



Drive-Thru 'Shot in the Arm' for Vets Fighting Flu

Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) conducted a pair of Flu Season Vaccination Drive-Thrus in January on both the East and West Campus (Tuskegee VA Medical Center/Montgomery VA Medical Center) in an effort to ensure all eligible Veterans had an invreased opportunity to start the New Year healthy.

"Our January 7th Drive-Thru was an unqualified success," said Flu Season Campaign Chairperson Mary Catherine Porch just prior to the second Drive-Thru held on January 28. "So, we hope this time we can vaccinate Veterans who couldn't drive through.

"This is not the first time we've conducted Drive-Thrus," said Porch, while being interviewed on WSAF12 Noon News the Thursday before the first Drive Thru. "We're willing to do whatever is going to help us ensure all eligible Veterans have

every opportunity to start the New Year healthy."

In keeping with the namesake of the Flu Shot Drive-Thru, more than



Veterans took advantage of the convenience of simply driving up to awaiting CAVHCS staff to get their seasonal flu shot during two drive-thrus in January. Vaccinations are still available at virtually every clinic interaction.

125 Veterans who took advantage of the opportunity simply by driving up to awaiting staff; get vaccinated and then they were on their way. They didn't even have to get out of their vehicle.

However, several Veterans did decide to get out of their cars once they heard there was also an opportunity to sign up for MyHealtheVet. "We have laptop computers with connectivity that allowed us to bring the registration process to the Veteran," said CAVHCS MyHealtheVet program coordinator, Rick Fanning. "We signed up 25 Veterans, who will now be able to take advantage of all the convenience and access MyHealtheVet offers."

Prior to administering the flu vaccine, CAVHCS staff verified eligibility, ensured Veterans were screened for allergies and obtained

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VA Caregivers SupportLine helps 25,000 in First Year

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently marked the one-year anniversary of the toll-free National VA Caregiver Support Line, **1-855-260-3274**. The support line's dedicated staff has helped more than 25,000 Veterans, family members and Caregivers connect to resources and receive access to services they have earned.

"VA recognizes the importance of Caregivers to our Veterans' health and well being. We also recognize the sacrifices the daily care of their beloved Veteran requires," said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. "It is the care and commitment of Caregivers that allows Veterans with chronic illnesses or severe injuries to remain in the homes they defended, surrounded by the loved ones they hold dear. I am proud we have been able to help so many Caregivers in this first year of the support line's operation."

Since the program began, the Caregiver Support Line has received more than 25,000 calls and email queries through VA's main page www.va.gov. Responders serve as a resource for Caregivers by providing guidance, education on VA programs and benefits, information on community resources and emotional support through brief supportive counseling, if needed.

The support line responders can also connect callers to VA's other support lines such as the VA Veteran Crisis Line

(1-800-273-8255) and Coaching Into Care Line (1-888-823-7458) when these lines better meet the callers needs.

"Caregivers play such a critical role in the lives of our nation's Veterans, often at great cost to themselves. VA recognizes this sacrifice and the Caregiver Support Line is just one way we seek to support Caregivers," said Deborah Amdur, VA's Chief Consultant for Care Management and Social Work.

If a Caregiver or Veteran who calls the line needs additional guidance, a referral is made to their local Caregiver Support Coordinator, located at every VA medical center, who is the key contact for Caregivers at VA and an expert in VA and community programs available to Veterans and their Family

Caregivers. **The CAVHCS Caregiver Program Manager, Joy Germanos can be reached at 334-727-0550 Ext. 3928.**

Veterans and Caregivers can reach the VA Caregiver Support Line toll free at 855-260-3274. Operating hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., ET, and 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., ET on Saturdays. VA also features a Web page, www.caregiver.va.gov, with general information on other Caregiver support programs available through VA and the community.



CAVHCS All-Stars

The purpose of this letter is to formally commend Mrs. Harden for the excellent services she provides to her patients. In my opinion the level of service that Mrs. Harden provides is far beyond any services I have encountered while receiving medical assistance. I am very pleased with the way she expounds on my lab results.

I have never before written a letter like this on an entirely unsolicited basis. I am impressed by her kind personality and patience she provides.

In closing I believe it should be made known of the great services Mrs. Harden renders.

-- Sincerely, Mr. Allen T., Retired Veteran

Dr. Mountcastle has demonstrated an extremely high level of professionalism and knowledge in her field of dermatology. After personally being treated by at least one other dermatologist and my assigned physician for over a year with no relief, I was assigned to Dr. Mountcastle.

Being given my appointment with Dr. Mountcastle has truly been a blessing. I began suffering with lumps over my legs and arms diagnosed as Prurigo Nodularis. It was awful, lumps, sores and chronic itching I endured 24 hours a day for a year.

Since my first and only visit to Dr. Mountcastle the condition is clearing up. She prescribed a medication for the morning, another for the afternoon and an ointment. Not only is this condition healing, but the old lumps and scars from active duty I developed from low crawling during live fire exercises are also healing.

She has truly earned my respect as a dermatologist and herself a "high five". Thanks for having such a great doctor on the CAVHCS staff. -- Sincerely, Wilhelmina P.

My name is Phil M. a retired Army 1st Sgt who felt compelled to recognize three outstanding employees. It is not often I take the time to write and recognize people who go above and beyond what is normally expected. Before I continue I would respectfully ask that you please call me and let me know you have received this recognition and take action as you see fit.

On Tuesday, January 3rd, 2012 after being discharged my vehicle broke down en route to Columbus. Officer Hughes, Ms. Lucille Stewart (AOD) and Mrs. Johnson (AOD) assisted me with food and transportation. These employees showed compassion and concern above and beyond. Please recognize Officer Hughes, Ms. Lucille Stewart (AOD) and Mrs. Johnson (AOD). -- Respectfully, Phil M., Columbus, Ga.

I want to say thank you for having a great lady around that loves her job and helping other people. Mrs. Daphne Essex is one of the hardest working ladies I know at CAVHCS. Everything you ask of her she gives her best on it. So please thank her for me. -- Bobby N., Alabama

Please offer my thanks to Miss Catherine P. Johnson for her service and professional care on Friday, January 13th. She is an exceptional worker and the VA could use more like her. -- Sincerely, Bob J. C., CMSGT (Ret.)

Today was a great experience. I came in feeling really bad. Mrs. Wright was very caring and showed sincere empathy and gave lots of reassurance. Dr. Daniels was great and told me what I needed to know and do. My experience was great! -- Respectfully, Mary B.

This lady in Food Service named Barbara King is very good to everyone. She does a great job. Please thank her and help her move up. God Bless you. -- Thank you, Colby D. Columbus, Ga.

Sir, as usual everyone on your staff treated me as if I was their only concern. Everyone in the country should have the care the VA provides to the Veterans. Please thank everyone for me and tell them "Great Job!"

-- Thank you all, Emanuel G., Dixon Mills, Ala.

As an Air Force Veteran of 22 years and one who served in Afghanistan, I can tell you how impressed and pleased I am with "Kenneth" at the podiatry clinic desk. He is always courteous and helpful and he goes out of his way to take care of the customer. Your other VA employees need to take a lesson from him!

-- Best Regards, Lt. Col. F, (USAF, Ret.), Montgomery, Ala.

The CAVHCS Salute

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The CAVHCS Survey says...

“Do you have a New Year’s resolution...and if so, why or how will you keep it?”



Tracy Melton
PSA, ICU

“I’ll be going on a romantic limousine ride while watching the stars through the sunroof.”



Ms. Crassandra Harris,
Podiatry Clinic

“Im going with my husband to the Pensacola Naval Base to spend time together, as our jobs keep us geographically apart.”



Billy Cook,
EMS

“I’m going to buy my girl a big box of chocolates and take her to dinner.”

Beneficiaries Receive 2012 Cost of Living Adjustment

Veterans, their families, and survivors receiving benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs saw a 3.6 percent increase in their compensation and pension benefits beginning January 1.

“Veterans, their families and their survivors are entitled to benefits that keep pace with the cost of living,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “VA is also using the latest technology to provide Veterans and their families with access to current information about their benefits.”

The new compensation rates will range from \$127 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$2,769 monthly for 100 percent. The cost of living adjustments (COLAs) also apply to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, disabled Veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits. The full rates are available on the Internet at www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/#BM01.

Under federal law, COLAs for VA’s compensation and pension rates are the same percentage as for Social Security benefits. The last COLA for VA benefits was in 2008 when the last Social Security increase occurred.

“Veterans receiving VA disability and pension payments can now check their new 2012 COLA increase online,” said Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. “I encourage all Veterans, their dependents and survivors to sign up for eBenefits, VA’s popular website that recently crossed the one million mark in registrations.”

In close collaboration, the Department of Defense (DoD) and VA jointly developed the eBenefits portal (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>) as a single secure point of access for online benefit information and tools to perform multiple self-

service functions, such as checking monthly benefit rates, filing a claim, or checking its status.

Veterans may enroll in eBenefits and obtain a Premium account by verifying their identity in-person at the nearest regional office or online depending on their status, or calling VA’s toll free number at 1-800-827-1000.

Servicemembers may also enroll in eBenefits using their Common Access Card at any time during their military service, or before they leave during their Transition Assistance Program briefings.

VA is enhancing its online eBenefits services with newer features such as online selection of Veterans organizations or other advocates to represent applicants for benefits where representation is desired.

Another new feature automates messages sent to Veterans and Servicemembers to notify them of benefits that they may be eligible to receive based on recent life events, such as military separation or marriage.

The site also continues to consolidate access to other VA and DoD systems through the portal, recently incorporating a gateway to vocational rehabilitation benefits under VA’s VetSuccess program.

VA provides non-taxable compensation and pension benefits to over four million Veterans, family members, and survivors. Disability compensation is a non-taxable monetary benefit paid to Veterans who are disabled as a result of an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service.

For more information about VA benefits or new payment rates, visit www.vba.va.gov or call 1-800-827-1000.



CAVHCS Photo Gallery

During January CAVHCS East Campus opened the newly renovated Patient Effects/Clothing Room. The renovation took six weeks and now provides Veterans in need with a ‘store-front, shopping’ environment.

CAVHCS also held a pair of Flu Shot Drive-Thrus to provide Veterans with an increased opportunity to be vaccinated. Veterans were offered an opportunity to sign up for MyHealtheVet. (VA photos by Eric Johnson)



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enough information to ensure the vaccine is documented in Veterans’ health records.

While this year’s weather may be unusually mild, the proven benefits of getting the Seasonal Flu vaccine remain. Veterans who were unable to attend this year’s Drive-Thru are still able to get vaccinated at almost any clinic experience at CAVHCS. In fact, due to the success of this year’s Drive-Thrus there may additional outreach efforts this flu season. As always, the flu vaccination is free of charge to eligible Veterans...they’ve more than earned it!



CAVHCS Police Investigation Ends with Arrest

By: Chief Roderick F. Byrne
CAVHCS Police Service

Between April 2009 and January 2012, numerous criminal reports were filed by the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) Police Service - Tuskegee Campus; recording the Burglary and Theft of Copper and other materials from several buildings on the campus. Multiple attempts to ascertain the identification and capture of a suspect or suspects remained unsuccessful.

Detective Cedric Thomas with the CAVHCS Police Service took over the investigation and immediately began to produce results. He coordinated with Tuskegee Police Department, Macon County Sheriffs Department, Office of Inspector General, and the U.S. Attorneys Office for the Middle District of Alabama. His dedication and tenacity resulted in the integration of these agencies into a task force which culminated in the capture of a prime suspect and identification of other possible accomplices.

At the conclusion of the investigation, \$47,196 in government property was found to have been stolen, several thousand dollars in damage to the buildings recorded, and cases from the other agencies involving the same suspect were solved.

Detective Thomas secured the arrest and incarceration of the suspect in the Macon County Jail, serving 12 felony warrants on the subject for Burglary,

Theft, and other associated crimes that occurred on VA controlled property.

The efforts of Detective Thomas and the entire CAVHCS Police Service continue to focus on the safety and security of our veterans, visitors, and staff; serving with professionalism and courtesy.



CAVHCS Detective Cedric Thomas' investigation and interaction with local law enforcement regarding recent thefts on the Tuskegee Campus resulted in an arrest.

VA Launches Acquisition Internship for Returning Veterans

A special internship to prepare newly-returned Veterans to become federal contracting specialists was launched recently at the Acquisitions Academy of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Frederick, Md.

"I'm pleased to welcome our new interns to the VA family," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki, who gave the keynote address Jan. 19. "These Veterans know the importance of integrity, and have learned to work together in diverse teams to accomplish difficult objectives. Those are skills we value in our professional acquisition corps."

Called "Warriors to Workforce," the internship is a three-year program. Participants will earn the 24 educational credits in business required to become contracting professionals. The program includes courses in leadership, technical acquisition training and on-the-job experience.

"This program is possible because of VA's steadfast commitment to Veteran employment," said Lisa Doyle, chancellor of the VA Acquisition Academy. "These Veterans have served and sacrificed, and it is our turn to give back by making sure they have gainful employment

when they return. We hope this program will serve as a model for other federal agencies and private organizations."

At graduation, participants will have taken the required coursework to achieve a Federal Acquisitions Certification in Contracting, which is recognized throughout the federal sector as evidence of solid education in the career field. Successful graduates will be eligible for contract specialist positions at the GS-11 level.

In the past two years, the government's contracting force has shrunk, although the volume and complexity of contracts has increased. VA opened its Acquisitions Academy in September 2008 in response to the growing shortage of contracting professionals, both for VA and other federal agencies.

Twenty-three Veterans are enrolled in the inaugural class of the "Warriors to Workforce" internship. Between them, they have seven Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars and over 170 years of military experience. More information about VA's Acquisitions Academy is available on the Internet at www.acquisitionacademy.va.gov.

VA Announces Changes to Emergency Care Payment Policy

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced recently a change in regulations regarding payments for emergency care provided to eligible Veterans in non-VA facilities.

"This provision helps ensure eligible Veterans continue to get the emergency care they need when VA facilities are not available," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

The new regulation extends VA's authority to pay for emergency care provided to eligible Veterans at non-VA

facilities until the Veterans can be safely transferred to a VA medical facility.

More than 100,000 Veterans are estimated to be affected by the new rules, at a cost of about \$44 million annually.

For more information about emergency care in non-VA facilities, visit www.nonvacare.va.gov.



Staff throughout CAVHCS (East Campus participants pictured) recently showed their support for Women's Heart Health Awareness by wearing red on National Wear Red Day. (VA photo by Eric Johnson)

2012 CALENDAR OF EVENTS VA OFFICE OF PUBLIC AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS							FEDERAL HOLIDAY
February 2012							
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National African-American History Month National Senior Independence Month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Cancer Prevention Month AMD/Low Vision Awareness Month 		1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Freedom Day (1865) Girls & Women in Sports Day 	2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groundhog Day Four Chaplains Memorial Day (1943) 	3	4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> USO Founded (1941) National Wear Red Day 	
National Patient Recognition Week • Women's Heart Week (Feb. 1-7)							
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Burn Awareness Week (Feb. 5 - 12) • Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week (Feb. 7-14)							
12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lincoln's Birthday (1809) NAACP Founded (1909) 	13 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Medal of Honor Awarded (1861) Marine Corps Women's Reserve Created (1943) 	14 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valentine's Day National Donor Day 	15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Susan B. Anthony Day 	16	17	18	
National Salute to Veteran Patients Week (Feb. 13 - 19)							
19	20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> President's Day Washington's Birthday 	21	22	23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desert Storm Ground War Begins (1991) Iwo Jima Day Anniversary (1945) 	24	25	
National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (Feb. 20 - 26)							
26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kuwait Liberation Day (1991) 	27	28	29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leap Day 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Heart Month Wise Health Consumer Month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Leadership Month National Children's Dental Health Month 	

The CAVHCS Community Calendar is not intended to be an all-inclusive, official calendar. It is intended rather to provide a medium for CAVHCS Salute to share upcoming events.

If you would like to add a CAVHCS event please email details directly to alan.bloom@va.gov. Submissions are not guaranteed to be published. Editorial considerations will be made for propriety, promptness and print space.