



Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Medical Center Director

UPCOMING EVENTS

Hinesville Women Veterans Health Fair
March 14, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Hinesville VA Outpatient Clinic

Fleet Forces Band Concert
March 14, 11:30 a.m.
VAMC Main Auditorium

SUICIDE PREVENTION TAKES EVERYONE

Veterans Crisis Line:
1-800-273-8255 and Press 1

Online chat at:
www.veteranscrisisline.net

Text: 838255

MONTHLY REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR



Providing the highest quality of care and the best access to that care has been our VA's goal for many years. I am proud of the fact that for several years now we have provided >97% of all appointments within 30 days, and that we have proven our care quality over and over to our Veterans, their families, and our community. The VA MISSION Act of 2018 provides Veterans more choice to access care where and when they need it. As part of implementing the MISSION Act and improving Veteran's access to care, VA has proposed new access standards of 20-day wait times and 30-minute drive times for Primary Care and Mental Health, and 28-day wait times and 60-minute drive times for Specialty Care. The proposed standards are currently available for public comment via the Federal Register. As drafted, beginning in June 2019 Veterans who cannot be seen in VA within the proposed wait times or whose drive times exceed the standard can choose to get their care in the community.

While Non-VA Community Care is an important part of our health care system, the fact is that our Veterans receive better, more timely care in most cases here at our VA – a fact proven by multiple studies.

- Northwestern University researchers published study found VA hospitals are better on most quality outcome measures in Hospital Compare. JAMA Internal Medicine, April 2018
- Dartmouth led study found care provided by VHA is at least as good as or better than provided in the private sector. Annals of Internal Medicine, December 2018
- A 2018 independent RAND study found VHA delivers higher quality care than non-VA systems, performing similar to or better on most measures of inpatient and outpatient quality.
- Study found wait times in VA are shorter than in the private sector for new patients. published Journal of American Medical Association, January 2019

While VA overall outperforms the private sector, the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center – your

VA – has been one of the highest performing VA's in the country for several years, with a goal of improving the care of our Veterans even more every day. As our VHA Executive in Charge Dr. Richard Stone said, "The future of the VA healthcare system is in the hands of Veterans ..." Throughout the life of the Choice Program, our Veterans have made it clear they value our VA and the care they receive here. But we can never take that for granted so we are determined to continue to earn their trust – your trust - every single day." At the Ralph H. Johnson VAMC, we are fully committed to providing our Veteran patients the exceptional care and care experiences they expect and deserve so they will continue to choose our VA.

Congressman Joe Cunningham Visit

Our VA was privileged to host Congressman Joe Cunningham (SC-1), newly appointed member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, at the medical center on Feb. 1. As we toured our home-like Community Living Center, Congressman Cunningham visited with Veterans who told him over and over how well they are cared for here. He also toured our newly expanded Emergency Department, learning about its many features including designated Mental Health rooms, advanced technologies, and enhanced patient care features. Our VA was very honored to be the first VA visited by Congressman Cunningham, and we look forward to working with him to serve Veterans across the Lowcountry.

Mental Health Chief Receives Prestigious Mark Wolcott Award

One of the reasons our Veteran patients continue to choose VA is the many fine doctors and providers we are blessed to have at our VA. Associate Chief of Staff for Mental Health Dr. Hugh Myrick, one of our most outstanding clinicians, was awarded this year's Mark Wolcott Award for Excellence in Clinical Care Delivery by the Department of Veterans Affairs. This award is the highest honor for health care providers in the Veterans Health Administration. Dr. Myrick has been on staff at Charleston VAMC for 21 years, serving as the Chief of Mental Health for the last 13 years. His leadership has led our VA to increase the number of mental health staff

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from 61 to more than 335, created a Tele-mental Health program that leads the nation in number of patient care episodes, and secured funding for a Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team, a Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Residency Program and a Community Resource and Referral Center. Dr. Myrick also spearheaded the growth in our VA's Mental Health research funding from \$1 million in 2006 to \$7 million in 2017. We are honored to have Dr. Myrick as part of our Charleston VAMC team and we're grateful for his dedication to our Veterans who continue to benefit from his innovative ideas that enhance the clinical care we provide here locally and throughout the nation.

The Rest of the Story

USA Today published a story on VA Hospital Compare data on Feb. 7, followed by a Live 5 News story reporting our VA Emergency Room wait times were five hours from arrival to admission, compared to a national average wait time of 4.3 hours for private and public sector hospitals. The rest of the story is that the data reported is at least a year old and does not reflect our newly opened Emergency Department expansion that more than doubled patient treatment areas or other improvements our ER has made. The fact is Charleston VAMC's Door to Triage time was 9 minutes and Door to Doctor time was 30 minutes from Oct. 1, 2018 through Feb. 5, 2019. The data also shows

Charleston VAMC has a 0.82 pressure ulcer rate, but it should be noted this VA has had no new pressure ulcers in more than 260 days which demonstrates the high-quality care provided here. Charleston VAMC also excels in numerous outpatient measures exceeding the national average by more than 25 points in blood pressure management, colorectal cancer screening and retinal exams. And we rate eleventh best among 146 VAs for patients who would definitely recommend this hospital with a score of 74 percent, eighth best among 146 VAs for death rate within 30 days of heart failure with an 8.1 percent score, and twelfth best among 146 VAs for death rate within 30 days of heart attack with an 11.7 percent score.

Wait times are important. But so is quality of care. We won't compromise on either one because we are determined to deliver nothing but the very best for our Veterans every time they need us. Thank you for your ongoing service to our Veterans and for your continued support of our VA.

Sincerely,



Scott R. Isaacks | Director & CEO



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