



# 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

BECAUSE WE CARE, WE WILL.



**Veterans Health Administration**  
VA North Texas Health Care System

DALLAS | BONHAM | FORT WORTH | TYLER | POLK STREET | PLANO  
BRIDGEPORT | DENTON | GRANBURY | GREENVILLE | SHERMAN

## FROM OUR DIRECTOR

### **VA North Texas enjoyed a year of growth, opportunity, and change in 2017.**

We said farewell to Director Jeff Milligan as he was promoted to the next tier, leading the VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network and its 7 medical centers throughout the state. Through his leadership, VA North Texas realized significant growth in access and became the best in all of VA for ORYX and HEDIS, inpatient and outpatient clinical quality measures.

As the new VA North Texas Director, a retired U.S. Air Force physician, disabled Veteran and patient at our Dallas facility, I am proud to stand ready in service to our nation's heroes. My priorities forging ahead through 2018 and beyond are simple:

- Continue to improve patient access to care through greater choice
- Improve the patient experience
- Modernize our systems
- Focus our resources and hire the best professionals to address staffing needs
- Improve the timeliness of care according to patient's desire - bottom line
- Address and prevent Veteran suicide

Every one of our 5,700 employees are in the healthcare delivery and improvement business. While much work is yet to be done in moving every patient experience from good to great, we've made considerable progress thanks to ongoing renovations, renewed methodology, and adherence to our ICARE values. Our patients are now seen faster than the private sector with a 10-percent improvement in wait times since 2014. A 2016 Rand Corporation study of 47 total outpatient quality healthcare measures showed VA was better in 45 and the same as the remaining two, when compared to the private sector.

North Texas is expecting a 40-percent growth rate in the Veteran population by 2027. In addition, many of our underserved war Veterans from campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq are projected to seek VA care in the next few years. To best serve our current and future patients we're examining our processes and adding services based on the needs of our growing population. Initiatives like our new Bravo Clinic that provides an evening option for primary care, Telehealth, and same-day access to primary care as well as Own the Moment customer service education for our employees are moving the needle from average and good patient experiences, to the greatness that each Veteran so richly deserves.

VA North Texas will have a bias for action in 2018. Our job as professionals is not complete until those we serve know what we can do for them, what they must do for themselves, and a bond of trust is established through compassionate and empathetic care.

In your service,

**Stephen R. Holt, MD, MPH, MSNRS**

*Director*





VA North Texas Health Care System strives to be a provider and employer of choice. When Veterans have the option to choose VA or not, sometimes their loyalty is decided by various conditions not related to their clinical health. A patient's overall experience and perception of VA care encompasses every aspect of their visit ~ from the parking garage to lunch in the cafeteria.

It's a customer service principle that is continually in development – the Veteran and Employee experience. It turns out that Maya Angelou's quote, "... People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel," goes beyond the medical condition of feelings.

When a patient receives top notch care in a timely manner from a trusted medical expert, that automatically means they consider their VA experience a success, right? Not so in many cases. Other factors influence their visit, and perceptions of family members are also part of the mix. It's up to each employee to make sure they contribute to a patient's positive experience.

Sometimes it's not enough that VA hospitals perform better than non-VA hospitals for most outcome measures. A helpful, friendly and respectful staff goes a long way to ensure Veterans keep coming back for VA care. Another great quote you might hear around VA North Texas is from Dr. Stephen Holt, VA North Texas director:

**“ You are the right team and now is the right time to move from good to great as an organization.”**

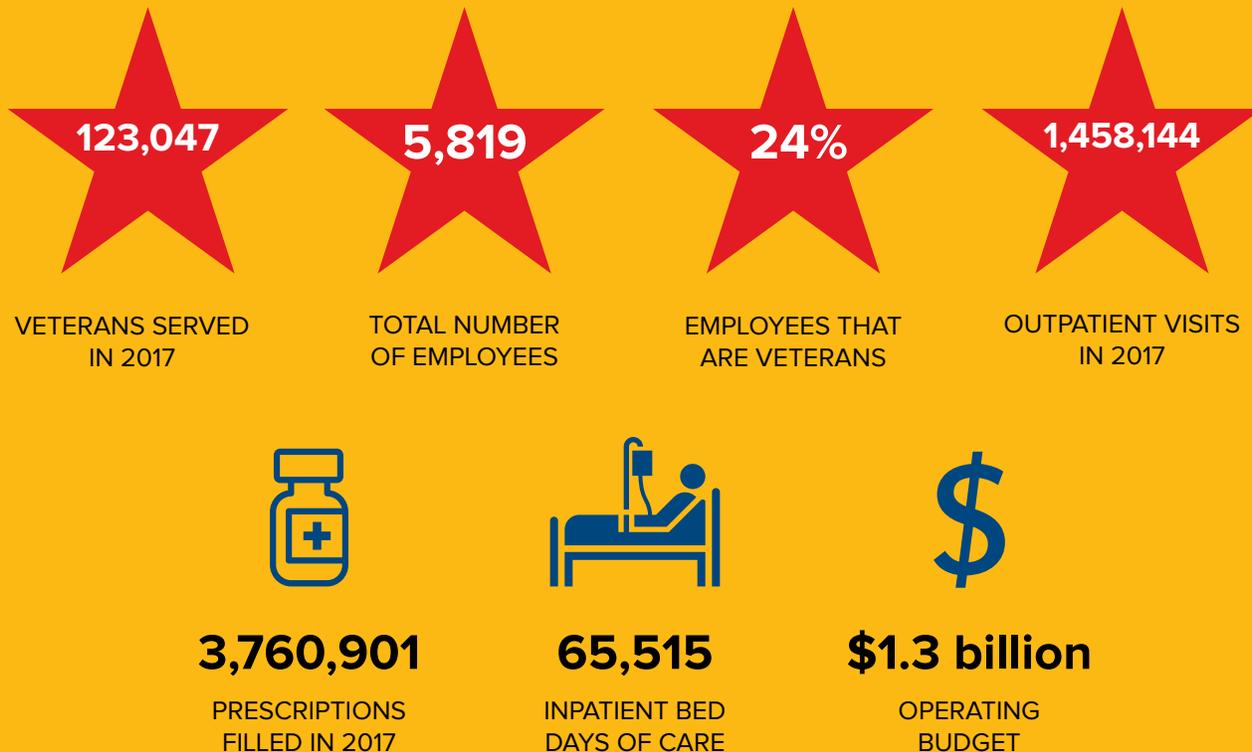
VA North Texas is in the people business. Investment in a well-trained, Veteran-centric staff to provide and support the best health care experience possible is a noble mission for those who have 'borne the battle.' They deserve no less.



# HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAM

- Health Care for Homeless Veterans programs in Dallas, Bonham and Tyler connected with approximately **2,957** homeless Veterans.
- Fort Worth Outreach Program – **1788** Veteran contacts
- Homeless Mobile Medical and Mental Health Vehicle spent four days per week in the community with **670** Veteran contacts
- Homeless Women Veterans Program completed **92** contacts.
- Assistance to find independent housing for **31** Veterans via the Peer Housing Locator Assistance Group program
- Approximately **3,180** Veterans served in Community Referral and Resource Centers
- HUD/VASH leased **1,250/1,330** vouchers (93.5%), **840** children and dependents, **40%** chronic homeless
- Homeless Stand Downs in Dallas, Fort Worth, Sherman and Denton served **554** Veterans
- Homeless Hotline received **1,616** calls for second highest call volume in the nation.
- Employment programs served **657** Veterans and paid **\$1,406,445** in salaries
- Occupancy rate of **87%** maintained for **99** contract beds with successful discharge rate of **79%**
- Occupancy rate of **91%** maintained for **194**-bed Grant and Per Diem program with successful discharge rate of **64%**
- Occupancy rate for the year was **87%** for 40-bed Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans program with successful discharge rate was **68%**

## THE NUMBERS



# NURSING SERVICES

VA North Texas nurses continue to achieve outstanding patient outcomes. Innovative new practices, groundbreaking research, and advanced professional nursing practices expand and strengthen a shared governance framework on our journey to Magnet status. Magnet recognition is the highest and most prestigious distinction a healthcare organization can receive from the American Nurses Credentialing Center for nursing excellence and high-quality patient care.

Nurses are driving a strategic plan to investigate and promote best practices. Partnership with the Nurse Leadership Council fosters an environment of autonomy and empowerment for staff to collectively contribute to nursing practice and Veteran experience. Nurse-led initiatives and evidence-based projects were behind many improvements made this year.

- Shhh "Silence Helps Heal our Heroes" noise reduction
- Reduction of falls and catheter-associated urinary tract infections
- Standardized patient white boards improved communication between the care team, patient and family
- Nurse First Look in the Emergency Department
- Delirium bundle for ventilated and non-ventilated patients
- AIDET model to improve patient and staff satisfaction and perception
- Interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary huddles/rounds for patient flow



*Nurse Jomy Mathew assists patient with eye exam*

Nurses work under stressful conditions and a demanding work environment. Employee engagement activities focus on support and satisfaction, including anti-bullying/harassment campaigns and career development/succession planning. These combined with continued growth of scholarship opportunities support a low turnover rate for nurses at VA North Texas. In FY 17, the RN turnover rate was lower than the national average of 3.6%. Strategic recruitment fairs reduced vacancy rates in Dallas and Bonham.

There's always a demand for nurses, and opening 7C-400 in May 2017 required specialized skills in mental health and acute care. 7C-400 developed an inter-service collaborative for behavioral care to meet the needs of this population (especially during the acute phase).

USE THE AIDET MODEL FOR RESPECT WHEN INTERACTING WITH VETERANS AND CO-WORKERS





*Restorative Tech Ophelia Strange assists Veteran Buddy Kindle*



*4C Nurses get positive results with Exparel pilot study for orthopedic patients*



*20 Nurses left Dallas VA to relieve staff at Houston VA during the long hours of Hurricane Harvey*



**CONTINUING IN 2018**

A pilot study began in 2016 to provide orthopedic patients Exparel, a sustainable local anesthetic, to reduce postoperative pain after hip or knee replacement surgery. Administered directly into the surgical site during the procedure, Exparel improves pain management and reduces use of opioids. Patients undergoing total knee replacements showed improved satisfaction and overall decreased length of hospital stay.

# NEW PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

## Tele-Town Hall Meetings

Introduction of tele-town halls to both patient and employee populations proved to be successful in 2017. Veteran opportunities targeted inpatients and Veterans who received primary care within the two previous years. Tele-town halls have greatly increased participation in stakeholder engagement and are convenient to attend via phone versus traveling to a designated location. Veterans and staff have indicated this to be their preferred method in town hall communications and includes an opportunity to answer survey questions and speak to executive staff!

## TUG Robots

A new tool in patient care at VA North Texas, TUG robots deliver meal trays to inpatient units freeing staff for other face to face encounters with the patient. Programmed with the hospital layout, the TUG returns to a docking station when its battery needs charging.

## New Patient ID Tool

Armband includes patient photo and branch of service as well as color indicators for fall risk or other precautions.

## Text Appointment Reminders

Veterans wishing to receive a text clinic reminder can self-enroll by calling 214-742-8387 or 800-849-3597 and press 1. Press 1 again and follow the prompts. Text messages for clinic reminders will begin immediately, and you will no longer receive a reminder call.

## Greenhealth Awards

Dallas and Bonham continued to be good stewards of the environment, receiving national Greenhealth awards for health care facilities that champion green initiatives and sustainability models to reduce its environmental footprint.

## Access and Quality in VA Healthcare [www.accesstocare.va.gov](http://www.accesstocare.va.gov)

This new online tool helps Veterans make informed health care decisions. Wait times, access, timeliness of appointments for specific VA medical centers is available as well as comparisons to private sector hospitals.

# CLINIC NEWS



## Tyler

- Added hearing aid and maintenance services, Psychiatry and Psychology
- Toll-free phone number: 855-375-6930
- Consolidated to one location on S. Broadway
- Expect activation of expansion clinic in 2020

## Plano

- 15-mile eligibility restriction lifted
- Added chiropractic and dry-needle acupuncture services
- Second women's health provider added
- Limited specialty services available, including Hematology/Oncology and Cardiology
- On-sight dietitian
- Site review on-going for Specialty Care Clinic land purchase

## FWOPC

These services were added in 2017

- Same-day mammography
- Cardiac stress tests
- Dermatology



Healing Garden at Bonham Community Living Center



Butterfly release during the opening ceremony of the Healing Garden



Bonham Regional Veterans Day Ceremony is a community event where local students thank Veterans for their service

## Bonham

- Two new Radiology Suites were installed in Building 1 with the most up-to-date technology to treat veterans
- Expanded Specialty Care waiting area with open concept and modern décor
- ScriptCenter Allows Domiciliary patients and nurses to pick up routine, non-controlled medications at the ScriptCenter machine inside the DOM – saves time/trip to Pharmacy and improves efficiency in the DOM
- Greenhealth Emerald Award for excellence and innovation in sustainability
- Domiciliary
  - Increased access with hybrid PTSD program
  - Veteran Resources Center with recovery books and other literature
  - Implemented Discharge Planning Group for continuity of care after discharge
- Community Living Center
  - Healing Garden has increased resident interest and participation in outside relaxation
  - Butterfly Garden is a feature of the Healing Garden that creates a therapeutic atmosphere for dementia residents



Curcia McClure, Julie Harris, Maria Pullins and clerk Tiffina McClendon discuss the day's schedule.

## COMING 2018

Grand Prairie Community Based Outpatient Clinic

# SOCIAL WORK SERVICE



Social Workers have a wide reach at VA North Texas in both the inpatient and outpatient setting because of their mission – to help people solve and cope with problems in their everyday lives. In developing skills and abilities to use their own resources or exploring opportunities in the community, Social Workers seek to improve a Veteran’s overall well-being. These programs were directly impacted by their case management or other intervention:

- Readmission rates decreased for Veterans meeting the high-risk level of follow-up
- Improved access to contract nursing homes
- Improved census in Medical Foster Home program
- Social Work Financial Assistance Program through donors and community partners assisted 85 Veterans
- Transition Care Management (formerly OEF/OIF/OND) provided case management for 392 Veterans who transitioned from DoD to VA.
- Top 20 Facility with highest number of approved family caregivers enrolled
- VA North Texas Social Workers made a significant impact resolving Veteran issues during evacuation of Hurricane Harvey victims to Dallas.
- Social Work Service led the Feds Feed Families food drive with approximately 27,000 pounds.



Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders chose Dallas VA to film an episode of their reality series, ‘Making The Team.’ It was an opportunity for rookies and new recruits to meet true heroes and practice the spirit of the Dallas Cowboys and ‘magic of the star.’

Congressman Pete Sessions (TX-32) met with Veteran stakeholders and the executive leadership team at Dallas VA Medical Center to learn more about care and services. Veterans shared personal experiences and expectations with receiving VA care.





## FISHER HOUSE

Since opening its doors in 2009, Fisher House has been a home away from home for families of Veterans receiving inpatient care at Dallas VA Medical Center. In 2017, approximately 950 families were guests of the Fisher House where staff and volunteers made sure their stay was comfortable with all the conveniences of home.



# ACCESS EXPANSION

## Parking Garages

Adding to the Freedom parking garage that opened in 2012, both the Patriot and Liberty garages opened April 2017 to close the gap in parking challenges at Dallas VA.

## Parking Improvements

The gravel lot near the Fisher House will be paved in 2018.

## 7C-400 Opening

This new inpatient unit dramatically improved the way nursing care and quality of life for Veterans is provided. 7C-400 is a 12-bed nursing unit with private rooms for high frequency monitoring. The unit opened May 2017 for patients with cardiac, telemetry, pulmonary, oncology and acute mental health diagnoses. The unit has telemetry capability, four negative pressure rooms for patients requiring isolation, two radiation rooms, and a dedicated family space (provider/family consultation or quiet reflection).

## Modernization

- Multi-function Devices (MFDs) were refreshed across the organization to improve communication with print and fax capabilities. Additional upgrades coming in FY18.
- 1st Employee Tele-Town Hall Began August 2017. Employees responded they preference for tele opportunities in the evenings
- Halls and Walls project from the main concourse, including Pharmacy and Lab south corridor and clinic waiting areas were upgraded to be quieter and easier or wheelchair and other assistive equipment to maneuver. Future phases of the project will improve privacy and provide charging stations for electronic devices.

## Emergency Department

Expansion will add 30,000 sq ft and renovate 5,000 sq ft. Private bays will be fully tele capable with accommodations for bariatric patients. A central nurses station will increase visibility and Mental Health bays will be in direct view for constant monitoring.



## Looking Ahead

Construction award for an Ambulatory Surgery Center near the Fisher House will accommodate non-emergent day procedures to free surgical suites in the main building for more complicated cases.



*Modernization project*



*Ambulatory Surgery Center*



## SPINAL CORD INJURY (SCI) CENTER

The SCI Center at VA North Texas maintains a high standard of evidence-based care. Front-line staff develop innovative ideas and strategies to challenge Veterans to improve their well-being and be an active member of their own health care team.

Empowering Veterans with SCI to embrace their personal challenges is one of the driving strategies behind complementary and alternative medicine. To expand its holistic approach, SCI developed a Whole Health program using clinical video telehealth where Veterans participated in a 9-week curriculum. Concentrating focus on the patient and his/her personal goals rather than specific injury or illness-related challenges, the Whole Health model looked at the areas of life that affect health, including work environment, relationships, diet and sleep patterns. Based on Veterans' positive results, a similar program is expected for staff.

Acupuncture is another holistic therapy available for SCI patients and is an effective alternative to safely manage chronic pain, stress, and nicotine addiction. A meditation component added to group acupuncture sessions has also been well received. Both these approaches have helped reduce the need for opioid medications.

Providing recreational activities was another area of focus to improve overall well-being for Veterans with SCI. The Adaptive Sports Program introduced an opportunity to play boccia ball. Participants included patients from the acute care unit and Veteran volunteers who use adaptive sports to socialize and engage in activity. Sports and athletics are great motivators and help build self-confidence, especially for this patient population. The SCI Center hopes to integrate more sports to the program in the future as Veterans train for VA competitions, like the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The Dallas Mavericks Wheelchair Basketball team trains at the SCI Center and have been the national champions for several years.

One of 24 SCI Centers in the nation, the VA North Texas SCI Center also serves as a Regional Multiple Sclerosis Center of Excellence and hopes to begin phase 2 construction in the next few years for an SCI Long Term Care Center.

## RESEARCH

### **Amyr Habib, MD**

Glioblastoma is one of the most lethal and common types of brain cancer, accounting for 17% of malignant brain tumors. Dr. Amyr Habib has identified a promising combination of medications, traditionally used in lung cancer and arthritis, that, when used in together, show a significant impact on glioblastoma. Though not yet tested in humans, the combination of the drugs shows significant promise in slowing and reducing glioblastoma. Dr. Habib has been funded by VA's Office of Research and Development, Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development to further explore this process.



### **Houman Khalili, MD**

Approximately 6,000 Veterans are admitted to VA hospitals annually for acute ischemic stroke. Left atrial appendage (LAA) closure is performed to reduce the risk of ischemic stroke from atrial fibrillation (AF), one of the most common causes of ischemic stroke. Though LAA is critical to reducing the risk of stroke, the effects of LAA on other systems has not been well evaluated. Dr. Khalili was funded by a North Texas New Investigator Program award to explore the effects of LAA closure on the release of polypeptides. This project will help us begin to understand if there is a likely association between LAA closure and other conditions.



### **Kyaw Soe, MD**

Dr. Soe received a North Texas New Investigator Program award to study the impact of cross-sex hormone therapy in transgender Veterans. Cross-sex hormone therapy may result in metabolism changes which has possible associations with insulin resistance and lipid disorder. This study is evaluating the effects of cross-sex hormone therapy on blood pressure, body mass index, changes in body fat distribution and abdominal fat tissue changes. Investigators hope to determine the effects of hormone therapy on body metabolism via adipose tissue changes, and results will impact safety and quality of care for this under evaluated population. Dr. Soe has collaborated with Dr. Philipp Scherer, director of Touchstone Diabetes Center at UT Southwestern Medical Center.



### **James LePage, Ph.D.**

Each year over 30,000 Veterans with mental illness or substance use disorders are released from prison. These Veterans encounter significant difficulty returning to the community including high levels of unemployment. Many of these Veterans cannot get to the VA for vocational rehabilitation due to distance and transportation issues. Dr. LePage was funded by VA's Office of Research and Development, Rehabilitation Research and Development to test a distance learning vocational rehabilitation program for veterans with mental illness or substance use disorders who also have histories of legal convictions.





**NATIONAL FORMER  
PRISONER OF WAR RECOGNITION DAY**

VA North Texas was honored to host its annual POW luncheon at Frontiers of Flight Museum at Dallas Love Field Airport, where these heroes enjoyed vintage airplanes and WWII exhibit.

**VA NORTH TEXAS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

- Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs)
- ★ VANTHCS Facilities



4500 S. LANCASTER RD.  
DALLAS, TX 75216  
[www.northtexas.va.gov](http://www.northtexas.va.gov)



**KEEPING THE PROMISE**



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VA North Texas Health Care System