

the link

August
2011



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



A Veteran's
Best Friend **6**

eye on nwi

Nancy Gregory | Acting Director



Leadership. Ownership. Value Improvement. These are far more than words at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. Employees at all campuses demonstrate in actions daily what these words represent. I personally see these actions, and hear of many more, as I talk to Veterans. The NWI Way has provided us a strong foundation for the past several years and will provide a platform upon which we will continue to build excellence well into the future.

Integrity. Commitment. Advocacy. Respect. Excellence. I CARE. These are also more than words. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki recently announced I CARE as core values for all VA employees. In a video to us, he stated he has seen many examples of these core values in many places in VA. I CARE is simply another way to express the NWI Way. Employees will read in this edition of The Link, and will hear in staff meetings and classroom sessions, how these core values compliment and are expressed through the NWI Way.

One day last week as I was leaving the main building in Omaha to travel to Lincoln, I followed a health tech pushing a Veteran in a wheelchair. Multiple times she told the veteran to please call the health tech number should he need any more help. I followed her and the Veteran through the clinic to the outpatient lab draw area. Before leaving the Veteran, she once more offered help to him should he need it to get to his next destination. This is the NWI Way. This is I CARE. This is just one of the more than 1,800 reasons (number of employees we have) why I think VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System is the best place in the world to work!

Enjoy this edition of The Link.

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AND PUBLISHER**

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FACT: THE CURRENT PROJECTED PERCENTAGE OF U.S. VETERANS WHO ARE WOMEN IS 8 PERCENT.

Cover: Kathryn Byrd and Hank, her guide dog, wait outside of the Green Clinic in VA NWIHCS, Omaha for Byrd's appointment. Photo by Joe Fogarty.



the link

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Photo By Anna Morelock

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CARE and I CARE



VA Views



Research in the News, Employee News



This magazine is an authorized publication for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS). Contents of The Link are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, or the Department of Veterans Affairs. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the VA NWIHCS Public Affairs Office.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Link welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not contain any libelous statements or personal accusations. Letters accepted for publication must include the writer’s full name and phone number. Letters may be edited for space, but never for content. Email letters to vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov.

meet

david breece

Outreach After-Care Therapist for the Substance Abuse Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program
Grand Island

Q: How long have you been a VA employee?

A: "Three years in October."

Q: What does your job entail?

A: "I work with Veterans who are getting out of alcohol and drug abuse treatment. I travel to see Veterans in remote areas to make sure they're working their after-care programs and see if they need support. I also travel to do interventions. I help Veterans get into substance abuse treatment, and sometimes see them while they're actually intoxicated. If need be, I help get them into the hospital system for detoxification."

Q: What is your favorite part of your job?

A: "Seeing Veterans recover and change their lives. I went through this program in 1994. I know it works, and it saves lives."

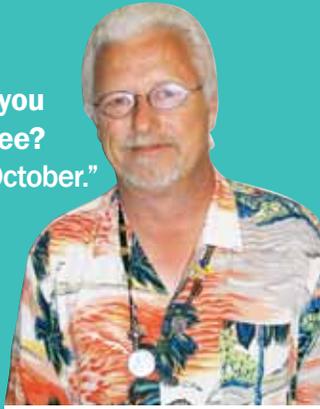
Q: What else would you like people to know about what you do?

A: "There is a Friends of Four North alumni group that includes Veterans who have been in the program at all locations and come back to support those going through treatment. They have monthly activities such as cookouts and just held their first poker run."

Q: Military Service?

A: "Twelve years, Navy and Marine Corps."

To find out more about SAARTP or Friends of Four North, call Breece at 308-383-9404. 📞



O'Neill CBOC GRAND OPENING

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System is now providing primary care through a contract clinic in O'Neill, Neb.

Providers at Avera St. Anthony's Hospital in O'Neill are caring for Veterans eligible for VA health care benefits at a new facility that opened in June.

The NWIHCS contract with Avera started in January at its old clinic in O'Neill. Avera consolidated services

from two clinics into the new hospital. Veterans can be assured Avera is providing high-quality care according to VA standards.



Photo By Will Ackerman

The O'Neill contract clinic is located at 300 N. Second St. in O'Neill, Neb.

"The staff at Avera were trained by our staff to ensure they meet VA quality measures."

Jan Youngblood, VA NWIHCS CBOC program manager

Three Avera providers are credentialed to care for Veterans eligible for VA services: physician assistants Gary Cuddy and Jennifer Stanton, and Dr. Mark Ptacek. Plans are for additional providers at the hospital to be credentialed to serve VA patients, said Crystal Kahle, director of Human Resources and Marketing at St. Anthony's Hospital.

Services through Avera include primary care and laboratory. Plans are in the works to provide additional services through telehealth for pharmacy, social work, mental health, nutrition and the VA's MOVE program, Youngblood said.

A contract with an O'Neill pharmacy is in place for providers to prescribe patients up to a 10-day supply of medicines for acute needs. Routine prescriptions will be processed through the VA's Central Mail Order Pharmacy. 📞

The clinic is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding federal holidays. Contact the clinic at 402-336-2982.

Welcome

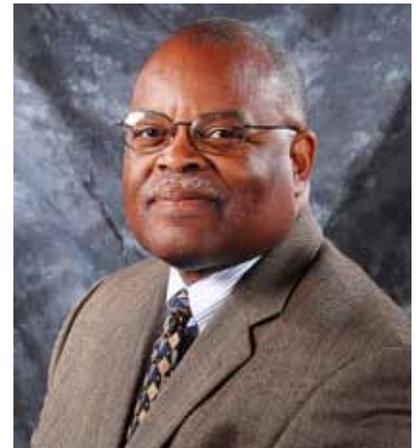
New Site Directors

Joe Fogarty | Public Affairs

nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System staff recently welcomed new site directors for its Grand Island and Lincoln facilities. Angela Williams will serve as the site director for the Grand Island Community Based Outpatient Clinic and Community Living Center. Duncan Fallon will serve as the site director for the Lincoln CBOC. Both Williams and Fallon bring vast leadership experience to their positions.



Angela Williams, Grand Island



Duncan Fallon, Lincoln

Grand Island

Before Williams assumed the position of site director, she had worked at the Grand Island CBOC as the acting assistant director since November 2010. Prior to that she served VA NWIHCS as a clinical pharmacist and the pharmacy director for Grand Island.

In addition to her service for Veterans Affairs, Williams also is the program director for the Community Actions Partners of Nebraska lead screening program. The program screens children from low-income and uninsured families across 26 Nebraska counties for lead toxicity.

Williams said she has big plans for the Grand Island facility now that she is the site director.

"I love working in pharmacy, but I think this new position is going to allow me to advocate for our Veterans a lot more effectively and I'm looking forward to it," she said.

"I find it very rewarding to advocate for the Veterans, and I feel that it's the least I can do to show my appreciation for the sacrifices they have made for this country."

Angela Williams, Grand Island site director

Williams' primary goals are to establish a higher level of collaboration between the VA NWIHCS facilities to allow Veterans to receive seamless care from location to location. She also will continue to utilize and grow telehealth, a program, she said she feels, is very important to reaching the rural Veterans served by VA NWIHCS.

Lincoln

Fallon comes to VA NWIHCS from California where he worked in the California Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections for 12 years. While working for CDRC, Fallon held various positions, including ombudsman, chief deputy warden, acting warden and assistant secretary of labor. Fallon's primary work was in labor relations. He twice held the position of assistant secretary of labor where he presided over 65,000 employees within 18 collective bargaining units. *(continued on page 9)* ►

service and therapy dogs

can be Veterans'

BEST FRIEND

Joe Fogarty | Public Affairs

healing through companionship

Veterans Affairs strives to take the best possible care of the country's returning Veterans, and sometimes the standard treatment options are not enough. For Veterans who return with injuries that limit their abilities to perform everyday tasks on their own, or those Veterans who suffer from conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder, specially trained dogs can be a lifesaver.

Kathryn Byrd, a post-Vietnam Air Force Veteran, has been legally blind since 1990. Over the past two decades, she has had four service dogs to help her get by in her day-to-day life. Her current guide dog, Hank, is a standard poodle that was born on Veterans Day in 2005. All of Byrd's guide dogs have come from The Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind in Smithtown, N.Y. According to the foundation's website, only a handful of breeds are suitable for training as service dogs: Labradors, golden retrievers, German shepherds and standard poodles.

"I don't know what I would do without him, he goes everywhere with me. When I ride on a plane, he's right there riding at my feet."

Kathryn Byrd, Air Force Veteran

Hank even goes to work with her. "I'm a massage therapist and he sits in my office and sleeps while I work. My clients laugh because he snores really loud.

In addition to service dogs that aid people with physical conditions, there are also therapy dogs trained to provide emotional support to people such as recovering hospital patients or people who suffer from severe anxiety. Sometimes a dog can be trained to fulfill both a service and therapy role. ▶



Photo By Joe Fogarty

Kathryn Byrd and Hank, her fourth guide dog, wait outside of the Green Clinic at VA NWIHCS, Omaha for Byrd's appointment. Hank will turn 6 on Veterans Day.

what benefits DOES VA PROVIDE?

Veterans with working service dogs are provided veterinary care and equipment through VA Prosthetics and Sensory Aids. VA does not pay for boarding, grooming, food or any other routine expense associated with owning a dog.

Larry Nelson and his dog, Husker, wait at the outpatient lab. Husker is a multi-task service dog that has been with Nelson for nearly eight years.

► Larry Nelson, a Navy Veteran who served during Vietnam, has a multitask service dog named Husker. Husker multitasks by serving as a therapy dog and a seizure response dog, as well. Husker, a German shepherd, also makes Nelson feel safer, he said, and emphasized the bond Veterans can have with their service dogs. Nelson has had Husker since he was a puppy. The dog will be 8 on Sept. 11.

“He’s number one,” Nelson said. “He’s my boy. It tears me up when we’re apart, and I know it does him too.”

Larry Nelson, Navy Veteran

For patients in Mental Health at the Omaha VA Medical Center, therapy dogs bring them a ray of sunshine and a whole new spirit, said Trish Schnack, Mental Health program clinical support assistant.



Photo By Joe Fogarty

Therapy dogs from Paws for Friendship visit Veterans at the Omaha VAMC about once a week. The visits have been going on for at least the five to six years since she’s worked in mental health, Schnack said. “Patients are down, and the pet therapy, just seeing the dog brings a smile to their face,” Schnack said.

The use of service and therapy dogs for Veterans has picked up in recent years. A bill called the Wounded Warrior K-9 Corps Act, which seeks to provide therapy and service dogs for all returning Veterans who could benefit from them, was introduced in 2009 and was referred to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. If the act goes into effect, it will appropriate a \$5 million annual budget to provide Veterans with service and therapy dogs for four years.

For more information on service and guide dogs, visit www.va.gov/health/ServiceandGuideDogs.asp. 

Inpatient pet therapy dog Belle and her handler from Paws for Friendship visit patients in the Mental Health department.



what is

PATIENT-CENTERED CARE?

Charlotte Thiessen | Learning Resources

THE CARE MODEL EXPLAINED | CONNECT APPRECIATE RESPOND EMPOWER

patient-centered care has been defined and used in a variety of ways. The essential theme is health care should be delivered in a manner best for patients. In a patient-centered approach to health care, providers partner with patients and their family members to identify and satisfy the full range of patient needs and preferences.

Organizations practicing patient-centered care recognize:

- A patient is an individual to be cared for, not a medical condition to be treated. Staff connect with Veterans.
- Each patient is a unique person, with diverse needs. Staff appreciate the situations in which Veterans find themselves.
- Patients are partners and have knowledge and expertise essential to their care. Staff respond to Veterans, letting them know they have listened and will help find a solution.
- Patients' family members and friends also are partners. Staff empower Veterans and inspire them to have confidence in their ability to contribute to the solution and outcome.



Rose King, an LPN at the Grand Island CBOC, talks with a patient about his care.

- Access to understandable health information is essential to empower patients to participate in their care. Patient-centered organizations take responsibility for providing access to that information. *(continued on page 11)* ▶



The Department of Veterans Affairs has never been unified under a set of core values and

characteristics until now. With its recent release, the department has defined the VA Core Values and Characteristics.

Core Values:

Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence (**I CARE**)

Core Characteristics:

Trustworthy, Accessible, Quality, Innovative, Agile and Integrated

According to the Core Values and Characteristics training material released for VA staff, the values and characteristics are derived from many values VA has demonstrated throughout its existence. Over the past two *(continued on page 11)* ▶

why did you choose to serve?

In honor of Women's Equality Day, The Link staff asked four women Veterans, "Why did you choose to serve?"



1

Hope Wilkinson
Army Veteran &
Assistant Chief, Voluntary Service | Omaha

"First and foremost was to provide for my children. Second was to see the world, and third was to serve my country."



2

Lynn Hafner
Army Veteran &
Primary Care Clerk | Grand Island

"I joined the Army after graduating high school as we did not have money for college. I also joined to travel and see the world."



3

Marina Barrett
Army Veteran &
Women Veterans Coordinator | Lincoln

"Because my dad was in—he was a sergeant major. I wanted to be like my dad, so when I turned 17, I joined. It was just something I felt like I had to do."



4

Jody Johnson
Army Veteran &
Voluntary Services Assistant | Grand Island

"I wanted to do something different with my life. My brother signed up on the delayed entry program and talked me into just going to see the recruiter to see what kind of job I could do. I figured, why not? I am from a small town, and there isn't much for employment there. I really enjoyed my time in the service. I met a lot of different people, and some that I still keep in touch with. I was stationed overseas twice. And I was stationed on both coasts of the U.S. I did do something different with my life, and I don't regret my decision one bit. I did it for me, and I am proud to be a Veteran."

► *New Site Directors continued from page 5*

Fallon's last six years in the department were spent as chief deputy warden. During that time he organized coordinated programs, work programs and educational services for institutions supporting about 2,000 employees. Fallon held this position at three different correctional facilities: California State Prison at Lone, Calif., California State Prison in Los Angeles County and Calipatria State Prison.

Fallon holds a degree in labor management and labor relations, and said he is looking forward to a long and successful tenure within VA NWIHCS.

"I think Lincoln is a grand place, and I am honored to be given the opportunity to serve the staff and the Veterans at the Lincoln facility."

Duncan Fallon, Lincoln site director

AudioCARE™

to begin Aug. 15

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a day, seven days a week
beginning Aug. 15:
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really?

- The largest group of women Veterans today served in the OEF/OIF operations.
- Women make up nearly 11.5 percent of OEF/OIF Veterans.
- 52 percent of women OEF/OIF Veterans have received VA health care; of these, 88.2 percent have used VA health care more than once.
- 47.8 percent of female OEF/OIF Veterans who used VA care during FY 2002-2010 were 30 or younger compared to 43.8 percent of male OEF/OIF Veterans.

research

in the news

Alex Olds | Research

The vast majority of fatally injured Soldiers (80 to 90 percent) die on the battlefield due to head injuries and a significant loss of blood from major blood vessel injuries. Immediate access to life-saving medical care, such as blood transfusions, is often not possible in the field.

Treatment for life-threatening hemorrhaging is needed. At the Omaha VA Medical Center, Dr. Mark Carlson is working on three methods to address this need.

The first is a novel bandage that uses blood-clotting proteins. Tested on an animal model, the bandage can easily be applied on the battlefield by someone with minimal medical training. In addition, blood-clotting proteins will be administered through the veins to determine if they will increase the animal's ability to form clots. Both military and civilian trauma incidents will benefit from the bandages.

Carlson also is working on an upcoming protocol to be funded by the Department of Defense involving swine and rabbits. The process deals with the clotting of blood to stabilize a victim suffering from blood loss.

The third research project deals with burn injury, a huge clinical problem in both the civilian and military arenas. Skin grafting has been the primary treatment of skin loss resulting from burn injury for the last 50 years. Carlson's project is to produce a new method of skin repair using a mixture of the subject's own cells and proteins to regenerate lost skin with adult stem cells grown in a biodegradable model. In doing so, this would eliminate the need for a mass amount of the subject's own skin.

For more information, visit www.nebraska.va.gov. Click the Services button and then the Research link. 

VA NWIHCS is now engaging Veterans through Twitter and Facebook



www.twitter.com/VANWIHCS



www.facebook.com/NebraskalowaVA

Watch for news, patient information and upcoming events.

LEAVING

HELLO

June 5 to 18

Sarah Aguilar, *Surgery*

Christa Guglielmo,
Nurse Director's Office

Stacie Ray, *Fee Basis*

Katrina Schneider, *Research*

Tara Smith, *Nurse Director's Office*

Peter Storm, *Bio-Med*

Regina Wessell, *Outpatient Care*

GOODBYE

June 5 to 18

Hale Becker, *Laboratory*

Jaime Bland, *V23*

Kristina Gray,
Veteran Canteen Services

Linda Grommet, *Outpatient Care*

Jolynn Kaczmarek, *Laboratory*

Shirley Piontkowski,
Extended Care

Gay Shreve, *Surgery*

Sandra Shunkwiler,
Extended Care

Katherine Smuskiewicz, *Surgery*

EMPLOYEE NEWS

Jeremy McIntyre was selected as the new Pharmacy manager for Grand Island.

Hope Wilkinson is the new assistant chief of Voluntary Service following the successful completion of her two-year VA Technical Career Field Internship.

Kristen Cook, PharmD, BCPS, co-authored a chapter titled "Cardiovascular Disease in Older Adults" in the "Pharmacotherapy Self-Assessment Program," Seventh Edition, Book VII: Geriatrics.

Would you like to submit employee news? Send it to vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov.

► *Patient-Centered Care continued from page 8*

- The opportunity to make decisions is essential to the well-being of patients. Patient-centered organizations take responsibility for maximizing patients' opportunities for choices and for respecting those choices.
- Each staff member is a caregiver whose role is to meet the needs of each patient. Staff can meet those needs more effectively if the organization supports staff in achieving their highest professional aspirations, as well as their personal goals.

Patient-centered care is the core of a high quality health care system and a necessary foundation for safe, effective, efficient, timely and equitable care. ①

► *I CARE continued from page 8*

years, participants from the many VA organizations provided input into the development of the Core Values and Characteristics. Input also was solicited from the VA workforce through surveys and feedback, as well as discussions on many topics.

The result of the past two years' work resulted in the Core Values and Characteristics, which are designed to define "who we are" and "what we stand for."

The Core Values, or "who we are," influence the VA's mission, strategy and day-to day operations. The values represent employee beliefs and provide a baseline for the standards of behavior expected of all VA employees.

The Core Characteristics, or "what we stand for," are a common set of principles around which employees' actions are organized and describe the traits all VA organizations should possess and demonstrate.

Overall, the VA Core Values and Characteristics are to remind employees of the special commitment they have to Veterans, their families and other beneficiaries. ①

Did you know Equal Employment Opportunity is for everyone?

Everyone has the opportunity to apply for jobs, develop their careers, and have a workplace conducive to providing the best quality care for the nation's Veterans. Everyone benefits from a proactive and comprehensive EEO program.

For more information about the VA NWIHCS EEO program, contact:

Bradley S. Shaff, EEO manager, at 402-995-3109 or bradley.schaff@va.gov.



EVENTS what's going on?

Aug. 1-6	National Veterans Wheelchair Games
Aug. 2	Farmer's Market, Omaha
Aug. 3	Farmer's Market, Lincoln
Aug. 4	Coast Guard Day
Aug. 5	Human Resources Open House, Omaha
Aug. 7	Purple Heart Day
Aug. 7-13	Assistance Dog Week
Aug. 7-13	National Health Center Week
Aug. 9	Farmer's Market, Omaha
Aug. 10	Farmer's Market, Lincoln
Aug. 14	Navajo Code Talkers Day
Aug. 15	Implementation of AudioCARE, VA NWIHCS
Aug. 15-18	National Veterans Small Business Conference and Expo, New Orleans
Aug. 16	Farmer's Market, Omaha
Aug. 17	Farmer's Market, Lincoln
Aug. 19	National Aviation Day
Aug. 23	Health Unit Coordinator Day
Aug. 23	Farmer's Market, Omaha
Aug. 24	Farmer's Market, Lincoln
Aug. 26	Women's Equality Day
Aug. 26	Welcome Home Event for Returning Combat Veterans, Omaha
Aug. 27-28	VA NWIHCS Outreach Team at Defenders of Freedom Air Show, Offutt AFB
Aug. 30	Farmer's Market, Omaha
Aug. 31	Farmer's Market, Lincoln

For more information about VA NWIHCS events, visit www.nebraska.va.gov.

Ever Wonder- What a VA job Looks Like? Come Find Out!



at the

VA Human Resources Open House

August 5, 9-11 am

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Education Conference Room**

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Veterans**

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- Where to find and apply for vacancies within VA and go on a brief tour of the facility.



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