Central Alabama VA 5-star Nursing Home Puts Veterans First
OUR VETERANS ARE IMPORTANT
AND SO IS YOUR FEEDBACK

YOU MAY RECEIVE A SURVEY ASKING YOU ABOUT YOUR VISIT

- Please complete the survey and let us know if your visit was excellent or if we can improve
- We will use your comments to improve the experience for all veterans.

THANK YOU FOR LETTING US KNOW HOW WE ARE DOING!

CAVHCS Connection
Summer 2020

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Act with high moral principle.
Adhere to the highest professional standards.
Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.

Interim Director
Amir Farooqi, FACHE

Chief of Staff
Brian Yee, MD, FACP, FACHE

Interim Associate Director
Patient Care Services
Laundrena LaPradd-Bradley, MHA, BSN, RN

Deputy Director
Valerie Russell, FAC-P/PM, MSM

Associate Director
Prudence Howard, MAS

Public Affairs Officer
Sheila Marie Austin

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https://www.facebook.com/VACentralAlabama/
From the Director

As we face COVID-19, I understand that you may be experiencing stress and even fear due to the uncertainty of this situation. It’s okay to be afraid. These are very challenging and unprecedented times, and all of us are trying our best to do what we can to feel in control and safe.

Our team knows there are risks associated with providing healthcare in our community. We’ve planned and trained for situations like this, and it is likely that no one expected to be working through a worldwide pandemic of this magnitude. I’m very proud of our accomplishments. I want to reflect on our steps to deliver health care to our Veterans during these trying times.

• We are fortunate to continue to receive incredible support from our community, even through this difficult time for everyone. The Church of the Highlands’ Dream Team visited our facility on April 9 and was kind enough to bring donuts for staff in appreciation for their work with Veterans. Villeda Pastel Sweets donated gourmet cupcakes to several departments in appreciation for their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. I’m grateful for our thoughtful and generous community partners. The Montgomery Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. continued their monthly partnership with CAVHCS delivering ferns and petunias to the Chapel and our inpatients.

• On April 17, Dr. Darryl Harris, chief of emergency medicine, and I were featured on Alabama News Network (Channels 8 and 32) news programs highlighting the COVID-19 triage tent recently installed outside of the Emergency Department entrance at West/Montgomery Campus. Individuals who screen positive will move to the tent for further screening and testing if needed. This is yet another step CAVHCS is taking to mitigate the risk of transmission.

• On April 17, Infectious Disease Specialist and Incident Command Medical Branch Director Dr. April Truett and I spoke to Veterans and the community during our quarterly Veterans Town Hall, which was held virtually on Facebook because of the pandemic. To date, we have reached more than 1,200 people through the Virtual Town Hall alone. We were glad of the opportunity to discuss the great work that the CAVHCS Team is doing taking care of our Veterans through this crisis, as well as ensuring that our Veterans and community receive information on what they can do to safeguard themselves and their loved ones.

• On May 5, the 187th Fighter Wing and the 117th Air Refueling Wing flew over our Montgomery and Tuskegee facilities as part of Operation American Resolve. The flyovers were a salute to essential employees and all who are serving in support of COVID-19 response efforts.

• Also, on May 5, we received 60 donated masks from Konnie Pace and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. In addition, on May 8, we received another 127 masks from Montgomery Masks, which was donated by Cindy Torbert. It is heartwarming to see how these groups and individuals dedicated their time and energy to making the colorful, creative masks for the wellbeing of employees and Veterans.

• On May 6, the American Legion of Prattville donated personal care items to our Veterans in the Domiciliary. Despite these trying times, this group wanted to make sure our Veterans did not experience the stress of needing basic care items and we are very thankful for their donation.

• On May 7, we implemented the mandatory face covering requirement for everyone entering our facilities. It was amusing to see the variety of masks and coverings used by all as we transition into this next phase of our battle against COVID-19.

• I want to welcome our new Associate Director, Prudence Howard. I look forward to working with Howard and I want to give her a warm welcome to CAVHCS!

• Lastly, I want to congratulate Dr. Brian Yee on his selection for the Chief of Staff at CAVHCS. Dr. Yee has worked diligently for our Veterans and I’m extremely happy he is officially part of our executive leadership team.

As we transition into our new normal, I want to emphasize the importance and requirement of wearing face coverings. In order to continue to care for our Veterans and safeguard ourselves, we need to maintain the safety measures previously established diligently; hand hygiene, social distancing and wearing face coverings.

Each of us needs to stay steadfast in our efforts to slow and stop the spread of COVID-19. You can always go to the CDC’s official page for additional ideas on how to remain safe at or away from CAHVCS.

Amir Farooqi, FACHE
Interim Medical Center Director
Dr. Yee Selected as CAVHCS Chief of Staff

Congratulations to Dr. Brian Yee, who has been selected as the new Chief of Staff at Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System.

He also served as Compensation and Pension (C&P) program lead for VISN 7, Acting PACT/Primary Care Program Lead and Acting Chief Medical Officer for VISN 7, Technical Advisor for Office of Community Care, Acting Chief of Staff for the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center and Technical Advisor for Office of Disability and Medical Assessment.

Dr. Yee received his medical degree in 1987 at the Medical College of Virginia and completed residency training under the University of California, San Francisco. He was an Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine at UCSF and published numerous articles, abstracts, books, and compilations on ambulatory care, resident physician performance, organizational planning and performance improvement.

Now in his 20th year with VA, he has been in public service for over 25 years, having held healthcare administrative positions at Federal, state and county levels. He is board-certified in internal medicine and has received numerous teaching awards.

He was inducted as Fellow of the American College of Physicians in 1998, recognized by the State of California in 2001 for contributions to their correctional healthcare system, recognized by VHA in 2011 for C&P improvements using Systems Redesign and inducted as Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives in 2016.

“Family, friends, and neighbors ask me all the time why I drive the long distances and put in the long hours working for the VA. I always tell them this: Veterans are a special group of people. They have made their sacrifices. Their families have made sacrifices. They deserve our help. And if I can serve yet one more Veteran then I will have made a difference. In the end it’s about fulfilling our mission – one Veteran at a time.”

CAVHCS Welcomes New Associate Director

Let’s welcome Prudence Howard as she assumes her new role as the Associate Director.

Before Howard’s appointment to this role, she served as the Director of Contracting for Network Contracting Office since 2013. In this role, she had operational oversight in managing the acquisition operations that support, advance and accomplished the patient care mission of the VA Southeast Network with over $440 million in contracts.

Howard was responsible for coordinating acquisitions to establish and implement national, regional and Network goals and objectives in various services and care lines.

She retired from the United States Navy in 2008, as a Lieutenant Commander in the Supply Corps, after serving 20 years of dedicated and honorable service, overseeing logistical operations for various Naval Air Stations and two U.S. combatant vessels.

After retiring, Howard went on to hold several Acquisition Leadership positions within the Department of the Navy. She managed the execution of highly complex procurements, including fleet vehicles, telecommunications, consulting services, components of major systems, complex scientific equipment and services impacting customers throughout the world.

Howard has over 32 years of experience in acquisition, finance and logistics. She is a member of the American College of Healthcare Executives, National Contract Management Association and is a certified mediator and mentor.

“We are happy to be here. We have been all over the world and we are so blessed to join you. I’m here to stay and we are going to do wonderful things here at CAVHCS. To serve my fellow Veterans is an honor. I’m grateful for the sacrifices Veterans made in the name of freedom.

I am excited about the future of Veteran health care in central Alabama and the advancements in patient care that we will make together.”
As a young girl growing up in Auburn, Margaret Ewell had a passion for taking care of others, and it would set her on a path to become a nurse. At a very early age, she would assist in the care of her sick grandmother and wanted to do anything possible to save her. It was those moments that inspired her to follow her dream and become a licensed practical nurse. Ewell's compassion continues to make a difference and exemplifies her commitment to the profession. Her hard work and dedication led to CAVHCS honoring her with a surprise DAISY Award ceremony at the Tuskegee campus.

What is the DAISY (Diseases Attacking the Immune System) Foundation?

The DAISY Foundation has a national program to recognize the exceptional performances of nurses from around the country. The program was inspired by the care Patrick Barnes received by nurses after he was admitted to the hospital and diagnosed with Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura, which is a disease that attacks the immune system.

According to the DAISY Foundation, “We created The DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses and piloted the program at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, whose nurses cared for Patrick during the last weeks of his life. Our goal was to ensure that nurses know how deserving they are of our society’s profound respect for the education, training, brainpower, and skill they put into their work, and especially for the caring with which they deliver their care. At the time we started the program, we could not have anticipated that The DAISY Award would come to be regarded as a strategic tool for nurse recruitment and retention and would be adopted by healthcare facilities all over the U.S. and beyond.”

The bond between our nurses and our Veteran patients is a vital component in how our health care system delivers the high-quality care our Veterans deserve and have grown to expect at our health care system.

Here is a very heartfelt excerpt from the letter of the Veteran family who nominated Ewell.

“I am writing this letter in reference to the excellent care that my husband and I receive from your facility, but I want to recognize an employee named Margaret Ewell. Nurse Ewell is really in a class of her own. She shows so much care and concern for her patients, very professional, and will take time out of her busy schedule to talk to you on the phone about any of your concerns.”

“She is truly an asset to the CAVHCS Care Team and should be recognized for her hard work and ethics. I’m requesting that she be nominated for the DAISY award, a title she has earnestly worked for and deserves. Thank you, Nurse Ewell. You are appreciated not only by myself and my family but all Veterans you serve.”

Ewell has been with CAVHCS for 29 years and decided to work for the Department of Veterans Affairs to give back to the heroes who fought for our nation.

“We have a very noble mission of serving the many Veterans who have put their lives on the line to keep our nation safe,” said Ewell. “We owe it to them to provide the best care possible.”

DAISY nomination boxes are located throughout CAVHCS facilities and the awardees are selected after a committee review.

“I was utterly shocked when I received the award. The nomination from the Veteran family was very nice, and I’ve enjoyed taking care of her and her husband.”

By Tramel Garrett

CAVHCS Nurse recognized with DAISY Award

Congratulations Mrs. Margaret Ewell
As Veterans get older, it’s sometimes nearly impossible to safely give them the care they need at home. Furthermore, ensuring a loved one’s safety during a pandemic can be overwhelming, but knowing your family member is in a 5-star facility can put your mind at ease.

A 5-Star Community Living Center

Easing the minds of our Veteran families is what our New Horizon Community Living Center (CLC) does, which sets the standard for nursing homes to emulate. Professional care is often necessary for the safety and comfort of our elderly, and our expert staff continues to give the best care possible.

New Horizon CLC was recently named a 5-star facility for the third consecutive quarter. This performance rating places CAVHCS’ community living center among the top performing in not only in the Veterans Health Administration but the country. Maintaining this level and continuing to improve are significant steps in the journey to becoming a high-reliability organization.

This reliability was a key factor in our community living center receiving Veterans and their loved ones in efforts to help Veterans and their families feel like part of the CAVHCS family.

Many patients don’t need to be in a hospital but can’t be cared for at home. VA has over 100 community living centers across the country with a mission to restore each Veteran to his or her highest level of well-being.

Making Veterans feel at home

CAVHCS celebrated National Skilled Nursing Care Week, which recognizes the role of skilled nursing care centers in caring for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities since 1967.

This year’s theme is “Sharing Our Wisdom,” which showcases purpose and wisdom learned by our Community Living Center Veterans.

Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Melissa Crawford said, “All of the events and activities are geared around sharing wisdom.” “We held a learning circle in which residents talked about what they wanted to share with the nursing staff and other residents.”

Crawford explained the types of activities CLC Veterans would participate in, such as sports trivia and nutrition bingo. “Activities such as healthy aging bingo are discussions about diverse subjects CLC residents should be aware of at this stage in their life. For instance, who do you ask if you need help? What do you do with old prescriptions?”

Veterans were also given the opportunity to share some wisdom of their own.

Marine Corp Veteran Joseph Worthem shared some words of wisdom, “Stay encouraged; look forward to fellowshipping with others and participate in spiritual services.”

Sharing knowledge gives our CLC staff members a chance to showcase what they learned from our seniors and individuals with disabilities. VA community living centers have taken the concept of making a comfortable, home-like environment instead of an institutional setting comparable to a traditional nursing home.

For more information about VA Community Living Centers visit https://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/pages/VA_Community_Living_Centers.asp

Central Alabama VA 5-star Nursing Home Puts Veterans First

By Tramel Garrett

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CAVHCS Celebrates 2020 Nurses Week

In 1993, the American Nurses Association declared May 6-12 as the national week to celebrate and elevate the nursing profession. We must recognize the immense contributions and positive impact of America’s 4 million registered nurses. Fittingly, each year Nurses Week ends on May 12, which is Florence Nightingale’s birthday, the founder of modern nursing. The bond between our nurses and our Veteran patients is a vital component in how we deliver the high-quality care our Veterans deserve and have grown to expect at our health care system.

In March, CAVHCS leadership set up processes to give employees up-to-date information on COVID-19 to ensure everyone is knowledgeable of our mitigation efforts.

This was accomplished by daily employee emails and employee telephone town halls, which were held twice a week. The staff could send questions for leadership to address during the town halls.

Equally important is the mental health of our healthcare heroes. Our Chaplain Service initiated biweekly “Moments of Encouragement” through teleconference to provide for the spiritual needs of all staff through these times of emotional strain. In addition, the Psychology Department and Whole Health Team began conducting biweekly “Employee Wellness Moments” teleconferences which are aimed at promoting employee health and well-being using mindfulness and reflection techniques. Our VA team has a very demanding job and it’s vital to take care of the mind as well as the body.

To also promote and maintain employee morale, the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Office at CAVHCS initiated the Acts of Kindness Campaign to spread and recognize the importance of supporting one another.

“We’re all facing a lot of uncertainty and competing demands right now, both personally and professionally,” said Interim Director Amir Farooqi. “The one thing that I’m sure of is that we have an amazing team at CAVHCS who are showing remarkable commitment to our Veterans.”

Employees and Veterans Confident in Central Alabama VA

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A nurse at the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System is doing her part to help Veterans fighting novel coronavirus by serving on the frontlines.

Dora Ratliff, a registered nurse, deployed to the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home to assist in providing care to our most vulnerable Veterans.

"To assist our state VA counterpart, Dora Ratliff, is deployed to the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home. As an Army Veteran herself, Ms. Ratliff will represent CAVHCS and assist in taking care of other Veterans," said CAVHCS Interim Director Amir Farooqi.

"We thank Ms. Ratliff for her service and continued effort to care for her fellow heroes," Farooqi added.

She volunteered to serve her comrades. "I am very proud to represent CAVHCS and I will perform at my highest level to demonstrate the quality of CAVHCS nursing."

Ratliff stated that she wants to help in any way. When the first opportunity for volunteering arose, she immediately raised her hand to serve in the current crisis.

Easing the minds of Veteran families while restoring each Veteran to his or her highest level of well-being is a primary focus of Ratliff.

"I am eager and very excited to have the privilege to assist in taking care of their loved ones that have served our country. I will provide the highest quality of care and will not give up," Ratliff said.

VA’s decisions in supporting community health care are made after determining the actions would not negatively impact Veteran care.

States may request assistance from the Federal Government through their local Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Regional Emergency Coordinator (REC), as part of FEMA’s National Response Coordination Center. Counties, cities and other municipalities should route all requests for Federal support through their respective states.

For the latest information about protecting yourself, visit CDC Coronavirus. To learn more about VA efforts to treat Veterans with COVID-19, visit VA COVID-19 Care.
As CAVHCS continues to work hard caring for our nation’s heroes, it is refreshing to receive donations from our community partners. The American Legion Post 122 and Montgomery Masks continue to give back to our Veterans, and we appreciate their shared commitment.

Community Partner Donations

June Cyrus (front right), Montgomery Federation of Garden Clubs Inc. and CAVHCS employees deliver ferns and mini yellow petunias to CAVHCS Chapel. The Montgomery Federation of Garden Clubs Inc. delivers flowers monthly to CAVHCS Chapel and Veteran patients. We are very grateful for a partnership that assists our vital mission of providing an excellent patient experience.

Donations continued

CAVHCS would like to express our sincere gratitude for the kindness of the members of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival for their generous donation of 60 masks. While our team members are working hard to take care of Veterans and keep our community safe from COVID-19, support like this helps keep us going.

In honor of Hospital Appreciation Week, Interim Director Amir Farooqi accepts a generous ice cream donation from River Region United Way, United Ways of Alabama and an anonymous donor. While our team is working hard to take care of Veterans, it is wonderful to get support from our community. A special thank you to Jimmy Hill, president and chief executive officer of River Region United Way and the honorable Lawrence “Tony” Haygood Jr., mayor of the City of Tuskegee, for assisting in the distribution of ice cream to our team.
Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) is safeguarding the health and wellbeing of Veterans and employees by expanding the use of virtual technology tools amid the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Since the onset of the pandemic, CAVHCS urged all Veterans to rely on virtual care and telephone appointments instead of face-to-face encounters.

"Switching from in-person visits to telephone and video helps minimize the risk of infecting other patients and employees," said April Truett, physician and infectious disease consultant. "Our goal is to keep all patients, visitors, and staff safe during these critical times while still providing the same high level of VA care."

From March 1 to April 30, 2020, more than 1,450 traditional appointments were converted to VA Video Connect, a platform like the popular FaceTime application. More than 4,000 appointments were by telephone and thus enabling Veterans to maintain contact with their healthcare teams while keeping socially appropriate distancing. Disciplines offering virtual appointments include primary care, mental health, cardiology, podiatry, clinical pharmacy, occupational therapy and more.

"Given these unprecedented times with COVID-19, in order to ensure we provide Veterans with the best telehealth experience possible, we are ensuring all staff are Telehealth-trained and capable of servicing our patients through various modalities of care," said Bonita Dennis, group practice manager.

CAVHCS also urged the use of other virtual care options including MyHealtheVet, RX Refill for prescriptions, Annie App and Home Telehealth.

Hurricane season starts June 1 and extends to November 30. During these months, we have a high probability of experiencing a tropical storm or hurricane in Alabama.

While many have a vast amount of experience preparing for hurricanes, others are new to Alabama. We want to make sure all of you are safe and prepared to weather any future tropical storms or hurricanes.

To be prepared, make an emergency preparedness kit for you and your family and store it in an area of your home that is always accessible to all family members.

The kit should contain:
1. Cash
2. Water and non-perishable food to last for up to seven days for your family and your pets
3. First aid kit
4. Battery-powered radio
5. Keep a full tank of gas
6. Disinfectant
7. Cloth face coverings

For managing stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic

Uses:
• Learn ways to improve your well-being during this global pandemic
• Use trackers for mental health and personal goals
• Find tools for coping and self-care
• Follow links to additional resources

Learn more at the National Center for PTSD website.
“I TRUST VA
with my healthcare
because their diligence
and thorough
examination discovered
two spots on my lung.
Then they had me
seeing an outside
Pulmonologist within
two weeks getting the
care that I needed.
Thank you VA.”

Alvin D. Carson
U.S. Army Veteran

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Website: http://www.centralalabama.va.gov/