

Bonne Santé



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Good Health, Great Care

Summer 2011

VA to host open house August 17 in New Orleans

Story by Kimberly Gearhart

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will host a free open house 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. Wednesday, August 17, at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans.

The event will be conducted in conjunction with the National Veterans Small Business Conference, which runs August 15 – 18. Veterans do not have to be registered for the conference to attend the open house.



VA employees from all three administrations will be on hand to offer information and assistance to Veterans. (Photo courtesy National Veterans Small Business Conference)

“We want Veterans to have the opportunity to come see what VA has to offer them. So many Veterans are eligible for health care, education and compensation benefits and they just don’t know what’s available,” said Julie Catellier, director of Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System.

Representatives from the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration and the National Cemetery Administration will be on hand to answer questions and help put

Veterans in touch with the resources they earned during their service.

Veterans attending the conference are invited to attend as well as those living in the New Orleans area.

“This open house will showcase national programs as well as local offerings. We want to make every effort to spread the word that VA is here for the Veterans,” Catellier said.

For more information about the Veterans small business conference or the VA open house, visit www.nationalveteransconference.com.

Open house highlights

Veterans Health Administration

- Post Deployment Health
- Mental Health Services
- Patient Centered Care
- Eligibility/Enrollment
- Health Promotion/Disease Prevention
- Women Veterans
- Health Care for Homeless Veterans

Veterans Benefit Administration

- How to submit a compensation claim
- Post 9/11 GI Bill information
- Gov’t life insurance for disabled Veterans
- Maximizing your use of eBenefits
- Securing a VA guaranteed home loan
- General benefits information

Human Resources and Administration

- How to apply for a federal job
- Resume building

For more information, visit www.nationalveteransconference.com

Be prepared this hurricane season with VA’s My HealtheVet

Story by Karen Collins

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides an Internet-based portal that could prove helpful to southeast Louisiana Veterans in case of an evacuation this hurricane season.

My HealtheVet is a free, online personal health record that allows registered users to electronically access their records from anywhere there is an Internet connection – even during an emergency situation.

“Everyone needs to have a plan and prepare for emergencies, especially during hurricane season,” said Julie Catellier, director of Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS).

“My HealtheVet is a great tool that allows Veterans access to their health records and prescription information no matter where they go,” she added.

Once patients register, they must complete an in-person authentication (IPA) by a qualified VA staff member. This security measure verifies a My HealtheVet user’s identity and protects against unauthorized access to the Veteran’s personal information.

Additionally, Veterans who complete IPA are able to refill prescriptions, view appointments and in some cases securely e-mail their providers, even during an evacuation.

All information placed in a My HealtheVet account becomes part of the patient’s personal health record and is subject to strict privacy and security measures to ensure confidentiality.

Step-by-step instructions for registration and IPA are located at www.myhealth.va.gov. If VA patients have problems with registration, they may contact the SLVHCS My HealtheVet Coordinator Phaedra Pea at 985-902-5042 or 1-800-935-8387 ext. 5042. IPA can be completed at any SLVHCS clinic location.

“You don’t have to be computer-savvy for My HealtheVet to be helpful. It’s pretty easy and we’ll help you get started,” Pea said.

My HealtheVet personal health records are comprised of self-entered health metrics (blood pressure, weight, etc.), contact information, test results, family and military health history and other health-related information.



My HealtheVet Coordinator Phaedra Pea assists Veterans with registering for and accessing My HealtheVet. Veterans are encouraged to complete the in person authentication process to gain access to enhanced services through the portal. (Photo by Kimberly Gearhart)

These files can be printed or saved on computers and portable storage devices. Having control of this information enables Veterans to share this data with health care providers, caregivers or other people they trust.

To date, My HealtheVet has almost two million registrants nationally, over 52 million site visits and has processed more than 21

million prescription refill requests for Veterans.

For the most up-to-date information about services and SLVHCS clinic closings during a disaster, Veterans are encouraged to get information on the local website at www.neworleans.va.gov, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/VANewOrleans or via Twitter at www.twitter.com/vaneworleans.



We’re now on Twitter and Facebook! Search VANewOrleans and join us.



Project, treatment helps those suffering from MST

Story and photos by Kimberly Gearhart

T-shirts bearing messages of hope and pain lined the walls of a therapy room at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) Mental Health Clinic in New Orleans after a “Clothesline Project” in May.

Nationally, the Clothesline Project allows those affected by sexual assault to express their feelings in a visual medium, drawing attention to the issue and standing as a testimony to the strength of those who have survived it.

The SLVHCS-hosted event raised awareness of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and the treatment programs available to Veterans. Provided with t-shirts and art supplies, Veterans designed and painted their recovery stories on cotton canvases.

Organizers hoped to both help the Veterans work through their trauma and encourage others to seek treatment. Approximately one in five female Veterans and one in 100 male Veterans reports having been the victim of sexual harassment or sexual assault while in the service. The trauma of these assaults can last a lifetime if left untreated.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has special services available to any Veteran who experienced MST.

“Some people don’t realize this care is available. Others don’t know that even if you didn’t report the assault, you are still entitled to MST services through VA,” said Women Veterans Program Manager Cynthia LeCount.

Dr. John Hunter, SLVHCS’ MST coordinator, knows patients can really benefit from treatment

once they make the decision to pursue it. Air Force Veteran Kateri recently completed the MST treatment and took part in the Clothesline Project.

Dr. Hunter treated Kateri for a year and a half. Her treatment included the use of Prolonged Exposure Therapy, or PE.

PE is time-limited treatment considered to be one of the most effective treatments for MST and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The therapy focuses on education; breathing exercises to help the Veteran relax; and imaginal exposure, which involves visualizing the event with a therapist. A regular course of treatment lasts about 12 weeks.

“There are really three goals to PE. First, We help the Veteran distinguish between memories and what’s happening now. Then we help them organize their memories and understand them. Finally, we work on habituation,” Dr. Hunter said.

Habituation involves repeatedly exposing the Veteran to the traumatic memories and allowing her to get used to remembering in a safe environment.

“In the end, they’re left with the memory without all the negative emotion attached,” Dr. Hunter explained.

“It was very difficult and gruesome at first. Visualizing it, that’s the horror,” Kateri said.

Although difficult, Kateri stuck with the program with Dr. Hunter.

“It was worth it. I realize now that I have the power to change the outcomes and I can channel my feelings into something that can help me,” she said.



A SLVHCS employee views t-shirts on display at the Mental Health Clinic in New Orleans. A mobile display will soon bring the t-shirts to other SLVHCS clinics to raise awareness for MST.

Kateri is now attending medical assistant school and has plans to continue her education and become a nurse practitioner.

“School has really kicked in my passion for helping people. I have stopped allowing the hurt to harm me. You have to have a plan. If you keep running in a circle, you never get anywhere,” she said.

For more information about The Clothesline Project, visit <http://www.clotheslineproject.org/>.

If you have been the victim of MST, alert your primary care provider, contact the women Veterans program manager at 504-539-7414 or the MST coordinator at 504-571-8301.

VA police first on scene of accident in June

Story by Kimberly Gearhart

Five members of Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System’s (SLVHCS) police force encountered an unexpected snag returning to New Orleans from Belle Chasse June 23: a vehicle accident with several injuries.

Chief of Police Service Robert Kenyon, Lead Investigator Geil Jacobs, Lt. Jerome Simon, Sgt. Dennis Cedeno and Officer Meg Powell were returning from a tactical shooting range just outside of Belle Chasse when Kenyon spotted the accident.

A tractor-trailer had rear-ended a parish road repair truck, which had stopped to fix a pothole. The smaller truck was crushed and the tractor-trailer had crossed into oncoming traffic and come to a halt on the other side of the road.

Although outside their jurisdiction, there was no question whether they should stop.

“Even as a civilian, you just couldn’t drive by this one,” Powell said.

“It would have been heinous not to stop,” said Cedeno. No other police were on the scene, so Cedeno flipped on his police lights and pulled over.

“We all jumped out and started tending to people. People were walking around in a daze. One guy was in pretty bad shape,” he said. The accident was serious enough that Cedeno anticipated casualties when he approached the scene.

Powell began tending to the wounded, making use of her first aid training and working to keep people calm.

“One looked ready to pass out. We just kept him still and kept talking to him,” she said.

Both vehicles were still partially in the road, so VA police began directing traffic around the site. Jacobs crossed the street to attend to the tractor-trailer.

“You had your rubbernecks, of course. I directed people to slow down and get around in the open lane,” Jacobs said. The biggest concern was that the lane blockage and onlooker interest would cause further collisions.

“We jumped out and just started doing what we were trained to do,” he added.

That sentiment was echoed by the other officers, who all said they did nothing more or less than their duty as police officers. Their training prepared them to react quickly and professionally.

“VA police are some of the best-trained officers in the country. I should know, I used to train civilian police,” Jacobs explained, citing his 40 years of law enforcement experience.

It took approximately 10 minutes for state troopers and deputies from Plaquemines Parish Sheriff’s Office to arrive.

“It really felt like longer. It was tense,” Cedeno said.

The team turned over the scene to arriving civilian officers, having aided the injured and successfully controlled traffic, avoiding further impacts or injury.

“I’m really proud of them,” Kenyon said. They displayed the professionalism and skills that come from years of training.”

SLVHCS’ Acting Director Jimmy Murphy also commended the officers.

“It is both an honor to work with officers of this caliber and a comfort to know men and women like them are here to protect and serve our Veterans every day,” he said.



Women’s call center launched

WASHINGTON – VA has embarked on an initiative to reach out to women Veterans to solicit their input on ways to enhance the health care services VA provides.

Representatives at VA’s Health Resource Center (HRC) are placing calls to women Veterans nationwide, asking them to share their VA experiences and suggest potential enhancements to offered services.

The HRC is contacting women Veterans who have enrolled, but have not begun using VA services.

“Through this contact center, we are placing friendly, conversational calls to women Veterans,” said Patricia Hayes, chief consultant of the VA’s Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group. “We want these Veterans and their caregivers to talk candidly about why they are not using VA, whether they are aware of the gender-specific services we offer, and what additional services they would like to see VA offer.”

For more information about VA’s programs and services for women Veterans, visit: www.va.gov/womenvet and www.publichealth.va.gov/womenshealth.