



Rocky Mountain Connections

Volume 1, Issue 3

December 2007

Message from the Network Director

It is with pleasure that I share our Winter issue of the VISN 19 Newsletter with you. As the new Network Director, I welcome the opportunity to increase our communication and share news from our VISN 19 facilities. Effective communication with all our stakeholders is a priority for me.

As of September 30, 2007, VISN 19 ended our Fiscal Year 2007 in very good standing. VISN 19 has excelled in many areas over the past several years and I can say with pride that we are among the best of VA's 21 health care networks. As we enter Fiscal Year 2008, I have the exciting challenge of directing the operations, finances and clinical programs of VISN 19, and will commit myself to continuously improve quality, access, patient satisfaction, financial performance and effective communication.

The VISN leadership team and all VA employees in VISN 19 share in my commitment to providing our patients with healthcare that is the best possible care that can be found anywhere in the nation. We look forward to working with you in 2008.

Please read on and enjoy.



GLEN GRIPPEN

Inside This Issue:

Cheyenne VA Mental Health Program Grows 2

VA Salt Lake City Health Care System Initiates Chaplain Training Program 2

Improvements to the Nursing Home Care Unit in Miles City, Montana 3

Got Flu Shot? 4

Suicide: Pairing Prevention and Intervention 4

Veteran Health Care Comes to Eastern Colorado, Western Kansas Communities 5

Transforming Mental Health Care 6

Rocky Mountain Network, Recreation Therapy and "Rock"-tober



Left to Right: Alvin Benefiel, Lupe Velasquez, Jenny Maher, and Tobias Martinez.

What do you call it when you have veterans, a crisp fall day, and an opportunity to cheer on the Colorado Rockies towards advancing into the MLB's National League Championship Series? You have a VA Recreation Therapy outing.

On Sunday, September 30th, the Eastern Colorado Health Care System and the Cheyenne VA Medical Center's recreation therapy programs had the same idea. Each station planned an

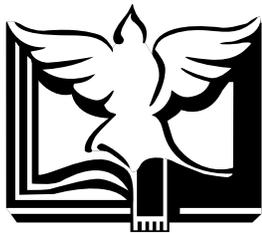
outing to take nursing home residents to cheer on the Colorado Rockies play the Arizona Diamondbacks. Regardless of the distance traveled to get to Coors Field, everyone enjoyed the excitement of the game, the opportunity of several quality hours and memories that will last forever.

VA's mission to improve and enrich bio-psycho-social functioning involves the discipline of Recreation Therapy. Through activity, socialization and various events, both maintenance and an improvement, to quality of life can occur. VA medical facilities across the country use active therapy to achieve the mission. Ask any of the veterans at the ballpark that day to rate their quality of life and we'll bet recreation therapy programs have enhanced those quality of life scores.

The VA Rocky Mountain Network is also home to one of the VA's national programs and special events. The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic will be held for the 22nd consecutive year in Colorado. The Clinic promotes physical and mental wellness by instructing disabled veterans in adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing, as well as other adaptive activities and sports. For many veterans, the Clinic offers their first experience in winter sports, improves their quality of life and gives them the inspiration to take their rehabilitation to a higher level.

The Rockies game occurred on Military Appreciation Day. All branches of the military were recognized by the grateful and very patriotic crowd. The Colorado Rockies won the game 4-3 and advanced to a one game playoff with the San Diego Padres.

“The patient centered model is evolving, emphasizing patient defined goals, education and the reduction of the stigma associated with mental health care.”



Cheyenne VA Mental Health Program Grows

Cheyenne VA Medical Center

The Cheyenne VA hospital provides a very wide range of mental health services for outpatients. Both historically and currently - the types of programs that are offered to veterans include general mental health counseling, a state certified SATP (Substance Abuse Treatment Program), MHICM (mental health intensive case management) program, home telehealth and the Southern Wyoming Tele-Mental Health program.

Historically, these programs have been focused around the medical model of treatment, where a VA provider would determine the patient's progress goals. This model is evolving says Dr. John Motl, Cheyenne VA's Director of Mental Health Service. "Through the Presidents Commission on Mental Health and congressional appropriations,

the VA care model has responded to the need to increase both services and opportunities for veterans to receive the support they need to maintain and improve their mental well being. So it follows, that in the Cheyenne VA's service area, we are actively expanding what we can provide." The patient centered model is evolving, emphasizing patient defined goals, education and the reduction of the stigma associated with mental health care.

As a response to this updated model, the Cheyenne VAMC has developed programs which help to empower those receiving mental health care. Examples are the implementation of a series of "Wellness Briefings." The briefings are given on Saturdays and after hours. The

seminars also allow for the interested veteran or family member to schedule an appointment with a VA provider for a more personalized development plan.

Other areas in which growth has been evident are:

- Development of a "Rapid Response Triage Team" for emergent mental health issues
- Establishment of a Suicide Prevention Coordinator
- Involvement with polytrauma care
- Development of Cheyenne's OIF / OEF case management program.

The Cheyenne VA ended FY06 with 20.5 staff in the mental health department. By the end of FY07, there was 30 staff employed in the same department.

VA Salt Lake City Health Care System Initiates Chaplain Training Program

VA Salt Lake City Health Care System

Chaplain Residents from a variety of faith traditions are enrolled in a new Chaplain Training Program at the George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, which started Sept. 4, 2007.

"The program is an opportunity where Chaplains and Clergy representing a cross-section of our society will be side-by-side training together and serving veterans," said Chaplain Mark L. Allison, supervisor, clinical chaplain training for the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System (VASLCHCS) and

veteran from Operation Enduring Freedom. The Chaplain Residents include a diversity of faith traditions to include Buddhist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Latter-day Saints, and Roman Catholic. They come from local parishes, wards, military units, and hospices for the necessary clinical education needed for board certification as professional Clinical Chaplains.

The medical center is an approved Clinical Placement training site for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

approved by the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy, Inc.

"The CPE program was developed to meet the accrediting standards of the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy, Inc., and includes both clinical and didactic opportunities to "sharpen and advance" pastoral care, counseling, and crisis intervention skills in a multidisciplinary setting," said James R. Floyd, director VASLCHCS. "Everyone involved benefits – the veteran

(continues page 3)

VA Salt Lake City Health Care System (cont.)

and family has their spiritual needs addressed by competent and compassionate Chaplains, the hospital benefits by providing around-the-clock Chaplain services and the Chaplain trainees benefit by receiving valuable supervised clinical pastoral experience and education, which he or she will later take back to their community and church.”

In CPE, theological students, ordained clergy, members of religious orders and qualified laypersons enhance their skills for ministering to people in crisis while being supervised and mentored. “The focus of CPE is learning competent compassion and ministry skills to the sick, hurting, dying, searching, alienated, reconciling, needy people and those who care for them,” said Chaplain Allison.

A minimum number of clinical hours per week must actually be acquired from within the medical center. Students will be assigned to provide Chaplain-Spiritual care to a specific medical unit and students will rotate on a quarterly basis for optimum training experience and to best meet the patient needs.

Improvements to the Nursing Home Care Unit in Miles City, Montana

Montana Healthcare System

Miles City, Montana, Nursing Home Care Unit (NHCU) residents are rekindling memories of the many facets of Montana life without having to leave the facility. A project to bring a more “home-like” atmosphere to the facility this past year included the conversion of an under-utilized courtyard into an atrium for the year round enjoyment of the Big Sky by the residents of the facility.

After furnishings were in place, the large open room still seemed to be lacking a final touch. Staff suggested that a local artist be contacted about the possibilities of painting some scenery on the wall space just under the atrium’s glass roof.

Keely Perkins, artist and Miles City native, created many of the panoramic scenes from ideas and memories shared by the NHCU residents. The railroad, the coal mines, the oil fields, logging, agriculture, livestock, hunting, fishing and wildlife as well as early day scenes featuring an Indian camp and buffalo on the plains

are all part of the changing scenery painted on the previously blank white walls. Even the local Miles City Bucking Horse Sale is featured, which is an event that attracts people far and wide.

Painting primarily in the evenings after finishing up at her regular job, Keely would complete one scene and sketch an outline for another. The residents would eagerly watch and anticipate what new aspect of Montana life was going to be featured next. Even the heat vents were incorporated into things like the grill of an old pickup or a hay bale on the Montana prairie.

The project took most of the summer to complete but provided many hours of enjoyment for everyone as the scenes evolved into a chronicle of life in the west. The uniqueness and warmth of the atrium has made it one of the most popular spots for residents and guests to pause, reflect and enjoy some Montana “big sky.”





“Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.”

“Once they’ve considered suicide, it’s tough to pull them back.

Our goal is to get them help before they need intervention.”

Got Flu Shot?

Sheridan VA Medical Center

Have you been shot? Flu season is upon us and unless you have received your flu shot you are at risk of not just getting the flu, but also passing it on. Every year more than 100,000 people are hospitalized with the flu and an average 36,000 die from the flu. Those are shocking numbers but ones that can be reduced. “A flu shot and washing your hands are the best ways to reduce your chances of getting the flu or worse, passing it on to someone who may not be able to fight the infection.” says Infection Control nurse, Ellen Sanders of the Sheridan VAMC.

During the first Fire House Flu Clinic at the Sheridan VA, primary care nurses and student nurses gave flu shots to over 300 patients and staff. The goal of the clinic focused on flu shots and Pandemic Flu



education. “A pandemic is going to happen. We don’t know when, but we can be ready for it” said Sanders. “If you get the flu shot every year, you have those antibodies in your system, so if a pandemic hits, your chances of survival are greater than someone who has never gotten a flu shot.”

Aside from having a flu shot every year, there are other things you can do to avoid getting or spreading the flu:

- Wash your hands frequently;

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth;
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- Stay home when you are sick if at all possible;
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and;
- Use alcohol gel or foam when there is no visible dirt.

Individuals with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, asthma or heart disease are particularly at risk of the influenza infection, as are people in nursing homes or institutional settings. People 65 years of age or older are also urged to get the influenza vaccination annually. Anyone who wants to decrease the risk for catching the flu should get a flu shot, except for those with an egg allergy.

Suicide: Pairing Prevention and Intervention

Grand Junction VA Medical Center

Sonja Encke is doing her best to put herself out of a job. But as the suicide prevention coordinator at the Grand Junction Medical Center the registered nurse not only has one of the toughest jobs in the VA, she’s dealing with a population that has one of the highest suicide rates in the Nation.

Colorado ranked number seven in the nation for successful suicides, Encke said, and the counties surrounding the Grand Junction VAMC are the highest in the state. “Last year 27 people killed themselves Mesa County alone, that’s a population about 145,000.”

“We knew our veterans were at risk,” Encke said. But the

situation didn’t really become totally clear to Encke until she started communicating with Sheila Linwood of the Western Colorado Suicide Prevention Foundation.

“Sheila’s data collection is extraordinary,” Encke said. And what that data shows isn’t good. There’s a direct correlation between working in the Colorado’s construction fields – including the gas and oil fields where a lot of the Western Slopes’ veterans are employed – and being at twice the risk for committing suicide.

The question is; is there a cause and effect, or is it just coincidence, Encke said.

“But that aside, we’re learning the key to stopping suicide is prevention, not intervention,” Encke said. “Whenever possible, we’re getting our veteran’s to take (suicide) risk consults, hopefully before they’ve even thought about killing themselves.”

“Once they’ve considered suicide, it’s tough to pull them back. Our goal is to get them help before they need intervention.”

“A lot of veteran’s don’t understand they are at risk,” Encke added. “For example, we recently had an event for female veterans and when we

(continues page 5)

Grand Junction VA Medical Center (cont.)

got some of them to take a look at the risk warning cards a few of them told me they didn't realize how many warning signs there were in their lives."

Working in mental health, especially suicide prevention, there's a new lesson learned everyday, sometimes every minute, Encke added, but the biggest lesson she learned is no single person or organization has all the

answers. "You have to reach out to your peers in the community, at other VA medical centers, and find out what's working."

Veteran Health Care Comes to Eastern Colorado, Western Kansas Communities

Eastern Colorado Healthcare System

VA Eastern Colorado Healthcare System (ECHCS) and the City of Burlington, CO hosted an Open House and ribbon cutting ceremony for its newest outreach clinic on Monday, Oct. 15th. The Burlington VA Outreach Clinic is located at 1177 Rose Avenue in Burlington, Colorado.

The ceremony featured speeches from congressional representatives, state and local officials, and community leaders. The ceremony concluded with the local veteran color guard leading local veterans and supporters to the front doors of the new clinic. The Burlington Outreach Clinic will provide on-site medical treatment that used to require traveling to the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Denver, CO or a Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Colorado Springs, or Lamar, CO.

"VA is committed to improving access for our rural veterans," Lynette Roff, Director, Eastern Colorado Healthcare System said. This clinic will ensure that veterans in Eastern Colorado and Western Kansas have access to the world-class VA health care that they have earned by their service to our nation."

The Burlington clinic will provide non-emergent primary health care, tele-mental health,

laboratory services and specialty care such as tele-dermatology to veterans in Eastern Colorado and Western Kansas nine county area (Cheyenne CO, Lincoln CO, Kit Carson CO, Washington CO, Yuma CO, Cheyenne KS, Logan KS, Sherman KS, Wallace KS counties). This region is primarily an agricultural area, supporting 4,023 veterans and has been designated as a "Medically Underserved and Health Professional Shortage Areas for Primary Care and Mental Health Professionals."



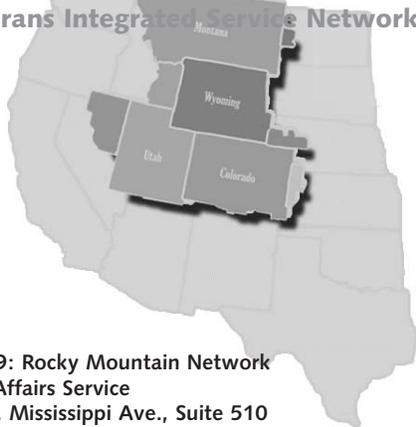
ECHCS Director, Lynette Roff, and Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave, stand next to Burlington Mayor Jim Knox at the opening of the new Burlington VA Outreach Clinic.

"This clinic will ensure that veterans in Eastern Colorado and Western Kansas have access to the world-class VA health care that they have earned by their service to our nation."

The VA Rocky Mountain Network

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle"

VA Rocky Mountain Health Care Network Veterans Integrated Service Network 19



VISN 19: Rocky Mountain Network
Public Affairs Service
4100 E. Mississippi Ave., Suite 510
Glendale, CO 80246



We're on the web!
<http://www.va.gov/visn19>

Transforming Mental Health Care: Promoting Recovery and Integrated Care And Bringing Mental Health Care Closer to Home

More than 700 mental health professionals, researchers, educators and clinicians met in Washington recently for the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Office of Mental Health Services first comprehensive mental health conference.

VA Secretary R. James Nicholson, the keynote speaker at the opening summit for the four-day conference, emphasized that VA is increasing its focus on mental health. "We are well prepared," Nicholson said. "With an annual budget of nearly \$3 billion for mental health services alone, VA is the largest provider of mental health care in the nation."

Key changes VA has recently made include a commitment to evaluate a veteran within 24 hours after the veteran has asked for or been referred for mental health or substance abuse treatment. If there is an emergency, VHA will conduct an immediate assessment and provide appropriate intervention. VHA is also working to ensure that emergency

departments have mental health professionals available around the clock, seven days a week.

"We are committed to bringing to the fore a full complement of services and programs that will improve mental health and the quality of life for the men and women who protect and defend this great country," Nicholson said.

Dr. Ira Katz, Deputy Chief Patient Care Services Officer for Mental Health, told the attendees that VA is in the midst of successfully implanting its five-year Mental Health Strategic Plan, which includes four primary areas: expanding access and capacity to mental health care for all veterans; integrating mental health and primary care; transforming the system to focus on recovery & rehabilitation; and implementing evidence-based care.

The conference focused on increasing recovery oriented services by transforming the VA system to a recovery oriented practice; integrating care between mental health and primary

care for better access and treatment rates; and promoting a national model for suicide risk identification and prevention, which requires ready access to high quality mental health services, supplemented by programs that directly address the risk of suicide. Additionally, the conference enhanced collaboration with Vet Centers and other community partners in the promotion of a more veteran and family-focused mental health care program.

Dr. Michael J. Kussman, Under Secretary for Health, told those attending he is proud of VHA's work in mental health, adding that VHA providers continue to learn and improve programs.

"Good mental health care can improve veterans' emotional well being, and change the everyday realities of their lives," Dr. Kussman said. "It can improve the way our patients function in society. It can improve productivity in the workplace and it can improve the way they function in their families."