



Monthly Report from the Director



Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Medical Center Director

Over the last several years, one of the top initiatives of the Department of Veterans Affairs has been to increase access to care for Veteran patients. While we have been a consistent leader in providing timely access, the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center has taken many additional steps to increase appointment availability in our primary care, specialty and mental health outpatient clinics, as well as expanding and optimizing our surgery, medical inpatient and mental health inpatient services.

Here are just a few recent ways Charleston VAMC—the second fastest growing VA in the U.S.—has increased access:

- Opened evening and weekend clinics to best accommodate Veteran schedules and add appointment slots; Charleston VAMC increased total appointment slots by 36,766 or 52.9%, FY14 to FY16
- Expanded community partnerships for Non-VA care
- Doubled capacity in our Gastroenterology Procedure Center
- Expanded mental health inpatient unit, adding seven beds
- Opened a sixth operating room suite
- Added more than 300 new staff since 2016
- Completed construction and opened the new Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic
- Expanded the Beaufort VA Outpatient Clinic
- Added a second computed tomography (CT) scan in our radiology unit
- Expanded telemental health services

These efforts, alongside other medical center initiatives, have proven to be successful, resulting in increased Veteran satisfaction and below national VA average wait times for primary care, specialty and mental health appointments. At the same time, we continue to focus on maximum utilization of our available appointments so Veterans receive the right care at the right time

Text Message Appointment Reminders

We offer several reminder options to alert Veterans to upcoming scheduled appointments. We recently added a text reminder option. These text reminders are convenient for Veterans with mobile phones, pushing a reminder directly to their phone. Text message appointment reminders are sent automatically 48 hours before the scheduled appointment instead of the automated reminder phone calls for Veterans who sign up for this service. Enrollment is easy for Veterans, taking less than one minute to complete. Veterans can opt -in for these alerts, by following these [simple sign-up steps](#).

No-Show Initiative

We also understand that things come up, and there may be times when Veterans are unable to make their scheduled appointment. When this happens, we encourage our patients to call as early as possible to cancel. One of the biggest benefits to alerting our schedulers is the Veteran’s ability to reschedule their appointment as quickly as possible. An added bonus also occurs—when a Veteran proactively cancels and reschedules, versus “no-showing” for the scheduled appointment, it opens up that time slot, giving sufficient time to offer that appointment to a fellow Veteran in need of services. When scheduling conflicts arise, Veterans with appointments at our medical center and outpatient clinics can simply call our schedulers directly at 843-789-6500. For those Veterans who have a premium [myHealthVet](#) account, they can login and reschedule directly online.

Winter Sports Clinic

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to volunteer at the [VA Disabled Win-](#)

[ter Sports Clinic](#) in Snowmass, Colorado. This event is one of six national VA adaptive sports and therapeutic arts programs aimed at increasing health and overall quality of life for Veterans with physical and mental disabilities. My assignment during the week was a boot loader, helping Veterans who needed assistance get on and off the ski lift. The greatest joy I have in working with Veterans is getting out and interacting with them, hearing their stories, where they’ve come from and where they want to be in the future. Being at the Winter Sports Clinic allowed me to do just that—I got to see one of the many incredible things our organization does for the Veterans we serve, and the astonishing things our Veterans can do, especially in the face of adversity.

Joining me at this year’s clinic were three Charleston VAMC Veteran participants, each eager to tackle new challenges on the slopes in Colorado. Two of the Veterans have multiple sclerosis (MS) and the third is blind. I met with these Veterans about a month prior to our departure and all I can say is wow—they’ve figured out ways to overcome the limitations that they have, and they do it with a joyful spirit that is infectious. As a medical center director, I deal with a lot of the business aspects of running the hospital, which is important, but the week in Colorado allowed me to reconnect with why I work for VA—to serve Veterans, providing them with the best health care anywhere and serving as a support system for them to achieve their goals and live their best life.

If you, or a Veteran you know, are interested in the [VA Adaptive Sports and Therapeutic Arts Programs](#), I encourage you to reach out to us. We look forward to helping more of our Veteran patients participate in these programs and engage in a better quality of life.

With gratitude and respect,

Scott R. Isaacks
Director