



May 2016

# Monthly Report from the Director

**VA** | Ralph H. Johnson  
VA Medical Center



Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE  
Medical Center Director



## Memorial Day Ceremony

May 27, 10:00 a.m.

*Front Courtyard,  
Charleston VAMC*

Our VA is a family—one that is expanding each day to include growing numbers of Veteran patients, staff and volunteers. Like a true family, our goal is to support one another and offer comfort and care in times of greatest need. With this in mind, we here at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center have implemented several key initiatives in the past month aimed at furthering our reach and expanding access to the quality care we strive to provide to each and every Veteran in our communities.

Chief among these developments is the creation of the first National VA Telemental Health Hub right here at our own Charleston VA. Telemental Health allows mental health clinicians to provide top-notch, research-driven care to Veterans struggling with the stigma of being seen at a hospital to attend mental health appointments or those geographically removed from a convenient point of care by connecting doctor and patient via secure teleconferencing technology. Veteran patients are able to receive quality care in the comfort of their own homes or wherever they have access to a computer. Over the past decade, our VA has grown TMH from a small team providing a few hundred appointments via this innovative technique to a team of 20 mental health professionals providing more than 12,600 episodes of care in 2015—the most TMH episodes of care provided by any VA in the country. At the same time, utilizing TMH appointments has helped Charleston VA provide expanded access to mental health care—helping to place us in the top 10%

of VA hospitals nationwide in offering timely access to mental health appointments. I am proud to say that our team of highly trained and qualified mental health practitioners will soon provide care to Veterans from North Carolina to Maine to West Virginia and beyond. As their work continues to expand, they will touch the lives of thousands of Veterans throughout the U.S. with healing psychological therapies and improved access to the services they need, such as medication management. I am beyond thrilled that we will soon enjoy the privilege of serving even more Veterans from across our great country as this critical service becomes established.

Additionally, in early April, our VA officially opened its new Welcome Center, which is located right at the front entrance of the medical center for easy access to arriving Veterans. This new space is home to the Transition & Care Management team (formerly the OEF/OIF Program), Release of Information, and Enrollment & Eligibility. We have combined these services into one



Ralph H. Johnson Medical Center Director Scott Isaacks pauses for a photo with Helen Richards, sister of the hospital's namesake Pfc. Ralph H. Johnson, at the christening ceremony for a new Navy destroyer named for the Marine.

convenient and easily accessible location in order to better serve those coming to us for the first time for health care or services. We here at the Charleston VA believe that you, our Veteran family, have sacrificed greatly for our nation. You deserve, and have earned, the benefits available here. This new Welcome Center is focused on making your transition to VA care as simple and efficient as possible.

Each year, during the month of April, we celebrate one special group that makes up the backbone of our VA family—our volunteers—during National Volunteer Week with three special awards banquets. We are privileged to have more than 750 dedicated individuals, many of whom are Veterans themselves, who regularly give of their time in service to our local heroes. In 2015, these volunteers served nearly 86,000 hours in 65 different assignments at the Charleston VA and at all of our outlying clinics. Our volunteer drivers drove 318,000 miles bringing more than 6,500 Veterans in for medical appointments. Additionally, more than \$325,000 in cash and in-kind donations were contributed through Voluntary Service to provide needed items for Veterans when no other resources are available. I am truly in awe of the outstanding accomplishments of our volunteers. I was honored to attend the annual volunteer awards luncheon here in Charleston on April 14 and shake the hands of dozens of volunteers as I presented them with certificates recognizing their hours of service. I consider myself very lucky to serve alongside all of our VA volunteers and I am proud of the contributions they make toward bettering our VA.

On April 2, I had the distinct pleasure of attending the christening of the U.S.S. Ralph Johnson in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The U.S.S. Johnson is a brand-new Navy destroyer currently being built, which is named for our hospital's namesake Pfc. Ralph H. Johnson. I had the great fortune to join Helen Richards, Ralph's sister and one of our dedicated hospital volunteers, and several members of Ralph's family, for this truly moving ceremony. Ralph's legacy lives within this medical center and is kept alive each day through the outstanding dedication and service of our employees. We honor this Marine's life, which was cut too short when he sacrificed himself for his comrades in a foxhole in Vietnam, by providing the best possible care to our Veterans. Now, we are honored to see Ralph memorialized in another way—through the naming of this new ship. We are working diligently with the Navy League of Charleston to hopefully hold the ship's commissioning ceremony here in 2017. I can see no greater way to strengthen the bonds our VA has with the military community and with Ralph's family and friends, many of whom still reside here in the vicinity of our hospital, than to celebrate this momentous event together in Charleston.

As our VA family grows larger we endeavor to also grow stronger, smarter and more effective. The staff here at the Charleston VA is committed to providing timely, world-class health care—but beyond that, we seek to further grow the rewarding relationships we have forged with our Veterans and care for one another in a meaningful way. Because our VA is a family—and that's what families do.

With respect and gratitude,

*Scott R. Isaacks*  
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