

Bonne Santé

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System

First robotic surgery performed at SLVHCS

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System

From the Director



As we close out 2018, I invite you to reflect upon the many steps that we've traveled together to rebuild and deliver innovative, cutting-edge, and much-needed health care services to more than 43,000 Veterans in the Gulf south.

Since our ribbon cutting, we are over 661,000 clinic appointments, over 2,100 surgical procedures and over 14,000 bed-days-of-care at the new Veterans medical center.

Together, we have achieved milestones that many thought impossible just a few years ago. Here are a few I'd like to highlight:

- Most recently, our surgical teams launched

a variety of technologically complex clinical services, including laparoscopic, robotic, and implantable cardioverter defibrillator.

- Our women's health program grew, now serving about 4,400 women Veterans.
- We have treated almost 500 patients since activating the inpatient mental health unit.
- We completed the last major construction project on the campus this summer – the Research building, and we opened it with a ribbon cutting ceremony featuring special guest U.S. Senator Dr. Bill Cassidy, VA Acting Deputy Chief Research and Development Officer Dr. David Atkins, and SLVHCS Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development Dr. Joseph Constans.
- We've made a bold commitment to reduce opioid use among Veteran patients.
- We expanded our tele-health program from basic vital signs to tele-stroke care with a specialized neurologist.
- We conducted over 1,366 sleep studies and more than 1,150 home sleep apnea tests in our 24-hour service sleep program.
- With a mission to eliminate Veteran suicide, we continue to focus on programs that support our Veterans who are suffering from traumatic brain injury (TBI) or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- We were recognized as a leader in the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Healthcare Equality Index (HEI) for the second year in a row.
- Our achievements have been recognized internationally as the SLVHCS was crowned as the 2018 Project of the Year by the Project Management Institute.

In Fiscal Year 2019, we will focus on our continued journey to 5-star ranking, improving patient satisfaction scores, improving our Best Place to Work score, and completing scheduled activation milestones. I am excited about the future of VA, our health care system in southeast Louisiana, and the advancements in patient care that we'll make. I am looking forward to the coming year and for the opportunity to work with all of you to continue to improve care for our nation's heroes. Thanks so much for helping to make the past year so memorable and thanks for all that you do!

Fernando O. Rivera, FACHE
CEO/Director Southeast Louisiana Veterans HCS

Bonne Santé

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Director

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On the Cover:

A six-member surgical team, led by Surgeon Dr. Jonathan Silberstein, performed the first robotic surgery at the Veterans medical center using the da Vinci surgical system. (Photo by Salah Ahmed)

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Veterans gathered in Ponchatoula to receive more information on the medical center and the recent changes in eligibility. (Photo by Anne Marino)

Town halls enhance communication with Veterans

By Jeff Nowakowski

Veterans learned about recent activations at the new Veterans medical center, received new information on health care benefits and heard about new VA priorities during Veteran town hall meetings conducted at different locations across southeast Louisiana.

SLVHCS Medical Center Director Fernando Rivera began each meeting with a brief presentation on the new medical center.

"We've completed several more milestones at the new Veterans medical center and we are offering expanded health care choices," said Rivera.

"I thought this kind of meeting was very good for Veterans," said

Navy Veteran William Daquin. "There was a good set-up, it was easy to understand about benefits and claims, so I thought it was very beneficial."

Despite severe thunderstorms in the area, Veterans in the Ponchatoula area gathered to hear about new VA priorities for health care, and new technologies designed to make health care easier for Veterans.

"I only had one question, but they were very helpful and I got a good answer," said Marine Corps Veteran Peggy Richards. "There's a few Veterans from this area who I know could use some help and they should come to these types of meetings because they're very beneficial."

Veterans from the capitol city area attended the Veterans town hall meeting in Baton Rouge.

"I got a lot more information than ever before and they got me moving in the right direction," said Army Veteran Robert Gluege. "If they can help me, then I got something out of this meeting."

SLVHCS conducted a Veterans town hall meeting in Laplace for Veterans living near the St. John clinic where Veterans learned about new MISSION Act as well.

Town halls are held each month throughout southeast Louisiana. Check us out on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for more information.



Veterans gathered in Laplace where they heard about the latest activations of technologically-advanced robotic surgical procedures. (See story on page 5 and 6.) (Photo by Josh Avist)



Veterans gathered in Baton Rouge to hear about new VA priorities for 2018. (Photo by Arthur Castle)



SLVHCS Surgeon Dr. Jonathan Silberstein and his team performed the first robotic surgery using the da Vinci surgical system. (Photo by Salah Ahmed)

New Veterans Medical Center Update

By Jeff Nowakowski

The past quarter here at the new Veterans medical center showed strong progress in activation of some of the most technologically-advanced surgical medicine to be brought online.

SLVHCS is preparing for a fully comprehensive surgery and procedure center that features advanced facilities, equipment and techniques.

But prior to these activations, it took a lot of planning, simulations, and training to safely activate these new procedures and included coordination among many services.

Robotic Surgery

For the first time, surgeons performed robotic surgery on a 61-year old Veteran suffering from a urological condition.

Dr. Jonathan Silberstein and his team performed the first robotic surgery using the da Vinci surgical system that enabled surgeons to perform operations through a few small incisions.

The da Vinci system, also known as minimally invasive surgery, reduces complications, pain, and recovery time.

“I’ve never heard of robotic surgery but the staff was very helpful and explained everything,” said Army Veteran Kenneth Moore.



SLVHCS Surgeon Dr. Kurt Davis leads a team performing a laparoscopic surgery. (Photo by Salah Ahmed)

Laparoscopic Surgery

In early summer, after receiving VA and federal regulatory approval, three Veterans underwent laparoscopic surgery to correct a variety of medical conditions. In all three cases, the Veterans were discharged within days of the procedure to recover at home and all are doing well.

“We have excellent equipment for these type of procedures and we had great support from many other services in order to accomplish these cases,” said Surgeon Dr. Anjoli Gresens. “We are now ready to ramp up and do more complex procedures.”

Cardiac Defibrillator Implant

Following in quick succession, surgeons performed an implant of a cardiac defibrillator (ICD) in a 67-year old Veteran suffering from a slower-than-normal heartbeat. This was the first implant of an ICD in the new Veterans medical center as implants had previously been completed at the old VA hospital. And just a week later, a second ICD was placed in a Veteran patient.

“These surgeries went very well because our multi-disciplinary team from a variety of services gave us great support,” said Surgeon Dr. Colleen Johnson. “Everything from scheduling, to equipment, to prosthetics, to infection control, to radiology, to nursing had to be lined up correctly for these surgeries to go as smoothly as they did.”

Both patients were discharged within two days and were scheduled for follow-up appointments within the month.

In just the past eleven months, more than 1,500 surgical procedures have been completed.

In the coming months, more advanced and more highly complex general surgeries are scheduled to be performed here at the new Veterans medical center as we return to being a cardiac care center of excellence in the region.



SLVHCS Surgeon Dr. Colleen Johnson implants the first cardiac defibrillator in a Veteran patient suffering from a slower-than-normal heartbeat. (Photo by Salah Ahmed)



Veterans can now exchange medical records between VA and community providers

By Jeff Nowakowski

More than 16,000 Veterans in the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System who have medical records with a community care provider have enrolled in the the Veterans Health Information Exchange (VHIE) this year. Of that total, almost 2,500 Veteran treatment records have been received from a community care partner and have been processed and loaded into the SLVHCS medical record program. And more than 960 Veteran medical records from SLVHCS have been exchanged with a community care partner and processed into their system.

The Veterans Health Information Exchange (VHIE), also known as the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) Health Program, allows VA, participating community care providers and Veterans to securely share electronically certain health information from a Veteran's health record.

“The VA and Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System is fortunate to have multiple community providers support the care of our Veteran patients,” said VISN 16 VHIE Community Coordinator Michael Campbell. “NOLA Veterans have an opportunity to

improve the quality and to safe guard their health care by participating in the eHealth Exchange.”

Many Veterans see both VA providers and participating community care physicians. This can make it difficult for providers to access the records they need to manage a Veteran's care. By sharing a Veteran's health information electronically, VA and participating community care providers are better able to coordinate and improve the overall quality of care for our Veterans.

VA health information shared with community care providers includes a list of health problems, allergies, medications, vital signs, immunizations, chemistry and hematology reports, medical history, records of physicals, procedure results (such as X-ray reports), and progress notes.

VHIE program coordinators would like to remind all Veterans must submit a signed consent VA Form 10-0485 prior to sharing Veteran health information between SLVHCS and participating community care providers.

Veteran Antonio Garrison selects fresh vegetables and fruits from the Farmers Market located next to the Canteen that will become a meal for his family as part of the first-ever fresh food-by-prescription program. (Photo by Jeff Nowakowski)



SLVHCS's pilots first ever fresh food-by-prescription program

By Jeff Nowakowski

Nutrition & Food Service develops program for Performance Excellence Fair to treat diabetic Veterans

Veteran Antonio Garrison, who turns 50 years old in September, has a new set of goals he wants to meet for the next 50 years of his life.

"I want to see the next century," said Garrison as he prepared a vegetable ratatouille. "I want to see my great, great granddaughter in the year 2100."

But to do that, Garrison has to get his diabetes under control or better yet, "I want off all of these medications."

Currently, Garrison's A1C is at

10. He is one of more than 400 Veterans in SLVHCS with an A1C greater than nine. That's why he and 14 other Veterans are enrolled in a first-of-its-kind program at SLVHCS that was designed to reduce or eliminate their diabetes by using fresh vegetables and fruit from a farmer's market incorporated into healthy meals.

The program, fresh food-by-prescription, was developed by SLVHCS's Nutrition and Food Service (N&FS) and earned the second place award in last fall's

Performance Excellence Fair.

"As usage — and costs — of diabetes medicines rise, I believe we can show that fresh food, along with a healthy dose of education and support, can go a long way in changing the course of this disease," said N&FS Chief Mark Morgan.

N&FS used their award money to fund vouchers for each diabetic Veteran that participates in the program.

The program, which began in June, is 16-weeks in duration

and features a day to purchase items at the farmers market alternating weekly with a cooking demonstration class.

The ten male Veterans and five female Veterans participating in the program established their baseline data of height, weight, body mass index, Hgb A1C, blood pressure, LDL, HDL, and triglycerides. At the end of the program, researchers want to see all of these parameters reduced significantly.

“This is a unique diabetes education program that blends self-care behaviors with our healthy kitchen classes and a local farmers market,” said Clinical Dietitian/Certified Diabetes Educator Angela Cemo. “The participants are using new skills and knowledge in their daily lives and are very pleased with the program at this time.”

In addition to the farmer’s market and cooking classes, the curriculum also features special



Garrison creates a meal made through the fresh food-by-prescription program to help control his diabetes inside the Patient Education Research Center (PERC). (Photo by Jeff Nowakowski)

presentations from Pharmacy on medications, Psychology on mindfulness in diet and life, Social Work for coping with stress, and physical therapy on exercise.

But it’s the cooking demonstration class to reinforce healthy eating habits that has the Veterans’ attention.

“I tell my Veterans all the time that I’ll never tell them that they can’t have a food, unless it is medically necessary to avoid it,” said Wellness Dietician Ross

Kennedy, who leads the cooking demonstration classes. “All foods can fit, it just comes down to how much. It’s about keeping things in balance, more of some foods and less of others.”

“When, not if, I meet my goals, I’m going to get married next year,” said Garrison. “I’m going to use this information and make it a regular part of my life from now on.”

Farmers market returns to SLVHCS

The farmers market returned to SLVHCS as a key part





Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist Carmen McLain (l) explains how to set-up the home computer of Veteran Miriam Jones who suffers from low vision. (Photo by Jeff Nowakowski)

Ophthalmology goes to homes of Veterans with low vision

By Jeff Nowakowski

Women’s Army Corp Veteran Miriam Jones is learning to be more accepting of what’s happening to her low vision after receiving weekly home visits from SLVHCS Ophthalmology to help her maximize remaining functional vision and maintain independence in daily living.

“I’ve learned a lot of new ways of doing things so I can match my clothes, take the right medicines, and get around the kitchen without spilling my coffee or burning the house down,” said Jones. “I can do things that are important to me in my life with less effort.”

Low vision is the term used to describe significant visual impairment that can’t be corrected fully with glasses, contact lenses, medication or eye surgery.

The 78-year old Jones, who suffers from glaucoma and double vision, which forced her to stop driving two years ago, is just one of several Veteran patients that Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist Carmen McLain visits each week to help with all levels of vision loss ranging from mild visual impairment to legal blindness.

“The loss of sight affects each person differently,” said McLain. “I guide each Veteran to help them better understand their type of vision loss and how to maximize their daily living skills through instruction in areas of homemaking, cooking, financial management, leisure participation, and overall independent living.”

SLVHCS Ophthalmology uses a multi-disciplinary approach to care — from ophthalmologists to optometrists to low vision therapists —who are trained to evaluate a patient’s condition and identify an individualized rehabilitation plan.

On this visit, McLain updated Jones’ MyHealthVet enrollment information and set-up an appointment for new high-powered reading glasses.

“Veterans with low vision need to learn these new things and train themselves so they can have an easier life,” added Jones. “My life has improved because of it. You need to remember that life is good, whether you can see or not.”



SLVHCS earns more accreditations

By Jeff Nowakowski

The Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System reached another type of milestone recently with the accreditation of three important programs for our Veterans.

Accreditation is official recognition that our organization is guided by internationally recognized service standards and best practices. Accreditation consists of ongoing consultation and in-depth on-site reviews to help us achieve the highest quality of care for our Veterans.

SLVHCS received a Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditation of the Compensated Work Therapy Program and a renewal of the existing accreditation of the Homeless Program. Both programs were awarded the full three-year accreditation!

Attaining and maintaining CARF-accredited status requires a significant effort, strong teamwork and a commitment at all levels of the organization to providing quality services and enhancing the lives of the Veterans we serve.

The Pathology & Laboratory Medicine Service was accredited by the College of American Pathologists, which is the gold standard accrediting organization.

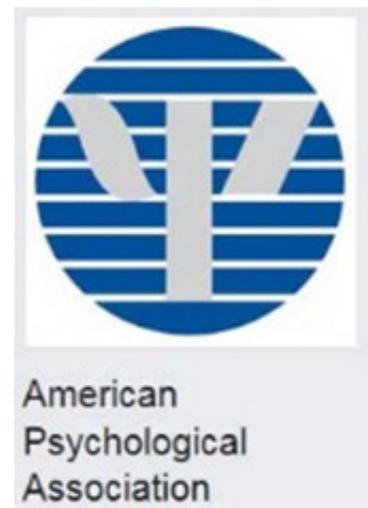
During the last five site inspections, Path & Lab encountered no deficiencies requiring follow-up action. This is a testament to the outstanding job our laboratory personnel do every day for our Veterans.

And the American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation conducted a review of our postdoctoral program in clinical psychology and reaffirmed our

accreditation, good for 10 years.

Our program aims to train professional psychologists for advanced practice and eventual leadership roles in clinical services, research and education. Accreditation is a process that encourages improvement through continuous self-study and review.

Attaining and maintaining this accreditation status requires teamwork and strong communications practices, a commitment to education and providing quality services to the Veterans we serve.



Hundreds of women Veterans stopped by the tables on the concourse to pick up information during SLVHCS observance of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. (Photo by Josh Avist)



SLVHCS observes breast cancer awareness month

By Chad Jenkins

The Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System accompanied by several community-based clinics celebrated breast cancer awareness month, complete with pink shirts, pink drinks, and a large pink tree.

SLVHCS recognized National Breast Cancer Awareness month to increase awareness of the disease and to raise funds for research, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and cure.

Hundreds of Veterans, visitors and SLVHCS employees wearing pink shirts gathered on the first-floor concourse, to acknowledge those affected by the disease while also providing a multitude of information.

“This event was a great opportunity to spread awareness of breast cancer and to highlight the importance of self-care,” said Veteran Divina Packer, who was visiting the facility for a doctor’s appointment when the many vendors and pink shirts attracted her.

Aligned were informational tables along the concourse where participants had the opportunity partake in giveaways, light refreshments, and receive

an abundance of educational information from outpatient clinics.

One of the highlights of the event was the “I Geaux Pink for ...” tree commemorated by the women’s health clinic where Veteran visitors and SLVHCS employees honored those loved ones and friends by placing their name on the respected tree.

“It’s important to continue to bring awareness to the threats of breast cancer,” said visitor Mary Ann, who was accompanying a Veteran friend.

Employee Wellness conducted a 1k walk for employees at the medical center and at all CBOC walking trails.

There was also samples of healthy alternative meals and snacks in the PERC and each Friday the cafeteria featured pink desserts.

Breast cancer continues to be one of the leading of causes of death amongst women. In a lifetime, 1 in 8 women are diagnosed with invasive breast cancer. Through the advancement of research, early detection, and preventative care the percentage of woman’s risk of dying continues to decline.



SLVHCS Nurse Practitioner Annie Cole-Bradley begins her examination of a female Veteran as the new HPACT nurse practitioner at the Community Resource & Referral Center in downtown New Orleans. Cole-Bradley is additionally certified as a Women's Health PCP, which allows her to offer preventative women's health services at the CRRC.

New women's health practitioner at CRRC

By Jeff Nowakowski

Women Veterans face unique challenges as they reintegrate into their communities following active military duty.

One of the largest issues is homelessness. Homelessness among women Veterans is expected to rise as increasing numbers of women in the military return to their communities as Veterans.

Other major issues include child care, employment, privacy, and safety concerns.

SLVHCS, in collaboration with community partners, can provide women Veterans with health care, housing solutions, and employment opportunities through the Community Resource & Referral Center (CRRC).

Recently, SLVHCS added a nurse practitioner who is also certified to offer women's health services to its women's health clinic at the CRRC in downtown New Orleans.

"We were starting to see more women Veterans coming into the CRRC to ask for assistance," said CRRC Program Manager Nikie Kelly. "Our leadership listened to what we needed to be able to provide safe, compassionate care to these female Veterans and now our women's health program here is going very well."

The women's health program inside the CRRC contains an examination room and provides a wide range of services for female patients. For more

specialized tests or procedures, Veterans are referred to the women's health clinic on the seventh floor of the new Veterans medical center.

"With this women's health office in the CRRC we are able to provide quick access to health care, which is very important to a female Veteran who feels anxious or nervous about walking in the door," said Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) Nurse Practitioner Annie Cole-Bradley, who moved here from Nashville this summer. "We need to help the Veteran as much as we can when they are here because they are so transient."

"We have to be flexible in every case so that these female Veterans feel safe," added Cole-Bradley. "Because if they feel safe and we can address their needs here in this clinic, then we can hopefully reduce emergency room admissions and provide better health care solutions."

Women currently make up 8 percent of the total Veteran population and 14 percent of the active duty military, increasing to an estimated 16 percent by 2035. However, the number of homeless women Veterans has doubled over the past decade.



Veteran Tanya Whitney earned a gold medal in discus and a bronze in javelin at the Golden Age Games.

Veterans win medals and place well at Golden Age Games

By Tramel Garrett

Three SLVHCS Veterans who participated in this year's Golden Age Games in early August in Albuquerque, New Mexico earned gold and silver medals and placed in the top ten in several events.

Veteran Nora Filos earned a silver medal in cycling at this year's Golden Age Games.

Veteran Tanya Whitney won a gold medal in the discus event and a bronze in the javelin. (Tonya also won a gold medal at the National VA Arts Contest. See story on page 17.)

Veteran Robert Whitney, Tanya's husband, placed sixth in the 800 meter power walk at the Golden Age games.

SLVHCS Certified Recreation Therapist Glenis Thompson worked daily with these Veterans one-on-one to prepare them for competition.

Each year, VA sponsors six national events for Veterans served by VA medical facilities nationwide. Each program enhances the physical, psycho-social, and emotional well-being of Veterans who participate. These national events increase awareness of the therapeutic value of recreation, sports, or the creative arts.



Veteran Nora Flores earned a silver medal in cycling at this year's Golden Age Games.



Veteran Robert Whitney took sixth place in the 800M power walk at the Golden Age Games.

Veterans win multiple medals at National Wheelchair Games

By Tramel Garrett



Four SLVHCS Veterans brought home a total of 8 medals after competing in the National Wheelchair Games at the end of July in Orlando, Florida.

Paralyzed Veterans of America Bayou Chapter President Julius Lee won a gold medal in shotput and discus, silver medal in bowling, and bronze medal in javelin and softball.

Veteran Terry Johnson won a gold medal in wheelchair basketball.

Veteran Arthur Lee earned a gold medal in bowling and a bronze in slalom.

Veteran Robert Bailey won a gold medal in cycling and a bronze in powerlifting. (Robert

Four Veterans earned multiple medals at National Wheelchair Games.

trained extensively with our recreation therapy service before competing. See story on next page.)

SLVHCS Certified Recreation Therapist Glenis Thompson worked daily with these Veterans one-on-one to prepare them for competition.

He, along with Physical Therapy Assistant Adam Casborn, drove our Veterans to the Wheelchair Games to provide additional support.

Each year, VA sponsors six national events for Veterans served by VA medical facilities nationwide. Each program enhances the physical, psycho-social, and emotional well-being of Veterans who participate. These national events increase awareness of the therapeutic value of recreation, sports, or the creative arts.

Congratulations to our winners!

VA recreation therapy changing Veteran lives

By Tramel Garrett

Veteran Robert Bailey has been training vigorously for the past six months inside the new recreation center at the Veterans medical center under the careful watch of our recreational therapy program.

Bailey recently decided to play sports to make changes to his lifestyle after being diagnosed with diabetes. As a double amputee, Bailey looked to cycling to help him overcome obstacles that plagued his everyday life.

“I lost 100 pounds because of the tricycle,” said Bailey. “I’ve told people that without the VA’s help, I wouldn’t be alive. I would have died because of depression or diabetes. Recreation helps you keep darkness away and your outlook on life is so much brighter.”

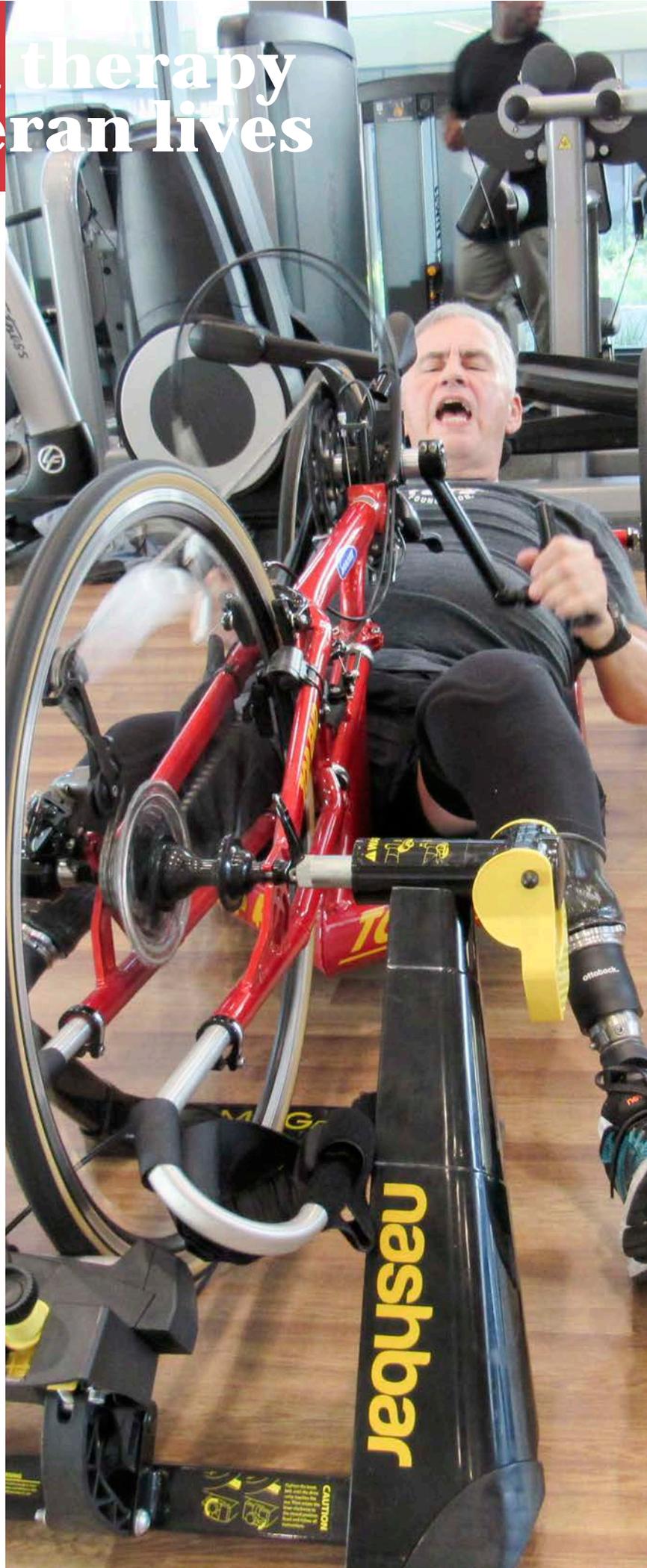
“He took the initiative to get involved in something to keep himself busy,” said Recreational Therapist Glenis Thompson. “His techniques have improved tremendously and he’s more dedicated than ever to compete in the upcoming U.S. Paralympics.”

For years, Veteran Affairs has used recreation therapy service to improve the quality of life for Veterans with active and meaningful activities. Most of this evidence-based clinical interventions are founded upon the needs and goal of each Veteran.

Veterans involved in these events and the hundreds of VA employees and volunteers who support them each year all share a strong sense of purpose and camaraderie.

“The biggest thing I’ve learned is the importance of exercise, and sports for people with disabilities,” added Bailey. “Recreational therapy made me more outgoing. It really pulls you out of yourself.”

Robert Bailey trains for the National Veteran’s Wheelchair Games inside the new recreation center at SLVHCS. The national Wheelchair Games increases awareness of the therapeutic value of recreation or sports. (Photo by Tramel Garrett)



Local Veteran Tanya Whitney (c) placed first in 2018 National Veterans Creative Arts Program in the 'Poetry-Inspirational' category for her poem 'In and Out.' Whitney was joined by Deputy Associate Director of Patient Care Services Dr. Ruth Davis (l) and Recreational Therapist Tom Petterson (r) for first place award in the local SLVHCS arts contest last March. (Photo by Amanda Jones)



Local Veteran wins national creative arts award

Veteran attended national arts festival in Des Moines, Iowa in the fall

By Tramel Garrett

Local Veteran Tanya Whitney placed first in the 2018 National Veterans Creative Arts Program in the 'Poetry-Inspirational' category for her poem 'In and Out.'

Whitney was one of 15 gold medal winners in the creative writing division of the creative arts contest.

"Writing has helped a lot as it gives me an avenue to express thoughts and feelings that in the past I tended to internalize," said Whitney. "When I was younger I was into drawing and sketching. However, after my last deployment, I found I no longer had the patience for it. Writing has filled that void."

The 2018 National Veterans Creative Arts Program featured competitions in the divisions of art, music, dance, creative writing, and drama.

This year, over 5,700 entries were submitted into the local competition with 128 VA facilities represented.

"Some of my writing is for me only, some for family after I'm gone, and some I share in poetry contests," added Whitney.

As a first-place winner in the local competition, Whitney was invited to attend the national arts festival in Des Moines, Iowa from October 31 to November 5 to participate in workshops and



Local Veteran Tanya Whitney attended the national arts festival in Des Moines, IA to participate in workshops

experience the festival.

"I have spoken with other Veterans about using writing as a tool," explained Whitney. "If not writing, then look for other ways to mitigate their symptoms. And don't give up until you find what works for you. I think the biggest thing we can do to help ourselves is to keep trying, especially new things. As I tell the kids I coach, don't be afraid to try something and fail. Be afraid of never trying and still fail."



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia Improves Veteran Sleep Quality

By Dr. Lisa-Ann Cuccurullo, Psy.D. and Marie C. Barrett, Ph.D and MST Graduate Psychologist

Difficulty getting a good night of sleep is a commonly reported problem among Veterans. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) is a treatment offered at SLVHCS to help address sleep difficulties. Healthcare providers from all services can help Veterans access this treatment to improve their quality of sleep and overall quality of life.

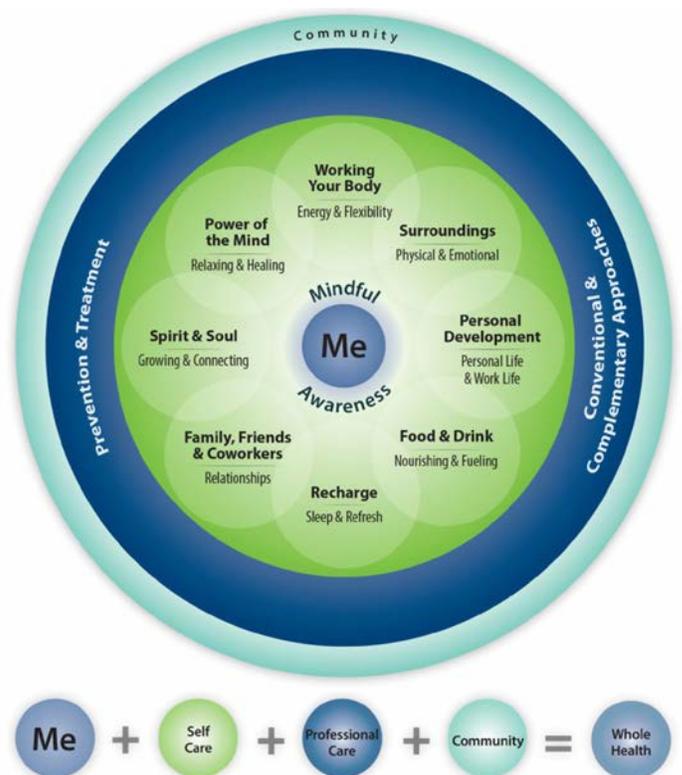
“Research shows that insomnia responds well to CBT-I and yields a reliable and lasting reduction in symptoms,” said SLVHCS Psychologist and Evidence Based Psychotherapy Coordinator Dr. C. Laurel Franklin. “Thus, the National Institute of Health has recommended CBT-I as a first-line treatment for insomnia. The VA has invested in training clinicians nationwide and SLVHCS has several clinicians who are able to provide this empirically supported psychotherapy.”

Health care providers in all services can assist Veterans by looking for signs of insomnia. It is important to realize that insomnia is more than one night of poor sleep. People with insomnia may have trouble falling asleep initially, trouble maintaining sleep throughout the night, or find that they wake up too early each morning and aren’t able to return to sleep. Some people with insomnia experience more than one of these symptoms. For people with insomnia, these symptoms are persistent and disruptive. For sleep problems to be considered indicative of insomnia, the problems must occur at least three nights per week, persist for at least three months, and cause problems in the Veteran’s daily life.

CBT-I is offered through outpatient Mental

Health at SLVHCS and takes a systematic, individualized approach to evaluating each Veteran’s beliefs, behaviors, environment, and goals related to sleep. CBT-I helps Veterans change factors that may be contributing to their sleep problems and teaches Veterans strategies for inducing relaxation and managing stress. Although CBT-I is not a treatment for nightmares or trauma, it does include education about trauma and strategies for managing nightmares, both of which are commonly reported by Veterans with sleep-related problems.

SLVHCS providers can help Veterans access evaluation of and treatment for insomnia by placing a consult to outpatient Mental Health.





VEText



VEText will now send messages with 5-digit code

By Jeff Nowakowski

The Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System has been using VEText for the past nine months, with excellent results in improving the patient no-show rate for outpatient clinic appointments.

VEText notifies Veterans of pending medical appointments and allows them to opt in or out of an appointment with a simple text message reply. The program is very convenient and every Veteran in the SLVHCS system is automatically enrolled in the program.

VEText has announced that text message appointment reminders will no longer be sent from a traditional 10-digit phone number. The new messages will come from a 5-digit short code.

The text messages do not replace the letters, postcards and automated phone calls Veterans already receive for appointment reminders, but are just another communication channel

available between SLVHCS and Veterans.

The program works by sending out its first message about five days prior to the appointment and then the Veteran will receive a reminder the day before the appointment. The Veteran can respond 'cancel' to either message and the appointment will be opened for a fellow Veteran.

"VEText is an excellent tool for Veterans to confirm or cancel appointments quickly and efficiently," said Medical Administration Service Assistant Chief Edward Payton. "The program also allows us to see available slots when patients cancel ahead of time and we are able to schedule patients who need to be seen sooner in those appointments."

If Veterans are not receiving appointment reminders via text message, please be sure to contact your primary care clinic to update your contact information.

Social Media Compliments



Debbie Lay

Today I was seen in Women's Clinic and was very impressed with DR Brewer. Went down and had my blood drawn very quickly. Building is Awesome. Very positive experience today.



Carol Keller Matis

I love going to New Orleans Va! Very clean, and they have the best staff!



Gary Flesher

I was pleasantly surprised by the whole experience I had here today. I had two appointments and both were started ahead of schedule and the personnel were extremely courteous and professional. The hospital is modern and clean. I have to say it's probably the best hospital I've ever been in.



Steve Barnes This is a fabulous facility with an outstanding staff. Thank you.

Like · Reply · 15h



Henry King Great news, I love my New Orleans VA Medical Center! Keep up the good work!

Like · Reply · Message · 5d



James Paul



We appreciate all y'all are doing to help us. Thank you all.



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