

Fall 2014

myVA QUARTERLY

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center

Serving Female Veterans

*Charleston VAMC offers
specialized care for women*

Fight the Flu

*Learn fact from fiction
regarding the vaccine*



VA | Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

From the Director

With Veterans Day and Stand Down Against Homelessness just around the corner, it seems 2014 has flown by. While this has been a challenging year for VA, it has also been a year of improvements for the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and our Veterans. We opened a beautiful new clinic in Hinesville, Georgia to serve 7,200 Veterans there. Our Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team and pilot Homeless Tele-Health program were both established, and we housed 420 Veterans in permanent housing through the HUD-VASH program. We are utilizing the daVinci robot for more types of surgeries, and have been chosen to be the VISN7 Tele-Radiology hub supporting VA medical centers across South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama. At the Charleston VA and in our clinics, we have consistently provided timely access to care by planning ahead for patient growth. One strategy we started last year was our evening and weekend clinics that are well received by patients. Thanks to expanded clinic hours, increased staffing, tele-medicine and many other strategies, our average wait times for primary and specialty care continue to improve – while experiencing our largest patient growth year ever!

Soon we will expand our Beaufort VA Clinic and open a shared VA-DoD Dermatology Clinic there thanks to our partnership with Naval Hospital Beaufort. We are also opening a VA-DoD Physical Therapy clinic this fall at Naval Health Clinic Charleston, and we are approved to open a new clinical annex in Charleston and a consolidated clinic in Myrtle Beach.

We have also continued our solid track record of quality care, ranking in the 90th percentile of all public and private sector hospitals according to the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) measures. HEDIS is a tool used by more than 90 percent of America's health plans to measure performance on important dimensions of care and service and enables health care consumers to reliably compare the performance of health care organizations across the country.

We at the VA know these improvements and accomplishments prove our Veterans can depend on us for the best care at the right time. More importantly, though, is that our Veterans know this to be true, a fact evidenced by the numerous messages and letters recently received expressing support and appreciation for the care provided at the Charleston VA. Simply, I want to thank each Veteran for the privilege of providing your health care. You are our number one priority and we look forward to caring for you for many years to come.

Sincerely,



Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Interim Director





VA | Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center

109 Bee Street
Charleston, SC 29401
www.charleston.va.gov

1-888-878-6884
(843) 577-5011

Interim Director

Scott Isaacks

Acting Associate Director

Sheila Meuse

Chief of Staff

Florence Hutchison, MD

**Associate Director for
Patient Care/Nursing
Service**

Mary C. Fraggos, RN, MS,
CNA, BC

Assistant Director

Felissa Koernig

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Vet Center opens in North Charleston

by Meredith Thomas,
Public Affairs Specialist



"The Vet Center team, the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and I are proud to have this new Vet Center in our community. We look forward to continuing to provide outstanding care and assistance to the Veterans we are all so privileged to serve."

Scott Isaacks, FACHE
Interim Director

A few hundred Veterans, community members, VA employees and volunteers gathered July 9 in North Charleston to celebrate the grand opening of the new Charleston Vet Center. The facility, located on West Montague Avenue, takes the place of a much smaller original center, allowing staff to assist more Veterans with reintegration services.

Ron Brinson, district 4 councilman for the City of North Charleston, Scott Isaacks, Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center interim director, and Sarita Figueroa, southeastern regional manager for readjustment counseling service, were on hand to give remarks to the enthusiastic crowd. Emily Shannon, Vet Center team leader, served as emcee for the event.

"The impact of the Vet Center in a Veteran's life is of great value," Figueroa said. "The centers offer an alternative to traditional mental health care and have the highest level of Veteran satisfaction of any VA service."

The Charleston facility is one of three Vet Centers located in the areas serviced by the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center – the others are located in Savannah and Myrtle Beach. These centers partner with the medical center and the community based outpatient clinics to offer invaluable readjustment counseling services to Veterans and their families.

"In large ways and in small ways, every Veteran has served every citizen," Brinson said. "It is now our duty to take care of them. This Vet Center is part of that deal."

The event started with the rumbling entrance of around 20 Patriot Guard motorcycle riders clad in leather vests and carrying American flags. The group was accompanied by a small group of road cyclists, peddling alongside the motorized bikes on the short trek from the old facility to the new one.

Music was provided by the East Cooper Home School Band, a group comprised of nearly 20 young

musicians of varying ages, who energized the crowd with renditions of each branch's service song, as well as other military tunes. The National Anthem was sung by Charleston Vet Center readjustment counseling therapist Delia Chariker.

The ceremony was focused on honoring all Veterans and remembering those who were either killed or missing in action or taken as prisoners of war. Caleb Paul, a Veteran of World War II, led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance and L.C. Mills, VFW 9509 Moncks Corner commander, performed a Prisoner of War Table of Honor ceremony. Additionally, honored Veterans joined together to officially raise the U.S. flag outside of the new facility.

Special guests then cut the ceremonial ribbon and opened the doors to the new Charleston Vet Center, welcoming guests in to take tours, enjoy a barbeque lunch and listen to musical selections provided by the band, Veterans in Harmony.



Check-in Kiosks Have Arrived

by Laura Valentine, Public Affairs Specialist

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center has implemented a fast and effective tool to check in for your appointments. VetLink check-in kiosks, a Veterans Point of Service Initiative, offer more convenience and privacy for Veterans checking in for their appointments.

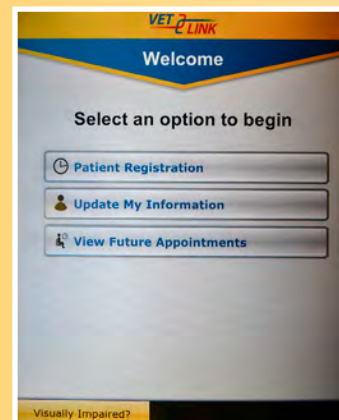
To use the kiosk, simply scan your VA ID card or enter your social security number, verify your birth date by selecting the year, month and day, and you're on your way to checking in or updating your personal information.

Check-in kiosks not only allow you to check in for your appointment without speaking your private information aloud in the presence of others, but you may also update information such as insurance, next-of-kin and contact information. You may also view and print upcoming scheduled appointments.

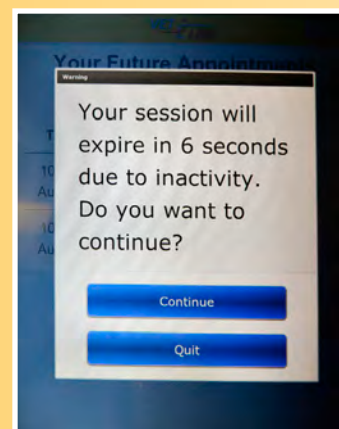
"These check-in kiosks will save our Veterans time during the check-in process while keeping their privacy information safe," said Laura Crawford, privacy officer, Ralph H. Johnson VAMC.

The kiosks serve as a host only, meaning it has no capability or capacity to store data. The view of your information is also protected by a built-in privacy screen, allowing only the current user to see what is being displayed. If for some reason you walk away from a kiosk before exiting from your options screen, the kiosks are also designed to timeout after just a few seconds of inactivity.

Check-in clerks will remain in each clinic to assist you with any paperwork your provider may have requested you complete for your appointment and to schedule your future appointments. VA employees and volunteers are standing by to assist you while you are learning to use the check-in kiosks.



Here's a look at what you'll see when you approach a VetLink check-in kiosk. Simply touch the item you wish to display and enter the requested information.



VetLink check-in kiosks will automatically time out after a few seconds of inactivity.

Look for the VetLink Check-in Kiosks at Community-Based Outpatient Clinics in the near future.



Woman Veteran Finds Healing at the VA

by Jenny Stripling
Public Affairs Specialist

Navy Veteran Emma Love may be all smiles now, but this wasn't exactly the case more than a year ago when she was told by her doctor that she had a life threatening illness.

"This entire process was a challenge for me," said Emma Love with tears in her eyes. "A mental and spiritual challenge, it was. I have always been a praying woman. Nothing is too big that my God and I can't handle, but I definitely had a battle going on inside."

Love who is also an administrative officer in health administration at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and United States Navy Veteran, said being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer last August was the ultimate shock. She went from being treated for severe heartburn one day, to lying in a CAT scan machine with unbearable back pain the next.

Pancreatic cancer is currently the fourth leading cause of cancer death in the United States and is anticipated to become the second by 2020. It is one of the nation's deadliest cancers with a five-year relative survival rate of just six percent.

Fortunately for Love, the surgery she underwent in November at the Charleston VAMC was a success and she is in remission from the cancer. She said care she received from the staff at the Charleston VA was more than good. It was fantastic.

"The people caring for me were awesome and I thought at first it was because everyone knew me as an employee, but when I was on the patient floor a very helpful nurse asked why so many people around the facility seemed to know who I was," said Love. "Then and there I knew that it wasn't just special treatment. It was


special care. It was amazing. I received better care than I would have gotten in the private sector."

"Care at the VA has broadened for females," said Love. "We have so many more services available to us. The biggest thing that bothered me when I first started coming to the VA, as a young woman, was sitting in the waiting room surrounded by older male Veterans. I was a little uncomfortable in the beginning, but I also knew I was receiving top-notch professional health care."

In fact, Love's daughter, Helena, receives her health care at the VA partly because of her mother's positive feelings towards the care she receives. She has also told her military friends about the exceptional care both she and her mother receive.

Veteran and VA employee Emma Love and her daughter Helena Frye both receive their care at the Charleston VA Medical Center.

Women Veteran care has expanded tremendously throughout the years and the need for more tailored and improved women's care continues to grow.



"I have the VA to thank for many things, both as a Veteran patient and an employee," said Love. "For one, it gave me the chance to help out my own daughter. When she returned home from deployment my experience, in both being a Veteran and having worked 24 years now at the VA, allowed me to see that there was a change in her and I knew she was exhibiting signs of PTSD."

More than 200,000 women currently serve in the military. Since 2000, more than 390,000 female veterans have used the VA health care system.

For VA, that has brought an increased need for general services for women as well as treatment for an increasing number of serious, combat-related injuries among women Veterans. With women Veterans being the fastest growing demographic at the VA, this brings about the increased need for general services for women as well as specialty care. Love started

receiving her health care from the VA in the early 90s and said she has seen a complete restructuring of how women's care is handled at the VA overall.

Helena received the care she needed for her PTSD thanks to VA and now lives a happy life. Love and Helena both volunteered recently to be part of an upcoming marketing campaign for the Charleston VA Medical Center, which will highlight several services the Charleston VA offers, including women's health care services.

Although Love is on the road to recovery, her journey is not over. But she is not alone and has caring people walking the journey with her.

Elizabeth Spitz, physician assistant in surgical services at the Charleston VAMC, helps Veteran patients navigate the complex world of cancer care. She worked closely with Love during her illness, and works with her

to help other Veterans.

"It has been an honor to work with Veterans who have been diagnosed with cancer and in particular with Emma, as she is a colleague," said Spitz. "Both prior to her surgery and since, we have worked together professionally, including a particularly complex case involving travel for a patient to a treatment center in Florida."

Love said Spitz and all of the other staff involved in her surgical care treated her and her family with respect and no questions were left unanswered.

"If a woman Veteran doesn't know what her options are at the VA, I recommended they talk to their primary care provider and find out what is out there," said Love. "If they come to the VA for their care, everything is kept private and the care is exceptional."



Any questions, concerns or comments about your women's health care can be directed to Patricia Hancox, women Veterans program manager. She's here to help with all of your needs, big or small. Call her directly at 843-789-7260.

"At the Charleston VA we are uniquely positioned to provide the best care anywhere for our women Veterans. Our cutting-edge, evidenced-based Mental Health treatment is second-to-none. In addition, our dedicated Women's Health Patient Aligned Care Teams are tuned in to the needs of our women Veterans," Hancox said.

If you would like more information about the services available for women Veterans, please visit www.womenshealth.va.gov.

**"As a woman Veteran,
thank you for your
service because 'We
served too'."**

Emma Love
U.S. Navy Veteran



The VA provides specialized service for the

45,779

Women Veterans in South Carolina



WOMEN VETERANS: *VA has you covered*

by Laura Valentine, Public Affairs Specialist

Changing Times

The culture has definitely changed within the walls of VA medical centers when it comes to women Veterans. Although it doesn't happen as often, every once in a while I'm still asked, while I'm waiting for an appointment or walking the halls of Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, "Are you waiting for someone?" It's still implied by a few folks that I (female) should be waiting for grandpa, daddy, brother or husband, but not my own medical appointment at a VAMC. That actually happened to me while I waited at another VAMC recently for a Compensation and Pension appointment.

But it's certainly not that gentleman's fault that he assumed I wasn't a Veteran. In the Air Force, I had a mission to deliver cargo or passengers. My mission here at the VA is to spread the word about programs, Veteran success stories or any other information that our Veteran population may need to help him or her succeed with their health care.

The Numbers

Women are currently the fastest growing Veteran population group, according to www.womenshealth.va.gov. The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics says that women make up approximately 10 percent of the total population of Veterans. The Veteran Population Projections released in 2011 anticipate this number will increase to upwards of 18 percent over the next 30 plus years. The three most common diagnoses among women Veterans seeking their care through VA are: Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder, hypertension, and depression. One in five women respond "yes" when screened for Military Sexual Trauma, and about 57 percent of female OEF/OIF/OND Veterans have enrolled in VA health care and had at least one appointment.

Why Choose VA for your Health Care

Women Veterans are automatically assigned to a Women's Health Primary Care Provider (WH PCP) upon enrollment. These providers receive specialized training specific to women Veterans and our unique needs. Each Primary Care clinic has a WH PCP assigned to cover general care needs including a health evaluation and counseling, disease prevention, nutrition counseling, weight control, smoking cessation and substance abuse counseling and treatment. The WH PCP also provides cervical cancer screens (pap smears), breast cancer screens including mammograms, birth control, preconception counseling, Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, menopausal support and therapy, and provides access to maternity care for expectant mothers.

VA also has you covered for specialty care including treatment for heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, fibromyalgia and sexually transmitted diseases. You may also request an infertility evaluation and care for other reproductive health care needs. Visit www.womenshealth.va.gov or ask your WH PCP for more information.

Need a second opinion?

Emma Love has been receiving care at the VA since 1994. She's seen a lot of changes over the last two decades in women's health care.

"I can say treatment is more personal now, being a woman Veteran in the VA health care system. I've noticed a new awareness of female needs," Love said.

Love served in the Navy as a fireman. Now, she is an administrative officer in health administration at Ralph H. Johnson VAMC. Her daughter followed in her boot-steps serving in the U.S. Air Force as an airfield system technician. She also receives her health care at the Charleston VAMC.

Bariatric surgery offers new beginnings for Veterans

by Jenny Stripling, Public Affairs Specialist



The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's bariatric program is tackling the challenge of obesity among Veteran patients with the option of bariatric surgery. In fact, the Charleston VA's bariatric program has completed more than 70 bariatric surgeries and serves as the regional referral center for the three-state VA Southeast Network of Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina, with the potential to benefit more than 14,000 Veterans.

Bariatric surgery, or weight loss surgery, is performed on the stomach and intestine of people who are obese. In long-term studies, these surgical procedures caused a significant long-term loss of weight, recovery from diabetes, improvement in cardiovascular risk factors and a reduction in mortality of 23 to 40 percent.

"It's been very exciting to have the bariatric program here in Charleston," said Dr. Rana Pullatt, program director and surgeon. "There are several advantages of bariatric surgery—it helps our obese patient population with weight loss, and it greatly improves their chronic medical conditions."

Navy Veteran Gary Barnes came to the Charleston VA weighing 355 pounds. Barnes retired from the Navy in 1986 weighing significantly less. A sedentary lifestyle combined with not eating healthy foods contributed to his weight gain.

Barnes took the first step by joining the MOVE! program in 2011. Soon after, he saw his 4X shirts becoming loose and the size 56 pants he wore were falling off of him. With the support of the MOVE! program Barnes lost 40 pounds.

"After having success with the program, I was approached by the bariatric team

asking if I would be interested in the gastric bypass procedure," said Barnes. "Of course I said I was!"

In order for a patient to be minimally qualified for bariatric surgery, the patient must have a body mass index of more than 40 and a serious weight-related health problem such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Each Veteran patient must also undergo a screening process and join the MOVE! program for at least six months. The patient must also lose at least five percent of their body weight prior to surgery.

In gastric bypass, the surgeon creates a small pouch at the top of the stomach. The pouch is the only part of the stomach that receives food. This greatly limits the amount that you can comfortably eat and drink at one time. The small intestine is then cut a short distance below the main stomach and connected to the new pouch. Food flows directly from the pouch into this part of the intestine. Because food now bypasses a portion of the small intestine, fewer nutrients and calories are absorbed.

After surgery, patients work with the clinical staff who make up their bariatric team on follow-up appointments and maintaining their healthy lifestyle.

Kristin Crady, bariatric surgery team dietitian, said as many as 15 percent of patients will regain their weight because lifestyle or eating patterns were not changed.

"Telling patients to eat healthy is easy, but for them to actually do it is another story," Crady said.

According to the bariatric team, bariatric surgery is not a fool-proof way to get thin, nor is it the easy way out of an unhealthy lifestyle. When patients decide to have surgery, they are agreeing to a lifetime relationship with the bariatric team. For more information on bariatric services please visit www.charleston.va.gov.

Vietnam Veteran finds healing at Patriot's Point

by Jenny Stripling, Public Affairs Specialist



Ashley Hatton, psychologist at the Goose Creek VA Clinic, says Veteran Roger Tinley has accomplished so much during his counseling sessions at the VA.

With support from the Charleston VA Medical Center and Patriot's Point, Vietnam Veteran Roger Tinley, in recent months, has been able to bravely face his heavy wartime memories.

Tinley served with the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines from 1966 to 1968 and was stationed seven miles south of DaNang in Vietnam. During his time in Vietnam, his command was attacked and many of his fellow soldiers were killed.

April 21, 1967, Tinley was part of a group of Marines sent to reinforce the Que Son District of Vietnam. They faced heavy numbers of North Vietnamese and casualties ran high. Tinley was wounded by a grenade and spent that night helping to fend off the attacking forces.

"The things I saw during that time were something I just chose not to think or talk about for a long time," said Tinley. "Back then, what I was suffering from wasn't known as PTSD. Everyone just called it being shell shocked."

Last March, Tinley decided to come to the VA for help with his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He said he was apprehensive at first, not sure if it would work, but started opening up to his clinician more and more with each session.

Tinley's clinical psychologist at the Goose Creek Clinic, Ashley Hatton, said Tinley came to her very reluctant.

After meeting with Tinley for several months, Hatton provided Tinley with passes to historical Patriot's Point, as part of his treatment.

"I had no idea just how important visiting Patriot's Point would end up being for Mr. Tinley," said Hatton. "It became an integral part of his therapy."

The Vietnam Naval Support Base Camp exhibit at Patriot's Point particularly drew in Tinley. He was suddenly surrounded by various crafts used to combat the dangers throughout the Vietnam War.

The main display that moved Tinley to astonishment was seeing the CH-46

Sea Knight Helicopter, a tandem rotor twin engine transport helicopter that replaced the CH-34 as the Vietnam War progressed. This was the type of aircraft that transported Tinley and the bodies of eight other Marines killed in the fighting out of Vietnam.

"Seeing that aircraft just really took me back to that time," said Tinley. "It was crazy to see and it brought back so many memories."

Hatton said she is so proud of the work Tinley has put into his therapy. She says she has seen such an improvement in him in just a matter of months.

Tinley says it's still hard to talk about his time in Vietnam but hopes that by sharing his experience publicly it will help other Veterans understand the resources available for them at the VA.

"I really hope that this helps someone else. I really do," said Tinley. "This isn't an easy thing for me to talk about, but I think it's important for others to know there's quality care and help available at the VA for them."



The Truth about the Flu

by Laura Valentine, Public Affairs Specialist



If health or other reasons prevent you from receiving the flu vaccine, please consider fellow Veterans and wear a mask during flu season when visiting the VAMC.

It's easy to be skeptical about the flu vaccine when you're not sure what information to believe. Today we are setting the story straight when it comes to the influenza virus and its vaccine.

Influenza is defined as a viral infection that attacks your respiratory system (the nose, throat, and lungs). It is

is you can get the flu from the flu vaccine. This is simply NOT true. You cannot get the flu from the vaccine because it does not carry a live virus. The flu vaccine contains inactivated or weakened organisms. The virus itself is grown in chicken eggs, then cleansed and chemically deactivated. There is absolutely nothing in the flu vaccine capable of causing the flu.

that you get the flu vaccine every year because the flu virus is constantly changing and the vaccines are updated to protect you against the most recent circulating viruses. In addition, a person's immune protection from vaccination declines over time. Last year's vaccine may not be effective against this year's flu viruses," said Malissa Robinson, Health Promotion

Disease Prevention program manager for Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center.

The flu vaccine is the ONLY protection against influenza. Protect yourself, family and friends and get vaccinated today.

commonly mistaken for the stomach flu virus which causes diarrhea and vomiting. In the United States five to 20 percent of the population will get the flu, putting them at risk for a severe illness and life-threatening complications. Despite constant pleas, year after year, by public health officials, most Americans do not get the flu shot.

Reasons Veterans choose not to receive their flu shot vary but much of it is driven by misinformation. So, what is true about the flu? One of the biggest myths about the flu vaccine

Another common myth centered around the flu vaccine is that it does not work. In scientific studies, the effectiveness of the flu shot ranges from 70 to 90 percent. Although it's not 100 percent effective, those who still end up with flu-like symptoms generally suffer far less than those who refused the vaccine. Getting vaccinated can be the difference between life and death when it comes to the severity of your flu symptoms.

"So, do not believe the old wives' tale that you do not need to get the flu vaccine every year. It is very important

Seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October and continue to occur as late as May. According to the CDC, for the 2013-2014 seasons, flu-like-illness in the United States began increasing in mid-November, and toward the end of December. Flu vaccination should begin soon after vaccines become available. Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center along with its CBOCs offer flu vaccines from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., no appointment necessary.

Get additional information by calling the Flu Hotline locally at (843) 789-7901 or long distance at 1-800-878-6884, option 1, extension 7901.



American Legion Riders bring Christmas in July to Veterans

by Meredith Thomas, Public Affairs Specialist



Instead of jingling sleigh bells, there was the thundering rumble of motorcycle engines. And instead of the famous man in the red suit, there were leather-clad bikers toting wrapped gifts and donations for Veterans.

This was the festive scene at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center July 20 when roughly 70 American Legion Riders from Post 166 in Goose Creek brought the annual Christmas in July event to patients at the facility.

Members of the local chapter of the nation's largest Veterans service organization delivered \$1,500 worth of clothing, hygiene items, games, gift cards and cash donations during the event.

"As a VA hospital, we're in a really unique position in seeking not only comfort and healing for our patients, but camaraderie for our Veterans, too," said Fred Lesinski, Chief of Voluntary Service at the Charleston VAMC. "There is no greater mutual respect than Veterans serving Veterans, and American Legion Riders make a significant

contribution to honoring the sacrifices of those who have paid the price in blood, sweat and tears. The VA and its Veterans are thankful that our community remembers its heroes by making sacrifices of time and treasure."

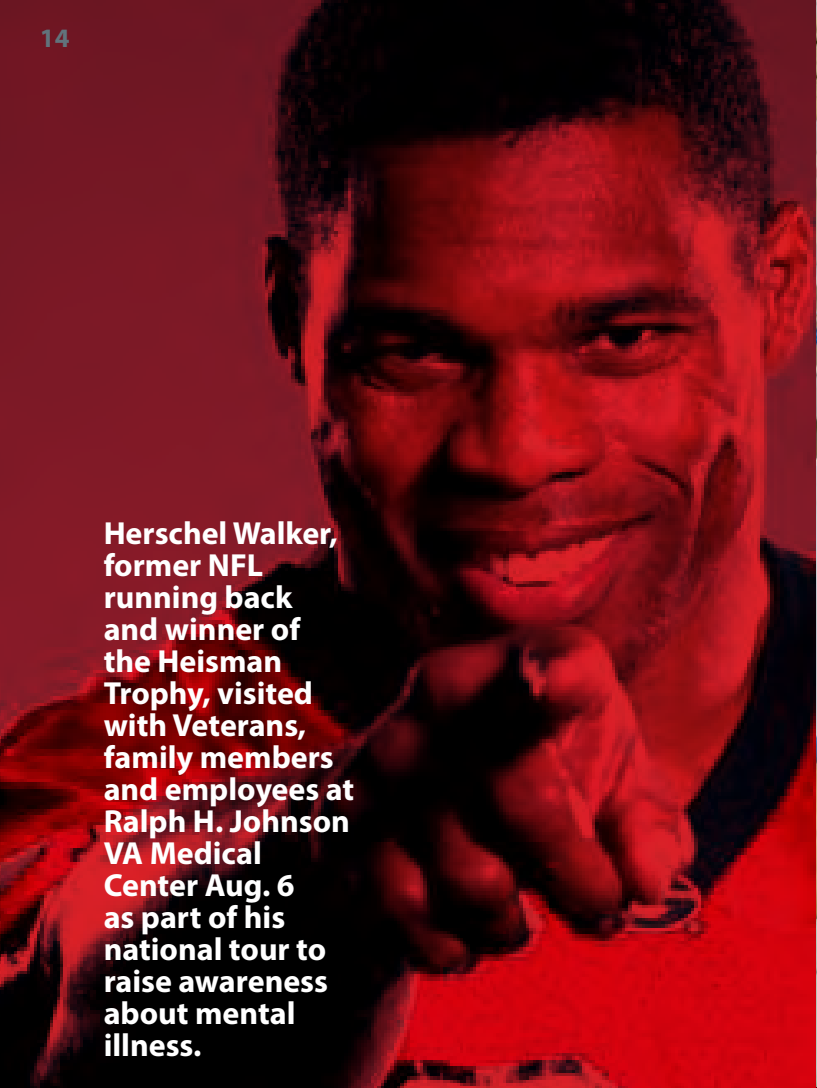
The bikers split up into groups and, escorted by staff from Voluntary Service, visited various areas of the hospital to hand deliver wrapped presents to Veterans throughout the facility. Several American Legion members also brought gifts to the Community Living Center and spent time with the residents there.

This was the ninth year that the American Legion Post 166 coordinated the donation drive and delivery experience. The group plans to round out a decade of Christmas in July events next year.

The American Legion is committed to mentoring youth in the community, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting a strong national security, and continued devotion to service members and Veterans.

For information on donating to Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center or for volunteer opportunities, visit our website at:

www.charleston.va.gov/giving



Herschel Walker, former NFL running back and winner of the Heisman Trophy, visited with Veterans, family members and employees at Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center Aug. 6 as part of his national tour to raise awareness about mental illness.

Walker spent the day meeting with active-duty service members at Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina, and then turned his attention, during the evening hours, to those who had already served and returned to civilian life - Veteran patients at Charleston VAMC.

The College Football Hall of Famer visited and conversed with inpatients in the facility's mental health ward, discussing his own personal, lifelong battle with dissociative identity disorder, a condition which causes a person to suffer from disjointed thoughts and memories and, often, a disconnected sense of personal identity. Walker also spent time with residents and families in Patriot's Harbor Community Living Center, signed autographs and posed for several photographs with patients and staff around the hospital.

Walker explained that, despite his numerous accomplishments, he often found it hard to fit in as a young man, and he was plagued by feelings of inadequacy.

"I didn't love myself or who I was," he said. "Everyone was telling me I was doing great things but I couldn't see it."

The football star now uses his celebrity status to speak out and dispel negative opinions people may have about those suffering with mental health issues. He encourages



by Meredith Thomas,
Public Affairs Specialist

Football Legend Visits

Tackles Mental Illness

individuals battling with mental illness to reach out and seek help before it is too late.

Walker is spokesman for the Patriot Support Program, providing emotional and motivational support to service members, Veterans and military families by conducting public speaking engagements at more than 80 military installations nationwide. He speaks out on behalf of programs specializing in mental health and addiction treatment.

Veterans struggling with mental health related issues, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, depression, or thoughts of suicide, should reach out to the Veterans Crisis Line by visiting their website at www.veteranscrisisline.net or calling 1-800-273-8255 and then pressing 1. The Veterans Crisis Line offers comprehensive, round-the-clock support for Veterans in need, and callers are connected directly to VA responders who can assist in helping them get their lives back on track.

Army Veteran Sings His Way into the Hearts of Veterans

by Jenny Stripling, Public Affairs Specialist

One Veteran patient described Chuck Fisher's voice as having the warble of the King himself.

Army Veteran Chuck Fisher, and his "manager" wife Sarah, entertained Veteran patients, Patriot's Harbor Community Living Center residents and employees at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center Aug. 7 with a musical show.

Singing for most of his life, Fisher brought his act to the Charleston facility in the hopes of putting a smile on at least one Veteran's face.

"As a Veteran myself, I feel a connection to these men and women," said Fisher. "Whether young or old, I like to cater my musical selection to everyone's tastes."

Fisher's grab-bag of songs was a delight for everyone and included

tunes from Marty Robbins to the more modern Brooks and Dunn. Patrons in the audience even felt compelled to get up and slow dance to songs that made them remember their first love and brought tears to the eyes of others.

Between songs, Fisher gave compelling commentary about his adventures in the music world.

One Veteran gave a tearful thanks to Fisher after the show, telling him some of the tunes took him back in time to being deployed during Vietnam.

Fisher was beyond grateful for the opportunity to meet Veterans during his visit.

"If I can touch the life of just one person during my show," he said, "I have succeeded in my mind."



STAND DOWN AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

October 31, 2014 — 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Armory Park, North Charleston

www.charleston.va.gov/standdown

- Volunteers provide medical screenings, job training, housing assistance, and other services to homeless Veterans and other people in need.
- Stand Down provides breakfast, lunch, clothing, and resources for more than 2,000 people at each year's event.

Sponsored by the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and Goodwill.

Help for Homeless Veterans
877-4★AID-VET
va.gov/homeless | (877) 424-3838



Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center
109 Bee Street
Charleston, SC 29401

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COLUMBIA, SC
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Important VA Phone Numbers

Charleston VA Medical Center

843-577-5011 or toll-free 1-888-878-6884 or
TTY: 843-789-6888

Telephone Advice Line

843-789-6400 or toll-free at 1-888-878-6884
Veterans who need medical advice from their primary care provider or have questions about their medications can call the TAP line Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Scheduling an Appointment

843-789-6500 or toll-free at 1-888-878-6884
Veterans who need to schedule, cancel or reschedule an appointment for all Primary Care Clinics including Myrtle Beach, Savannah, Beaufort, Trident, and Goose Creek can call Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Automated Prescription Refill Line

843-577-5011 or toll-free at 1-888-878-6884
Veterans who need to request a refill of a prescription or check the status of refills can call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Have your social security number and prescription numbers ready when calling.

VA Benefits (other than health care)

1-800-827-1000

Veterans who need information on VA benefits including VA pension and compensation, home loans, and education can call the VA Regional Office.

Billing Questions

1-866-258-2772

Veterans who have questions about a bill received from the Charleston VA Medical Center can call the VA Revenue Center.

Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-TALK (8255), Press 1 for Veterans
Veterans can call the Veterans Crisis Line to talk to trained professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week or visit www.veteranscrisisline.net

My HealthVet

www.myhealth.va.gov

Veterans can manage their health by logging onto My HealthVet, which offers access to Veteran health benefits



For more information on VA related topics, visit www.charleston.va.gov. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

