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January 2012



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

10 Shop With a Cop



Happy New Year!

A fairly common conversation this time of year is about New Year's resolutions. What are you going to focus on this year to change, improve and sustain?

This year is bound to be an especially exciting year for Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. We have many exciting initiatives in progress – the Victory Apartments, which is affordable housing focusing on homeless Veterans; new hospital design and planning, enhanced-use leases in Lincoln and Grand Island, the continued journey toward Magnet status and many others. And, I am sure we will begin many more initiatives this year.

Perhaps most exciting of all is the opportunity to welcome Dr. Marci Mylan to NWIHCS. I am extremely confident she will lead us to a new level of excellence. Let's welcome her in NWI fashion!

It has been my pleasure to work with all of you as acting director these past few months. Let me thank everyone for your support during this time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Gregory".

**ACTING DIRECTOR
AND PUBLISHER**
Nancy Gregory, FACHE

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
Will Ackerman

THE LINK EDITORIAL STAFF
Editor | Anna Morelock
Photographer | Bruce Thiel
Designer | Becky Brown

FACT: TO DATE, THERE HAVE BEEN 12,930 PATIENT ENCOUNTERS VIA TELEHEALTH FOR THE MOVE! PROGRAM.

Cover: VA Police Officer Jack Nelson and Navy Veteran Brian Miller help Pierce Miller pick out a Cars action figure for Christmas. The Miller family was chosen as the VA Police's first Shop With A Cop family. Photo by Anna Morelock



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“As a civilian member of the VA team, it is a tremendous honor for me to be able to give back to those who have graciously served our country.”

Natalie VanKat MS, RD, LMNT



Photo By Will Ackerman

Meet an Employee and VA NWHCS' New Director



Connecting Veterans with their Providers via My HealthVet



Veterans MOVE to Meet Weight Loss Goals



Snowflakes: A Small Tribute With a Big Heart



VA Views | American Legion Auxiliary Gift Shop



Shop with a Cop



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.

CONTACT US

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.

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meet

lori neighbors

Program Support Assistant | Substance Abuse Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program

Q: What does your position entail?

A: "I work with Dean Warneke. I help him with admissions over to the transition house and admissions to the program here."

Q: How long have you been with the VA?

A: "I've been in this program five years in June. At the VA in Grand Island for a little over 16 years."

Q: What your favorite part of your job?

A: "Meeting the Veterans – all the different backgrounds that they come from." 📞



Veterans Health Administration Announces New Director for Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

dr. Marci Mylan has been named the new director for the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

Mylan will serve as the senior official for the VA health care system that serves more than 161,000 Veterans who live in 104 counties in Nebraska, western Iowa, and portions of Kansas and Missouri.



Before coming to NWIHCS, Mylan served as the associate director at the Minneapolis, Minn., VA Health Care System.

Mylan brings extensive clinical and administrative experience. She has served in a variety of supervisory roles in the VA mental health service line. Mylan also served as the acting deputy director for seven months in 2009 for the VA Midwest Health Care Network, Veterans Integrated Service Network, which is located in Minneapolis.

Mylan holds a doctorate in clinical psychology and a master's degree in health care administration from the U.S. Army Baylor Program at Baylor University in Texas.

Her new appointment is effective Jan. 15 and will coincide with a promotion to the VA's senior executive service.

Mylan replaces Al Washko, who retired March 31, 2011, after serving as the VA NWIHCS director for more than seven years. Nancy Gregory, the system's associate director, has been acting director in the interim. 📞

VA NWIHCS is now engaging Veterans through Twitter and Facebook



[www.twitter.com/
VANWIHCS](http://www.twitter.com/VANWIHCS)



[www.facebook.com/
NebraskalowaVA](http://www.facebook.com/NebraskalowaVA)

Watch for news, patient information and upcoming events.



Winter Voice of VA Survey is Coming!

Administration Dates:
Jan. 17– Feb. 6, 2012

Watch Your Email for More Information

My HealthVet

Connecting Veterans with Their Providers and Health Care

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

If Veterans forget to ask a question at their appointments, they now can reach their primary care team via My HealthVet.

Maybe a Veteran read some health information and has further questions. My HealthVet can help with that, as well.

If Veterans start new medications, they can message their providers to let them know how it's going.

All of these scenarios and more are reasons Veterans can use My HealthVet secure messaging to contact the members of their Patient-Aligned Care Team. All primary care providers and PACTs within Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System now are up and running on the secure email-like system.

"It helps them take a little more action in their health care," said NWHCS My HealthVet Coordinator Jan Carlin. "So, if they see something they're wondering about or they have a wellness reminder, they can ask their doctor about it."

Besides secure messaging, MyHealthVet offers numerous other features Veterans can use to take control of their health care.

The online health record gives Veterans a place to store their health information. They can record vitals, such as pulse, blood pressure and blood sugar. The system sends health reminders and allows Veterans to keep track of medications, including over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and supplements.

"The other good reason to have a My healthVet account is they can connect with their electronic information (at VA). They can see their appointments, see their lab results, use secure messaging, they can be alerted to their health reminders and also see any allergies that they have."

Jan Carlin, NWHCS My HealthVet Coordinator 



Get your My HealthVet account In-Person Authenticated and start using secure messaging today.

To learn more about the benefits of using My HealthVet and to sign-up for an account, visit www.myhealth.va.gov.



Veterans MOVE

TO MEET WEIGHT LOSS GOALS

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

When asked to set a weight loss goal, Gale Richardson said she wanted to weigh what she did when she entered the Army at age 23 – 136 pounds. The 61 year old has about four pounds left to lose.

James Cockerham has a similar goal; to weigh what he did when he entered the Air Force at age 18 – 212 pounds. He's six pounds from reaching his goal.

Both Veterans are participants in Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's MOVE Program. They've both lost more than 100 pounds over the course of two years using programs designed specifically for their needs.

Cockerham used MOVE's Intensive Weight Management Program and attends group classes. Richardson meets individually with program staff as a part of her program.

"MOVE focuses on different lifestyle tools, so we look at nutrition, exercise, physical activity, different behaviors that are involved with that," said Shelly Oestmann, MOVE Program coordinator.

"We really try to have the patient direct where they want their care to go so we do a lot of motivational interviewing. We'll guide them, but a lot of times we really have them direct what they can do."

Shelly Oestmann, MOVE Program coordinator

The weight management program is for Veterans with a body mass index of 25 or greater and includes self management, weekly classes, monthly support groups, a medication program, the Intensive Weight Management Program and, as a last resort, bariatric surgery, as options for participants. ▶



"It works if you work with it. You have to apply yourself."

Gale Richardson, MOVE Participant

Veterans participate in one of the weekly MOVE classes in Omaha and via video-conference at the community-based outpatient clinics. The motivational classes include information on different weight-loss topics each week.



Photo By Anna Morelock

► The basis of the program – self management – is an important starting point for the Veterans, said Christine Demasi, nurse practitioner for the MOVE program. During the self management portion of the program, Veterans make changes to their diets and exercise. Participants can call into the MOVE hotline or meet weekly with the MOVE health care provider.

“Everybody can lose weight,” Demasi said. “They can do anything – you could eat grapefruit for nine months and lose weight, but you’re never going to stick to it and it’s not healthy. What I tell them is we’re doing a healthy approach ... (medication) isn’t the solution. The solution is that you uncover what it is that triggers you to overeat and you change that behavior. And if you don’t change that you’re never going to get anywhere because you’re going to keep on doing that again.”

Richardson has stuck to her 1,400 calorie diet and works out regularly. It was hard at first, she said, but has continued to get easier.

“The longer you go without something the less you miss it. For the calories in a piece of cake, I can have a whole plate of food for the same amount of calories. I don’t feel guilty. I’m eating healthy, and I’m full.”

Gale Richardson

Looking and feeling good, are worth it, Richardson said.

“It’s up to you,” she said. “You have to want to do it, and how bad do you want it? How bad do you want to lose weight? How bad do you want to lower your cholesterol and your blood pressure or go off diabetes medicine? Nobody cares how much I exercise or how much I’m sweating my butt off. Nobody cares. I care. I care how I look. I care how I feel. I love clothes, but I didn’t when I was heavier. It’s a personal thing that you have to make up your mind do and stick with it.”

Cockerham said he knew he had to do something for his health, but he wasn’t sure what. The MOVE Program gave him the direction he needed. As a diabetic, Cockerham was taking four insulin shots a day. After dropping from 322 pounds to 219, he is down to one shot a day.

Usually with just a 10 pound weight loss, patients can come off of some of their meds, Demasi said.►

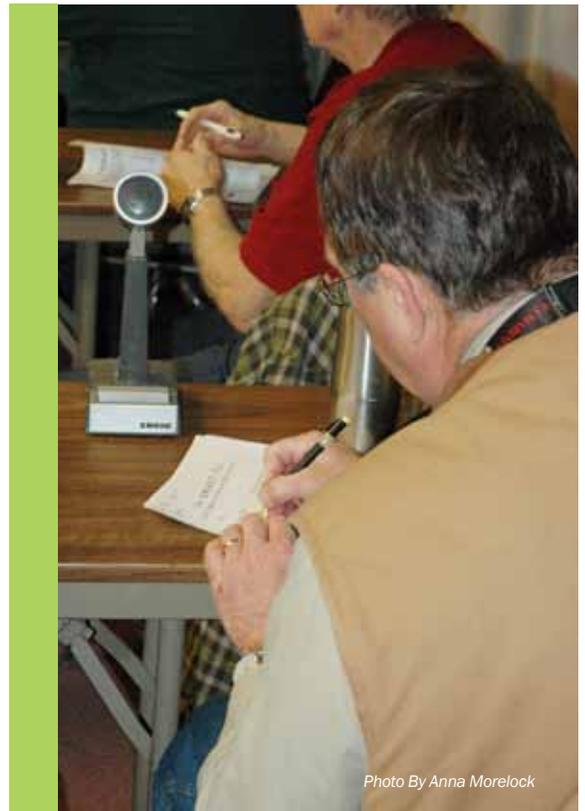


Photo By Anna Morelock

A Veteran in the weekly MOVE class fills out an exercise on what changes he made in 2011. The weekly classes include information on healthy cooking, exercise and other aspects of healthy living.

► “It’s really nice to see that and when you can show it to them,” Demasi said, “the benefit of it – they can see their toes again, or they can bend easily, they really do believe in the program. What they’re doing is working.”

“I don’t want to toot my own horn, Cockerham said, “but I think I’ve done pretty good really.”

Since it began at NWHCS in 2005, the MOVE Program has helped more than 4,000 Veterans with their weight loss goals and is the biggest user of telemedicine throughout NWHCS. The program is available at all NWHCS facilities except O’Neill, and Veterans can attend the weekly classes via telemedicine. ⓘ

To sign up, a Veteran just needs to visit the MOVE office on the third floor in Omaha, or call 402-995-3776. The program is available to all Veterans enrolled with NWHCS and no copays are charged for MOVE visits.



snowflakes:

A SMALL TRIBUTE FROM A BIG HEART TO AREA VETERANS

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

Snowflakes appearing at the Grand Island VA facility Dec. 5 didn't fall from the sky, but came from the scissors of 9-year-old Kaden Skorniak, the son of Pharmacy Technician Lynn Skorniak.

Kaden, who doesn't meet the minimum age of 13 to volunteer at the VA, still wanted to do something for the Veterans. He'd made about 10 get-well cards previously, his mom said, but decided he wanted to do something for everyone.

“My grandpa, my sister, and my uncles and my dad were all in the military. I kind of want to be in the Navy Seals, and I just have a lot of respect for these people, and this is my way of thanking them.”

Kaden Skorniak

It took Kaden about four hours to cut 76 snowflakes out of coffee filters – a craft he learned in preschool.

“It doesn't surprise me that he's doing stuff like this,” Lynn said. “He's got a big heart. He likes to make people happy.”

“I just like to see them smile,” the third-grader said.



Photo By Coral Selden

Third-grader Kaden Skorniak shows off a box of coffee-filter snowflakes he cut out to give to Veterans at the Grand Island VA facility. Kaden made 76 snowflakes as a way to thank Veterans for their service.

Kaden handed the snowflakes out to residents at the Grand Island Community Living Center and outpatients waiting for appointments in the clinics. ①

STOP FIGHTING ALONE...
START

MOVING FORWARD

A problem solving approach to achieving life's goals



THURSDAYS
3 TO 4 P.M.

The clinic has four group sessions.

Omaha VA Medical Center
Third Floor, Room 3583
Located Near Credit Union

Moving Forward is a life coaching program that uses strategies to teach a set of skills to better handle stressful situations associated with transitioning to civilian life or other life problems. The program teaches "every day" problem solving skills and ways to overcome low motivation, negative moods, and negative attitudes that interfere with life goals.

Contact your provider or Larra Petersen-Lukenda, Ph.D.
at 402-995-4598 for a referral to this group today!

what are you LOOKING FORWARD TO MOST IN THE new year?



Judy Bell, LPN
Ambulatory Care | Grand Island

"I have a granddaughter graduating from high school. I have seven grandchildren, so that's my life. So, I just look forward to being happy and spending time together."



Brandon Hargrove
Food Service Worker | Omaha

"I hope to better myself through education so that I can also improve myself with a better job position."



Donna Higgins, LMHP
Social Worker | Omaha

"I want to be a better person, to improve myself, so that I can be better at helping the Veterans around me."



Jocelyn Ritchie, Ph.D.
Psychologist, Polytrauma Support Clinic | Omaha

"I plan to stick to my 'eating adventure' (I don't say diet) to lose even more weight, and to be more physically active."



Alan Brummel, RN
Nurse Manager | Bellevue

"I am looking forward to leading the growth and building our team of providers, nurses and support professionals. Building our team will allow the Bellevue CBOC to expand on how we provide excellent care for Veterans."

It's not Santa

It's the American Legion Auxiliary Bearing Gifts

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

finding time to select gifts for people during the holidays can be challenging.

Thanks to the generosity of American Legion Auxiliary members, many patients in Department of Veterans Affairs health care facilities have one less worry during the holidays.

Since the 1930s, the organization has hosted gift shops for hospitalized Veterans at VA medical centers, community living centers, dialysis units and some long-term residential treatment programs. Nebraska auxiliary member Gertrude Johansen said it's the organization's way to thank the Veterans.

"This is part of our mission, which is, 'In the spirit of God and country. We serve our Veterans'."

Gertrude Johansen, Nebraska Auxiliary (continued on page 11) ▶



Photo By Will Ackerman

Veteran Dan Kesterson selects a gift for family members with help from American Legion Auxiliary member Rose Sheehy (L) at the Omaha VA Medical Center with assistance from his wife, Mary Kesterson.

Shop With A COP

VA NWIHCS Police Shop for Christmas Gifts for a Family in Need

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

Pierce Miller carried an armload of Cars toys around the Papillion Walmart as his family shopped for holiday gifts and everyday needs with officers from the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Police.

Navy Veteran Brian Miller, his wife Sunshine, and sons, 3-year-old Pierce and 2-year-old Peyton were the first family to be helped by the VA Police's "Shop With A Cop" event. The police officers raised almost \$400 to help the Veteran's family.

"I loved it," said VA Police Lt. Ross Venditte about participating in the event, "helping out people that don't have as much as we do."

Venditte, Officer Jack Nelson and Police Program Support Assistant Ted Wzorek helped Pierce and Peyton pick out toys for Christmas – mostly with a Cars theme – but also, backpacks for daycare, light-up toothbrushes and a couple of DVDs.

VA Police Lt. Ross Venditte looks at a Cars coloring set with 3-year-old Pierce Miller. The Miller brothers chose numerous Cars toys as they shopped with VA Police during their first Shop With A Cop event.



Photo By Anna Morelock

VA Police Officer Jack Nelson and Navy Veteran Brian Miller help Peyton Miller, 2, pick out backpacks for him and his brother Pierce, 3. The VA NWIHCS Police donated money for the Miller family to shop for Christmas presents and household items as a part of the police's first Shop With A Cop event.

Brian and Sunshine shopped for the more sensible items such as diapers and detergent.

"To me, it was what it was supposed to be about. They got what they needed."

Ted Wzorek, Police Program Support Assistant

Brian, an Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran, said the family would be spending Christmas morning together at home and the kids would also get to see grandparents in Lincoln for the holiday.

After checking out, the group loaded the toilet paper, toys and other goods into the family's minivan.

"Thank you, this was amazing." Sunshine said, as hugs and thanks all around ended the outing.

The VA NWIHCS Police hope to make VA Shop With A Cop a yearly event for the holidays. 



Photo By Anna Morelock

► *Gift Shop continued from page 9*

The auxiliary hosted gift shops at the Omaha VA Medical Center from Dec. 5 to 12 and the Grand Island VA Dec. 12. Veterans selected from a variety of free gifts that included clothing, games, toys and electronics.

If patients couldn't make it to the gift shop in the basement of the Omaha VAMC, auxiliary members brought gifts to them on a cart.

“It's wonderful that they would go to this extreme.”

Dan Kesterson, U.S. Army Veteran

Kesterson selected a toy truck for his grandson and a necklace for his daughter from the cart at his bedside.

The auxiliary provides the gifts and wraps them. Johansen said the Omaha auxiliary spent more than \$6,000. Grand Island's gift shop had about \$3,500 to spend, said Paula Reimers.

Each auxiliary unit is assessed so much money per member. They also hold fundraising events.

The Omaha gift shop helped 297 families in 2010. Grand Island expected to serve about 60 Veterans.

Although it may seem like a simple gesture by the auxiliary, the Veterans appreciate the kindness.

“Last year, I was able to get some nice shirts. This year, I selected a watch for my brother,” said Bernard Mullen, a former Marine and inpatient at the Omaha VAMC who had knee-replacement surgery. “It's nice.”

EVENTS what's going on?

- Jan. 1** New Year's Day
- Jan. 2** New Year's Day Federal Holiday
- Jan. 2-8** National Folic Acid Awareness Week
- Jan. 15-21** Healthy Weight Week
- Jan. 16** Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Jan. 16-20** Planetree Information Sessions
- Jan. 17-Feb. 6** Voice of VA Survey
- Jan. 22-28** National Certified Nurse Anesthetists Week

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

LEAVING

NEW

employees

HELLO

Oct. 24 to Nov. 19

Rachel Alexander, *Inpatient Care*

Scott Arnold, *Mental Health*

Lisa Bilsend, *Pharmacy*

Brent Bollwitt, *Pharmacy*

Eileen Broich, *Patient Care*

Patrick Cunningham, *Logistics*

Eric Curtis, *Prosthetics*

Rodney Day,
Sterile Processing Department

Carrie Hansen, *Imaging*

Kelsey Hopwood, *Fee Basis*

Lynn Kimsey,
Nurse Director's Office

Samantha Lloyd, *Patient Care*

Staci McConaughy,
Nurse Director's Office

Teresa Rainey, *Outpatient Care*

Scarlet Schwab, *Police*

Rosana Walker, *Fee Basis*

Michael Williams,
Quality Management

GOODBYE

Oct. 24 to Nov. 19

Karen Marie Shapley,
Mental Health

Kenneth Mausbach, *Mental Health*

Mary Larson-Brenden, *Primary
Care and Specialty Medicine*

George Valenzuela,
Environmental Management Service

Jordan Horner, *Logistics*

Amy Zoll, *PCSM*

John Beister, *Office of Information
and Technology*

Elizabeth Wear,
Veterans Canteen Service



TECHNOLOGY: My HealthVet

My HealthVet provides Veterans online access to their personal health records. The online tools can help Veterans manage their health and make informed decisions about their care. Secure messaging allows Veterans to contact members of their care team. A personal health journal is available for Veterans to track information on their health. Veterans can use My HealthVet to submit prescription refills and to learn more about benefits available to them through VA. To register, visit www.myhealth.va.gov.



ex·cel·lence [ek-suh-luh'ns], *n.*, **1.** the fact or state of excelling; superiority; eminence. **2.** an excellent quality or feature. **3. VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System** —Syn. **1.** preeminence. **2.** merit, virtue.



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