

VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care — Earned by Veterans — Delivered Here —

VA Secretary Wilkie Views Salisbury VA HCS COVID-19 Response Firsthand



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By Amanda Reilly | SALISBURY VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert L. Wilkie paid a visit to three Salisbury VA Health Care System facilities June 10-11, for his very first site visit in the field since COVID-19 restrictions were enacted in March. As a native of North Carolina, Wilkie chose these facilities to hear and see for himself how the measures put in place by the Health Care System have significantly impacted the effects of COVID-19 on our most vulnerable populations and kept their Veterans and staff safe and healthy.

During his visit, the Secretary spoke with Salisbury’s Executive Leadership Team, Veterans receiving care, and staff on the frontlines who have been working diligently throughout the pandemic. Upon arrival to both Salisbury and Charlotte, Secretary Wilkie participated in all screening processes put in place by the facilities, as well as temperature checks, mandatory masking and all other current regulations while on the VA grounds. He spoke with staff directly, to see if they had any needs, and thanked them for all of their hard work. He even participated in a Web-based conference, addressing the Salisbury VA Health Care System’s staff, expressing his appreciation for

TOP PHOTO: VA Secretary Robert Wilkie presents a challenge coin to Charlotte HCC, Pharmacy Supervisor Alyssa Conner, thanking her for her leadership after observing the dynamic teamwork at the Charlotte HCC Pharmacy and seeing how much the staff have been able to accomplish since COVID-19 began. **(Photo by Luke Thompson)** **IN-PHOTO:** Secretary Robert Wilkie discusses local highlights of VA COVID-19 response with Salisbury Health Care System leadership and VISN 6 Network Director DeAnne Seekins. **(Photo by Luke Thompson)**

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Message from the Network Director



June 7th marked the one-year anniversary of the Mission Act go-live. A year ago, we knew that 2020 would be a landmark year with all that the Mission Act outlined for us. However, we had no idea what really was in front of us. June 2020 marked 90 days into the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a country crying out for unity. So many cities faced with demonstrations, a pandemic and too much unknown. VA did not step back, but instead took giant steps forward. We have served our Veterans and their communities during the pandemic, we refused to be silent regarding the state of civil unrest, we are listening to our employees and their stories, we are encouraging all that this is a time to have uncomfortable conversations and we are embracing unity. All of this while we continue to move Veterans Care forward.

As we step back, VA observed the first anniversary of the MISSION Act. Over the last 12 months we have updated our processes, making it more convenient and safer for Veterans to receive care at VA and in the community. We updated our technology-based services just in time, as our telehealth and virtual care appointments have skyrocketed during COVID-19! Our transition to a new third-party administrator went practically unnoticed, and we have enabled

urgent care services in the community.

Our capacity for Caregiver Support has expanded. Through our Veterans Signals survey tool, Veteran trust in VA is higher than ever before. The trust has risen for good reason. During the onset and proliferation of the COVID-19 pandemic, VA — and particularly the professionals in VISA 6 — were able to nimbly adjust operations to continue Veterans' care at the lowest possible risk. Infection rates in our facilities among staff and Veterans are extremely low, due in large part to the agility and advanced capability of our staff. Because we have been fortunate that none of our facilities were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been able to support other organizations.

I'd like to acknowledge the many volunteers who travelled to assist in VA hospitals across the country, where the impact stung mightily. We also have provided staff to help prepare, train and equip the state nursing homes in North Carolina and Virginia. Our assistance to those facilities has meant fewer transfers of COVID-19 patients to our facilities for intensive care. We have been challenged to move judiciously, protecting Veterans' physical safety, along with Veteran and employee psychological safety.

Our nation is desperately searching

for the appropriate pace to reopen businesses and services. It can be stressful not knowing exactly what to do. VA is being extremely cautious in this regard, as the disease remains with us. We are moving forward, but not until high standards are met will we expand services in our facilities. You'll notice these changes as they are slowly, incrementally introduced at each facility.

The incident in Minnesota that incited nationwide civil unrest and social tension has been deeply felt by Veterans and staff. I've opened a dialogue throughout the VISA 6 to address concerns and ensure that everyone in our community feels safe, valued and protected. The recent Supreme Court ruling on LGBTQ+ employment rights further solidifies our commitment to fair treatment, and is supported by VA's Equal Employment Opportunity Office and Zero Tolerance policies.

I look forward to seeing you soon out in the community, but I hope that when I do, you'll be wearing a mask and practicing your physical distancing!

— DeAnne M. Seekins
VISA 6 Network Director

The Durham VA Health Care System Screening Program Adopted Nationally

By Joshua D. Edson
DURHAM VAHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

With some 9 million cases worldwide and 54,000 cases in North Carolina alone, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) shows little signs of slowing down. The effects of the pandemic have had far-reaching implications on our lives. From going to movies to meeting friends for coffee, the simplest social interactions have a new sense of urgency with precautions becoming the new watchword.

Nowhere is this urgency more apparent than in the Durham VA Health Care System

(DVAHCS). From small rural towns in Eastern North Carolina to the growing metropolises of Raleigh-Durham, VA providers must balance the needs of Veterans with COVID-19 safety precautions. It is a balance that requires teamwork, planning, and dedication. Since early March 2020, the DVAHCS has met that balance by implementing a screening process.

The process is a daily ritual of questions designed to provide a level of security and protection against the spread and infection of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). This has been a necessary tool to keep both patients and employees safe, and the screening has been



Sanoj Shakaya, a Lab Technician at the DVAHCS, screens a Veteran patient at the Durham VA breezeway entry point. Since early March 2020, the DVAHCS has implemented screening procedures for all Veterans and employees entering DVAHCS facilities.

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Ollie Hendricks celebrates beating COVID-19 with the Durham VA medical staff.

Local Veteran Leaves Durham VA Health Care System following 2-Month Battle With COVID-19

DURHAM, NC — On Friday, June 26, 2020, the Durham VA Healthcare System honored its longest hospitalized COVID-19 patient as he was released home and reunited with his family following more than two months in the hospital. Ollie Hendricks, a 58-year-old Veteran, was diagnosed with COVID-19 in early April and has fought a long, rough battle, including several stays in the Durham VAHCS intensive care unit, followed by in-patient occupational and physical rehabilitation.

About his experience with the illness, Hendricks was quoted in a local news story, expressing that, “You need to take COVID seriously. Practice social distancing, wear a mask and wash your hands. Trust me, it can kill you — I know, I stared death in the face.”

Hendricks isn’t the first COVID-19 patient to be discharged from the Durham VA Health Care System. But he is getting a special fare-

well from his care team and other hospital staff because they want to make going home even more memorable after such a challenging and scary illness. The Durham VA medical staff celebrated the Veteran’s recovery with an inspiring sendoff back home to his loved ones. Staff gathered near the main medical center’s emergency department entrance at 508 Fulton St, Durham, to cheer for him and offer him a bouquet of balloons. The event received lots of media attention and community support. Hendricks’ recovery is a testament to the excellent medical care the Durham VA provides for our treasured Veterans.

Hampton Veteran Affairs Medical Center Employee and Veteran Beats COVID-19

After a two-month battle with COVID-19, Hampton VA Medical Center employee and U.S. Navy Veteran Wayne Petersen is finally going home.

During the festive send-off, the medical center employees lined the hallways of the large hospital to support their co-worker and to congratulate him on his recovery from the virus.

With the iconic theme song from the movie Rocky playing over the loudspeaker, the hospital staff waved signs, cheered, and applauded for Petersen as he made his way through the hospital.

Petersen was admitted to a community hospital on March 24 and was later transferred to the Hampton VA Medical Center on April 21.

“I came here on a ventilator from Sentara CarePlex out in town. I was in an unconscious state. All I can recall was going to Sentara Emergency Room to be seen,” said Petersen. “Now that I am recovered, I am elated to be going home! I’m super happy.”

As a Veterans Health Administration employee, Petersen had the unique opportunity of having his peers and co-workers provide him round-the-clock care while he battled the persistent virus.

“The Hampton VA staff took excellent care of me. Above and beyond. Everyone was great,” said Petersen. “One staff member that stands about above the rest is Nurse Howard that was working on 3-East at the time that I was there. She took excellent care of me and was constantly checking on me. She really lifted up my spirits telling me, ‘You are going to make it through this! You’re going to be just fine!’ She was really top-notch!”

Petersen’s experience with the virus allowed the Veterans Affairs staff to study the effects of the virus up-close.

“When I woke up, I was here at Hampton VA. I had no idea that



Wayne Peterson is greeted by staff and family as he exits HVAMC

over two weeks had passed,” said Petersen. Seventeen days had passed. “I only thought it all happened ‘yesterday’ as in only maybe a day passed.”

During his final days as a patient at the medical center, Petersen was very appreciative of the care he had received from the attending doctors and nurses.

“There is this stigma and belief that people say, ‘Oh, you don’t want to get seen for anything at the VA! I’m here to say that I experienced none of that stigma,” said Petersen. “As a matter of fact, I experienced the exact opposite of all of that! We truly do take care of our own!”

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Salem VAMC Patients Benefit From Medical Research Opportunity

By Rosaire Bushey | SALEM VAMC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In a first-of-its-kind study, a device using topical wound oxygen for home care therapy has shown that patients who used the device were six times more likely to heal in under 12 weeks, and were six times more likely to see a prevention in the wound reoccurring within 12 months.

Working through the Salem Research Institute, Dr. Aliza Lee, Director of Podiatric Medical Education at the Salem VA Medical Center and Primary Investigator for Salem VAMC, took part in the research project and is one of the authors in a paper that appeared in the March Diabetes Care journal.

“Using oxygen for wound care is a therapy that’s been around for decades,” Lee said. “But we conducted a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial to evaluate how well cyclical topical wound oxygen (TWO2) works for diabetic foot ulcers.”

Patients who qualified for the study were provided a standard of care treatment before using the device, and if they healed more than 30 percent, they were removed from the study. Those who remained received one of two identical devices, one that administered the oxygen therapy, and one that did not.

“The idea behind the placebo, or what we call a sham device, in this case, was to look at data from the device group and a control group,” Lee explained. “All patients received the same dressing and all other care, but those with the actual device were six times more likely to heal in under 12 weeks and were six times more likely to see a prevention in the wound recurring within 12 months.”

The device, which consists of a humidifying unit about the size of a dorm refrigerator, and a cuff that covers the wound area, ‘bathes’ the area with oxygen that aids in the healing process. That it can be used at home

by patients is an enormous benefit, according to Lee.

“Oxygen therapy isn’t new,” she said. “Hyperbaric chambers where the entire body undergoes oxygen pressure have been available for a long time, but they are cumbersome, expensive and not everyone can use it. The home-based therapy can be used by anyone.”

Salem VA Medical Center does not have a hyperbaric chamber, so Lee’s involvement in the research project has allowed Veterans who use the Salem VAMC to take advantage of new technologies they can’t get otherwise.

“The oxygen boot was more likely to keep the wound closed after treatment,” Lee explained. “Normally a wound is healed at the one-year mark, but only to about 80 percent — it never truly gets back to where it was. During that 12 months, it’s still susceptible to breakdown. This technology keeps the skin more normal and for a longer period to get it to that closed point.”

Because the device was considered a ‘no harm’ device, the VA approved it for the study, and Lee said other studies related to the device are being proposed. The next clinical trial will look at how the device works in conjunction with biological wound care, such as grafts.

“Whereas many insurance companies won’t approve the use of a device like this until there is ample evidence, the VA, because it’s considered a ‘no harm’ device, will provide this technology to our Veterans for their benefit,” Lee said. “Now, because of the study and its observed benefits of use, our patients have access to a treatment we couldn’t offer before.”

More than 130 patients have used the therapy at the Salem VAMC to date to aid in the healing process. Patients use the device

for diabetic ulcers, surgical wounds, diabetic wounds, pressure ulcers, burns, and other injuries.

“One of the reasons we wanted to test this device with the diabetic population is that if someone gets an infection and subsequent amputation, half of those people die within five years — that’s a worldwide statistic,” Lee said. “Anything we can do to prevent amputation gets our patients out of that risk category.”



Dr. Aliza Lee has studied the effects of the “Oxygen Boot” device to speed healing of wounds for diabetic foot ulcers, surgical wounds and burns. Faster healing could help extend life for some diabetes patients.



HAMPTON STORY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3



Wayne Peterson leaving Hampton VA, on his way home.

Hampton Veteran Affairs Medical Center Employee and Veteran Beats COVID-19

Hundreds of hospital employees lined the hallways leading from the unit where Petersen was being treated to the main entrance of the hospital where his family was waiting to receive him with open arms.

“Days like today make what we do even more special,” said David Collins, Hampton VA Medical Center Director. “Wayne is a valued member of our medical center team and I could not be prouder of the way our doctors, nurses, and administrative personnel responded to help our teammate and other Veterans fight this virus!”

VA Secretary Wilkie Views Salisbury VA HCS COVID-19 Response Firsthand

their selfless acts and commitment during these “unprecedented” times.

“The importance of military service to America’s safety and security never needs to be explained to North Carolinians. That’s why I was pleased last week to see how well Veterans from the state are being cared for at the Salisbury VA Health Care System and facilities that are part of that system, like the Charlotte Health Care Center,” shared Secretary Wilkie. “The dedication of VA employees at the Salisbury VA Health Care System contributed to the strong national effort VA made for Veterans in the face of COVID-19 and ensured we could keep living up to President Lincoln’s call that we serve those who served this nation in uniform.”

Joseph Vaughn, Executive Director for the Salisbury VA Health Care System indicated that there were several areas of the tour that Secretary Wilkie was particularly impressed with, including the Charlotte Health Care Center’s Dialysis Service and the former Hospice Unit in Salisbury that was transformed into a COVID-19 isolation unit to treat Veterans who were transferred to the Medical Center from two nursing homes in the community. “We are honored the Secretary chose Salisbury as his first stop since the COVID-19 outbreak. His gratitude and support for front-line staff during this time speaks volumes to his practice of servant leadership,” expressed Mr. Vaughn. The Director reported the visit was extremely successful, and the Salisbury VA Health Care System will continue moving forward with continued hard work during these challenging and uncertain times.



On June 11, Charlotte Health Care Center Interim Dialysis Nurse Supervisor Jennifer McClaney-Aiken discusses measures being taken to keep Veterans and staff safe at the facility during COVID-19 with VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. McClaney covered topics including screening patients a second time before they enter. (Photo by Luke Thompson)



Chaplain Service Offers ‘Bread for the Soul’ Program to Staff

Story by David Hodge | RICHMOND VAMC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Each Tuesday at the VA medical center in Richmond, Virginia, a facility chaplain launches a webinar through a screen sharing platform from their office and opens a venue for staff to discuss spiritual health.

Aptly called “Bread for the Soul,” the program invites staff to circle around the digital dinner table and engage in dialogue on a variety of helpful topics.

“The program is chaplain led and speaks to how spirituality can help cope with stress,” said Mark Flores, staff chaplain.

Since March, face-to-face appointments for Veterans have been limited to those that are medically necessary. And, in many cases, health care workers who are on the front lines in the fight against coronavirus tend to spend less time together in social settings.

A small group of clinicians and chaplains collaborated and determined there was a growing need to offer additional spirit-based programs, Flores said. These webinars are always inclusive and remain open to employees of any faith.

Bread for the Soul has brought access to chaplaincy to staff since April. As people learn to adjust to a new way of business after COVID, staff may not have had an option to visit the facility chapel at times.

“This event is really putting us on the radar as a service,” Flores said. “Like a submarine, we are ping-ponging on people’s radars, which is a great opportunity.”

The programs range from academic-style presentations to fluid Q&A discussion surrounding a single theological topic, Flores added. While some programs last 20 minutes, dialogue between presenters and participants has lasted up

Chaplain Robert Franzen mans an informational support table in the main mall area of the Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS). Franzen, a chaplain at CVHCS since last August, is one of several chaplains who work to bring their spiritual services to any staff members in need. (Photo: David Hodge)

to one hour. Topics have included Self-Care to Keep the Soul in Perfect Peace, and Spiritual Journey of Hope in the Midst of Grief and Fighting Fear.

“On average, we’ve had 20 to 30 participants on the webinars viewing and participating in the series,” said Flores, who served as a chaplain for 13 years in the Air Force Reserve before coming to VA.

In addition to webinars, Chaplain Service opened a spiritual hotline for staff and have made their services available three times each weekday in the facility’s main mall area.

It can be imperative to incorporate elements of the mind, body, spirit and social aspects during times of increased stress. To further support staff, Central Virginia VA Health Care System has created several supportive programs to reach anyone who may be in need. These include an employee mental health hotline and a separate weekly webinar series covering important topics.



Chaplain Mark Flores helped bring Bread for the Soul to Central Virginia VA Health Care System staff members in April. Flores served as a chaplain for 13 years in the Air Force Reserves. (Photo: David Hodge)



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The Durham VA Health Care System Screening Program Adopted Nationally

more aware of the need to protect themselves by wearing the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) and it gives Veterans a certain peace of mind to know that we're being vigilant."

The "screeners," as they are called, are employees pulled from various departments throughout their respective medical facilities. From nurses to medical technicians and medical support assistants, everyone is contributing to the effort to protect the facility against the spread of COVID-19.

At the main facility of the DVAHCS, there are three screening points, two of which are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As clinics and departments prepare to expand selective services, there are plans to hire permanent staff to screen potential visitors, employee, and staff. Until the hiring officially begins, screeners such as Sanoj Shakaya, a Marine Corps Veteran and Lab Technician at the DVAHCS, will continue serve on the frontlines.

"I really don't mind doing this," says Sanoj. "I like the fact that I'm doing something to help my fellow Veterans instead of just earning a paycheck. COVID is a crisis and it feels good that I'm doing my part in keeping the virus contained," he said.

At the initiation of the screening process, lines were long and the course of action to

enter the DAVHCS medical facilities was lengthy. It was during this time that the executive leadership team extended an invitation for ideas to expedite the screening process. The result was a QR code known as "ScreenPass," which streamlined the process and removed some of the stress the screeners encountered during heavy traffic hours at the entrances. The "ScreenPass" and all of the screening activities at the DVAHCS have been so successful that some of their practices were adopted by the Veterans Health Administration as a national method for screening at all VA medical facilities.



The COVID-19 pandemic was unexpected and has challenged the DVAHCS to explore non-conventional means for securing and safeguarding the health of the Veterans and the staff. However, this experience has shown that with teamwork, a willingness to explore new ideas, dedication to the I-CARE Values, and some ingenuity, the DVAHCS staff is fully equipped with a cohesiveness that enables success.



Link to ScreenPass:

<https://www.va.gov/covid19screen/>

Scan this code or go to [va.gov/covid19screen](https://www.va.gov/covid19screen)



For more information on how the DVHACS is screening and treating COVID-19, please visit https://www.durham.va.gov/pressreleases/DVAHCS-Explanation_of_Screenings_and_Treatments_for_COVID_19_Coronavirus.asp.

Virus, Not Hurricane, Calls Nurse Away From Home

By Rosaire Bushey | SALEM VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

During VA's COVID-19 response, VISN 6 Incident Command Center has been working diligently with facilities to coordinate our DEMPS volunteers to assist VA facilities in need across the nation, facing more critical challenges. Currently, VISN 6 has completed 83 (14-day) missions, with 21 volunteers currently deployed, and six more staff ready to deploy. VISN 6 has also supplied 18 volunteers to assist with VA's 4th mission, supporting community health care organizations by supporting State Veterans Homes in Virginia. The network has also provided support to North Carolina State Veterans Homes. Our volunteers are typically on two-week rotations, although there are some staff who have committed to serve in extended deployments.



When Johnny Turner first volunteered for the Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS), he had no idea that it would be a pandemic that would require him to deploy.

When Johnny Turner arrived at the Salem VA Medical Center to take the position as assistant nurse manager of the Progressive Care Unit the week of Thanksgiving 2019, he also signed up for the Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS), thinking perhaps one day a tornado, hurricane or other natural disaster might take him out of southwestern Virginia to help those in need.

In January, Turner welcomed his first grandchild, the son of his daughter, an emergency room nurse at Carilion Franklin Memorial in Rocky Mount, Va., where Turner worked from 2005.

By April however, it was apparent that if he were called to fulfill a DEMPS mission, it would be COVID and not a hurricane that would call him away.

"When I arrived, they briefed about DEMPS as part of the new employee orientation, and as I'd done some Emergency Medical Service work in the past, I started the process to take part," Turner said. "On Thursday, April 30, I was told there was the potential for a COVID relief mission. On Friday I was notified it was a go, and on Sunday I was on my way."

In addition to his new grandson, Turner also left a 14-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter along with his wife of 26 years, to board a mostly empty plane to Newark International Airport in New Jersey. Upon arriving at his hotel, the Martinsville, Va., native and graduate of the University of Texas, Arlington, got an afternoon of rest — the last he would receive for two weeks.

"The East Orange VA Medical Center is about 14 floors, but only the emergency room, and several medical surgical areas on the 5th floor, and two eight-bed intensive care units were really busy — and every one of those beds was full with COVID-19 patients when I arrived," Turner said.

The EOVMC welcomed the team of five medical staff from VISN 6 with open arms. In addition to Turner, medical centers in

Hampton, Asheville and Salisbury had sent DEMPS personnel to help.

"To give you an idea of how busy it was," Turner explained, "next to the ICU where I was assigned there was a telemetry unit. The nurses who worked there went home one night and came back the next day as ICU nurses — going from dealing with four to five patients at a time to dealing with perhaps two, but two who are much sicker and require much more care."

For a hands-on nurse like Turner, and like all the others without COVID experience, the learning curve came fast.

"There are some different things you do with COVID patients," he said. "For instance, CPR is compression only, and then it's straight to intubation; and it's a very hands-off style of nursing that most of us aren't used to. Professionally, it was interesting to see the adaptations. Coming from an ER/ICU world where it's very hands-on, COVID units stress minimizing the time spent around the patient. For instance, the ventilator module and IV pumps were set up in the hallway outside the patient areas so they could be handled without going into the room."

With particular attention to personal protective equipment, Turner quickly became comfortable in the unit.

"You have to go into the room every couple of hours for 10 to 30 minutes to bathe and take care of the needs of the patient," he said. "But you get over your apprehension and fear of how quickly the disease can spread by attending to PPE procedures."

What affected Turner most was watching patients who were intubated on ventilators or those who were 'trached' — given tracheostomies to help them breathe — confined to the hospital because nursing homes weren't taking COVID patients.

"The disease has no rhyme or reason," Turner said. "Most of those who were intubated were between 50 and 80, and most of those had comorbidities such as diabetes, lung or

heart problems. But there was a man in his 50s there who was talking, wondering about his social life when he got out."

By the time his tour was finished on May 16, Turner looked over his daily temperature and symptom log, was tested for COVID-19 and given the all clear. An off-duty member of the staff at EOVMC took him and some other DEMPS crew on a quick tour of New York City across the river on the day before he flew back to Roanoke.

"I've been to the city before and it was just elbow-to-elbow people. This time though, Times Square was empty, and it brought home the seriousness of the pandemic."

"I never thought I'd deploy for a pandemic response," he said. "But being there gives me a new appreciation for Virginia, and while everyone in New Jersey was very receptive and appreciative of us being there, it's still not home."

Turner said he's appreciative of his wife and family for supporting him in his decision to deploy, and of his manager, Vicky Doss, and Chief Nurse, Robin Davis, for their efforts in making it possible for him to assist.

TOP PHOTO: Sincere appreciation for Johnny Turner and the other DEMPS volunteers. **BELOW - RIGHT PHOTO:** By observing all PPE procedures, Johnny Turner got through his two weeks at the East Orange VA Medical Center with a clean bill of health.



VA Launches COVID-19 Screening Tool

Pre-Screening Expedites Veteran Access to Facilities for Care

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced the launching of a digital [COVID-19 screening tool](#) to streamline Veteran access to medical care during the coronavirus pandemic.

The tool, designed with Veteran and staff input, enables the screening of more than 10,000 people each day.

Veterans, their caregivers and VA health care employees can use this tool on their mobile phones before entering facilities. It takes less than a minute to complete and helps reduce wait times, lowers exposure risk and eases patient stress. It also helps Veterans to gain

confidence with increased digital interactions as part of their VA health care experience.

“This screening tool emphasizes the ongoing importance of VA’s investment in digital modernization, as it went from initial concept to national availability in less than two weeks,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “In addition to providing a broad range of innovations and improvements that significantly benefit the Veterans we serve, our culture of innovation allows us to respond quickly to urgent and evolving needs.”

To protect patients and staff, VA screens everyone for coronavirus symptoms and expo-

sure each time they enter a health facility. VA staff uses the information received to direct people to either enter the building or go to a designated area for additional screening.

Veterans, caregivers and staff can use the tool by texting the word “SCREEN” to 53079 or scan a dedicated QR code with their mobile phone to get a link to the tool. They then answer a series of simple questions and share their results at the VA facility entrance.

For more about VA efforts to meet Veteran and staff needs during the coronavirus pandemic, visit [VA.gov coronavirus FAQs](#) and [VA’s public health response](#).

President Trump Releases PREVENTS Roadmap, a Nationwide Plan for Ending Suicide Among Veterans and All Americans

PREVENTS

The President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced the release of the President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS), an historic, nationwide plan to raise awareness about mental health, connect Veterans and others at risk of suicide to federal and local resources, and facilitate focused and coordinated research into suicide.

The roadmap is the result of an Executive Order President Trump signed March 5, 2019, calling on the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, Health and Human Services and several others to develop a comprehensive strategy for ending the national tragedy of suicide.

The order was signed as data continue to show that, on average, 132 Americans — including 20 service members, former never federally activated Guard and Reserve members, and Veterans — die each day by suicide.

“Veteran suicide is a tragedy this country started measuring in the decades following the Civil War, but one that sadly went unaddressed for generations,” said President Trump. “Today, my administration is taking steps to ensure the men and women who bravely fought for us when they were called will be given the care and attention they



need during some of their darkest hours. Our Veterans will lead the way for all Americans as we end the stigma that for too long has kept us from talking openly about mental health, and thwarted our efforts to provide the kind of assistance and support that will save lives.”

“Suicide prevention is VA’s highest clinical priority, and the department is taking significant steps to address the issue,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “But just as there is no single cause of suicide, no single organization can end Veteran suicide alone. That’s why PREVENTS aims to bring together stakeholders across all levels of government and in the private sector to work side by side to provide our Veterans with the mental health and suicide prevention services they need. By employing a public-health approach to suicide prevention, President Trump’s roadmap will equip communities to help Veterans get the right care, whenever and wherever they need it.”

The PREVENTS Task Force is co-chaired by White House Domestic Policy Council Director Brooke Rollins and Secretary Wilkie, and the recently released roadmap calls for several steps to be taken to further this critical national goal, many of which are already underway:

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTIVATION CAMPAIGN

This summer, the PREVENTS Task Force will launch a nationwide public health campaign aimed at educating Americans that suicide is preventable, creating awareness of mental health and suicide prevention best practices with a call to action for ALL Americans to take the PREVENTS Pledge to Prevent Suicide.

A primary goal of the campaign is to change the culture surrounding issues related to suicide and mental health. The campaign will stress that everyone has a role to play in the wellbeing of family members, friends and coworkers. It will create awareness about risk and protective factors, and encourage people to reach out to those who may be struggling.

The campaign will rely on coordinated messaging from all levels of government and non-government partners, as well as national digital, radio and television public service announcements. Efforts will focus on dissemination in states with a high concentration of Veterans. It will also rely on high-profile ambassadors who will help amplify these messages, including Second Lady Karen Pence, and U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams.

IMPROVING SUICIDE PREVENTION RESEARCH

Too often, efforts have focused on a one-size-fits-all approach to suicide prevention

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VA Supports 988 Expansion for National Suicide Prevention Crisis Line and Veterans Crisis Line Access

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced its support for the Suicide Prevention [988 expansion initiative](#), a new national three-digit emergency telephone number to access crisis call centers across the country for suicide prevention and mental health services, including the [Veterans Crisis Line](#), by July 2022.

VA is working alongside the [Federal Communications Commission](#), the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#), and the [National Suicide Prevention](#)

[Lifeline](#) to implement and activate the 988 expansion.

“The 988 three-digit number will help Veterans and non-Veteran callers quickly access help in times of crisis and open the door to engage new individuals in life-saving care,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The Veterans Crisis Line will continue to remain available 24/7, 365 days a year, by calling 1-800-273-8255 and pressing 1.”

Once activated, the 988 expansion will also grant VA the opportunity to collaborate

with the suicide prevention community across the United States.

This initiative is aligned with the [President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide \(PREVENTS\)](#) program, a nationwide plan to raise awareness about mental health, connect Veterans and others at risk of suicide to federal and local resources.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](#).

STORY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

that fails to consider an individual’s specific risk factors. As a key element of the roadmap, PREVENTS will launch the National Research Strategy to accelerate the development and implementation of effective solutions to help prevent Veteran suicide.

A critical first step toward this goal is the optimization of the current research ecosystem, which will accelerate the impact of Veteran suicide research by enhancing interagency collaboration, evaluating the role of open science practices, leveraging team science and enhancing data resources and analysis. The PREVENTS Task Force will have an initial assessment of the current research landscape by the end of 2020, and will simultaneously work with Task Force agencies and non-governmental partners to begin moving toward this exciting goal.

The development of the National Research Strategy will result in an increase in focus on the isolation of risk factors and an identification of the most effective treatment practices and interventions for Veterans. This all-of-government and all-of-nation approach will lead to a dramatic shift in the ability to prevent suicide for Veterans and all Americans.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

The PREVENTS Task Force has built relationships with dozens of organizations across the country, including faith-based groups, universities, non-profits, corporations and small businesses, as well as state and local governments. The Task Force will continue



to expand these relationships in order to share best practices for promoting mental health, ensuring awareness of and access to federal, state, local and tribal resources, and coordinating and implementing the public awareness campaign across sectors. The Task Force will encourage all 50 states, the U.S. Territories and the District of Columbia to sign the PREVENTS proclamation, affirming their commitment to preventing suicide among Veterans and all of their citizens.

The PREVENTS Task Force has already connected with more than 150 known community boards, 27 statewide suicide prevention teams and Building Healthy Military Communities, a pilot initiative with seven partnering states. The Task Force has also completed an initial analysis of funding that will be available for suicide prevention efforts. During

the next several months, PREVENTS will be implementing a plan to improve coordination among grant programs and develop a strategy to fill gaps through additional funding as well as additional public-private partnerships.

The PREVENTS Task Force is working with communities and stakeholders to develop and further efforts focused on coordinated systems of care. Government and non-government entities alike have a critical role to play in ensuring a comprehensive system of support.

View the president’s roadmap and find more information about the PREVENTS Task Force here: [www.va.gov/PREVENTS](#).

VA Video Connect Visits Increase 1,000% During COVID-19 Pandemic

Video appointments provide Veterans safe, convenient access to care

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today telehealth video appointments using [VA Video Connect](#) increased from approximately 10,000 to 120,000 appointments a week between February and May of 2020.

This increase of 1,000 percent is attributed to VA providers and Veterans taking [precautions against COVID-19](#).

“As we near the three-year anniversary of the launch of VA Video Connect, even during these challenging times, VA has and continues to maintain access to high-quality health care for Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “As the service becomes more popular, VA remains committed to providing a seamless user experience to ensure Veterans have access to care where and when they need it.”

VA Video Connect allows Veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA care teams on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with an Internet connection. It is one of the largest and most successful digital health platforms in the nation and currently enables

more than 25,000 virtual appointments, including [mental health appointments](#) each day.

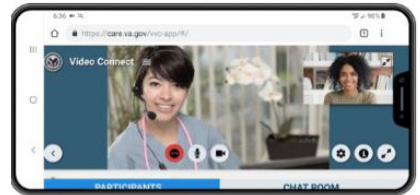
VA is also taking strides to bridge the digital divide for Veterans who lack the technology or broadband Internet connectivity required to participate in VA telehealth services. More than 26,000 cellular-enabled tablets are currently distributed to Veterans across the country. Major wireless carriers T-Mobile, Sprint, now part of T-Mobile, *SafeLink* by Tracfone and Verizon are allowing Veterans to access VA telehealth services without incurring data charges.

Due to increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, VA is rapidly expanding VA Video Connect, allowing more Veterans and VA care teams to connect by video. During this time, Veterans using VA Video Connect with limited data plans could temporarily [experience data charges](#). While, cellular carriers are taking measures to support Veterans during this period of expansion — Veterans with concerns are encouraged to contact their carrier.

Read more about [VA Video Connect](#). For information about VA's telehealth services visit [connectedcare.va.gov](#).



Personal Computer/Laptop



Android

COVID Screeners Offer Bright Start in Richmond

There are some bright spots that have come out of VA's pandemic response. One involves screeners at the Richmond VA. Since arriving at Richmond's Central Virginia VA Health Care System in March, security contract staff have received high praise from staff and leadership for their work. BLW Solutions has served CVHCS since late March by providing COVID-19 medical screenings at six entrances at the main hospital. There are 35 employees on three shifts. The company is a Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small

Business (SDVOSB) specializing in several areas, including security and training. It is owned and operated by Col. Keith Blowe (USA, Ret). They're known on campus as “The VA All-Stars.”

“In my 30 plus years in law enforcement, I've worked with many security guard agencies,” Patrol Operations Officer Maj. Michael Yates said. “The security guards here at the hospital are by far one of the best groups I've ever worked with. They are indeed professional and conscientious in their duties here.

Their customer service is off the chain.”

The compliments have come in person and through email notes from staff from all over the facility. The guards aren't simply courteous; they get involved with the people they meet. One person offered that they witnessed an officer one morning, “greeting a Veteran by name to tell him she was excited for his last radiation treatment.” So, they help the process with personal engagement. Yates added that, “In fact, Chief Guidry and I [considered some of the] guards as potential police officer candidates. We are very happy with this group.”

But the bottom line can be summed up in another recent observation to leadership by a fan of the group, about one of the officers who “really makes people's days brighter... everyone mentioned ... he is particularly great.”



BLW-Solutions is a service-disabled Veteran owned small business that specializes in program/project management, information technology, security and training. Pictured are some members of the “VA All-Stars” team. They have been serving staff and Veterans by screening them for COVID-19 at all entrances since March.

Live Whole Health Self-Care Episode #32 – Scheduling Pleasant Activities

Anticipating a pleasant experience can increase our overall enjoyment of an activity

In the chronic pain classes I taught at VA, we discussed the importance of scheduling activities we enjoy. There are several reasons why scheduling time to do things you enjoy is important, and one of these is what happens to our bodies when we look forward to something.

If I plan to go fishing this weekend, I will imagine where I'm going to drop a line, which bait I'm going to use, and I will picture myself on the water. I will arrange my tackle box, check the weather forecast and block all chores from my Saturday schedule.

During the planning, my brain almost believes I'm already on the lake. Neurotransmitters and hormones that trigger happiness will flood my system. Pleasure areas of my brain become active, and I experience the joy of fishing before even leaving the house.

Our minds can create an array of feelings. Recall your first day of basic training and you will probably notice how you felt that day — maybe nervous, maybe excited, maybe even a little scared. Remember your happier days, such as graduation, your wedding day, the birth of a child — you will probably notice you are smiling.

Why not use this gift that the mind offers and plan something fun this week? You may just find your excitement building and bringing you joy in the moments leading up to the activity.

The mind can also create a physical feeling of serenity and safety through meditation. Try this 9-minute meditation and you will experience how powerful the mind-body connection can be. Giving yourself time in a quiet place — a place of peace, tranquility, safety, and happiness — will allow your mind and body to rest and recover wherever you are.

To view the video for this story, [click here](#).

Marc Castellani, Ph.D., NBC-HWC, is the Whole Health Clinical Education Coordinator for the VHA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation.

Whole Health is VA's cutting-edge approach to care that supports your health and well-being. Whole Health centers around what matters to you, not what is the matter with you. This means your health team will get to know you as a person, before working with you to develop a personalized health plan based on your values, needs, and goals. Find out how you can #LiveWholeHealth from home through [VA's ongoing self-care blog series](#). This series highlights Whole Health resources — such as video sessions for yoga or meditation — that you can follow along at home to live healthier and happier.



VA Receives Funding From The US Postal Service for PTSD Research

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced, during national Post-traumatic Stress Awareness (PTSD) month, that [VA's National Center for PTSD](#) will fund more research about PTSD.

This is thanks to the proceeds from the [Healing PTSD semipostal stamp](#), which was issued in December 2019 by the U.S. Postal Service. More than 7 million stamps were sold from December 2019 to May, garnering upwards of \$717,000 which have been disbursed to VA.

“Thanks to the millions of Americans who purchased the Healing PTSD stamp, VA will continue to study, create awareness, educate and develop policies which better the lives of Veterans with PTSD,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The stamp not only raises awareness about PTSD but will provide funding for needed research and education about trauma and PTSD treatment.”

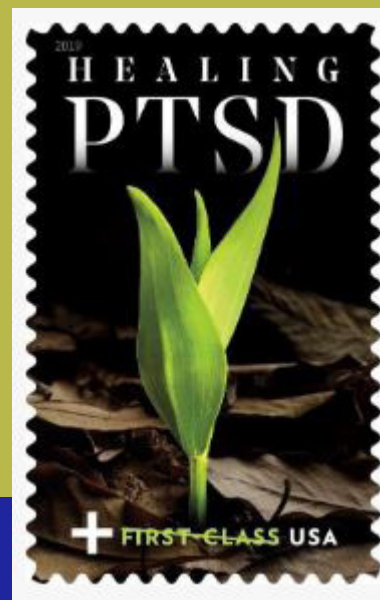
Anyone who has seen or gone through a traumatic event, such as war, sexual assault or a serious accident, can develop PTSD. As a result, they may experience problems sleeping, trouble concentrating, recurrent dreams about the trauma, intense reactions to reminders of the trauma, disturbances in relationships and/or isolation. However, PTSD can be treated.

VA offers personalized effective treatments for PTSD including [talk therapy](#) and [medication](#). During PTSD Awareness Month and all year round, VA encourages Veterans to find out more about PTSD and treatment.

This initiative is aligned to the [President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide \(PREVENTS\)](#), a nationwide plan to raise awareness about mental health, connect Veterans and others at risk of suicide to federal and local resources.

For more information about PTSD, visit www.ptsd.va.gov.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.



The U.S. Postal Service sold more than 7 million stamps between December 2019 and May 2020, earning more than \$717,000 for the VA.

VISN 6 Sites Of Care & VA Vet Centers

MEDICAL CENTERS

Asheville VAMC

1100 Tunnel Road
Asheville, NC 28805
828-298-7911 | 800-932-6408
www.asheville.va.gov

Durham VAMC

508 Fulton Street
Durham, NC 27705
919-286-0411 | 888-878-6880
www.durham.va.gov

Fayetteville VAMC

2300 Ramsey Street
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106
www.fayettevilleenc.va.gov

Hampton VAMC

100 Emancipation Dr.
Hampton, VA 23667
757-722-9961 | 866-544-9961
www.hampton.va.gov

Richmond VAMC

1201 Broad Rock Blvd.
Richmond, VA 23249
804-675-5000 | 800-784-8381
www.richmond.va.gov

Salem VAMC

1970 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153
540-982-2463 | 888-982-2463
www.salem.va.gov

Salisbury VAMC

1601 Brenner Ave.
Salisbury, NC 28144
704-638-9000 | 800-469-8262
www.salisbury.va.gov

OUTPATIENT CLINICS

Albemarle CBOC

1845 W City Drive
Elizabeth City, NC 27909
252-331-2191

Brunswick County CBOC

18 Doctors Cl., Units 2 & 3
Supply, NC 28462 | 910-754-6141

Charlotte CBOC

8601 University East Drive
Charlotte, NC 28213
704-597-3500

Charlotte HCC

3506 W. Tyvola Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28208
704-329-1300

Charlottesville CBOC

590 Peter Jefferson Pkwy
Charlottesville, VA 22911
434-293-3890

Chesapeake CBOC

1987 S. Military Highway
Chesapeake, VA 23320
757-722-9961

Clayton CBOC

11618 US Hwy 70 Business Highway West,
Suites 100 & 200
Clayton, NC 27520

Danville CBOC

705 Piney Forest Rd.
Danville, VA 24540
434-710-4210

Emporia CBOC

1746 East Atlantic Street
Emporia, VA 23847
434-348-1500

Fayetteville HCC

7300 So. Raeford Rd
Fayetteville NC 28304
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106

Fayetteville Rehabilitation Clinic

4101 Raeford Rd. Ste 100-B
Fayetteville NC 28304
910-908-2222

Franklin CBOC

647 Wayah Street
Franklin, NC 28734-3390
828-369-1781

Fredericksburg CBOC

130 Executive Center Pkwy
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
540-370-4468

Fredericksburg at Southpoint CBOC

10401 Spotsylvania Ave, Ste 300
Fredericksburg, VA 22408
540-370-4468

Goldsboro CBOC

2610 Hospital Road
Goldsboro, NC 27909
919-731-4809

Greenville HCC

401 Moye Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-830-2149

Hamlet CBOC

100 Jefferson Street
Hamlet, NC 28345
910-582-3536

Hickory CBOC

2440 Century Place,
SE Hickory, NC 28602
828-431-5600

Hillandale Rd. Annex

1824 Hillandale Road Durham
North Carolina 27705
919-383-6107

Jacksonville CBOC

2580 Henderson Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Jacksonville 2 VA Clinic

306 Brynn Marr Road
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Jacksonville 3 VA Clinic

4 Josh Court
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-353-6406

Kernersville HCC

1695 Kernersville Medical Pkwy
Kernersville, NC 27284
336-515-5000

Lynchburg CBOC

1600 Lakeside Drive
Lynchburg, VA 24501
434-316-5000

Morehead City CBOC

5420 U.S. 70
Morehead City, NC 28557
252-240-2349

Raleigh CBOC

3305 Sungate Blvd.
Raleigh, NC 27610
919-212-0129

Raleigh II Annex

3040 Hammond Business Place
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-899-6259

Raleigh III CBOC

2600 Atlantic Ave, Ste 200
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-755-2620

Robeson County CBOC

139 Three Hunts Drive
Pembroke, NC 28372
910-272-3220

Rutherford County CBOC

2270 College Avenue, Suite 145
Forest City, NC 28043-2459
828-288-2780

Sanford CBOC

3112 Tramway
Road Sanford, NC 27332
919-775-6160

Staunton CBOC

102 Lacy B. King Way
Staunton, VA 24401
540-886-5777

Tazewell CBOC

141 Ben Bolt Ave.
Tazewell, VA 24651
276-988-8860

Virginia Beach CBOC

244 Clearfield Avenue
Virginia Beach, VA
757-722-9961

Wilmington HCC

1705 Gardner Rd.
Wilmington, NC 28405
910-343-5300

Wytheville CBOC

165 Peppers Ferry Rd.
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363
276-223-5400

DIALYSIS CENTERS

VA Dialysis and Blind Rehabilitation Clinics at Brier Creek

8081 Arco Corporate Drive
Raleigh, NC 27617
919-286-5220

VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville

2301 Robeson Street, Ste. 101
Fayetteville, NC 28305, 910-483-9727

VET CENTERS

Charlotte Vet Center

2114 Ben Craig Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28262
704-549-8025

Fayetteville Vet Center

2301 Robeson Street
Fayetteville, NC 28305
910-488-6252

Greensboro Vet Center

3515 W Market Street, Suite 120
Greensboro, NC 27403
336-333-5366

Greenville Vet Center

1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.
Greenville, NC 27834
252-355-7920

Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center

110-A Branchwood Drive
Jacksonville, NC 28546
910-577-1100

Norfolk Vet Center

1711 Church Street
Norfolk, VA 23504
757-623-7584

Raleigh Vet Center

8851 Ellstree Lane
Raleigh, NC 27617
(919) 361-6419

Roanoke Vet Center

1401 Franklin Rd SW
Roanoke, VA 24016
540-342-9726

Virginia Beach Vet Center

324 Southport Circle, Suite 102
Virginia Beach, VA 23452
757-248-3665

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