Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Medical Center Director

December 2015

Monthly Report from the Director

As the year is winding down, we get a chance to reflect on all the things we are thankful for, including the many freedoms that we enjoy in our great nation. Our leadership team and staff are especially grateful for the privilege we have of serving our nation by providing the highest quality health care and services to those who first served us. When our Veterans visit this medical center, we understand that you are entrusting us with something that impacts every facet of your life—your health. The team at our VA is truly dedicated to putting your health first, and to developing patient centered health care services that exceed expectations.

Most recently, the Ralph H. Johnson VA leadership team held our annual strategic planning retreat, focusing on customer service, to share ideas and plan for the coming year. This is a valuable opportunity to collaborate across all areas of our VA to find ways to improve the experience of every Veteran who walks through our doors. Our goal is to provide you with the patient experience you deserve and have come to expect from this medical center. Over the past few months, we've implemented several customer service initiatives, including using new survey tools that help us collect your feedback, and deploying secret shoppers who can give us a firsthand glimpse into how well our staff is performing. Veterans like you also play an integral role in enhancing the customer service experience by serving as members of our customer service and other councils, participating in focus groups and forums, and serving on our VSO advisory teams where I gain valuable input directly from our Veterans. In 2016, I am expanding our VSO advisory teams to include advisors in Beaufort, South Carolina, Hinesville, Georgia, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia. We value and appreciate your input as we work to remain your health care provider of choice.

Honoring Veterans and their families

Last month I was honored to kick off the annual Veterans Day Parade in the Market District of downtown Charleston. Community members lined the historic Charleston streets, waving American flags as Veterans Service Organization floats, marching bands, motorcycle groups, and historic military vehicles proudly celebrated our country's heroes. Retired Air Force Colonel James W. Shumard, III, served as the parade's grand marshal. It was a memorable event that I was privileged to be a part of.

I was also honored to attend Fisher House Charleston's second Annual Veterans Day Celebration on behalf of the VA Medical Center, along with the VA Deputy Secretary, the CEO of Fisher House Foundation and more than 400 supporters from across the Lowcountry. Fisher House Foundation, the local non-profit Harbour House, and donors from across the Lowcountry and beyond are making Fisher House Charleston a reality. Once built, it will be a 16-suite house for the families of Veterans who are receiving care at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. To learn more, visit www.fisherhousecharleston.org.

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Remembering the fallen

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is the proud recipient of a sculpture donated by local artist and Vietnam Veteran Dr. Edward Byrd. Dr. Byrd's sculpture depicts Pfc. Dennis Lee Lobbezoo, a young Marine Dr. Byrd cared for in 1968 who later died in combat during the Vietnam War. On Nov. 10, a sculpture dedication ceremony was held in the front courtyard of the medical center. VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson delivered the keynote address. It is Dr. Byrd's hope that the sculpture will serve as an enduring reminder of the ultimate sacrifice so many Service members have made to secure our freedoms. Dedicated on the eve of Veterans Day and the 240th birthday of the United States Marine Corps, this installation will hold a special place in this facility's growing history. Visitors may view the sculpture in the front lobby of the VA.

Read more about the Dr. Byrd's sculpture at 1.usa.gov/1PKHqpK.

Deputy Secretary visits Charleston VAMC

Charleston VAMC recently hosted The Honorable Sloan D. Gibson, Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, as our special guest. Mr. Gibson commended our VA for continuing to achieve high SAIL quality and efficiency ratings. Our VA has the third best efficiency rating among all VAs in 2015, a significant improvement from the 39th rating in 2014. These ratings speak to our ability to continue to provide excellent customer service and care to our Veteran patients even as the number of patients we serve continues to grow. Currently, our VA has the fifth fastest growth rate in the nation, and we continue to provide access to appointments that exceeds the national average. We were also pleased to report to Mr. Gibson our low employee turnover rate of 6.79 percent in 2015 (lower than the VHA turnover rate of 9 percent and private sector health care rate of 18 percent), which speaks well of our employee satisfaction.

The Deputy Secretary learned more about Charleston VAMC's fully-implemented Veterans Choice Program, as well as the successes of the pain management and alternative therapy programs. Later, Mr. Gibson visited the Naval Health Clinic Charleston and the Goose Creek VA Outpatient Clinic to see firsthand the collaborative work being done through the VA-DOD partnership, the Lowcountry Federal Healthcare Alliance. To date this partnership has saved more than $12M in Federal health care funds while improving access to care for Veterans, service members and their families across the Lowcountry.

As you can see, great things are happening at our VA and we are looking forward to continuing our progress in 2016. We appreciate your continued support as we proudly serve our nation's heroes. On behalf of the entire Ralph H. Johnson VAMC family, I thank you for the privilege of caring for you, and I wish you and your loved ones a happy holiday season and a joyous new year!

— Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Medical Center Director