

NWI NEWS

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

Link

MARCH 2010

OUTREACH OPEN HOUSES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

In January, we launched a new initiative created through an interagency partnership between VA NWIHCS and other agencies. VA NWIHCS is partnering with Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran service agencies, county Veteran service officers and military transition advisors to bring information and services to Veterans in the communities where they live.

The objective is to reach out to Veterans in rural communities across the VA NWIHCS service area, which includes 104 counties in Nebraska, western Iowa, and portions of Kansas and Missouri.

The initial Veteran of the Armed Forces Outreach Open House was held Jan. 15 and 16 in Falls City, Neb. at the American Legion Club. The event was targeted toward Veterans who live in Richardson, Pawnee, Nemaha, Johnson, Gage, Otoe and Cass counties in Nebraska; Washington and Atchison in Kansas and Page, Taylor and Fremont in Iowa. About 70 Veterans from Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa and Kansas attended.

Veterans received information and counseling about VA and other Veteran-related benefits. Representatives from the following agencies were present: VA NWIHCS, Veterans Benefit Administration Regional Office, Vet Centers, Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Nebraska Transition Assistance Advisor. Other agencies involved included TRICARE, the Social Security Administration, and Military One Source.

Veterans not enrolled for VA benefits could bring their DD Form 214 to the open house to assist the agency counselors with assessing individual eligibility for VA benefits. VA counselors also helped Veterans to complete eligibility and enrollment applications.

GREETINGS FROM THE DIRECTOR

More than 167,660 Veterans reside within the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS) service area. Unfortunately, many of them are unaware of VA and the benefits and services available to them. One estimate is that only 30 percent of eligible Veterans are enrolled in the VA health care system.

One of our goals in VA NWIHCS this year is to enhance our outreach efforts. Our goal is to reach every Veteran in our service area.

In 2010, we are expanding our outreach activities. We will be visiting Veterans in their communities and connecting with them virtually through social media. We will also have several opportunities for Veterans to provide us with feedback about their health care experiences.

This issue of *NWI News Link* highlights some of our new and enhanced outreach activities.

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Photo by Will Ackerman

Above: Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy and Richardson County (Neb) Veteran Service Officer Ralph Huettner visit with Lori Wardlow, Cindy Niemack-Brown (not pictured), and Jody Kennedy during the Veterans Open House in Falls City, Neb., Jan. 15.

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The interagency outreach team will host similar open houses in rural communities across the service area throughout 2010. The next event is March 26, from Noon to 8 p.m. and March 27, from 8 to 11:30 a.m. at the Carson Community Center in Carson, Iowa.

The goal is to increase awareness about VA and other benefits and services available to Veterans, and to assist them with applying for these benefits.

COMMUNITY SPEAKER'S BUREAU

VA NWIHCS has been very responsive to requests made by service organizations, community groups, and schools for speakers at special events. We welcome these special opportunities to tell the VA story, educate members of the public about VA NWIHCS activities, and reach Veterans and family members of Veterans who may not be aware about Veterans benefits.

This year, we are making a special effort to actively seek out these kinds of opportunities. We will be pursuing this by establishing contacts with rotarie clubs, chambers of commerce, colleges and civic groups. There are many subject-matter experts in our organization who can also serve as potential speakers for these kinds of groups.

Requests for speakers should be directed to the Public Affairs Office at (402) 995-4719. We are also creating the ability to schedule a speaker via the VA NWIHCS Web site at www.nebraska.va.gov.

WOMEN VETERANS OUTREACH

About 13,000 women Veterans reside within the VA NWIHCS service area. Nationally, women represent about eight percent of the total Veteran population. This number is expected to grow by as much as 10 percent in the next decade.

VA NWIHCS has a Women's Health Care Committee that is tasked with addressing the needs, standards and quality of care we provide to women Veterans. Designated women's health care providers are at each site.

The Women's Health Care Manager has also established a newsletter that is especially targeted toward women Veterans.

Women Veterans forums are also planned this year throughout the VA NWIHCS service area in an attempt to encourage eligible women Veterans to enroll in the VA health care system and take advantage of the benefits they are entitled to.



PATIENT FORUMS

We are also reaching out to Veterans through patient forums. This is a wonderful opportunity for Veterans to provide us with some feedback.

Patient forums were piloted by the VA NWIHCS, Grand Island Division and have been very well received. The long-term plan is to expand the patient forums to our other clinics within VA NWIHCS.

We hosted a patient forum at VA NWIHCS, Omaha Division Feb. 3. Veterans who attended were first given a brief update about current activities within VA NWIHCS. The VA NWIHCS Veteran Health Promotion Coordinator then presented a short educational program called, "Celebrating American Heart Month: Take Care of Your Heart."

The remainder of the one-hour evening program offered patients the opportunity to provide feedback about their health care experiences to facility leadership. VA NWIHCS director, public affairs staff, patient advocate, Veteran health promotion coordinator and public affairs officer from the VA Regional Office were present to hear concerns and answer questions posed by Veterans.

SOCIAL MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

VA NWIHCS established a Twitter account in November. The site is www.twitter.com/VANWIHCS. We are using Twitter to distribute healthy tips for nutrition and exercise, announce special events, and provide news about the VA. We currently have about 175 followers, which include many of our stakeholders, members of the media, and VA employees.

We are using Twitter as a way to reach Veterans of all ages, but in particular to establish a presence in the online community where many younger Veterans reside.

VHA, which also has a presence on Twitter, established a Facebook page in January 2009. The page now has more than 6,000 Facebook friends. VA presence in the online world of social media encourages Veterans to establish a virtual relationship with VA. It's just one more way that VA can engage Veterans and provide information to them about their benefits.



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