

the link

November
2011



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



employees
think pink **4**



November is the month which we traditionally stop to pause and consider all we are thankful for.

This year is certainly no different for me! I am thankful for many, many things - it would simply not be possible to list them all. The many facets to our lives add depth and breadth to the list of items for which to be thankful. Certainly near the top of the list are all the Veterans who have served our country and the employees of NWHCS who come to work daily to provide

for their needs. I have often commented that our greatest asset is our employees; and I am profoundly thankful for the hard work, endless passion and driving discipline I see each and every day. Thank you.

Please take a moment to read the article in this edition regarding NWI's Safe Patient Handling Program. This program officially began in 2008 and has grown considerably since then. Its main focus is to ensure patients and our patient handlers are safe during patient transfers, repositioning and lifting. We have 139 ceiling lifts covering 21 departments in the Omaha VAMC, as well as in the Grand Island CLC and Lincoln CBOC.

NWHCS is recognized as one of the leading SPH Programs in the nation. You may find lifting equipment in other facilities around the area, but no one has the quantity or variety we do! VAs across the nation are leading the way in the SPH realm. Just one more way of taking care of those who have served us.

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AND PUBLISHER**
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Will Ackerman

THE LINK EDITORIAL STAFF
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FACT: OF THE 22.7 MILLION LIVING VETERANS, MORE THAN 1.8 MILLION ARE WOMEN.

Cover: Employees at the Lincoln CBOC participated in a "Pink Out" Oct. 19 along with other VA facilities nationwide. Photo by Bruce Thiel.

“I've only been here two weeks, but it's like working with family.”

Jared Hrdy
Pharmacist, Grand Island



Photo By Anna Morelock



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This magazine is an authorized publication for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWHCS). 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 NWHCS Public Affairs Office.

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Have a story idea? Call the VA NWHCS Public Affairs Office; Will Ackerman at 402-995-4719, Anna Morelock at 402-995-5547, or email vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov.

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

alice baden

Clinical Dietician | Lincoln CBOC

Q: How long have you been with the VA?

A: "I've been with the Lincoln VA since December of '92, but I've been with the VA since my internship in 1980."



Q: What do you do in your position?

A: "I receive consults from the primary care providers and also self-referrals from the Veterans for medical nutrition therapy."

Q: How did you get into your field?

A: "When I was in high school I had one of my siblings develop an inflammatory bowel disease, and I was fascinated by how what he ate made a difference in how he felt. I have this inquiring mind, and I just was in awe of the whole thing. So it led me into this field, and I'm still in awe about it all. I'm fascinated by the science of nutrition."

Q: What is your favorite part of your job?

A: "Seeing the delight in the changes the Veterans make and how it makes a difference in their - changing their lifestyle in general - makes a difference in their outcome."

Q: When you aren't at work, where can you be found?

A: "Volunteering. I teach English language learners, and I also teach a Bible study. 🇺🇸"

PINK OUT



Employees at the Holdrege CBOC participated in a "Pink Out" Oct. 19 along with VA facilities nationwide to support breast cancer awareness. The Pink Out originated with a challenge from the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center to all other Veterans Health Administration facilities. For more information about woman Veterans health care, visit www.nebraska.va.gov/services/women.asp.

Veterans SERVING VETERANS

VA invited employees who are Veterans to submit photos of themselves in uniform. The photos will be displayed on the VA Flickr site at www.flickr.com/photos/VeteransAffairs/ beginning Nov. 11. Check the site for these NWHCS employees and others.



Patrick Smith
LPN, Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit at Omaha VAMC
U.S. Army Reserve 1982-1996



Larry J. Krafka
RN, Clinical Research Unit Manager at VA NWHCS
U.S. Navy 1966-1969
U.S. Navy Reserve 1969-1973
U.S. Army Reserve 1979-1981

3 ways to protect yourself from getting the flu

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

get a flu shot, cover your cough and wash your hands. These three preventive measures can help employees and Veterans stay well this flu season.

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System purchased 20,500 doses of flu vaccine this season, and employees have been administering the shots since mid-October.

“If you take the flu vaccine, you protect not only yourself, your family, your coworkers and then the Veterans.”

Lesley Royal, RN
VA NWIHCS Pandemic Flu Coordinator

While flu season runs from October to April, one flu shot in the fall will protect a person the whole year. And, the flu shot is an inactive virus, so getting the shot won't make a person sick.

The flu virus can last from 48 to 72 hours, and symptoms may include headache, aching, fever, fatigue, diarrhea and vomiting. Most hospitalizations from the flu occur because of severe dehydration, and it can also turn into pneumonia, Royal said. ▶



Photo By Anna Morelock

Dr. Edward Adickes, acting chief of staff for the day, kicks off the Employee and Veteran Health Fair Sept. 27 in Omaha by getting the first flu shot of the day from Occupational Health nurse Lois Johnson

▶ “If you are having any symptoms, the key is to make sure that you're taking either like a Tylenol for the fever or the aching and ensuring that you're drinking fluids,” she said.

And, stay home.

“The key is if you're not feeling well, cover your cough. Make sure that you wash your hands – hand washing, hand washing, hand washing. If you don't feel well, and you've got that fever, stay home. It's not worth bringing it in to get people sick.”

NWIHCS employees who notice patients coughing or sneezing can offer them tissues or surgical masks from the respiratory etiquette stations located throughout the clinics.

Walk-in flu clinics at NWIHCS facilities will run through Nov. 18. ①

Anybody can fall into

homelessness

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

VA IS HELPING VETERANS GET BACK ON THEIR FEET.

Sharon Coutermarsh, a military policewoman, served in the U.S. Army for 14 years. She never thought she would become homeless. But, she did, just like thousands of other Veterans. Veterans who put their lives on the line in combat often come home and travel down a path laden with personal landmines.

Coutermarsh faced post-traumatic stress disorder because of things she experienced in the military, including seeing her platoon leader killed in front of her while serving in Operation Desert Storm. Her marriage failed in 2008 after 15 years.

“All of my support systems had broken down. People who I thought were friends before the military had moved on with their lives.”

Sharon Coutermarsh, U.S. Army Veteran

Her problems seemed small at first, she said, but they crept up on her like a “thief in the night.” A couple of beers to ease the depression and pain escalated to a 12 pack. She didn’t know how to write a resume to get a job and admits to being financially irresponsible.

Her story is similar to others.

“It usually starts with one bad thing that happens,” said Linda Twomey, Mental Health Specialty Programs coordinator for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. Common factors include a Veteran losing a job or a house, getting divorced or becoming disabled.

“One of the biggest challenges we see is new Veterans transitioning their job skills from the military to the civilian sector.”

Linda Twomey,
Mental Health Specialty Programs
Coordinator, VA NWIHCS

Veterans don’t have to go it alone, though. The VA implemented a full scope of benefits and services to give these Veterans their lives back. ▶

Veterans try on coats during the Stand Down event for homeless Veterans Oct. 5 at the Pershing Auditorium in Lincoln. Veterans eligible for VA care are offered free health care, clothing and other services at the event.



Photo By Bruce Thiel

► Twomey leads a team that provides a variety of services including health care, employment and job training, and housing support services.

From October 2010 to August 2011, NWIHCS employees served more than 1,100 homeless Veterans. This was a 15 percent increase from fiscal year 2010. Although most were men, 3 percent, like Coutermarsh, were women.

Although there is not one overriding risk factor, there are several that put the Veteran at higher risk of becoming homeless, including childhood abuse and neglect, poverty, mental illness and substance abuse, said Twomey. About 70 percent of these Veterans have substance addiction, 60 percent have mental illness and 60 percent have major medical ailments.

Unfortunately, many of the Veterans who end up homeless may be familiar with the health care benefits, but not other services the VA can provide to assist them. This is why people like U.S. Army Veteran Mike Johnson, a homeless outreach team member, spends much of his time performing street outreach. He visits shelters and bridges or other places homeless Veterans may be in Omaha.

“I go out and introduce myself. If the person is a Veteran, I tell them, ‘Let me see how I can help you out.’ My goal is to develop a rapport, not to judge.”

Mike Johnson, VA NWIHCS Homeless Outreach Team Member

Once the Veteran is verified as eligible for VA benefits, a case manager helps the person learn what services might be available and how to access them.



Photo By Will Ackerman

Veteran Steve Watkins receives items from Mercedes Bourn, a medical support assistant at the Recovery and Rehabilitation Center in Omaha.

Benefits and services available to homeless Veterans have grown exponentially in recent years. This is in part because Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki made ending Veteran homelessness by 2014 one of his top three goals.

NWIHCS has seen significant enhancements to homeless Veteran services. An old building at the Grand Island VA was transformed in early 2011 into a transitional residence for the Compensated Work Therapy program. Disadvantaged or at-risk and homeless Veterans live in the nine-bed residence while working for pay. These Veterans learn new job skills and regain a sense of pride and self-worth, Twomey said.

Craig Hunt, a U.S. Army Veteran, who was homeless and lived under bridges in Lincoln, Neb., from 2004 to 2008, benefitted from another housing program — Department of Housing and Urban Development/VA Supportive Housing. While Jana Langhorst, a social worker at the Lincoln VA, provided case management services, the program provided Hunt a Section 8 voucher and he found a suitable apartment unit through Lincoln public housing authorities.

“A requirement to get a HUD-VASH voucher is that I had to go through treatment at the VA,” Hunt said.

(continued on page 11) ►

Need help with a **LIFT?**

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

VA NWIHCS IS A NATIONAL LEADER IN SAFE PATIENT HANDLING

In 2008, Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System leaders invested in their nurses, nursing assistants, health techs, orderlies and others involved in moving patients.

With the installation of lifts in patient rooms, the Intensive Care Unit and Emergency Department in Omaha, NWIHCS cut down on the number and severity of injuries to patient handlers, as well as the number of workers' compensation claims.

According to Rhonda Fritz, RN, safe patient handling coordinator, several studies done in the late 1990s showed the average nurse in an average eight hour shift lifts 1.8 tons of patient weight a day. ▶

“What other industry or profession thinks that lifting 200 pounds routinely, 100 times a day is okay, and does it without the assist of some kind of device to help them?”

Ronda Fritz, RN, Safe Patient Handling Coordinator



Photo By Bruce Thiel



Photo By Bruce Thiel

Chris Tye, CNA; Yvonne Howland, CNA and Trisha Jergenson ultrasound technologist practice placing a sling on Corey Ritchie, RN. They are getting ready to use an overhead lift to get Ritchie out of bed from a sitting/lying position into a chair. NWIHCS has 139 ceiling lifts to assist with lifting and repositioning patients in and out of bed.

▶ “You go to Home Depot or Menards or Lowe’s, what do they grab? If you want them to get a box that weighs greater than 50 pounds and take it out to the car, they’re getting some kind of lift. They know better,” Fritz said.

Patient handlers are consistently in the top five for injuries and lost work days. Lifting and moving patients without the assistance of lifts was just the way business was always done, Fritz said.

“We just accepted the fact we’d go home, as patient caregivers, hurting, taking Tylenol, taking Motrin, putting our feet up, taking a hot bath,” Fritz said. *(continued on page 11)* ▶

Deb O’Reilly, RN, demonstrates the SARA 3000 by lifting Mary Belt, CNA. The SARA 3000 can be used to assist patients from a sitting to standing position for chair-to-chair, chair-to-bed, or bed-to-chair/commode positioning.

Why do you feel it's important to celebrate

Veterans Day?



In honor of Veterans Day Nov. 11, the Link staff asked staff to reflect on their commitment to serve Veterans.



Vita Derun
Dental Assistant | Lincoln

"Because they did a lot for our country. We have to show them our appreciation every day, but especially on Veterans Day."



Jodi Manley, LPN
Patient Advocate | Lincoln

"It's a small way to say thank you for what they've done for us."



Mercedes Bourn
Program Health Assistant | Omaha

"I think Veterans Day is a special day to thank Veterans for what they have done. Without our Veterans, I wouldn't have freedom."



Angela Williams
Site Director | Grand Island

"I feel Veterans need to be honored every day. Veterans Day gives us a day to take a step back as a society to honor Veterans and to reflect upon the sacrifices they have made."

Thank You for CHOOSING US for Your Health Care

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

Celebrating Patient-Centered Care Month

Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman signed a proclamation urging citizens of Nebraska to observe October's Patient-Centered Care Month along with the VA NWIHCS.

NWIHCS employees celebrated the observance Oct. 19 at each of its 10 facilities. Throughout the day, employees thanked Veterans for choosing VA for their health care.

"Veterans are the core of everything we do," said Gayla Gries, NWIHCS patient-centered care coordinator. "As a patient-centered organization, we want Veterans to know we honor and respect their knowledge and realize they are the experts on their individual needs."

As written in the proclamation:

"The role of health caregivers is to meet the needs of patients as individuals to be cared for, not medical conditions to be treated; and The VA realizes patients and their family members are partners



Photo By Will Ackerman

in their care and have knowledge and expertise that are essential to their care; and 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."

(continued on page 11) ▶

EVENTS what's going on?

- Nov. 1-7** Urology Nurses and Associates Week
- Nov. 2** Open Season Benefit Fair, Grand Island
- Nov. 3** Hospice Information Fair, Grand Island
- Nov. 4** Hospice Information Fair, Omaha
- Nov. 5** Veterans Parade, Bellevue
- Nov. 6** Daylight Saving Time ends
- Nov. 8** Open Season Benefit Fair, Lincoln
- Nov. 8** Enhanced-Use Lease Forum, Lincoln
- Nov. 8** Hospice Information Fair, Lincoln
- Nov. 11** Veterans Day
- Nov. 14** Benefits Open Season begins
- Nov. 14** World Diabetes Day
- Nov. 15** America Recycles Day
- Nov. 15** Safe Patient Handling Day
- Nov. 17** Great American Smokeout
- Nov. 19** Stand Down for Homeless Veterans, Omaha
- Nov. 24** Thanksgiving
- Nov. 27-Dec. 3** National Influenza Vaccination Week

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

employees | NEW | LEAVING

HELLO

Aug. 28 to Oct. 8

- Stacy Albers, Nurse Director's Office
- Shayne Aldana, VCS
- Autumn Cherie Barton, Nurse Director's Office
- James Baumberger, Fee Basis
- Pi-Wan Cheng, Research
- Glen Cook, Facilities
- James Crouch, Pharmacy
- Michelle Dougherty, VCS
- Angela Fuehrer, VA Police
- Thomas Glen Harsin, IT
- Jared Hrды, Pharmacy
- Laci Krzywicki, Imaging
- Sabrina Nicole Lee, Imaging
- James Means, SPD
- Oscar Mendez, Nurse Director's Office
- Avishai Meyer, Fee Basis
- Sheryl Mitchell, Amb. Care
- Amy Onstott, Patient Care
- Jennifer Ringler, Patient Care
- Mary Smith-Zoucha, Extended Care
- Ashley Steinhauer, Nurse Director's Office
- Milton Thomas, VCS
- Kathryn Thompson, Fee Basis
- Matthew Wheeler, Fee Basis
- Dustin Winkelman, Nurse Director's Office

GOODBYE

Aug. 28 to Oct. 8

- Jabir Abdullah, EMS
- Samantha Baker, Amb. Care
- Kimberly Cabriales, Pharmacy
- Joe Fogarty, Director's Office
- Gwendolyn Gillispie, Patient Care
- Kelly Hastings, Extended Care
- Michael Hein, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
- Brielyn Jensen, Lab
- Lindsay Johnson, Patient Care
- Melissa Larsen, Imaging
- Mary Larson-Brenden, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
- Carrie Mullin, Facilities
- Sonia Murrillo, Amb. Care
- Kristin Powell, Student
- Eugene Roland, Patient Care Surgery
- Larry Selzler, Associate Director's Office
- Robert Thorpe Jr., EMS
- Bennie Upchurch, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
- Daniel Van Der Meulen, VERC
- Jan Youngblood, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

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



Photo By Anna Morelock

FALL Employee Forums

Coral Selden, Cheryl Schneider, Rita Czaplowski and Cindy Niemack-Brown participate in the 2011 Fall All-Employee Forum in Grand Island Oct. 17. Beginning Oct. 17 and running through Nov. 4, employees gathered to discuss the VA Values – Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence. After a video of Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care employees from different facilities talking about how they care for Veterans in their positions, the employees gathered in small groups to discuss their own experiences. Using I CARE as the theme, employees drew pictures representing experiences they've had at the VA or in their own lives. The groups shared their stories and ended each forum by watching a video on a new Veteran's first visit to the VA.

“There was a time I used to cope by using alcohol. The VA is the best thing that ever happened to me in my life.”

Craig Hunt, U.S. Army Veteran

VA relies heavily on collaboration with community agencies to assist homeless Veterans. For example, the Grant and Per Diem program funds community-based agencies that provide transitional housing or service centers, up to 65 percent of the project construction costs. In April 2011, the GPD program provided a \$1.8 million grant for New Visions, a 26-unit homeless Veteran transitional housing facility in Omaha.

One of the more recent additions to NWHCS services is a Veterans Resource and Recovery Center that opened in October in Building D on the Omaha VA Medical Center campus. The R & R center offers Veterans free showers and laundry facilities in addition to the chance to learn what VA benefits and community services are available to them. The center is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Any Veteran can slip through the cracks into homelessness, Coutermarsh said. However, with VA employees like Johnson, there is hope.

“Sometimes, angels don’t always have wings,” she said. ⓘ

VA homeless programs:
www.va.gov/HOMELESS/index.asp

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans:
1-877-4AID-VET

VA NWHCS:
www.nebraska.va.gov

“It was just a way of life. Now we know different. We know there are things out there that can prevent those things because it’s the cumulative injuries that lead us up to the debilitating injury.”

Veterans Affairs realized injuries to patient handlers could be prevented and dedicated \$208 million to facilities nationally to implement the Safe Patient Handling Program. By installing its first patient lifts in 2008, NWHCS was two years ahead of the curve because the NWI leadership “got it,” Fritz said.

“By our fiscal year ‘10 report from the national office, (VA is) one of the leaders in the nation on where our program stands, and certainly in our VISN (NWHCS is) a leader in how far we’ve gotten our program developed. That’s a huge thing, and that really reflects on our leadership here.”

Veterans and their family members, as well as NWHCS employees will have a chance to see patient lifts in action from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 15 during Safe Patient Handling Day at the Omaha VA Medical Center.

Fritz and unit peer leaders, who train patient handlers in their areas, will be on hand in the main lobby to demonstrate the lifts and share information on the program.

Since 2008, NWHCS has continued installing lifts throughout the Omaha facility as well as in other NWHCS clinics.

“If we’re not using the equipment we’re just asking for injuries,” Fritz said. “Plus if we’re not using the equipment, we’re causing discomfort to our patients.” ⓘ

Displays in the lobby of each facility and clinic areas showed how NWHCS employees focus on Veteran-centered care. Along with the informational aspects of the day, volunteers at each location passed out cookies and popcorn. Employees received lanyards and pens thanking them for caring and putting Veterans first. ⓘ

Introducing the Hello Wellness Incentive Card for Employees



Complete Your Card and You Could Win a \$50 VCS Gift Certificate

Starting October 1, 2011, for every Employee Health Promotion Disease Prevention (EHPDP) sponsored program, class or survey completed, you will receive one punch on your Incentive Card.

2011 Federal Employee Benefits Open Season

Open Season will run Nov. 14 through Dec. 12

This is an opportunity for employees to enroll, cancel or make changes to their existing FEDVIP (dental and vision) enrollment and/or FEHB health plan.

Please remember that your FSAFEDS enrollments DO NOT carry over year to year and you must reenroll during open season.

View benefit options at www.opm.gov/insure/health.

For more information, please contact Carla LeFrancois at carla.lefrancois@va.gov, or Omaha ext. 3261.



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