

Pulse

AUGUST 2012 EDITION 4

9 Steps TO HEALTHY LIVING

A March of Greatness

COVER STORY:

JOBS *for* VETS

Army Veteran and VA North Texas employee,
Betty Pettway, then and now.
Right photo of Betty by Nancy Gray

Director's Message

There is an African proverb that says it takes a village to raise a child. If we think about that proverb as it relates to caring for Veterans, we could say that it takes a community to care for a Veteran.

You may not know we have a group of partners in the community who work just as passionately as we do to improve Veterans' health and well-being. If it were not for them, we would miss the chance to offer valuable resources that can make the difference between hope and despair.

Our community partners advocate for us through the justice system, county Veterans organizations, Veterans service organizations, state departments, city municipals and more. And then there are those who stand side-by-side with us as volunteers. Here at VA North Texas, almost 1,800 volunteers, including more than 200 students, gave their time and effort to further our mission to care for Veterans. Last year, our volunteers worked nearly 150,000 hours which resulted in \$1.5 million in comparable work hours.

So if you haven't taken a moment to think about the thread that helps us weave our quilt of care, here's more. Last year, our stakeholders donated \$318,500 in cash, with non-monetary donations totaling \$1,174,500. That's a total of \$1,493,000 to supplement patient care.



And while there are many organizations and individuals who help us give a hand to Veterans, our employees are in the community doing the same. Employees mentor in neighboring schools where they tutor, mentor and inspire community youth.

Our dedicated staff works to ensure all Veterans, including those returning from combat, receive quality and compassionate care in a timely manner.

So here is the challenge. As you discuss plans among your teams to meet our mission and goals, think about the important community piece. There is a village of compassionate and dedicated community partners who are eager to help us define excellence and they have the talent and resources to assist.

Let's continue to reach beyond our walls. When we do, the difference will come in that extra special act of kindness, a comfort item for an ailing patient or a place of respite and dignity for a Veteran who is striving to end the cycle of homelessness.

Jeffery L. Milligan

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, meets with VA North Texas stakeholders. Photo by Bruce Morris



Evening shift employees love reading Pulse.



Happy Anniversary!
Pulse

It's been one year since the first issue of Pulse was published. We thank you for your loyalty as readers and hope you enjoy each issue. Share your thoughts and story ideas at ntxpublicaffairs@va.gov.



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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.

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(below left) A crane sets the 6-ton MRI in place.

(below right) The new polytrauma suite at Dallas VA. Photo by Bruce Morris

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OPEN AND FRIENDLY LISTENING



We Put Veterans to Work – At VA and in the Community

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM OFFERS HOPE AND SECOND CHANCES

One of the defining qualities of a good, able citizen is to be gainfully employed. It promotes self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Robert Drake, M.D., Ph.D. said, "Given a choice between work and idleness, people will almost always choose work. Regardless of our station in life, the conditions of our body and minds, or the amount of money in our bank accounts, the need to work remains one of our strongest drives." Drake states, "Work is central to our lives, and as such, gives a large measure of structure to our days."

Dr. Drake, along with Deborah Becker, developed an evidence-based approach to employment which was adopted by the Veterans Health Administration. The Compensated Work Therapy-Supported Employment (CWT-SE) model assists Veterans in special populations: serious mental illness, spinal cord injury and traumatic brain injury. The goal is to help Veterans secure and maintain competitive employment by focusing on one the following:

1. Vocational rehabilitation is considered an integral component of the treatment, rather than a separate service. The vocational rehabilitation specialist (VRS) is assigned to the Veteran's treatment team.
2. Veterans with serious mental illness, spinal cord injury or traumatic brain injury can obtain competitive employment given proper follow along supports without prevocational, sheltered, segregated work activities or training. Follow along support is provided as long as there is a clinical need.
3. Rapid engagement, job search and follow along supports are provided to Veterans who receive CWT-SE services.

4. Services are provided in the community rather than in the vocational rehabilitation office or rehabilitation setting.

At VA North Texas, we offer CWT services in Dallas, Fort Worth and Bonham. Our program addresses the unique needs of our Veteran population.

The Dallas CWT Transitional Work Experience (TWE) Program provides vocational rehabilitation for Veterans through a combination of work experience and psychosocial rehabilitation. On average, approximately 110 Veterans are in the program and the typical length of stay is six to nine months.

The TWE program meets Veterans' strengths, needs, abilities and preferences. During the program, Veterans work at a VA facility or clinic in areas such as engineering, voluntary services, logistics, sterile processing or environmental management, and they are paid at or above federal minimum wage. Plus, any VA compensation or pension they are receiving is protected while in the program. While working those jobs, Veterans develop skills that make them ready and able to work in the community in a job of their choice after they complete the program.

The newest CWT program is the Homeless Veterans Supported Employment Program (HVSE), which also uses a modest variation of Dr. Drake's model. This program provides employment assistance to Veterans enrolled in one of several housing programs: Grant & Per Diem, Transitional Residence, Dallas Homeless Domiciliary and Health Care for Homeless Veterans.

Veterans account for more than 30% of our workforce.

Veterans have several advantages to set them apart from the rest of the crowd. When applying for jobs, Veterans should maximize their opportunities by identifying any special hiring authorities they qualify for. Additionally, our staff hosts and attends various events in the community and at our locations to assist with the job application process. Those include job fairs, workshops and the monthly Transition Assistance Program (TAP) held at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base in Fort Worth. The program helps Veterans who are discharging from the military to better transition into civilian life.



nearly
50

Veterans have graduated from the Dallas CWT-TWE program and secured employment in the community or in positions at VA North Texas in this fiscal year alone.

nearly
300

Veterans found employment after they completed the CWT-TWE program in the past five years.

35%

of Veterans are employed immediately after completing CWT-TWE. *Veterans who obtain employment within a few weeks of completion are not counted in this number.

60%

of Veterans in the HVSE program gain employment.

Marianna Touchstone Demko, CWT program manager, said sometimes society mistakenly assumes some Veterans are not employable because of their condition or circumstances.

“Our program provides hope and opportunity that Veterans don’t know exists,” Marianna said. “We strive to always go above and beyond what’s required because we know we can have a strong impact on improving their lives.”

That’s just what we do at VA North Texas. Read about one Veteran’s story — Army Veteran Mitch Farris (right).



New employees, all Veterans, at orientation.

JOBS *for* **VETS**

A CHANCE MEETING BRINGS GOOD LUCK

Army Veteran Mitch Farris said he whole-heartedly appreciates Marianna and VA North Texas. By some accounts, Mitch may not have qualified for assistance through CWT. He was not really homeless. He was simply displaced. Situations like Mitch’s require someone who will look beyond the black and white rules to search for an exception, any exception to work in the Veteran’s favor. That’s exactly what Marianna did.



An unfortunate event eventually led Mitch to where he is today.

One day Mitch found out the house he was renting was sold. He knew he needed a place to stay, but had no idea where to begin looking. One of his Veteran buddies told him about the CWT Transitional Residence program. Mitch thought it would be a long shot, but he gave it a chance.

He came to VA North Texas where he met Marianna. The very next day, he had a place to call home.

Mitch is a culinary arts student half way complete with his associate’s degree. Marianna knew one of Mitch’s competitors in a food competition and asked if he could give Mitch a job. Did the corporate chef give Mitch a job as a favor to a friend or because Mitch proved himself to be an outstanding cook after winning second place in his category? It may be a little of both, but nevertheless Mitch has a lot to be happy about.

These days, Mitch enjoys working at a five star steakhouse in the Dallas area. It’s a long way from Jefferson City, Missouri where he was born and raised, and quite different from his mom’s kitchen where he made everything from homemade buttermilk biscuits and pies to fried chicken. “If Mom were here today to see me,” Mitch said, “she would be smiling from ear to ear.”

(right) Army Veteran Mitch Farris works as a chef at a five star steakhouse in Dallas. Photo by Nancy Gray

(left inset) EEO Specialist Alonzo Price (right) assists Veteran Leopoldo Quirino at a hiring workshop. Photo by Nancy Gray



Veteran Serves Twice with No Regrets

At 19 years old, Robert Hampton enlisted in the U.S. Army and soon after found himself at war. "I left my home and loved ones to fight a battle not of my creation," he said. What would happen to Robert eight and a half years later was not only a dilemma, but an honor – to serve his country a second time.

Robert left the rugged life of being a soldier, working as a combat engineer in Iraq, to go to Officer Candidate School, better known as OCS. He was completing his first week of training when he made the ultimate decision to accept a job offer from the Department of Veterans Affairs. "It was the only thing," he said, "that would convince me to end my service in the armed forces."

Today, Robert works as a recreation therapist at Dallas VA Medical Center. He said the choice he made was not easy, but serving Veterans allows him an opportunity to continue in his service to America.

Robert enjoys working at a place with friendly staff and great leadership. If ever you're at Dallas VA Medical Center, you may see him in the halls on his way to meet a Veteran. Whether he's facilitating a pet therapy session, working with the PTSD theater group or helping Veterans with photo narrative projects, he's always got a smile on his face. A smile that he said comes from deep within. "The greatest lesson I've learned from going to war is to appreciate every moment and never take life for granted."



"I'm honored to be a part of VA's mission to provide the best quality care to our Nation's heroes, and I'm very grateful for the opportunity to continue my service to America."

Recreation therapist Robert Hampton assists Army Veteran Derrick McCuller with a photo journaling project. Photo by Bruce Morris



VIP Visit

THE HONORABLE ERIC K. SHINSEKI, SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, VISITS VA NORTH TEXAS

Secretary Shinseki arrives at Dallas VA Medical Center and is escorted by Director Jeffery Milligan (left). Photo by Conrad Wolfe



Secretary Shinseki's tour began at the Dallas VA Medical Center's campus model where he received an overview of construction projects and expansions. Pictured (left to right) Jeffery Milligan, Dr. Clark Gregg, chief of staff, and Lawrence Biro, VISN 17 network director. Photo by Bruce Morris



Veteran Wilson Cook meets Secretary Shinseki at the new hotel-like medical unit at Dallas VA Medical Center. Photo by Bruce Morris



Secretary Shinseki greets GI/Endoscopy employees at Fort Worth VA Outpatient Clinic. Photo by Conrad Wolfe



1 Strive for a healthy weight.

Losing even a little will help. If you are of normal weight, maintain it. Staying in control of your weight helps you be healthy now and in the future. Consider joining the *Move!* program.

Avoid inactivity. Some activity is better than none. Aim for at least two and a half hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. Every 10 minute session counts. Do strengthening activities at least two days each week.

2 Be physically active.

3 Get recommended screening tests and immunizations.

Ask what screening tests and immunizations are best for you. It can help you live healthy.

4 Be tobacco free.

Quit smoking. Pick a date to stop and let our smoking cessation team help you.

You know your body better than anyone. Work with your health care team to improve your health by:

- Keeping appointments
- Writing down questions in advance
- Stating your current health problems and concerns
- Participating in decisions about your health care and treatments

5 Be involved in your health care.

6 Eat wisely.

Eat wisely to maximize your health. Eat a variety of foods including vegetables, fruits and whole grains. It is important to include fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products in your diet and to limit salt, fat, sugar and alcohol.

7 Manage stress.

Here are some ways to help manage stress.

Physical Activity

Take a brisk walk or engage in other physically demanding activities.

Problem Solving

Learn problem solving skills as this can often improve your ability to cope.

Relaxation Training

Learn relaxation and mindfulness skills to assist you to manage the arousal that is associated with stress.

Expression

Speak up in respectful ways. Sharing thoughts and feelings in an assertive and respectful manner can sometimes help buffer stress.

Time Management

List what needs to get done, make plans for addressing issues and stick to the plan.

Positive Thinking

Focus your attention on positive thoughts about yourself, favorite songs, poems, favorite prayers or hobbies.

Pleasant Activities

Make time for fun in your life. Plan to have regular, enjoyable activities and see if this buffers your stress.

If you or someone you know is in an emotional crisis call the Veterans Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK and press 1 for Veterans.

8 Be safe.

Use caution. Find out how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, limit alcohol and prevent motor vehicle accidents.

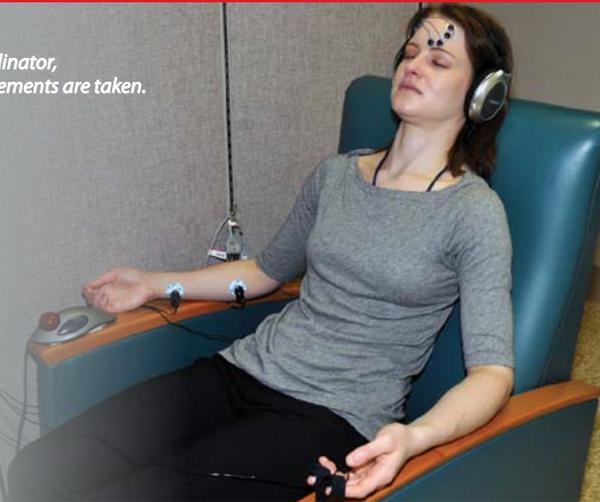
9 Limit alcohol.

If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Women should not drink more than one drink a day; men should not drink more than two drinks a day. Avoid binge drinking. If you are concerned about your drinking, talk to your VA health care team about getting help.

Healthy Living in 9 Easy Steps

Elizabeth Anderson, research study coordinator, demonstrates how physiological measurements are taken. Photo by Marti Fellhauer-Sampson

Have you ever wished you could react differently to a painful or traumatic memory?



Novel Approaches to Treat PTSD

a Veteran with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may report bad dreams and nightmares, have difficulty interacting with others and no longer interested in activities they once enjoyed. Thanks to some novel approaches to treating PTSD, Veterans at VA North Texas are getting relief.

VA North Texas provides medication management and psychotherapy to treat PTSD, including evidence-based psychotherapies such as Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure Therapy. These evidence-based interventions are structured time-limited “talk” therapies and are recommended by VA and Department of Defense PTSD Treatment Guidelines, as they have been shown to significantly reduce PTSD symptoms.

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can occur after someone has experienced – or witnessed – an event with death or serious injury. It is categorized by three clusters of symptoms that can impact one’s ability to function in social, work or family settings:

- *intrusive re-experiencing of the event*
- *avoidance and numbing*
- *hyperarousal*

An estimated 300,000 Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars will suffer from either PTSD or major depressive disorder, and many will experience both. Combined with the number of Veterans with PTSD from other eras, it is easy to see why researching innovative treatment is so important.

Alina Suris, Ph.D., ABPP, chief of psychology, is the principal investigator of several research studies. She and her team examine innovative methods to treat PTSD by modifying the fear/trauma memories with medication at the cellular or most basic level.

Two memory processes are under investigation: extinction and fear memory reconsolidation. Augmentation of fear memory extinction seeks to eliminate learned responses to specific trauma-related cues. The fear memory reconsolidation process involves modifying the emotional impact of an unpleasant memory at the biological level.

“We are not changing Veteran’s memories of their traumas, but are changing the emotional impact of the memory so that they are no longer as upsetting,” Dr. Suris said.

Extinction does not erase any memories. It involves making new connections in the brain related

to traumatic cues or situations. For example, in Iraq or Afghanistan, a bag in the road often meant danger because it could be an explosive device. When Veterans with PTSD return to the U.S. and they see a bag in the road, their brains automatically react and they may take evasive maneuvers, although they are technically safe.

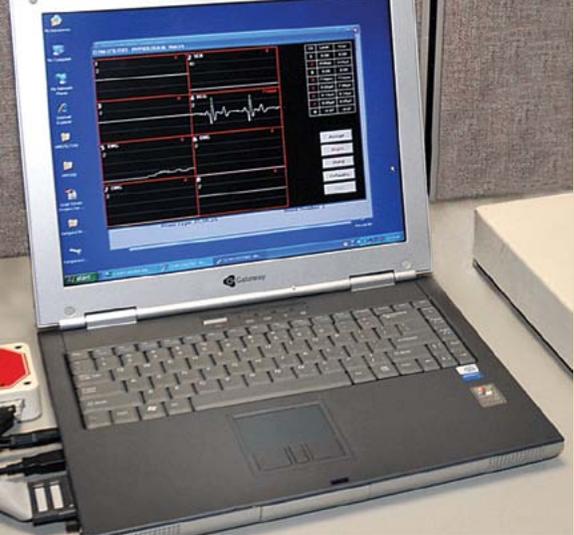
This study seeks to help Veterans with PTSD decrease reactivity to cues that formerly signaled “danger.” During the study, a medication is administered and the participant listens to 30-second audio recorded descriptions of their combat traumas alternated with descriptions of neutral events. While listening to the descriptions, their heart rate, forehead muscle tension and hand sweating are measured with electrodes. The most recent completed study focused on interference with fear memory reconsolidation. The procedures were similar to those described for the extinction study above, but the medication and theory underlying the memory changes differed. When memories are activated by thinking about them, they become changeable and must be reconsolidated back into long-term memory.

Are you a homeless Veteran?

At risk or know somebody who is?

VA Has Resources to Help Homeless Veterans

Make the call to the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans



Laptop used to record data during PTSD study.

Dr. Suris found Veterans with more recent memories, those of Desert Storm and Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom, were more amenable to interference of reconsolidation of trauma memories. The good news is these studies provide promise for more effective and novel interventions for treating PTSD. It is important to remember not all Veterans returning from combat develop PTSD. And if a Veteran develops PTSD, it does not mean he/she is crazy, dangerous or will have the disorder for the rest of their lives. Early interventions significantly reduce symptom burden, and novel interventions like the ones being developed at VA North Texas show promise.

Advanced Services Underway for Veterans

New Suite for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

More than half of all combat-related injuries sustained by American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan were the result of explosive weapons. Improvements to body armor and surgical stabilization on the front lines of combat made it possible for more individuals to survive these types of injuries. Consequently, more soldiers are returning from war zones with polytrauma.

Polytrauma is multiple complex injuries that cause physical, cognitive, psychological and social impairments and functional disabilities. Common injuries in blast-related polytrauma include open wounds, traumatic amputations, spinal injuries, eye conditions, musculoskeletal system disorders, psychiatric problems and TBI.

“VA North Texas has always had capabilities to provide care for TBI/polytrauma injuries,” said Richard Robinson, M.D., medical director of TBI/polytrauma. “Now our efforts have ramped up to provide a polytrauma suite for treatment and recovery of the more than 16,400 Veterans enrolled for health care who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, including approximately 1,900 women Veterans.”

The new polytrauma suite will open in October to provide care for Veterans in one central location.

3T MRI Center Boosts Advanced Radiology Services

Radiology is delighted to announce the opening of its second generation clinical 3T MRI. The technological advances in the new magnet yield significant quality enhancement and improved comfort for patients. The large bore, which has an internal diameter of 27.5 inches, accommodates large and claustrophobic patients without the significant compromises to image quality associated with open magnets. The short length of the magnet, at 68.1 inches, allows many studies to be completed with the patient’s head outside the bore. That will ensure further comfort for claustrophobic patients. Patients can be scanned in the head-first or feet-first position.

The art fixture overhead calms Veterans before an MRI.



With Comfort in Mind

An LED mood light panel will help ease tensions associated with the test. These comfort-enhancing features produce sharper images and diminish anxiety and motion and, in many instances, reduce or eliminate the need for sedation. A portable table facilitates rapid patient preparation and ensures easy patient transport, comfort for immobile patients and flexibility in emergency situations. It can accommodate patients up to 550 lbs.

Technology at Hand

Image quality of the 3T MRI is at the pinnacle of what is currently available clinically. Notable applications of the technological advances include superior non-invasive angiography, advanced cardiac applications, prostate-imaging and very high resolution imaging of the central nervous system and musculoskeletal system. “The new 3T MRI is one of the very best clinical scanners currently available anywhere,” said Michael Ginsburg, M.D., chief of radiology. “It will make ‘best care anywhere’ in MRI examinations available to our North Texas Veterans.”

1-877-4AID-VET

(1-877-424-3838)

www.va.gov/homeless



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Fort Worth VA Outpatient Clinic employees cultivate a new vegetable garden for Veterans.



Fort Worth Clinic: Still Growing

Now in its second year of existence, Fort Worth VA Outpatient Clinic (FWOPC) operations are going swell. The demand is evident. Since its opening in November 2010, FWOPC enrolled about 3,000 Veterans for health care. Over the past year, FWOPC has consistently added new services and expanded existing ones. The clinic experienced a 15 percent growth in fiscal years 11 and 12.

With the implementation of the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) model, Fort Worth Outpatient Clinic is able to enhance chronic disease management and improve coordination of care for Veterans. The steady increase in patient population prompted the hiring of more health care professionals to provide care for more Veterans.

In the coming year, cardiology procedures will be added along with ankle brachial index therapy, echo cardiograms, stress tests and prosthetics. The addition of these procedures will not only help relieve some congestion at Dallas VA Medical Center, but will also save Veterans from making a trip there.

And as the clinics and programs expand, employees, volunteers and patients are interested to see some growth outdoors. Staff joined together this spring to plant two vegetable gardens. Veterans in the Lamp Clinic will maintain the gardens as part of their rehabilitation therapy. Everyone looks forward to watching all of the wonderful vegetables and herbs grow.

More Space Coming for Tyler Clinic

In case you haven't noticed, Tyler VA Primary Care Clinic is bursting at the seams! The clinic, at 5,000 square feet, has four primary care providers and serves nearly 6,000 Veterans. With a new facility expected to open in March 2013, employees and Veterans are eager to get a larger space.

"We just don't have the space we need," said Lee Farr, operations administrator. "This expansion will allow us to serve our growing population of Veterans."

The new facility is approximately 9,000 square feet. Primary care teams will be enhanced by adding support staff for physicians including RNs, LVNs and clerks.

The facility at 3414 Golden Road will still be used to provide mental health and telecare services for Veterans. Primary care and social work will be at the new location less than five miles away.

A broad marketing campaign is planned to increase awareness about the many services offered in Tyler. Until then, help us spread the word. "Many Veterans don't know about us and travel to the other VA clinics for services," said Lee. "We want to bring those Veterans to a clinic closer to home."

Benefits of the expansion are not limited to new patients. Veterans who were traveling to Dallas for some specialty services will be able to access the new clinic near home, eliminating a two hour commute.

The Tyler clinic is located between two other VA clinics in Palestine and Longview.



A March of Greatness

In 1942, the U.S. Army on Bataan surrendered to the Japanese and 70,000 American and Filipino soldiers became POWs. Tortured and cruelly abused, they were forced to march more than 65 miles over the course of six days through intense heat with little water or food.

How often do you get a chance to sit alongside history?

For staff at Dallas VA Medical Center, the chance came when former Prisoners of War (POWs) were honored at a National POW Recognition program. Three men who survived the Bataan Death March were present and shared their stories.



William Adair remembers the day he was freed. He was with others in the mountains of mainland Japan and they were the last ones to be released. "We went crazy when we learned the war

was over," Adair said. He remembered when doctors and nurses came in a truck to check them to make sure they could travel. "A friend pulled an American flag from beneath his clothes and raised it on the flag pole. He hid it from the very beginning, even sleeping with it," he said. "When the flag was unfurled, it was the first time I saw it in years."

As POWs pass from our lives, it makes honoring those who remain a precious moment to be treasured. For it's not often that you stand in the presence of such greatness.



William Adair at the POW luncheon.



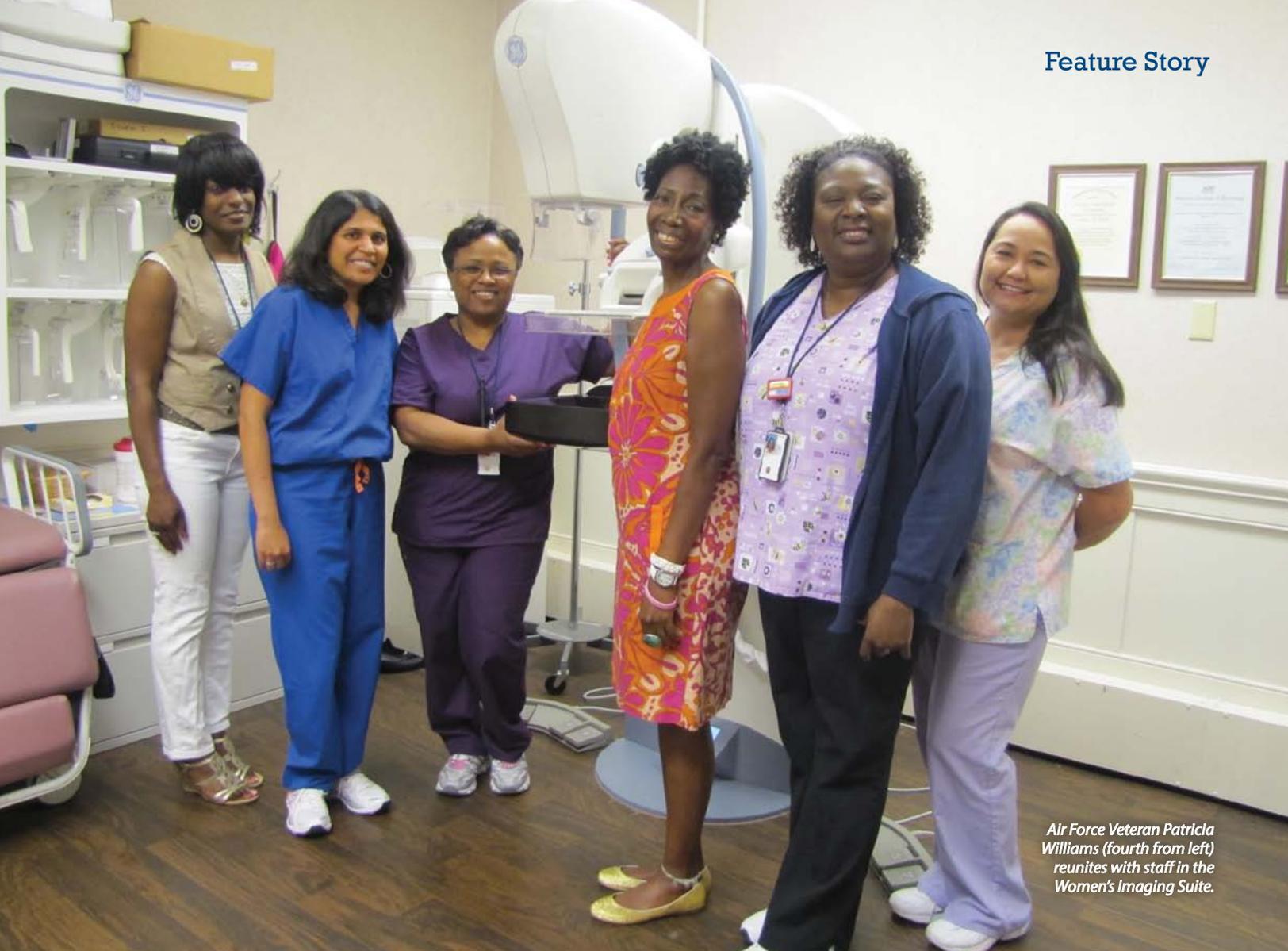
Ben Alpuerto was stationed in the Philippines when Japan struck Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. What he planned to be a one year commitment to the U.S. military turned into many, and months later he was making the torturous trek that became known as the Bataan Death March. "I'm so thankful to God that I'm alive," he said.



Charles Dragich remembers collapsing on the fifth day of the march, unable to move. He was propelled forward when Japanese soldiers thrust a bayonet through the back of another fallen man. "God gave me the strength to somehow carry on," he said. But Dragich also recalled moments of mercy. One night he tried to sneak out of the barracks and ran into a Japanese soldier. Unable to see, he heard only the clinking sounds of the soldier loading his rifle. Then all of a sudden, the soldier walked away. "He had every right to kill me," he said. "His kindness saved my life."

Charles Dragich (left) and Ben Alpuerto share greetings at the POW luncheon.
Photo by Donna Alexander





Air Force Veteran Patricia Williams (fourth from left) reunites with staff in the Women's Imaging Suite.

Amanda Hansen is an Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) combat Veteran. She served nine years in the Army Reserves. Having joined when she was just 18 years old, Amanda said she would do it all over again.

"War was very difficult for me at such a young age," she said. "Yet, I learned some very important life lessons and I wouldn't be the person I am today if I hadn't gone."

Amanda met her husband Greg in the Army. They are the proud new parents of a baby girl, Lillian. VA's maternity program was available for her prenatal care and delivery. She said she had a great experience with the program and it relieved the stress of finances while she was pregnant.

Amanda is grateful and proud to be an American and a mom. You can tell by the big kisses and smiles when she cuddles with Lillian. A kiss even bigger than the one she remembers when she landed on U.S. soil. "I kissed the ground!" Amanda exclaimed. "I know it's a cliché, but I just couldn't help it!"

These days, in her spare time, Amanda enjoys traveling and working in the backyard vegetable and herb garden with her husband. "I'm a foodie," she said. So, cooking and trying new cuisines are among her favorite things to do.

Amanda also uses her GI Bill to support her education at The Art Institute of Dallas where she's studying for a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design. She loves shopping and decorating and hopes to start a an interior design business in the future.

Patricia Williams is an Air Force Veteran who has seen some ups and some downs. Through it all, she continues to move forward.

It's been a long and tough journey for Patricia. She eagerly awaits the two year mark in October 2012 when she can finally consider herself in remission, one step closer to being cancer free. At every six month follow-up since her ordeal began, she counts it as a blessing when she hears the news of no tumors.

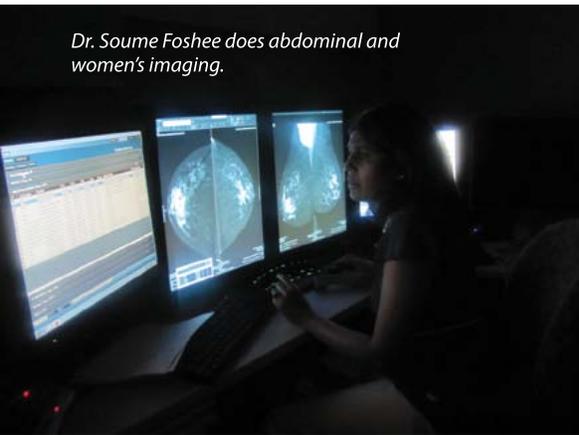


With no family history of breast cancer, Patricia said she was surprised to find out she had three tumors. From the time between her biopsy and surgery, VA North Texas doctors discovered a fourth one.

Soume Foshee, M.D., a radiologist at VA North Texas, was instrumental in locating Patricia's tumors.

Since one out of eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime, Dr. Foshee understands the need to be careful and concerned.

"I call every Veteran after each biopsy and talk to them about their results," Dr. Foshee said. "They are very grateful to hear from their actual doctor and not someone else." She said talking to Veterans outside their normal visits is one her favorite parts of her job.



Dr. Soume Foshee does abdominal and women's imaging.

The personal touch women Veterans get in radiology is only one of many features. The Women's Imaging Suite at Dallas VA Medical Center opened in March and offers more comfort and privacy than the prior one. The secure dressing rooms adjacent to the exam and consult rooms give women the convenience of remaining in their gown from start to finish.

Patricia is among 7,700 women Veterans who receive health care at VA North Texas. As a patient and employee, she appreciates the care and consideration she receives at every doctor's appointment. "I know what it's like to serve as a Veteran and I know what it's like to serve Veterans," she said. "I want to make sure that we all have a place we can trust to provide the care we deserve."

America is grateful to all of the women Veterans who served, and so is VA North Texas.



(below) Army Veteran Amanda Hansen with her husband and newborn. Photo by Nancy Gray



Beat the Heat with a Summer Treat

On these hot summer days, it's nice to have something cool and refreshing. What's better than fresh fruit? Fresh fruit with a twist! Sheryl Hampel, secretary to the assistant director, makes this delightful dish in less than 10 minutes. Creamy cinnamon dip with assorted fruit can be enjoyed either alone or as an accompaniment to any meal, especially lunch. It's always a hit with guests or share it with co-workers, like Sheryl does in the Dallas Executive Office.

Cool & Creamy Cinnamon Dip

*Makes 18 (2 tablespoon) servings
Prep Time: 5 minutes*

Ingredients:

- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 1 container (8 ounces) sour cream
- 1/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon, ground
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Instructions:

1. Beat all ingredients in medium bowl with electric mixer on medium speed until well blended. Spoon into a serving bowl and cover.
2. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve with fresh fruit slices, cookies or pound cake or angel food cubes.
3. Enjoy!

Other options:

- For sweet dip, prepare as instructed above, substituting 1 container (6 ounces) plain or vanilla yogurt for the sour cream.
- For cheesecake dip: Gently stir 1 cup thawed frozen whipped topping and 1/2 teaspoon pure lemon extract into cream cheese mixture.
- For spiced dip, prepare as directed, substituting 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice or apple pie spice for the cinnamon.

She's a novice to VA, but no stranger to social service. From children to adults, this Bonham VA social worker has dedicated more than 15 years to helping those who are often labeled as difficult to manage.

Meet Patricia Hart, a licensed clinical social worker, people lover and a steward of service.

it's easy to understand why Veterans in the Domiciliary Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program seek after her comforting advice and warm smile. Spend a few moments in her work environment and you will soon discover her magnetic personality and compassion illuminates the domiciliary.

Her open and friendly listening helps develop an almost immediate trust and bond. Patricia knows it's all in how you present yourself in that initial contact. "I like to meet people where they are in life," she said. "Sometimes life experiences shape their being and the very core of who they are." It could be homelessness, abuse, substance use, unemployment or many trials. In Patricia's experience, it is difficult for most people to ask for help. "The first contact determines whether that person will continue to seek help or walk away," she said.

Giving respect is not something Patricia takes lightly. To her, it means not taking Veterans' struggles personal. She knows they are here for a reason so she educates herself about personality disorders, diagnoses or certain behaviors that may trigger responses from her patients.

Patricia knows Veterans are a special group who made an unselfish choice to serve our country. That's why she loves what she does. When asked what she likes most about her job, she replied, "I like to see the progression and transformation over time."

She offers this piece of advice for employees who may work at VA just to make a living. "Veterans are the ones who keep us here. Forget that," she said, "and you will lose focus." Patricia summed it up best and cautioned, "When you lose focus, your compassion follows."

Perhaps part of her strength and motivation comes from a framed writing on her office wall which describes what social workers make. It states, "Social workers make forgotten people feel cherished, ugly people feel beautiful, confused people feel understood and broken people feel whole." It closes with this thought: "What do they make? They make more than most people will ever make. They make a difference."

Patricia has been serving at VA North Texas since November 2010 and says she plans on being here for quite some time. Undeniably so, she will continue to softly inspire Veterans to do better and be better, all while offering her open and friendly demeanor and compassionate listening.



Open and Friendly Listening

“Veterans are the ones who keep us here. Forget that,” Patricia said, “and you will lose focus.”



Patricia Hart loves her job serving Veterans.

“What does our new slogan, “Changing lives. One Veteran at a time.” mean to you?”

“The new VANTHCS logo encourages us to value and serve the Veteran as a whole person—body, heart, mind, spirit. It means employing Veteran-centered and Veteran-directed care we can honor. We make Veterans’ hopes possible for improved quality of life.”

George E. Cooper, Jr., Ph.D., Chaplain Service
Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center



“It means we are providing health care that is individualized, for a special population, and not just writing prescriptions.”

Cody Nichols, M.D., Primary Care, Tyler VA Primary Care Clinic



“I believe we as VA employees can change the lives of our Veterans by showing how much we appreciate them for their service to our country. It means to provide love and care in such a way that it impacts our Veterans. I have learned by doing unto others, it will also come back unto me. My integrity within this position allows me to do what is right legally and morally.”

Cassandra Anderson, Medical Administration Service
Fort Worth VA Outpatient Clinic



“That’s a really good way to treat us Veterans! I help a lot of Veterans around here myself, and you have to do it on an individual basis, make it personal. I hope that message gets out to all VA programs around the country.”

Walter Neahr, U.S. Marine Corps



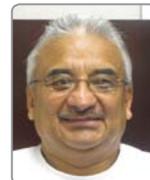
“It is to the point and expresses what the VA should be all about—service to all Veterans, one at a time.”

Steven Lee, U.S. Navy Veteran



“It’s a very strong statement! To me taking personal care of one Veteran at a time is a very important thing. Taking care of each individual Veteran is what this slogan tells me.”

Carlos Santoyo, U.S. Marine Corps Veteran



Get in touch

with My HealthVet, VA’s Personal Health Record

Who can use it?

Veterans, active duty service members, their dependents and caregivers.

Long gone are the days of not being able to have your medical information when you need it. It’s now right at your fingertips. With My HealthVet, you can do a number of things:



- Request consultations, appointments and renewals of medications
- Request test results and receive a doctor’s explanation
- Communicate with your actual doctor with secure messaging
- Access portions of your medical records online 24/7

Questions?

Contact Cathrine England, My HealthVet coordinator, at 214-857-1721.

Salute to Excellence

Environmental Management Service (EMS) Keeps It Clean and Tidy

It takes more than big powered machines to make a place sparkle. We salute the dedicated EMS employees who take care and dignity to clean and sanitize our VA facilities.

*Pictured (l to r): Justin Agee; Jackie Lister; Michael Moorman; Shawn Betters; Thomas Brown; Rolan Brazier; Whitt Brown; and Robbie Hamilton.
Photo by Bruce Morris*

