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Medical Center Director

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The start of a new year brings thoughts of new beginnings and resolutions for an improved way of doing business. I am honored to be welcoming in 2015 having been recently named the new Director of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. It is my personal mission this year to further open the lines of communication between the hospital, its community based clinics, and you, our Veteran patients and stakeholders, as we strive to offer the best care and services anywhere for our Veterans.

To that end, we have established this monthly report, which will be distributed directly to those we serve, and on our website www.charleston.va.gov, as a way to share with you our successes and our struggles. It is our hope that this new publication will keep you better informed of the happenings at your VA.

Access to Care

While this has been a challenging year for VA nationally, it has also been a year of improvements for the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and our Veterans. We have consistently provided timely access to care by planning ahead for patient growth. Thanks to expanded clinic hours, adding 180 new positions in the past year, tele-medicine and many other strategies, our average new patient wait times for primary care, specialty care and mental health – 16 days, 19 days, and 9 days respectively, according to the most recent data release – are among the best in the nation and continue to improve.

Late last year, in compliance with the Veterans Choice Act and to increase access, Choice Cards were mailed to Veterans. About 800 of our 63,000 patients reside more than 40 miles from the nearest VA facility. I am pleased to report that only 44 of those 800 Veterans have chosen to seek care in the community as opposed to receiving their health care with us.

Accuracy of Scheduling

In addition to ensuring timely access to care, accuracy of information remains of the utmost importance to us. A recent letter from VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson confirmed that, in a recent review, the Charleston VAMC was found to have no issues related to scheduling of Veteran appointments and does not require further evaluation. However, we are committed to remaining vigilant when it comes to our scheduling practices, ensuring Veterans are able to see a provider as soon as possible when the need arises.

Quality Health Care

This year, the medical center has continued its solid track record of quality care, ranking in the 90th percentile of all public and private sector hospitals according to the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) measures. HEDIS is a tool used by

more than 90 percent of America's health plans and provides the information health care consumers need to reliably compare the performance of health care plans across the country.

Additionally, Charleston VAMC recently achieved a 5-star rating under VA's Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) evaluation system. This is a source of great pride as it places us in the top 10 percent of all VA hospitals in the nation. SAIL assesses 25 quality measures in such areas as complications, patient safety, access, and customer satisfaction.

Growth and Expansion

The Charleston VAMC is growing at a record-breaking rate with 2014 being our largest growth year ever. We are currently the 6th fastest growing facility in the nation for percent increase in unique patients.

To meet the needs of our expanding patient population, we opened a brand new clinic in Hinesville, Georgia to serve 7,200 Veterans in that area. We also have plans to break ground this year on a larger clinic in the Savannah area, and have been approved to open a larger consolidated clinic in Myrtle Beach and a clinical annex in North Charleston. At our main facility, construction will begin soon on our greatly anticipated parking deck. Veteran patients and staff will benefit from the addition of 600 spaces at our offsite parking lot with free shuttle service to and from the facility, which is anticipated to begin in March.

We at the Ralph H. Johnson VA believe these upgrades and accomplishments prove our Veterans can depend on us for the best care at the right time and we are very proud of that fact. We also know that we can always do better. We endeavor to make 2015 a year of continued growth and ever-improved quality and access for our Veterans.



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Happy New Year from the Charleston VA Medical Center.

We have some exciting advancements
and achievements to share with you.
Open to learn more.

