



# February 2010

# VISN 19 Network Director Update

## Glen W. Grippen



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

[Secretary Shinseki Announces Gulf War Task Force Report](#) - Today, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced that the department's Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force has nearly completed a comprehensive report that will

redefine how VA addresses the pain and suffering of ill Veterans who deployed during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991. (2/27/10)

[Web Site Offers Single Access Point for Wounded Warriors](#) - The federal departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor and Defense unveiled today an improved Web site for wounded warriors. (2/25/10)

[VA Education Call Center Again Operating Five Days a Week](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs today announced that the Education Call Center, closed on Thursdays and Fridays over the past two months, is again operating five days a week. (2/23/10)

[VA Begins Nationwide GI Bill Advertising Campaign to Reach Student Veterans and Schools](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs today announced a two-month, nationwide advertising campaign to assist student Veterans and service members applying for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. (2/23/10)

[VA Expands Evaluation of Technology Projects](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs today announced that all information technology (IT) projects at the Department will now be managed under its program management and accountability system (PMAS). (2/23/10)

[Shinseki Announces Winners of Innovation Competition for Improving Claims Processing](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs selected 10 winners in a competition that solicited ideas from VA employees and co-located Veterans service organizations to improve claims

processing and provide greater transparency to Veterans. (2/19/10)

[Shinseki Announces Winners of Innovation Competition for Improving Claims Processing](#) - The Department of Veterans Affairs selected 10 winners in a competition that solicited ideas from VA employees and co-located Veterans service organizations to improve claims processing and provide greater transparency to Veterans. (2/19/10)

[Petzel Sworn in to Head Veterans Health Care System](#) - Dr. Robert A. Petzel has taken the oath of office as the Under Secretary for Health within the Department of Veterans Affairs, stepping up to lead the nation's largest integrated health care system. (2/18/10)

["Innovation Initiative" Underway for Health Records Improvements](#) - Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki launched the "Veterans Health IT Innovation Initiative," an employee-based Health Information Technology (HIT) competition to spur VA's transformation into a 21st Century organization that is Veteran-centric, results-oriented, and forward-looking. (2/18/10)

[White House Seeks \\$125 Billion for Veterans in 2011](#) - To expand health care to a record-number of Veterans, reduce the number of homeless Veterans and process a dramatically increased number of new disability compensation claims, the White House has announced a proposed \$125 billion budget next year for the Department of Veterans Affairs. (2/1/10)

### **VISN 19:**

#### **New Deputy Network Director for VISN 19 Selected**

Ms. Lee Logan, Deputy Network Director announced her decision to retire from the VA this past summer. Ms. Logan served as Deputy Network Director, VISN 19 from March 18, 2007 to present. The Deputy Network Director is responsible for the supervision of VISN administrative programs



and their respective program managers, including Finance, Logistics, Capital Assets and Planning, GEMS, and Occupational Health and Safety, and VISN administrative support staff. A search for a new Deputy Network Director was initiated and a selection has been made.

**Lavonne K. Liversage has been selected as Deputy Network Director, VISN 19** effective May 2010.

At present, Ms. Liversage is serving as Acting Medical Center Director at the Fargo VA Medical Center since December 6, 2009. Ms. Liversage was appointed as Associate Director for Operations and Resources at the Fargo VA Medical Center in July, 2007. Prior to this appointment, she served as the Chief Financial Officer of the Central Iowa Health Care System, beginning in January 2005.



Ms. Liversage began her career with the Department of Veterans Affairs in March 1996, as Chief of the Accounting Section in Fargo and was promoted to Chief Financial Officer in 2000. Her federal career began in 1991 with the Internal Revenue Service in Fargo.

Ms. Liversage was raised on a farm near Hampden, North Dakota, and graduated from the University Of North Dakota with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. She received a Master of Business Administration from the University of Mary in 2004.

### **Updates on VISN 19's Four Rural Health Projects**

#### **1) Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinics**

**(PCTOCs)** will serve an estimated 7,023 veterans in rural and highly rural counties in Colorado, Montana, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming. The PCTOCs make extensive use of telehealth modalities

#### **Status of PCTOC Space, Locations/Leases:**

##### **Montana**

Plentywood - Operational target – June/July 2010.

Hamilton – Operational target – June/July 2010.

##### **Cheyenne**

Rawlins, WY – Operational target- July 1, 2010.

##### **ECHCS**

Salida, CO – OPERATIONAL as of December 2009

##### **Grand Junction**

Moab, UT- Operational target – June 2010.

Glenwood Springs, CO – Operational target – June 2010

##### **SLC**

Idaho Falls and Price –Operational target – June/July 2010.

##### **Sheridan**

Evanston –Operational target – July 1, 2010.

Worland –Operational target – June 2010.

#### **2) General Telehealth – Specialty Consultations:**

VISN 19 staff is working to establish a VISN Telehealth Care Shared Resource System to provide expanded specialty care conferencing and consultation for care providers and veterans in rural areas across VISN 19. Program areas include Endocrinology, Traumatic Brain Injury Cognitive Impairment Services, Pain Management, Dementia, PTSD, Dermatology, Rehabilitation & Wound Care, Pre/Post Surgery Care, Cardiology, and Tumor Board. General Telehealth (GT)-TeleSpecialty Service Clinical Champions have been identified.

An Initial Tele-Endocrinology patient test for connectivity and telehealth video consult was successful and endorsed by clinical staff using a Sheridan/Denver consult. A successful test of the Specialty Scheduling System was also completed in February. This clinical pathway / consult management system focuses on ensuring both inter and intra facility consults and all the related activities for a telehealth visit: service agreements, clinic set-up/scheduling, consult templates, progress note templates, communication and follow-up are working as planned.

ECHCS specialty staff is now working on operations development for Endocrinology, Pain, and TeleDementia consultations.

**3) Extended Education and Wellness** – Using primarily telehealth modalities, this project will provide innovative education and wellness strategies to veterans in rural areas. The program will deliver intensive case management and education to veterans who have high-risk conditions. The identified priority courses are Diabetes Mellitus, Tobacco Cessation, and Navigation with med management.

A VISN MOVE (weight management program) dietician has been hired and will start working on 3/9 (Denver). Sheridan expects to have all patient education carts installed in all CBOCs by the end of March. The Gillette CBOC's cart has already been installed. ECHCS has their consult system, class curriculums, and equipment in place to begin intra-facility patient education classes based on Krames modules in March.

#### **4) vICU Project: Name changed to (Virtual)**

The vICU is an "electronic ICU (vICU)" that maintains access to critical care services in the three smaller facilities (Fort Harrison, MT; Grand Junction, CO; Cheyenne, WY) by combining existing technology with expanded critical care nursing services and medical specialists located in Denver and Salt Lake City in a collaborative fashion across all five medical centers. The vICU Project is operational and very successful via telephone.

### **ORH Funding Report and Change Request:**

VISN 19 facilities are preparing proposals to reallocate additional funds to help cover telehealth lease and build out costs and are requesting additional FY 2010 and 2011 Office of Rural Health funding for new, expanded and sustaining funds for our current Office of Rural Health initiatives through FY 2011.

### **VA's Telehealth: Wherever You Are, You're Not Too Far**

VISN 19 was featured in a story highlighting Telehealth in a national VA publication.



A nurse assists a Veteran with medical exam equipment while a physician tunes in via video to offer her expertise.

He had never been to an appointment like this. Veteran Richard Martinez sat in the exam room while his nurse practitioner, Carla Uran, listened to his heart and lungs and took his blood pressure. After conducting an EKG (electrocardiogram) to check for heart irregularities, the two discussed Martinez's health. There was one distinctive factor that made this appointment different: Martinez and Uran were 120 miles apart.

Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) gives patients and providers the opportunity to conduct several aspects of medical examinations that do not require in-person visits. Veterans are able to visit a VA clinic near their home, connect to medical centers through videoconferencing, and transfer medical information by way of specially-designed telecommunications equipment.

### **Who Wants a Four-Hour Drive? Nobody!**

Martinez lives in Pueblo, Colorado, which is more than two hours away from both Alamosa and Denver - the nearest VA locations with in-house doctors and nurse practitioners.

Uran is based in Alamosa but provides care for Veterans in smaller clinics in Pueblo and La Junta (nearly a four-hour drive from her home). She used to spend a significant amount of time on the road in order to serve her patients.

"My commute was working, but my patient load was smaller and I wasn't as readily available for my patients," explained Uran. CVT has allowed her to better utilize her time and provide care for more Veterans. Now, neither patient nor provider is required to spend excessive amounts of time on the road. "Telehealth consultations can be just as good as in-person consultations - it depends on the medical reason for the visit," said Uran. For example, if a patient comes in with a cold, she can have a nurse perform the basic assessment activities on site at the smaller clinic, and have a specialized video camera pointed in the patient's ear, nose and throat.

Martinez, as a first-time participant of telehealth, described his experience as "different." He explained, "I thought it was a good idea, especially because I'm not much for long-distance driving." Although he missed the hands-on experience, he was happy to know he had medical expertise on hand when he needed it - without spending hours on the road. In several regions across the country, there is not a dense enough Veteran population to justify a fully-staffed medical centers. Telehealth provides access to quality healthcare for Veterans in many rural areas.

### **"Out in the Boonies"**

Bill Morgan is an army Veteran who lives; as he puts it, "out in the boonies" near Craig, Colorado. He loves his rural home, but it means he must drive 160 miles to the nearest VA Medical Center in Grand Junction, Colorado. Morgan requires a blood test once a month, so it is no surprise that he appreciates having access to telehealth through the VA clinic in Craig.

"I love it because it saves me a trip all the way to Grand Junction. Nobody likes that three-hour drive - especially in winter with the icy conditions," said Morgan. In addition to regular medical check-ups and blood tests, Morgan participates in another telehealth service, MOVE!, a national weight management program.

"Telehealth lends itself to the MOVE! program because it is difficult to find necessary staff to participate in each rural location," said Jeff Lowe, Special Projects Manager for the Office of Telehealth. Several VA clinics now host MOVE! sessions via videoconferencing to larger medical centers. Other educational programs include diabetic education and smoking cessation. Morgan has been pleased with all services provided through Craig's telehealth program. "Telehealth is convenient; the staff takes great care of me, and it saves me a lot of time," said Morgan.



Practitioners use remote image interpretation (telerectal imaging) to screen for diabetic retinopathy.

### Teleservices for 17,000 Veterans

CVT primary care is just one of the many ways in which telehealth connects Veterans to healthcare services. The VA provides services in telerehabilitation, teledermatology, telemental health, telerectal imaging and the list is growing.

Expansion of services is continuously in the works. The VA Rocky Mountain Network alone (spanning Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado) provided telehealth care to 17,000 Veterans last year. The same region is also in the process of opening 10 primary care telehealth clinics equipped with nursing and technical staff ready to connect Veterans to far-reaching practitioners. Future plans are "to expand the size and scope of telehealth programs to focus on expanding access to care for Veterans in rural locations," said Dr. Adam Darkins, Chief Consultant of Care Coordination Services at the VA. "This will reduce the need for travel to specialist services, thus increasing the quality and timeliness of care."

Related links:

- [Clinical Video Telehealth](#)
- [MOVE!](#)

More on Telehealth:

- [Home Telehealth: I Just Called to Say...Here's My Blood Pressure](#)
- [A Doctor's Appointment...when the Doctor is 150 Miles Away](#)

### Eastern Colorado Health Care System



### Denver, CO – Replacement Medical Center Facility:

The Denver VAMC is providing monthly updates on the status of the Denver Replacement Hospital. Updates are distributed via e-mail monthly and can be found on <http://www.denver.va.gov/projecteagle/index.asp>.

### Project Eagle Profile: Mr. Tim Pogany, Project Eagle Director

Timothy Pogany has over 25 years experience in federal government. He currently is a Senior Resident Engineer within Construction and Facilities Management (CFM) and is the current Project Manager overseeing all the details for Project Eagle.

With a wealth of experience in medical facility design and construction, Mr. Pogany managed design and construction contracts for many of VA's largest and most complex projects. Mr. Pogany's experience as an outstanding performer is supported by several awards for outstanding performance and special contributions.

He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from The University of Akron. He is also a certified construction manager as well as a registered professional engineer in Texas. He holds an active Contracting Officer Warrant.

As a previous participant in CFM/VHA's Leadership Development program, he became one of CFM's first to complete his certification as a mentor and now serves as one of two co-chairs in managing CFM's Senior Resident Engineer development program. The expertise that Mr. Pogany brings to Project Eagle is vital to the success of the project.

### VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System Opens Brand New Clinic

VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System hosted a Grand Opening Ceremony for the brand new Jewell Clinic at 14400 East Jewell Avenue in Aurora, CO on Friday, February 19.



Congressman Ed Perlmutter, Aurora Mayor Ed Tauer, State Representative Nancy Todd and VISN 19 Director Glen Grippen attended. The program led by Lynette Roff, Director, ECHCS included a short ceremony, as

well as tours of the facility and veteran demonstrations of the equipment and programs.

The new Jewell Clinic provides state-of-the-art rehabilitative and prosthetic care and is home to the

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service, the Prosthetic Treatment Center, and the Call Center.

Outpatient services

include a new Polytrauma Program, the Assistive Technology Program, Drivers' Training Rehab, Outpatient Recreation Therapy, the Regional Amputee Center, Rehab Psychology, Speech Pathology and Voice Lab, Wheelchair Program, Orthotic and Prosthetic Lab, Shoe Clinic, Brace Clinic, Amputee Clinic, Gait Lab, Telemedicine Wheelchair and Amputee Clinics and our Visual Impairment Services Outpatient Rehabilitation Program (VISOR).



### **Denver VAMC's Medical Foster Care Program**

The Denver VAMC's Medical Foster Care program was highlighted in the AARP Bulletin Today. Please hit the control (Ctrl) button on your computer and click on the link below that see the video on the AARP link.

[http://bulletin.aarp.org/yourhealth/caregiving/articles/a\\_caring\\_alternative.html?generalStatus=Thanks%21%20Your%20email%20has%20been%20sent](http://bulletin.aarp.org/yourhealth/caregiving/articles/a_caring_alternative.html?generalStatus=Thanks%21%20Your%20email%20has%20been%20sent)

### **VA Montana Health Care System:**



### **VA Medical Center at Fort Harrison holds ground breaking ceremony for the new twenty-four bed inpatient mental health facility**

The VAMTHCS held a well attended ground breaking ceremony on Tuesday, February 16, 2010 at 3717 Veterans Drive, Fort Harrison MT. Senator Jon Tester was the featured guest speaker.

The twenty four bed inpatient mental health facility will allow Veterans needing residential rehabilitation in substance abuse and/or post traumatic stress disorder to stay in Montana for their care. Currently Montana Veterans needing these longer stay programs are required to travel to VA facilities in North Dakota, Wyoming or Idaho.



This is a much needed addition to the VA Montana



Healthcare System and will allow VA Montana to provide a full array of comprehensive services and continue to expand community partnerships that currently exist for both inpatient and outpatient mental

health care.

The partnership with community resources has facilitated the provision of community based services for our Veterans that live in rural areas of Montana. The addition of inpatient specialty units, that have not been available in Montana previously, will afford Veterans and their families the ability to meet their needs and support recovery in the state of Montana.

### **Outreach Events held for Veterans and Families**

Through the use of the Mobile Vet Center, VAMTHCS held outreach events on February 23<sup>rd</sup> at CS&K for the Flathead Nation at Pablo, MT; on February 24<sup>th</sup> for the Blackfeet Nation at Browning, MT; on February 25<sup>th</sup> for the Chippewa Cree Nation at Rocky Boy, MT; on March 1st for the Assiniboine-Gros Ventre Nation at Ft Belknap, MT; and on March 2nd will hold events for the Assiniboine- Sioux Nation at Poplar, MT; on March 3<sup>rd</sup> for the Northern Cheyenne Nation at Lame Deer, MT; on March 4th for the Crow Nation at Crow Agency, MT. These all day events offer assistance with veteran's benefits by traveling to where Veterans live.

Representatives from the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, Minority Veteran Representatives, Tribal Veteran Representatives, Tribal Outreach Workers, Psychiatry Outreach Providers, Vet Center Counselors, Indian Health Service, and State of Montana Department of Labor participated. Veterans were offered Healthy Veteran Check, Flu Shot (Seasonal and H1N1), Healthcare enrollment, Veteran Benefits Counseling, and Vet Center counseling.

## Sheridan VAMC:



U.S. Senator Mike Enzi recently toured the new Gillette, Wyoming CBOC. The Senator recounted a situation years ago when Veterans drove to the Denver VA when they thought they were having serious health problems. Sen. Enzi said, "now with CBOCs veterans have access to care much closer, and for many in their home town."

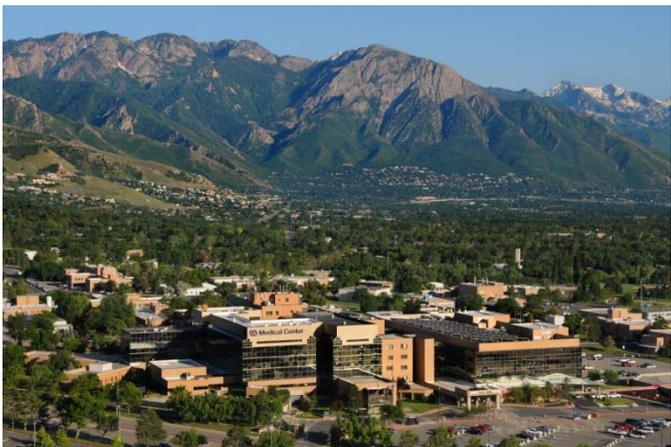
Harriet Browning, Director of CBOCs, demonstrated the new tele-health technology being utilized in the clinics, specifically the global media unit which will provide care to Worland and Evanston, Wyoming patients in the coming months. "This new technology allows for patients to have follow up appointments with specialists or have mental health appointments without having to drive hours and hours."



**Senator Enzi**

The Sheridan VAMC will be hosting an open house and grand openings at their two newest clinics on April 22 in Rock Springs and April 23 in Afton.

## VASLCHCS:



## VA Salt Lake City Health Care System: Healing the Mind and Spirit with Art

Hard to believe a hard core marine could paint something so colorful and bright, but for marine Veteran Amanda Middlemas, it is all about soothing her soul.

"A Lovely Turtle" took first place at the George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center in Salt Lake City for the visual arts portion of the Creative Arts Festival. Middlemas, an OEF/OIF Veteran, was medically discharged with a mental disability and since then has channeled her energy and emotions through art.



She and twenty five other Veterans submitted art entries through the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System's Recreation Therapy Program.

Emily Potter, VA recreation therapist, says, "They're trying to decide what to do with all the feelings of what they've gone through in the wars and their service. Art gives them a voice to express what's going on with them and also lets them let the past go and live in the present."

Some will take their blue ribbons to the national competition in Wisconsin, others just enjoy sharing their work ribbon or no ribbon. Visual and performing arts gives struggling Veterans a productive outlet and helps them tap into talents many never even knew they had.

## Women's Clinic Open House Opens Eyes of More Female Veterans

Heart health awareness week did a lot more than just remind women Veterans to take care of themselves it reminded them to take advantage of the health care benefits they have earned.

The VA Salt Lake City Health Care System welcomed women Veterans to an open house for free health screenings and information. In two hours nurses and doctors connected with 38 women and educated three women brand new to the clinic. There were several comments about the number of new resources available to women Veterans including a new support group for women. While having their blood pressure and EKG's taken female Veterans also received information and resources on PTSD, and Military Sexual Trauma.

Gina Painter, Women's Program Manager, did several interviews with local media outlets explaining the VA's commitment to female Veterans and their unique health care needs. She also mentioned just how honored she is to serve such a courageous population of women. The clinic was full of Veterans of all ages and eras; brand new young Veterans sitting next to Vietnam Veterans. One Desert Storm Veteran was there with her four year old son in a stroller, something the VA hasn't seen a lot of in the past but times are changing.

**Grand Junction VAMC:**



Numerous projects continue to roll along at the Grand Junction VA Medical Center.

**Grand Junction CBOCs Update:** A final rental contract has been signed for the TeleHealth Clinic location in Moab, Utah and modifications should be complete soon. Outpatient clinic operations are expected to begin in late April.

At the Craig TeleHealth location, staff is preparing to move to a new location as soon as possible because patient load has outgrown the current facility.

In the last month, construction on a new building to house Recreation Therapy and other offices has neared completion with occupancy scheduled for mid-March.



The unique design of the new Recreation Therapy Building and office building will allow the facility to place a maximum number of

solar converters on the roof and drastically reduce the building energy usage compared to standard construction.

The Grand Junction VAMC hosted several organizations ranging from Job Corps students through Choice Hotels, the American Red Cross and the National Weather Service during National Salute to Veterans week at the Medical Center. The facility also hosted its annual creative Arts Festival and the silent auction that supports the veterans in the program.

The medical center's combined outreach team continues to be busy with appearances before several organizations, staffing a booth at the Moab Health Fair, organizing a Women Veteran's Extravaganza, and writing articles requested by a local paper for a Veterans Benefits special insert published Feb. 17 to name just a few activities.

In the picture on the right, Kathy Goe stuffs box for transport to the Grand Junction VA Medical Center's annual Women Veteran's Extravaganza. Last year organizers had nearly 80 female Veterans show up and hope to top that number this year.



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The Grand Junction Free Press produced a Veterans Benefits Guide that has received rave reviews by the Medical Center patients and VSOs. The guide was expected to be eight pages long, but the Free Press sold enough ads, the guide was expanded to 20 pages. You can see an electronic version of the Veterans Guide at [www.gjfreepress.com/vetguide](http://www.gjfreepress.com/vetguide)



The Medical Center was saddened over the death and loss of Bill Harding, the former Route County Veterans Service Officer and volunteer with the Medical Center.

Mr. Harding was considered a number one Veteran's advocate on the Western Slope and genius at developing cooperative efforts between the many Veteran Service Organizations who support the facility.

### **Cheyenne VAMC:**



Military personal, by the nature of their job, have a high risk of experiencing traumatic events that that can continuing to bother them for weeks, months, or even years afterwards.

PTSD related problems such as difficulty falling and staying sleep, difficulty concentrating, flashbacks, nightmares, jumpiness, irritability, and nervousness can adversely affect their home live/marriage as well as their school/job performance. Fortunately, in the most of cases, these PTSD related symptoms gradually decrease over time. Unfortunately, for some veterans, these symptoms can be chronic, or even cause permanent problems. This does not have to happen! PTSD is preventable!

Dr. David Fohrman, Cheyenne VAMC Psychiatrist, has developed training program that has been delivered to numerous veterans organizations, including leadership from the Wyoming National Guard prior to the deployment of the 115<sup>th</sup> Fires Brigade as well as members of the community and other stakeholders groups.

Dr. Fohrman has recently developed a schedule for taking this program out to rural parts of the Cheyenne VA Medical Center's patient service area. Plans are in the works to provide this program to other areas within VISN19. In fact, a two day, CEU accredited seminar will be held this spring in Denver for Health Care providers.

The audience for this training program is intended for Veterans, loved ones of veterans, including spouses, co-workers and educators as well as other persons interested in helping veterans avoid getting PTSD.

For more information, visit the patient education page of the Cheyenne VAMC's website or call the Cheyenne VAMC Mental Health Department at 307-778-7349.