



December 2009

VISN 19 Network Director Update

Glen W. Grippen



National News: (Click on titles to read full press release)

[President Obama Meets with SAVE Award Winner](#) - President Barack Obama today presented the first-ever SAVE (Securing Americans Value and Efficiency) Award to a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee from Loma, Colorado. Nancy

Fichtner's idea was voted the winner out of four finalists in a public online vote. Over 38,000 federal employees made SAVE Award submissions from across the country. (12/21/09)

[Secretary Shinseki Releases Hospital Report Card](#) - For the second consecutive year, the Department of Veterans Affairs has released a "hospital report card" as part of VA's effort to provide the public with a transparent accounting of the quality and safety of its care. (12/9/09)

[Shinseki Says VA's Home Loan Program a "Continued Success"](#) - Despite problems in the nation's housing market, mortgage loans backed by the Department of Veterans Affairs had a lower foreclosure rate than any other type of home loan in the industry, as of the end of the last fiscal year. (12/7/09)

[VA To Survey Veteran Households](#) - Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced the Department of Veterans Affairs has launched a national survey of Veterans, active duty service members, activated National Guard and reserve members, and family members and survivors to learn if they are aware of VA services. (12/3/09)

VISN 19:



A New Year's message from Glen Grippen, Network Director, VISN 19:

"I hope your holiday season was wonderful and I wish to extend our great respect and honor for your gift to the Nation....Peace."

Exciting National Program Highlight: Working Together to Share Records Safely, Improve Care

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Kaiser Permanente announced an exciting program designed to improve care and services to our Nation's heroes. VA and Kaiser Permanente are launching a pilot program to exchange electronic health record (EHR) information using the Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN) created by the Department of Health and Human Services.

VA and Kaiser Permanente sent a joint letter to Veterans in the San Diego area who receive care from both institutions, to invite Veterans to participate in this first-ever pilot program. Veterans, who respond and ask to participate, will enable their public and private sector health care providers and doctors to share specific health information electronically, safely, securely and privately. This initial pilot began mid-December 2009.

The pilot program connects Kaiser Permanente HealthConnect® and the VA's electronic health record system, VistA, two of the largest electronic health record systems in the country.

The program places the highest priority on patient privacy and data security, and no exchange of information will occur without the explicit permission of the individual patient. Explicit policies and technologies to safeguard patient information are part of the NHIN. Patient information will not be shared without first

obtaining their consent. Veterans' access to care will in no way be affected at either institution if they choose not to participate. Patients who do choose to participate will benefit by allowing their doctors at any one of the institutions to obtain key health record information from other participating institutions.

VA, DoD, and HHS have been working closely to create a system that will modernize the way health care is delivered and benefits are administered. DoD will be included in the next phase of the pilot program in early 2010.

ECHCS



Denver, CO – Replacement Medical Center Facility:

The Denver VAMC is providing a weekly update on the status of the Denver Replacement Hospital. These updates are distributed via e-mail every Monday and can also be found on <http://www.denver.va.gov/projecteagle/index.asp>.

Denver Replacement Hospital Highlight: Spinal Cord Injury and Disease (SCI/D) Center at the Denver VAMC replacement facility.

Plans are to locate the SCI/D Center on the first floor of the North and South inpatient buildings, with patient rooms contained in the south building, allowing nearly all patients to stay in single patient rooms. The north building includes services such as exam rooms, a pharmacy, therapy pools, a gym and other amenities such as an internet room, and a horticulture therapy area. The Center will also include a full apartment to prepare patients for life once they leave the hospital.

In addition to state of the art treatment facilities inside the SCI/D Center, the SCI dedicated court yard between the two buildings provides recreation opportunities such as basketball, horseshoes; therapy opportunities such as wheelchair skills and horticulture; and areas for families to have BBQs and children to play.

Overall, the new SCI/D Center will make receiving health care services simply easier and more convenient for veterans. The SCI/D Center has a dedicated parking lot, a separate entrance from the main hospital entrance, and will allow for one-stop for nearly all the medical needs of veterans. Veterans will no longer need to travel great distances for their annual exams and will be able to utilize all of the features of the hospital without traveling to different medical facilities depending on the care they require. Most importantly, the new SCI/D Center will provide area veterans with top quality care that will enable veterans with spinal cord injuries to live healthy and active lives.

Update on other aspects of the replacement hospital: Seventy percent of the old PX building is down and most of the debris and metal has been transported for disposal. Next steps include the completion of above ground demolition of the old PX building and start of concrete slab removal.

Update on Salida Primary Care Telehealth

Outreach Clinic: Plans are in place for a grand opening for the clinic on January 15, 2010. As of December 21st, the clinic is ready to open. Clinic staff includes an RN, LPN, and a tele-tech. Nurse Practitioner coverage will be provided by the Pueblo CBOC and the Alamosa CBOC until a full-time NP is hired. Tele-mental health coverage will be provided by the part-time psychiatrist out of Alamosa. We are very excited about this new clinic and the opportunity to serve veterans in rural Colorado.

VA Montana Health Care System:



This month's update highlights the Fort Harrison's Homeless Veterans Program and introduces individuals who coordinate and provide outreach and case management services to Veterans who are transitioning from homeless environments to a safe, secure and independent living.

Transitional Housing for Homeless Vets

Contact information for Homeless Program staff:

Gerald Kuhl, MEd - Homeless Veteran Programs Coordinator, Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) POC
Office: 406-447-7309 Cell: 202-3062

Mark Annas, LCSW – HUD-VASH Case Manager
Office: 406-447-7192 Cell: 202-4073

Megan Phillips, MSW, MPA – Grant and Per Diem Liaison
Office: 406-447-7309 Cell: 202-5601

Kevin Skocilich, LCSW – Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist
Office: 406-447-3709



Mark Annas, Megan Phillips, Gerald Kuhl



Kevin Skocilich

Healthcare for Homeless Vets (HCHV)

VA Montana has 2 HCHV facilities where Veterans may stay up to 90 days in a sober environment. The HCHV's are contracted shelter type facilities that provide room, board, self laundry, and secure storage. Veterans receive medical, behavioral, and substance abuse supportive care through VA and are eligible for single course dental care after 60 days.

The two facilities:

The Poverello Center located in Missoula, Montana, is a 66 bed facility providing room and board for both men and women and has VA on-site contracted counseling for homeless Veterans.

The Samaritan House located in Kalispell, Montana, is a 28 bed facility providing room and board for men and women as well as five (5) family rooms and a 13 bed Vet pod.

Grant and Per Diem Transition/Recovery Facilities (GPD) – In these program facilities, Veterans may stay for up to 2 years. Case management is provided by program managers on site as well as through the GPD office. VA Montana has



The Willis Cruse House (above) is located in Helena, Montana. It is a 12 bed men only facility with 2-3 beds per room. Veterans receive room and board at no cost with zero tolerance for alcohol and illegal drugs. Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) is available for Veterans with diagnosed mental illness. Veterans work at finding employment, continued education, voc rehab, and saving for permanent housing and receive medical, behavioral, and substance abuse supportive care through VA. Veterans are eligible for single course of dental care after 60 days in program.



The Valor House (above) is located in Missoula, Montana. It is a 17 bed, single unit apartment facility for single or unaccompanied men and women. There is no income requirement to enter, but Veterans pay 30% of what they receive per month. This is a sober environment with maximum income (\$975) restrictions at entry. Food is supported through the food pantry and Poverello Center. Veterans work at finding employment, continued education, voc rehab, and saving for permanent housing and receive medical, behavioral and substance abuse supportive care through VA. Veterans are eligible for single course dental care after 60 days.



Independence Hall (above) is located in Billings, Montana and is a 20 bed facility providing medical, behavioral, and substance abuse supportive care with the same benefits as described for the other programs above.

NW Veterans Stand Down Pantry is located in Kalispell, Montana. There is no shelter but food, clothing, hygiene supplies, showers, and counseling service are provided.

HUD-VASH VOUCHER PROGRAM – This is a Housing & Urban Development/VA Supportive Housing program that provides Section 8 vouchers to Veterans and families qualifying as either chronically homeless or homeless. Priority status according to program defined protocol: Disabled Veterans with families; Veterans with families; OEF/OIF; Women; Disabled and Homeless. The station had 35 vouchers in 2008 and Veterans pay between 30 to 40% of monthly rent income according to Housing Authority formula. Veterans must be no income to qualify – max income determined by number in family – single person not more than adjusted @\$18,000/yr depending on county where voucherred. Vouchers are good for one year, and then a lease-up must be completed. Five year renewals are allowed. NOTE: An additional 35 Vouchers received in 2009 will offer permanent housing through the Billings Housing Authority. Same basic rules apply.

Veteran Justice Outreach Program - Provides outreach services to Veterans involved with law enforcement, legal and/or judicial systems in Montana. The object is to provide city, county and state law enforcement as well as municipal, district and Federal courts alternatives to fining or incarcerating Veterans who are involved as first time, non-violent misdemeanor or felon offenders. The program is in start-up phase and currently developing information packets and training modules; identifying VA and non-VA mental health and substance use disorders treatment programs that would offer justice systems alternatives to fines or incarceration.

Sheridan VAMC:



This past Thanksgiving, three veterans pooled their resources together and provided dinner for 20 of their fellow vets. All of the Veterans are part of the supporting housing program co-sponsored by VA and Housing and Urban development (HUD/VASH) which is

a program that assists veterans in finding affordable housing by providing vouchers. The three cooks are part of the program and wanted to make sure that all the veterans in the program had the opportunity for a great meal on Thanksgiving.

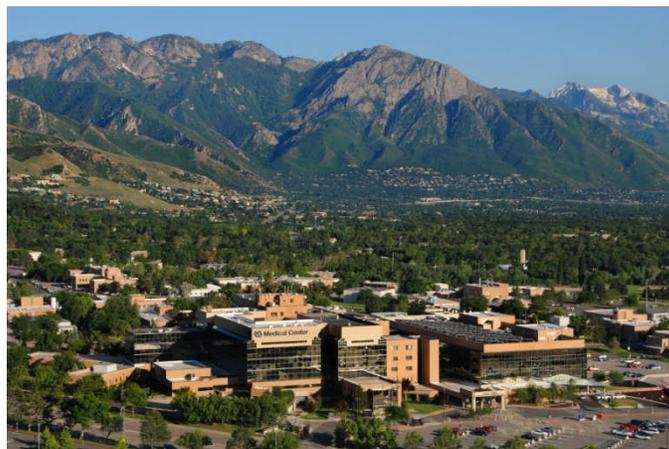
“We have vets that don’t have family around or anyone else and I decided I wanted to make a nice meal for them” Charles Farley, a Veteran and HUD/VASH participant told the local news paper. Gail Quenneville, the HUD/VAHS program manager said the program has worked very well in creating a support group for the participants. “For them to want to gather together and have a meal and help one another is wonderful” said Quenneville.

The local community college provided a professional kitchen for the guys to do all of the cooking along with any items they might have forgotten, or just run out of. “We want them to do their Thanksgiving and not have to worry about that stuff.” Sheridan College Culinary Institute Manager Monty Blair.

Other Veterans were treated to a holiday meal to thank them for their work on the Sheridan VAMC Veterans Council. Every month members of the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Wyoming Submariners, and the Wyoming Veterans Commission meet with the Sheridan VAMC leadership to review facility activities and provide insight into new or existing programs.

Each December the VAMC Director treats the council to lunch. “It is a great opportunity to hear from our veteran groups, and just thank them for all they do for us.” Acting Director Karla Mallo related.

VASLCHCS:



VA Salt Lake City OEF/OIF Team has a New Home

The OEF/OIF Program at the George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center in Salt Lake City is happy to announce the opening of the PDICC (Post Deployment Integrated



Care Clinic) at which local Veterans officially cut the ribbon. The OEF/OIF Program Team sees newly returned combat Veterans for readjustment counseling, primary care, behavioral health and screenings for TBI and PTSD all in one place. In addition they are doing counseling and have continued contact with rural combat Veterans via telehealth.

"It is one stop shopping for our newly returned veterans seeking services and it is our job to make sure they are getting what they need." says Patient Transition Advocate Daniel Murchie. The team is excited about the opportunity for personal one on one contact with their veterans in a setting completely devoted to their needs.

You can check out photos and media stories related to this grand opening on the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System's new Facebook site...just one more tool we are using to connect with our newest veterans. <http://www.facebook.com/vasaltlakecity>

Salt Lake City Santa Makes Holiday Magic at Medical Center

It is at this time of year we pause to reflect on what we hold most dear, our families, our friends, our faith and our freedoms....freedoms provided by the Veterans that we serve. Gift bags and blankets go out to all of our hospitalized veterans this time of year courtesy our volunteers and the generous surrounding community.



Dozens of volunteers from our medical center's Voluntary Service Department and from other service organizations spent the morning packing gift bags and folding donated, handmade blankets for our Veterans. The joy in patient's faces was all the return gift needed. Faces lit up as men and women in uniform, our leadership and of course our dedicated volunteers handed out the gifts.

Grand Junction VAMC:



VA EMPLOYEE FIRST WINNER OF PRESIDENT'S SAVE AWARD

A VA employee is the first-ever winner of the President's SAVE Award -- a contest for federal employees to come up with the best idea to save taxpayer dollars and make the government perform more effectively and efficiently. Nancy Fichtner, fiscal program support clerk at the Grand Junction, Colo., VA Medical Center, presented her idea to President Obama at the White House.

Her idea is that Veterans leaving VA hospitals should be able to take the medicine they've been issued during hospitalization home with them instead of throwing it away when discharged. In most hospitals across the country, medicine that is used in hospital such as ointments, inhalers, eye drops, and other bulk items is not given to patients to take home; instead, it is thrown out. Fichtner says that Grand Junction and other VA hospitals could easily change this practice through VA's automated pharmacy barcode system by including an outpatient barcode on inpatient medication labels.



President Barack Obama speaks on making government more efficient and effective in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House, Dec.

21, 2009. Joining the President are, from left: Office of Management Budget Director Peter Orzag, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki, and SAVE (Securing Americans Value and Efficiency) Award winner Nancy Fichtner of Colorado, a Fiscal Program Support Clerk at the Department of Veterans Affairs. (Official White House Photo by Lawrence Jackson)



Nancy Fichtner, winner of the SAVE (Securing Americans Value and Efficiency) Award, listens as President Barack Obama speaks on making government more efficient and effective in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House, Dec. 21, 2009. Fichtner is a

Fiscal Program Support Clerk at the Department of Veterans Affairs. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

Other GJVAMC updates: Contractors and government engineers gather for their first on-site meeting to plan out the details of the 30,000 square foot expansion at the Grand Junction VA Medical Center. The project will not only add a third floor to one wing of the facility, but will allow pre- and post-operative care to be consolidated with the surgery on one floor.



Clyde Ruble works on a donation to the USMC Reserves during a Help Hospitalized Veterans craft therapy session at the Grand Junction VA Medical Center. Each year in October the participants start making toys for the Toys for Tots program. This year, their contribution was extremely important according to a Toys for Tots representative as donations were down by two thirds across Western Colorado.



Cheyenne VAMC:



There is plenty of holiday spirit at the Cheyenne VAMC, particularly in regard to facility improvements. Steady progress on several projects improving the environment of care has continued.

As a continued commitment to fostering the "home like environment" in nursing homes, several resident rooms in the Old Glory Community Living Center (CLC) have been renovated with wood grain vinyl flooring. These upgrades, along with some new furniture, wood grained grab rails and a new paint job throughout the CLC, has really created a home like feel to the unit.

Earlier this month, some very talented servicemen and women shared their vocal talents in the Old Glory CLC. Pictured below is USAF Ssgt, Krista Joyce singing Christmas carols with backup from the USAF Heartland of America: New Horizons Band. This is a single example of the number of special holiday visitors that have taken time to visit and honor Veterans at the Cheyenne VAMC this past month.



Construction on the two new surgical suites has reached a milestone. The roof structure is nearing completion. This will allow contractors to close in the exterior walls next where they will soon be able to work on the interior. At the pace that work is occurring on this project and with no delays, the surgical suite is expected to be completed sometime in the late part of calendar year 2010.

Other reasons why the holiday spirit is running high at the Cheyenne VA is the parking situation. In the spring of 2009, the City of Cheyenne excavated a large storm water retention pond on city property adjacent to the southeast boundary of the Cheyenne VAMC's property. This project, along with steady growth in workload at the VAMC, impacted parking on certain days.

Since that time last spring, two existing parking lots have been significantly expanded and two new parking areas have been established. When all of the parking lots construction is completed (expected in the spring 2010), a total of approximately 120 new spaces will be available for Veterans, visitors and staff. Additionally, several administrative sections including Human Resources and coding and billing, have moved from the main campus to the Jonah building located approximately a mile east of the main campus.

The Cheyenne VA team wishes everyone a happy and healthy holiday season as we look forward to continuing to serve you with continued high quality health care, customer service and communications in 2010!