

VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here —



East-Raleigh Nurse Practitioner RECEIVES PRESIDENT'S Volunteer Service Award

Inside This Issue



By Joshua Edson | DURHAM VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM INTEGRATED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

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Lisa Sanford, a nurse practitioner and primary care provider at the Clayton-East Raleigh VA Clinic, was recently awarded the President's Volunteer Service Award (PVSA). The PVSA is the highest national award for volunteer achievement. Dr. Kenneth Curry, a local member of the clergy in Franklinton, N.C., submitted Dr. Sanford's nomination for the award.

The President's Volunteer Service Award, established in 2003 by the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation, recognizes the contributions of voluntary activities to the nation's strength and national identity. The PVSA recognizes individuals whose service positively impacts their communities in hope of inspiring others to voluntary service.

For the past 30 years, Dr. Sanford has contributed her medical expertise to the well-being of Veterans as a full-time nurse. During that time, Dr. Sanford has also volunteered her medical acuity and knowledge to people in Johnston County, N.C., and the surrounding communities.

"I've been doing this since I was in college," Dr. Sanford said. "I first started with Asian immigrants and refugees in the Atlanta area and continued from there."

Dr. Sanford's volunteer efforts have been enhanced due to her fluency in Spanish. While a resident of California and during her time in North Carolina, she's taught Latin

TOP PHOTO: Dr. Lisa Sanford, a Nurse Practitioner and provider at the Clayton CBOC, poses with her President's Volunteer Service Award. Dr. Sanford received the award in recognition of the countless hours of community service she has performed spanning almost 30 years.

(Continued on page 6)



MESSAGE FROM OUR ACTING NETWORK DIRECTOR

This month we held our virtual Veterans Advisory Council (VAC) meeting with more than 60 VSOs and congressional staffers across North Carolina and Virginia. This was my first opportunity to host the VAC meeting instead of presenting as a facility director. I have to say; it's pretty amazing to collectively see what VISN program managers and facilities are doing to ensure Veterans have the health care they need and deserve - especially during this time of massive change and transition.

COVID-19 variants and their increased spread only solidify the importance of being fully COVID-19 vaccinated.

Even though the country is averaging about 250 coronavirus deaths each day (the fewest since March 2020), case numbers have slowly trended upward. The uptick in cases is primarily due to localized outbreaks in

places with low vaccination rates. VA remains vigilant of the rising number of cases caused by the [Delta variant](#) of the coronavirus, which is highly contagious and accounts for [more than 50%](#) of COVID-19 cases in the U.S. The [Delta strain](#) drives more than 80% of new infections in some parts of the country, including Midwestern states such as Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa.

The good news is the vaccines being used in the U.S. all appear to be [highly effective](#) at protecting against severe disease, hospitalization, and death caused by these variants. Nearly all US COVID-19 deaths are among [unvaccinated individuals](#). Yet, there is still widespread distrust of the vaccine or the need to be vaccinated. We continue to stand at the ready to educate and inform all Veterans why getting the vaccine is critical.

We have been preparing for hurricane season since June. This month

we were able to test our readiness with Tropical Storm Elsa. Though she only brought heavy rain and wind with her our sites used this as an opportunity to test our employee alert system and contact our most vulnerable patient Veteran population to ensure they had the medication, transportation, and oxygen they needed. I feel confident that our facilities are ready to respond when needed. We encourage patients to call for a refill when they are down to two weeks of medication, especially during hurricane season.

As they say, the only constant is change, but what doesn't change is our drive to take care of Veterans in North Carolina and Virginia proactively.

Thank you for all that you do.

STEPHANIE YOUNG

Acting VA Mid Atlantic Health Care Network Director, VISION 6

Salem VA Health Care System Nurses Honored With Citizen of the Year Award

Nurses from the Salem VA Health Care System, Carilion Clinic, and LewisGale Medical Center were honored with the Salem Rotary Club's Citizen of the Year Award at a special ceremony held May 25 at the Salem Civic Center.

The award, which was first presented in 1957, is presented, according to the Salem Rotary, "in recognition of distinguished service to the community for steadfast dedication to the high calling of good citizenship and faithful devotion to those ideas which have made America strong and free."

Pamela McAnally, Associate Director of Patient Care services, attended the event with five other nurses to represent the Salem Health Care System, including Patricia Bohannon, RN, Carolyn Casey, RN, Celeste Griffith, RN, Stacey Boris, LPN, and Carolyn Keyes, RN. Small groups of representative nurses also attended from Carilion and LewisGale.

Nurses from the Salem VA Health Care System, Carilion Clinic, and LewisGale Medical Center were honored with the Salem Rotary Club's Citizen of the Year Award during a ceremony May 25 at the Salem Civic Center.

"The award is presented annually in recognition of distinguished service to our community for steadfast dedication to the high calling of good citizenship and faithful devotion to those ideas which have made America strong and free," said Rob Cassell, Chair of the Citizen of the Year Committee. "We recognize the nurses in our community for their extraordinary contributions to our community over the last 15 months during the COVID pandemic. Their efforts and work in the community are always appreciated, and our awareness of the unique and critical role

they have played as the community managed the tragedies associated with COVID-19 merits this special recognition."

"The award is such an honor for all nurses," said McAnally. "This past year has been challenging for all of us. It has been humbling to watch how everyone has come together to take on the pandemic. Nurses answered the call of service over self, not only during the pandemic, but as they do every day. I am proud and thankful to work alongside them and our community partners to care for our Veterans."



Securing VA Centers of Excellence for Aging Veterans

By Christopher Camacho | DURHAM VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM INTEGRATED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

The Durham VA Health Care System Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center, or GRECC, has a mission to improve the care of aging adults. The GRECC has garnered national attention by honoring aging Veterans, making significant advancements through integrated research, education and clinical innovation. Additionally, the GRECC, originally established by Congress in 1975, is one of the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Centers of Excellence.

Dr. Kenneth Schmader, director of the Durham GRECC and a professor of medicine at Duke University, has dedicated his career to care for aging adults. His research includes herpes zoster (shingles), infections, and vaccines for older adults. He is a consistent advocate for aging adults, and has practiced medicine for more than 30 years.

"The Durham GRECC was founded in 1984," said Dr. Schmader. "I have been here since 1986 and I absolutely love working here because the people are fantastic to work with, and we all have a common mission to serve our Veterans."

Numerous innovative programs and products have been developed by the Durham VA GRECC in five general areas of concentration: exercise and nutrition, optimal use of medications in older adults, bone health (reducing falls and fractures), vaccines and infections, and novel care innovations and models.

"Being the director of the GRECC, it is just so wonderful to see the products that directly impact the care of older Veterans that have come out of our GRECC, and I really enjoy working with the people I work with every day," said Dr. Schmader.

Perhaps the most popular program developed for aging Veterans by the Durham VA GRECC is [the Gerofit program](#). Gerofit was initiated in 1986 by Dr. Miriam Morey, the

associate director of the Durham VA GRECC. Gerofit is a nationally known exercise program that has increased longevity, improved quality of life, and increased independence in older Veterans. It is a gold status practice, recognized nationally across the VA.



Dr. Kenneth Schmader takes pride in the innovation and collaboration that takes place under his direction at the Durham GRECC.

"Another example is the Perioperative Optimization of Senior Health (POSH). This is a multi-disciplinary collaboration between geriatrics, surgery and anesthesiology to reduce perioperative complications in frail, older Veterans who undergo surgery," Dr. Schmader explains. "It's been fantastically successful, too."

Dr. Schmader attributes multidisciplinary teamwork and collaboration for the success of many of the programs and services available through GRECC, in addition to the abundance of innovative ideas and research.

"We're highly collaborative," Dr. Schmader said. "We work locally with our Centers of Excellence ... our sisters and brothers in Health Services, Research and Development (HSR&D), Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC), and many other services."

Over the last four years, efforts from those collaborations have brought in over \$42 million in research funding and grants from

the National Institute of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, the Department of Defense, and the VA Office and Research and Development.

"It's not just physicians, it's nurses, social workers, pharmacists, exercise physiologists, nutritionists, basic lab scientists, biostatisticians ... and we all work together to propel this mission that I've spoken about."

It is not just the research that has made the Durham GRECC a center of excellence, but the people who perform the work. There appears to be collective energy to care for older adults that drives the quality of the care, a rare sense of responsibility, and a desire to honor Veterans. Harry Babwah, a retired Army Veteran and Bronze Star recipient, serves as the administrative officer for the Durham VA GRECC.

"The staff here are dedicated to helping our Veterans 65 and older, and the commitment of the team that I see here is unprecedented," said Harry Babwah, GRECC administrative officer.

The Durham VA GRECC staff attribute their success to the depth and variety of the research performed. From gene-syphoning DNA to determine their effect on medication to looking through a fluorescent microscope to visualize cells, the Durham VA GRECC continues to secure VA excellence for aging Veteran care.

Working here in GRECC has been extremely gratifying personally and for the entire team here," said Judith Davagnino, GRECC coach director. "It's a group of excellence and I am very proud of them."

For more information about the Durham VA Health Care System, GRECC, or other Durham VAHCS Centers of Excellence, visit <https://www.durham.va.gov> or www.facebook.com/VADurham.

Western North Carolina VA Health Care System Continues to Make Strides During COVID-19

By Vance Janes

WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — The Western North Carolina VA Health Care System continues to move forward in its fight against COVID-19 and its efforts to better care for the Veterans it serves.

With the number of Veterans who have received the COVID-19 vaccine increasing, the Health Care System has changed the way it is offering the shots. Originally the Health Care

System set up a drive-through vaccination clinic in the parking lot in December 2020 where shots were provided by appointment only to the highest-risk Veterans.

Over the course of the following six months, thousands of patients made their way to the Medical Center to receive the vaccine.

The clinic was set up in the same fashion as the Flu Shot Clinic which also served thousands of Veterans in the fall of 2019. A tried-and-true method, the flu shot clinic model was used to create a modified version which

allowed staff to provide first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Veterans were able to drive up, get their shot, sit in their cars for an observation period and then be on their way.

As more vaccine became more readily available across the country and with the passing of the Save Lives Act — legislation that opened VA vaccine accessibility to all Veterans, spouses, and caregivers — the medical center was able to serve a much larger segment of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Veteran population.

The demand at WNCVAHCS began to taper off once more and more people were getting vaccinated everywhere in the community, from pharmacies to community doctors.

That's when the decision was made to move the clinic inside the CGVAMC to the Building 47 atrium. No longer are appointments needed. Vaccines are now available Mondays through Fridays, and Veterans can walk in and receive the shot. That said, the option to schedule the vaccine through primary care is still available to Veterans who receive care from the VA.

The Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Rutherford County, Franklin and Hickory were also vaccinating Veterans during scheduled shot clinics. This has changed, and now the CBOCs are also offering no-appointment walk-ins. During this same time, VA employees were scheduling and continue to get their vaccines through the Health Care System's Occupational Health Department.

By June 16, a total of 25,647 first and second doses had been provided to Veterans and staff, which includes more than 11,000 Veterans, 1,700 staff. More than 500 people also received the vaccine under the Save Lives Act.

To make sure that everyone eligible to receive a vaccine at the WNC VA Health Care System can get it, the CGVAMC and three CBOCs have ongoing clinics.

Charles George VA Medical Center, Asheville

Monday through Friday, 8:00am-3:30pm. No appointment needed. The vaccination clinic is now located in the atrium of the main hospital building.

Franklin Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)

Monday through Friday during business hours. Call 828-369-1781, ext. 3831, to schedule a vaccine.

Rutherford County CBOC

Monday through Friday during business hours. Call 828-202-2735, ext. 6031, to schedule a vaccine.

Hickory CBOC

Monday through Friday during business hours.

These groups are now eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine:

- All Veterans
- Spouses and surviving spouses of Veterans
- Caregivers of Veterans. For COVID-19 vaccine eligibility, we define a caregiver as a family member or friend who provides care to a Veteran. Caregivers may help a Veteran with personal needs like feeding, bathing or dressing. They may also help a Veteran with tasks like shopping or transportation.
- Recipients of Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) benefits.



(L-R) Dr. Therese Montoya (Chief PMRS), Dr. Taquissa Simmons (Executive Director), Dr. Shawn Alexander (Chief of Staff), Judith Curtis (Chief of Volunteer Services), Jeannine Leonard, (Chief Nurse SCI), Crystal Lindaman (ADPCS), Dr. Kenneth Waller (Chief SCI) and Mr. Michael Harper, Associate Director for Operations, cut the ribbon on the newly donated iBOT.

Hampton VA Receives iBOT Personal Mobility Device

By John Rogers | PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

Through a partnership with Mobius Mobility and Newly developed, [New England Center for Innovation Excellence](#) (NECIE), Hampton VA Healthcare System has received a donation of an iBOT personal mobility device (PMD). NECIE is the first-of-its-kind Veteran Integrated System Network (VISN) Center for the VA and is led by the VA New England Healthcare System; its virtual home and educational hub is the VA Manchester Healthcare System. NECIE is executing the VA side of the donation tour as part of VA's efforts to transform health care services through its strategic public and private partnerships.

The iBOT personal mobility device (PMD) increases mobility by allowing users to independently elevate their view, climb up stairs, and traverse various terrains. The iBOTs will be distributed to Veteran residents of HVAMC SCI/D clinic who are appropriately determined based on need, a clinical assessment and prescription. An additional unit will be used for training and demonstration purposes for Veterans with spinal cord injuries.

In honor of this momentous occasion, Hampton held a ceremony and demonstration of the iBOT. Dr. Taquisa K. Simmons, Executive Director thanked Mobius Mobile and NECIE for their collaboration and for the donation of the iBOT PMD. In addition, she thanked our Spinal Cord Injury clinic staff for all that they do for our Veterans each day. "You are a unique and appreciated group of individuals that provide the highest quality of care for our nation's heroes. The VA would not be able to fulfill its mission without the sacrifices you all make giving of yourselves," stated Dr. Simmons.

Representing NECIE, Ms. Kristin Pressely, Public Affairs Officer, stated, "Our goal is to deliver the mobility and independence our disabled Veterans deserve," Kamen said. "It's often said as a nation we are in debt to Veterans for their service and sacrifice. The best way to repay this debt is to deliver advanced technology that enables them to live life on their own terms, and to be as healthy and independent as possible."

HVAMC appreciates this life-changing donation, and we deeply appreciate your efforts in caring for our Veterans. On behalf of Team Hampton, thank you.

Right Photo: Dr. Darlene Moran, OT Supervisor



Charles George VA Medical Center Clinicians, Veterans Participate in National Study on Effects of Statins on Elderly

By Vance Janes | WNC VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PUBLIC AFFAIRS

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — A major statin study focused on older people is now underway, and Charles George VA Medical Center (CGVAMC) is one of the 50 VA medical centers across the nation taking part.

Statin drugs are used by millions of Americans to lower cholesterol, but most of the research surrounding them has focused on middle-aged people.

The new study, called [PREVENTABLE](#), focuses on how taking the statin atorvastatin (sold as Lipitor) could help adults 75 and older who don't have cardiovascular disease improve their lives by preventing dementia, disability or heart disease.

"This is a very large study addressing a clinical question that is a quandary to patients and providers alike," Dr. Brian Peek, CGVAMC Chief of Pharmacy and Associate Chief of Staff for Research, said. "Most providers have had to deal with questions about statins without as much information as needed."

Others on the team at CGVAMC are Dr. Michael Lidow and Pharmacist Angela Pentecost — both co-investigators, and Research Study Coordinator Jessica Michael.

The local team has primarily focused on getting the word out to providers about this opportunity and has just begun enrolling patients. Members of the team at Charles George are experienced researchers and have connections with primary care, which is where most volunteers are expected to be found.

Dr. Lidow said the research has exciting implications for future treatment of patients.

"I am excited to be involved with this inter-

disciplinary team working on this study," he said. "We have an opportunity to help answer meaningful clinical questions and look at outcomes that directly affect our patients' quality of life. At this time, the scientific evidence to answer these questions is limited, but I am grateful to be able to work with this group at CGVAMC to help change that."

Dr. Jacob Joseph, a Boston VA Healthcare System Cardiac Specialist and researcher who is also a lead investigator on the PREVENTABLE study, echoed Dr. Lidow's comment.

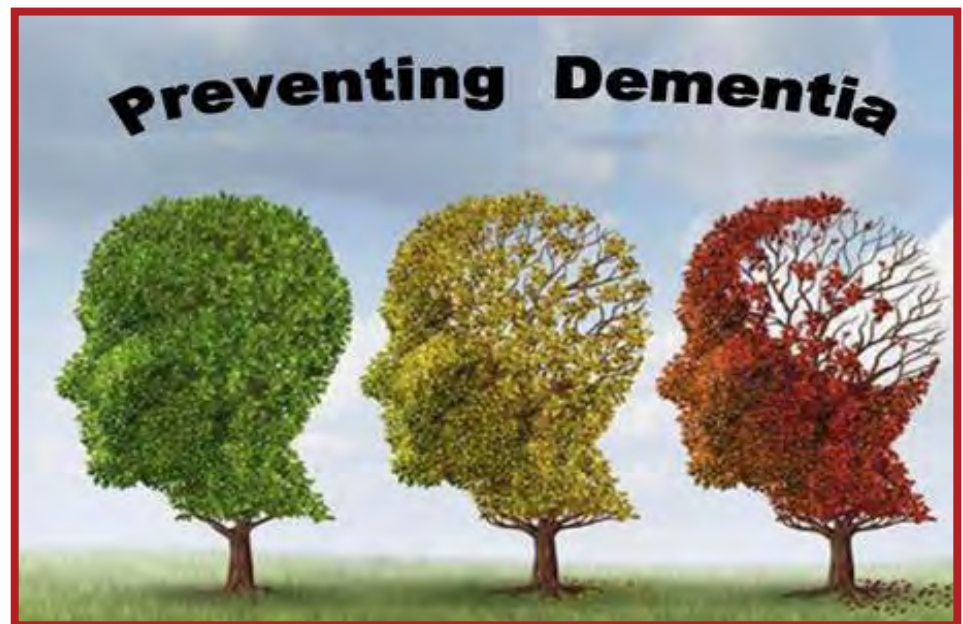
"The question is so important for both older people generally and older Veterans specifically," says Joseph, a principal investigator

with the network of 50 VA hospitals involved in the trial.

The VA network is one of 100 health systems represented in the research. VA contributes "fantastic strengths," Joseph said, such as research expertise, a huge and generous patient population of prospective volunteers, and a sophisticated electronic records system.

With the large number of sites and a plan to include 20,000 participants in the 75-plus age range, PREVENTABLE stands to be among the largest-ever health studies in older adults.

Photo Above: A new study called PREVENTABLE aims to determine how taking the statin atorvastatin (brand name Lipitor) might help prevent dementia, disability or heart disease in adults 75 and older.



Editor's note: Veterans who receive their health care here can participate by contacting the study team at 828-298-7911 ext. 4245. Tamar Nordenberg, VA Research Communications, contributed to this article. To read more about the study, visit: [Can statins help 75-and-overs stay healthy? PREVENTABLE trial will provide answers \(va.gov\)](#)



Left Photo: Congressman Dan Bishop (R-District 9) listens intently during a round table discussion as Veteran Service Organization representatives speak about issues relevant to Veterans transitioning from the military. **Right Photo:** Jillian Baugh, LCSW, a mental health social worker with Charlotte VA Health Care Center, presents at a recent round table discussion that included Congressman Dan Bishop (R-District 9). Baugh spoke about the importance of Veterans finding a sense of purpose after transitioning from the military.

Congressman Bishop Impressed with Veteran Health Services Plans to Hold More Round Table Events in Future

By Christopher “Todd” Goodman
SALISBURY HCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

How better to serve Veterans who are transitioning from the military as well as those already seeking care within the Salisbury VA Health Care System were the topics of a recent round table discussion that included Congressman Dan Bishop (R-District 9).

Held at South Piedmont Community College in Monroe, the panel featured area Veteran Service Organization (VSO) representatives from housing, employment, education, benefits, and mental health, which was provided by Charlotte VA Health Care Center Social Worker Jillian Baugh.

The discussion introduced and put a face to the many services and representatives that help area Veterans.

“My hope was to assist with VA visibility and contribute to the ongoing conversation about VA and how it can better collaborate with valued community partners,” said Baugh.

There is a wide network of available resources to Veterans. The issue is knowing how to find them and the barriers community leaders face when working with Veterans.

“My office can help make Veteran services across the gamut work better,” said Bishop. “If we communicate with each other, we can provide services that much better. This is a first step, and what it left me with is that we didn’t have enough time to cover everything. We are going to have more of these meetings in the future.”

For many Veterans, the most important thing to have after leaving the military is a sense of purpose, which can encourage them to use the services available to them.

“Veterans are transitioning from an environment where they have a role and a sense of purpose,” said Baugh. “Then they get out into the civilian world and people may not understand. So, I think many Veterans have difficulty finding their sense of purpose.”

That’s where employment, therapy,

a sense of community, collaboration and communication come into play. There are many challenges facing Veterans, but from the mental health side, a sense of purpose cannot be overstated.

“I think that is one of the greatest hurdles we face,” said Baugh. “Service officers know this very well, and what we can do is work better together to support Veterans in this population.”

For Bishop, whose office handles a variety of Veteran issues and requests, he realizes these discussions can lead to solutions. Building a VSO network can give his field representatives more tools to accomplish their mission — serving Veterans.

“I think this is an extraordinarily important day, where I get to learn from you what challenges we face and what help is available,” said Bishop. “I appreciate what VA is doing and all the different ways VA helps Veterans. I’m grateful to everyone for being here today.”

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Clayton East-Raleigh Nurse Practitioner Receives President’s Volunteer Service Award

By: Joshua Edson | DURHAM VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM INTEGRATED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

American immigrants how to read and write in English. As an advocate for the Latin American community, she’s provided immunizations to disadvantaged Spanish-speaking communities, as well as healthy living classes for aging adults who struggled financially or were unable to acquire medical care.

“Any and all of the above,” says Dr. Sanford. “I always have something going when it comes to volunteering.”

Dr. Sanford’s volunteer activities and

advocacy got the attention of the local community, sparking gratitude from residents in North Carolina, eventually leading to the nomination for the PVSA. Dr. Kenneth Curry of New Horizons Christian Ministry is an Army Veteran and patient at the Clayton East-Raleigh VA Clinic. Dr. Curry was impressed by Dr. Sanford’s commitment to the less fortunate members of her community. Being a past recipient of the PVSA, Dr. Curry decided to nominate Dr. Sanford.

“My organization is a certifying agency for the President’s Volunteer Service Award, which authorizes us to nominate deserving individuals,” says Dr. Curry. “There are so many unsung heroes out there, working to make their communities and this nation better. [Dr. Sanford] was one of those people.”

Dr. Sanford states that she is honored to be a recipient of the award, but quickly mentions that her goal is to help people, despite anyone recognizing her efforts.

“I’m incredibly humbled receiving this [award],” says Dr. Sanford. “There’s always something you can do, big or small, to help someone in need.”

G.I. Bill 77 Year Anniversary

June 22, 2021, marks the 77th Anniversary of the GI Bill, originally titled the “Service- men’s Readjustment Act of 1944.” The GI Bill set out the authority and responsibility for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide Veteran education and training benefits, as well as loan guaranty services.

Some may only associate the GI Bill with just education and training benefits, but there’s much more to it and its associated programs and benefits.

VA set a record last fiscal year by providing more than 1.2 million home loans, totaling \$375 billion. VA helped nearly 120,000 Veterans to avoid foreclosure, saving taxpayers more than \$3.4 billion in mortgage servicing fees. VA also provided nearly 2,100 adaptive housing grants worth more than \$116 million.

VA continues to improve and expand the benefits and services that were connected to the GI Bill. This year saw several pandemic-related acts administered by VA.

The Isakson-Roe Veterans Improvement Act of 2020 is a good example of how recent changes made by Congress recognize that the GI Bill is an economic opportunity engine.

To better support education, VA is implementing a Digital GI Bill that will modernize the information technology platform supporting the GI Bill. This will allow VA to deliver direct, online, one-stop access to GI Bill benefits and information to all GI Bill students, revolutionizing how Veterans and beneficiaries can interface with VA and their benefits while allowing them to receive benefits uninterrupted and on-time.

Another goal is to improve overall outreach and usage of the GI Bill programs for special populations, such as women Veterans, military spouses, children and minority Veterans.

One change that beneficiaries may also have noticed recently is that Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) services has changed its name from the previous “Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment.” The change re-emphasizes our mission to encourage, promote and support transitioning service members and Veterans with service-connected disabilities to achieve maximum independence in daily living and, to the maximum extent possible, to become

employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment.

VR&E counselors work on military installations and college campuses across the nation to provide outreach and readiness services to service members and Veterans.

VR&E is also currently undertaking a modernization effort to ensure that the next generation of service members and Veterans reach their employment goals. It includes tele-counseling, e-VA communications, centralized mail, a Web-based orientation tool and a state-of-the-art case management system.

Since 1944, more than 26 million home loans have been guaranteed by VA, worth nearly \$3 trillion. Since 1948, VA has made close to 45,000 housing grants totaling nearly \$1.7 billion.

The GI Bill was a triumph when it was passed 77 years ago. Its impact today only grows as it continues to benefit Veterans and their beneficiaries.

Dan Kuester is a public affairs specialist for the Veterans Benefits Administration.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt signs the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, which eventually became known as the GI Bill.



VA Secretary Denis McDonough

Statement On Department's Extension Of Moratoriums On Foreclosures And Evictions As Well As New Mortgage Repayment Assistance To Help Stabilize Vulnerable Households

As the nation emerges from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated millions of Americans remain in need of mortgage and rental assistance.

To provide continued relief to the Veteran and service member community, the Department of Veterans Affairs is extending by an additional month the foreclosure and eviction moratoriums through July 31.

Extending the COVID-19 moratoriums on foreclosures and evictions will allow households that may have fallen behind on their mortgages more time to recover. Ultimately the extension will help thousands of VA home loan borrowers stay in their homes, and provide those hard-hit by the pandemic the time needed to get back on a regular monthly mortgage payment schedule.

In addition to the multiple ways VA already helps borrowers to avoid foreclosure, the department is implementing a short-term mortgage repayment assistance program via the VA Partial Claim Payment program, to bring certain borrowers current on their mortgage as they resume regular mortgage payments. VAPCP will be available for COVID-19 impacted borrowers to help them remain in their home and continue to enjoy the benefits of homeownership.

Once the moratoriums end, VA will take additional steps to prevent foreclosures on VA-backed mortgages until borrowers are reviewed for COVID-19 home retention options that are affordable. VA will announce additional steps in July to offer borrowers payment reduction options that will enable more homeowners to stay in their homes. Additionally, VA will also continue to allow homeowners who have not taken advantage of forbearance to date to enter into COVID-related forbearance through Sept. 30 of this year.

The VHA Homeless Programs Office offers a wide range of resources and services for Veterans facing housing crises, having helped more than 850,000 Veterans and their families exit homelessness or remain in stable housing since 2010. The VHA Homeless Programs Office Supportive Services for Veteran Families program gives homeless prevention assistance and has taken a proactive approach to reach Veterans at risk of homelessness during the pandemic. The SSVF program's Shallow Subsidy intervention initiative will also assist by providing a modest subsidy for two years to extremely low-income Veterans who are at risk of homelessness.

Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless can call or visit their local VA Medical Center or contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838) for help.

The White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development also have resources for homeowners and renters needing help.

PRIDE at the VA

By John Rogers | PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

Every year in June, celebrations occur across the world to commemorate Pride Month. The special observance serves to recognize the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community and honor the history of the Stonewall Riots. While many may be familiar with the rainbow flag as an international symbol for the LGBTQ civil rights movement, there are few who know that the Pride flag was created by a Veteran. Gilbert Baker served honorably in the Army (1970-1972) and created the rainbow flag for Harvey Milk in 1978. It may also be surprising that the Transgender flag was also created by a Veteran! Monica Helms, who served honorably in the Navy (1970-1978), developed the Transgender Pride flag in 1999, and later founded the Transgender American Veterans Association (TAVA). Both of these innovative images have roots within the armed forces and reflect a history of proud military service.

In the spirit of innovation, the Veterans Health Administration (VA) has been at the forefront of setting the standard for affirmative care. From inclusive policies to staff education, VA has clearly sent the message that all individuals are welcome. The Hampton VA Medical Center has led the way in transforming the system to be inclusive of all sexual and gender minorities, a transformation that has been shared with facilities across the country. The VA Innovation Ecosystem recently featured two projects that were developed at the Hampton VA:

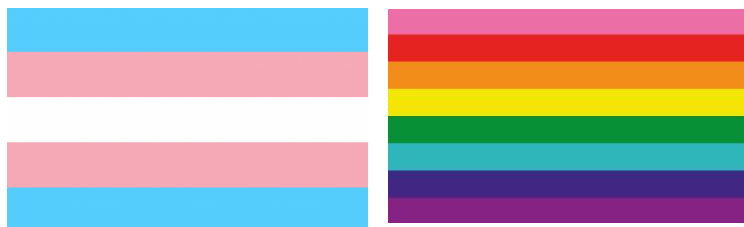
PRIDE in All Who Served

The PRIDE in All Who Served program is a 10-week health education program that focuses on reducing health care disparities. It helps LGBTQ+ Veterans to find the support, camaraderie and guidance they need to navigate the VA health care system while also training VA employees on how to engage with, and care for, LGBTQ+ Veterans. Since the program's launch, it has spread to more than 50 VHA facilities across the country through support from both [VHA Innovators Network](#) (iNET) and [Diffusion of Excellence](#).

Trans-Affirmative Narrative Exposure Therapy (TA-NET)

TA-NET is a therapeutic approach for transgender and gender-diverse Veterans that emphasizes sharing personal narratives holistically. The program is not just focused on one trauma as most evidence-based treatments are, but on the entire life story, chronologically, across a Veteran's lifespan. It focuses on how a lifetime of trauma impacts how a person views themselves and the world around them. It is currently supported through iNET's [Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Investment Program](#) and piloted at the Hampton VA Medical Center.

LGBTQ+ Veterans are welcomed and supported at the VA. Through ongoing innovative efforts, we are working to ensure that all Veterans have the support and guidance they need, as well as easy access to the best available care. [Click here](#) to learn more about how VA supports our LGBTQ+ Veterans.





The future of medicine is in your genes



The Future of Medicine Is in Your Genes. We Need Your Help. Fifteen minutes and a blood draw are all it takes to make a lasting difference.

Facilities in VISN 6 are enrolling Veterans into the Million Veteran Program, a national research program that studies how differences in genes, lifestyle and military experiences affect Veterans' health and illnesses.

The goal is to one day give Veterans specialized care with targeted treatments and preventions based on their genetics and medical history.

Veterans can enroll online at mvp.va.gov or by scheduling an appointment at your facility (Durham, Hampton, Richmond, Salem or Salisbury medical centers) by calling 866-441-6075. You do not need to receive VA health care to join VA's Million Veteran Program or schedule an appointment at our facility.

What is the Million Veteran Program (MVP)?

Since launching in 2011, nearly 840,000 Veteran partners have joined MVP, helping researchers to better understand the genetics of disease in Veterans.

By collecting DNA from as many Veterans as possible, along with information on their health, lifestyle and military experiences, researchers are beginning to answer important questions like:

- Why does a certain treatment work well for some Veterans but not others?
- Why are some Veterans at greater risk for developing an illness?
- How can we prevent certain illnesses in the first place?
- If [more women](#) and diverse populations enroll, MVP researchers can discover new medical breakthroughs that work for all Veterans.
- What does it mean to enroll?

To join MVP, you'll be asked to:

- Complete a consent process online at mvp.va.gov or at Durham, Hampton, Richmond, Salem or Salisbury medical centers by calling 1-866-441-6075 to make an appointment.
- Allow access to your health records.
- Provide a one-time blood sample for genetic analysis.
- Fill out occasional surveys about your health and lifestyle.

Once enrolled, you may be contacted again on a periodic basis if additional information is requested, or if there is a research opportunity you may want to consider. You will also receive newsletters about the program at least once a year with updates on research findings and other topics of interest.

For more questions about MVP, [explore their FAQs](#) or speak with a staff member at 866-441-6075.

Biomedical Engineers Vital to Veteran Health Care in Central Virginia

In health care, behind the scenes work is often as important as what goes on behind a medical curtain. Health care is complex, with technology constantly evolving to better assess, diagnose and treat the Veterans who seek care through Richmond's Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS). Without the medical devices that aid the nurses and doctors on the front line of health care, the entire operation might come to a screeching halt.

Enter CVHCS's Biomedical Engineer team, the technical experts who enable nearly every appointment, procedure, surgery and lifesaving encounter CVHCS's providers offer Veterans each day, according to Kim Hillmer, CVHCS's Chief Biomedical Engineer.

"The better we do our job, the better the clinical staff can do theirs," said Hillmer, who has been with the VA medical center in Richmond for 5 years. "Our service is not a patient-facing service, but the equipment we maintain is."

The field of professional Health Care Technology Managers with CVHCS has a wide reach across the different service lines that Veterans rely on for care. From calibrating medical equipment and training providers to use that equipment to maintaining computer network connectivity, biomedical engineers are operational enablers. At CVHCS, their goal is supporting frontline providers who are the face of Veteran health care.

"Access to care directly depends on the availability of the equipment," said Hillmer, who worked at the VA medical center in Milwaukee for two years before joining CVHCS. "Biomedical Engineering takes care of all of the medical equipment in the facility, from Ultrasounds to MRIs, and everything in between. We



David Wren Sr., back, and Michael Ankrum perform diagnostic testing on a portable X-ray device at the Central Virginia VA Health Care System, Richmond, Virginia, June 29, 2021. Wren and Ankrum are both Army Veterans and current biomedical engineers with CVHCS. The CVHCS biomedical engineers have a wide reach across the different service lines that Veterans rely on for care here. From calibrating medical equipment and training providers to use that equipment to maintaining computer network connectivity, biomedical engineers are operational enablers. "The better we do our job, the better the clinical staff can do theirs," said Kim Hillmer, CVHCS's Chief biomedical engineer. "Our service is not a patient facing service, but the equipment we maintain is." (Official CVHCS Photo by Megan Kon/Released)

try to maximize the 'uptime' of the equipment in all departments so that Veterans can receive care in a timely manner."

The 15-member CVHCS Biomedical Engineer team has a systematic approach to its mission, as might be expected for a group of technical experts in medical equipment maintenance and repair. Their focus — and driving factor behind the more than 7,600 repairs made in fiscal year 2020 alone — is ensuring that Veterans receive the timely and comprehensive care they expect from the Central Virginia VA, according to Chief Engineer Stephen Mosher.

"The goal of Engineering is to provide a healing environment that empowers VA's clinicians to provide the highest quality care," said Mosher, who has been with CVHCS since 2015.

"Biomedical Engineering is responsible for servicing, maintaining and managing over 6,000 medical devices valued at over \$100 million. Medical equipment and technology are used during most patient care visits. By partnering with clinical staff, Biomedical Engineering assists with the deployment of cutting-edge medical technology that revolutionizes patient care."

Media and stakeholder point-of-contact for this release is Tim Parish, Public Affairs Officer, Central Virginia VA Health Care System; timothy.parish@va.gov; 804-675-5242. (Tim Parish cannot schedule eligible persons for a COVID-19 vaccination appointment. Please go to the [Sign up to get a COVID-19 vaccine at VA](#) page to register.)



Left Photo: Biomedical engineers with Central Virginia VA Health Care System (CVHCS) perform diagnostic testing on a portable X-ray device, Richmond, Va., June 29, 2021. The CVHCS biomedical engineers have a wide reach across the different service lines that Veterans rely on for care here. From calibrating medical equipment and training providers to use that equipment to maintaining computer network connectivity, biomedical engineers are operational enablers. "The better we do our job, the better the clinical staff can do theirs," said Kim Hillmer, CVHCS's Chief biomedical engineer. "Our service is not a patient facing service, but the equipment we maintain is." (Official CVHCS Photo by Megan Kon/Released) **Right Photo:** A collection of IV monitors sit ready for routine maintenance inside the Central Virginia VA Health Care System's Biomedical Engineering workshop, Richmond, Va., June 29, 2021. The CVHCS biomedical engineers have a wide reach across the different service lines that Veterans rely on for care here. From calibrating medical equipment and training providers to use that equipment to maintaining computer network connectivity, biomedical engineers are operational enablers. "The better we do our job, the better the clinical staff can do theirs," said Kim Hillmer, CVHCS's Chief biomedical engineer. "Our service is not a patient facing service, but the equipment we maintain is." (Official CVHCS Photo by Megan Kon/Released)

VA Seeks Increase in Academic Relationships With Minority-Serving Institutions to Expand Health Professions Training

WASHINGTON — June 9, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs hosted the 2021 Minority Summit: The Power of Collaborating with VA to strengthen and expand its relationships with minority-serving colleges, universities and medical schools, and professional organizations.

VA's Office of Academic Affiliations hosted more than 700 participants in a collaborative effort to increase academic affiliations with minority-serving institutions to create a more diverse cadre of health professions trainees to learn and care for Veteran patients at VA.

Summit discussions centered around affiliation, scholarship and research opportunities available through VA. Included were panels comprising representatives from VA and academia, remarks by VA Secretary Denis

McDonough and a keynote address from Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services and Chief Medical Officer of the Veterans Health Administration Kameron Matthews, M.D., J.D.

"Veterans are one of the most diverse populations, representing America in all its strength, a wealth of races, ethnicities, genders, and geographic and cultural backgrounds," said McDonough. "It's vital we build a workforce that reflects the diverse population we serve — not only because it's the right thing to do, but because doing so will save lives. VA has affiliations with more than 200 minority-serving institutions across the country to train health professionals for VA and the nation, and we look forward to establishing even more partnerships to fulfill our mission."

VA has made strides in broadening diversity in the workforce and with its trainees.

The Veterans Health Administration is the largest education and training program for health professionals in the U.S. working with 97 percent of the country's medical schools and more than 1,800 universities and colleges.

Each year, 120,000 trainees in more than 40 clinical health profession education programs — including nearly 20,000 students from minority-serving institutions — train in a VHA facility. Approximately 70 percent of the country's physicians have participated in training at VA.

Learn more about VHA's mission of training health care professionals at the Office of Academic Affiliations by [viewing this video](#).

VA Responds With Record Number of Fourth Mission Assignments to Assist America During Pandemic

WASHINGTON — In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, [since March 2020](#), the Department of Veterans Affairs has completed 150 [Fourth Mission](#) assignments nationwide.

COVID-19 mission assignments are carried out in coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Administration. Assignments range in scope from:

- Deploying staff to other VA facilities.
- Placing VA staff in community medical and long-term care facilities.
- Caring for civilian inpatients at VA facilities.

Helping local governments in

need of COVID-19 testing, vaccines and staff.

"VA nurses, doctors and other staff have volunteered for more than 5,000 deployments supporting missions in State Veterans Homes, community medical facilities and nursing homes across the nation," said Acting Under Secretary for Health Richard Stone, M.D. "This past year has undoubtedly been a challenging time in our history. Seeing VA staff rise to the challenge and volunteering to help others has remained a point of hope throughout this pandemic."

In addition to mission assignments, VA has provided nearly 1 million pieces of personal protective

equipment to states and local governments since the start of the pandemic, and admitted more than 480 non-Veteran patients for COVID-19 care at VA medical centers.

VA's Fourth Mission is a statutory requirement to support states, territories, tribes and other federal agencies by providing resources and support in times of emergency. An independent [report](#) published by the Government Accountability Office in May found VA in coordination with FEMA successfully achieved its mission serving as back-up for the nation's health care system.

Learn more about VA's [Fourth Mission Summary](#).

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

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Questions or comments about the newsletter, email stephen.wilkins2@va.gov or call 919-956-5541

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