Veterans. I expect great things from these new leaders as we serve together and provide the high quality care our Veterans have earned and deserve."

— Director Jeffery L. Milligan



"Dallas VA is great like the Veterans who served. I have insurance through my work, but I choose VA North Texas."

James Brubaker, Air Force Veteran



Reaching Veterans through partnerships

This year VA North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS) partnered with the Texas Veterans Land Board and Texas Veterans Commission to host benefits fairs at our locations across the system. The latest fair took place February 22 at the Fort Worth VA Outpatient Clinic. The benefits fair showcased the many resources available to North Texas Veterans. Representatives from both agencies stood by to provide information on Veteran benefits, health screenings, disability, pension claims, home loans, as well as State Veterans Homes and National Cemeteries. Several VANTHCS program offices attended the fair including Enrollment and Benefits, Minority Veterans Program, Nursing, Homeless Veteran program, MyHealthVet, Women Veterans Health Program, Suicide Prevention, Vet Center and the VBA Waco Regional office. Our goal with partnering with the Texas Veterans Land Board and Texas Veterans Commission is to bring Veterans and their families together in a one stop shop for both VA and State benefits they may not be aware they are eligible for. Overall, there were over 325 attendees at the fair who took advantage of this great partnership opportunity. VA North Texas prides itself on the ability to provide these services for our Nation's finest and will continually strive to partner with our good friends from the State of Texas to support outreach activities throughout our catchment area.

Another event with Texas Veterans Land Board and Texas Veterans Commission was held at Dallas VA Medical Center June 7. For more information on this and future events stay connected with VA North Texas by visiting our website at www.northtexas.va.gov or by social media at www.facebook.com/NorthTexasVA or www.twitter.com/NorthTexasVA.



"VA has good benefits, and I appreciate the services specifically for women."

Fannie Borders, Marine Corps Veteran



Regina Best Visits the White House

It's not every day you get invited to the White House...

Air Force Veteran Regina Best has been homeless but became so passionate about service that she became a volunteer with AmeriCorps and Habitat for Humanity. When executives asked if she would like to go to the White House to participate in a round table discussion about AmeriCorps and Habitat for Humanity, she jumped at the opportunity.

The next few days Best continued with her hectic schedule. In the midst of getting her own apartment and going back to school, she was assisting to supervise her first Habitat home construction.

"Going to Washington, D.C. did not sink in for me until I received my flight itinerary. Then it became real!"

I was going to speak with senior White House officials, along with 11 other AmeriCorps members, as part of a roundtable discussion. We were chosen from more than 80,000 members, and I was the only one from Habitat for Humanity. Best said, "When my friends and family asked if I would get to meet the President, I told them no, but it would be cool if I did."

She arrived in Washington, and the day was full of introductions, information, wonder and intensity from the round table. Not only was Regina to speak at the White House but she would start the discussion!

Members of the discussion group walked to the White House and entered the West Wing into the Roosevelt Room. Their names were printed on place cards and they took their seats. The room felt formal and extremely official with flags standing tall along one wall.



Regina Best (left) with President Obama

Regina stayed focused, and soon her name was called to speak. She began telling her story as a homeless Veteran when a door to the left opened and in came President Obama to join the discussion! She stood at attention, but with weak knees until he walked over and shook her hand. The audience sat down and President Obama spoke about AmeriCorps and thanked them for their service. He then looked directly at Regina, and asked her to tell her story. She wrapped up her time and ended saying she wanted to build her own house and catering business some day and hoped to live and work in the same house – like he did! The President got a good chuckle out that.

Regina returned home and pursued her education. She graduated in March from the International Culinary School at The Art Institute of Dallas with a Bachelor of Science in Culinary Management and is on her way to doing what she loves – cooking and construction.

Regina is an active patient at VA North Texas and attributes much of her success to the HUD-VASH program, AmeriCorps and Habitat for Humanity. She maintains her own household through VA Supported Housing and is a true example of what can be accomplished when someone is given a chance to change their life.



Facebook Townhall

VA North Texas took advantage of its social media following and conducted its first Facebook town hall this past January, making it the second VA in the country to conduct an online town hall. Dr. Roger Bedimo and Dr. Brad Cutrell, along with our Infection Prevention team, answered questions and comments posted from Facebook friends regarding, "The Flu Shot: Get the Facts."

Several of our Veterans asked the experts questions, including how safe and effective the flu shot was and risk considerations for children. We had over 20 interactions and learned a great deal.

Join the more than 2,500 VA North Texas friends and 'Like' us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/northtexasva or follow us on twitter @ NorthTexasVA and keep up to date on the latest events, program and other information.



Dr. Bedimo and Dr. Cutrell answered flu concerns on the spot.

A new expanded clinic in Tyler is on the way!



Transportation is equipped to accommodate wheelchairs, powerchairs and scooters.



Tyler area Veterans arriving at Dallas VAMC

The Tyler VA OPC building is expected to be completed in fall 2014. The larger space will ease crowded conditions in our current clinic, along with providing additional space for future growth of outpatient services.

There has not been a significant expansion since it moved from its location at the University Texas Health Science Center to its current location seven years ago. This new expanded facility will add nearly 10,000 square feet of much needed space to operations in Tyler, and, once finished, will also allow for expansion in primary care, optometry, expanded telehealth and support staff, and specialty care.

The new building site is currently unknown since the project is actively being solicited to the public. The goal of the clinic expansion is to maintain and expand health care services for Veterans in the Tyler and surrounding area. Tyler VA OPC continues to add space to care for the growing number of Veterans seeking VA services and has strong support from VA North Texas leadership, employees and members of the community. Operations Administrator Lehebron Farr says, "I am proud to lead this new project as we expand services to Tyler area Veterans."

Tyler is also expanding access to health care for rural Veterans. When travel to Dallas VAMC is necessary, many Veterans can't drive long distances or don't have the resources to make the trip. That's where the VA Voluntary Transportation Network comes in. Debra Christian, commander of the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary in Tyler, is a volunteer driver. VA North Texas Health Care System also provides a shuttle van complete with wheelchair access that makes daily trips to Dallas VAMC.

Fort Worth OPC

February 18

Fort Worth OPC had the pleasure of hosting Congressman Marc Veasey (representing Texas 33rd district) for a tour of the facility. Congressman Veasey was impressed with the staff and clinic as a whole and spoke with a number of Veterans. He was particularly interested in learning more about Patient Aligned Care Teams and Telehealth programs

February 19

EEO hosted a Black History Month program. Veteran Estrus Tucker was the keynote speaker and provided the audience with a dynamic discussion on "Civil Rights in America." The event also included a soul food luncheon where samplings of tasty homemade soul food dishes were prepared for the entire clinic to enjoy.

February 22

The clinic hosted a benefits fair in partnership with the Texas Veterans Land Board and Texas Veterans Commission. A number of programs and services were highlighted, including enrollment, OEF/OIF/OND, Vet Center, Minority Veterans Outreach, Women Veterans Health, and numerous other program services. Attendees were also given the opportunity to receive flu shots. The event had an excellent turnout and was featured on a local news station.

Compensation & Pension

Compensation & Pension (C&P) section (pictured right) consists of 40 staff members including physicians, physician assistants, psychologists and administrative personnel. Our goal is to provide outstanding service to our Veterans and improve the overall perception of the disability examination process. At the end of FY 2013 and leading into FY 2014, C&P experienced its highest spike in processing times. The average processing time for claims was 61 days

for both the monthly and yearly quality measures. With the hard work from staff and support of executive leadership, the section was able to improve the monthly processing time to 17 days and the yearly processing time to 36 days.

Over the past year, three initiatives were implemented by the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment to help reduce the backlog of disability claims. VA North Texas also completed more than 5,550 examination requests in the timespan covering these initiatives. VA North Texas C&P continues to expedite the claims process and is ready to meet future challenges.



Guests toured the new space for women Veterans

Women Veterans get their own space in the Bonham Dom

Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center in Bonham is the new home of the Deloris F. Clemons Women's Wing in the domiciliary. The new space was designed exclusively for women Veterans and provides a safe, warm and inviting area complete with visiting areas for children. The new wing was named after Ms. Clemons, long time administrative manager of Bonham VA, who retired recently. (See pg. 10)

VA North Texas is excited to provide specialized services in the new wing to meet the treatment needs of women Veterans participating in a mental health program in the Bonham Domiciliary.

Kimberly Coleman Prier is the chief, Bonham domiciliary and says since opening the Women's Wing in February, women have expressed overwhelming gratitude with the new environment. One female Veteran stated,

"It really helps with my serenity, feeling safe and dealing with my MST issues."

Honoring those who served

At VA, we honor Veterans every day. We asked some Veterans how they like to be honored for their service, and asked employees and stakeholders how they honor Veterans.

It's an honor for me to work at the VA. I could never repay them for their service. A lot of patients say that I help them understand their diseases and understand what's going on. It's wonderful to help them understand their health issues and provide education to improve their quality of life.

Aracely Ortega, LVN, Clinic 2

I did not serve in the armed forces, but I am proud that I am serving those that did and in so doing I do feel like I am serving my country. Being around these Veterans has given me a sense of my own connectedness to our nation's history and has brought out in me a level of patriotism I did not have before working here. I am proud of the personal growth that working at the VA has brought out in me and I honestly feel this experience has made me a better person and a better doctor. I am very honored to get to serve these men and women in whatever way I can.

Cody Nichols, MD, Tyler

I truly enjoy the diversity of my job. It is a very rewarding feeling to know at the end of the day that I have had the opportunity to make a difference in a Veteran's life by providing exceptional health care services.

Katy E. Kelton, Bonham-MAS

"I am a Veteran myself. I've learned to serve my country and now serve Veterans. They deserve it."

Larry Robinson, EMS

"When I lost vision in one eye recently, the team of physicians determined I needed a biopsy. I appreciated the care and attention from Dr. Kruti Dajee, Dr. Lyle Thorstenson, Elton Dublin, Patty Boyd and Richard Treviso. I was amazed with the coordination of care and that it was so efficient for a government entity ~ three tests were arranged on the same day for my convenience. The most noticeable impression was the way everybody treated me and the way they treated each other."

Ralph Beaulieu, Army Veteran

"I have been serving Veterans in VHA since 2003. The most important aspect of patient centered care is making sure that the Veteran is satisfied with the coordination of their care. We must treat each patient as an individual and address their specific needs."

Lori Babineaux, Patient Advocate, FWOPC

From the first day to now, VA has taught me how to continue normally with my prosthetic, and my progress makes me want to encourage other Veterans. The CIIRP program is extremely rewarding, and I accepted their instruction because I knew they were truly interested in my best quality of life.

Leroy Jackson, Army Veteran

Living in my VA Medical Foster Home has made a huge impact in my life. I was able to learn what I can do and what my limitations are in a safe environment.

Kenneth Dahms, Air Force Veteran

Dallas VAMC has been a great blessing to me. My life has improved in so many ways. I came to Dallas VA while passing through as an over-the-road truck driver. While getting registered into the Dallas system, there was a complication with my heart - I was in surgery the next day. Unable to return to work I found myself homeless and battling a 20-year substance abuse problem. The VA provided resources to me, including HCHV, SRRT, HUD-VASH and VRAP. I owe much of my success to Crimsetta Dunn, Jewel Cooper and Don King for not only doing their job but making me feel appreciated as a Veteran.

Kenneth Phipps, Marine Corps Veteran





VA North Texas 2014 Black History Month Program

Since 1976, February has been designated as Black History Month by every U.S. president. Black History Month remains an important moment for America to celebrate the achievements and contributions of black Americans.

In honor of Black History Month the EEO Advisory Committee conducted an educational program in which employees paid homage to black dignitaries by portraying them and highlighting their significant contributions to the history of black Americans.



Left to right: **Andrew Whigham**: Program Moderator; **Melvin Haley**: as Jimmie Porter, Activist and Civil Rights Leader; **Trony McCoggle**: as Jim Brown, Football Player and Activist; **Felicia Griggs**: as Betsy Coleman, First African American Pilot; **Gertrude (Trudie) McCoggle**: as Angela Davis, Political Activist, scholar, and author; **Wendell Spencer**: as Malcolm X, Activist and Leader of the Nation of Islam; **Kendrick D. Goree**: as Martin L. King, Jr., Activist and Civil Rights Leader; **Humphrey Okele**: as Muhammad Ali, Professional Boxer; **Akinyele R. Oyeniyi**: as Nelson Mandela, Activist and Past President of South Africa

No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and exactly how he arrived at his present place.

—Maya Angelou

"VA doctors have more compassion. I also need to be around other Veterans and I like the comraderie here."

René'se Logan
Navy Veteran



VA North Texas Celebrates 2014 National Salute Week February 10-14

Valentine's Day is a special opportunity to show your appreciation for the ones you love, and VA North Texas loves Veterans. Salute Week kicked off with volunteers and staff decorating at Dallas, Bonham and FWOPC. More than 15,000 valentines sent from the community and local school children practically covered the walls from floor to ceiling.



Congressional members made time to stop by and visit patients, including Congressman Sam Johnson, Congressman Michael Burgess and Congressman Joe Barton. Staffers with Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, Congressman Kenny Marchant and Senator John Cornyn brought Valentine greetings as well. The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders are always a welcome surprise to honor our Veterans. Veterans also enjoyed visits from North Texas beauty queens, news anchors, school choirs and Veteran Service Organizations enjoyed sharing their time and talent with patients.

Salute Week is also an annual reminder to consider volunteering at your local VA. Fifteen new volunteers were recruited to be part of the team at VA North Texas. For additional information on how you can volunteer, visit www.northtexas.va.gov/giving.