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Why VA?
Do you ever wonder why the acronym for the Department of Veterans Affairs is VA, instead of DVA?

Until 1988, the Veterans Administration, commonly referred to as “the VA,” was the place that Veterans go for medical care, hospitalization and disability benefits. By 1960, VA was the hospital system for at least three generations of American veterans who fought in both World Wars, the Korean and Vietnam Wars. It was the only Veterans’ hospitals that they and their families were familiar with. However, VA was actually the third incarnation of federal Veterans’ health care in American history.

The origins of VA hospitals and medical facilities began in 1865 as the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, which were the first facilities founded for the masses of Veterans who served in volunteer forces. The National Homes operated for 65 years, seven years longer than the Veterans Administration was in existence. During World War I, a second system of federal Veterans’ hospitals was initiated under the Department of Treasury and operated for about three years when that system became an independent agency known as the Veterans Bureau in 1921. In 1930, the oldest and newest Veterans’ hospital systems were merged along with the Pension Bureau to form the Veterans Administration. VA was all most people knew.

Shortly after the Veterans Administration became the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1988, there was confusion about what to call the new department or what its acronym would be. VA had been in use for so long that many employees and Veterans were conflicted about changing it. The services that the new department provided to Veterans were the same as before—only the name had changed.

Former VA Secretary, Ed Derwinski, determined that VA would remain our moniker despite the new official name, allowing the term’s legacy to live on into its 85th year in 2015.
There are many programs and resources available to Veterans here at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System. One program, the transgender support group, is facilitated by SLVHCS Mental Health Service to help Veterans who self-identify as transgender.

The program provides a place for them to discuss issues, topics and concerns related to their experiences of being transgender Veterans, said Danielle Rosenfeld, SLVHCS social worker.

“We as group facilitators wanted to provide a safe environment within the (Department of Veterans Affairs) for transgender Veterans to discuss issues that they have in common, so they can get feedback from each other and build a network with other transgender Veterans,” Rosenfeld said.

The support group was started in June 2013 by Rosenfeld and Carly Leblanc, SLVHCS social worker, with only five Veterans. Since then, the group has grown to to more than 20 Veterans and the feedback has been extremely positive.

“When I first started transitioning, I was thinking I am the only transgender Veteran and that’s why I couldn’t find any resources,” Carlo Fantozzi said. “Then I was introduced to this group and was surprised to see how many both male to female and female to male transgender Veterans are out there.”

Fantozzi explained it was great to have a community of transgender Veterans that understood what he is going through and can help him find the resources and services he needs.

For Veteran Donna Jean Loy, being a part of the support group brings her a sense of pride for herself and her transgender community.

“It’s nice to know as a transgender Veteran that the VA has your back with this group,” Loy said. “Not every VA has something like this and it’s probably one of the premier groups in the country.”

The support group members indicate that coming to the meetings is a priority for them because of how the meetings benefit their lives, Leblanc said. Especially with the excellent level of care transgender Veterans receive at SLVHCS.

“Many of our Veterans have to hide or face stigma in many areas of their lives including during the time of their service,” LeBlanc said. “It has meant a lot for us to be able to create a safe place in an environment that has not traditionally been accepting of transgender Veterans. One Veteran travels from Alabama to attend the support group weekly as well as receive other services here.”

At SLVHCS, many of the support group members receive care from Dr. Jamie Buth, associate chief of staff for clinics, who is a transgender woman herself. LeBlanc and Rosenfeld worked with Buth to develop the group.

One of Buth’s patients, transgender Veteran Bobbi Werkheiser says the care she receives is outstanding and has changed her life.

“My healthcare by (Buth) is by far the best anywhere,” Werkheiser said. “The care given me by Dr. Buth, Dr. Michelle Hamilton and others has treated the whole person and saved my life. Had it not been for the fine professionals at (SLVHCS), I would not be here today.”

Veteran Pamela Raintree said that she moved to south Louisiana to be under the care of Dr. Buth based on her reputation as a caregiver to transgender patients. Veteran Caroline L’huillier explained that Buth has been a personal inspiration to her for many years starting when L’huillier’s Veteran father was a patient of Buth’s.

“(Buth) was a role model and I said ‘one day I want to be like her,’” she said. “And then she was my caregiver.”

For more information about the transgender support group, contact Mental Health Service at (504) 412-3741.
By Karla Marshall

Every medical center has policies to govern its work and Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System is no different. Employees are in the middle of developing policies to govern the work we will do in our new medical center.

Standardization and regulatory requirements are just a couple of the reasons why we have policies, but more important is patient safety and the need for everyone to know what they can expect in their new workplace and what acceptable practices are.

“The good news,” said Denise Overby-Reyes, “is that most of the needed policies already exist at other VA facilities and we just need to tweak them for our operations.”

Overby-Reyes, a SLVHCS registered nurse, is leading the effort to identify policies and help employees find policies that are similar to what they will need.

“We have a great opportunity, with the opening of the new hospital, for employees to have a say in the policies that govern their work,” Overby-Reyes said. “And since we’ve not had a hospital in 10 years, we are incorporating new technology and best practices too.”

“Writing policies is not the most fun, but they are the foundation for excellent patient care,” said Jan Lemaire, Office of Cultural Transformation patient center care manager. “Having policies in place is just part of the activation process, she explained.

“SLVHCS must also get the buildings ready for use,” Lemaire said. “That means purchasing biomedical and other equipment, determining where supplies will be stored, how patients will be transported and what food items will be available in our canteens when they open, among many other things.”

SLVHCS is also in the midst of hiring hundreds of new employees, especially over the next several months, so they can be trained and ready in advance of operations at the new facility.

“It is an exciting time to be here and every day we are closer to opening the doors of our medical center,” said Lemaire. “Watching it take shape and being able to see ourselves working there motivates us to get this critical work done.”

Left is a design rendering of the chapel at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System medical center under construction in Mid-City New Orleans. On the right is an actual photo taken in early June 2015 of the same space.
The pharmacy at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System in New Orleans recently received an automated prescription refill machine, which is helping to reduce wait times and increase convenience for Veterans.

Since the pharmacy began using the machine in April, the staff has been able to refill prescription about 50 percent faster according to Dr. Phalba Adams, SLVHCS pharmacy chief.

By centralizing the location where the prescriptions are filled, the need for space in the pharmacy and the time it takes to refill each prescription has been reduced. This makes the process of filling each prescription simpler and more efficient.

“The graphics are easier and the software is easier to use,” Adams said. “We are learning day by day how to optimize it.”

In addition to optimizing the machine, Adams tracks pharmacy wait times and shares that information with her staff.

“I started sending out the wait times to the staff to make sure they were aware of our goals and expectations,” she said. “We celebrate our successes small and large.”

A new feature of the machine allows the pharmacy staff to prioritize refills by Veterans who are waiting at the pharmacy for their medicine over those who plan to pick it up at a later time or have the refill mailed.

While the new system is not stocked with all of the medicine the pharmacy has, it does contain 200 different medications, including the ones most commonly used by our Veterans.

Although the machine has increased the speed of the refill process, the staff remains committed to quality assurance for our Veterans so that they get the highest level of care they deserve.

Each prescription is checked by a pharmacy technician and a pharmacist to ensure the medication, quantity and patient information are correct.

“The vials are scanned and a picture and description of the medication shows on the machine for double checking purposes,” Adams said.

In addition to reducing wait times, Adams and her staff are working to make the overall experience better.

“I asked staff to greet every Veteran upon entry and hear what their needs are,” she said. “Also the volunteers have been a great help to us with receiving the Veterans when they walk into the pharmacy.”

The new machine replaced the previous one that had been in service since before Hurricane Katrina.
After finding a headstone bearing the name Oliver K. Bierhorst that had been sitting in an attic for 46 years, a Veteran brought it to Connie Washington, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System’s Police Service deputy chief asking for assistance in getting it back to its rightful owner.

The headstone was brought to SLVHCS on May 5 by Robert Claverie, a Veteran who was a customer at a hardware store when the headstone was brought in by a construction contractor who was renovating a home.

After much research, Jan Lemaire, Office of Cultural Transformation patient center care manager, learned that Bierhorst was a U.S. Army 1st Lt. who served in World War II and Korea and was buried at the Greenwood Cemetery in New Orleans.

Capt. Kevin Ricks, Police Service, then contacted Tammy Hemstad of the Firemen’s Charitable and Benevolent Association who oversees the cemetery. Hemstad notified Bierhorst’s family of the found headstone and Ricks and Hemstad then coordinated a ceremony to deliver the headstone to Bierhorst’s grave. Gilbert Luke, SLVHCS lead telecommunications equipment operator, made contact with the family and helped with the coordination efforts because to him, this mission was personal.

On Memorial Day, several SLVHCS employees proudly joined Bierhorst’s family in honoring his life and legacy by unveiling a grave marker in his honor. Robert Kenyon, SLVHCS Police Service Chief shared a brief history of the Veteran and how SLVHCS came into possession of the headstone.

“It took a great deal of energy from a determined team to get the headstone to Lt. Bierhorst’s family, but the outcome far outweighed the efforts,” said Capt. Ricks.

This story goes beyond the dedication of a headstone and for Luke, it was unimaginable. In 1965, Luke washed dishes after school at a hotel in New Orleans and saved the money he earned to buy a motorcycle. He purchased his first motorcycle from a man named Oliver K. Bierhorst.

“When I saw this headstone I thought, this has to be him, said Luke. “In my research, I located information under the Bierhorst name that showed Oliver K. Bierhorst as the owner of O.K. Honda Rental, which was formed in 1966. I knew then that this was the same Mr. Bierhorst because I was O.K. Honda Rental’s first employee.”

“Bierhorst hired me to work for him in his motorcycle shop,” explained Luke.

“Less than a year later I joined the United States Marine Corps and never saw Mr. Bierhorst again,” said Luke. “Those who knew and worked with Lt. Bierhorst respected and admired his great love for his country and family. He was an inspiration to us all. And now, he can rest in peace.”
In December 2014, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the introduction of a national Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative to encourage diabetic Veterans receiving VA care to get help lowering their risk of hypoglycemia.

A possible side effect of diabetes treatment, hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, affects about 25 percent of VA’s patient population, and is the leading cause of blindness, end-stage renal disease and amputation.

At the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, health care providers are able to work one on one with Veterans to take proactive steps for Veterans to their health to lower the risk of becoming hypoglycemic, according to Dr. Vivian Fonseca, SLVHCS Endocrinology chief. Fonseca indicates that one of the best ways to lower their risk is to follow a proper diet as instructed by their doctor and take medications as prescribed.

He warns that when a patient doesn’t eat and takes medicine on a regular-basis, their inaction can lead to serious health problems.

“It’s very dangerous,” Fonseca said. “You can start to feel very unwell, which can lead to heart attacks, loss of consciousness and possibly a seizure.”

Part of the national initiative incorporates a teach-back method by asking Veterans questions to make sure they understand and can manage their self-care, including diet, exercise, glucose monitoring and medication management. This method is designed to share decision-making and create universal health literacy to ensure Veterans understand the health information they receive.

In addition to the teach-back method, Veterans are encouraged to use peer-to-peer education with other Veterans. Fonseca said Veterans can sometimes learn by talking to their fellow Veterans about how they manage health issues such as diabetes.

“Sometimes people learn better from those who overcame a problem,” he said.

The initiative also uses the MyHealtheVet website to alert health care providers as to which patients may be at risk, and decision-making support to help ensure appropriate care and follow-up.
Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System makes progress on wait times

By Tyler Grimes

Recent data indicates that patient wait times showed improvement at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System.

In the Department of Veterans Affairs’ most recent completed appointments data release on June 4, SLVHCS reduced wait times for primary, specialty and mental health care appointments. The medical center and the community-based outpatient clinics combined completed a total of 37,080 appointments, with 30,863 appointments completed in 7 days of a Veteran’s preferred appointment date. In addition, 97.08 percent of all our appointments were completed in 30 days or less.

“Our mission is delivering excellent patient-centered health care by prioritizing the Veteran first, but also by engaging and inspiring employees to their highest possible level of performance and conduct,” Fernando Rivera, SLVHCS director said. “At SLVHCS, we want to be among the highest performing health care systems, not just to improve our standing, but to improve our delivery of excellent health care.”

Nationwide, the Department of Veterans Affairs completed more than 46 million appointments between May 1, 2014 and February 28, 2015, which is two million more than the same period the year prior. There were approximately 1.5 million appointments completed per month in VA care in the community, which represents nearly 20 percent of completed appointments. VA also completed 12 million same-day appointments, which is 20 percent of VA’s total appointments per year.

To build on the improvement, SLVHCS is hiring 95 additional new providers and staff. The leadership is also looking at ways to maximize our current operations through extended clinic hours, reviewing space options, and expanding non-traditional health care delivery such as tele-health options and My HealtheVet.

“Our team and partners are working extremely hard to open the doors of the new medical center,” he said. “We anticipate that the soonest we’ll be able to see our first patient there will be at the end of 2016. We have much to be proud of, but we aren’t done yet!”
Beginning in 2005, the Department of Veterans Affairs developed an integrated system of care for Veterans who suffer from traumatic brain injuries and other multiple severe injuries also called polytrauma.

The Polytrauma System of Care provides rehabilitation services to Veterans and helps to ensure a seamless transition from active duty into Veterans Health Administration medical centers close to home. The PSC program provides a wide range of services including assessment and treatment by interdisciplinary teams of rehabilitation specialists, case management, patient and family education and training, psychosocial support, and advanced rehabilitation and prosthetic technologies.

At Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, Dr. Randolph Roig, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation physician, works with his team to give Veterans the best care possible.

“The PSC assures that Veterans who have sustained injuries affecting the brain and multiple body systems receive the coordinated and specialized care that is necessary to assure the best possible outcomes,” Roig said. “This system includes coordinating the efforts of the health care systems of the Department of Defense and VA, ensuring the smoothest possible transitions and making sure the Veteran receives the most thorough, long-term treatment plan across the spectrum of care, from acute care to rehabilitation to transitional living to home.”

VA currently screens all Veterans of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan for mild TBI upon initial entry into VA health care. Since April 2007, when VA began TBI screening, more than 128,000 Veterans screened positive for TBI and have completed comprehensive follow-up evaluation. Veterans with a positive TBI screen are referred for a comprehensive evaluation with specialty providers for a definitive diagnosis and development of an Individualized Plan of Care for those that need ongoing rehabilitation services.

The PSC program follows an IPC developed by the team of specialists in collaboration with the Veteran to address their needs and achieve their goals, he said.

“This assures that the treatment team remains focused on the specific needs of the individual Veteran,” Roig said. “With polytrauma, there are invariably special circumstances and needs.”

Clinicians and researchers collaborate with researchers from the DoD, academic institutions and private facilities to investigate a wide range of TBI-related topics including diagnostic tools, imaging, comorbid conditions and other advances in prevention and treatment.

“Veterans with moderate to severe traumatic brain injuries and polytrauma often require intensive care and rehabilitation,” Roig said. “The (program) provides specialized residential care and rehabilitation for eligible Veterans through community-based and transitional rehabilitation programs.”

In addition to delivering various TBI programs and services, VA monitors and compares rehabilitation outcomes of Veterans with TBI to outcomes from the private sector for patients with TBI. The data indicates that outcomes for the VA polytrauma rehabilitation centers compare favorably with those from TBI Model Systems facilities in percentages of patients discharged to home and those who are independent in the community at one year following discharge from rehabilitation.

“As a system, we are now well-equipped to provide Veterans with world-class treatment,” he said. “These abilities will no doubt allow the VHA to provide better care to all Veterans who suffer from polytrauma and traumatic brain injury.”
I’m a Veteran. I know what it’s like. Hear my story.

“Put yourself first, and just seek whatever help you can, because you’re not going to know what kind of help you need until you actually go in there.”
—Edward, Navy, Navy Reserve

“Get on top of it—take advantage of what’s there for Veterans.”
—Frank, Marines

“In the beginning I was against going to therapy. But it really started to work. Therapy works.”
—April, Army Reserve

MAKE THE CONNECTION
www.MakeTheConnection.net
Make the Connection is here for you.

Whether you just returned from a deployment, served stateside, or left the military decades ago, support is available for the challenges you may be facing. If you are struggling, professional treatment can help get you on the path to recovery.

At MakeTheConnection.net, you can listen to hundreds of Veterans share their stories of strength and recovery, find information relevant to you, and locate nearby resources. Many topics are covered, including:

**Life Experiences**
- Transitioning from service
- Pursuing higher education
- Jobs and employment
- Death of family or friends
- Retirement and aging

**Signs and Symptoms**
- Trouble sleeping
- Relationship problems
- Anger and irritability
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feeling on edge

**Mental and Physical Health**
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Depression
- Effects of traumatic brain injury
- Problems with alcohol
- Effects of military sexual trauma

"It took me 30 years before I went to see the VA; don’t let that happen to you."
—Jim, Air Force

Every day, thousands of Veterans connect with the resources and support they’ve earned and find ways to move forward.

Learn more at MakeTheConnection.net and join the conversation on social media.
With the number of American Veterans growing nationwide, it is more important than ever for the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide our heroes with a variety of tools and resources to meet their health care needs.

My HealtheVet is one of those tools that enable Veterans to better understand and take control of their health and, at Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, more Veterans are taking advantage of this online resource.

As of March 1, SLVHCS had more than 32,000 registered Veterans on the My HealtheVet website according to Ronald Grissett, My HealtheVet coordinator. The number of registered Veterans equates to more than 83 percent of those SLVHCS serves. Grissett says the Veterans who use the website really enjoy the benefits of it.

“They love it,” he said. “They don’t have to come in and wait or call and be put on hold.”

Some of the features of My HealtheVet Veterans are using most include ordering prescription refills, setting up wellness reminders, monitoring their personal health record and communicating with their health care team via secure messaging. Secure messaging is a popular feature that Veterans can opt into and directly ask non-emergency questions of their health care providers anytime.

“They get a response in less than three business days,” said Grissett. “It empowers patients a great deal because any patient who signs up for My HealtheVet is a person who is interested in their health. They’re proactive with their medications, they can read their (health) record and they can communicate with their providers,” Dr. Jamie Buth, associate chief of staff for clinics, said. “And it really takes us into a new way of delivering health care.”

Buth said the secure messaging feature provides Veterans with a safe and efficient medium to get health information from their doctors without having to make an appointment.
or calling the office. In addition, since it is a secure communication system, Veterans can be assured that any information will remain between themselves’ and their health care providers.

One of the main features, the option to order refill prescriptions online and have them delivered to their home, helps a lot of Veterans.

“Once ordered Veterans can view the status of the refill and track its delivery at any time,” said Grissett. “All refills ordered online are delivered by the VA’s Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy within five to 10 business days.”

Another popular option of My Healthevet is the ability to view and download medical records, including test results, vital health statistics such as blood pressure and blood sugar, status of medications and military health history.

With this level of access, VA health care providers have increased accountability to maintain accurate patient information and the opportunity to correct any errors in the Veteran’s patient record, Buth explained. “(My Healthevet) democratizes health care to a large degree,” she said.

To ensure health care providers remain responsive to Veterans using the My Healthevet messaging, VA monitors messages that take longer than three days to be answered, Grissett said. “This year, less than three percent of messages were responded to in more than three business days.”

SLVHCS has seen significant growth in the number of Veterans who use My Healthevet, including more than 4,000 women Veterans. In fact, SLVHCS has the most My Healthevet users in Veterans Integrated Service Network 16, compared to medical facilities of the same sizes.

To keep up with the increasing My Healthevet users and their needs, coordinators like Grissett are working to develop new features for this expanding resource. One of the forthcoming features will be the inclusion of information on Veteran benefits. “(My Healthevet) can really enhance their experience with us here at the VA,” Grissett said.

Red, White and Blue

I love my country
Cause I’m red, white and blue
Don’t talk bad about her
See, I served her for you

Americans are the true chosen people
Look around at what we have
You can speak your mind without worry
Just remember to care

Don’t take her for granted
The world is filled with envy
Cause just thinking about us
Puts them in a frenzy

You go to bed safe at night
And don’t even wonder why
Cause you know you’ll wake up
To a beautiful blue sky

Any may you never forget
The sacrifice some have made
To ensure you have that liberty
Red, white and blue are such a beautiful shade

Veteran Robert Oster, Jr.
May 2015
The Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System’s program dedicated to Veterans who served during Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn now has more than 10,800 enrollees.

The number of enrollees has grown significantly said Eleanor Chapital, OEF/OIF/OND program manager.

“We knew that we would have an influx of Veterans into the program, we just didn’t know how many,” Chapital said.

According to her data, 86 percent of the enrolled Veterans are male and 14 percent are female, which has remained a steady ratio for the past several years. With the expanding and diverse population, Chapital and her team provide case management services and a variety of resources to meet the specific needs of OEF/OIF/OND Veterans including employment assistance, housing, benefit entitlement aid as well as help with issues dealing with traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual assault, substance abuse and homelessness.

“That’s a big heartbreaker for me, individuals who return and report that they are homeless,” she said.

The OEF/OIF/OND program is a collaborative effort among all of the SLVHCS services to ensure Veterans receive the excellent care and support they deserve. With the significant percentage of women Veterans in the program, Chapital’s staff focuses on helping connect them to the services and providers for their unique health needs.

In some ways this program was developed as a response to issues with previous war era Veterans, Chapital said.

“Unfortunately, there were lessons learned from the Vietnam War era Veterans,” she said. “They weren’t treated well and often didn’t get the benefits they were entitled to. But we are getting it right this time.”

Chapital believes that helping the Veterans transition from the military back into civilian life is her way of honoring Veterans who made many sacrifices to give this nation its freedom. As a result of her team’s work, they continue to get positive feedback from Veterans on how the program has benefitted their lives.

“We have Veterans who have said ‘Thank you, I was about to give up and if I didn’t come here I don’t know what would have happened to me,’” she said. “They are very glad we’re here.”

When Veterans express problems and issues to the program staff, the information gets put into the Patient Advocate Tracking System then it is resolved by the OEF/OIF/OND team.

“We work with the other SLVHCS services to make improvements in care and refer Veterans to the services they need,” Chapital explained.

For more information about the OEF/OIF/OND program, please contact the team at 1-800-935-8387 ext. 8490.

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**Enrollment as of March 31, 2015**

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Veteran Glenn Green of Westwego, Louisiana makes a donation for the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System’s Veteran coffee program to Cynthia White, SLVHCS Voluntary Service assistant, May 28 in the SLVHCS pharmacy. The Veteran coffee program provides free coffee to Veterans when visiting the medical center.
Quick Facts about your Veterans Choice Card

What is the Veterans Choice Program?
On August 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146). This Act gives Veterans the option to receive non-VA health care rather than waiting for a VA appointment more than 30 days or traveling more than 40 miles to a VA facility.

How do I know if I am eligible for an appointment under the Choice Program?
If you have an appointment with Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System that is scheduled more than 30 days from when it was clinically indicated, your name has been added to the Veteran Choice List (VCL), meaning you may choose to request an appointment in the community. Please wait at least three business days before calling the third party administrator (TPA) to be sure they have received your information.

OR
If your current residence is more than 40 miles of driving distance from any VA medical facility, including community based outpatient clinics located in Hammond, St. John Parish, Houma, Baton Rouge, Bogalusa, Franklin, Slidell and New Orleans, then you may be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program.

If you choose an appointment in the community, you may be asking...
If the non-VA provider writes a prescription, how do I get it filled?
To have a prescription filled by the non-VA pharmacy of your choice, you need an episode of care authorization from the TPA. The pharmacy can fill a 14 day supply. To have a prescription filled by the VA pharmacy, you still need an episode of care authorization form and you must be enrolled at SLVHCS. If you are not enrolled, Patient Services can assist you.

How can I claim travel for my appointment?
Please bring in documentation from your non-VA appointment (an official note/documentation from the doctor's office) to the Travel Office at 1601 Perdido St, New Orleans, or mail it to P.O. Box 61011, New Orleans, LA 70161. The travel staff will print out a voucher for you to sign. Once signed, the travel voucher will be processed and you will receive payment via direct deposit to your bank account. You can call the Travel Office at 504-412-3713 for more information.

Should I cancel my appointment with SLVHCS?
No, you should not cancel your VA appointment. That process will be taken care of by VA.

What happens to my medical records for my Choice Program appointment?
You don't need to do anything. Your records for the authorized care will be automatically transferred into your SLVHCS medical records if you are enrolled. If you are not enrolled at SLVHCS, please contact Patient Services for assistance.

If you prefer to wait and receive your care through SLVHCS at the appointment VA scheduled for you, you don't need to do anything more. The Choice Program does not impact your existing VA health care or any other VA benefit.

Even if you are eligible, you must still be authorized for care. The TPA will help you determine your eligibility, authorize your care, and make your appointment. Call the TPA at (504) 558-1427 or toll free at 1-866-606-8198 to get started.

When you call the TPA, please have your Veteran Choice Card and current medical insurance ready. For more information about your Veterans Choice Card, visit http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.