Wiregrass Stand Down provides support for Homeless Vets

In military life a Stand Down is a time to stop operations, rest and focus on specific areas of concern. And, for homeless veterans in the Wiregrass Region, the recent Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) Homeless Stand Down in the Army National Guard Building on Dothan’s Third Avenue provided a similar respite as well as an opportunity to regroup and focus on areas of concern in their life after the military.

“Stand Downs are conducted to assist homeless veterans in crisis,” explained CAVHCS Social Worker Marguerita D. High. “This is the second year we’ve conducted a stand down in the Guard’s building. Along with all the other support organizations we’re able to provide a single meeting point where homeless veterans can access several services at once to hopefully assist them in their efforts to improve their quality of life.”

Homeless Veterans attending the stand down were greeted by volunteers, as well as members of more than 20 support activities based in the Wiregrass Region. “We had folks from Department of Human Resources, Social Security and the Alabama State Employment Service,” said High. “Veterans also received clothes and even flu shots.”

Nationwide, the number of homeless veterans is estimated to be 200,000 on any given night, though accurate numbers are impossible to pin down, according to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans in Washington. Locally, while numbers are equally difficult to determine, the Wiregrass Region’s homeless Veterans are being actively supported.

Message from the Chief

Goals, Strategies, and Operational Plans

By: John Gingrich
Chief of Staff, Department of Veterans Affairs

The Secretary’s ambitious vision of a transformed, 21st Century VA, is taking shape. Thanks to the efforts of a VA Transformation Task Force created earlier this year, and with broad cooperation and support throughout the Administrations and Staff Offices, we have created a new strategic plan – a roadmap that will help guide our transformation journey. Our strategic plan is now under review at the Office of Management and Budget.

Our strategic plan has four Department-wide goals:
(1) Improve the quality and accessibility of health care, benefits, and memorial services while optimizing value; (2) Increase Veteran client satisfaction with health, education, training, counseling, financial, and burial benefits and services; (3) Raise readiness to provide services and protect people and assets continuously and in time of crisis; and (4) Improve internal customer satisfaction with management systems and support services and make VA an employer of choice by investing in human capital. These are bold goals that reflect our desire to honor the service of our nation’s Veterans.

The strategic plan establishes three Integrated Objectives for the Department, with a series of integrated strategies to achieve each objective. It is our collective responsibility to execute this plan – ensuring continuous alignment, collaboration, and communication. We need to make sure that our resources are properly allocated, that our actions are transparent and accountable, that our results are meaningful and clearly reported. We need to learn from our mistakes, improve our processes, and hold ourselves to the highest standards of clarity and focus. Every VA leader and employee must be an active participant in our efforts to transform VA and implement this strategic plan.

The final component of our planning cycle is the development of Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Operating Plans for each Administration and Staff Office. These operating plans...
In September 2009, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) determined target populations to first receive novel H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available. Based on the projected initial supply of vaccine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) agreed on an initial novel H1N1 vaccine allocation for VA staff who are at occupational risk because they deliver healthcare to VHA patients. 

In addition, certain patients who receive health care in VA or VA staff who are at personal risk or pose a risk to others from novel H1N1 illness are also among targeted groups to receive vaccine from this initial allocation. By an agreement with other Federal agencies, non-VA Federal workers who are at occupational risk may also be vaccinated by VA staff at VA sites around the U.S. 

Targeted groups from the VA community who are to receive vaccine from the initial allocation are (*note that this list is not in order of risk or priority for vaccination): 
* Health care workers and emergency medical service personnel who are expected to have direct contact with patients or infectious materials.
* Pregnant women.
* Caregivers and contacts of infants less than 6 months old.
* Adolescents (generally 18 year-olds) with medical conditions making them at higher risk for Influenza-related complications.
* Vaccination targeting was designed to protect persons believed to be most at risk for infection with H1N1 influenza.

* VA has agreed to follow the National guidelines developed by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices as endorsed by HHS/CDC. 
* After the targeted individuals are vaccinated (we hope this will take no more than 3-5 weeks), vaccination of all remaining VHA patients and VA staff should begin without delay using any vaccine and supplies available. 
* At this time, we recommend H1N1 influenza vaccine for everyone, except persons who have a severe allergy to eggs which is rare.
* We especially recommend vaccine for the following patients and staff who may have a higher risk of becoming ill with novel H1N1 influenza than others
  * All 19-24 year olds
  * All 25 to 64 year olds with medical conditions that put them at risk of influenza complications.

Dear Caregivers:

Mr. Jerry B. C. recently brought to my attention the excellent care that you are providing at the VA Medical Center in Tuskegee, and I would like to express my immense appreciation for everything that you do for our nation’s veterans. The American dream would not be possible if not for the courageous and valorous efforts of our servicemembers, and we are all extremely fortunate to have selfless caregivers, such as yourselves, in our great state to provide the support that they have rightfully earned in their service to our nation. 

Again, thank you for all that you do for our veterans, our state, and our nation. I pray for the utmost success in all of your future endeavors, and I look forward to hearing more great things about the Tuskegee VA Medical Center. 

-- Sincerely, Richard Shelby, United States Senate

If your office handles “complaints” then I hope that you will accept a simple “thank you”. I am only one service-connected Veteran. However, it seems like every time I go into my local CBOC for treatment, that not only me alone, but all the Veterans are treated in the utmost fashion. Your staff are caring, efficient and very professional. Please convey my gratitude to all of them particularly: Dr. Lokesh, Bruce Clyne and Dr. Welch, Maria Acobe, Evelyn Sonn and Mo Funderbirk. 

-- Sincerely, David H.

The CAVHCS Salute is produced by the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care (CAVHCS) Public Affairs Office. CAVHCS Salute is an unofficial, internal communications publication.

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-- Sincerely, David H.
Our FY 2010 Operating Plans are currently being finalized, but this work is far from over. As we begin to execute our strategy, we will certainly discover mistakes and opportunities to improve – even the best plans must be adjusted after implementation begins. But, together, with your creativity, passion, and commitment, VA is prepared to pursue the goals and objectives of our new strategic plan.
VA Warns Vets of Phone Scam

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is warning Veterans not to give credit card numbers over the phone to callers claiming to update VA prescription information.

“America’s Veterans have become targets in an inexcusable scam that dishonors their service and misrepresents the Department built for them,” said Dr. Gerald Cross, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. “VA simply does not call Veterans and ask them to disclose personal financial information over the phone.”

Veteran Service Organizations have brought to VA’s attention that callers are misrepresenting the VA to gain personal information over the phone. They say VA recently changed procedures for dispensing prescriptions and ask for the Veteran’s credit card number.

“VA has not changed its processes for dispensing prescription medicines,” Cross said. “Nor has VA changed its long-standing commitment to protect the personal information of this nation’s Veterans.”

Veterans with questions about VA services should contact the nearest VA medical center or call, toll-free, 1-877-222-8387.
24/7 Access to VA Health Care Services

MyHealth\text{e}Vet: My Health, My Care

My Health\text{e}Vet, www.myhealth.va.gov, is VA’s award-winning e-health website, which offers Veterans, active duty soldiers and their dependents and caregivers anywhere, anytime Internet access to VA health care information and services.

Launched nationwide in 2003, My Health\text{e}Vet is a free, online Personal Health Record that empowers Veterans to become more informed partners in their health care. With My Health\text{e}Vet, America’s Veterans can access trusted, secure, and informed health and benefits information and record and store important health and military history information at their convenience.

Veterans may log on to My Health\text{e}Vet at www.myhealth.va.gov and begin to better manage their health care and make informed decisions in collaboration with their health care providers. To register, Veterans simply need to go to www.myhealth.va.gov.

With My Health\text{e}Vet, registrants can access:
* VA Prescription Refill Services
* Healthy Living Centers
* Trusted Health Information
* Vitals Tracking & Graphing
* Military Health History
* Disease & Condition Centers
* Activity/Food Journals
* VA Benefits & Services
* VA News & Feature Stories
* Personal Health Journals

Veterans who receive care at a VA facility should ask about In Person Authentication, or “IPA”, to obtain an upgraded account which offers additional access to key portions of their VA electronic medical record. You will also need to sign a VA Form, 10-5345a. Bring the signed form to CAVHCS’ Release of Information Office on the first floor of the Montgomery Campus, Room 1A-108. This form is also available at Release of Information Offices if you are unable to print. When this one-time process is complete, you will have access to your online Personal Health Record by logging on to My Health\text{e}Vet at www.myhealth.va.gov.

You will be able to:
* Refill VA Prescriptions by name
* Get VA Wellness Reminders
* Communicate electronically with participating health care providers through Secure Messaging (coming to local facilities throughout 2009 and 2010)
* Get VA Appointment Reminders and view VA Appointments (coming in 2009/2010)
* View VA lab results (coming 2010)

Veterans, active duty service members and others are urged to join hundreds of thousands of enrollees already taking charge of their day to day health care by logging on to www.myhealth.va.gov. My Health\text{e}Vet is about My Health, My Care: 24/7 Online Access to VA Health Care and Services. For more information please contact one of the following CAVHCS staff: Lena Anderson in Tuskegee at 334-727-0550 Ext. 5379, Rosetta Latimore in Montgomery at 334-272-4670 Ext. 4794, or Faye Rayford-Outsey, CAVHCS MyHealth\text{e}Vet Point of Contact, 334-272-4670 ex 4307.

OIG Results: Endoscopic Equipment Inspection Completed

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General inspected every VA medical site with endoscopic equipment, independently verifying the success of a national program VA instituted to ensure safe and sterile procedures for reprocessing endoscopic equipment across the country.

“VA’s top priority is to provide the highest quality care to the Veterans of this Nation,” said Acting Under Secretary for Health Dr. Gerald M. Cross. “This report shows VA’s unparalleled quality assurance programs identified a risk and successfully corrected that risk on a national scale.”

The VA Office of Inspector General report, dated September 17, 2009, shares findings from 129 medical sites inspected across the country. Only one discrepancy was found, a typographical error in certification paperwork.

In late 2008 and early 2009, VA found that inconsistencies in the sterilization of endoscopes at three medical centers led to possible infection risks among 10,000 patients. VA facilities rapidly notified patients of the risk and offered testing. Since that time, VA has been able to contact over 99 percent of these patients. Although fifty-six patients potentially screened positive for infections, though it is uncertain whether the endoscopes are the source. The national information line at 1-877-345-8555 is available for patients and their families.

VA instituted a national review of facilities in February, 2009, to ensure all VA medical sites are trained on proper endoscope use and cleaning procedures. VA then established a new policy for the reprocessing of reusable medial equipment, including certification of staff, to prevent future incidents. VA has also currently taken over forty disciplinary actions related to this event.

Following the completion of this national effort, the Office of the Inspector General inspected every VA medical site with endoscopic equipment for compliance with manufacturers’ instructions and VA’s national policy on endoscopic equipment and procedures. This report is found at: http://www.va.gov/oig/54/reports/VAOIG-09-02848-218.pdf.
The CA VHCS Community Calendar is not intended to be an all-inclusive, official calendar. It is intended rather to provide a medium for CA VHCS Salute to share upcoming events.

If you would like to add a CA VHCS 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.