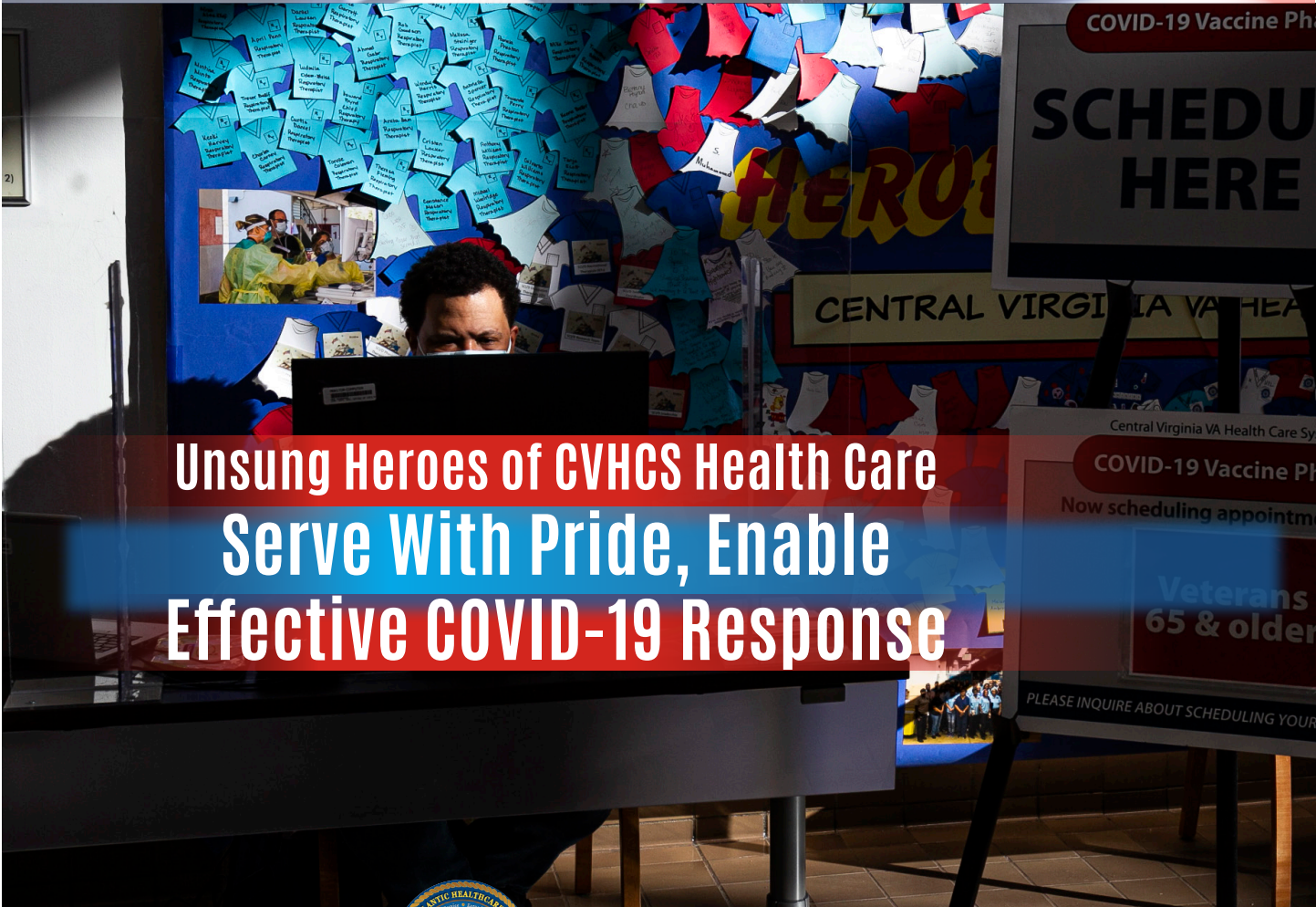


VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here —



Unsung Heroes of CVHCS Health Care Serve With Pride, Enable Effective COVID-19 Response

Inside This Issue



By Tim Parish | RICHMOND VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- 3** WNC VA Health Care System Offers Six-Week Program for Women Veterans
- 4** Salem Laundry Team Gets It Done
- 6** Veterans Impressed with Efficiency as Salisbury Vaccinates 10,000th Veteran
- 7** C-Forts Provide Expanded Emergency Care Facilities
- 8** WNC VA Health Care System Sees Multiple Personnel Moves for 2021
- 8** Acupuncture Modernizes Medicine for Veterans
- 9** MyHealtheVet Is Changing the Way Veterans Access Health Care
- 10** Hardworking, Dedicated Nurses Recognized

A year into the pandemic, much has been said about the heroes of health care — the front-line nurses, doctors, first responders and ICU staff who have saved countless lives and who are now helping steer the largest vaccination initiative in world history. Their efforts have been universally lauded, and rightly so. They are not alone. Behind the scenes, perhaps a few steps back from the “front line,” are the support staff who enable care delivery for Veterans enrolled with the 4,000-employee strong Central Virginia VA Health Care System.

Medical Support Assistants, the army of facilitators who work to connect Veterans with providers, serve many roles: customer service, appointment scheduling, records management, jack-of-all-trades — if it involves customer relations and connecting Veterans with care, MSAs can do it. CVHCS’s COVID-19 vaccine rollout is exhaustive, and much of the workload falls on MSAs, according to Daryl D. Warren, an MSA and current acting secretary for the chief of Health Administration Services.

TOP PHOTO: Jerry Trotter, a program support assistant, schedules COVID-19 vaccine appointments inside the Central Virginia VA Health Care System’s (CVHCS) South Mall. CVHCS has been vaccinating Veterans in Richmond since initiating the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in December last year. To this point, nurses in the vaccine clinic have provided more than 16,000 doses of the lifesaving vaccine for Veterans, employees, volunteers and caregivers. CVHCS began its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

(Continued on page 5)



MESSAGE FROM OUR ACTING NETWORK DIRECTOR

Greetings,

As the nation moves forward to increase vaccination accomplishment, VA has much to be proud of. Across America, VA has vaccinated more than one million Veterans, staff, and Veteran Caregivers. In VISION 6 alone, we will approach 200,000 by the end of March. The addition of the Janssen vaccine and our ability now to change distribution lanes will help us to better meet demand.

We are subject to national distribution protocols that determine vaccine allotments. But we're doing well enough with our vaccination process that our throughput has increased on average for Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, and the Janssen vaccine will add to our capability. We will continue to expand our administration of the vaccine as much as possible to reach as many as we can, more quickly. Thanks to all the staff who are supporting this effort, braving the cold in

drive-through lines, and spending extra time during vaccine blitzes to ensure that we optimize the time and vaccine we have on hand.

We are doing whatever we can to deliver VA health care, quality health care, to the most people, at the highest level of performance and service. Congratulations to the Fayetteville VACHCS team on the reopening of their operating rooms and emergency department! We are marching forward and expanding services to Veterans.

I would also like to recognize our VISION 6 surgical lead, Dr. Kenneth Lipshy, and VISION 6 Police Chief William Dale Hendley for their work on "Stop the Bleed," a program that teaches crisis response for traumatic injury to law enforcement. We traced a recent rescue in the Charlotte HCC directly to this program. VA police officer and retired Army Veteran Berent Jones applied a tourniquet (later tightened by Dr. Alok Trivedi) to a

badly bleeding Veteran on Jan. 26, saving his life.

The 'I Am Not Invisible' campaign corresponds with Women's History Month. Photos you'll see posted in VA facilities call on our responsibility to treat women Veterans with dignity and respect, help advocate for cultural transformation, and extend our welcome, recognizing women Veterans' service and contributions.

In closing, I'd like to add that safe practices remain in place in all facilities as we continue to conduct our phased reopening of services. We are a long way from the end of the pandemic, so it is critical to remember that when you're at VA and elsewhere to mask up, social distance, and wash your hands.

Stephanie Young
Acting VA Mid Atlantic Health Care Network Director, VISION 6

Senator Visits Hampton VA, New Director

On Feb. 16, Hampton VA Medical Center leadership met with Senator Mark Warner. Dr. Taquisa K. Simmons, Executive Director Hampton VA, discussed several topics to include wait times, specialty care, COVID-19 vaccinations/testing, staff vacancies and needs of the facility.

"I think we're seeing great progress; Hampton has made major progress towards cutting waiting times for patients," Senator Warner said, adding, "I commend the staff

and the work they're doing. But you've got to stay ever vigilant; you've got to stay on top of it."

Notably, Hampton has reduced wait times for new patients from 63 days to 15 days. Dr. Simmons' leadership has contributed to an increase in staffing — 30 new hires in the past 15 months — which has greatly improved wait times for care appointments.

Senator Warner is aware of the challenges faced by all VA hospitals, and focused

on specialty care wait times. He challenged Hampton to improve the wait times in specialty care, specifically in podiatry, dermatology, orthopedics and cardiology clinics. He and the facility's top managers set an ambitious, yet reasonable, goal to reduce the average waiting time for specialty care to seven weeks.

Hampton, which once posted some of the longest waiting lists in the country, has prioritized systemic improvements to cut its average waiting time for primary care visits to 15 days. This achievement is well below the 25-day goal that Senator Warner established a few years back, when the hospital averaged a 42-day wait in late 2019.

One area of emphasis for Senator Warner is that he would like to address the pay gap between what doctors in the VA system earn compared to potential earnings in private practice; he voiced plans to communicate this with the Biden administration and his fellow senators back in Washington. Senator Warner said, "It is difficult to recruit specialists when they can make more money outside of VA."

Hampton closed the meeting by providing updated information on their vaccination efforts. Senator Warner said he plans to push the administration to boost Hampton's weekly allocation of COVID-19 vaccines.



Senator Warner (center) speaking with Dr. Taquisa Simmons (right). Senator Warner was provided an update on wait times, specialty care, COVID vaccinations/testing, vacancies and needs of the facility. The Senator was very pleased to hear Hampton VAMC has reduced new patient primary care appointments to 15 days. Pictured right to left: Dr. Taquisa Simmons, Executive Director, Dr. Elena McSwain, Acting Chief, VEO, Senator Mark Warner, Crystal Lindaman, Associate Director for Patient Care Services, Senator Warner Staffer, and Dr. Usha Subramanian, Chief, Primary Care.



Fayetteville VA Coastal Health Care System's newly modernized operating rooms reopened March 1.

FAYETTEVILLE OPENING ED/Operating Rooms/Med. Surge/ICU

By Fayetteville V ACHCS Public Affairs

Construction and plans are complete. Staff is in place. Leadership is ready and excited. March 1, Fayetteville VA Coastal Health Care System (FVACHCS) Chief of Staff Dr. Jeffery Morgan joined Medical Center Director Dan Dücker and the rest of Fayetteville's leadership team to open new operating rooms there. The project to modernize the operating rooms began a number of years ago, but the project faced challenges delaying completion. Now that the operating rooms are ready for use, their availability has enabled other significant changes at the facility. Morgan offered, "This project has come together from a broad multidisciplinary team to improve our capabilities and capacities to treat Veterans. Any project this big requires support from the ground level up through senior leadership in Washington, D.C. It is a great accomplishment for the VA system. We now are using that same multidisciplinary team approach at the operational level to ensure our teams are working together to expand safe and excellent services for as many Veterans as possible."

As of March 1, Fayetteville again offers full Emergency Department Services. Their plan to reopen was awarded final approval a few weeks ago, and they'll be able to serve Veterans as a full-service ED with the opening of the operating rooms. The ED has been functioning as an urgent care unit since 2015, when contracting issues developed, affecting staffing capability at the medical center. But to function as a fully authorized emergency unit, operating rooms must be available to support it. With the completion of the operating rooms, the facility gained approval to re-establish its Emergency Department. The medical center will also open a new, state-of-the-art Intensive Care Unit space and Medical-Surgery units. "Higher-level medical care is provided by a team," Morgan declared. He continued, saying, "No one individual person or type of service can deliver the various dimensions required for high-level care." With the expansion of the ED, OR and ICU, there are increased responsibilities of providers, nurses, administrators and support personnel in all arenas of the hospital system working together to ensure safe and excellent healthcare to our Veterans. "We work as a team to make every day better for our Veterans!"

"This will vastly improve patient care to Veterans in the community and help our bottom line as well," Director Dücker said. All of these projects have been pursued independently over several years, although ultimately, they are dependent on one another. Congratulations to Mr. Dücker, Dr. Morgan, Dr. Villard and the entire Fayetteville team!

WNC VA Health Care System Offers Six-Week Program for Women Veterans

By WNC VA Health Care System Public Affairs

The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System is offering women Veterans an opportunity to explore the richness of their stories in a six-week art and journaling series.

"Who we are and how we see ourselves is always changing as we move through life," signaled the announcement. "Moving fluidly through this wealth of changing perspectives keeps us healthy. So, tell your story over and over, as many times, in as many ways, as you like."

The online workshop combines art and journaling. It will also offer meditation and imagination to help women Veterans to explore the richness of their past, present and future selves.

There will also be a focus on revisiting memories, hopes and dreams, and providing an avenue to express those ideas and images creatively — with writing, drawing,

painting and collage.

The program is designed to comfortably accommodate all artistic skill levels, so participants don't need to be artists. They will also receive an array of art and journaling materials to work with.

The series offers group sessions which provide the opportunity for Veterans to share with each other; but sharing is always optional.

This workshop is being presented by Mary Lounsbury, PhD, and WNCVAHCS Chaplain Lea Brown, D.Min. Lounsbury is an artist, educator and group facilitator. Drawing from her extensive research in multicultural mythological traditions, she uses expressive arts and stories to access intuitive awareness and to develop group narrative. Brown is Whole Health Chaplain at the Western North Carolina VA Health Care System, bridging the area's mind and spirit.

Editor's note: To find out more, call the WNCVAHCS Whole Health Department at (828) 298-7911, ext. 2107.





(Left Photo) Kim Masseille, Laundry Worker, Alvin Melvin, Laundry Worker (U.S. Army, 1980-1983), and Eddie Wright, Laundry Machine Operator (U.S. Navy, 1988-1996), work together on a conveyor line sorting dirty linen. The sorting process must be done by hand and can be dangerous, as linen can contain bodily fluids. Other items, such as TV remotes and phones, have also been found. **(Right Photo)** Dominique Nichols, Team Leader, takes sorted laundry and empties it onto a conveyor where it will enter the wash cycle.

Salem Laundry Team Gets It Done | By Rosaire Bushey | SALEM VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

In every hospital room there is about 15 pounds of equipment that gets largely taken for granted — linen.

The Salem VA Health Care System is one of a small number of facilities across the VA to have its own laundry facilities, and in 2019, more than 3.3 million pounds of laundry was cleaned and processed, providing clean linen for Salem Veterans, and a large portion of the linen for the Durham Health Care System Veterans in Durham, N.C., as well as the Virginia Veterans Care Center.

In addition to being convenient, the service is also economical, costing only about 46 cents per pound instead of the national average of 74 cents per pound.

“If we had to ship our laundry out for cleaning and processing, Salem would have spent about \$600,000 last year,” said Jesse Gearheart, Laundry Manager. Instead, the facility is able to return money to the VA general fund. (As a government facility, it is not allowed to make profit, but the savings are returned.)

While COVID-19 meant that there were fewer patients in the hospitals, isolation gowns were in high demand, and the Laundry Manager said his team was busy keeping up with the high-demand item.

“We’ve got about 14 people working here right now, even though we have 25 positions on the books, and they’ve been busy ensuring all facilities have the items they need in time.”

Using a continuous batch washer, the facility processes 150 pounds of linen every four and a half minutes. Each worker in the laundry can handle from 75-110 pounds of laundry per hour at their stations, which include sheet folding machines, presses, and cart washers to

ensure that the carts that carry the laundry to and from the hospital are as clean as the linen they carry.

A couple of the machines are 20 years old, but most are nearing 10 years, and are at the end of their service expectancy, the Laundry Manager explained. Several new machines are expected in the next year that will help to make the process more efficient.

“We have one maintenance person to work on all these machines, and the age of some of the equipment makes it difficult for him to find what he needs to keep the facility moving,” Gearheart said.



Almost all linen that goes through the facility is machine folded, except for pajamas and washcloths, which are folded by hand.

The movement of the linen starts in the sorting area, with carts loaded with 100-300 pounds of soiled linens. Before going into the washers each cartload is sorted by hand to ensure that all non-linen items are removed.

“Everything from human waste to cell phones, and tubing to TV remotes gets pulled out of these carts, so we have to be careful.”

When the items are separated and sorted, the dirty laundry goes first into the batch

washer, which has six large drums. The first drum is filled, and after a few minutes the laundry moves to the second drum, and the first drum is filled with new laundry. Once all segments are filled, cleaned laundry is delivered in damp circular cakes every four and a half minutes.

About 60 percent of the water used in the system is recycled. Chemicals are filtered out and neutralized in the washing process so nothing hazardous goes into the wastewater stream.

“Every piece of textile that goes through the laundry is manually touched at some point,” according to the laundry manager “Some pieces several times. After washing and drying, each piece is clipped to a machine that irons or folds.”

There are different machines for pillow-cases, towels, bedspreads, uniforms and flat bedsheets. Pajamas and patient gowns are each folded by hand, as are washcloths.

The Laundry Manager, who is also a registered nurse, says he remembers, as a nurse, grabbing a handful of washcloths and using maybe one or two, and just throwing the rest into the pile of soiled linens to be rewashed.

“I didn’t think anything of it then but seeing the process from this side makes me appreciate it differently.”

During the holidays the team tries to build up a stock so the laundry workers can get time off.

“The crew working here are the unseen backbone of the hospital,” he says. “It’s a tough job, and one not many people think about. But I suppose that means they’re doing their job well if nobody notices the linen cabinets are always full,” Gearheart concluded.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

UNSUNG HEROES OF CVHCS HEALTH CARE Serve With Pride, Enable Effective COVID-19 Response

By Tim Parish | RICHMOND VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS



“Being able to work alongside the nursing staff allows both the MSAs and nursing staff to provide world-class service to the Veterans,” said Warren, who has been with CVHCS since August 2019, the summer before the pandemic began. “MSAs are the backbone to the facility and their roles are forever important to CVHCS.”

Everything — literally everything — has changed since the SARS-CoV-2 virus began to sweep across the globe. Who would have known what social distancing was before December 2019? Who would have thought masks might one day be a fashion statement? Who would have seen the need for a worldwide vaccination effort, unparalleled in global history? Yes, many things have changed, including perspectives. What hasn't changed is the Central Virginia Health Care System team's commitment to the roughly 68,000 Veterans who receive care at one of CVHCS's six sites of care across Central Virginia.

“Every day I wake up knowing that I am going to make a change in someone's life as an MSA,” said Warren, who grew up as a military child but calls Chesapeake, Va., his home-

town. “I may look at some days as a ‘rough day,’ but serving Veterans has allowed me to understand that I am providing service to those who provided service for me. Working endless hours during the current pandemic has allowed me to have a gratifying feeling at the end of the day, knowing that I worked to my best capabilities. This experience has truly enhanced my compassion for the field, as well as my work ethic.”

MSAs tie the Veterans' experience with CVHCS to the physical — or virtual — encounter the Veteran has with a provider. They act as a critical link, and as ambassadors, for each Veteran who seeks care at CVHCS. Though their duties and responsibilities are myriad, their primary role is to ensure that each Veteran receives the world-class care they earned while in uniform, according to Tiffany Felder, an advanced MSA in the CVHCS Health Benefits Department's Centralized Registration section. Ensuring that eligible Veterans are enrolled is especially important today as only Veterans currently enrolled with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) will be scheduled for the

COVID-19 vaccine. “I provide primary clerical and administrative support for the Health Benefits Department and Health Administrative Service Office,” said Felder, originally from Colorado Springs, Colo., who moved to Richmond at age 15. “My day-to-day duties include checking eligibility and registering Veterans. I am responsible for accurate

appointment management and the coordination of all administrative information. Teamwork is one of my best assets.”

Felder, who has been with CVHCS for nearly three years, was working at a local private health care facility when she began looking for other job opportunities. With a proud family history of military service, serving Veterans seemed like a natural opportunity.

“I understand that during these times it can be very stressful for some of them,” said Felder. “I am honored to work with the Veterans during this time to provide world-class service. I look at all my Veterans as family. I go above and beyond to make sure they receive the care and information they deserve.”



(Left Photo) Lee Jones waits in the COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic observation area of the Central Virginia VA Health Care System's (CVHCS) Richmond campus. Veterans receiving the vaccine must wait at least 15 minutes before departing the clinic to ensure that they have no immediate adverse reactions to the vaccine. **(CVHCS Photo by Megan Kon/Released)**
(Right Photo) Howard Vaughan of Richmond received his second COVID-19 vaccine dose at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System's Richmond Campus, Feb. 23. Vaughan, a Marine and Korean War Veteran, served with the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, Calif., from 1949 through 1954. **(CVHCS Photo by Megan Kon/Released)**

Veterans Impressed with Efficiency as Salisbury Vaccinates 10,000th Veteran

By Todd Goodman | SALISBURY VA PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Salisbury VA Health Care System reached its 10,000th Veteran vaccinated for COVID-19 at 10:00am on Saturday, Feb. 13. The moment was a significant milestone made possible by an aggressive approach to vaccinations.

Navy Veteran Dr. Randall Gehle, acting chief of staff for Salisbury VA Health Care System, has often said that vaccines don't do anybody any good sitting on a shelf. So, when Salisbury VA received an extra allotment of COVID-19 vaccine, he and other leaders immediately planned two mass vaccination clinics to put it to use.

Nearly 2,600 Veterans were vaccinated during the two events. The first one occurred Jan. 30-31 in the gymnasium on the Salisbury campus. The second, on Feb. 13, included all three facilities. From the start, staff had things running timely and efficiently, something that impressed Army Veteran Tom Kearney.

"When it comes down to COVID, this organizational level is beyond what people associate with government bureaucracy," said Kearney. "It's extraordinary. From the time you get to the gate to the time you get your shot, everyone along the way knows precisely what to do. I brought my newspaper, thinking I would have to wait. I didn't get past the first page. It's the best customer service a Veteran can get."

For Gehle, success like this is the product of a dedicated staff and a little bit of practice time to master the timing and movements. From the start, the vaccine clinics ran 15 minutes ahead of schedule.

"Our staff has been vaccinating Veterans since Dec. 23, and they have gotten pretty good at doing that," he said. "I'm proud of the team that I have here."

But it wasn't just the speed of the process that impressed the Veterans. Interaction with staff gave them a level of comfort that can be important to a first-time vaccine recipient.

"I felt comfortable with getting the shot," said Army Veteran Jerry Archable. "I was very pleased with the organization and service. People were very nice. It's just been a pleasant experience. "The positivity of the event overpowered me. It was a good day — in and out in 30 minutes."

The positivity of the event was due in

large part to the way nursing staff interacted with the Veterans. They were generous with their time, answered questions, and addressed any concerns they may have had.

"To sit and watch the loving kindness between the Veteran and the staff nurse is really touching," said Melissa Yost, RN and Whole Health Nurse Manager. "Our staff are here because they want to be here. People are showing up because they believe in what we're doing. People are dedicated, and if you pause and look at that, it's hard not to become emotional."

Emotions have been a big part of this vaccination effort. For Gehle, he is tired of seeing what this virus can do to Veterans.

"Nearly 100 percent of Veterans who have gone on a ventilator haven't come off," he said. "This disease ... when it's bad, it's very bad, and I'm tired of seeing Veteran deaths. And this is the only way we can stop it. I'm looking forward to some semblance of normalcy."

So is Army Veteran Robert Hopkins. The 87-year-old said that he believes in science and wants to do his part to help end this pandemic. His biggest motivation, however, was the deal he made with his wife.

"I promised her I'd stick around until I was 90," he said. "So, I didn't want to take any chances that I didn't have to. My wife has been waiting and waiting, and still doesn't have an appointment. It's much easier here at the VA. It sure is."

After the 10,000th Veteran had been vaccinated, and hundreds of Veterans continued to pass through the doors at all three facilities, Director Joseph Vaughn stood on the gym floor at Salisbury VA Medical Center and marveled at the operation.

"For me it's phenomenal," said Vaughn. "Our staff's dedication is so impressive. To have this many Veterans vaccinated is a great feeling."

Pharmacy staff prepare doses of the COVID-19 vaccine prior to the kickoff of a recent Mass Vaccination Clinic held in Salisbury VA's Gymnasium.



WNCVAHCS Women Veterans Program Manager HONORED WITH 2021 ROSA PARKS AWARD

By WNCVA Health Care System Public Affairs

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — Dr. Sharon West, Western North Carolina VA Health Care System Women Veterans Program manager, has been selected by the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Association of Asheville and Buncombe County as a recipient of the 2021 Inaugural Rosa Parks Award.

According to the association, she received the award for her efforts to foster a culture of inclusion in the Asheville community, working to achieve a just society for the disadvantaged, exemplifying a nonviolent philosophy in pursuit of a better life for non-majority people, and for her inspired direct action in the cause of social justice.

The Association contends that Parks, the award's namesake, was Mother of the Civil Rights Movement in America and helped to change the landscape of American race relations.

West, an Asheville native, teaches at Mars Hill University and has contributed in myriad ways over the years in the community.

"The actions and outcomes of a Servant Leader are not only seen within the organization, but also within our community," Shenekia Williams-Johnson, VISN 6 Women Veterans coordinator, said as she related news of the award to co-workers.

West said she views concepts like having a heart for humanity in her work an essential driver. She also said she is concerned most with serving the least likely and unlikely to help them see value in their own lives.

West said that she hopes she will live up to the standards of such an award, and to the hope she saw in the demonstrated actions of "young people of the rainbow" advocating for the right thing to do in the wake of George Floyd.

"Stepping out of our comfort zone to address issues of moral conflict — taking the risk to move forward" is necessary, she said, but with that, there is hope not only for Asheville, but for the nation.

West maintains that there is hard work



Dr. Sharon West, a registered nurse and self-proclaimed author, professor and Clinical ethicist, has been selected by the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Association of Asheville and Buncombe County for the 2021 Inaugural Rosa Parks Award.

left to do, but as her mother said, "Anything worthwhile is gonna be hard."

She pulled together her faith in hope for all in remembering a passage from the poem recently presented by Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman:

"Even as we grieved, we grew, That even as we hurt, we hoped, that even as we tired, we tried." West concluded, "The journey will be worth it."

Editor's note: To view an interview with Dr. West, click [HERE](#).

C-FORTS Provide Expanded Emergency Care Facilities

Meet Central Virginia VA Health Care System's newest deployable asset: The Compound Fold-Out Rigid Temporary Shelter (C-FORTS). This structure is designed to transform from a medium-sized shipping container into a medical clinic with three exam rooms. During an emergency, C-FORTS can be set up and fully operational within three hours.

Recently, CVHCS Emergency Manager Jerome Benson led a training to familiarize members of the Safety Team with the setup and teardown of the C-FORTS. Benson later explained how CVHCS has assisted other VA hospitals in the region during emergencies, citing several instances during the nation's hurricane season in recent years. CVHCS is the largest Veterans hospital in Virginia and serves approximately 70,000 Veterans across the central part of the state. (Photos by David Hodge, Public Affairs Specialist, January 2021)



WNC VA Health Care System Sees Multiple Personnel Moves for 2021

By Vance Janes | WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

From the top down, there's an exciting game of musical chairs going on at Western North Carolina VA Health Care System.

The health care system — comprising the Charles George VA Medical Center and Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) in Rutherford County, Hickory and Franklin — has seen multiple position changes since the beginning of the year.

When VISN 6 Network Director DeAnne Seekins retired in December, WNC VA Health Care System Director Stephanie Young was selected to take up the mantle as Interim Network Director until a permanent replacement could be chosen.

With Ms. Young moving to Durham to take on her new duties, Dr. Colleen Noe, James H. Quillen VA Medical Center Associate Director, moved to Asheville as the Acting Director.

Other personnel changes include:

Dr. Laura Tugman was selected as the Chief of Mental Health Service. Tugman has been with the Western North Carolina VA Healthcare System for eight years in a variety of roles. Most recently, she has served as the Assistant Chief of Mental Health Service. She is an Army Veteran and brings a wealth of experience and passion to the position.

Debra Whisenant, MSN, was also selected as the Chief of the three CBOCs. She has been with the Charles George VAMC for 11 years in a variety of nursing and leadership roles, and brings more than 30 years of nursing experience to the job and most recently served as Chief Nurse for Outpatient & Procedural Care at the Asheville site.

In Franklin, **Angela Stone** was selected as the Franklin CBOC Director and Nurse Manager. Stone started at the Franklin CBOC as a

Primary Care Nurse in 2008. She was promoted to Assistant Nurse Manager in 2014, and to Nurse Manager in 2017. She became the acting Franklin CBOC Director in January 2020.

Stone was a recipient of the National Nursing Education Initiative scholarship through the VA in 2017 and completed her Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2018.

With the COVID-19 pandemic creating new challenges in health care, telehealth services became increasingly more important. As our services grew, telehealth expanded its role, and the CGVAMC realigned.

Melissa Edwards, MSN, was named the new Chief of Telehealth for the health care system. Edwards has served the Charles George VAMC in a variety of nursing and leadership roles over the last 19 years, and brings a wealth of knowledge to the position.

VA Care in the Community also got a new chief, as **Cynthia Smith, BSN**, was selected for the role. She previously served as the Nurse Manager for VA Care in the Community and has been with the Charles George VAMC for nine years.

With **Anne Bailey, PharmD**, being successful in her role as Innovation Specialist for Asheville and fostering a great climate for creative solutions, she was selected for a VHA Central Office role in Innovation. Since that transition needed to occur rapidly, WNC VA Health Care System leadership called on another very engaged innovator, **Caitlin Rawlins**, who accepted a detail into the role of Interim Innovation Specialist for our facility. With a creative background in Fine Arts, Rawlins served others as an LPN for several years before completing another bachelor's degree in the accelerated BSN program at Western

Carolina University.

Patricia Campbell, MSN, RN was selected to serve as Chief Nurse, Outpatient and Procedural Care. Campbell brought a wealth of private sector Med/Surg, ICU, Surgical Outpatient Center and leadership experience 11 years ago to her most recent role as Nurse Manager of the health care system's active Emergency Department.

Highly successful in leading the Emergency Department team, she completed her master's degree, LEAN Yellow and Green Belts, and recently achieved National Improvement Advisory Certification. Campbell has led numerous systems redesign projects, conducted AIBs at several other VAMCs and was selected by Dr. Chad Kessler for detail to the National Emergency Medicine Office in early 2020 to develop ED guidelines for the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this capacity, she also participated in site visits to review several Emergency Departments and has served as the RN representative on the Emergency Medicine Women's Health, SPED, Victim Recovery, ICT, ICT Training and Whole Health Workgroups, as well as the Emergency Medicine Field Advisory Council.

Another emergency department move included **Cynthia Morris, BSN, RN** being selected as the Acting Nurse Manager of the Emergency Department. Morris graduated from Western Carolina University and has been a nurse for 26 years, 20 of which have been here at the CGVAMC. Her first 10 years in the VA were shared between MICU, ED and the Rutherford CBOC. In 2011, she returned to the ED as the Assistant Nurse Manager.

Acupuncture Modernizes Medicine for Veterans

By Steve Wilkins | VISN 6 PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Under the "strange but true" heading might be the story of how a sport, Ping-Pong, led to the establishment of a medical wonder in America that is an increasingly common rehabilitative and wellness staple in many physician's toolkits.

Acupuncture is a technique that uses a variety of mechanisms of action for stimulating and balancing the energy flow to boost your body's natural painkillers. It can stimulate endorphin release, relax muscles locked in contraction, increase blood flow to areas being treated, and reset autonomic muscle tone. It dates back more than 4,000 years in Eastern Culture, primarily China. American interest in

the practice existed as early as the Civil War, but it wasn't considered seriously until the early 1970s.

A long and widely accepted story brings together several dynamics to explain the proliferation in American interest in acupuncture since 1972. It seems that an exchange in visits between American and Chinese Ping-Pong championship teams inspired political dialogue between the two countries, leading to the U.S. lifting an embargo against China on June 10, 1971, followed by a visit to China by then U.S. President Nixon and the Shanghai Communique, noting that both nations would work towards the normalization of their relations. During the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

Acupuncture Modernizes Medicine for Veterans

Nixon visit a reporter took ill and was treated through acupuncture. He later wrote about it and his article garnered interest, inspiring medical professionals to investigate. A bevy of research and experience since then has shown the practice to reap great rewards.

The procedure works by inserting disposable needles into specific points along meridians in the body, to increase energy flow toward a rebalance. American acupuncture practitioners say it stimulates nerves, muscles and connective tissue to boost the body's natural painkillers. Acupuncture has few side effects, so it may be worth a try if you're having trouble controlling pain with more-conventional methods.

Acupuncture points are situated in all areas of the body. Sometimes the appropriate points are far removed from the area of your pain. The procedure involves insertion of thin, disposable needles to various depths at strategic points on your body. The needles cause little discomfort and are disposable to promote safety. People often don't feel them inserted at all. Next, the practitioner may gently move or twirl the needles after placement or apply heat or mild electrical pulses to the needles. In most cases, the needles remain in place for 10 to 20 minutes while you lie still and relax.

Michael Freedman, M.D. suggests that, "Simple and easy-to-use acupuncture treatments should be a core competency that every physician or medical provider has, as a tool, regardless of specialty or the number of years of training and practice." Freedman is a Neurologist and Medical Acupuncturist in the Durham VA Health Care System. Since his initial training several years ago as part of a VA/DoD collaborative project, he has incorporated acupuncture into his General Neurology practice because, he asserts, "Many pain conditions commonly seen in a general neurology practice are particularly responsive to acupuncture." Freedman contends that using a few minutes to perform brief acupuncture treatments can often alleviate pain immediately as well as increase the effectiveness and duration of other pain treatments between visits.

Inside a long list of benefits, acupuncture is recognized to relieve adverse feelings associated with chemotherapy-induced and postoperative illness, dental pain, tension headaches and migraines, labor pain, low back pain, osteoarthritis, menstrual cramps and respiratory disorders, such as allergic rhinitis. Freedman shares that there is deep, gratifying satisfaction to providers who receive tearful thanks from patients suddenly relieved of pain. Freedman believes that every health care provider should be equipped with knowledge of some common acupuncture treatments. He says, "There is no justification to make a patient wait hours, days or weeks for relief that the [provider] standing in front of them could provide in minutes."

So, this isn't just an alert for Veteran patients who could benefit from the treatment. It is also a call to action to providers who are in a position to better serve their patients. In considering the topic, Freedman was reminded of an Albert Schweitzer quote: "The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others."

Acupuncture is offered in many VA facilities with other complementary and integrative health care (CIH) protocols that supplement traditional health care methods and promote wellness. Check with your primary care team or open VA's [Live Whole Health app](#) for more information.



MyHealtheVet Is Changing the Way VETERANS ACCESS HEALTH CARE

By Megan Kon

MyHealtheVet (MHV) is an [online portal](#) designed to help Veterans communicate with their health care team in a faster, more convenient way. It is completely encrypted and secure, housing medical records, lab reports and personal information about the Veteran.

MHV became a useful means of communication during the coronavirus pandemic. Veterans and health care teams increased their use of MHV to send written messages to each other.

"It is an excellent tool and helps bridge the gap between our Veterans and our providers," Annette Timberlake, the new MHV Coordinator at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS), says. She joined the MHV team last month and has worked in clinical coordination since 2009.

MHV offers a basic and a premium account. A premium account provides Veterans with the highest level of access to MHV features. Veterans can refill and track prescriptions, download medical records, manage appointments and ask health care questions. To find out more about how MHV can improve your health care experience, including how to create a premium account, visit <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home> or call (804) 675-5312.

Have an issue that hasn't been resolved yet?

MHV offers secure messaging for Veterans to send messages to most CVHCS services, including [Office of Patient Advocacy](#).

"My HealtheVet is a great way for Veterans to communicate with their physician or health care team," Timberlake said. "There are hundreds of reasons why the MyHealtheVet portal would make a Veteran's life easier."

CVHCS currently has 39,192 Veterans enrolled into a premium account.

(TOP PHOTO) MyHealtheVet Coordinator Annette Timberlake helps Veterans to enroll onto the secure, online communication tool, MyHealtheVet (MHV). She also ensures that Veteran messages are addressed by clinical teams within a timely manner. **(Official CVHCS Photo by Megan Kon/Released)**

VA Offers Continued Debt Relief Options to Veterans

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reaffirms its commitment to extend debt relief for Veterans through Sept. 30. VA will continue suspension of collection on all Veteran benefit overpayments and medical copayment debts incurred after April 1, 2020.

VA is suspending this debt collection to provide Veterans continued financial relief due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “My top priority right now is to do everything in our power to help our Veterans, caregivers and their families get through this challenging COVID-19 pandemic,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “VA will continue to find ways to provide real relief to 2 million Veterans and their families as we fight through this health crisis together.”

To assist with making informed choices for their situations, VA will notify Veterans of the existence of their current debt and available expansive relief options. These options include making payments, extending repayment plans, waivers, compromises and temporary hardship suspensions.

Veterans and beneficiaries with questions regarding benefit overpayments can go online to see frequently asked questions or to submit requests, or call (800) 827-0648. Call volume is generally lower Tuesday-Friday.

For questions about medical and pharmacy copayment debt, Veterans can contact the Health Resource Center at (866) 400-1238.

VA to Increase Participation of Women Veterans in Genetic Research to Aid in Improving Women’s Health

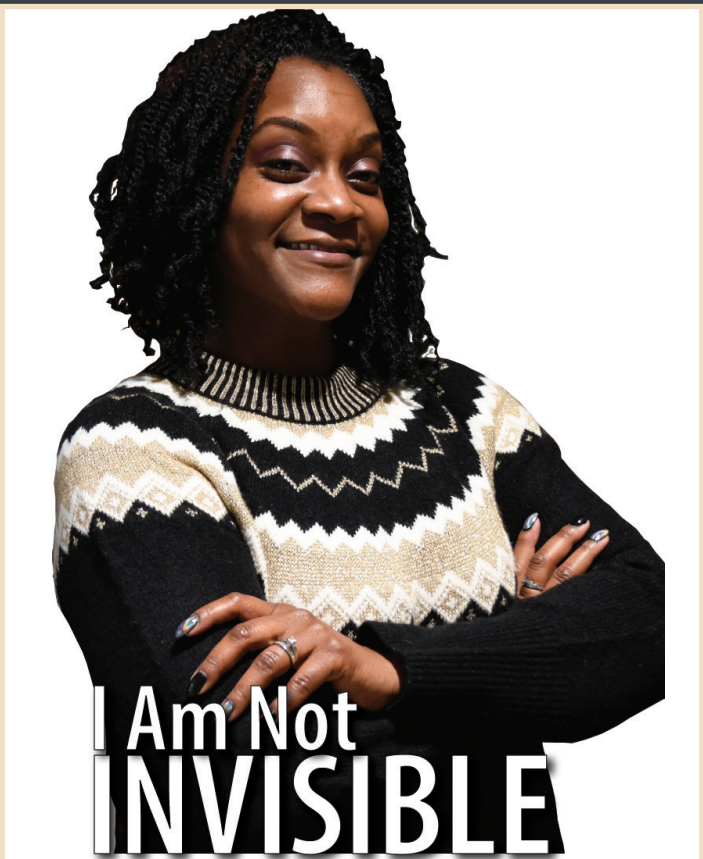
WASHINGTON — On the first day of Women’s History Month, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched efforts to increase women Veteran participation in VA’s Million Veteran Program (MVP) to aid in genetic research focused on women’s health issues.

MVP is currently researching genetic and clinical markers to predict breast cancer risk in women Veterans. “While there are roughly 2 million living women Veterans, only 75,000 are currently enrolled in MVP representing only 9 percent of the MVP cohort,” said VA Assistant Secretary Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Kayla Williams, who is also an MVP participant.

“If more women Veterans consider joining, VA researchers would have a larger gene pool to be able to study women’s health in greater detail and offer women the specialized care they need and deserve.”

With increased participation, research could focus on investigating treatments and preventions of diseases that affect women Veterans including depression, hypertension, heart disease, osteoarthritis and others. Since 2011, more than 830,000 Veterans have joined MVP, allowing researchers to learn how differences in genes, lifestyle and military experiences affect Veterans’ health and illnesses.

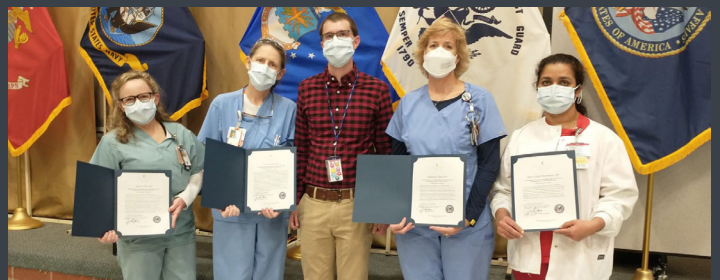
Participation in MVP is entirely voluntary, and Veterans go through an informed consent process to ensure that MVP is right for them. Learn more about enrolling in MVP on the [website](#) or by calling (866) 441-6075. For more information about VA research, including MVP research program, visit VA’s Office of Research and Development.



I Am Not INVISIBLE

There are roughly two million women Veterans, making up 10 percent of the Veteran population and that number is growing. However, they continue to face significant barriers and challenges in accessing necessary health care and other services, while experiencing a lack of recognition. The I Am Not Invisible (IANI) project, developed in Oregon, aims to increase awareness and dialogue about women Veterans and to open viewers’ eyes to the myriad of contributions, needs and experiences of women who have served in the military. VA medical centers across the country will unveil their exhibits between now and March 2021.

Hardworking, Dedicated Nurses Recognized

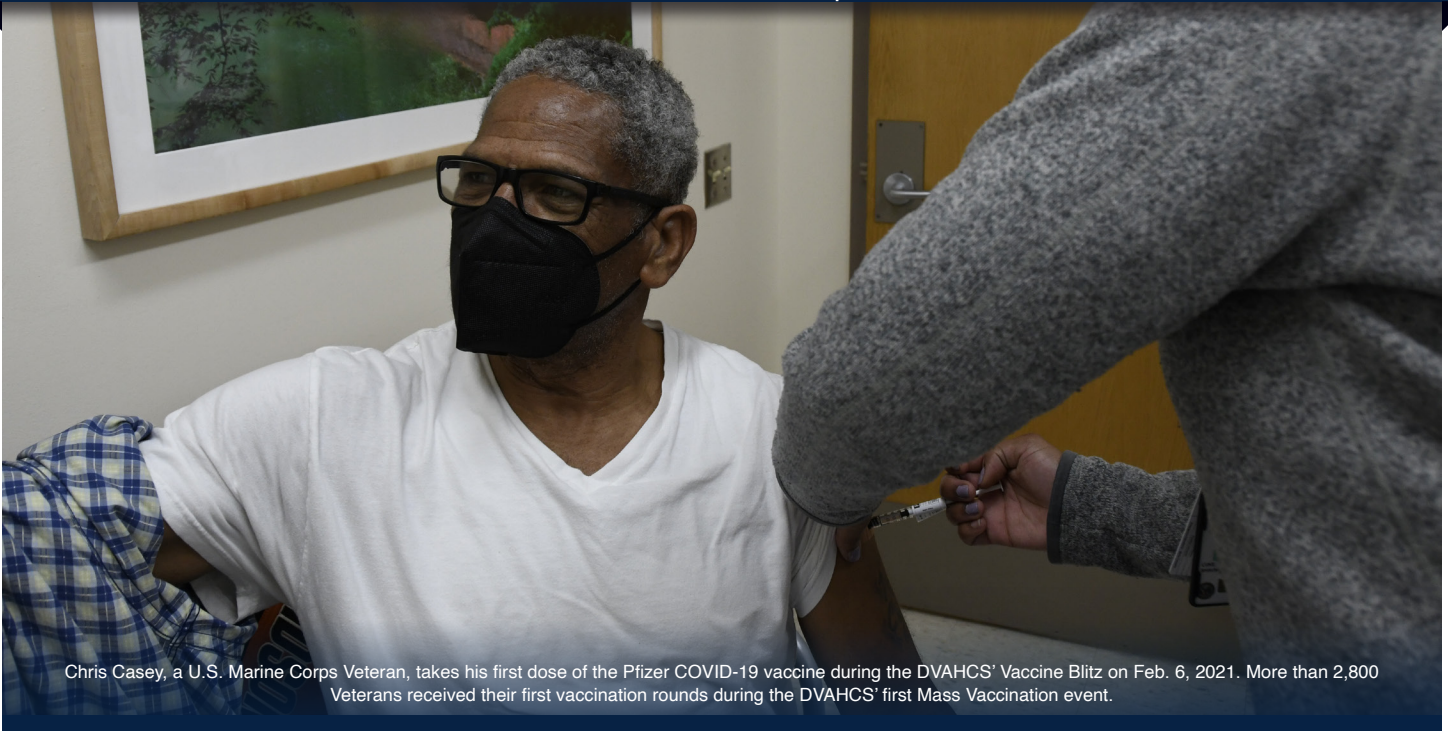


From left to right: Angela Weis, Emily Tewksbury, Dr. Matt Hitchcock, Vaccine Coordinator, Kimberly Elgin and Mary Linda Rajendran. (Photos by Megan Kon, public affairs specialist, February 2021)

Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) recently recognized four nurses who have been integral to the operations of the COVID Vaccination Clinic. Since December 2020, these nurses have helped to deliver thousands of doses to employees, Veterans, caregivers and volunteers.

“We are proud of the entire nursing team, but this crew of four helped start the clinic,” Linda Nierman, nurse coordinator for the COVID-19 Clinic, said. “Their hard work and positive attitudes helped continue the team effort to ensure Veterans are contacted, scheduled, educated and vaccinated for the COVID-19 vaccine.”

Mary Linda Rajendran, Kimberly Elgin, Angela Weis and Emily Tewksbury received certificates recognizing them for their outstanding, Veteran-centered performance and their dedication to the clinic.



Chris Casey, a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran, takes his first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine during the DVAHCS' Vaccine Blitz on Feb. 6, 2021. More than 2,800 Veterans received their first vaccination rounds during the DVAHCS' first Mass Vaccination event.

In February, the Durham VA Healthcare System (DVAHCS) held two mass vaccination events, administering doses of the Pfizer Vaccine to more than 6,000 Veterans. Despite initial long lines, many Veterans lauded the organization and the professionalism of the DVAHCS staff and volunteers, as well as the short duration between initial appointment times, observation, and the return to their homes.

"I spent longer in the parking garage than I did waiting in line," joked Preston Miller, an Operations Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom Army Veteran. "The coordination that went into this is amazing."

With weeks in planning by the DVAHCS Office of Public Health and Epidemiology (OPHE), staff and Duke University Medical Student volunteers ensured a comfortable experience for Veterans. Veterans over the age of 65, with certain high-risk medical conditions such as diabetes, were prime candidates to receive the vaccine. Additionally, Veterans who fulfill roles as essential workers were also vaccinated.

"An event like this made sense," said Dr. Chris Hostler, chief of the Office of Public Health and Epidemiology. "We had about 3000 first doses of the vaccine and we felt it best to vaccinate as many Veterans as we could in one go."

Heavy promotion of the mass vaccination event ensured that plenty of Veterans would have the opportunity to receive the

Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. Initial lines looked daunting, but quick and coordinated work from staff enabled Veterans to move through the lines with few glitches. The events of the day went so smoothly that eligible Veterans, who did not have appointments, were able to take the timeslots of those that didn't show up for their appointment times.

Much of the success of the event is due to great community partners such as Duke University's School of Medicine.

"It was great experience," said Danielle Rosenthal, a third-year Duke University medical student, "The Veterans were understandably eager and overall great patients to work with."

For many aging Veterans, receiving the vaccine brought a sigh of relief and a reassurance that there are brighter days ahead. For other Veterans; many of whom travelled several hours for their first dose, the day had an equally significant meaning.

"In the two hours it took me to drive here, I had a lot of time to change my mind and turn around," said Vietnam and Marine Corps Veteran Chris Casey. "But then I thought about my fellow African Americans, and Americans of all races who aren't here now because of this virus, and it hardened my resolve."

This is the first mass vaccination event held at the DVAHCS. Preparations are being made for more Veterans to be vaccinated soon.

"Because of this, I'll be able to have a measure of peace," said Mr. Casey. "I'm extremely grateful to the doctors here at the VA, and I can't wait to take the next step."

I AM NOT INVISIBLE

Dr. Heather Rosati, PharmD, BCPS
United States Navy (1994-2020)
Hospital Corpsman to Pharmacist
Associate Chief of Pharmacy Operations

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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 27809
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

VISN 6 Newsletter

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