

FOCUS

RALPH H. JOHNSON MEDICAL CENTER

VA

www.charleston.va.gov

SUMMER 2011

H. Johnson
Medical Center



Waist Loss

*Meet the first bariatric patient
and learn if you can benefit too*

Veterans' Caregivers
*Program offers benefits
and education to those
who care for 9-11 Veterans*

SOARing Results
*Check out how well your VA
services are doing*

director's letter

We are very excited to introduce a new program for our Veterans – **bariatric surgery**. Our very own, Dr. Chitharanjan Pullatrana is spearheading this event for not only the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center network but for the three-state region of Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina. We hope to bring a much improved quality of life and help decrease diabetes and obesity to our Veterans.

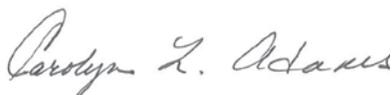
In addition, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs just announced new benefits for **Family Caregivers**. In the United States, there are more than 54 million adults who provide unpaid care to an adult family member or friend and a quarter of those reports having a difficult time coordinating care with health care professionals. I want to personally assure you that we are committed to our Veterans and their caregivers. Read more about how the Charleston VAMC will assist you through this process.

Also in this edition, walk in the shoes of **Carl Nowakowski** -- a wheel-chaired Veteran who is crossing items off his bucket list. He recently skied mountains in Colorado, rode horses in South Carolina and registered to wheel his way across the finish line in the Wheelchair Games in Pittsburgh.

We've also overhauled our **Around the Lowcountry** section to include information you can use. Our goal is to provide information about new programs and answers to pressing questions. Peruse this section and feel free to email our editor with comments and suggestions.

As always, we are dedicated to the wellbeing of our Veterans and are always looking for opportunities to improve communication. Thank you for your service, and I look forward to seeing you around the medical centers.

Sincerely,



Carolyn L. Adams
Director



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on the cover

The bariatric team at the Charleston VAMC's Center for Bariatric and Minimally Invasive Surgery: Dr. Chitharanjan Pullatrana, surgeon and team lead; Dorothy Lee, nurse practitioner and program coordinator; Kristin Crady, team dietitian.



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Charleston Doctor Directs Science of VA *Study on Women Vietnam Veterans*



Little is known about the long-term health and mental health status of women Vietnam Era Veterans. For many of these women, the effects of this war are still present in their daily lives. As they approach their mid-sixties, it is important to understand the impact of wartime deployment on health and mental health outcomes nearly 40 years later.

Dr. Kathleen Magruder, a health scientist researcher at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, is the principal investigator for this study dubbed “Long-Term Health Outcomes of Women Veteran’s Service During the Vietnam Era” otherwise known as HealthViEWS. Specifically, she is in charge of directing the science for the VA’s coordinating center at Perry Point.

Magruder was asked to develop this project because she is a co-investigator on a similar study to examine outcomes in Vietnam Era men. For comparability, it was logical for the trained psychiatric epidemiologist who received her PhD from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill to lead this study.

This study will seek to contact approximately 10,000 women to participate in a mail survey, a telephone interview and a medical records review. The study aims to determine the prevalence of lifetime and current psychiatric conditions including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among women who served during the Vietnam Era, their physical health and their level of current disability.

Magruder, who is originally from Siler City, N.C., has been with the Charleston VAMC for 12 years. She recently won a Fulbright Scholarship to study the effects of PTSD on Iraqi Kurds at the Medical University in Ankara, Turkey.

This research study will also provide important information about Vietnam Women’s Veterans health care needs now. Currently this study is in its beginning phases and estimated to be completed in September 2012. If you are interested in participating or are interested in more detailed information on the study, please see the study website at: <http://www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT00958061?order=1>

If you have any questions, please call the Perry Point Coordinating Center at 1-800-949-1003 x6122 or x5291.



Vietnam Women’s Memorial, Washington, DC copyright 1993, Vietnam Women’s Memorial Foundation, Inc. Glenna Goodacre, Sculptor.

SOARS Results:

Outstanding Visit!



By Jennifer Lovett

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center met all expectations during the System-wide Ongoing Assessment and Review Strategy visit held here in mid-May.

Among the strong practices pointed out by the team were the Operating Room's non-biological implantable device early release form, patient identification bands in the individual blood bank, the Watchful Eyes patient companion program and the Trident instant messaging system between clinicians.

Of particular note was an interactive video game developed by the facility for staff education, as well as meeting a 14-day notification to patients of their lab results. The Reusable Medical Equipment unit received notable praise from the team.

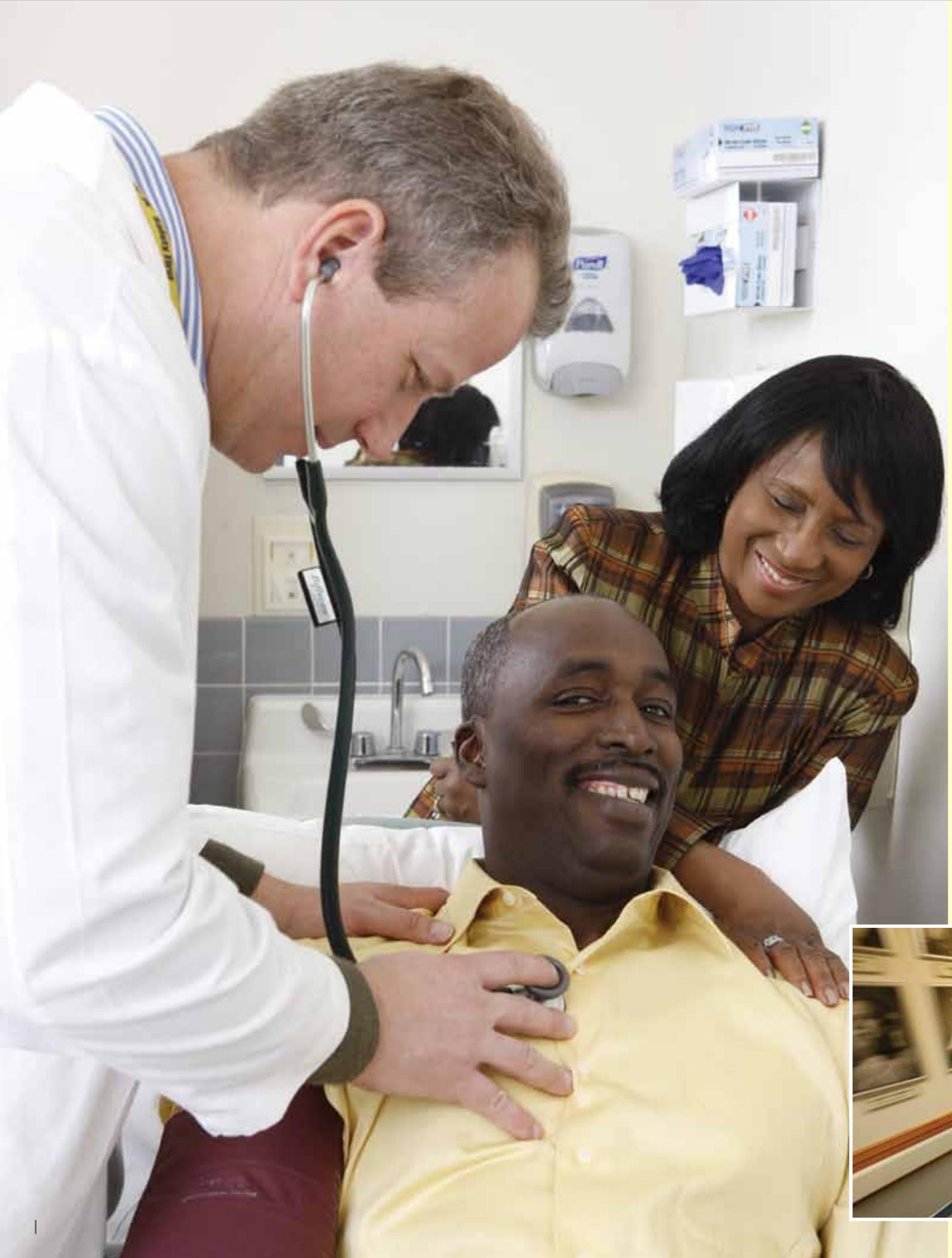
"There was a big focus on RME and they did a great job!" said Kathleen Coniglio, team member from VA central office.

Charleston VAMC had resolved all findings from all previous surveys prior to this SOARS visit, which was an astounding achievement, according to the team. Most findings by the team during this visit were fixed on site, and the team congratulated the facility for how responsive the facility employees are.

"I am so impressed with the tremendous work and consistency within Charleston," said Robin Hindsman, VISN-7 Quality Management Officer. "They have managed to spread that consistency and uniform of practice across the facility, and their access turnaround has vastly improved. Charleston is just phenomenal."

The very few areas for improvement that the team pointed out were suggestions to assist the hospital in any upcoming Joint Commission inspections. As a result, this inspection was considered a rousing success.

"I'd like to thank everyone for helping make this a successful review. This does not happen without the employees," said Ms. Carolyn Adams, Charleston VAMC director. "I'm so proud of what we do here every day and how dedicated our staff is to taking care of Veterans."



New Family Caregiver Benefits

The Department of Veterans Affairs now provides additional support to eligible post-9/11 Veterans to designate a primary family caregiver and secondary family caregivers if needed. Eligible primary family caregivers can receive a stipend, training, mental health services and access to health insurance if they are not already under a health care plan. The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center began processing applications May 9 for eligible post-9/11 Veterans and Servicemembers to designate a Primary Family Caregiver.

“We know that in some cases getting out of bed every day can be a challenge for some of our Veterans. Here at Charleston, we are committed to providing the kind of support each of our Veterans need,” said Carolyn Adams, Charleston VAMC director. “I encourage any Veteran who feels they have eligible family members to submit their applications as soon as possible.”

In the first week for open applications, the Department of Veterans Affairs has assisted more than 625 Veterans, service members and their family caregivers

in applying for new services under the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act 2010. In addition, the VA assisted nearly 1,200 other caregivers in finding more than two dozen other caregiver benefits VA provides.

“Applications can be processed by telephone through the Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274 or in person at the Charleston VAMC in room CC129 between 8 am and 4 pm,” said Linda Boyd, Charleston VAMC Caregiver Support Coordinator. Applications can also be submitted by mail or online at www.caregiver.va.gov with the new Caregiver Application, VA Form 1010-CG.

Caregivers for Veterans of all eras are eligible for education and training on what it means to be a caregiver, how to best meet the Veteran’s care needs, and the importance of self-care when in a caregiving role, and respite care.



VA
Caregiver Support



Are you a Caregiver?



If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you are a caregiver.

Do you feel responsible for providing support to a loved one?

Do you help out a loved one around the home, with cooking or cleaning, even if only on an occasional basis?

Do you take your loved one to run errands and/or escort them to medical appointments?

Would your loved one call you in an emergency and expect your prompt assistance?

Do you provide support or assistance to a loved one living in long-term care, assisted living, or a residential facility?

VA programs for Veterans and their Family Caregivers

 **In-Home and Community Based Care:** skilled home health care, homemaker home health aide services, community adult day health care and Home Based Primary Care.

 **Caregiver education and training programs:** pre-discharge care instruction and specialized caregiver programs

 **Caregiver support groups and other services:** family counseling, spiritual and pastoral care, family leisure and recreational activities and temporary lodging in Fisher Houses.

 **Other services:** durable medical equipment and prosthetic and sensory aides to improve function, financial assistance with home modification to improve access and mobility, and transportation assistance for some Veterans to and from medical appointments.

Take Charge

of your Health!

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
Puts the Wheel in Your Hands

By Kevin Abel

The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention program supports caregivers with resources and training that help motivate and educate Veterans on how to live healthier lifestyles while becoming better at managing their own health.

“It’s about getting a Veteran to understand their barriers,” said Donna Pittman, HPDP Program Manager. “My focus of the program is working with the primary care staff and the Patient Alliance Care Team to offer resources to them.”

Behaviors such as poor food choices, unhealthy weight and lack of physical activity lead to health problems.

The HPDP program reduces unhealthy daily living, which will lead to significant health benefits and decreases in chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and cancer. “[HPDP] allows them to see that unhealthy choices will lead to medical problems and diseases in the future,” said Pittman.

The foundation of the HPDP program is to provide assistance for Veterans to focus on living a healthier life.

The HPDP program is part of a national VA veteran-centered care initiative. The VA’s focus is to partner with veterans to empower them to live a happier healthier life.

Veterans are asked to partner with their VA healthcare team to learn about ways to make healthier choices for life.

Facility Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (HPDP) Program



Meet your

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program Coordinator



photo by Chris Baroody

“ I am always looking for ways to improve the care of our patients.”

As a young girl, Donna L. Pittman was no stranger to the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. She started making visits to the VA with her father, a World War II Navy Veteran, for his appointments.

Back then, VA Medical Centers did not have a very good reputation among some Veterans. Pittman's father like other Veterans had his complaints. When she asked why he kept going back, he would reply that he got to sit around and talk to some of the guys, and the doctors weren't that bad.

Following her father's death at the VA Medical Center in 2002, Pittman saw changes among the staff which changed her thoughts about care within the VA Hospital.

“The nurses were some of the best that I have encountered,” said Pittman, who has a master's degree in nursing and decided to move from the private industry to the VA in 2008 where she was initially hired as a clinical nurse specialist. For her first two years, she worked as an advance practice nurse providing evidence-based education to those medicine units.

When the position as HPDP Program Coordinator was announced, Pittman decided to apply. “One of the reasons I wanted to do this is because I am always looking for a challenge, something different,” she said. “I am always looking for ways to improve the care of our patients.”

Pittman served eight years in the U.S. Army as an Intelligence Analyst and five years in the U.S. Army Reserve as a Registered Nurse and has been in nursing, patient and community education in some capacity for the past 15 years.





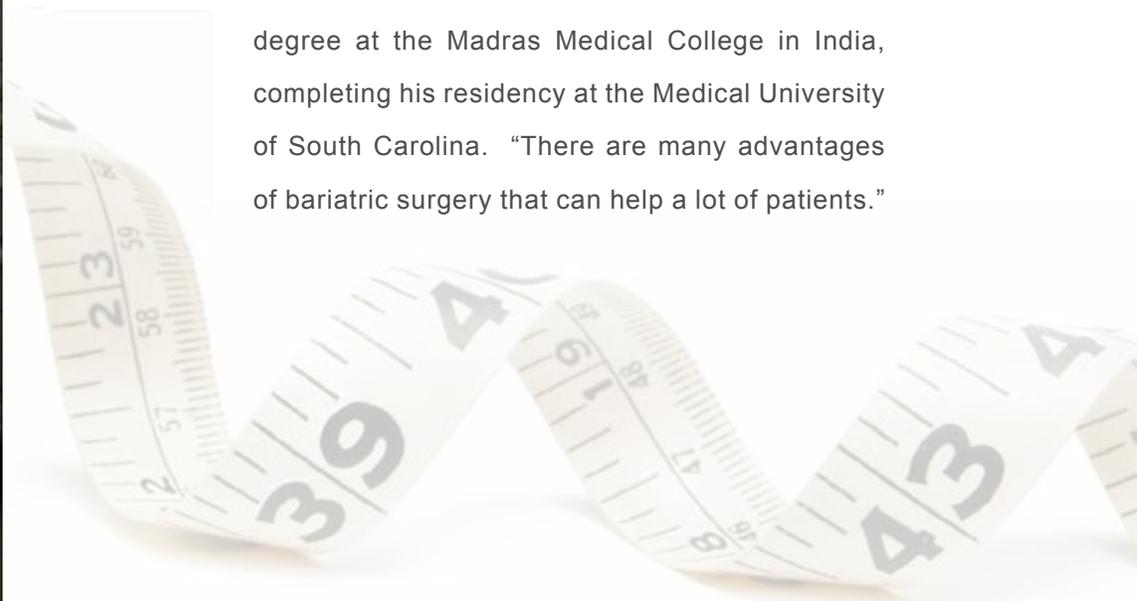
CHARLESTON PERFORMS *First* *Bariatric Surgery* DOC WITH 300 SURGERIES MAKES HISTORY

By Jennifer Lovett, Photos by Kevin Abel

Walking out of the operating room in blue scrubs, the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's premiere bariatric surgeon grins at the crowd.

Dr. Chitharanjan Pullattrana performed Charleston VA Medical Center's first bariatric surgery in the Center for Bariatric and Minimally Invasive Surgery recently.

"I am excited that we are doing bariatric surgery at the Charleston VAMC," said Dr. Pullatt, who is the head of the Center and earned his medical degree at the Madras Medical College in India, completing his residency at the Medical University of South Carolina. "There are many advantages of bariatric surgery that can help a lot of patients."



Bariatric, or weight loss surgery, helps the VA's obese patient population with more than just weight loss. By assisting Veterans in losing weight, it also improves their chronic medical conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

In a region with the country's highest rates of diabetes, obesity and high cholesterol, Charleston's Bariatric Center opens at an opportune time. It will serve as the regional referral center for the three-state VA Southeast Network of Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina. There are 14,000 Veterans who have the potential to benefit from this new service.



BENEFITS

Bariatric surgery is performed on the stomach and intestine of people who are obese. In long-term studies, these surgical procedures caused a significant long-term loss of weight. Due to the weight loss, it can also cause recovery from diabetes, improvement in cardiovascular risk factors, and a reduction in mortality of 23 to 40 percent.

“Veterans experience shorter incisions, a much lower pain level, shorter recovery time, and better healing with this minimally invasive surgery,” said Dr. Pullatt. “However, the surgery itself will not lower weight and cure diabetes or heart disease. It is not a quick fix. Patients must play an interactive role. Diet and exercise are a vital part of the program.”

Studies have shown that anywhere from 10 to 15% of bariatric patients will gain weight after surgery, because they do not maintain a proper diet and an active lifestyle.

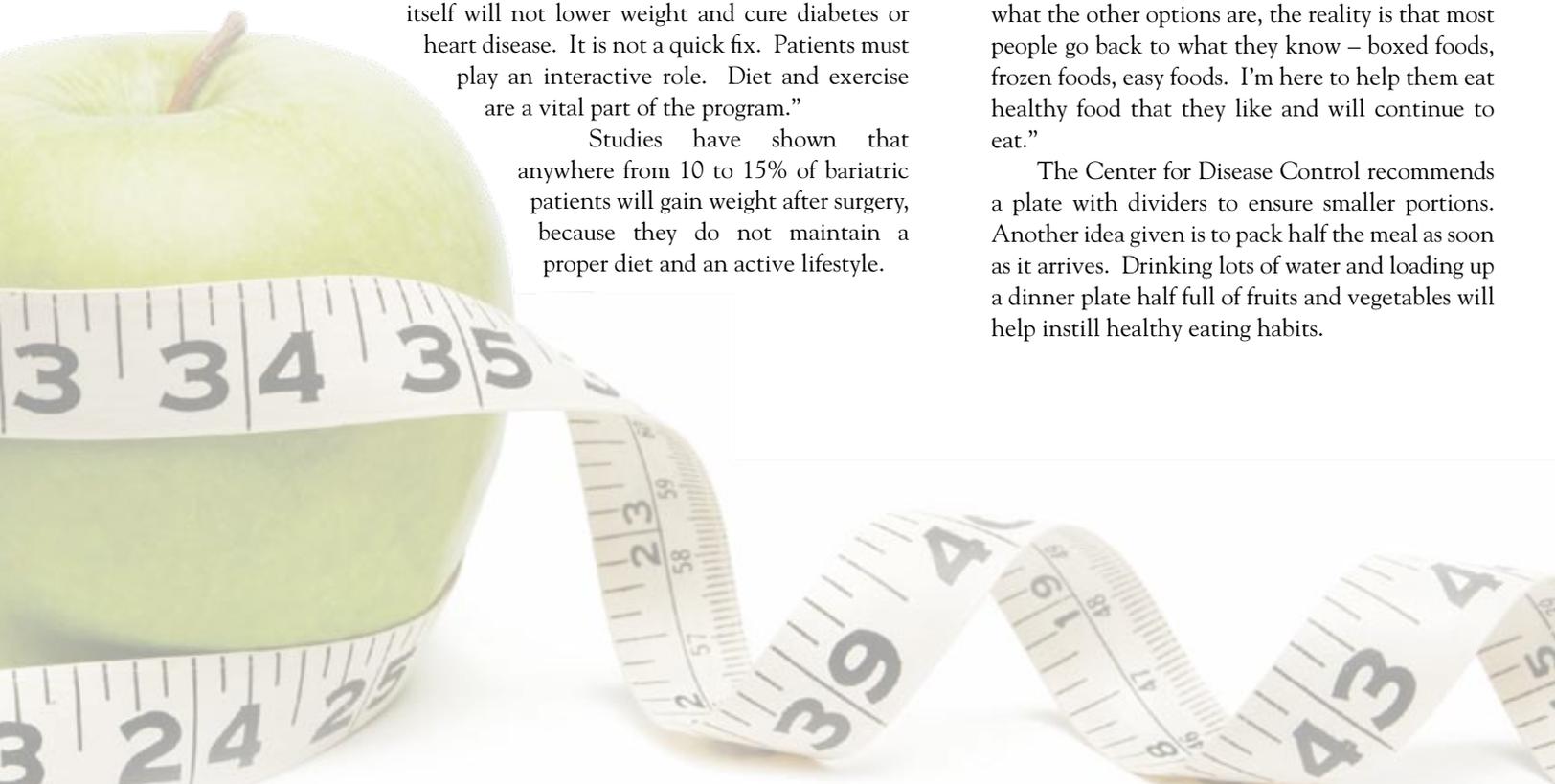
NUTRITION

The dietitian on the bariatric surgery team is Kristin Crady, who has a master's degree in clinical nutrition from the University of Kentucky. She accompanied Charleston VAMC's first bariatric patient, William McCracken, to the grocery store, to explain how to shop for healthy foods.

“To say ‘eat healthy’ is easy but to actually do it is something else,” Crady said. “Everyone knows that eating fruits and vegetables are good for you but eating salad every day gets boring.”

“There are plenty of options for eating healthy but if you've never been shown or taught what the other options are, the reality is that most people go back to what they know – boxed foods, frozen foods, easy foods. I'm here to help them eat healthy food that they like and will continue to eat.”

The Center for Disease Control recommends a plate with dividers to ensure smaller portions. Another idea given is to pack half the meal as soon as it arrives. Drinking lots of water and loading up a dinner plate half full of fruits and vegetables will help instill healthy eating habits.





COORDINATION

In addition to advocating diet and exercise, the surgery team screens every potential patient before they are authorized the surgery.

Dottie Lee is the team surgery coordinator who meets with each potential patient to perform a comprehensive screening.

“Each patient must undergo the screening process and join the MOVE! program for at least six months. MOVE! is designed to help Veterans lose weight in a healthy way,” said Lee, a nurse practitioner who earned a Master’s in Nursing, Critical Care from the Medical University of South Carolina. “The patient must also lose at least five percent of their current body weight.”

Patients are also screened for certain diseases that would disqualify a patient.

“If a Veteran is interested in the program, the best thing for him or her to do is discuss bariatric surgery options with the Primary Care Provider,” she said.

Because the VA utilizes bariatric surgery

as a method of mitigating health diseases, in order for a patient to be minimally qualified for bariatric surgery, the patient must have a body mass index of more than 35 and a serious weight-related health problem such as diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure. Unhealthy weight levels tend to trigger these types of diseases.

The team recommends that any overweight or obese Veteran who is interested in bariatric surgery know their blood pressure ratings and cholesterol levels. Any blood pressure that is consistently higher than 120/80 mmHg and any cholesterol rating above 200 should be monitored by a physician.

The bariatric center is ready, willing and available. If you or someone you know might be a candidate for this type of weight-loss surgery, please talk with your Primary Care Provider.

Heather Friesen contributed to this article

BY THE NUMBERS:

64% of Americans are obese

If you have a Body Mass Index between 25 -29.9, you are considered obese; a BMI over 30 is morbidly obese.

14,000 Veterans in Ga., S.C., and Ala., are morbidly obese

26M Americans have diabetes, most reside in the Deep South

More than 29% in the Deep South report no physical activity in their leisure time.

1 in 5 Americans have high blood pressure and don't know they have it

If you haven't had your blood pressure checked in a while, and you are obese, you may have this “silent killer”.

High blood pressure often has no warning signs or symptoms.

21.5% of Americans have never had their cholesterol checked

Too much cholesterol can accumulate and build up in your arteries and sit there as plaque.

When plaque blocks an artery, a heart attack can occur.

500,000 Americans die of obesity-related diseases per year

Healthy diet and exercising at least 150 minutes a week can help reduce obesity.

Data accumulated from the Centers for Disease Control

“The best thing is for any interested Veteran to discuss options with the Primary Care Provider.”

Charleston's first BARIATRIC PATIENT



photo by Kevin Abel

By Jennifer Lovett

William McCracken is the first bariatric patient at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. He is 5'4 and weighs just over 220 pounds. In the realm of obesity, he is not that big. However, his body mass index is 38, which is considered morbidly obese. He has diabetes, high blood pressure and sleep apnea. Even though he lost 90 pounds, he kept putting it back on.

It was not until he joined the MOVE program that he was able to lose 5 percent of his body weight as well as 30 pounds and keep it off.

"I walk around Colonial Lake four days a week. It took me 11 months, but I [lost the weight]," said McCracken, a Vietnam Veteran who served four years in the U.S Marine Corps. "I think the MOVE program is one of the best things to happen at the VA."

His goals with the bariatric surgery are to lower his blood pressure and blood sugar as well as try to curb his sleep apnea.

"I'm having the surgery for my health. I've learned a lot from [the bariatric surgery team]," he said. "They showed me what to eat, which wasn't too hard because I was already on a diet."

Losing that weight was a requirement to be considered a candidate for the bariatric surgery program.

Since the surgery, McCracken continues to walk the lake four days a week and says he feels better than he has in years. He now weighs 27 pounds less than before the surgery and is losing weight every day.

"My knees don't hurt, my back doesn't hurt. I'm sleeping better," he said. "I am sticking to my diet and I feel great."



The Department of Veterans Affairs Presents

NATIONAL VETERAN SMALL BUSINESS Conference and Expo

Building Partnerships - Veterans, Businesses, and Government

SAVE THE DATE

August 15 - 18, 2011

**Ernest N. Morial Convention Center
New Orleans, Louisiana**

The largest nationwide conference of its kind, with 4,000 attendees expected this year, the National Veteran Small Business Conference provides Veteran-Owned and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (VOSBs and SDVOSBs) an opportunity to learn, network and market their businesses.

This year's event is composed of three venues:

- **Small Business Conference** – Attendees will participate in training sessions on a variety of topics including managing small business finances, compliance, business development, marketing and selling to the Federal Government, navigating the Federal acquisition process, developing successful business strategies, contract management, human resources, technology, and program management.
- **Exhibit Hall** – Leaders from Federal agencies, VOSBs, SDVOSBs, and large businesses will network with each other in a 500+ booth exhibit hall and through one-on-one matchmaking sessions.
- **VA Open House** – Veterans from both the conference and local community will join us to learn and experience the wide range of resources available to the Veteran community.

To register and for more information, please visit
www.nationalveteransconference.com

Horses & Snow

WHEELCHAIR VETERAN KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES

By Laura Lythgoe

There are many Veterans at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center who consistently strive to get more out of their lives. Richard “Carl” Nowakowski is no exception.

“Any time I can get out of this chair, I do,” Nowakowski said, who sits in a motorized wheelchair due to multiple sclerosis.

Nowakowski was diagnosed with MS in 2000 but didn’t show any symptoms until 2007. Over the last couple years, his condition has forced him into a wheelchair full time. He is a resident at Patriot’s Harbor, the Charleston VAMC’s Community Living Center.

Nowakowski’s smile brightens the halls of Patriot’s Harbor where he’s known as the “Trouble Maker” and “Rule Breaker.” He’s a spry 41, which sparked the Recreation Therapist, Cindy Ingels, to ask if he wanted to go skiing this last winter.

Ingels is responsible for arranging trips for the residents of Patriot’s Harbor. Some of the activities include bowling, fishing or visiting the park.

“I try to get everyone at Patriot’s Harbor who is able involved in our activities,” Ingels said.

Nowakowski answered Ingels with a resounding, “Yeah, I’ll go!” That led to his participation in the VA’s National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic



in Snowmass Village, Colo., in April. Nowakowski downhill skied and had both a Gondola Ride and Sno-Cat Ride through the mountains. He was able to ski with an assistance device called a Sit-Ski. A guide held onto a tether attached to the Sit-Ski while Nowakowski steered his way down the hill.

“It was really fun and just great to do,” said Nowakowski.

Nowakowski had skied before MS, but the obvious difference was sitting down with a guide this time.

In addition to skiing, Nowakowski decided to try horseback riding as his next adventure. The Charleston Area Therapeutic Riding on Johns Island is a non-profit organization and participant of Horses for Heroes.

Horses for Heroes was established to help combat Veterans build confidence while learning how to cope with disabilities such as Traumatic Brain Injury, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and physical injuries.

Horseback riding was a brand-new

experience for Nowakowski. Patriot's Harbor's first trip to CATR helped him and the other Veterans become comfortable around the horses. The initial step was to brush the horses and take them for walks with the handlers. On the residents' second trip, Nowakowski rode a horse named Woodstock with the help of the staff at the ranch. The expression on his face was that of a kid in a candy store.

"Next time I ride, I'll jump the fence if they can tape my hands to the reigns," Nowakowski said.

In addition to the horseback riding and Winter Games, the very active Nowakowski has registered for the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Pittsburgh, August 1. He signed up for bowling, the powerchair 200 track, powerchair 200 track relay, the motor rally and power soccer. He's most excited about soccer, because he used to play.

Nowakowski encourages any disabled Veteran who can to participate. "These games are fantastic for Veterans who want to be involved," he said. "The camaraderie and enthusiasm reminds us that we aren't alone."

"I take every opportunity to get out of this chair," he said "I think all Veterans should take advantage of these opportunities and do something fun."



Upcoming Special Events

**NATIONAL VETERANS
WHEELCHAIR GAMES**

Aug 1-6, Pittsburgh, Pa.

**NATIONAL VETERANS
TEE TOURNAMENT**

Sept 12-15, Iowa City, Iowa

**NATIONAL VETERANS
SUMMER SPORTS CLINIC**

Sept 18-23, San Diego, Calif.

**NATIONAL VETERANS
CREATIVE ARTS COMPETITION**

October 23, Fayetteville, Ark.

**NATIONAL DISABLED VETERANS
WINTER SPORTS CLINIC**

April 1-6, 2012 Snowmass
Village, Colo.

**NATIONAL VETERANS
GOLDEN AGE GAMES**

2013, St. Louis

For more information, visit www.va.gov and click Media Room for Special Events.



3rd Annual WELCOME HOME

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center hosted its third annual Welcome Home event on the USS Yorktown in May. This job and health fair for Veterans provides opportunity for Veterans to meet and greet potential employers and to learn more about their eligible health benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

More than 260 Veterans participated in the event. There were also an unprecedented 75 vendors from around the Low country offering information about job opportunities and education opportunities.

“We were very happy with the vendor attendance this year,” said Jan Bolger, Welcome Home event program director. “Our goal is to provide an opportunity for our Veterans to pass out their resumes and business cards to folks in the



WELCOME HOME

By Jennifer Lovett, Photography by Chris Baroody

area who we know are hiring. In addition, this is a prime opportunity for Veterans to learn more about the wonderful benefits they are eligible for here at the VA."

A special guest of the Welcome Home event was decorated U.S. Marine and public speaker Clebe McClary. First Lt. McClary was Pfc. Ralph H. Johnson's platoon leader in Vietnam. He lost an eye and an arm in the same fire fight where Pfc Johnson threw himself on a grenade to save his platoon mates - for that selfless act, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

"We are thrilled that Mr. McClary could join us," said Bolger. "Anytime he is here, it just makes the event that much more special."

Veterans from all eras are encouraged to attend this annual event held on the USS Yorktown. The next job fair is expected to have even more local businesses and to be held in May 2012.



2K Walk & Roll

By Jennifer Lovett

More than 200 employees, Veterans and family members walked in a blistering 90-degree heat in the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center 2K Walk and Roll in June as part of a VA-wide effort in support of employee wellness month.

In addition, participants brought donations for homeless Veterans.

“I think it went really well,” said Tammy Gray, Occupational Health Nurse and Wellness Is Now Coordinator, who was committee chair for the 2K Walk and Roll. “A lot of employees just donated instead of walked because it was so hot. But I think everyone had a good time, and the committee who worked with me was fantastic.”

As the walkers began the walk, they were given a visor for sun protection. Upon completion, they were awarded a button and a chance to win a prize pack. Each prize pack included a gym bag, a lunch cooler, a healthy cookbook, a water bottle, a jump rope that records time and calories and a gym towel.

The prize pack winners were Maria Hutsell, from the Consolidated Patient Account Center; Shelly Gray from Bed Central and Tina Fereday from the Amulatory Care Center.

The Veterans Canteen Service provided water, fruit and granola bars to help abate the heat.



3 Tips Get Hurricane Ready

Looking for smart ways to prepare for Hurricane season? Read on.



1

Develop a Family Plan

Know your vulnerabilities to flood, wind and storm surges

Locate a safe room in your home and a safe place in your community

Have an out-of-state, single point of contact for all family members

Post emergency phone numbers

Plan what to do with your pets

Take First Aid and CPR classes

Stay aware of the weather

2

Create a Disaster Supply Kit

1 gallon of water per day per person for at least 3 days

Food for 3 to 7 days – non perishable, infant food, snack food

Can opener

Paper plates and utensils

Blankets, pillows

Clothing

First Aid Kit

Flashlight and batteries

Radio and telephones

Cash and Important Documents

Tools

3

Secure Your Home (aka Batten down the hatches!)

For increased wind resistance, bond shingles with asphalt cement

Secure gabled roofs with braces

Install impact-resistant windows and doors

Make sure doors have at least 3 hinges and a dead bolt

Reinforce garage doors with horizontal and/or vertical bracing

For more information, visit the National Hurricane Center at www.nhc.noaa.gov



Is your plate colorful?

You've heard it a million times – eat your veggies! According to the Department of Agriculture's Food Pyramid, **mix it up**. Try a low-fat salad dressing or dip with celery sticks or broccoli. Add color to your salads by adding in-season vegetables that can be found at the Charleston VAMC **Garden Market every Wednesday**.

Keep a bowl of cut-up vegetables in clear containers in the refrigerator. Make sure to use lots of color to make it more appealing. Toss some of those veggies on a pizza or throw them on the grill for a kabob. Whatever you do, make sure to eat at least 2 cups a day – that's about two small peppers.

Why? Because a diet rich in veggies **may reduce the risk** for type 2 diabetes, stroke, certain cancers, coronary heart disease and bone loss. One small change every day can go a long way because those veggies pack a powerful punch!

More room at the Beach

Veterans in Myrtle Beach have a new facility for Mental Health services – the **Myrtle Beach Department of Veterans Affairs Specialty Care Annex**. The 10,000-square foot leased space opened June 3 just two blocks from Myrtle Beach Primary Care Clinic.

There are eight staff members assigned to the new facility including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and nurse practitioners. The clinicians began seeing Mental Health patients in a VA effort to help alleviate overcrowding at the main facility.

The address is **Market Common Bldg R2A, 2nd Floor 1101 Johnson Ave, Suite 204**, Myrtle Beach, S.C. 29577. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your Primary Care Provider.

Other services such as physical therapy, optometry and audiology are expected to be provided at the facility at a later date.



What is PACT, really?

It is patient-driven care focusing on the person rather than the condition or disease. Veterans and their families and/or caregivers ensure that Veteran's wants, needs and preferences are respected and are at the hub of decision-making. One of the biggest questions we hear is **Do I get to see my Primary Care Manager?** The answer is **Yes**. Not only do you see your PCM, but you are also assigned an entire team. While the primary care provider's relationship with the Veteran patient will remain key, that bond will be strengthened by an integrated team that includes an RN care manager and clinical and administrative staff.

Ok, so what is all this comprehensiveness? The PACT uses education, preventive care services, lifestyle coaching, appropriate consultation, and early detection screenings to deliver whole person oriented care. Comprehensive care addresses all medical, behavioral, psychosocial and fun

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TWEETING YET?

Social media has taken the world by storm. There is even a movie about that Harvard guy who "invented" Facebook. And, the over-50 crowd is roaring right along -- tweeting, Facebooking and LinkingIn. According to Pew Research, there was a **100% increase in Facebook users over the age of 55** in 2010.

Veterans are joining the wave and connecting with other Veterans all over the world they served with long ago or high school buddies they haven't seen in years. It's as simple as having an email account and making sure you have the level of privacy you want. And if you want the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center **buzz fast**, following on Twitter and Facebook is the way to go. You can also join the conversation because that is what social media is all about. **Tell us what you think online** and discuss it with others who follow us. Come on, we can take it!



going virtual

WITH MEDICAL RECORDS



What is VLER?

The Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record Health is a new program that shares select parts of a Veterans' medical record electronically, safely and privately with other approved health care facilities -- members of a secure Internet network known as the Nationwide Health Information Network. The members of the network with Charleston VAMC will be announced once all the processes have been completed.

What is the benefit?

Before VLER Health, when a VA doctor needed medical records from outside the VA, it often took weeks of waiting for the paper records to arrive. VLER Health does the same thing in just seconds. Some of the information, for example medications and allergies, may be critical to patient safety. Because doctors will have more information available, it will improve the quality of care that they provide to our Veterans.

When is it available?

The Charleston VA Medical Clinic is expected to be able to start signing Veterans to VLER in late 2011 or early 2012. Stay tuned for more information as it becomes available. For questions about VLER, call the toll free Health Information line at 1-877-771-VLER (8537)

And the winner is...

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Mr. Martin Brunworth, Biomedical Engineer from the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, accepted the **Outstanding Scientific/Professional Employee Award** at the Federal Executive Association annual awards luncheon in May.

The Greater Charleston FEA is an organization participating in the Federal Executive Board program established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy to support this coordination, because approximately 88 percent of all Federal employees work outside the national capital area. Nominees must have been either full-time civilian employees of the federal government or uniformed military personnel. All must have served 12 months in federal service and at least six months in the Tri-County area to be eligible.

Other notables: **Dr. Ron Acierno**, PTSD Clinic Team Lead, won 1st Runner Up for **Outstanding Managerial/Executive Award**, and **Mr. Wade Wallace**, Myrtle Beach CBOC Administrator, won 2nd Runner Up for the **Outstanding Supervisor Award**.





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

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
COLUMBIA, SC
PERMIT 1204

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 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.

Suicide Prevention

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

Veterans can call the VA Suicide Prevention Lifeline to talk to trained professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week or visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

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

