The new year came in with a bang – or shall we say flurry – here in the Lowcountry. The rare Winter Storm Grayson brought ice, snow, high winds and temperatures well below freezing. In its aftermath, our VA team met many challenges, with some staff sheltering in place and others working remotely to ensure our Veterans received uninterrupted, high-quality medical care in a safe, warm environment. From our engineering and safety teams, to our nursing and medical staff, to our food service workers and housekeeping teams, everyone pulled together to maintain operations at the medical center. They salted parking lots, cooked hot meals, cared for our inpatients and those in need of emergency care, made sure Veterans had options for medication refills near their homes, checked on our spinal cord injury and other vulnerable Veterans, and made numerous critical decisions along the way to keep everyone safe. While this is not the first time our team has faced bad weather together, it is another shining example of the teamwork and family spirit that make our staff and our VA so special.

Ralph H. Johnson VAMC Fisher House Welcomes First Guests

Once we had our feet back on the ground and had returned to normal operations, we had a big milestone to celebrate together – on Jan. 10, our brand-new Ralph H. Johnson VAMC Fisher House welcomed our first guests. Since that day, our Fisher House, which was dedicated on Dec. 7, 2017, has provided free accommodations to more than 35 families of Veterans receiving treatment at our VA.

Marquel Davis, along with several of his family members, called the Fisher House home for close to two weeks as his father, Army Veteran Isaac Davis, recovered from emergency surgery at our medical center. Marquel lives in Savannah and stayed at a nearby commercial hotel for $200 per night prior to being lodged at the Fisher House. He said that, without the help of this home-away-from-home, he would not have been financially able to remain in Charleston for the duration of his father’s post-operation recovery. I had the pleasure of meeting Marquel and his uncle Richard during their stay and they expressed such relief and gratitude for not only a place to rest and relax in a challenging time, but for the true compassion they experienced during their days at our Fisher House. Our doctors are amazed at the progress he has made and Marquel believes that’s because he’s had his family close by through the most difficult days. You can learn more about the Davis’ and their experience as our first Fisher House guests via the ABC News 4 story here.

Protect Yourself and Others from the Flu

This flu season, many areas have experienced higher than anticipated cases of flu. We’ve taken great steps to minimize everyone’s exposure to the flu, but we need your help, too. We ask that all patients and visitors to our sites of care follow the guidelines below:

- Patients experiencing flu symptoms are encouraged to call the VA’s Telephone Advice Program (TAP) line at 843-789-6400 or 888-878-6884 prior to presenting in person to the medical center. Veterans will be referred to an appropriate medical professional to address their needs without face-to-face interaction if the flu is suspected.
- Patients who are prescribed medication for flu treatment are encouraged to have someone without flu symptoms retrieve their medication from the Pharmacy.
- Patients who are ill are encouraged to wear a surgical mask while in the medical center. Masks can be obtained at clinic check-in desks or at sanitation stations located throughout the hospital. Take the most direct route to your appointment location and limit interactions with others. Medical center staff may ask that you wait in a separate waiting area to reduce the risk of spreading influenza.
- Children, 12 years old and younger, are discouraged from visiting sites of care during this time and may be restricted from areas of Charleston VAMC where patients are at an increased risk for flu.
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water and utilize hand sanitizer frequently.
- Get your flu shot. It’s not too late! The flu vaccine may help you avoid getting the flu or lessen the effect of the virus should you become infected. Veterans can receive flu shots Monday through Friday, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., by checking in at Primary Care, 1st floor Charleston VAMC. No appointment is necessary. Flu shots are also available at all CBOCs.

Thank you for doing your part to protect yourself and others from influenza. Be well!

With gratitude and respect,
Scott R. Isaacks
Director