



VA Defining
HEALTH **EXCELLENCE**
CARE in the 21st Century

Bonne Santé

Fall 2012

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System



The changing of the guard at SLVHCS during Hurricane Isaac.

SLVHCS stands strong as Hurricane Isaac batters the Gulf coast, pg. 6-7

Flu season has arrived!

Have you gotten your flu shot yet? Veterans can walk in for flu vaccinations Monday through Friday from 9 - 11 a.m. and 1 - 3 p.m. at all of the community-based outpatient clinics and the Mental Health clinics. Veterans can also get flu shots during all primary care, mental health and specialty clinic scheduled appointments. Additionally, vaccinations are available in the New Orleans eye clinic from 8 - 11 a.m. Wednesday through Friday.

Protect yourself and your loved ones this flu season. Here are steps you can take to ward off the flu:

- avoid people who are sick
- clean hands often
- keep hands away from face
- cover coughs and sneezes



Cheryl Davis

Robert Wynn gets a flu vaccination from Deborah Cox.



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On the Cover

The changing of the
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during Hurricane
Isaac. Photo by
Amanda Jones

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Getting to know our volunteers: Nestor Mairena

By Debra Caesar-Winbush

When he began volunteering, Nestor Mairena found both a way to help patients and assist staff in remaining committed to improving health care services.

“I love volunteering here because it gives me a sense of purpose,” said Mairena.

A Marine Veteran, Mairena volunteers in the Rehab Medicine gym with Sal Cannatella, physical therapist. Cannatella recalls the day he first met Mairena and his family.

“I have known Nestor and his family since the day he came to the New Orleans VA on a stretcher from the Houston VA,” said Cannatella. “At that point, Nestor had a spinal cord injury and this was Pre-Katrina. From the day I first met him, I knew he would do the utmost in his abilities to return to walking and becoming independent again.

“One thing about Physical Therapy and certain patient populations here at the VA is that you become intimately involved with their families and the patients’ lives,” said Cannatella. “Today people see Nestor walking the corridors and have no idea what incredible strides he has made as a Marine, a Veteran and a patient. He came back to VA last year to volunteer and inspire through example.

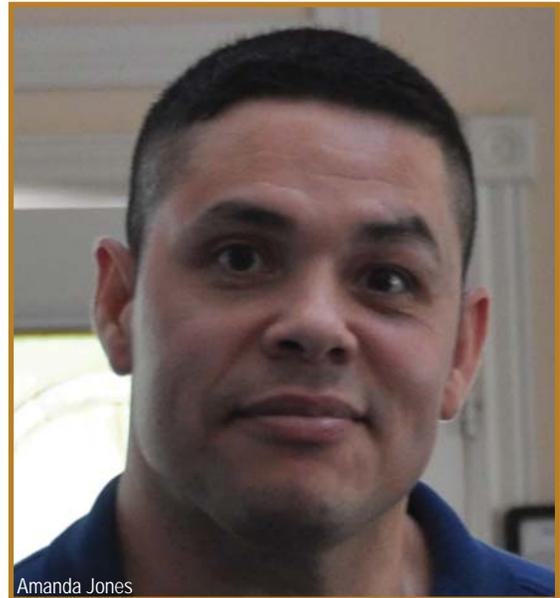
“Knowing Nestor, I could see that this wasn’t enough to challenge him,” said Cannatella. “I asked him if he would like to help us out at the gym and he happily accepted.”

Mairena now assists with keeping the room orderly for patients.

Through rehab and determination, Mairena overcame a lot of hardship and strives daily to integrate himself back into mainstream society. His volunteer duties in Rehab Medicine help him maximize his daily potential and progress closer to becoming self-reliant and independent.

Patricia Jefferson, a respiratory therapist in Asthma Education/Pulmonary Rehab, met Nestor while conducting the outpatient Pulmonary Rehab class in the Rehab Medicine gym.

“He was busily cleaning and neatly arranging the equipment in the room and making it presentable for the patients,” said Jefferson. “I noticed how he was able to move heavy exercise equipment without assistance even though he had a significant



Amanda Jones

Nestor Mairena, SLVHCS volunteer

disability. Rehab patients began to observe him as he moved around the room, dragging boxes and orderly arranging the equipment. We were impressed at his fortitude and ability to work independently in lieu of his disability.

“I engaged Nestor in conversation and asked him about his military service and he proudly professed to be an Iraqi War Veteran and a United States Marine, said Jefferson. “I noticed the pride in his eyes as he responded. I turned and announced to my patients that Nestor is a U.S. Marine and that he is continuing to render service to others in spite of his handicap. Others need to hear about Nestor and his determination to serve. His presence at the clinic is a source of inspiration to others to never give up.”

Volunteerism by persons with disabilities can be individually meaningful as well as valuable for everyone they support. Given the social isolation of many people with disabilities, volunteering is important and one of the most useful avenues for really getting to know others.

“Nestor is an inspiration to the patients and staff at SLVHCS because he touches that part of us that longs to know we make a difference for our Veterans,” said Charmaine Kathmann, SLVHCS occupational therapist.

PROJECT LEGACY

BUILDING HEALTH CARE



HONORING VETERANS



KEEPING THE PROMISE



Karen Collins

Internal framing is just about complete and the windows are being installed at Pan Am.

By Karen Collins

In August, the Dixie Brewery building and land transferred to VA. This final piece of property completes the 30 acre site for the new medical center. The historic Tulane Avenue façade, including the iconic dome, is incorporated into the design of the new research building that will rise up behind masonry panels to echo the character of the original building.

The most critical modification of the Dixie building is the necessary structural stabilization of the brewery. Even the Tulane Avenue-facing section, the most stable portion of the building, requires significant intervention to prevent total structural failure. Now that we have received the Dixie Brewery, the work to preserve the New Orleans landmark can begin.

Work on another historic landmark, the Pan

American Life Building, is progressing well. New windows are being installed, the internal framing is complete and the elevator and heating and air units have been installed inside the newly expanded penthouse. This building will be activated early to serve as the recruitment and training hub for approximately 1,100 new employees that will need to be hired to operate the new medical center.

Some of those employees will be working in the new inpatient building located at the corner of Canal and Galvez streets. We began driving piles for this new building in September. Currently, there are four pile drivers on location that will continue to drive more than 5,000 piles over the next six months, approximately.



Work on the the second deck of the new warehouse is underway.

VA stands strong as Hurricane Isaac batters the Gulf coast

By Amanda Jones

With the predicted path of Tropical Storm Isaac headed toward Louisiana, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System established an emergency operations center and put hurricane plans into motion Aug. 27, 2012. The first step was to contact high risk Veterans that were identified at the start of hurricane season.

As forecasters made predictions that the storm would develop into a category 1 or 2 hurricane, evacuation orders were underway for part or all of Jefferson, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, St. Charles, Lafourche and St. John parishes. High risk Veterans, including those on home oxygen, in need of assistance getting out of the area were transferred to Alexandria's VA medical center out of harm's way. SLVHCS drivers Olander Cassimere and Earl Addison, along with Registered Nurse Leachel McMillan and Occupational Therapist Mary Green-Keys, used dual use vehicles to transport four Veterans over 200 miles to safety.

"We acquired five of these vehicles in 2005 after Katrina and the VISN recently gave us five more," said Welton Corey, deputy chief of Logistics. "These vehicles have the capacity to transport stretcher, wheelchair and ambulatory persons. We use them daily as part of our Vet-Tran transportation service, which helps Veterans navigate our health care system since we operate as a widespread system of clinics. The dual use vehicles are very efficient and practical because they have an undercarriage storage area and some have refrigerators for transporting medications."

Jim Tardie, manager of the Health Care for Homeless Veterans, along with city of New Orleans Homeless Director Stacy Horn-Koch, worked diligently through the night to get homeless Veterans and non-Veterans to safety. SLVHCS even donated 100 toiletry kits to the city of New Orleans for use in their homeless shelters and gave out 1,500 hot meals to the homeless at St. Jude's Emergency Shelter.

"We found a homeless Vietnam Veteran who was a danger to himself and gravely disabled, but he did not want to go to the shelter," said Tardie. "He did agree to talk to me only after I was able to locate a Bible because he said it was the only thing that eased his PTSD memories from Vietnam. But after he got his Bible, all he wanted to do was go sit by the river.

He refused to go in to a shelter, even after talking and listening to him for several hours while pushing him around in his wheel chair."

Eventually, Dr. Dean Robinson had to issue a Physician Emergency Certificate, assessing him in the rain on the sidewalk just blocks from the river.

"After this, we continued to work to get people off of the streets," said Tardie. "We helped stranded motorists and transported over a hundred persons - Veterans, non-Veterans and families - to shelters. We worked in the wind and rain for about 12 hours."

But they didn't stop there. They continued to work as long as it was safe to do so. And as soon as the worst had passed, they were back out again.

For the safety of the patients and employees, Director Julie Catellier made the decision to close all community-based outpatient clinics and administrative offices, with the exception of skeleton crews at Baton Rouge, Urgent Care in New Orleans and the emergency operations center, for the next three days. As she laid out the emergency plans for the week, Catellier reminded employees that while clinics were open Monday prior to the storm, supervisors should grant liberal leave as necessary and, above all, "stay safe and protect your families, yourselves and your pets."

August 28

As Isaac strengthened and moved closer to the Louisiana coast, SLVHCS continued to serve Veterans.

Though most of downtown New Orleans was quiet as residents prepared for the onslaught of winds and rain, Urgent Care was open and helping Veterans with non-emergent issues. Meanwhile, Baton Rouge, a city 90 minutes north of New Orleans, bustled with evacuees and residents prepping for Isaacs expected move northward. Baton Rouge clinic staff continued to serve Veterans in the Baton Rouge area until 4:30 p.m.

Hunkered down in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, a total of 54 staff rode out the storm overnight to ensure buildings remained safe and to handle any infrastructure problems. Clinical and administrative staff also stayed overnight since no one knew for sure if staff could get back to work the next morning and



Urgent Care staff works through Hurricane Isaac.

serving our Veterans is a priority. Through the night, staff watched category 1 Hurricane Isaac make its first landfall around 6 p.m. in Plaquemines Parish.

August 29

Wind and rain continued as Isaac made a second landfall in the early morning hours in Lafourche Parish, and then stayed nearly stationary over southeast Louisiana, filling streets, homes, lakes and rivers with several inches of rainfall.

Though New Orleans remained protected from storm surge, Plaquemines Parish was flooded and water levels persistently rose in parts of St. Tammany and St. John parishes, causing last minute mandatory evacuations and forcing residents to leave in the middle of the storm. Many were evacuated by boat from their homes and then bused all over Louisiana, including Alexandria.

“As acting director of the Alexandria medical center, I have asked the staff there to go shelter to shelter looking for both VA employees and Veterans and to bring them back to the medical center for care,” said Catellier in one of the twice daily conference calls with SLVHCS service chiefs.

Life after Isaac

Nothing kept the dedicated employees from the

mission of caring for our Veterans. Clinics opened Aug. 31, with the exception of those without power, and all clinics were back up and running after Labor Day.

Showers were made available in New Orleans for any employee needing it, since many were without power and some without water.

While the rain forced the Tangipahoa River to overflow it’s banks, flooding some homes, the dam held and residents were able to return home Sept. 1.

Once assured that all had habitable homes, the four patients transported to Alexandria prior to the storm were brought back to New Orleans via the dual use vehicles. Drivers Cassimere and Addison, along with Registered Nurse Zidia Kelly and Occupational Therapist Melinda Castro, brought back two additional patients as well. The two ‘extras’ included one who had made the trip by ambulance, but had improved enough to return home in the van, and the other was admitted to Alexandria VA medical center from a shelter in Alexandria.

SLVHCS leadership contacted over 40 employees who reported catastrophic losses to their homes to ensure their safety and find out their needs. Many other employees asked what they could do to help and those needs were communicated.

At SLVHCS, communication was key throughout the event. Catellier kept patients and employees up to date through the SLVHCS website and social media.

“Thanks so much for all the employees at the VA medical center in New Orleans,” said one Facebook friend and daughter of a Veteran who needed VA help getting medication during the storm. “Every time I come to the clinic, all employees are so friendly, caring, helpful. Thanks so much for taking such great care of our Veterans!!”

But SLVHCS couldn’t do it alone. Throughout the storm, any patients who called were routed Houston to speak to a live medical provider and those wishing to speak to a pharmacist were routed to Little Rock.

“The VA family is wonderful. The VISN pitched in during our time of need and at SLVHCS, employees want to help each other get back on their feet. It’s the innate nature of this team and I am so proud to be a part of it,” said Catellier.

Health care + hospitality = Medical Foster Homes

By Karen Collins

Family is important to Frank and Marita Romano. In fact, their house is right next to their son's and his eight children are over all the time. Recently, the Romanos invited a Veteran who needed help with daily living activities into their home and to become an honorary member of the family.

The Romanos are Medical Foster Home (MFH) caregivers. The MFH program provides care for Veterans who are medically complex and disabled due to chronic issues that impede their ability to live safely on their own. And MFH is less costly than a nursing home. Cost of care is based on the Veteran's care needs and financial resources. Caregivers are paid directly by the Veteran or the Veteran's family.

"We've been introduced to a wonderful family; a daughter who is dedicated to her father," said Marita Romano. The Romanos work together with the Veteran's family to ensure he receives the care needed to live more independently.

"A medical foster home offers an alternative to institutionalized care, allowing the Veteran to remain in a community family setting," said MFH program coordinator Elissa Lesassier. "Moreover, with proper support, Veterans who would previously have been placed in nursing homes can continue to live in a home environment and delay, or totally avoid the need for nursing home care."

Veteran's participating in this program may need assistance

with personal hygiene, feeding and transferring. Caregivers also provide assistance with activities such as cooking, laundry and making phone calls depending on the Veteran's needs.

"You want them to be as self-sufficient as they can, but safely," said Marita Romano.

As SLVHCS's first caregiver with the MFH program, Karen Sidney's passion for MFH is contagious.

"I get to work at something I would do for free. It's my calling," said Sidney.

MFH allows Veterans to choose a home environment, over being institutionalized, improving the quality of his or her life by remaining in a family setting.

"They show you that they appreciate it and what the Veterans did – they said I'll go and I'll do it (serving during times of war). That bravery deserves to be rewarded," said Sidney. "These seniors need somebody to take care of them and show them the same dignity and respect that they had as adults. Who better to give back to – a senior and a Veteran?"

This program is a partnership between the MFH and the Home Based Primary Care (HBPC) programs. The combination and cooperative services between these two programs, when coupled with a qualified MFH caregiver, will allow Veterans to live in a nurturing, safe and medically supported non-institutional environment. MFH caregivers are part of the Veteran's health care team. They often have unique insights, due to the level of daily interactions with patients' health that a more traditional provider might not have.

"At first I felt kind of uncomfortable. I thought they (doctors) might want to speak to the Veteran in private," said

Frank Romano, but the medical care staff asked Frank to stay and participate. "I'm trying to give them an accurate assessment of what's going on."

MFH caregivers work with a HBPC team, consisting of doctors, nurses, dieticians, social workers, occupational and physical therapists, and recreational therapists. Caregivers must reside in the MFH and must have a relief caregiver, who is subject to the same security, health and safety clearances as the primary MFH caregiver.

"Caregivers' drive will be compassion and devotion, not money," said Lesassier. "They should understand that this is a long-term commitment and that the patient will probably get worse, not better; that the job will get harder, not easier."

"If you're not a caregiver than this isn't for you," said Sidney. "It is a wonderful program. Everyone who came into my home for the inspections was here for the Veteran. We're dealing with a human being and that they're being placed somewhere where they are being taken care of."

At this time, many Veterans have expressed interest in participating in the MFH program so there is a need for qualified caregivers. Those interested in becoming caregivers should contact the Medical Foster Home Office at 985-690-6920 for more information.



Frank and Marita Romano are caregivers in the Medical Foster Home Program.



Ross named 2012 Employee of the Year

By Sandra Terrebonne

Eddie Ross, licensed practical nurse at the VA Baton Rouge Outpatient Clinic, was named Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System's 2012 Employee of the Year.

"I was knocked off my feet," said Ross.

To those who know him, it was well deserved.

"Mr. Ross is exceptionally polite and respectful to everyone with whom he encounters," said Janie McKenzie, SLVHCS associate chief of clinical operations. "His smile is contagious and he puts patients at ease and demonstrates his pleasure in taking care of them."

Based on Veteran comment cards, Ross is one of the most complimented employees at SLVHCS. When presented with this information, he was surprised.

"It could be because I work for the Veterans," said Ross. "I love doing what I do and I love people. I have no regrets when I walk out the door each day."

Ross has been working with SLVHCS in Baton Rouge since 2004. In his free time, Ross enjoys jogging and working out, spending time with his two dogs, home decorating and he is very active with his church.

Northshore dental services on the *move*

By Amanda Jones

Dental services offered at the Mandeville dental office are being realigned to our Baton Rouge clinic and Metairie dental office, with full implementation by the end of the year.

The Mandeville dental office was opened shortly after Hurricane Katrina as a temporary clinic to restore dental services to Veterans in southeast Louisiana until more permanent services could be offered. Since this time, additional dental services have been opened in Metairie, La., which will move to the new medical center once it is complete. Also, expanded permanent dental services will be available at our Baton Rouge clinic. The expansion of the Baton Rouge clinic is part

of the long-term recovery plan for SLVHCS and will remain in place.

By December 2012, all patients currently receiving services at the Mandeville dental office will be accommodated at either the Metairie or Baton Rouge dental offices. Dental providers will be realigned to one of these offices. Dental hours at both locations are 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and travel reimbursements will continue to be provided according VA regulations. Appointments can be made by calling Metairie at 504-565-4746 and Baton Rouge at 225-761-3450.

Karen Collins

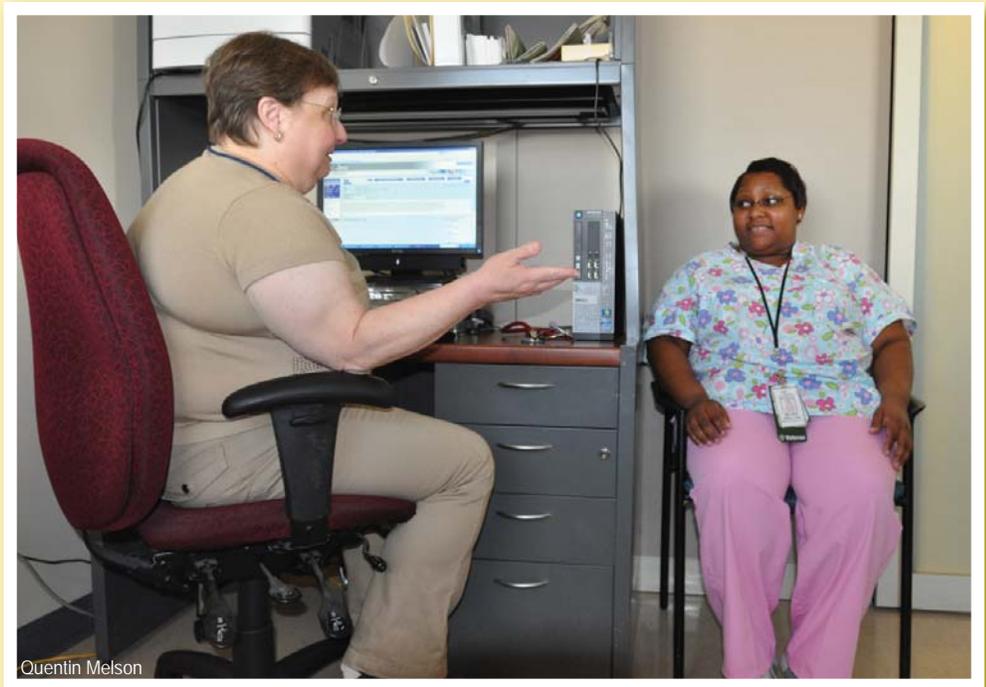
Women Veterans' health care is a top priority at VA

By Quentin Melson

The number of women Veterans is growing rapidly. A recent VA estimate says the total number of female Veterans will rise to 10 percent by 2020. With increasing demands for health care from this population, the Women Veterans Health Care program has been transformed to a Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) format to address the health care needs of women Veterans and ensure that timely, equitable, high-quality and comprehensive services are provided in a sensitive and safe environment at VA health facilities nationwide.

“The new system is more transparent and clear,” said Cynthia LeCount, SLVHCS Women Veterans Program manager. “It’s providing a way for both the Veteran and the staff to work cohesively and to have a model for accountability. The system allows for health care to come full circle. The Veteran knows who to contact for health care before and after their appointment, they also know who to contact if they have any questions.”

PACT is the centerpiece of the new system. In this system, each Veteran works together with health care professionals to plan for whole-person care and life long health and wellness. The care team considers all aspects of patient health, with an emphasis on prevention and health promotion. The patient is the center of the care team that includes family members,



Dr. Susan L. Vaught, Women's Health champion provider, explains the Women's Health Program to Army Veteran Melissa King.

caregivers and health care professionals – a primary care provider, nurse care manager, clinical associate and an administrative clerk. When other services are needed to meet patient goals and needs, the PACT oversees and coordinates that care.

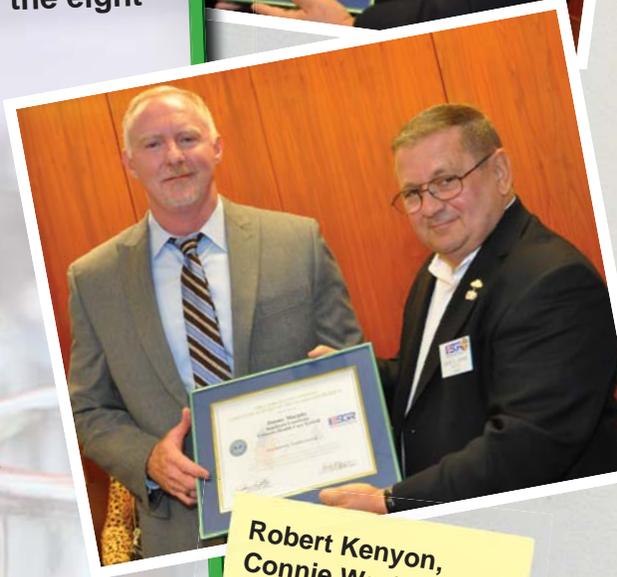
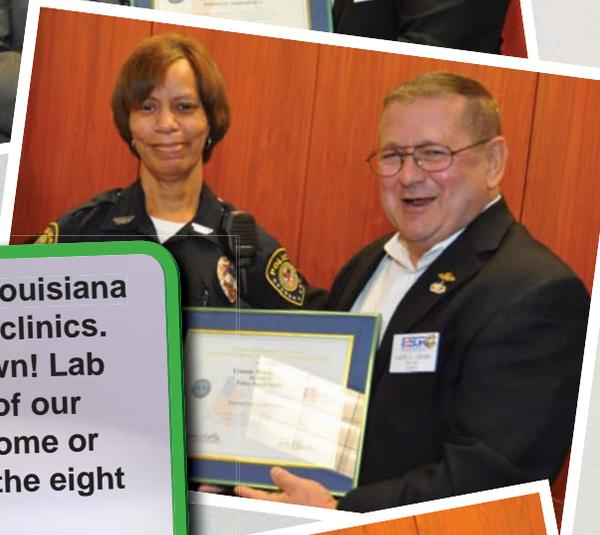
The PACT model extends to the SLVHCS Women Veterans program. At every community-based outpatient clinic, there is a designated woman's health care provider.

“Whether it’s a physician or a nurse practitioner, there is someone at every facility who is proficient in providing comprehensive women’s health services,” said LeCount. “These women’s health care providers or champions are important because women have gender-specific needs that not all of our providers are able to satisfy. It is important for women Veterans to understand that at every VA facility, there will always be someone there who can perform a breast exam, pelvic exam or any other type of gender-specific procedure.”



Karen Collins

Cynthia Glancy (left) with Louisiana Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution – Spirit of '76 recently presented a Valley Forge American flag to Assistant Director Stephanie Repasky (right) as part of their ongoing art donations for the new medical center.



Robert Kenyon, Connie Washington and Jimmy Murphy receive Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve awards from Larry Jones.
Photos by Amanda Jones

Correction

Get your lab specimens collected at any of the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System community based-outpatient clinics. No more driving to New Orleans just to get your blood drawn! Lab specimen collection for most lab tests can be done at any of our locations. That's right! Go to the location closest to your home or work. You don't need an appointment. Just stop by any of the eight SLVHCS clinic locations.

Lab hours

- Baton Rouge:** Mon-Thu, 7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Fri, 7 - 10:30 a.m.

- Bogalusa:** Mon - Thu, 8 a.m - 4 p.m.
Fri, 8 - 8:30 a.m.

- Franklin:** Mon - Thu, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Fri, no labs

- Hammond:** Mon - Thu, 7 - 9 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Fri, 7 - 9 a.m.

- Houma:** Mon - Thu, 8 - 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 - 4 p.m.
Fri, 8 - 11 a.m.

- New Orleans:** Mon - Thu, 7 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Fri, 7 a.m. - 3 p.m.

- Slidell:** Mon. - Thu, 7 - 10 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Fri 7 a.m. 10 a.m.

- St. John:** Mon - Thu 7 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Fri 7 - 10 a.m.

Don't forget to check with the clinic staff to see if any of the lab tests ordered for you might have special collection requirements.