

FOCUS

VA

RALPH H. JOHNSON MEDICAL CENTER

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Fall 2012

Getting Her Life Back

Female Veteran battles homelessness and breast cancer

Technology Improvements
VOCERA Badge improves communication, patient care

Stand Down 2012
With your help homeless Veterans find services, support they need

director's letter



The fall season brings with it so many wonderful things ... cooler temperatures, football, and opportunities to gather with friends and family as the holiday season begins. At the VA fall also brings special ways to reach out and remember our heroes. Our Stand Down Against Homelessness held each October provides a hand up for hundreds of Veterans and others in need in our community, and the annual Veterans Day Parade honors all who have served in uniform.

This is also the season we celebrate Breast Cancer Awareness Month. This October breast cancer survivors and families who have been affected by this disease will commemorate their journey, remember the ones whose fight has ended, and press on to help find a cure. Our "to your health" section features Navy Veteran Theresa Meadows who is currently battling this disease and homelessness simultaneously. Her

story is sure to inform and inspire. Our men need to pay attention too, because breast cancer can happen to males and females alike. Please make sure you contact your provider right away if you notice any changes in your breast health.

At the VA, we are on the MOVE! with our Biggest Loser Challenge. Veterans are learning to live healthier, lose weight, and enjoy a little friendly competition at the same time. We're also moving into new options for hands-free communication that are helping improve coordination amongst our nursing staff to better serve our patients. And we just opened our newest VA-DoD partnership project – a mobile MRI located at Beaufort Naval Hospital.

It really is an exciting time to be part of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. We are making a lot of improvements – many of them inspired by your feedback – to better serve you. But the one thing that will always remain constant at your VA is the highest level of quality care delivered by a dedicated team that is truly honored to care for our nation's heroes.

Thanking you for your service,

Carolyn L. Adams, Director



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Innovation

Success

Vocera Badge allows for more efficient patient care

By Jenny Stripling, Public Affairs Specialist

The days of nurses sprinting to a phone or medical staff routing a call through a call center are over thanks to the implementation of Vocera.

Rather than medical personnel leaving a patient's room to take a call, they can immediately be connected to staff using the new wireless communication system.

The Vocera Communication Badge, also referred to as Genie, has significantly improved the quality of work for staff at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center.

Vocera has enhanced more than just staff efficiencies. Since the system was introduced in June, it has streamlined communications, increased productivity and improved patient care. Nurses, for example, are able to ask questions related to a patient's care and get an immediate answer rather than having to wait until a doctor is out of surgery or another nurse is finished with a patient.

According to Kearston Silver, Administrative Officer, Nursing and Patient Services, the hospital discovered that by integrating VOCERA into the nurse's daily work they were able to streamline and enhance their daily communication.

"This is an innovative way that nurses are meeting the needs of the Veterans," said Silver. "Using this device we are not only addressing the response time we give to patients, but are supporting our staff, making sure they have the resources they need in a timely fashion."

The badge is considered part of a nurse's daily operations—from the time they arrive to when their shift ends.

"The Vocera Badge has been well-

received by staff," said Silver. "We have found the device to be a great contributor in making our work more efficient."

The Vocera Badge transforms the way nurses are communicating throughout the VAMC by enabling them to instantly connect with the right person simply by saying the name, function or group name of the person they want to reach, often while remaining at the patient's bedside. The badge is enabled to be hands-free and voice-controlled when using throughout a wireless networked building.

The highly durable design of the Vocera Badge is built to withstand the rigors of the workplace and consistently performs in

demanding hospital environments. With four microphones and Acoustic Noise Reduction (ANR) the device is made to be used in a noisy environment by eliminating background noise.

"I have had staff members from other areas of the hospital come up to me and say, 'tell me more about the badge' or 'I would like to have that in radiology or mental health,'" said Silver. "What we are trying to do is make sure our experience is positive. As simple as the badge looks, there's a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to make sure the device works well."

Charleston VAMC is the first VA Hospital in VISN 7 to integrate the Vocera



Nurses at the VAMC are able to make calls with the Vocera Badge even while tending to patient's bedside.



Badge into their day-to-day work cycle.

Heidi Bennett, a registered nurse and the clinical lead for the Vocera Badge at the VAMC, has been the “hands and feet” of the project, according to Silver. Her information technology skills from her previous career have allowed her to troubleshoot and help out with the Vocera Badge whenever needed.

“There are certain people, what we call super users, identified on all units,” said Bennett. “They are able to lend help with the Vocera Badge if a question or concern should arise. I’m there to lend additional support for users should they need it.”

Looking Forward with VOCERA

Integration of the Vocera Badge is a two phase process. Phase one, the deployment phase, included group discussion on call flow design and uploading contacts into the device for use, or “making the device smart.”

Phase two, or integration, is currently

in progress and includes the configuration of communication between a patient’s in-room call bell and the Vocera Badge.

“The second phase has been a bit challenging because we are now looking into infrastructure of our call-bell system,” said Silver. “We have to consider our options of either implementing a new call system or trying to make the one we currently have work with the device.”

Silver added that the support of leadership to acquire the badge has been wonderful.

“We couldn’t have done this without the tremendous support and help provided by IT and engineering as well,” Silver said.

Silver believes Vocera will continue to transform the hospital’s functionality in the future.

“This has been a fascinating process,” said Silver. “We are still learning how to take further advantage of the technology. In a year or two we will have an even better story to tell as we evolve with this sort of innovative communication tool.”

Heidi Bennett, registered nurse and clinical lead for the Vocera Badge, makes a call to another nurse using the Vocera Badge.



VA-DoD Mobile MRI OPENS IN BEAUFORT

Beaufort area Veterans and DoD beneficiaries benefit from state-of-the-art imaging



By Tonya C. Lobbestael, Public Affairs Officer and Regena Kowitz, Public Affairs Officer, Naval Hospital Beaufort.
Photos by Regina Kowitz

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and Naval Hospital Beaufort opened a state-of-the-art GE Signa HD Excite 1.5 Tesla Magnet mobile MRI to provide diagnostic imaging for Veterans and DoD beneficiaries in the Beaufort area Sept. 25.

The MRI, which is a \$2.3 million Joint Incentive Fund project, brings this diagnostic capability to Naval Hospital Beaufort and the VA clinic located there for the first time. The joint venture project is the result of an ongoing partnership between VA and Navy in the Lowcountry that has brought several health care improvements to VA and DoD patients.

The partnership, known as the Lowcountry Federal Healthcare Alliance (LFHA), has established a joint medical clinic, a joint Optometry clinic, a mobile MRI located at the Goose Creek clinic, and several shared medical services such as radiology and orthopedics. Established in 2006, LFHA is comprised of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, Naval Hospital Beaufort, Naval Health Clinic Charleston and 628th Medical Group, Joint Base Charleston, U.S. Air Force.

The addition of this equipment means active duty, DoD beneficiary and Veteran patients will receive state-of-the-art

imaging at the same location where they receive their primary care. The unit will be co-operated and co-managed by VA and Naval Hospital Beaufort staff to provide imaging studies for Veterans, active duty service members, and DoD beneficiaries.

“As the commanding officer of Naval Hospital Beaufort, it is my job to ensure that not only do we provide our patients with the very best care possible, but also that I am a prudent manager of the hospital and DoD resources that have been entrusted to me,” said Naval Hospital Beaufort Commanding Officer Capt. Joan Queen. “The mobile MRI project allows me to easily do both.”

“The addition of the mobile MRI at Naval Hospital Beaufort will help us ensure that our service members and Veterans are receiving the highest level of diagnostic imaging as quickly as possible in their own community,” said Ralph H. Johnson VAMC Director Carolyn L. Adams.

“We are fortunate to enjoy such a strong partnership between VA and DoD in this area,” Adams added. “Each command is fully committed to working together to provide better services and access for all of our patients, and projects like this MRI are a real benefit for our Service Members and Veterans alike.”



For 25 years National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM) has been at the forefront of promoting awareness of breast cancer issues.

NBCAM recognizes that although many great strides have been made in breast cancer awareness and treatment, there remains much to be accomplished.

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is dedicated to educating and empowering women and men to take charge of their own breast health. In the pages that follow you meet Navy Veteran Theresa Meadows who came to the VA to deal with her homelessness and found she has breast cancer. You will also learn more about breast cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment options.

While October is designated as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we encourage each of you to do self-exams every month and contact your provider right away if you notice any changes.

Homeless Veteran

battles breast cancer



“ I never thought in a million years I would be 50 years old, homeless, and battling breast cancer. ”

Story and photos by Vicki Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist

Navy Veteran Theresa Meadows was a successful dental assistant for 27 years before losing her job a year ago because of alcohol problems. Her fiancé had passed away the year before, and she turned to alcohol to help deal with her overwhelming grief. She had always been a social drinker, but after her first husband's death in 2004, the drinking escalated, and continued to increase over the years. The death of her fiancé was her tipping point. She never drank at work, but drank every night and eventually lost her job because of absences.

She knew she was on a downward spiral and tried to control the drinking on her own. After several unsuccessful attempts to quit, she knew she had hit bottom. Following what Meadows refers to as her “last binge”, she ended up at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center Emergency Department in February.

“My blood pressure was really high, I had the shakes, and my pancreas was inflamed. I knew I needed help ... I was in bad shape. I stayed in the hospital for four days,” said Meadows.

After being released from the hospital, she enrolled in the Substance Abuse and Treatment Center here at the VA. As part of the enrollment process, she was required to have a complete physical to assess her current health. It was through those screenings that the breast cancer was found. She hadn't had a mammogram in 5 years.

“I didn't have money for a mammogram; I had money for alcohol, but not for my health care. That was my mindset at that time,” said Meadows.

Meadows was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a double mastectomy and reconstruction June 4. Ninety-five percent of her breasts were removed. She

is waiting for test results to see if chemotherapy will be necessary.

“If I could share one piece of advice, it would be to get regular checkups, make sure you are getting your mammogram. You don't really realize how important that is until it's too late,” said Meadows. “If I hadn't come here for my other problems, I might not have been diagnosed in time. It's very, very important to make your health care a priority. I realize that now.”

“Theresa is a great example of the care that the VA is able to provide to our patients,” said Kathryn A. Bottonari, PhD, SATC Psychologist and Meadows caseworker. She has been able to utilize resources from many different areas, including the Substance Abuse and Treatment Center, and the Homeless Program. Theresa's multidisciplinary team, including her primary care doctor, Dr. Gregory Perron, Healthcare for Homeless Veterans case worker, Amy Sellers, LISW-CP, and Lynn McCall, her Primary Care Program Social Worker, have worked together to change her life, both physically and emotionally. Theresa is very motivated and wants to get better. Right now, her biggest challenge is that her mind is ready to go, but her body is still recovering.”

She is incredibly grateful for the support she has received from her health care team here at the VA. Meadows said that ending up in the ED at the VA was really a blessing in disguise.

“People may look at my situation and think it's hopeless. But the people here have given me hope. They believe in me. I always thought VA was paint peeling off the walls and bad smells, but this hospital is wonderful. The people here have all been so kind to me,” she said. “No one has looked down on me; everyone has gone out of their way to help. Their goal is for me to get better.”



Kathryn Bottonari, PhD, and Theresa Meadows discuss her care plan during a weekly counseling session.

Meadows is currently living at Crisis Ministries, a local shelter that participates in the Charleston VAMC homeless transitional housing program.

“It’s a wonderful place that provides a safe, clean environment for me to live until I can get back on my feet. If I wasn’t there I would probably be on the street or sleeping in my car,” she said. “They work really hard there to help you get your dignity and self-respect back.”

She says her biggest struggle is keeping her chin up, staying positive, and not allowing herself to feel defeated.

“The two biggest problems I’ve ever had to face were both thrown at me at the same time....breast cancer and homelessness...that’s a lot to deal with,” she said. “But everyone at the VA has been so supportive and encouraging. There is no way I could ever thank them enough for what they have done for me. They are helping me get my life back.”

Bottonari is very optimistic about Meadows’ future.

“Theresa doesn’t fit the demographic of the traditional homeless Veteran,” said Bottonari. “After she recovers from her surgery, she should be able to transition smoothly. Her background in dental assisting is very marketable and will hopefully make it easier for her to find a job and return to a normal life.”

Ask Meadows what she sees in her future and her face lights up.

“I want to get better. There are so many things I want to do. I want to get a job in the dental field again, I want my own place to live, maybe get a puppy, and spend a lot of time fishing. But most of all, I want to find a way to help others in situations like mine....I want to give back. I want people to know there is hope and there are people who want to help.”

Help is only a phone call away

VA has established a 24-hour Veterans Crisis Line where you can get understanding, compassion, and help from trained mental health professionals. Reach out and call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or send a text message to 838255 for help. You can call for yourself or someone you care about. Your call is free and confidential.

Homeless Program

VA offers comprehensive services to move Veterans out of homelessness. Services include referrals for medical and mental health care, housing and case management. For eligibility criteria please report to the Mental Health Walk-In Clinic Monday-Friday 9-11a.m. in Room A359.



VA Offers

screenings & complete care
FOR BREAST HEALTH

Each year the month of October is designated as Breast Cancer Awareness month and, although being diagnosed with breast cancer can be scary and the journey to wellness might be tough, being aware and informed about breast cancer's signs and symptoms can prove to be beneficial.

By Jenny Stripling, Public Affairs Specialist

Women in the United States get breast cancer more than any other type and it is estimated that every two minutes, there is a new breast cancer diagnosis.

“If we can get the word out to our female Veterans that they have the availability for mammography as part of their health care, we are more capable of catching breast cancer early,” said Dr. Ann Hanlon, Director of Women’s Health, Charleston VAMC.

According to Hanlon, many women Veterans are not aware that they can come to the VAMC and get their mammograms.

“We offer comprehensive women’s health care at VAMC,” said Hanlon. “A female Veteran can come see us for their pap smears, mammograms, blood pressure monitoring and just about anything they might need.”

Hanlon said that they screen all women Veterans aged 40 to 65 yearly at the VAMC. If there is a higher risk factor for someone, they will push that age down to 35.

The risk of breast cancer increases with age, meaning women who are 60 or 70 have a greater risk of developing the disease than someone who is 40.

Mammograms are commonly used to screen for breast cancer in women with no signs or symptoms and to diagnose it when an abnormality has been found. A mammogram study examines the breast using low energy X-rays.

While many studies have demonstrated that screening was associated with early detection and fewer breast cancer deaths, some groups argue that overuse of mammography for breast cancer screening has caused errors in diagnosis and over treatment.

Recently, the Preventive Services Task Force recommended beginning screening at age 50 and getting mammograms every two years instead of every year. The recommendation is that women in their 40s should decide with their doctors when to start screening based on individual risk factors and preferences.

According to Hanlon, it is important for women to discuss with their physicians the risks and benefits associated with screening. The decision should be based in large part on patient preferences, risk factors, age and overall health.

“We are very aggressive in our preventative measures,” said Hanlon. “There has been a lot of debate recently on having mammograms yearly or every other year, but at the VA we still adhere to our aggressive screening of every year.”

Generally women are encouraged to do a breast self-exam. Breast cancer can be painless and have no symptoms, but more often than not, women may first notice an irregularity during their breast self-exams.

Hanlon said a self-exam should be done every month after a menstrual cycle when breasts are less tender and less swollen.

Look for any changes in breast tissue, such as changes in size, a lump, dimpling or puckering of the breast or a discharge from the nipple. If you discover a persistent lump in your breast or any changes in breast tissue, it is very important that you see a physician immediately. However, eight out of 10 lumps are benign, or not cancerous.

“I think overall we’re seeing more cases of breast cancer just because we’re screening more,” said Hanlon. “We are so fortunate because we screen 98 percent of women between 40 and 65 in the Charleston network. We do everything possible to find abnormalities.”

Hanlon said that because mammography is part of the comprehensive health plan for women here at the VAMC, it’s easier to get women screened.

In the event breast cancer is found, treatment options may include surgery, biopsy and sometimes the patient will need to go through chemotherapy, radiation or hormone therapy.

“We want our Veterans to know that this is a new VA,” said Hanlon. “We are offering more comprehensive exams and care in 2012 than ever before.”

BREAST CANCER SNAPSHOT

Every 2 minutes, there is a new breast cancer diagnosis.

Every 14 minutes, a life is lost to the disease.

Over 40,000 people will die this year; about 400 of them will be men.

85% of all diagnoses have no family history.

1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the leading cause of death in women between ages 40 and 55.



By Tonya C. Lobbetael, Public Affairs Officer

Breast cancer is most often thought of as a women's disease. But the reality is men can develop breast cancer too.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, men account for one percent of all breast cancers in the United States. It is most often diagnosed in men between the ages of 60 and 70 years old, and is often found at a later stage making survivability rates lower amongst men.

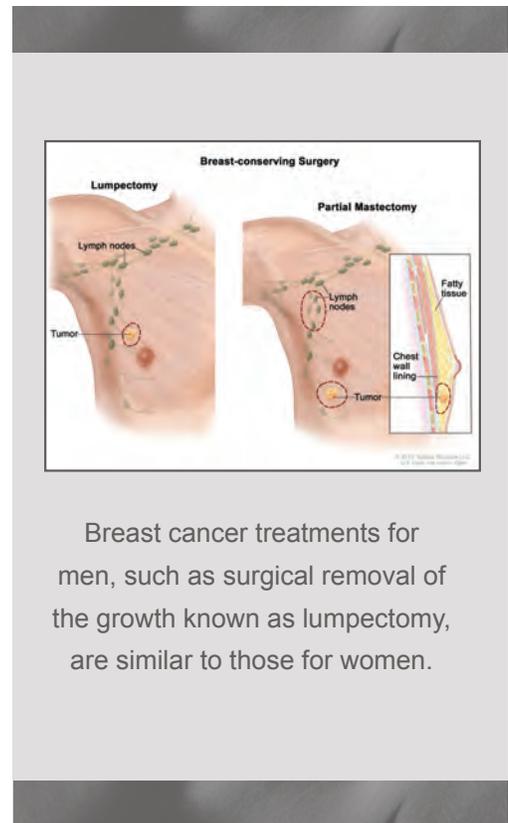
CDC estimates there will be 2,190 men diagnosed with breast cancer in the U.S. in 2012. The agency expects 410 of them to die.

There are particular risk factors for breast cancer in men. They are:

- Exposure to radiation;
- Having a disease such as cirrhosis or Klinefelter syndrome which is related to high levels of estrogen in the body;
- Having several female relatives who have had breast cancer, especially relatives who have a BRCA2 gene alteration.
- Hereditary breast cancer makes up approximately five to 10 percent of all breast cancers. Men who have an altered gene related to breast cancer have an increased risk of developing the disease.

Men with breast cancer usually have lumps that can be felt. Diagnosis may include a physical exam, ultrasound, MRI, blood chemistry studies or a biopsy. It is commonly treated by various combinations of surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy.

The chances of recovery and treatment options are better if the cancer is found in its early stages. If you notice any changes in your breast, contact your health care provider right away.



Breast cancer treatments for men, such as surgical removal of the growth known as lumpectomy, are similar to those for women.

LET'S MOVE!

National program helps Veterans lose weight, keep it off and improve health

By Jenny Stripling, Public Affairs Specialist

If the idea of living a healthier and more active lifestyle has crossed your mind, now is the time to make that idea a reality.

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center began its Biggest Loser contest September 1 for all Veterans enrolled in MOVE! and there's still time to start losing.

MOVE! is a national weight management program designed by the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP), a part of the Office of Patient Care Services, to help Veterans lose weight, keep it off and improve their health.

The VA serves over six million Veterans and about 77 percent are overweight. Approximately 38 percent are obese. MOVE! is the largest and most comprehensive weight management and physical activity program associated with a medical care system in the United States.

The Biggest Loser contest is in place to encourage participation, improve enrollment and increase retention in MOVE! Last year's contest participants lost over 700 pounds.

"Primary Care teams annually discuss weight management and the MOVE! program with the Veterans at their primary care appointments," said Mary Walker, Clinical Nutrition Manager. "If the Veteran is interested an alert is sent to the MOVE! clinicians at each clinic."

The clinicians are either a dietitian or the MOVE! Coordinator-Nurse Practitioner. The clinician discusses the program with the Veteran, their goals and plans for weight management and sets up an appointment if the Veteran desires to enroll in MOVE!.

A report is produced based on answers from a questionnaire to help identify a Veteran's specific needs for diet and exercise.

After the report is assessed, the team of clinicians will help the participants set initial goals such as how much total weight to lose, how much to lose each week and plans for increasing activity and decreasing calories.

"We have individual MOVE! classes and TeleMOVE," Walker added. "TeleMOVE gives the Veteran the choice to work from home on his weight management goals."

Anyone participating in the MOVE! program from Aug. 1 through Jan. 31 is entered into the Biggest Loser contest.

For those just beginning, their weight is taken during their first class. The total weight loss will be calculated during a four month period of time.

There are prizes given away each month for each clinic location. The grand prize for The Biggest Loser is a bike, which is awarded to the overall weight loss winner from all clinics combined after four months.

"We will use percentage of weight loss and not pounds so that everyone participating is on an even playing field," said Walker.



To sign up for the Biggest Loser contest talk to your dietitian or Becci Luhrs at 843-789-6676. You must come to MOVE! individual appointments, MOVE! classes or TeleMOVE to participate. For more information on the MOVE! program visit online at www.move.med.va.gov/Default.asp

Your support helps Veterans at
STAND DOWN
Against Homelessness



Volunteers cook and serve breakfast and lunch at Stand Down, feeding more than 2,000 people over the two-day event. Donations totaling over \$7,000 are needed each year to provide the food.



This year more than 200 volunteers from the community participated in setting up and tearing down the event, plus registration for our homeless population, distribution of items and food service.

By Laura Lythgoe, Public Affairs Specialist

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and Goodwill Industries sponsored Stand Down Against Homelessness 2012 at Armory Park in North Charleston Oct. 18 and 19 providing medical screenings, job training, housing assistance and other services to homeless and persons in need in our community. The annual event is made possible through the support of the local community's generous contributions of time, funding, food, clothing and hygiene items.

Last year more than 200 volunteers from all over the community came together to set up and tear down the event, register clients, serve lunch, distribute clothing vouchers, give flu shots, perform dental screenings, and help with many other tasks to make sure guests had what they needed.

Veteran Service Organizations conducted drives to collect hygiene items for Stand Down. Individuals and community groups donated used clothing for the event through Goodwill. The State Department collected reading glasses. The Naval Consolidated Brig cut grass at the event site and manned the event. And many others gave monetary donations to support Stand Down.

Each year the Knights of Columbus, Elks, Department of Defense commands, and others step forward during Stand Down to help our homeless Veterans. Goodwill provides clothing vouchers for two outfits per Veteran for use in stores across the Lowcountry. VA medical staff members give basic health exams, flu shots, dental screenings and foot care both days of Stand Down. Local barbers and beauticians also donate their time giving haircuts.

Stand Down provides breakfast and lunch each day to over 1,000 people in need. This is the most costly portion of the event. That price tag is more than \$7,000. The event relies solely on donated funds to provide the food and other items needed. Another \$4,000 is needed to rent tables, chairs and tents to accommodate our homeless population.

Learn more at
www.charleston.va.gov/standdown

Events like Stand Down Against Homelessness are successful because of people like you.

You Can still support Stand Down 2012 and help us plan for 2013. Donate today!

Mail your check to: VA Voluntary Service (0135)
Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center
109 Bee St. • Charleston, SC 29401
put "Stand Down 3349" in the memo

The Mobile Vet Center provides Veterans exposure to a wide variety of programs, as well as, counseling services.



MOBILE VET CENTER

Always There for You

Ever wonder how VA reaches out to Veterans in rural areas?

By Laura Lythgoe, Public Affairs Specialist

The Mobile Vet Center (MVC) makes it easy. It's an outreach tool on wheels, designed to travel South Carolina in search of Veterans, service members, National Guardsmen and Reservists who need to learn about their VA benefits.

The MVC partners with Department of Employment and Workforce centers across the Lowcountry, County Veterans Affairs offices and representatives from the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center to inform Veterans of a wide variety of programs and provide counseling services.

Veterans Advocate for the Ralph H. Johnson VAMC Paula Hanson said we still have many Veterans throughout the state who remain unaware of the benefits available to them.

"That's why the Mobile Vet Center has been so successful. This program has enabled the Veterans to receive a variety of information and to become enrolled in the VA health care system," Hanson said.

The MVC is equipped with a room enabling Veterans to speak privately with counselors about their

military experiences. Veterans can receive counseling for a number of issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Military Sexual Trauma, bereavement counseling, and marriage and family counseling via the MVC. Suicide prevention referrals are available and post-deployment health reassessments can also be conducted for returning combat service members.

"Going to the Veteran rather than having them travel long distances to enroll in health care or obtain resource and service information is cost effective for our Veterans and enhances our ability to reach more people who may not have the means, time or transportation to come to Charleston or our CBOC locations," said Women Veterans Program Manager Patricia Hancox.

For more information about the Mobile Vet Center and future events, contact Transitional Patient Advocate Patrick O'Leary at 843-789-6648.



Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center
109 Bee Street
Charleston, SC 29401

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IMPORTANT VA PHONE NUMBERS

Charleston VA Medical Center

843-577-5011 or toll free 1-888-878-6884 or TTY: 843-789-6888

Telephone Advice Line

843-789-6400 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884

Veterans who need medical advice from their Primary Care provider or have questions about their medications can call the TAP line Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Scheduling an Appointment

843-789-6500 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884

Veterans who need to schedule, cancel or reschedule an appointment for all Primary Care Clinics including Myrtle Beach, Savannah, Beaufort, Trident and Goose Creek can call Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Automated Prescription Refill Line

843-577-5011 or toll free at 1-888-878-6884

Veterans who need to request a refill of a prescription or check the status of refills can call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Have your social security number and prescription numbers ready when calling.

VA Benefits (other than health care)

1-800-827-1000

Veterans who need information on VA benefits including VA pension and compensation, home loans, and education can call the VA Regional Office.

Billing Questions

1-866-258-2772

Veterans who have questions about a bill received from the Charleston VA Medical Center can call the VA Revenue Center.

Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-TALK (8255) Press 1 for Veterans

Veterans can call the Veterans Crisis Line to talk to trained professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week or visit www.veteranscrisisline.com.

My HealtheVet

www.myhealth.va.gov

Veterans can manage their health by logging onto My HealtheVet, which offers access to Veteran health benefits and services.

For more information on VA related topics visit www.charleston.va.gov. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

