



August 2009

VISN 19 Network Director Update

Glen W. Grippen



National News:

[Secretary Shinseki Moves to Simplify PTSD Compensation Rules](#) - Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced the Department of Veterans Affairs is taking steps to assist Veterans seeking compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). (8/24/09)

VA Secretary Shinseki

[VA Reaching Out to Suppliers, Contractors](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is strengthening its working relationship with the private-sector to improve service for Veterans, cut costs for taxpayers and enhance the operation of federal employees, VA's Deputy Secretary W. Scott Gould said recently. (8/20/09)

[Secretary Shinseki Announces Expansion of Counseling for Combat Veterans](#) - Today, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced that combat Veterans will receive readjustment counseling and other assistance in 28 additional communities across the country where the Department of Veterans Affairs will establish Vet Centers in 2010. (8/14/09)

[Supporting Our Troops: The Post 9/11 GI Bill](#) - Today, President Obama celebrated the beginning of implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. This bill, through its Yellow Ribbon Programs and partnerships with colleges and universities throughout the nation, will provide our service members with the most generous educational benefits package since the original GI Bill of 1944. (8/3/09)

VISN 19:

VISN 19 has hired a new Palliative Care Coordinator, Ms. Kay Calloway-Williams. Kay has significant experience as a hospice director in the private sector and will be providing clinical and administrative support to all Palliative care Programs in VISN 19. We welcome Kay to the VISN 19 team!

VISN 19 Rural Health Projects:

The Rural Health Initiative Projects continue to be developed as funding has been allocated to all facility sites. This month's updates on our four projects:

Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinics (PCTOCs)

Telehealth Equipment: A purchase list for all telehealth equipment for the PCTOCs has been finalized by location. The goal is to have telehealth equipment located to maximize access for both provider and patient and to minimize the need to run to distant "Telemedicine Rooms" to deliver care.



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PCTOC Project Staffing: All facilities are moving on getting positions posted, and hired by the target date of September 30, 2009.

PCTOC Telehealth Training: for the new staff is being developed and some resources are available on line. Telemedicine basics training, and specific Primary Care and Specialty care training on basics and specific peripherals are considered critical. Training will be ongoing using train the trainer concepts to enable early as possible start ups.

PCTOC Space, Locations/Leases: All facilities are actively engaged with site selection and are at all stages at present.

General Telehealth – Specialty Consultations: General Telehealth (GT)-TeleSpecialty Service Clinical Champions are being identified from ECHCS in Endocrinology, TeleTBI – Cognitive Impairment, TelePain, Tele-Dementia Services, Telemental Health – PTSD, Tele-Derm, Tele-Wound Care, Tele-Surgery, Tele-Cardiology, and Tele-Tumor Board. Service

Agreements are also being developed for all activities at ECHCS.

Extended Education and Wellness – This team is currently identifying points of contact for each facility to implement an Oversight Committee. They have established criteria for priority courses and targeted populations. They plan to start with Diabetes Mellitus, Tobacco Cessation, Navigation with med management as curriculums have been established. Patient education staff have been hired and are on station at ECHCS.

eICU Project:

The eICU Project held a Kick Off meeting in Grand Junction on Aug 4-5. The next steps between now and Oct 1 are to develop measurable outcomes, visit rural stations and purchase Tandbergs (telehealth equipment) with deliveries in September.

Veteran to Veteran Outreach Event



The VISN 19 Minority Veteran Program Coordinator and several Tribal Veterans Representatives participated in a Vet to Vet Outreach Event held on the Ft Harrison VAMC grounds in Montana on August 21st. The primary purpose of the event was to inform other veterans of the benefits of the Vet-to-Vet support group. The Montana National Guard, National Veteran Service Organizations, as well as other community support services also participated in this first outreach event which was attended by approximately 100 Veterans.



Buck Richardson (left) sharing information

New El Paso County Veteran’s Court Opened

A new court opened in El Paso County this month is designed to provide returning veterans accused of felonies with an alternative to the conventional justice system, which is not always sympathetic to combat-related brain injuries and stress disorders.

The court, which opened Aug. 14, is designed to recognize the unique needs of combat veterans who have committed a crime and may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or a brain injury.

The Colorado Springs Gazette recently published an article about the first session of the court. Please click on the link below to read the article.

<http://www.gazette.com/articles/minta-60612-combat-courtroom.html>

The court is funded by a portion of a \$2 million, five-year federal grant. The court will receive \$100,000 each year. Denver District Court, using some of the same grant money, hopes to open a veteran’s court early next year.

ECHCS



Denver, CO – Replacement Medical Center

Facility: On August 22, 2009, Secretary Shinseki provided the keynote speech for the Denver VA Medical Center Replacement Facility Groundbreaking. The Secretary emphasized the importance of a Level 1 VA facility in Denver and the commitment to the Veterans of VISN 19.

The Secretary was joined on stage by Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, Colorado Senator Michael Bennet, Colorado Congressmen Ed Perlmutter, Mike Coffman, Jared Polis, Congresswoman Betsy Markey, Rocky Mountain Network Director Glen Grippen, Eastern Colorado Healthcare System Director Lynette Roff, and other dignitaries.

The event was well attended by approximately 600 veterans, citizens, and members of the media. By all accounts, the event was a success.



VA Secretary Shinseki on stage at Denver Replacement Hospital Groundbreaking Ceremony



VA Secretary Shinseki in front of drawing of Denver Replacement Hospital



VA Secretary Shinseki (in foreground) with VA Network Director Glen Grippen (in background)



"Breaking ground"



First Shovels of Ground



VA Secretary Shinseki

VA Montana Health Care System:



Director of the VA Montana Healthcare System announces plans to retire .

Joe Underkofler, who has served in the VA for more than 37 years and has spent the past 17 at the VA Medical Center at Fort Harrison, said in a letter to hospital employees that he plans to retire from the VA on Oct. 2.



In a letter to hospital employees, Underkofler said the decision to retire had not been easy. He called it a “great joy” to have been a part of VA Montana for so long and indicated he plans to enjoy his Saturdays and family outings.

“It has been amazing to watch the growth and see all the changes,” he wrote. “I will miss coming to work and seeing you as well as knowing we can make a difference in a veteran’s life.”

Underkofler touched on VA Montana’s many successes and its potential growth in the future. He named a new hospital lab, the treatment of mental health issues, and a new clinic in Billings as good examples of the system’s aim to improve veteran care.

“All of you can be proud of the work you do every day,” he wrote his employees. “It is remarkable to see and rewarding to know that Montana’s best providers are taking care of Montana’s men and women who have served our state and country. I know of no nobler mission in the government.”

Billings CBOC Update: VA CBOC in Billings is 95% complete on construction. The final walk through took place August 26, 2009. The clinic will likely be turned over to VA Montana Healthcare System on September

We will continue to provide you with regular updates in our monthly Network Director’s Updates.

1, 2009 with move in to follow shortly. The clinic is scheduled to open September 29, 2009.

Sheridan VAMC:



Ten staff members from the Sheridan VAMC traveled to Afton Wyoming August 25-27, 2009 to set up a health and enrollment clinic at the Civic Center. The purpose of the three day event was to assist with enrollment and provide Veterans in the area with care, all in anticipation of the Sheridan VAMC opening an outreach clinic in the Star Valley area soon.

The Afton, Star Valley area has long wanted a clinic as many of the patients travel to Idaho or Salt Lake to receive care. With a VA outreach clinic in Afton, patients will no longer need to drive the long distances for blood pressure or blood test in bad weather, but will have a clinic in their town. A location for the clinic has not yet been determined.

VASLCHCS:

The VASLCHCS recently launched a new patient orientation program for new Veteran enrollees. This ninety minute session touches on key programs and clinical services available to Veteran patients. The program teaches the newly enrolled veteran how to navigate the system ahead of time and answers many frequently asked questions as they prepare for their first appointment. The very first orientation was held Wednesday, August 19, 2009 and received very positive feedback. It is VASLCHCS' goal to eventually produce a patient orientation DVD that new enrollees can take home with them. The DVD will allow Veterans to revisit the areas they may have questions about later from the comfort of their own living rooms.

The George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center in Salt Lake City was approached by a group of local fishermen who offered to sponsor a full day fishing trip for our veterans in Recreation Therapy. This type of activity helps Veterans with both their physical and psychological recovery.



This group volunteered their personally owned boats and fishing equipment and spent countless hours getting donations and community support to give veterans a day of fishing they would never forget. The event went so well and our veterans caught so many fish the members of Big Fish Tackle are interested in making this an annual event.

Grand Junction VAMC:



Several projects at the Grand Junction VA Medical Center have come together to make for a much safer, ecologically friendly and visually appealing environment.

Discovery of new seismic fault lines in western Colorado necessitated a seismic upgrade at the facility. Construction has started in the Grand Junction VAMC's Community Living Center's sunroom. As part of the upgrade a stronger foundation will be placed under the sunroom's support wall and special pilings will be driven about 60 feet into the ground at a 45 degree angle.



Contractors clear debris from the Grand Junction VA Medical Center's Community Living Center's Sunroom as part of a seismic upgrade at the facility.

A highlight for the entire community of Grand Junction was a recent visit from the President of the United States. President Obama explained his health care plan to a large crowd in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Among the health care professionals who received a special invitation to the event was Terry Atienza, Grand Junction VA Medical Center director, who took the following photos.



President Obama – Grand Junction, CO



President Obama – Grand Junction, CO



President Obama – Grand Junction, CO



Grand Junction, CO

Cheyenne VAMC:



The implementation of a Mobile Telehealth Clinic to be operated and managed from the Cheyenne VA Medical Center has literally gotten traction and is rolling steadily forward. The first visit in the new clinic took place on August 25 in Sterling, CO. Regularly scheduled visits to the three additional communities of Laramie, Wheatland and Torrington, WY, will begin in October, November and December.

Michele Mulberry, program coordinator of the new Mobile Telehealth Clinic says, "This new clinic will increase access to care for preventative primary and mental health care services to Veterans who live in the more rural parts of our service area. Veterans who enroll in this clinic will receive all of the high quality VA care, only without having to travel as far or as much."



Specific services that will be provided through the Mobile Telehealth Clinic include on-going coordination of overall medical care, wellness promotion and immunizations, appropriate health screening procedures, management of chronic illnesses, referral to specialty clinics, mental well being exams, individual counseling, lab and hematology, EKG's, and Tele-

retinal imaging. The Mobile Tele-health Clinic will have VA health technicians and nurses providing the on-site care to veterans while a secure tele-video connection is made to VA providers at the Cheyenne VAMC. The scope of care in the new mobile unit is to provide non-urgent, preventative care.

Patients are seen a week before their provider visit for a nurse visit. During this time labs are drawn, Teleretinal Imaging and EKG's if needed. This maximizes Veterans time with the provider the following week, and the provider has had the chance to see their labs and review their results.

Mobile Operations Targets: Torrington 1 Oct, Laramie 6 Nov, and Wheatland 2 Dec.



Michelle Mulberry & George Pechulis, VA Staff

Mobile Van Staffing: Mr. Scott DeFreece, RN comes to us from Denver, where he has worked as an ICU nurse for the last 4 years. Scott Maddison, Tech, comes to us from Cheyenne Regional Medical Center (CRMC) ER where he has been working as an ER tech for the last several years, and prior to that was an Anesthesia Tech. He is a Gulf War Vet, Army, is an EMT and was a volunteer firefighter for years. Mike Hensala, Tech comes to us from CRMC ER as well. He has been working as an ER tech for many years, is in the Air Guard and flies as a Flight Medic on C130s. Michelle Mulberry, Mobile Coordinator, comes from CRMC ER worked there for the last 10 years. She is in the Air Guard as well, and flies as a flight nurse on C130s.

If you are a veteran in one of the communities that will be served by this new clinic and would like to schedule an appointment, call 1-888-483-9127 ext. 3816.

New Cheyenne VA Medical Center Associate Director Appointed

Elizabeth Lowery was named as the Associate Director of the Cheyenne Medical Center in June, 2009.

Ms. Lowery began her VA career as the Education Officer for the West Texas VA Health Care System in Big Spring, TX.

Prior to that position, she worked in Higher Education Administration, serving as the Education Officer and EEO Manager at the Grand Junction VA Medical Center. Most recently, she held the position of Special Assistant to the Director at the Grand Junction VA Medical Center.



Elizabeth Lowery

Ms. Lowery obtained a Bachelor of Science Degree, Education, from Lubbock Christian University (Lubbock, TX 1982) and a Master's Degree, Communications, from University of Texas - Permian Basin (Odessa, TX 1991). Currently, Ms. Lowery is working on a PhD.

She is community oriented and has volunteered with Chamber of Commerce groups, has coached youth sports and has been active in the Rotary Club. She enjoys the outdoors, sports, the arts and is the mother of three boys.