Family is Everything

EDUCATION & TEAMWORK
Drive Plano Community Clinic

COVER STORY:
Fighting Veteran Homelessness

PROUDLY SERVING VETERANS OF NORTH TEXAS AND SOUTHERN OKLAHOMA FROM LOCATIONS IN
BONHAM ★ BRIDGEPORT ★ DALLAS ★ DENTON ★ FORT WORTH ★ GRANBURY ★ GREENVILLE ★ PLANO ★ SHERMAN ★ TYLER
VA North Texas served more than 123,000 Veterans in FY2016 with almost 1.5 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.

Changing lives. One Veteran at a time.

When I began my VA career as an engineer in 1989, I did so in large part to honor the service of my father and the millions of Veterans like him who have given so much to our country.

Like family, my commitment to Veterans is unwavering and has driven my actions through various VA assignments over 27 years of service. Every assignment over the course of my career has come with a unique set of responsibilities and challenges. These experiences have helped me grow both personally and professionally and I am truly grateful for each moment.

It is with humility and a sense of service to all North Texas Veterans that I let you know that I have been appointed by Secretary Shulkin as the Network Director, VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network (V17). This move is truly bittersweet as I consider VA North Texas my home and its staff that continues to provide world-class healthcare and experience to our community.

I see a strong and diverse workforce dedicated to serving North Texas Veterans. It is this staff that ensures same-day access to Primary Care and Mental Health services. It is this staff that provides direct scheduling in Audiology, Optometry and Radiology. It is this staff that pioneers clinical improvements like TAVR, MitraClip and V-Bloc that is saving Veteran lives every day.

Improving quality of care data, to Veterans is my personal challenge. These experiences have helped me grow both personally and professionally and I am truly grateful for each moment.

When I look across the organization, I see a strong and diverse workforce dedicated to serving North Texas Veterans. It is this staff that ensures same-day access to Primary Care and Mental Health services. It is this staff that provides direct scheduling in Audiology, Optometry and Radiology. It is this staff that pioneers clinical improvements like TAVR, MitraClip and V-Bloc that is saving Veteran lives every day. It was this staff that enabled the successful activation of essential community based clinics in Plano and Tyler. It was this staff that ensured Veterans had plenty of Dallas campus parking through the building of two new garages. It is this staff that pioneers clinical advancements like TAVR, MitraClip and V-Bloc that is saving Veteran lives every day. It was this staff that enabled the successful activation of essential community based clinics in Plano and Tyler. It was this staff that ensured Veterans had plenty of Dallas campus parking through the building of two new garages. It is this staff that ensured Veterans had plenty of Dallas campus parking through the building of two new garages.

I am grateful for the leadership of Mr. Kendrick Brown who will serve as Interim Director for the Director of VA North Texas, Mr. Jeff Milligan. I ask that you support him during this transition period and extend him the same courtesy you have extended me.

In your service, I remain, Kendrick Brown
VA Offers Primary Care alternatives due to Tyler physician shortage

The Tyler VA Primary Care Outpatient Clinic on S. Broadway is experiencing an unforeseen shortage in primary care physicians. Efforts to increase physician levels are on-going, and VA North Texas will continue to meet your primary care needs.

When requesting a primary care appointment, please call your clerk at Tyler VA toll free at 855-375-6930 or 903-266-5900 who will share the following options and assist with scheduling.

1. “Opt-in” to the Veterans Choice Program. After 10 days for processing, call TriWest at 1-866-606-8198 to schedule an appointment in the Tyler community. Please note co-payments apply and will be billed to you after your appointment.

2. An appointment with a VA provider at Polk Street VA Clinic located at 4243 S. Polk St., Dallas, TX 75224.

3. Be placed on a waiting list to be seen by a physician at Tyler VA.

New providers are expected to be on board by the end of September.

:30 SECOND HEALTH TIP

Nutrition and healthy lifestyle changes

“Seemingly everyone in the media and on the internet, offers healthy eating tips—but viewer and reader beware,” offers Jessica Mooney, a registered dietician with VHA’s Employee Health & Well-Being program.

Here are six tips to consider when planning for your nutrition and healthy lifestyle changes:

• Make small lifestyle changes that get you closer to your nutrition and health goals and can be maintained for life.
• Some sites tell you to eat five small meals a day or to remove all grains from your diet. Everyone’s diet is personal and different. What may work for one person may not be good for you. Consult a VA dietician and your doctor before embarking on any drastic changes.
• There are no magic pills or food combinations that will get you the results you want.
• The ideal diet includes all food groups, heavy on vegetables and exercise.
• Watch portion sizes and listen to your body for hunger cues. If getting from meal to meal is tough, have a small snack consisting of protein and carbohydrates, like cheese and crackers, Greek yogurt, hummus or cottage cheese.
• Make achievable and realistic goals and get information from reputable sources like registered dietitians, VA Nutrition and Food Services or the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
Fighting Veteran homelessness with opportunity, self-determination and a van

Dallas VA Medical Center’s building 71 is abuzz with activity accentuated with the steady chatter of keyboards. Freshly brewed coffee and clipboards are common accessories bright and early on a Wednesday for members of VA North Texas’ Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program. VA North Texas Health Care System established the first VA Comprehensive Homeless Center in 1990, and the vehicle that HCHV is using to address this commitment is the Homeless Mobile Medical and Mental Health Veterans (HMMMV) Team that travels via a Wednesday for members of VA North Texas Health Care System.

Cover Story

For VA, success in dealing with homeless Veterans isn’t always captured in metrics or statistics. VA’s greatest strength is its ability to provide patient-centered care that addresses physical and psychosocial needs, while empowering Veterans to take responsibility for their care and treatment, even in the most complex and desperate cases.

Once identified by HMMMV Team members, Homeless Veterans’ needs are often broad and long-term in nature. Immediate concerns like the availability of safe shelter combine with urgent and chronic medical concerns to present a need for timely intervention and care. Often, these homeless Veterans have never sought assistance from VA because of misinformation, a bad experience or just the lack of awareness for what services and resources are available to them.

“We’re out on the streets and in the shelters as often as possible,” said Price. “We do get referrals from agencies who have Veterans that could use our help, but we do get associated with the VA scandals or just the lack of awareness for what services and resources are available to them.”

In late 2009, VA announced an ambitious goal to end Veteran homelessness. The plan to address this urgent national priority was outlined in 2010’s Opening Doors, the first-ever federal strategic plan to end Veteran homelessness. In general, finding affordable housing is an already crowded market like Dallas can be challenging despite the best attempts of the HMMMV Team to identify Veterans in need and leverage community relationship.

Success in dealing with homeless Veterans isn’t always universal. "Some Veterans do not want to be in an apartment, house, or facility, " said Fields. That struggle, lost employment and the desire to get closer to his family in Tulsa, Oklahoma, resulted in Fields’ ending up at Austin Street Center, a homeless shelter, near downtown Dallas. The HMMMV Team’s first stop on a Wednesday morning was to the Center to meet with Veteran’s like Fields. Fields’ already utilizes VA services and his request of the Team on this day was for a bus pass or train fare to the Dallas VA Medical Center for an upcoming appointment.

A homeless Veteran’s desire for a stable and safe place to call home beyond a shelter, or long term housing solution, isn’t always universal.

"If I lost my way, got into some trouble," said Fields. "It’s not always universal."
"As social workers, we respect the Veterans self-determination and will not force them into housing or services they adamantly do not want."

A former boatswain mate in the Navy, Fields is hoping to get back to family in Tulsa in the next month. He already has his transportation lined up.

"I'm ready to get back on my feet, get in my truck, and go. I just need some insurance and gas money," said Fields.

Veterans like Mr. Fields can take advantage of the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. HUD-VASH combines Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by VA medical professionals. Typical Veterans using the program are actively in the recovery process from mental health or substance abuse issues and are seeking stable housing to expedite their return to society. HUD-VASH assists the largest number of Veterans who have experienced long-term or repeated homelessness of all programs, and of those Veterans in the program, 91 percent remain housed.

The transition from life on the streets, or a shelter, to supportive housing, is a community effort and an exercise in building trust.

"It is not always easy for us to build rapport with homeless Veterans from the initial encounter," said Price. "Our community partners help tremendously by utilizing their services to build rapport with the homeless population and then make referrals to us once someone identifies as a Veteran."

Outside agencies also assist the VA tackle homelessness by providing services for Veterans who are not eligible for VA healthcare.

"An other-than-honorable or a bad-conduct discharge is a huge barrier for Veterans when it comes to obtaining employment, which can often lead to homelessness," said Price.

The journey undertaken by the HMMMV Team never really ends—it simply pauses to resupply, regroup and replay the day’s activities, successes and moments of opportunity. During her 100-mile, daily commute to building 71, Price has time to reflect on the day and why she continues to put forth her all for Veterans she has never met.

"I do it for my father as he died before I could understand how his experiences in Vietnam shaped who he was," said Price. "I couldn’t help him, but by doing the work that I do with the VA, I’m able to help someone else’s father, husband, or child."

For more information on VA North Texas’ Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program, call 1-800-849-3597, extension 78955.
Glen Davis can be found eating lunch with his wife, LaShun, every Monday through Friday, at the Dallas VA Medical Center, rain or shine. In fact, Mr. Davis spends about 35 hours per week at Dallas VA Medical Center. Davis is not an employee, nor a volunteer—he’s much more than that. To the staff and the many Veterans who work and utilize the Dialysis and Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) clinics, Mr. Davis is family.

Texas native Glen Davis served as a combat engineer in the U.S. Army from 1989 to 1995. During his time in uniform, Davis served at Fort Hood, Texas, Germany and was an attached member of the storied Big Red One, 1st Infantry Division, during Operation Desert Storm. Davis joined 12,000 fellow soldiers and 7,000 pieces of equipment in spearheading the armored attack into Iraq that enabled the critical breach of Iraqi defenses.

Unfortunately, within a short amount of time, the same medical issues that ended a military career surfaced and added to the grave reality of a systemic lupus diagnosis, a spinal tumor that took away much of Davis’ mobility and lupus-nephritis that caused kidney failure.

“Guys like me, in a chair, get together to keep on living. I do it for me and for my family, as family is everything. I was scared. My family was scared.”

Confined to a wheelchair, Davis was transferred from the VA facility in Temple to the Dallas VA Medical Center in 2001 for surgeries and subsequent long-term care in the SCI and Dialysis clinics. Mr. Davis has surrounded himself with diverse surrogate families at Dallas VA. Because of the lupus-nephritis, Davis must undergo four hours of dialysis, three days per week, in addition to continued rehabilitation in the SCI clinic, two days per week.

Creating these surrogate relationships with staff and his fellow Veterans has served Davis well during the thousands of trips and hours at Dallas VA over the last 16 years.

“I treat dialysis like a part-time job,” said Davis. “I know I have to get up each morning and do what I need to do to keep living. I do it for me and for my family, as family is everything.”

On a typical day, the clinic will see at least 80 patients over two shifts. For the clinicians, specialists and support staff who administer life-saving treatment to these 80 patients each day, their efforts are much more than just a list of tasks.

“If they come to our clinic, it’s very serious,” said Nasreen Parupia, Dialysis Unit Clerk. “It’s tough for them to come three times per week for a lifetime. Knowing this, we remain positive and look at them as more than just a patient.”

Dialysis is a serious, lifetime journey that requires support from family, friends and staff during every step of the process. “The people who come to our clinic aren’t just patients, we look after them like family,” said Parupia.

The term ‘breaking bread’ is often associated with informality, thankfulness, friendliness and family. Mr. Davis’ would never miss the chance to break bread with his bride during his daily VA visits. After all, family is everything.

Dallas’ Dialysis clinic is the largest in the entire VA system. A significant remodel in 2014 incorporated holistic design elements and amenities to augment the whole health and healing process for each patient.

“TUG’s have made cart transport much safer for our employees. We can provide better, timely customer service during meals to our Veterans as employees are not spending time walking back and forth from the kitchen with the carts.”

—Traci Steinert
Chief of Nutrition and Food Services

Yes, robots—silver clad mobile delivery systems bringing meal trays to in-patient units, known simply as TUG. Dallas VA Medical Center is home to 35 Aethon TUG autonomous delivery robots that enhance hospital automation and improve the delivery and retrieval process across all major facility functions. Dallas VA moves an immense amount of materials through hallways and elevators to patient units, requiring a complex internal logistics plan that can have implications on key tenants like cost, quality and safety. TUG robots automate the delivery of these materials and free clinical and service employees to focus on patient care.

TUG's improve patient and employee satisfaction in Dallas by improving processes essential to proper care and treatment.

The TUG uses smart autonomous navigation that utilizes a map of the hospital translated into a facility layout programmed with routes including use of elevators, auto-opening doors, delivery points and charging stations. TUG uses the on-board map for guidance and calculates its location in real-time through an algorithm. It uses its on-board sensors to adjust changing hallways in real-time to safely navigate around people and obstacles while always staying on track with its built-in map. TUG is self-charging and upon completing a task delivery it returns to the charging dock. This charging allows TUG’s to run 10 hours or more at a time. With the continued efficiencies realized by TUG’s in food delivery, their increased utilization in other employee intensive areas is being considered. Per developer, Aethon, TUG robots make over 5 million deliveries in a hospital setting each year throughout the United States.

“Long-term plans include pharmacy TUG’s being utilized to deliver medications within the facility,” said Steinert. “We are also working with Logistics and Environmental Management Service on how TUG’s can be applied to their daily operations.”

VA North Texas Health Care System is committed to realizing efficiencies and enhancing the patient and employee experience, even if that means adding one, or 35, four foot tall robots, to the team.
Clinic Updates

① ScriptCenter prescription kiosk improves Bonham patient satisfaction

The Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center’s Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program recently implemented a secure kiosk to ensure 24/7 prescription pickup for the 202-bed domiciliary’s patient population.

ScriptCenter is a pharmacy kiosk implemented to reduce pharmacy pickup window traffic and improve patient satisfaction by allowing Veterans to pick up their prescriptions and medical supplies without waiting in line, and even when the pharmacy is closed. ScriptCenter also reduces trips to the pharmacy by the patients and nursing staff by transitioning domiciliary prescriptions to an alternate pickup location located in the domiciliary.

“We remain committed to serving our domiciliary patients through high-quality residential rehabilitation and treatment services. Our patients’ health care and access to their medications are areas we constantly strive to enhance and improve.”

—Kimberly Coleman Prier
Chief of the Bonham Domiciliary

Since implementation, the facility has realized a 33% increase in medication compliance while ensuring a safe and secure patient transition into a lifestyle of self-care and personal responsibility.

② Dallas opens newly renovated inpatient unit

Dallas VA opened its newly renovated medical, surgical and oncology unit on May 16.

The 12-bed inpatient unit combines the latest technological interventions with a serene patient-centered environment for Veteran healthcare and treatment. The upgrades include private rooms with hotel like furnishings, flat screen TVs, recliner chairs, private lockers, noise meters, tele-monitoring and a bed management system.

Some of the new technological features include bed alarms integrated into the call light system, ceiling lifts inside the patient room and bath room, computer on wheels with medication cabinets, and disposable curtains. Each of these features will enhance patient safety and improve the amount of time nursing and physician staff spends at the bedside.

The patient-centered environment is complete with upgraded amenities, enhanced patient privacy, and an open concept nurses’ station. Earth toned décor, and upgraded bed furnishings make the medical unit look and feel more like a hotel than a hospital.

③ Meet the interim VANTHCS Director

Kendrick Brown was appointed Interim Director on May 1, 2017. Previously serving as Associate Director of VA North Texas Health Care System since Jul. 2016, he managed areas of Logistics, Engineering, Human Resources, Pharmacy, Prosthetics, Health Information Management, and Fiscal Services.

Formerly serving as Chief, Engineering Service at VANTHCS since 2009, Mr. Brown chaired or co-chaired various committees as well as participated in workgroups at the national level. His role as Chief gave him direct management and oversight for more than 200 employees with diverse responsibilities, including medical equipment support, patient transportation, and project facilitation, with facility operations across three North Texas facilities and multiple community based outpatient clinics.

Brown entered the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1996 as a Technical Career Field Candidate. He has served in varied capacities in VA and has advanced through the leadership ranks of Engineering Service from Projects Supervisor, Associate Chief to selection as Chief. Brown received also received certification as a program/project manager through the Federal Acquisition Academy.

④ Tele-Town Hall connects 850 Veterans with VANTHCS leadership

VANTHCS held its second Veteran Tel-Town Hall on June 8th that gave some 850 active patients the opportunity to engaged with senior system leadership on various topics including access to care, facility services, kudos and lessons-learned.

Over a 60-minute period, leadership provided updates on recent patient experience developments and gathered input via several polling questions encouraging participation and feedback from the Veterans listening to the town hall. Those asked to participate in the town hall were Veterans who had used primary care services at the Fort Worth Clinic over a three-month period.

★★★
Skin cancer: I earned it. No excuses.

I think it goes without saying that most people would rather not have to walk around with two large bandages on their face.

Though the temptation to weave an exciting story about said bandages involving the rescue of a basket full of puppies from a fire or even a mysterious underground boxing match, the truth is anything but heroic or intriguing. The truth involves words that nobody wants to hear or entertain as part of their life: skin cancer. But I earned it. No excuses.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), skin cancer is the leading form of cancer in the United States. Exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UV) from the sun is the prime risk factor for skin cancer. The two most common types are basal cell and squamous cell cancer. Less common, but more deadly, is melanoma, which forms in darker parts of the skin, such as moles. In my case, though I seemingly managed to avoid it for 41 years, basal cell carcinoma (BCC) were the three words uttered by my dermatologist on a cloudy Dallas afternoon. But I earned them. No excuses.

My relationship with skin cancer likely began as a young boy. Despite being slathered in Coppertone, I could always count on seeing a red face staring back at me in the mirror. Fast forward a few years to my two decades in the military when remembering to wear sunscreen took a back seat to missions that included hundreds of hours in the helicopter's glass cockpit. Though the temptation to weave an exciting story about said bandages involving the rescue of a basket full of puppies from a fire or even a mysterious underground boxing match, the truth is anything but heroic or intriguing. The truth involves words that nobody wants to hear or entertain as part of their life: skin cancer. But I earned it. No excuses.

Almost all BCC’s occur on parts of the body excessively exposed to sun — especially the face, ears, neck, scalp, shoulders and back. Both long-term sun exposure over your lifetime and occasional extended, intense exposure (typically leading to sunburn) combine to cause damages that lead to BCC. So of course, I had several spots extracted for study during this inaugural visit, and to my amazement, had no cancers to speak of. Truth be known, after hearing this good news, I truly felt as if I would never get skin cancer. But I earned it. No excuses.

It was my daughter who made me aware of a couple of irregular markings on my arm. Several samples were taken on my arms and back, but it was one question levied by my dermatologist brought instantaneous fear: How long have you had these spots on your face? Dumbfounded, he handed me a mirror and pointed out three spots that concerned him. Since I didn’t see anything other than a couple of small red spots I saw everyday while shaving, I was confident that nothing was amiss. I left the dermatologist office with two large bandages on my face. Two days later, the dermatologist called to advise that all three biopsies came back as BCC—skin cancer. I earned them. No excuses.

Dermatologists report that more and more people in their twenties and thirties are being treated for skin cancer. Most can be cured if caught and treated, early. If left untreated, the cancer can spread to surrounding areas and nearby tissues and bone. Anyone with a history of sun exposure can develop BCC, however, people who are at highest risk have fair skin, blond or red hair, and blue, green, or grey eyes. Those most often affected are older people, but as the number of new cases has increased sharply each year in the last few decades, the average age of patients at onset has steadily decreased.

Fair skin, blond hair, blue eyes and just out of my thirties: Check. But I was lucky. More dissections, stitches, bandages, office visits and awkward conversations preceded what I can happily report is a face, free of BCC. Since BCC can come back, my new morning regime includes generous application of 70 SPF sunscreen.

I may have unintentionally earned my skin cancer, but I learned a great lesson. Take an active interest in your health. No excuses. Trust me, you don’t want to earn it.

SKIN CANCER FACTS:

- Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a proven human carcinogen
- Skin cancer affects anyone, all ethnicities, skin tones, ages
- 1 million cases of basal cell carcinoma are diagnosed in the U.S. each year
- Half of all Americans who live to 50 will have basal cell or squamous cell carcinoma at least once
- Melanoma accounts for less than one percent of skin cancer cases, but a person dies from it every 54 minutes
- Regular use of SPF 15 or higher sunscreen reduces carcinomas and melanomas by up to 50 percent
- Protect the skin by wearing wide-brim hats, long-sleeve shirts, long skirts, or pants.
- Use sunscreen in winter and on cloudy days, too.

For more information on skin cancer, visit www.veteranshealthlibrary.org and www.skincancer.org.

Faces of Service

VOLUNTEER TO PATIENT: A 50 year history with Dallas VA

The United States Marine Corps has long prided itself in being America’s 9-1-1 force—first-in to the fight. Gilberto Hernandez still lives by this mantra despite having fought in the wars of his beloved Corps in 1980. Hernandez was the very first patient admitted to Dallas VA’s newly renovated medical, surgical and oncology unit on May 16.

The upgrades include private rooms with hotel-like furnishings, flat screen TVs, recliner chairs, private lockers, noise meters, tele-monitoring and a new bed management system. The new amenities are just fine by Hernandez who spent eight years as a 0311-Infantry Rifleman—amphibious warriors who bring freedoms in the chaotic nature of crisis and conflict.

"I’ve always been grateful for VA and although I would rather be heading to California to see my grandson’s college graduation, my stay here has been really good. I’ve been around this facility for almost 50 years so I know I’d be taken care of.”

—Gilberto Hernandez

Born and raised in Dallas, Hernandez first roamed the halls of Dallas VA as a volunteer high school student in the late 1960’s as part of a youth program. Hernandez left Texas in 1972 to join the Marines where his journey took him to Okinawa, Cambodia, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan and throughout the Pacific area of operations. Service and sacrifice are part of the Hernandez heritage—a son followed a brother spent 28 years serving the Nation in the United States Air Force.

Semper fideli, or always faithful—two words first uttered by Hernandez in 1972 that made their home in his heart and soul and never left.

Jeffrey Clapper is the Editor of Pulse and a decorated, disabled, Combat Veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan.
Every member of Plano VA Outpatient Clinic’s (OPC), five Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) recites a simple question several times each day to their patients— What really matters to you?

Since opening its doors to North Texas Veterans in September 2016, the Plano community clinic has served as an innovator and incubator for success in patient centered and whole health delivery. At the heart of VA’s patient centered care is the desire to explore what matters most to Veterans, in part to help each person redesign a sense of meaning and purpose and primarily as the foundation to build a partnership for designing a personalized health plan. The 10,000-square foot Plano OPC includes a staff of 45 offering primary care services, specialty care, mental health, telemedicine, laboratory, x-ray and alternative therapies to some 4,100 enrolled Veterans. Plano OPC’s short wait time, access to care and level of services are popular to the growing Veteran population of North Texas.

But perhaps the most used and valued service provided by employees of the Plano clinic isn’t listed on a website or brochure.

“It’s all about listening to the patient,” said Myke Prier, Plano OPC operations manager and disabled Veteran. “This allows the teams to not only treat acute issues, but also provides education and support that will help the patients move towards lifestyle changes.”

The diversity of the Plano OPC patient population equals the specific individual health needs of each of the veterans, ranging in age from 22 to 95, from World War II to service in Iraq and Afghanistan. This diversity and specificity of needs means that there is no typical day for the employees of Plano OPC, with employee communication, teamwork and the ability to educate dictating its success.

Each PACT, which includes a physician (MD), Registered Nurse (RN), Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN), a clerk and a dedicated health coach, PACT’s follow a Health for Life model that uses health coaching in conjunction with traditional medicine to optimize health and healing, facilitated by experienced and dedicated PACT employees.

“Everyone member of the team plays a key role,” said Prier. “It’s usually the LVN that introduces the whole health concept to the patient, continues that conversation during each visit and makes referrals to the health coaches.”

Plano LVN’s play a significant role in the application and fostering of practical knowledge of human behavior, motivations, and reactions that ensure a working, effective partnership between patients, family and staff members.

“We’re educators and we make every engagement solely about the patient,” said Sophia Quinones, Plano OPC LVN. “The PACT sits together and communicates throughout the day and often huddle to get answers to questions and discuss the best treatment options.”

Part of Quinones’ day as a PACT LVN involves typical tasks such as recording vital signs, immunizations, gathering intake histories and assisting the physician in patient care, but a greater share is spent listening to the Veteran and providing input for modifying patient care plans, considering physical, emotional and social factors.

“We don’t push our patients into care plans. We seek to empower them to take active responsibility for their health and lifestyle,” said Quinones. “Just as we view our PACT members as family, we hold our patient Veterans as extended family members and want to see them healthy and thriving.”

Quinones has spent the last nine years serving Veterans with VA. Her motivation to serve those who have given of themselves for the nation, is simple.

“I couldn’t serve in the military, so this is how I can serve my country, those currently serving and our Veterans.”

said Quinones. “We want to enable our Veterans to achieve what truly matters to them.”

Complimentary Alternative Medicine

A significant tool to the success of a patient centered, whole health for Veterans is the use of Complimentary Alternative Medicine (CAM) which includes mindfulness-based stress reduction, chiropractic care, acupuncture, yoga, tai chi, vitamins and supplements. Studies by VA’s War-Related Illness and Injury Center show that many Veterans are using CAM to augment traditional medicine for common ailments like chronic pain and arthritis, and for serious conditions like Alzheimer’s and PTSD.

Plano OPC is the first such facility of its kind within VA to embrace and adopt several CAM services, augmented with staple whole health and nutrition classes and the MOVE! Weight Management Program for Veterans. These services are facilitated by dedicated health coaches that act as the fifth member of each PACT.

Plano OPC Health Coaches introduce benefits and tailor coaching to the Veteran’s responses to VA’s Health for Life Personal Health Inventory (PHI) results. The PHI is self-assessment tool to help people explore areas of their life.

The assessment opens with a question common to Plano PACT professionals— What really matters to you—and further focuses on sleep, diet, relationships, energy levels, exercise and opportunities for growth. These answers help create a care and treatment plan that helps Veterans realize goals that could be as varied as waking up each day without pain, enjoying time with family and friends or finding a suitable job.

The true measure of success with any CAM program can best be conveyed through the success stories of the patients who overcame lifestyle roadblocks and fears to enjoy progress and a better life.

“We have a patient who came to a group session and admitted that she hadn’t been out of bed for five years,” said Kathryn Eggers, Plano Health Coach. “After completing our nine-week program, she was active, working out, practicing mindfulness and had abandoned her walker. Her family who hadn’t seen her in six months didn’t even recognize her.”

In fact, that patient will soon begin volunteering with the Plano coaches to mentor other Veterans who are wanting to make lasting changes that can improve their health and quality of life.

“It’s been a real change in conversation for the those coming from traditional primary care areas. We don’t just want to know what’s physically wrong with our patients, we want the Veteran to take control of their own health.”

—Tyra Johnson, Plano Health Coach

Enrollment in the Clinic is open and Veterans can call 972.801.4200 to move their Primary Care to Plano.

It means so much to coaches when we see these life-changing results,” said Eggers.

Terms like mindfulness and services like acupuncture and chiropractic care are largely unknown to many Veterans and the VA facilities that they use. As continued research on CAM is done by VA and other experts, the findings will guide VA policymakers and help determine which therapies have enough evidence base to be further incorporated into Veterans’ care beyond the doors of Plano OPC.

“We’re really at the starting point of what VA can do,” said Johnson. “We’re already testing out new classes and programs that can reach a greater group of patients and address several the lifestyle driven diseases and conditions like hypertension and type 2 diabetes that are unfortunately all too common among the Veteran population we see here in Plano.”

In 2012, VA with the help of Congressman Sam Johnson set out to bring convenient outpatient services to a growing number of Plano area Veterans. Nearly five years later, area Veterans and employees alike are enjoying integrative health services to augment the healing process, with plans to further expand access to care.

“We’ve received a lot of positive feedback from the Veterans in the nine months we’ve been open,” said Prier. “Our plan is to continue expanding access to services and eventually meet our 6,000 patient capacity.”
Dallas library technician named best in federal government

Jennea Augsbury spends a large portion of her day processing large article files for use by physicians, researchers and other medical professionals at the second largest medical facility in all of VA.

As a leading teaching, research and treatment facility serving 123,000 patients, the flow of critical data and information at VA North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS) is constant and time sensitive. As lead library technician and acting service chief due to vacancies, Augsbury embrace several roles over a 15-month period and was recognized as the 2016 Federal Library Technician of the Year on May 9th at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.

Augsbury, a 24 year VA employee, spearheaded a library that not only assists researchers and medical professionals, but also provides Veterans assistance in job searches, resumes, access to their MyHealtheVet and eBenefit accounts, email access and information on health conditions.

Despite lacking a service chief and medical librarian for over a year, the expectation was for the library to continue its critical services.

“It was important that services were continued without interruption to the medical center staff as we support them in their efforts in providing care to our Veterans,” said Augsbury.

To maintain the library’s services during this period, Augsbury coached and mentored other library technicians on various library-service-related functions, including how to process the critical large article files through OCLC, the Online Computer Library Center. In addition to developing informational materials for distribution at new employee orientations, Augsbury analyzed statistical data of medical journal usage and recommended the removal of several titles from the library’s annual order, saving VANTHCS thousands of dollars.

The key to success in this environment was getting and staying caught up on the myriad of functions and tasks within the library that enable patient-centered care and treatment to our nation’s heroes.

“The award is nice as it’s truly a culmination of all the exceptional performances by the library staff. Taking care of our Veterans requires dedication and team work. I’m glad that I could contribute to these efforts.”

— Jennea Augsbury

Dallas nurse awarded 2017 D Magazine Excellence in Nursing Award

A Dallas VA Medical Center Rheumatology Nurse Darlene Townsend was recognized for her leadership and for selflessly going above and beyond in patient care.

D Magazine editors received 374 nominations, selected the best ones, and sent finalists to a panel of registered nurses in various fields. Townsend, who has served the Dallas VA Medical Center for 41 years, was ultimately selected from a pool of some 20,000 nursing professionals in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

“Darlene provides exceptional care to veterans,” said Jiby Mathew, Dallas VA Rheumatology Nurse Practitioner. “She consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty to meet the needs of anyone that comes to her.”

Townsend was specifically recognized for her patient education and organizational skills, ensuring that Veterans can effectively communicate with physicians, nurses and other medical professionals in matters concerning medication refills and renewals, lab reports and other critical patient-centered care issues.

They were coined the Greatest Generation by acclaimed journalist and author, Tom Brokaw. They grew up during the Great Depression—men and women born between 1914 and 1929.

When World War II became reality for Americans after Pearl Harbor, 16 million of them answered the call to serve at home and abroad during what would become the deadliest and most destructive war in history.

This Greatest Generation came home from war and humbly built our nation through blood, sweat, tears and loyalty to family and country. 400 of these World War II Veterans—our heroes—die each day. Fewer than 600,000 of the 16 million who served, survive. Texas is home to 35,000 of these Veterans, most quietly living into their nineties, many receiving medical care and benefits through VA.

This Greatest Generation was the model of the VA core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence. These actions brought freedom and opportunity to many and defined history as we know it, today. VA’s core values are who we are, our culture, and how we care for our Veterans and their families. Our debt to these heroes will never fully be repaid—it’s immense, and in keeping with the service and sacrifice of those who have borne the battle for our country and the world.

It is an honor to serve those who have given so much. Thank you for your service.
### VA Health Care Near You

**Dallas VA Medical Center** 800-849-3597 or 214-742-8387  
**Bonham – Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center** 800-924-8387 or 903-583-2111

#### Outpatient Clinics
- **Bridgeport** 940-627-7001  
- **Dallas – Polk Street** 214-372-8100  
- **Denton** 940-891-6350  
- **Fort Worth** 800-443-9672 or 817-730-0000  
- **Granbury** 817-326-3902  
- **Greenville** 903-450-1143  
- **Plano** 972-801-4200  
- **Sherman** 903-487-0477  
- **Tyler Primary Care** 855-375-6930 or 903-266-5900  
- **Tyler Specialty Care** 855-375-6930 or 903-590-3050

#### Vet Centers
- **Dallas County Vet Center** 972-288-8030 or 972-288-8030  
- **Dallas Vet Center** 214-361-5896 or 877-927-8387  
- **Fort Worth Vet Center** 817-921-9095 or 817-921-9095  
- **Tarrant County Vet Center** 817-274-0981 or 817-274-0981

#### Telephone Care
- **Prescription Refills** 888-364-5227 or [ww.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)  
- **Telecare** 800-677-8289  
- **Telenurse** 888-252-9970

#### Outpatient Pharmacies
- **Dallas** 214-857-0556  
- **Bonham** 903-583-6255  
- **Fort Worth** 817-882-6000  
- **Tyler** 903-583-6255  
- **Spinal Cord Injury** 214-857-1782

#### More VA Services
- **VA Benefits** 800-827-1000  
- **Health Care Benefits** 877-222-8387  
- **VA Health Resource Center** 866-393-9132  
- **Dallas Fisher House** 214-857-4401 or 214-854-4400  
- **Chaplain Service**  
  - **Bonham** 903-583-6280  
  - **Dallas** 214-857-1070  
  - **Fort Worth** 817-335-2202 (x23330)  
- **Recreation Therapy**  
  - **Bonham** 903-583-6396  
  - **Dallas** 214-857-1270  
  - **Fort Worth** 817-730-0000 (x23327)  
- **Social Work** 214-857-0388 or 214-857-0367  
- **Women’s Clinic**  
  - **Dallas** 214-857-4800  
  - **Fort Worth** 817-730-0000 (x233126)  
- **Voluntary Services**  
  - **Bonham** 903-583-6283  
  - **Dallas** 214-857-1060  
  - **Fort Worth** 817-730-0078  
  - **Comprehensive** 214-857-4182  
- **Homeless Center**

#### Crisis Hotlines
- **Veterans Crisis Line** 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)  
- **Women Veterans Hotline** 855-VA-WOMEN (829-6636)  
- **Combat Call Center** 877-WAR-VETS (877-927-8387)  
- **National Call Center for Homeless Veterans** 877-424-3838

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**Our patients are our Heroes**

Veterans serving Veterans

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I’m free of hepatitis C  
You can be, too

Tens of thousands of Veterans enrolled in VA care have been cured of hepatitis C.

Ask about hepatitis C testing and treatment. Learn more at [www.hepatitis.va.gov](http://www.hepatitis.va.gov)