



VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network

Keeping Veterans at the HEART of it all

July 2010

News briefs

North Texas Domiciliaries Accredited

The VA North Texas Health Care System received a 3-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) for the Behavioral Health Domiciliary Residential Rehabilitation Treatment program at Dallas and Bonham.

Web site overhaul continues

The VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network and its health care systems continue to update and add to their Web sites. Visitors can find links to important VA programs for service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, Women Veterans programs, Suicide Prevention programs and more. Find the latest online at:

www.HeartofTexas.va.gov

Radio PSAs Available Online

Radio public service announcements inviting Veterans to enroll for VHA health care are now available from VISN 17. To preview the PSAs in Spanish or English, visit www.heartoftexas.va.gov/opa/. To get a high-quality MP3 file, e-mail Diana Struski or Aaron Reed

Network News is a publication of VISN 17, the **VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network**. Contact:

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Network news

Center of Excellence Hosts External Site Review

The VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network Center of Excellence (CoE) for Research on Returning War Veterans in Waco hosted its first External Advisory Panel May 18-20.

The advisory panel comprised 20 of the top VA leaders, researchers and advisors from around the nation, including VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network Deputy Director Mark Daskocil, Chief Medical Officer Wendell E. Jones, MD, and Thomas C. Smith III, FACHE, director of Central Texas Veterans HCS and Brian Kirkpatrick, MD, MSPH, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science at Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine.

The purpose of the panel was to review the CoE's mission, current programs, performance metrics and effectiveness in addressing research focusing on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as well as co-occurring disorders and other issues related to veteran care.

The panel concluded the review with outstanding remarks about all aspects of the Center of Excellence and gave high praise to its director, Suzy Bird Gulliver, Ph.D., and the CoE researchers and support staff. The CoE currently employs more than 40 researchers and support staff with more than \$15 million in funding from the VA, Department of Defense and National Institute of Health.

The CoE expects to be at full capacity of roughly 75 employees within the next two years.



The Staff of the Center of Excellence for Research on Returning War Veterans includes many distinguished investigators.

VA Takes Action to Strengthen Measures to Protect Veterans

Over a 13-month period ending in March of this year, the failure to properly sterilize dental equipment may have exposed more than 1,800 Veterans to the risk of infection at the St. Louis VA Medical Center (VAMC). While officials say the risk is low, Veterans who used the clinic were urged to return for testing.

"The mistakes made at the St. Louis VAMC are unacceptable, and steps have been and continue to be taken to correct this situation and as-

sure the safety of our Veterans. VA will not tolerate risk to our Veterans," said Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki.

Under the Obama Administration, in the past 18 months, VA has implemented more stringent oversight of the safety of all its medical facilities.

It is this more rigorous standard that directly led VA to identify and address problems at the St. Louis hospital. Additional resources have been

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Some Veterans see a \$1 bump in medication co-pays beginning in July

Veterans who generally have higher income and no service-connected disabilities - referred to as Priority Groups 7 and 8 Veterans - will now pay an additional \$1 for each 30-day supply of outpatient medications. Taking effect July 1, the increase to \$9 from \$8 is the first change in VA's medication co-pay since Jan. 1, 2006.

"Because of the harsh economic reality facing many Veterans, we delayed the change," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We're now ensuring the Veterans most in need of VA care are those least affected. Yet,

even with this increase, VA medication co-pays are lower than much of the private sector."



This change does not impact Veterans in Priority Groups 2 through 6 who will continue to pay \$8 for each 30-day supply of medications for their non-service

connected conditions.

These Veterans will also continue to have their out-of-pocket expenses for VA outpatient medications capped at \$960 per calendar year.

Veterans who have an injury or illness connected with their military service resulting in a disability rated 50 percent or greater are exempt from the co-pay.

VA generally sets its outpatient medication co-pay rate based upon a regulation that ties the rate to the Medical Consumer Price Index for prescription drugs.

Veterans who have difficulty paying copayments for outpatient medications should discuss the matter with their local VA enrollment coordinator.

Veterans may also contact VA at 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visit VA's health eligibility Web site at www.va.gov/healtheligibility.

South Texas Nurse Honored with Top Award from VA Secretary

A South Texas Veterans Health Care System (STVHCS) nurse was named one of just six recipients of the Secretary's Award for Excellence in nursing and Advancement of Nursing Programs June 30.

Lisa Alexander, RN, MSN, was recognized in the "Registered Nurse, Staff Role" category for her outstanding work as part of the Care Coordination Home Telehealth (CCHT) team in San Antonio.

"The more than 77,000 nurses employed by the VA are critical to every aspect of the care we provide Veter-

ans," said Marie L. Weldon, director of the STVHCS. "Lisa exemplifies the skill and dedication that makes VA health care the 'best care anywhere.'"

Alexander completed a Master's of Science in Nursing while working in the Home-Based Primary Care Clinic in San Antonio.

The results of her collaboration with the Diabetes Rapid Action Team were acknowledged as a Best Practice and she is a recognized leader among the national CCHT Master Preceptor group due to her innovation and commitment to national initiatives.



VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki congratulates Lisa Alexander, RN, MSN, on her award.

July 2010 Priority 8 Outreach Events

10: Texas National Guard Yellow Ribbon Program, 2nd Bn., 149th Aviation, 9 a.m. – Noon, San Antonio, Texas, Tiffany Charvet, 210-617-5300 ext. 19240

10-13: Hispanic Medal of Honor Organization, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., 2010 NCLR Annual Conference, Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, 200 E. Market Street, San Antonio, TX 78205, Genevieve Josen, 210-617-5300 ext. 15735

15: 75th Division Family Program Yellow Ribbon Phases 2-3, 7 a.m. – 4 p.m., DFW Executive Lakes Hilton, 1800 E. Hwy 26, Grapevine, TX 76051, Eva Carwile, 512-963-2390

16-18: 63rd Regional Support Command, 7:30 a.m. – 4 p.m., Hyatt Regency DFW, Staff Sgt. Mariya J. Wakem, 650-625-9614

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allocated and new procedures and stricter enforcements are in place to ensure the safety of all Veterans who seek care at VA facilities.

The St. Louis facility has undergone a thorough examination, and many safeguards are in place that are designed to prevent a similar situation from occurring again.

Immediate actions were taken to ensure all personnel were properly re-trained and all equipment is being handled in accordance with manufacturers' instructions. All pre-washing of dental equipment which was performed by dental personnel prior to sterilizations is now being done by qualified SPD staff.

No Veterans are currently ill as a result of this incident.