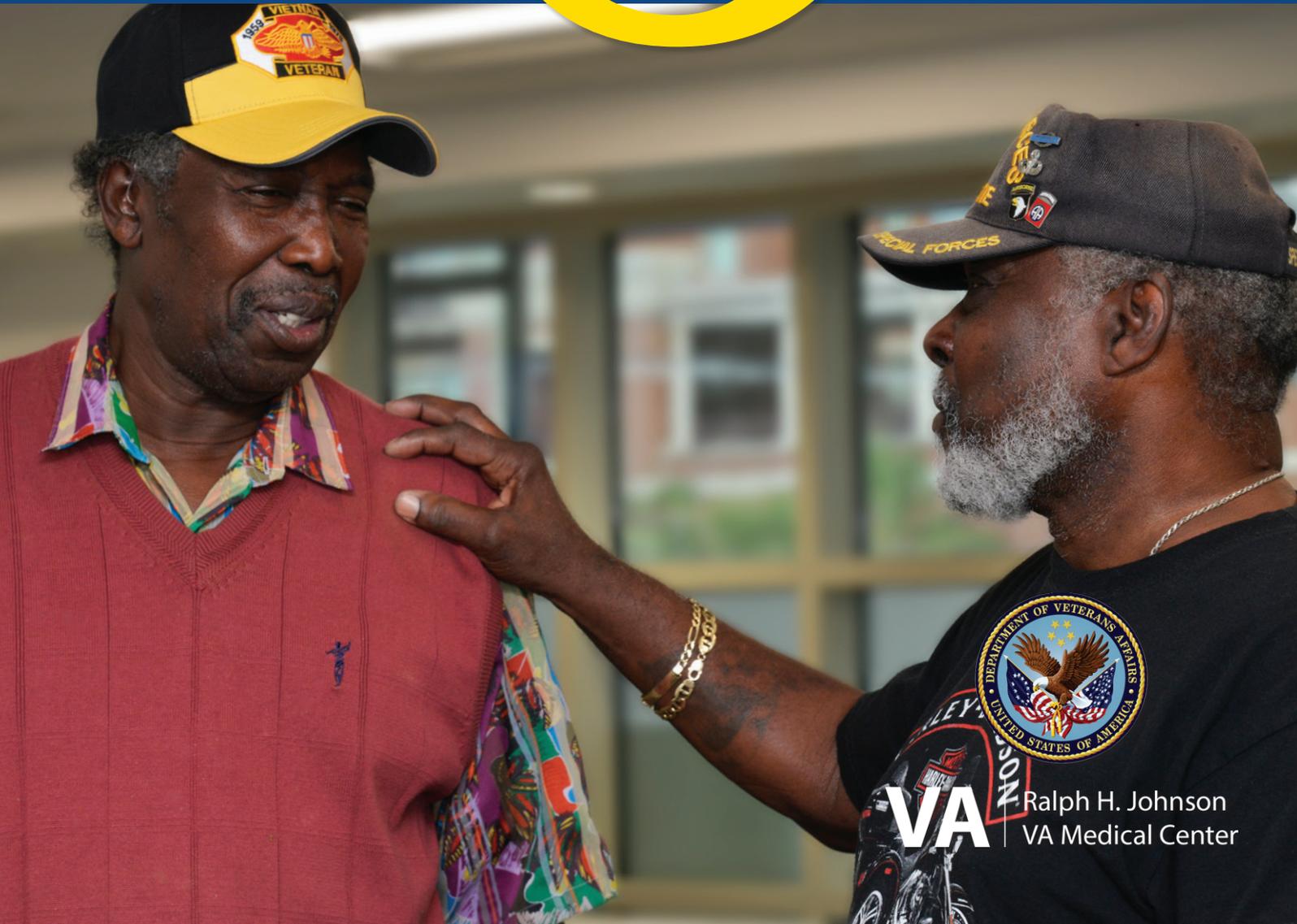




YEARS
OF EXCELLENCE
1966 – 2016



2016 Annual Report



VA | Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center



INTTEGRITY

COMMITMENT

ADVOCACY

RESPECT

EXCELLENCE

At the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, our daily mission is to care for those “who shall have borne the battle” and for their families and survivors. To ensure that we remain focused on this mission and succeed in the goals set before us, the employees at our VA have adopted and internalized our agency’s core values. These values – Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence – shape our everyday actions and strengthen our devotion to every Veteran who walks through our doors – that they may receive the highest quality health care and benefits with due respect and dignity.

my VA
Honors Veterans



VETERANS AFFAIRS
MEDICAL CENTER





executive leadership

A great year at » » » myVA

Over the past few years, the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center set a course of continuous improvement that has led us to become one of the top VA's and one of the top hospitals in both the public and private sectors nationally. Our pursuit of clinical excellence has led us to embrace new technologies, discover new treatment methods, and expand access as we seek to truly become the health care provider of choice for Veterans across the Lowcountry. And while we have made great strides, we are resolved to improve even more the high quality medical care our VA consistently delivers, enhance our customer service, and partner even closer with our community and our Veterans.

Here at your VA we are determined to earn your trust every day by living up to our standard of a leading medical center that assures you of safe, effective, high quality care each time you need us. We are committed to improving access, increasing available appointments by more than 36,700 over the past two years, and opening new facilities like our 56,000 square foot Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic that includes primary care, mental health, and extensive specialty medicine services onsite. We are discovering optimal ways to treat diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and post-traumatic stress, and proving the efficacy and value of the future of medicine through such endeavors as establishing VA's first National Telemental Health Hub to care for Veterans both at home and across the U.S.

We are especially focused on improving the Veteran experience, partnering with our patients – many of whom serve alongside our staff on our Customer

Service Council and other committees – and gaining their insights and feedback because we understand that the best improvements are made when we fully understand Veterans' perspectives. As we continue to engage our customers, community partners and employees, we enhance care delivery and services designed to exceed our patients' expectations while honoring their wishes and extending a heartfelt thank you for their service.

While our goal is to be the best, our reason is really what drives us. That reason is you ... the 70,000 Veterans we are privileged to care for each day. That reason is also the Veterans who need our VA but have yet to come through our doors. So while 2016 was a banner year for our VA, there is more work to be done because there are more Veterans to serve. That is why we are building collaborations through such avenues as our VSO Advisory Boards in each community, broadening our network of services both within our VA and through our community care providers, and utilizing technology to deliver the right care in the right place at the right time.

Simply put, we will continue to be the best VA – the best medical center – for you, our Veterans. Our resolve is steadfast. Our commitment is unwavering. Our ability to excel is tried and true. And we are honored to be your choice ... your VA.

Sincerely,



Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Director

DIRECTOR
Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
Pamela S. Crowell, MPA

CHIEF OF STAFF
Florence Hutchison, M.D.

**ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR
PATIENT/NURSING SERVICE**
Garett Schreier, MSN, RN

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Felissa Koernig, J.D., MBA

50 YEARS

On June 27, 1968, the Charleston Veterans Administration Hospital accepted its first 15 Veteran patients.

15 Patients Enter New VA Hospital

Fifteen patients checked in yesterday as Charleston's massive, new Veterans Administration Hospital opened its doors.

Hospital officials reported no problems during the first day of registration. "Every-

officials when he entered soon after 8 a.m.

He posed for photographs before settling into a bed in the 40-bed general medical ward, the first section of the \$13 million facility to be opened. The hospital has a 400-bed capacity.

Mavraidis was born in Daphne Kalavrita, Greece, in 1894. He came to the United States in April, 1912, and joined the army in 1917.

He served in France during World War I and was wounded in action in August, 1918. As a result of the injury, he suffers a progressive deafness.

The veteran has lived in Charleston for the past 24 (See HOSPITAL, Page 2-A)

Pictures

... See Page 1-B

thing went surprisingly well." James A. Sneed, assistant hospital director, said.

The first patient to sign in received a celebrity's welcome. Peter M. Mavraidis, 72, a native of Greece, was warmly greeted by hospital



EMPTY RECEPTION ROOM

The reception room at the Veterans Administration Hospital was empty late yesterday afternoon after 15 patients checked in. The hospital expects from five to 10 new patients to register every day. Hospital director Robert L. Russell predicts the hospital will reach capacity in about a year.

(Charleston Evening Post, June 27, 1966)



875,114
outpatient visits



11.4%
patient growth
in two years



4,368
inpatient admissions



210 +
new staff positions--
approximately 150 of
which are clinical staff

*Terberth, M.D.
Nephrology*

The right care at the right time » » »

myVA

When Johann Herberth, M.D., Ph.D., chief of primary care, came to the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center three years ago, he set out to improve access to care, enhance work balance for clinical and support teams, and increase patient satisfaction in his clinics. And while this might have been a daunting task for many, it didn't faze the doctor with the laser focus on statistical data to help manage clinic capacity.



Primary care leaders Dr. Johann Herberth and Dr. Simon Scalia review clinic capacity data to determine when the next primary care team is needed to care for Charleston VAMC's growing Veteran patient population.

Knowing the key was in the data, Herberth and his team developed a best practice for predicting demand, projected available appointments, and individual provider capacity so advanced it actually pinpoints to the month when the next primary care team should be hired to meet the needs of our VA's rapidly growing patient population – a growth that has exceeded 11 percent over the past two years.

"First, you look at panel capacity, reviewing historical growth at each clinic and you compare it to current capacity," explained Herberth. "From there you project 100 percent clinic utilization, and when a clinic starts to reach 80 to 85 percent utilization, you know it is time to start recruiting the next primary care team."

Sounds simple. But, as Herberth says, there is no "easy" button.

The best practice model also includes an Appointment Supply Demand Monitor that allows each primary care team to see the number of patients that need to return for appointments

versus available clinic slots up to six months in advance. This assessment of supply and demand can prompt alternate encounters such as telephone visits, secure messaging, shared medical appointments, and home telehealth when appropriate to ensure patients receive the care on time as clinically indicated.

This two prong approach – pinpointing the exact month when the next primary care team will be needed based on patient growth and clinic utilization, and constant monitoring of appointment supply and demand – has set the bar for VA medical centers across the country for expanding access while managing clinic workload.

Overall, our VA has added more than 36,700 appointment slots over the past two years in primary care, mental health and specialty care, providing more than one million encounters annually and more than 875,000 outpatient visits in FY 2016. Thanks

to expanded clinic hours including evening and weekend clinics, the addition of some 210 staff members, and solid strategic planning, we have provided 97 percent of these appointments within 30 days. Our VA has also increased use of telehealth and has established VA's first National Telemental Health Hub, providing care to Veterans across the Lowcountry, the Southeast, and as far away as Maine.

And we've done all this for one reason ... to provide the right care for each Veteran at the right time.



69,858

Veterans served at main hospital & clinics



97%

of appointments completed within 30 days of clinically indicated or Veterans preferred date



my **VA**

» » » » » *knows my name*





When U.S. Air Force Veteran Lester Pittman describes his care at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, he is struck by both the personalized care he receives and his observations of how other Veterans are treated.

“The employees treat all the Veterans with value, dignity and respect despite their age, condition or anything else,” said Pittman.



I can't tell you the number of people that said to me 'thank you for your service.' It makes a difference.
- Lester Pittman, U.S. Air Force Veteran



Charleston VAMC received the same type of feedback from Joint Commission surveyors in March 2016.

This year, the Joint Commission—an independent body that assesses hospitals and health care organizations nationwide—visited Charleston VAMC. This evaluating body visits at least once every three years to assess performance in several areas, including

5-Star Quality Care

Charleston VAMC achieved an overall annual 5-Star rating in FY 2015 and FY 2016 under VA's Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) evaluation system—an accomplishment that places us in the top 10 percent of all VA medical centers in the nation. We also improved our SAIL efficiency score from 39th in FY 2013 to a third most efficient rating in FY 2015 and FY 2016. SAIL is a comprehensive tool that assesses 25 quality measures in such areas as complications, patient safety, access to care and customer satisfaction.

patient care, medication safety, infection control and consumer rights. We are proud that once again Charleston VAMC has maintained full accreditation by the Joint Commission and was recognized by the surveyors for multiple best practices and the high quality of integrated care provided here.

But, the highest compliment paid to our medical center was one that didn't go into any of the scorings or rankings; instead it was one that focused on the heart of what we do—care for Veterans.

The Joint Commission surveyors were impressed that our staff knew patients personally, by their name. They commended our VA for how our team truly cares for the whole Veteran, not just their health care needs. For our staff, it is truly, the Veteran—the person—who is most important. That relationship between our staff and our patients is something we are most proud of.

Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS)

90th percentile ranking across U.S. health plans and facilities in the public and private sector

In February 1990, Charleston VAMC established a four-person clinical team to diagnose and treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Veterans. At the time, it was one of 26 teams established nationwide in VA.

In July 1995, Charleston VAMC implemented a new primary care approach to Veteran patient care, comprised of a team of health care providers assigned to each Veteran.

VA will start new care plan

■ **TEAMS:** VA patients will have a family doctor and will be assigned a team for care in person and by telephone.

By **LYNNE LANGLEY**
 Of The Post and Courier staff

The Veterans Administration hospital in Charleston is introducing a coordinated health care program and adding new staff to oversee it.

The new primary care approach offers teams of doctors to coordinate and direct care of patients at the Ralph H. Johnson Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Each patient will have a family doctor and will be assigned to a team for care in person and by telephone.

That means appointments will be scheduled more efficiently and the Outpatient Department will be able to meet emergencies in a timely manner, according to Mary Bowrin, staff assistant to the director.

Dr. Dennis W. Cope has been named associate chief of staff for

ambulatory care and will oversee the transition to primary care.

He comes to Charleston from the VA Medical Center in Sepulveda, Calif., where he started the first primary care program in the VA system.

He also will hold a faculty appointment as professor of medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina.

Dr. George W. Arana, who held positions at MUSC since 1987, has joined the VA medical center as chief of the psychiatry service.

Chaz Kasiel, former director of medical administration services at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Washington, has been appointed chief of medical administration service at the Charleston VA hospital.

Denise Carey, former chief of nursing service at the Northampton (Mass.) VA medical center, will head the Charleston VA nursing service.

(The Post & Courier, July 4, 1995)



THE POST AND COURIER Letters to the Editor

Praise for VA *July 1, 2016*

The chaplain's office, primary care, specialty clinics, mental health support, pain management staff, nurses, physician assistants and even wise old housekeepers care, share, pray and heal numerous Veterans and their loved ones.

Wayne Moore, North Charleston

Fine VA care *July 11, 2016*

I am a U.S. Army Vietnam Veteran. The emergency room at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center has always done fine by me, particularly when I was diagnosed with Agent Orange-caused lung cancer this past February. I spent seven hours there that day, and the staff was outstanding.

Subsequent care has been timely, and I applaud all those involved, including the emergency room staff.

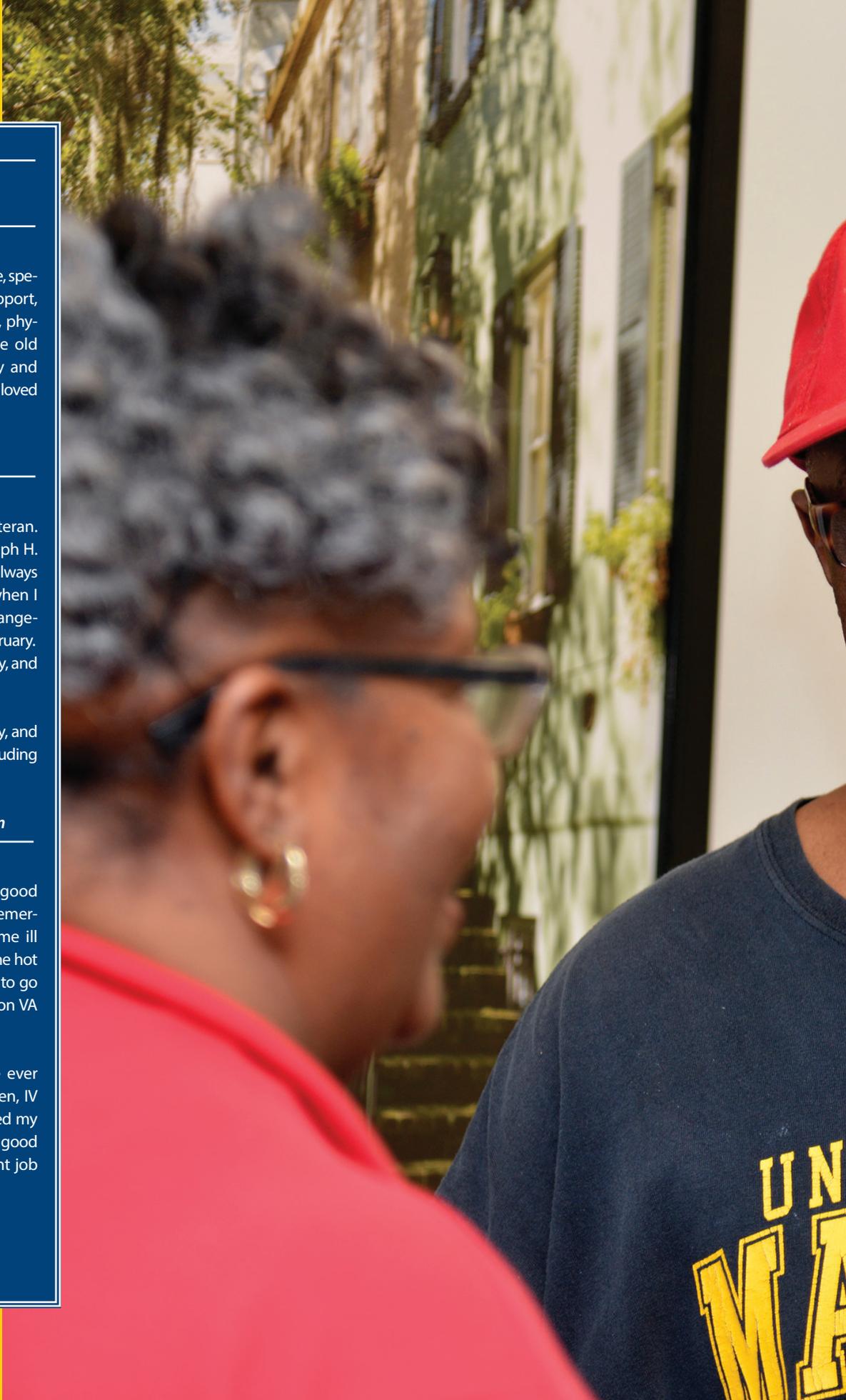
Arthur H. Hahn, North Charleston

Good VA care *July 21, 2016*

I am a 71-year-old Veteran in good health. I've never been in an emergency room. However, I became ill while working under my RV in the hot sun a few weeks ago. I was told to go to the ER at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Hospital ...

That was the best care I have ever received anywhere. I had oxygen, IV fluids, blood work, etc. They fixed my problem, and now I am back in good health. The VA does an excellent job helping Veterans.

Ron Rowland, Hanahan



I owe it all to » » » my VA

Wayne Moore spent 18 years in the U.S. Marines. Today he is a volunteer at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center—the hospital that diagnosed and treated his prostate cancer and who helped him get sober after a battle with alcohol and drugs.

“Trinity’s only seven, but she knows how to be thankful and grateful,” Moore said. “She also knows there’s bad in the world, and there’s good. One day she told me, ‘Granddaddy, the VA fixed you so they must be good. Somebody should write about all the good things they do.’”

The Marine Veteran now sees Charleston VAMC as his second home.

“That’s my first stop every day,” he said. “I head over to the VA and visit with the chaplain. Then I go see the addiction people, and then I go visit with the homeless program people. I talk to everybody there, including the housekeeping people. Everybody knows me.”

Moore said even his two granddaughters, 7-year-old Trinity and 10-year-old Alexis, are keenly aware of how much the VA has done for their grandfather.

So Moore did just that, writing a letter to the editor that was published in Charleston’s daily newspaper, *The Post and Courier*. Moore hopes that sharing his experience at Charleston VAMC will encourage other Veterans to seek medical care at his VA.



Sam Smargissi *October 27, 2015*

By far the best service a Veteran could have. I am extremely impressed with the friendliness, professionalism and services provided to date. I want to thank the staff and doctors for your service. You guys rock.

James Garren *May 9, 2016*

The room was clean and comfortable. Staff was very knowledgeable, on top of every situation, and handled me with respect and gave me explicit explanation and details of what they were planning on doing before they did it. I was more comfortable staying in the hospital there than I was at any other medical facility in my entire life.

Chad Bott *August 1, 2016*

The level of care and treatment here far exceeds my civilian doctor's office... I have only praise for the wonderful doctors, nurses and staff members here. Thank you for all you do!

Sylvia Mickey Winchell *September 30, 2016*

The VA in Charleston was great. My husband had surgery there today. Everyone was very nice and helpful. The surgeon was absolutely awesome. All the complaints I hear about the VA...they don't apply here. Thank you all.

My home » » »

my VA



584

Veterans
housed through
HUD-VASH program

17.2%

increase
in Veterans housed
since FY 2015



Number of Veterans
housed through
HUD-VASH at
Charleston VAMC

FY 2014.....426

FY 2015.....498

FY 2016.....584

On any given night in America, approximately 40,000 Veterans are homeless. In Charleston, that number looms around 400. Facing a daunting nationwide problem, the Obama administration made reducing Veteran homelessness a major focus. In fall 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Interagency Council on Homelessness announced a 47 percent reduction in Veteran homelessness in the United States since 2010.

While this decline in homeless Veterans is significant, even a single Veteran without housing is one too many. Charleston VA has been committed to ending homelessness among former Servicemembers since the program began here in the late 80s. In FY 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program at Charleston VA placed 584 Veterans into permanent housing – 17 percent more than the number of Veterans housed in FY 2015, and 39 percent more than FY 2014.

Every day U.S. Army Veteran Alexander is grateful to Charleston VA's homeless program. Aiken learned about the housing program in 2010 when he was sent to Charleston from Savannah to undergo surgery for a hernia. Years of poor decision-making, dead-end jobs and substance

abuse had left Aiken without a home or a clear direction of where he was going in life. However, Aiken says it was the unyielding and persistent encouragement of VA social worker Latisha West that led him to finally enter VA's Substance Abuse Treatment Clinic (SATC). During his time in the program, Aiken was a resident at Vet Villas—a temporary housing facility in North Charleston. Through the resources provided by Charleston VA, Aiken was able to achieve sobriety, find a rewarding career as a painter at Charleston VA, and last year,

Aiken purchased his first home. Now he uses every opportunity he can to encourage other struggling Veterans who are ready for change.

Aiken's story is one of several successes that occur each year as Charleston VA continues its mission to house Veterans through the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans

program and HUD-VASH. The VAMC also works annually with community partners to host and participate in Stand Down events throughout the Lowcountry in Charleston, Myrtle Beach and Savannah, with a goal of connecting Veterans with the VA and community resources they need to get back on their feet. The recent downward trend in attendance at Stand Down events reflects Charleston VA's daily efforts to get Veterans into transitional and permanent housing throughout the year. The homeless program is here to help every homeless Veteran find their way home.

“

*Now helping people
is what I want to
do. If I can help one
person get out of the
place they're in, I'm
all for it.*

– Alexander Aiken,
U.S. Army Veteran

”



A warm welcome at » » »

my **VA**



Cameron Dills was medically separated from the U.S. Marine Corps in June 2016 at the age of 23 and was a little wary about going to the VA for his health care. He came to Charleston VAMC and met Ron Spruill, a case manager on the Transition and Care Management (TCM) team.

“The care hasn’t been like the stories I heard before I got out [of the service],” Dills said. “I got connected with Ron and he helped fast track all the things I needed to get started with VA. It’s been easier because Ron walks me to see who I need to talk to. He doesn’t just tell me where to go, he actually takes me there.”

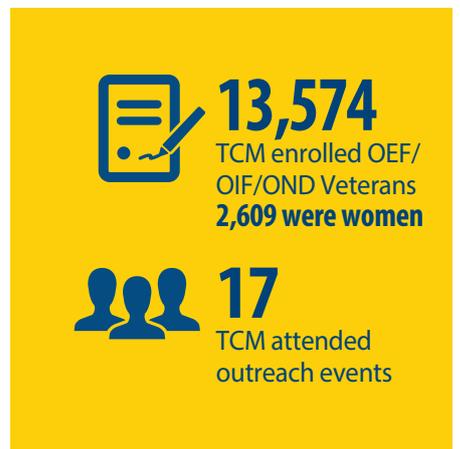
The role of TCM case managers is to assist Veterans as they enter and navigate our health care system, so they can best access all of the

benefits they have earned by serving our nation. These services include assisting with appointment set up, identifying local Veteran Service Organizations, coordinating care from a military treatment facility, and general education on the resources available to the Veteran as a new patient with VA health care.

“Due to the increasing numbers of Veterans returning home and transitioning off of active duty, we have added additional TCM case managers to the team,” said George Webb, TCM program manager. “Case managers are located at the medical center and at each of our community outpatient clinics.”

Charleston VAMC is proud to serve these recently returning Servicemembers and Veterans of all eras. Their location in the new

Welcome Center at the medical center and expanded services in the community clinics provide a warm first impression to the Charleston VA, reflecting the high quality health care services Veterans can expect to receive once they walk through the doors.



Personalized women's care at » » » myVA

U.S. Army Veteran Tara Giles attests that the women's health care she's been receiving at the Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic for the last six years is the best she's ever had. And that assessment includes the private health care she's received.

"Dr. [Shaun] Franklin truly cares about me. I'm not just a patient, I'm family. She's like a second mother to me and always goes above and beyond what most doctors do," said Giles.

As a Chatham Country Police Officer, Giles also appreciates the flexibility offered by the Women's Health Clinic to work around her tight schedule to ensure that she never misses an appointment.

Giles is one of the many female Veterans receiving care in the VA health care system. As the fastest growing segment of the Veteran population, the number of female Veterans receiving care in the VA has doubled in the last decade. The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center introduced the Women's Health Program in 2007 - a program that is led by a dedicated Women's Health Program Manager.

"The care and follow-up are personalized and thorough. I can even email my doctor through myHealtheVet



and she responds quickly. She always does everything she can to help me," said Giles.

Charleston VAMC's program now serves more than 9,000 women and offers a wealth of gender-specific health care, including gynecology services, mammograms, breast and cervical cancer screenings, maternity care and menopause symptom management, just to name a few. In fact, the program is a leader in gynecologic robotic surgery.

Beyond gender-specific care, the program offers treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),

family and parenting issues, smoking cessation, and nutrition and weight management. VA also provides free military sexual trauma (MST) care to Veterans who have experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment while on active duty. Veterans do not need a VA disability rating or service-connection for MST, and may be able to receive treatment even if they are not eligible for other VA care.



9,469
female Veterans
enrolled

Women's Services Available:

- Primary care
- Pregnancy
- Reproductive care
- Wellness
- Healthy aging
- Long-term health care services
- Mental health services
- Homelessness



Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center

2012 President Barack Obama called the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War. The VA Medical Center is a proud Commemorative Partner and is committed to giving you, our Vietnam era Veterans, the recognition and welcome home you so rightly deserve.

At Charleston VA, it is our privilege to provide high quality health care services to our nation's Veterans. It is our goal for every Veteran who walks through our doors to feel welcomed and well cared for. Today we are honored to provide a special welcome and Commemorative pin to our Veterans who served during the conflict in Vietnam.

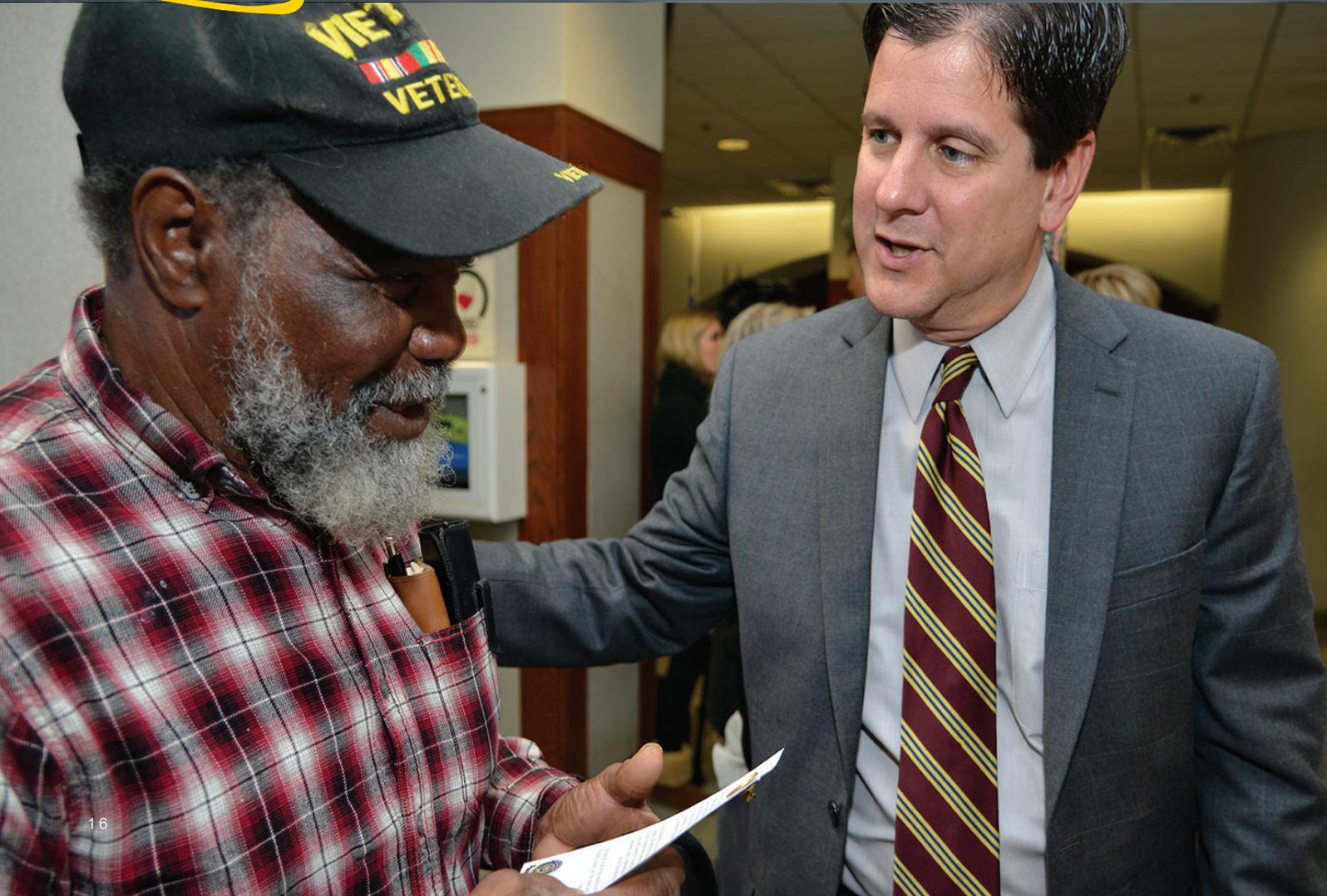
On behalf of all of the employees here at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, I thank you for your dedicated and selfless service to our country.

Scott R. Isaacks
Center Director

VA | Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center

myVA

Honoring 50 years



This year the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center partnered with the Department of Defense Commemoration for the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commission and several other local agencies and organizations to celebrate and honor Vietnam era Veterans for their selfless service in defense of our country and freedoms.

In March 2016, the hospital embarked on what would become a year-long endeavor to honor our Vietnam heroes by holding a special pinning ceremony – inviting those who donned a military uniform during the Vietnam War to receive a personal “thank you,” a handshake, and a commemorative lapel pin from members of executive leadership and local DOD leaders.

Vietnam Veterans were further honored at the facility’s “Welcome Home Salute: A Night with The Miracles” in May, which brought hundreds of Veterans and supporters together for a free concert by the musical group, The Miracles, and an informative benefits fair geared toward this unique segment of our Veteran population.

The year wrapped in November with a special symposium, titled “Heroes Among Us: The Ongoing



Panelists, left to right, Clebe McClary, Alex Colvin, Frank Walker and Jackie Hall discuss their military experiences with the event moderator as part of the “Heroes Among Us: The Ongoing 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War” symposium.

50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War.” The event was held aboard the USS Yorktown in partnership with Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum, ABC News 4 and iHeart Media, and featured the stories of four Servicemembers who sacrificed greatly during the Vietnam War – including our hospital’s namesake Pfc. Ralph H. Johnson who threw himself upon a grenade during a fire-fight to save the lives of two fellow Marines. The symposium was broadcast live across the nation – carrying the stories and legacies of our local heroes with it to people from coast to coast and border to border.

For many Veterans, attending one of the year’s commemorative events, was the first time since the war that they felt acknowledged and validated. And for others, it was the first time they’d heard someone say, “Welcome home.”

Charleston VAMC is privileged to provide high quality health care and services to Vietnam era Veterans and all those who served – proudly wrapping each patient in the welcome embrace of home and the gratitude of a thankful nation.



>24,500

number of Vietnam era Veterans enrolled at Charleston VAMC

Healing at home

Air Force Veteran Wendy experienced serious trauma during her several years of military service – trauma that manifested itself in the form of severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and affected her ability to interact with others and with her surroundings.

Thanks to the home-based telemental health (TMH) treatment option offered at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, however, Wendy was able to conveniently address her symptoms from the safety of her own bedroom via secure mobile video-conferencing technology.

“The TMH home-based option allows patients suffering from symptoms of PTSD to enjoy the privacy of their home where they often report feeling more comfortable in discussing their symptoms or allowing difficult emotions to process,” said Mental Health Social Worker Mark Murphy, LISW-CP.

In fact, recent studies have shown that TMH



with » » » my VA

therapies are just as effective as face-to-face treatments. The at-home option also eliminates some of the barriers that Veterans may encounter when seeking traditional treatments, such as inconsistent transportation, inflexible work schedules and living in a remote location.

“I absolutely would not be where I am today without the ability to work through this process at home,” Wendy said. “I was able to really dig deep and deal with complex emotions and then, afterwards, I was in my own space where I could feel comfortable and safe and I could decompress. This program was seriously life changing.”

This year, Charleston VAMC was named the first VA National Telemental Health Hub, which allows the facility’s program to provide these revolutionary TMH services to Veterans across the country – from West Virginia to Alabama, Georgia to North Carolina, and beyond.

“Home-based TMH offers the flexibility to get these Veterans the help and care they deserve,” Murphy said.



(Vanguard, Oct. 29, 1968)

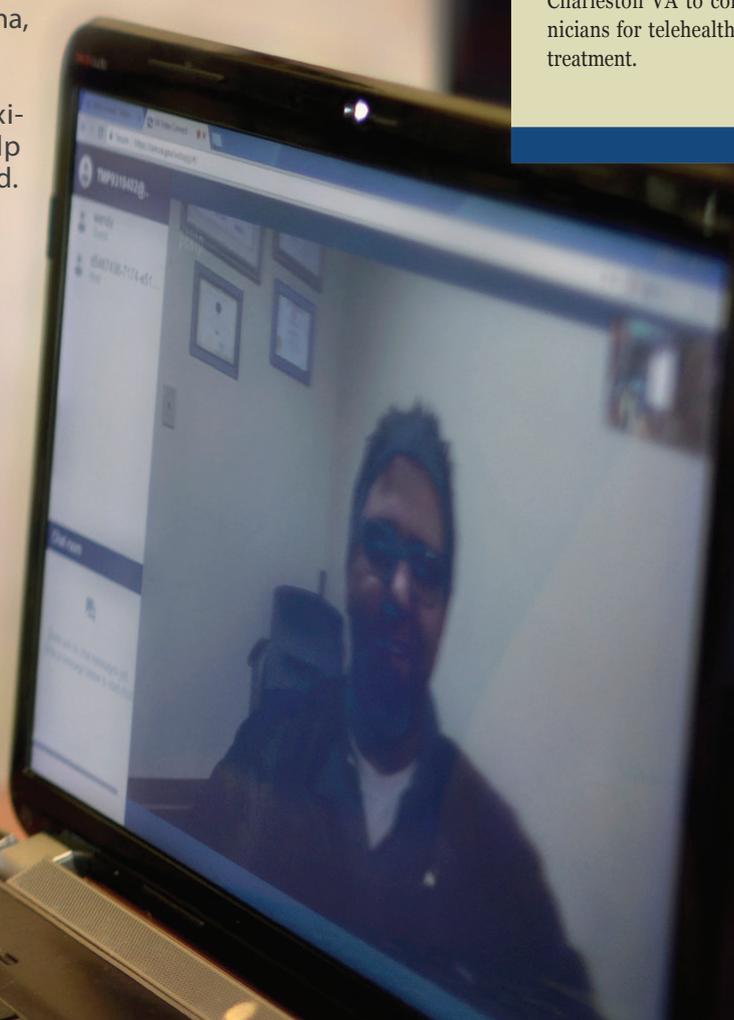
In October 1968, Charleston Veterans Administration Hospital patient Daniel H. Steedly “visited” with his family via a dual closed-circuit television. Today, secure video-conferencing technology is used throughout Charleston VA to connect patients and clinicians for telehealth and telemental health treatment.



11,062
TMH patient visits



46%
increase in TMH unique patients since FY 2015



Always improving at» » »

myVA

Veterans with smoking cessation and establishing a Patient Safety Conference to identify areas for regular systems-based quality improvement.

Alsfeld's work in teaching quality improvement and patient safety is important to both medical residents and Veterans. More than 350 medical residents in 28 specialties and services rotated through Charleston VAMC in FY 2016, treating thousands of its 70,000 unique patients. To meet Veterans' health care needs, the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) approved approximately 100 full-time equivalent (FTE) medical residents, up from 94 residents in FY 2016.

One of the new residents added for FY 2017 will work in psychiatric pharmacy. This pharmacy resident joins a robust team of seven pharmacy residents representing three different programs—general pharmacy, pharmacy administration and ambulatory care. Each pharmacist is already board-certified, but continues in residency at Charleston VAMC to develop a specialized skillset.



Dr. Alsfeld talks to a Veteran about his treatment while leading MUSC medical residents through grand rounds.

As the chief resident for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety, Dr. Leonard "Clark" Alsfeld is responsible for making the medical center a better, safer place for Veterans. He accomplishes this task by identifying processes that may need improvement, such as developing a screening tool that helps identify patients who would benefit from early palliative care.

"I strongly believe there is no place for complacency in medicine. It is my mission to find better, more efficient ways to provide high quality care for our Veterans," Alsfeld said. "It is an honor to work on projects with different multi-disciplinary teams who are focused on the same goals."

Some of those goals include creating a unique process to help

Approximately **60% of physicians rotate through the VA** for some portion of their training according to the American Association of Medical Colleges.

Over **70% of VA physicians have faculty appointments** and are involved in educating future clinicians and research activities.

VA is the largest provider of medical training in the United States and is involved at all levels of medical training, including medical students, residents and fellows.



50 YEARS

Since its opening in 1966, Charleston VAMC has been committed to training the nation's future doctors. Over the years, that commitment to education has grown to include other disciplines. In 1990, Charleston VAMC began offering the Veterans Affairs Learning Opportunity Residency (VALOR)—an honors nursing residency program for student nurses. Today Charleston VAMC continues to offer residency programs for medical students, nurses, social workers, mental health providers and pharmacists.

Medical Students Start New Program

Junior medical students at the Medical College of South Carolina will receive one to two months of additional training at the Veterans Administration Hospital under a program inaugurated there this past week.

Under the Clinical Clerkship Program, the 76 juniors will participate in the care of patients at the hospital under the supervision of attending staff physicians. The students will serve in both the Medical and Surgical wards, examining patients and reviewing their histories and symptoms with staff doctors. Dr. Vince Moseley, chief of the medical service, said yesterday.

One of the student's most important duties will be to visit his patients twice daily to observe their response to treatment, Dr. Moseley explained.

The student will then make his own observations and complete the appropriate records.

The VA and County hospitals are teaching hospitals of the Medical College. Their professional programs operate under the guidance of the dean's committee of the Medical College. The County Hospital has a similar training program for students.

"This type of a program is valuable," Dr. Moseley explained, "because it brings a rich experience to the student by enabling him to have direct observational opportunities in the care of a considerable variety of patients."

"It also acts as a stimulus to the hospital's own staff to see that the neophyte physician has the opportunity to observe only the best of medical care and practice," he said.

(The Charleston Evening Post, April 29, 1990)



200+
published
research
studies

\$24M
research
budget (5-
year high)

54
active VA-
funded research
studies

200+
active research
investigations

100
principle
investigators

Discovering solutions at



Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's Associate Chief of Staff for Research R. Amanda C. LaRue, Ph.D., has a passion for stem cells.

With the help of a special genetically-engineered mouse that glows fluorescent green when exposed to a black light, LaRue's team uses a special process to track where hematopoietic stem cells travel and how they change and react in the body - fostering a better understanding of the lung disease pulmonary fibrosis, a condition that often affects Veterans who served in desert locations.

Other researchers are blazing new trails in the arena of stroke rehabilitation by training patients with high-intensity workouts - more like athletes.

And still others are proving the effectiveness of telemental health treatments as compared to face-to-face appointments.

Thanks to Charleston VAMC's well-established relationship with the Medical University of South Carolina, breakthrough discoveries happen every day through shared

resources and the collaborative efforts of scientists.

The \$24 million research portfolio of the Ralph H. Johnson VAMC is comprehensive and includes projects from each of the four major VA Office of Research and Development categories, including Biomedical Laboratory and Development, Clinical Science Research and Development, Rehabilitation Research and Development, and Health Services Research and Development, as well as the Cooperative Studies Program.

In short, this makes Charleston VA research unique - allowing our nearly 100 investigators to quickly translate evidence-based findings from the bench to the bedside across a wide spectrum of disciplines. The goal? To pursue ever-improved health care outcomes and quality of life for our nation's most revered citizens - our Veterans.

"I see all of this as my way of giving back," said LaRue. "I come from a big military family and this research is how I can be involved in helping our Veterans and contribute to the big picture."





my VA

Partnering with

80+
community
partner
organizations
in LVET

1ST
health care
organization
to partner with
SCServes
Lowcountry

\$1.6M
VA value of service
provided at VA-
DOD resource
sharing sites

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center has been a fixture in Charleston for more than 50 years, providing Veterans

with quality health care services that match or exceed the care provided at private hospitals. Over that time, community organizations have supported Charleston VA in its mission to serve Veterans and have come to play a crucial role in providing ancillary support services to former Servicemembers.

Four years ago, Charleston VA became a founding member of the Tri-County Veterans Support Network, which was established to allow local organizations to exchange ideas and identify the

best strategies to effectively refer Veterans to resources throughout the region and across the country. As the network's positive impact on Veterans became apparent, so did the need to provide similar access to services for Veterans in other parts of the region.

“LVET is a coordinated community response to the needs of our Veterans; we’re excited to be able to extend our reach throughout the Lowcountry to support those who serve our Veterans and their families.”

- Tim Taylor, Co-Chair of LVET

Charleston VA partnered with the collaborative network of community and Veterans advocacy groups known as the Lowcountry Veterans Engagement Team (LVET) in FY 2016. With more than 80 organizations in

the Tri-County area, along the Grand Strand, and as far south as Hinesville, Georgia—this community-led initiative serves as a



my community

safety net for Veterans and their families. The network connects former Servicemembers to resources from food and housing, to services like job placement and childcare. This year, LVET signed a charter to establish itself as a MyVA Community Board in keeping with the VA Secretary’s national MyVA Communities model. The board’s objective is to improve service delivery for Veterans, Servicemembers, and their families at the local level and allow them to have a voice in identifying community goals.



As part of our commitment to connect Veterans with resources, in July, Charleston VA hosted the launch of SCServes Lowcountry – the latest extension of AmericaServes, an affiliate of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University. South Carolina’s newest coordinated network of public, private, and non-profit organizations works to serve Veterans through a shared, online portal, which identifies community partners that can offer support and resources to Veterans in need. Veterans are an integral part of the fabric of each community we serve, and our gratitude lies with every community organization that is committed to aiding our nation’s heroes.



In addition to partnerships with community organizations, the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is proud to be one of 12 medical centers selected as a VA-DOD joint venture site in the United States. Through the Lowcountry Federal Healthcare Alliance (LFHA), Charleston VA shares resources with Naval Health Clinic Charleston, the 628th Medical Group at Joint Base Charleston and Naval Hospital Beaufort to provide health care services to Veterans in locations that are convenient and familiar.

A new joint physical therapy clinic, featuring a dedicated prosthetics center, opened on the first floor of Naval Health Clinic Beaufort in May 2016. Other services for Veterans and Servicemembers at joint venture sites include optometry, ophthalmology, MRI, physical therapy and dermatology. Shared health care resources for Veterans, active duty military members and their participants are made possible through Joint Incentive Funds (JIF) awarded by Congress as part of a national initiative to facilitate health care sharing between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense.



Growing for the future at *my*VA

As the number of Veterans in and around the Charleston area continues to grow, more of our nation's heroes are choosing the quality health care provided at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. Averaging 150 to 200 new patients each week, our VA is one of the fastest growing VA medical centers in the nation, with a growth rate of approximately 12 percent over the past two years. To date, our VA serves almost 70,000 unique Veteran patients, more than 10 percent of whom are women. In FY16, Charleston VA provided more than 1 million patient encounters per year, including 875,114 outpatient visits and 4,368 admissions.

“ *The Ralph H. Johnson VAMC has completed 33 projects in FY 2016 totaling \$8 million and continues to lead the VISN with 50 active construction projects totaling more than \$100 million. Our thanks go out to everyone impacted by these projects for their patience and understanding while we improve our facility.* **”**

- Jeff Sage
Chief,
Engineering
Service

Renovations expand, don't disrupt patient care

Engineering Service carefully choreographed a detailed plan for multiple simultaneous renovation projects to expand but not disrupt patient care in FY 2016. Exterior renovations at the front of the VA medical center, which include an expansion of the third floor and expanding the Intensive Care Unit, were coupled with interior renovations for a brand new front lobby and a larger Emergency Department. These and several other improved areas will open in 2017. They include:

- Sterile Processing Service third floor expansion and renovation
- Transition and Care Management expansion
- Front lobby expansion and renovation, including a new coffee shop and Welcome Center featuring eligibility services and Transition and Care Management for returning combat Veterans
- Intensive Care Unit expansion and renovation above the Veteran Enrichment Center
- Community Living Center balcony
- Emergency Department expansion
- Pharmacy expansion and renovation design



Veteran population by county

Beaufort, SC	20,312
Berkeley, SC	25,151
Charleston, SC	28,268
Colleton, SC	3,707
Dorchester, SC	18,000
Georgetown, SC	5,866
Hampton, SC	1,746
Horry, SC	29,248
Jasper, SC	1,700
Marion, SC	2,614
Williamsburg, SC	2,432
Bryan, GA	4,099
Bulloch, GA	5,080
Chatham, GA	27,574
Effingham, GA	6,095
Evans, GA	780
Liberty, GA	11,686
Long, GA	1,842
McIntosh, GA	1,338
Tattnall, GA	2,332
Wayne, GA	2,799

Veteran population estimates, as of September 30, 2015, are produced by the VA Office of the Actuary (VetPop 2014).



Charleston VAMC parking improvements

In fall 2016, Charleston VAMC opened 200 additional parking spaces for Veterans adjacent to the new parking deck, which opened the same day. The new patient parking provides easy access to the Emergency Department and the main patient care areas at the West Entrance. A golf cart shuttle staffed by volunteers was added to transport Veterans and guests who may need assistance to this entrance.

The 600-space offsite leased parking with complimentary shuttle service is also a convenient, popular parking option for Veterans.



Welcome Center

Veterans now find all the services they need to begin receiving care at our VA in one convenient location, our new Welcome Center. Eligibility services, release of information and the Transition and Care Management team are located in the Welcome Center, adjacent to the front lobby, to provide a warm welcome to our newest Veterans as well as those who served in previous eras.



Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic

Veterans living in Savannah and the surrounding area now receive their care at the new Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic. The 56,000-square foot facility supports up to 15 primary care teams and 13 specialty services, including a dedicated women's health area, cardiology, physical therapy, audiology, and much more. The new facility serves more than 14,000 Veterans and nearly doubles the clinical space of the former clinic.

Devoted employees and volunteers»»»



Neurology, EMU, and Stroke Program Coordinator Elizabeth Aprile, RN, helps Veterans who suffer from seizures find answers and relief.

Working at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is more than just a job for the more than 2,580 employees who make it their priority to provide quality health care to Veterans along the South Carolina and Georgia coasts. Each day at work is an opportunity to serve the men and women whose commitment to country has helped ensure this nation's freedoms.

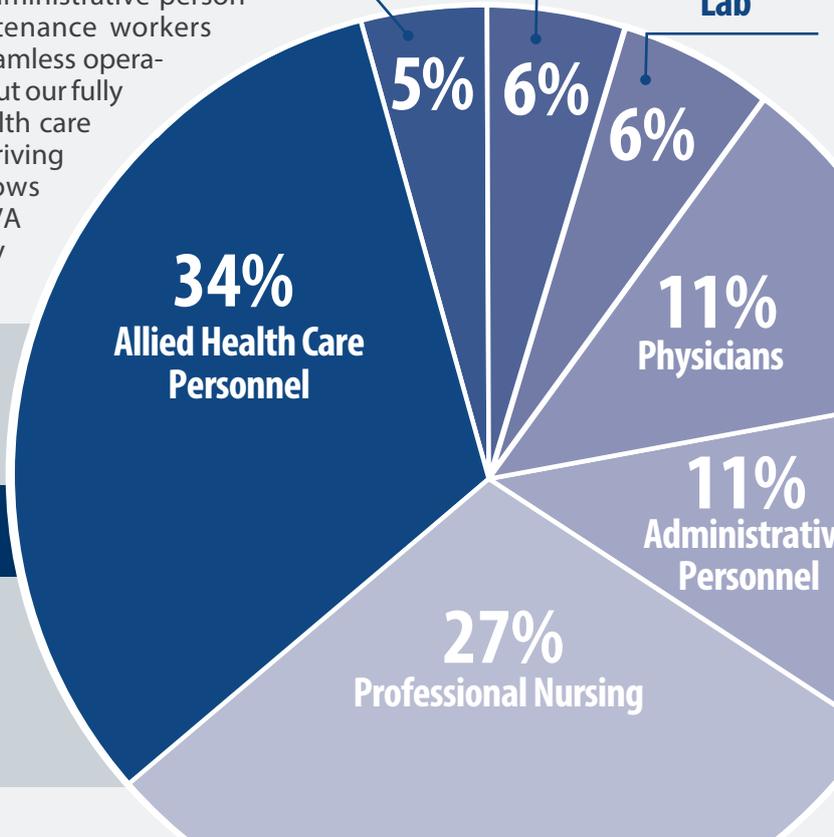
During FY 2016, Charleston VA's workforce grew by six percent

– with additions to the staff ranging from the health care professionals and clinical support specialists who provide direct patient care to Veterans, to administrative personnel and maintenance workers who ensure seamless operations throughout our fully integrated health care system. Our thriving workforce allows Charleston VA to continually broaden its

capacity to provide quality care to former Servicemembers.

Charleston VA is also committed to building an inclusive workforce that reflects the patient population we serve. Thirty percent of the Charleston VA staff members are themselves Veterans. The level of camaraderie shared between a Veteran patient and their Veteran provider is unmatched in the private sector and can make all the difference in a patient's experience. Similarly, as women have become the fastest growing group of Veterans in the country, Charleston VA added 104 women to its workforce in FY 2016. Female employees comprise 64

Engineering 5%
Other 6%
Pharmacy & Lab 6%



<9%
turnover

214
new positions

6%
workforce increase

2,586 EMPLOYEES

30%
Veterans

64%
female

36%
male

Giving in Action

VA's Voluntary Service celebrated 70 years of service in 2016. Volunteers have played an integral role at Charleston VA Medical Center since its doors opened 50 years ago. As the lifeblood of the medical center, they impart a degree of compassion and consideration that embraces every Veteran as a welcome part of the VA community. More than 1,100 Charleston VA volunteers contributed 86,021 hours of service.

Veterans are never far from the minds of community members. In FY 2016, donors have generously given more than \$719,000 in monetary and in-kind donations. These donations include two new 15-passenger vans to transport patients to and from appointments. Last year, volunteer drivers transported Veterans over 318,000 miles—the equivalent of approximately 106 trips across the United States! Other donations included clothing, hygiene items, bus passes and fuel cards. A golf cart and volunteer drivers were recently added to shuttle Veterans and their families from the medical center parking lot to the facility entrance.



Retired Senior Chief Petty Officer Francis Boldt wheels a patient to his room. The 89-year-old Veteran faithfully reports twice a week and has contributed more than 9,000 hours during his 23 years as a Charleston VA volunteer.

1,138
volunteers

86,021
hours of voluntary service

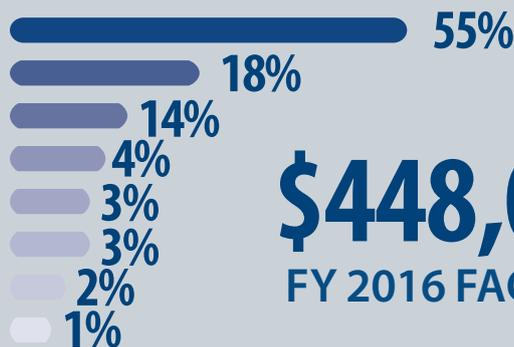
\$2.7M
total resource impact of voluntary services & donations

\$719,712
monetary and in-kind donations

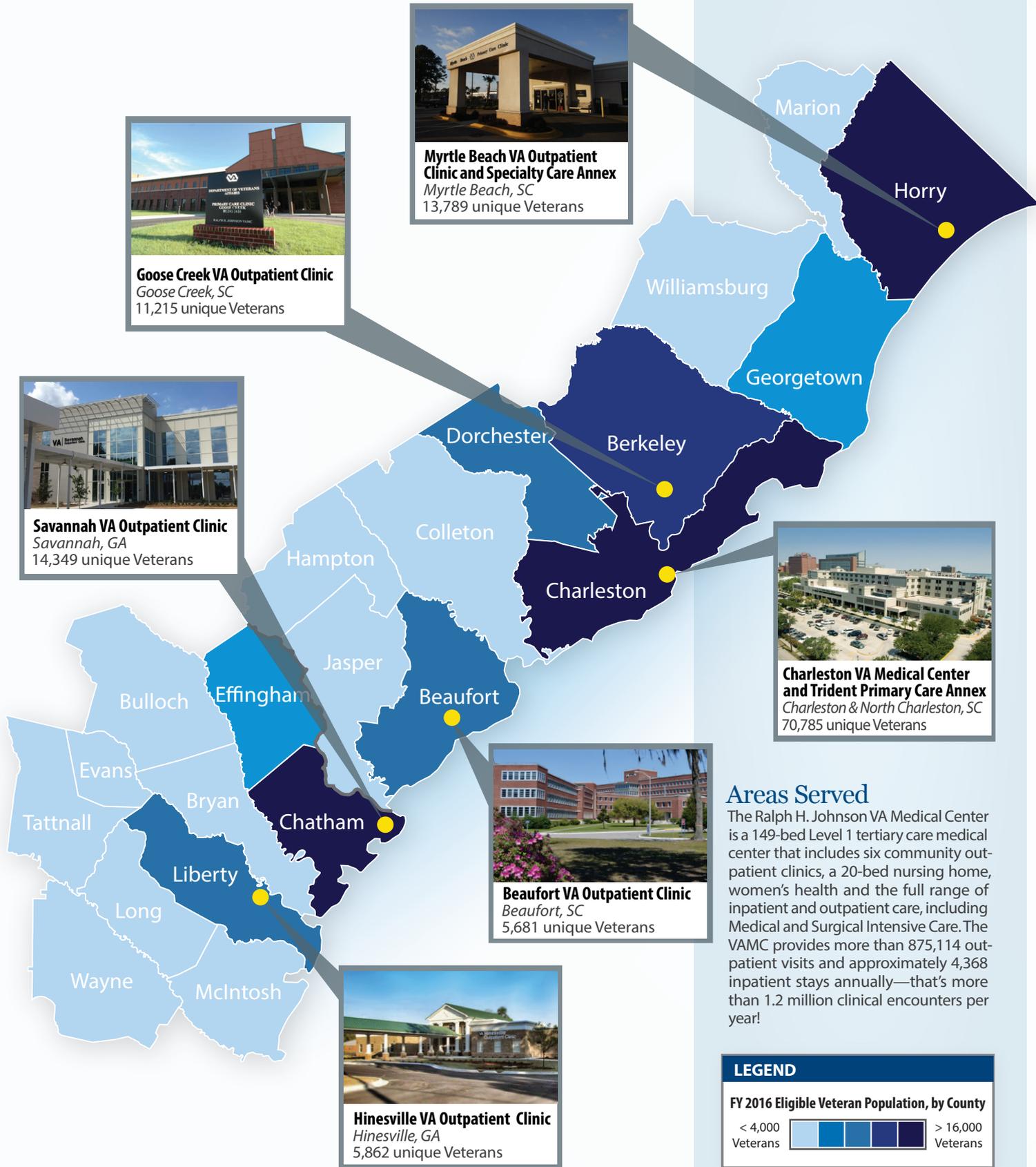


The Charm of Charleston Doll Club donated \$40,000 to our medical center to help purchase two vans that assist in transporting Veterans to and from medical appointments at Charleston VA.

- Personnel services
- Miscellaneous contracts
- Supplies and materials
- Land & structure improvements
- Grants & contributions
- Rent & leases
- Equipment
- Travel



\$448,021,987
FY 2016 FACILITY BUDGET



Areas Served

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is a 149-bed Level 1 tertiary care medical center that includes six community outpatient clinics, a 20-bed nursing home, women's health and the full range of inpatient and outpatient care, including Medical and Surgical Intensive Care. The VAMC provides more than 875,114 outpatient visits and approximately 4,368 inpatient stays annually—that's more than 1.2 million clinical encounters per year!

LEGEND

FY 2016 Eligible Veteran Population, by County

< 4,000 Veterans					> 16,000 Veterans
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FISHER HOUSE CHARLESTON

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME



A Fisher House for Our Veterans

Four short years ago, a community effort was undertaken to build a Fisher House for the families of Veterans in the care of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. In the coming year, we will open the doors of a beautiful 16-suite "home away from home" bringing families closer to their loved ones. It is a house of healing, a house of hope, a house of love and honor. The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center thanks the Fisher House Foundation, the Fisher House Charleston board, and all of the donors and supporters from this and other communities who are making the Charleston Fisher House a reality.



VA

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**THE RALPH H. JOHNSON
VA MEDICAL CENTER
1966-2016**



**PROUDLY SERVING
AMERICA'S HEROES FOR
50 YEARS**

