This fall, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) will open a dedicated Sterile Processing and Decontamination (SPD) operation in New Orleans.

“SPD is critical in a medical setting,” said SPD Chief Ward Seward. “We break the chain of infection by cleaning, disinfecting and sterilizing reusable medical equipment.”

Medical Centers and clinics use many types of equipment designed to be used more than once. Scallops, scopes and dental tools are just a few. When medical equipment is not cleaned and sterilized correctly between uses, patients can become sick.

Ensuring the equipment is safe to use is SPD’s job. Used equipment is separated from the clean supply and sent to the SPD where employees begin the cleaning process.

“We follow a step-by-step process, making sure each piece gets the attention it needs every time,” said Brinda Williams-Morgan, Associate Director, Patient/Nursing Service.

Currently, a small SPD is located in New Orleans and many items must be sent out for processing. VA staff members conduct frequent inspections to insure that VA’s high standards for patient safety and cleanliness are met.

Once the new SPD center opens, all cleaning will be handled in-house by VA personnel.

“Then we’ll be able to control all aspects of SPD directly, making sure manufacturers’ guidelines are followed and safety standards are met,” Seward said.

SLVHCS has never had a patient made ill by unclean reusable equipment. This is due to the strict controls and inspections and the hard work and dedication of the SPD management and staff.

“During the groundbreaking ceremony, Catellier honored those Veterans for their service and thanked them for their patience in sticking by VA as New Orleans has grown and expanded to recover from the loss of the hospital in 2005. Project Legacy, as the effort to build the new facility is called, will end Veterans’ long wait for dedicated hospital care in southeast Louisiana. This facility will become a cornerstone in New Orleans’ medical research community, which will ensure the best care is available for our Louisiana Veterans,” Shinseki added. “VA is proud to bring this state-of-the-art facility to New Orleans.”

VA’s new full-service medical center campus in New Orleans will occupy a site bounded by Canal Street, S. Galvez Street, Tulane Avenue and S. Rocheblave Street. When it opens 2013, the facility will have 120 inpatient beds in addition to 60 transitional care beds that provide rehabilitation, hospice and palliative care and mental illness research.

Outpatient facilities within the hospital will be able to accommodate a half-Million visits annually for a predicted 70,000 enrolled Veteran patients.

Minnie Brown, left, and McKinley Phipps, medical supply technicians working in the SPD, work to sterilize, repackage and track the reusable medical equipment used in SLVHCS clinics.

“People take great pride in the vital role they play in ensuring the safety of our Veteran patients,” Williams-Morgan said.

**Sec. Shinseki breaks ground for new VAMC in New Orleans**

NEW ORLEANS – Fulfilling President Barack Obama’s strong commitment to rebuild New Orleans, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki joined state and local officials for a groundbreaking ceremony for a new 1.5 million-square-foot medical center for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

“This is an historic day for all of Louisiana,” Secretary Shinseki said. “With this groundbreaking, we begin rebuilding a new legacy, a new chapter in the history of this proud city.”

Five years ago, the old VA Medical Center in New Orleans was rendered inoperable after breached levees allowed the waters of Lake Pontchartrain to inundate the city. “Hurricane Katrina changed the face of New Orleans,” said the Director of Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, Julie Catellier.

“Our Veteran patients stood for us in war and with us as we’ve begun to rebuild.” All of New Orleans is a grateful nation and our Veterans deserve the best,” she continued.

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The new medical center will also be ideally suited to serve Veterans and the citizens of southeast Louisiana in case of an emergency. Once construction is complete, the new medical center will be able to operate independently for seven days without resupply. All mission-critical services will be 20 feet above ground level, and the facility will have a heliport for evacuations.

As part of VA’s preservation efforts, the Pan-American Life Insurance Company Building at 2400 Canal Street will be rehabilitated and integrated into the design of the new medical center, used as an administrative building for the complex.

VA will also conduct a structural appraisal of the Dixie Brewery with the intention of working the historic brickwork façade and cupola into the final design of the facility’s research center.

VA is working with the city and state to ensure all other historically significant buildings are either preserved and moved from the site or that architecturally significant pieces will be salvaged before any necessary demolition.

For more information about Project Legacy or to see renderings of the future Medical Center, visit www.neworleans.va.gov.
VA simplifies access to care for Veterans with PTSD

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced a critical step forward in providing an easier process for Veterans seeking health care and disability compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with the publication of a final regulation in the Federal Register.

“This nation has a solemn obligation to the men and women who have honorably served this country and suffer from the often devastating emotional wounds of war,” said Shinseki. “This regulation goes a long way to ensure that Veterans receive the benefits and services they need.”

By publishing a final regulation in the Federal Register to simplify the process for a Veteran to claim service connection for PTSD, VA reduces the evidence needed if the trauma claimed by a Veteran is related to combat, or terrorist activity and is consistent with the evidence needed if the trauma claimed by a Veteran adequately supports a diagnosis of PTSD and the Veteran’s symptoms are related to the claimed stressor.

Previously, claims adjudicators were required to corroborate that a non-combat Veteran actually experienced a stressor related to hostile military activity. This final rule simplifies the development that is required for these cases.

VA expects this rulemaking to decrease the time it takes VA to decide access to care and claims falling under the revised criteria. More than 400,000 Veterans currently receiving compensation benefits are service connected for PTSD. Combined with VA’s shorter claims form, VA’s new streamlined, science-based regulation allows for faster and more accurate decisions that also expedite access to medical care and other benefits for Veterans.

PTSD is a medically recognized anxiety disorder that can develop from seeing or experiencing an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to which a person responds with intense fear, helplessness or horror, and is not uncommon among war Veterans. For more information, go to www.va.gov or call VA’s benefits number at 1-800-827-1000.

VA nurses spend a “Night Out”

WASHINGTON – As part of Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki’s effort to streamline access to benefits, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has removed the signature requirement for Veterans who electronically submit an online 10-10EZ “Application for Health Benefits.”

“This singular action will reduce days, if not weeks, for Veterans who apply online to access their hard-earned medical benefits and upholds the promise to reduce access barriers to needed care for this nation’s Veterans,” Shinseki said.

Previously, Veterans filling out the online application were required to print a copy, sign it and send to their local medical center or wait for a copy to be mailed to them for signature and mailing back before enrollment into the VA healthcare system could occur. Veterans may still fill out the 10-10EZ form in person at their local VA Medical Center or Community Based Outpatient Clinic as well. They are not required to use the online form.

Locally, Veterans may enroll in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, St. John, Hammond, Slidell, Bogalusa, Franklin or Houma. For additional information, go to www.va.gov/healtheligibility or call VA’s toll free number at 1-877-222-VETS (8387). The online form is also available through www.neworleans.va.gov, just click on “Health Care Enrollment.”

Reduce your risk of falling with tips from The Joint Commission

Falls are the number one cause of hospitalizations for the elderly. Reduce your risk of falling by following a few tips courtesy of The Joint Commission.

Take care of your health

• Exercise regularly. Exercise builds strength.
• Prevent dehydration. Dehydration can make it easier to lose your balance.
• Have your eyes checked. Make sure you do not have any eye problems or need a new prescription.

Take extra precautions

• Turn on the lights when you enter a room. Do not walk in the dark.
• Make sure your pathway is clear.
• Use the handrails on staircases.
• Sit in chairs that do not move and have arm rests to help when you sit down and stand up.
• Wear shoes that have firm, flat, non-slip soles. Do not wear shoes that do not have backs on them.
• Replace the rubber tips on canes and walkers when they become worn.

Make small changes to your home

• Install timers, “clap-on” or motion sensors on your lights.
• Use night lights in your bedroom, bathroom and the hallway leading to the bathroom.
• Keep the floor and stairs clear of objects such as books, tools, papers, shoes and clothing.
• Remove small area rugs and throw rugs that can slip. Rubber mats are a good replacement.
• Put frequently used items in easy-to-reach places that do not require using a step stool.
• Be sure your bed is easy to get in and out of.
• Apply non-slip treads on stairs.
• Apply non-slip decals or use a non-slip mat in the bathtub or shower.
• Install grab bars near the toilet and the bathtub or shower.

A home care agency, personal care and support agency, or community program may be able to help make changes to your home if you live alone and need help.

Hospital or nursing home

Many falls occur when patients or residents try to get out of bed either to go to the bathroom or walk around the room by themselves. If you need to get out of bed:

• Use your call button to ask for help getting out of bed if you feel unsteady.
• Ask for help going to the bathroom or walking around the room or in hallways.
• Wear non-slip socks or footwear.
• Lower the height of the bed and side rails.
• Talk to your doctor if your medicine makes you sleepy, light-headed, sluggish or confused.

VA form 10-10EZ just got easier

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