Story by Kimberly Gearhart

Have you ever filled out a Comment Card after a visit? If you haven’t? Why not?

Patient feedback is critical to any health care organization, and Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) is no exception. Comment Cards are one way to solicit and track that feedback.

Cards are available at each clinic, and can be turned in anonymously or the patient may request a response. Patient Advocates at each location compile the comment cards, and the data is forwarded to the Customer Service Coordinator, Brian Carnes.

Comment Cards like this are available in all SLVHCS clinics.

New technology may help reduce intake wait times

Story and photo by Kimberly Gearhart

There’s a COW in the 10G clinic in New Orleans these days.

“I call her ‘Elsie,’ and she just moos all over,” said Janice Cobb, licensed practical nurse.

The COW is a Computer on Wheels, and Cobb is helping test the device for possible widespread use in Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) clinics. The program was born from recommendations made during a patient flow systems redesign project.

The new computer cart system allows intake nurses a more mobile method of patient processing. The computer comes equipped with a smaller, hand-held tablet and a camera.

For Joanna Caprera, clinic charge nurse, the “changeup” is happening just in time to capitalize on some patient-area renovations as well.

Many of the exam rooms in 9 and 10G were equipped with private bathrooms. Those facilities are not necessary in the clinic setting, and the pilot program also includes a remodeling of the old bathroom space as a waiting area.

“Patients don’t have to go back and forth between the waiting room, intake processing and the exam room now,” Cobb said. Instead, patients can wait in a more private area co-located with the exam and intake stations.

“Or, if something happens, we can go to the exam and get the intake started wherever we can find a cubicule open,” Caprera added.

If the test phase goes well, you may see more COWs popping up around SLVHCS.

Bonne Santé?

Tell us about your experience!!!!

1. Clinic visited: _______________________

Date visited: _______________________

2. Using any number from 0 to 10, where 0 is the worst healthcare possible and 10 is the best healthcare possible, what number would you use to rate all your VA healthcare in the last 12 months?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. How long after the time when your appointment was scheduled to begin did you wait to be seen?

   _No Wait  _1 to 10 minutes  _11 to 20 minutes

   _21 to 30 minutes  _31 to 60 minutes  _More than 1 hour

Comment Cards give patients voice in SLVHCS

Additional comments are appreciated.

SLVHCS is helping test the device for possible widespread application. If the test phase goes well, you may see more COWs popping up around SLVHCS.

“Customer concerns are discussed at the highest level each week. The Director is really emphasizing improving customer service for our Veterans,” he said.

Improving service, however, requires some help from the patients. By filling out Comment Cards, you can help shape those improvements in the future.

Additionally, Comment Cards can be used to tell the Director about exceptional service received.

“Compliments are always welcome,” Carnes noted.

Carnes encourages patients to fill out a comment card for every visit to ensure that system improvements are in line with patient needs.

New two community clinics open in SLVHCS

Story by Pete Scovill

Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System (SLVHCS) is expanding patient services to better serve Veterans in outlying communities by opening two new clinics in Franklin and Bogalusa.

“Since the early days following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, SLVHCS has pursued an innovative and model approach to bringing healthcare back to Southeast Louisiana,” said SLVHCS Director Julie Catellier.

“It is our privilege to provide health care to our military men and women who have defended and protected our nation.”

SLVHCS will open its doors to Veterans in Franklin and the surrounding area Jan. 25 and in Bogalusa Feb. 1.

With the opening of these two clinics, VA will have opened eight full service healthcare clinics in outlying areas to better serve Veterans nearer to their homes.

“The great thing about opening these clinics in Franklin and Bogalusa is that this will bring more than 90% of our Veteran patients to within 30 minutes of their primary care team,” said Dr. Jamie Bath, Associate Chief of Staff for Clinics.

Bringing care closer to the Veterans who need it is one of SLVHCS’ most important goals. If these clinics are located closer to your home, you may begin using them for your primary care as soon as they open.

The Franklin clinic will be located at 603 Halfway Street. Bogalusa’s new clinic can be found at 319 Memphis Street.

Appointments for either clinic can be made by calling 1-800-310-5001 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Doctors in all VA community clinics have instant access to your VA medical records and are able to offer exceptional care; using them is just one of your many VA health benefits.

Director’s Note

You hold in your hands the first edition the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System’s (SLVHCS) patient newsletter.

We here at SLVHCS are dedicated to offering you the best medical care and keeping you informed about goings-on in the health care system.

I hope you find this newsletter to be helpful and informative, and feel free to make suggestions about the kind of information you would like to see in its pages. Comment Cards are an excellent way to let us know, or you can contact Public Relations at the e-mail address listed below.

Questions, comments or suggestions about Bonne Santé? E-mail VHAONLYPublicRelations@va.gov.
VA 2010 benefits and programs

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) wants to inform Veterans and other beneficiaries of changes that will take effect in 2010:

VA Freezes Prescription Copayments

Any increase in Veterans out-of-pocket payments for pharmaceuticals will be delayed until June 30, 2010. This means the department will delay a scheduled $1 increase — to $9 — in the copayments facing Veterans for each 30-day supply of medicine for the treatment of conditions not related to military service.

During this period, VA will also keep $960 as the maximum, annual out-of-pocket payments for pharmaceuticals for non-service-related conditions. The $960 cap will not apply to Veterans in priority groups seven and eight. The yearly maximum out-of-pocket payment was scheduled to increase to $1,080. There are no copayments associated with the treatment of conditions related to military service.

VA will Distribute Insurance Dividends

Approximately 900,000 Veterans are in line to share $286.4 million in annual insurance dividends during 2010. VA operates one of the nation’s largest life insurance programs, providing more than $1 Trillion in coverage to seven million servicemembers, Veterans, and family members. These payments will be made to insurance policy holders on the anniversary date of their policies. Payments will be sent automatically through different payment plans and the amounts will vary based on the age of the Veteran, the type of insurance, and the length of time the policy has been in place.

Veterans who have questions about their policies may contact VA insurance toll-free number 1-800-669-8477 or send an e-mail to VAinsurance@va.gov. They may also visit www.insurance.va.gov.

No Disability Compensation & Pension Benefits COLA Adjustment

As a result of negative inflation and the consumer price index going down over the past year the Social Security Administration has announced there will be no COLA this year for Social Security recipients. Under federal law VA’s COLAs cannot exceed the Social Security COLAs. Therefore, VA is barred from making a COLA increase for recipients of its benefits.

VA provides compensation and pension benefits to over 3.8 million Veterans and other beneficiaries. Presently, the basic monthly rate of compensation paid to Veterans ranges from $123 to $2,673. Annual income limits for disability pension begin at $11,830 for a Veteran without dependents and increase for Veterans who have dependents. VA will Distribute Insurance Dividends

Approximately 900,000 Veterans are in line to share $286.4 million in annual insurance dividends during 2010. VA operates one of the nation’s largest life insurance programs, providing more than $1 Trillion in coverage to seven million servicemembers, Veterans, and family members. These payments will be made to insurance policy holders on the anniversary date of their policies. Payments will be sent automatically through different payment plans and the amounts will vary based on the age of the Veteran, the type of insurance, and the length of time the policy has been in place.

Veterans who have questions about their policies may contact VA insurance toll-free number 1-800-669-8477 or send an e-mail to VAinsurance@va.gov. They may also visit www.insurance.va.gov.

Pre-travel health planning helps keep vacations relaxing

Whether you plan to travel to the tropics or hit the slopes at a snowy resort, don’t forget to plan for your health! While every destination is different, these tips can help you plan for a safe and healthy trip.

Learn about your destination

Visit the CDC travel health website at www.cdc.gov/travel to learn of any health risks or travel warnings in effect in the country you’re planning to visit. It is also important to understand the laws and culture of the places you will be visiting. You can learn about countries by using many different resources such as websites, guidebooks, and other media.

Pack Smart

If you’re traveling abroad, it is important to bring copies of your passport and travel documents. Place a copy of your passport and travel documents in each piece of luggage, in case you lose the original documents. Don’t forget to leave a copy with a friend or relative at home.

Create a travel health kit (see inset). If you are traveling with prescription medications, bring a copy of your prescription. Pack a note on letterhead stationery from the prescribing physician if you are bringing controlled substances and injectable medications.

Plan ahead for illness or injury

Check your health insurance plan to see if they will cover your health needs abroad. Think about purchasing additional health insurance for your trip if your health insurance does not cover you while you are traveling. Pay attention to your health during your trip, and see your doctor if you are injured or feel ill. Know the location of the nearest VA facility. All medical centers in the VA have access to your electronic records and medical history.

Travel Health Kit

- Prescribed medicine
- Overthecounter medicine
  - Anti diarrheal medication
  - Antihistamine
  - Decongestant
  - Antimotion sickness medication
  - Medicine for pain or fever
  - Mild laxative
  - Cough suppressant/expectorant
  - Cough drops
  - Antacid
  - Antifungal and antibacterial ointments or creams
  - 1% hydrocortisone cream

- First aid supplies
  - First aid quick reference card
  - Basic firstaid items (bandages, antiseptic, tweezers, scissors,cottontipped applicators)
  - Moleskin for blisters
  - Aloe gel for sunburns
  - Digital thermometer
  - Oral dehydration solution
  - Sunscreen (SPF 15 or above)
  - Insect repellent
  - Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
  - Health insurance card