



# VISN 19 Network Director Update

## June 2009

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### **National News:**

**[VA Begins Stimulus Payments to Veterans](#)** - The Department of Veterans Affairs has requested the Department of the Treasury to make \$250 payments to eligible Veterans as part of President Obama's recovery plan. The first payments were sent Monday,

June 22. All payments will be distributed by June 30. (6/25/09)

**[VA Launches 10-Year Health Study of 60,000 New Veterans](#)** - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has initiated a large, long-term study to look carefully at a broad array of health issues that may affect Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Veterans and their counterparts who served during the same time period. VA's "National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans" will begin with 30,000 Veterans deployed to OEF/OIF and 30,000 comparison Veterans who were not deployed. (6/22/09)

**[VA Reopening Health Care Enrollment to Thousands of Veterans](#)** - The Department of Veterans Affairs, which now has nearly 8 million Veterans enrolled in its award-winning health care system, is poised to welcome nearly 266,000 more Veterans into its medical centers and clinics across the country by expanding access to health care enrollment for certain Veterans who had been excluded due to their income. (6/19/09) More information is available at [www.va.gov/healtheligibility](http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility).

**[VA's Suicide Prevention Message Carried on 21,000 Buses](#)** - The telephone number for the suicide prevention "lifeline" of the Department of Veterans Affairs is now being carried on more than 21,000 city buses in 124 communities across the United States and will run until Sept. 1, 2009. (6/19/09)

**[Over 700 Schools Partner with VA to Help Veterans Pay for Education](#)** - The Department of Veterans Affairs announced today that it has entered into more than 700 agreements with institutions of higher learning

across the nation to participate in the Post-9/11 GI Bill's "Yellow Ribbon Program." (6/5/09)

### **VISN 19:**

More Exciting News... in the high priority area of Women's Health! VISN 19 has been approved for funding for three **Women's Health Projects.**

\$25,000 was funded in continuation support of a VISN 19 Women Veteran's Health Care Primary Mini-Residency.



The SLCHCS was funded for two projects: \$7,250 to develop Prevention and Intervention Intimate Partner Violence Training for Staff and \$13,640 to develop a Women Veterans State-wide Aggressive Outreach and Awareness Plan.

We have continued steady progress on the implementation of our four VISN 19 Rural Health projects. Action is being taken on approved projects.

### **VISN 19 Primary Care for Rural Veterans: Telehealth Outreach Clinic Expansion Initiative: Funded for \$7,320,523**

This proposal will implement ten new Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinics (PCTOC) to serve an estimated 7,023 veterans in rural and highly rural counties in Colorado, Montana, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming. The PCTOC makes extensive use of telehealth modalities, resulting in improved access for veterans in highly rural locations where it is not feasible or sustainable to locate a fully staffed clinic. Facilities are actively planning/reviewing proposed locations for clinics in communities or near the following towns:

- o Hamilton, MT Area
- o NE Montana
- o Rawlins, WY Area
- o Salida, CO Area
- o Moab, UT Area

- o Glenwood Springs, CO Area
- o Price, UT Area
- o Idaho Falls, ID Area
- o Evanston, WY Area
- o Worland, WY Area

**VISN 19 e-ICU Initiative: Funded for \$2,845,260**

This project proposes an “electronic ICU (eICU)” that will maintain 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.

**VISN 19 General Telehealth – Specialty Services: Funded for \$3,764,356**

This proposal will 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 would include Endocrinology, Traumatic Brain Injury Cognitive Impairment Services, Pain Management, Dementia, PTSD, Dermatology, Rehabilitation & Wound Care, Pre/Post Surgery Care, Cardiology, and Tumor Board. The proposal will also explore expansion of services to rural Non-VA Telehealth Networks.

**Extended Education and Wellness Strategies for Veterans in Rural Communities: Funded for \$1,712,542**

Approximately 44% of the 700,000 veterans in VISN 19 live in rural areas that are long distances from specialty and educational services at the six VA Medical Centers. Using primarily telehealth modalities, this program 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.

**Reusable Medical Equipment Re-Processing**

The Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General (OIG), issued the [Healthcare Inspection - Use and Reprocessing of Flexible Fiberoptic Endoscopes at VA Medical Facilities](#) (Report No. **09-01784-146**). VA’s Congressional oversight committees requested a review of the reprocessing of endoscopic equipment at several specific VA medical centers (VAMCs), and an assessment of the program throughout the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

The VA OIG recommended that VHA management ensure compliance with relevant directives regarding endoscope reprocessing, explore possibilities for improving the consistency of endoscope reprocessing to strengthen quality controls and ensure compliance with directives.

**SHORT + LONG TERM ACTIONS:**

Within the past few weeks, every VA hospital and health care network has certified that all employees who work on endoscopes are not only trained, but that a qualified supervisor has certified they could properly reprocess all endoscopy equipment owned by the facility, and that standard operating procedures for reprocessing all equipment is on file and available.

Unannounced inspections have been conducted at every VA facility using endoscopes to verify these statements. By July 17, 2009 every VA facility that performs endoscopic procedures will be visited by a qualified inspection team.



Over the next two years VA intends to standardize endoscopy reprocessing procedures in each of its facilities that will require that the work of those who do these tasks be reviewed by others every single day.



VISN 19 had two unannounced OIG inspections and has developed a VISN team to continue to conduct unannounced inspections.

## ECHCS:



**Denver:** The Denver Replacement Hospital space plan has been approved by VA Central Office and sent to the Joint Venture Team to complete a cost estimate. This will provide guidance for future planning. The second round of user group meetings is scheduled for the week of July 6-10, 2009. These user group meetings will continue monthly until the end of this calendar year. The meetings have been well attended and the staff is very involved. Recently brief updates have been given to the Aurora City Council working group as well as the Dean's Committee of the University. Veteran Service Organizations have also been actively involved in the planning.

**Colorado Springs:** Space plan identifying the need for approximately 115,000 SF and funding documents have been submitted to VA Central Office thru the VISN. The contractor and real estate broker who were utilized for the prior planning for Colorado Springs have been engaged to identify possible properties in the Colorado Springs area. Kick off meeting to be scheduled and the solicitation being prepared to start process.

**Pueblo:** A plan for 35,411 SF has been submitted to VA Real Property to utilize as a basis for a solicitation for an existing building to lease. On a long range basis this maintains two sites for the Pueblo clinic – one clinical and the second mainly administrative.

## VA Montana Health Care System:



VA Montana Healthcare System participated in the Gateway to Freedom Air Show on Saturday and Sunday, June 27 – 28, 2009 at the Army Aviation Support Facility in Helena, MT. The Montana National Guard and Reserve Units at Fort Harrison held an open house during the Air Show; featuring the Air Force Thunderbirds and Army Golden Knights parachute demonstration team.

Representatives from VA Montana Healthcare System included Behavioral Health, which presented information on Suicide Prevention and Military Sexual Trauma; the Women Veteran Program provided verbal and written information about the provision of care to women Veterans, families and coworkers; Infection Control provided printed materials to Veterans; and the Patient Business Office provided information on healthcare benefits and handed out over 200 booklets and applications.

Also present was the VA Montana Operation Enduring Freedom / Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) office staff who presented canvas bags and sunglasses visor clips to veterans with "Welcome Home Montana Veterans" imprinted. OEF/OIF staff also provided contact information, services available and how to enroll in the program. Employees from the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) provided on-site information to service members and members of the public about various VBA benefit programs.



*\*\*Photo Airshow June 2009 (6): VA Employees (left to right) Brenda Summerlin, Behavioral Health; Trish Salway, Patient Business Office and Roger Trumper, Enrollment Coordinator, provide information to veterans visiting the VA tent during the Gateway to Freedom Air Show June 27 and 28, 2009.*

VA Montana Healthcare System also remains on track with the planned opening of the new 25,000 square foot clinic in Billings this fall.

**Sheridan VAMC:**

125 people attended an open house at the Casper CBOC on Thursday, June 25, 2009. The open house was to welcome new employees and the new physicians at the clinic. Members of the medical community also attended to wish the long time Wyoming private doctors well in their new positions as VA providers. Enrollment staff was also on hand to assist veterans who were not receiving care from the VA to enroll and learn about eligibility.

The Sheridan VAMC was recognized by the Department of Defense as an employer that supports its employees who are part of the National Guard and Reserve. The award was presented to Director Hirschman from Jim Murosock of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program (ESGR). The award is given to any employer who is supportive through the creation of programs and services for deployed men and women and their families.



*Sheridan VAMC Director Hirschman grooming "Spot".*

CHAPS Horses 4 Heroes is a therapeutic riding program for Veterans at the Sheridan VAMC. Each week eight patients have individualized therapeutic riding lessons for an hour. The sessions are designed to enhance the class and therapy work patients receive at the VA while providing a relaxing experience. Staff is also involved in the program through a volunteer program. Director Debra Hirschman and several other staff members spent a Saturday morning learning how to groom the horses and also how to be side walkers and leaders.



*Sheridan VAMC Director and Pamela Mann practicing leading and side walking with Spot and a client*

Many of the patients have never been on a horse, "our job is to make sure they are safe and comfortable during their lesson" said Director Hirschman. The idea of having staff volunteer and assist patients has been very successful. "Each time the staff come back from a session I get to hear what amazing things the patients did and how much staff and patients look forward to the next week," Hirschman said. The program began in May and will run through December.

## **VASLCHCS:**



George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center in Salt Lake City loses its namesake and humble hero.

Our hearts are heavy as veterans, volunteers and staff reflects on a remarkable man who tirelessly served veterans until the very end. Medal of Honor recipient George E. Wahlen, died June 5, 2009, after an extended illness. He was 84 years old. This reluctant hero truly exemplified the meaning of patriotism, commitment to service and love of country.

He earned the Medal of Honor as a Navy Corpsman at the battle of Iwo Jima where he is credited for saving countless lives. He was injured on three separate occasions but refused to leave the battlefield. Many who witnessed his heroics remain dumbfounded he survived. President Harry S. Truman presented the Medal of Honor to Mr. Wahlen in 1945. He later re-enlisted in the [United States Army](#), where he served during the [Korean War](#) and the [Vietnam War](#). He retired a highly decorated officer with the rank of Major. He then went on to a career with The Veterans Benefits Administration where he continued to serve our country and other veterans for fourteen years. His story of gallantry as a Navy Corpsman and subsequent years of dedicated service is truly inspirational.

## **Grand Junction VAMC:**



### **Minor Construction**

Minor Construction projects continue to proceed as planned. Renovations of the third floor from office space to inpatient ward, in anticipation of the 30,000 square foot expansion, are continuing with few delays. In addition, installation of a fifth camera and cardiac monitored bed in the ICU will soon be complete.

Repaving and sealing of the Grand Junction VA Medical Center's patient parking lot is nearly complete. Ninety percent of the drainage paths have been milled and 75 percent of the milled areas have been recovered with asphalt and resealed. Project should be fully completed by July 27, weather permitting. When complete, the project will increase patient and employee safety and by reducing winter icing, and preventing development of potholes and frost heaves which have developed due to drainage issues.



## **Cheyenne VAMC:**

The VISN 19 Network Expansion Plan remains on track at the Cheyenne VA Medical Center. The contract for the surgical suites expansion was awarded in late May 2009 for \$1.9 million dollars. The award was granted to a service disabled, veteran owned small business. Construction for the two new operating rooms is anticipated to begin by August 2009. The new OR suites will be used for additional general and orthopedic surgical procedures.

Ms. Elizabeth Lowery has been selected as the new Associate Director for the Cheyenne VA Medical Center. Ms. Lowery comes to Cheyenne with experience from the Big Spring (TX) and the Grand Junction (CO) VAMC's. Ms. Lowery will assist in the daily operations and management of the Cheyenne VAMC, particularly in the administrative sections such as the Business Office and Engineering.

The Human Resources section has moved off campus of the Cheyenne VAMC into leased space approximately one mile east of the main campus. At the end of FY 09, it is expected that billing and collection sections will also move into the off campus space.

The mobile health clinic, expected to serve Laramie, Wheatland and Torrington (WY) as well as Sterling (CO) is expected to be delivered in late August, 2009.