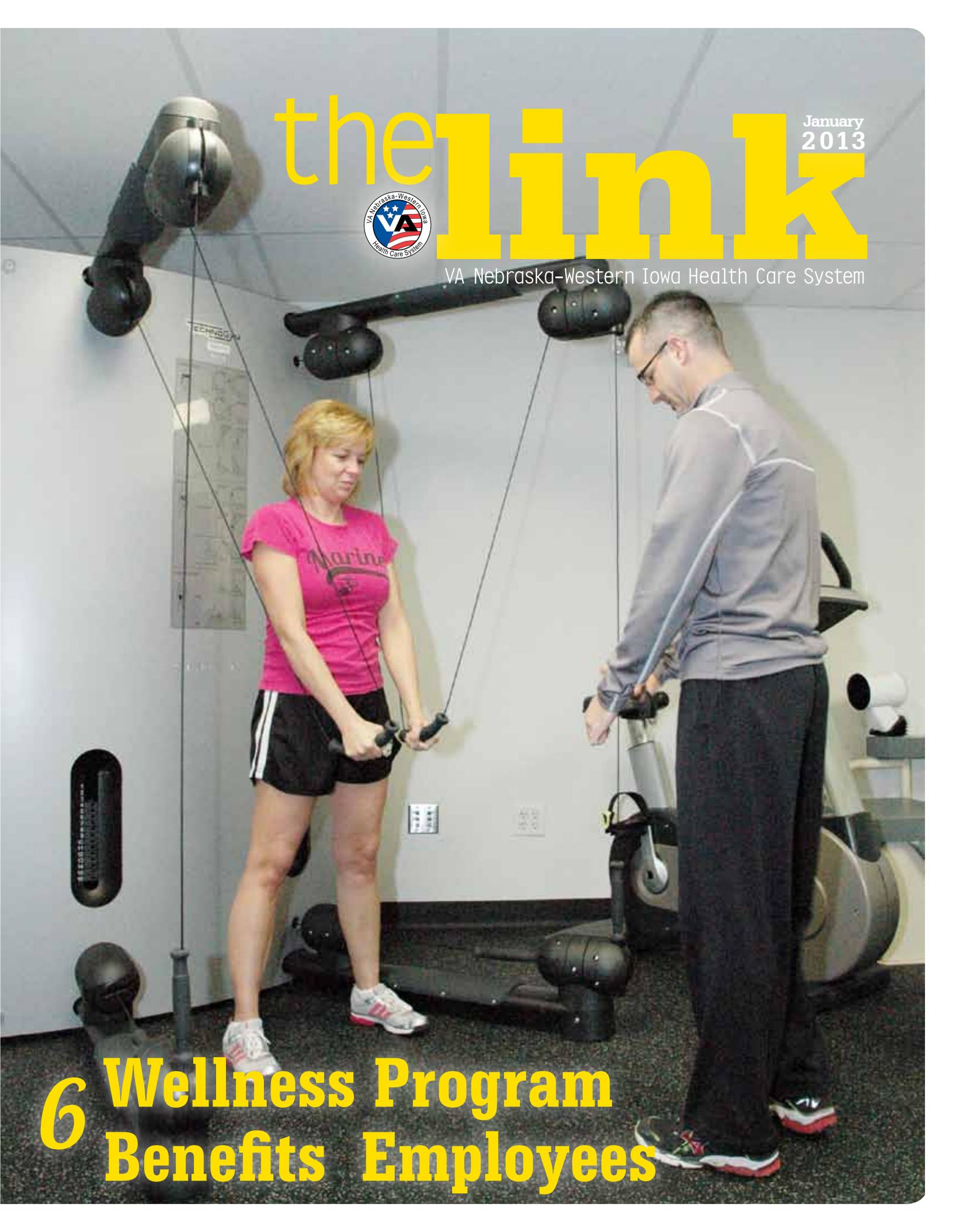


the link

January
2013



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



**6 Wellness Program
Benefits Employees**



I recently read the Veterans Health Administration's Organizational Health newsletter, which included several articles on transformation in the workplace, redefining the patient experience and engaged employees. All of these are topics VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System leadership and employees will focus on in the new year.

Each NWHCS employee focuses on the VHA mission of honoring America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves Veterans' health and well-being. Accomplishing this mission involves the dedication of clinical and administrative employees focused on treating Veterans, as well as their fellow employees, with care and respect. While it takes the whole system to accomplish the mission, the power of one employee to make a difference is huge.

NWHCS leaders will engage employees in cultivating a culture of caring. We'll be looking at new ways to reach out to Veterans who don't know about, or aren't taking advantage of, their VHA benefits. And, as always, we'll continue our focus on ensuring high-quality, safe health care.

In the Organizational Health newsletter, one author shared an anecdote about performing a simple extra task during his rounds – feeding a Veteran his dinner. Later, he witnessed a group of residents performing small but appreciated actions for Veterans in their care. The residents had seen his act of kindness and decided they could also use their time to help where they could.

This one provider's action was seen and spread to others. What small action can you take in the new year to prompt someone else to act? If we each seek to make a change, imagine how far we can go.

Marci Mylan

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Cover: Jeff Kernen, NASM-CPT, trains employees at the Omaha and Lincoln facilities. Deb Atterson, program support assistant at the Omaha VAMC, takes his classes weekly. Photo by Kate O'Dell.

“I like working with people. I’ve been so lucky to be a Veteran, and I’ll always be a spokesperson for the Veterans. Being a Veteran makes it feel like you’re part of a brotherhood or a sisterhood.”

Marsha Fields
Operations Clerk, Veterans Canteen Service | U.S. Army Veteran



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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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meet

tonya murphy

LPN, Primary Care | Norfolk CBOC

Q: How long have you worked at the VA?

A: "A little over four years."

Q: What is a work day like for you?

A: "Very busy. Working in a CBOC is different. We have to be able to do it all from patient check ins, to lab draws to triage."

Q: What is your favorite part of your job?

A: "Getting to know the Veterans. Since we are a small town, we have many Veterans who come in frequently; so, it's fun to hear their stories. I think a lot of them see us as family, not just caregivers."

Q: When not at work, where can you be found?

A: "At home or one of my kids' activities. My whole life pretty much revolves around my children. I do like to run. In the mornings, I run on a treadmill while I watch DVR'd shows." 📺



AMERICAN LEGION Gives to Veterans

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

For the past 80 years, the American Legion Auxiliary has provided Veterans with the gift of holiday shopping while they are undergoing treatment at VA medical centers. This year, the gift shop was held for three days in Omaha and one day in Grand Island.



Photo by Kate O'Dell

Eligible Veterans were able to select up to four free gifts through the gift shop. Waffle makers were a popular gift this year, but a variety of gifts were available including toys for children of all ages, watches, perfumes, colognes, winter wear and kitchen appliances.

The mobile gift shop visited inpatient floors at the Omaha VAMC. Veteran Randall Roy picked out his gifts this way.

After selecting their gifts, the Veterans provided the names of their family members so volunteers could wrap the gifts for the Veterans to hand out to family members. Veterans also were encouraged to select gifts for themselves, if they did not have family members in mind for the holidays.

Dan Hurley, U.S. Air Force Veteran, was admitted to the Omaha VAMC with pneumonia early in December. He was able to shop from his bed with the mobile gift shop – a big blue cart. He picked out a sandwich maker for his wife, a watch for his son and a purse for his daughter. The gifts were brought back to the shop where they were wrapped and delivered back to Hurley for him to give to his family.

"It helped me out tremendously and (the volunteers) were really nice."

Dan Hurley | U.S. Air Force Veteran

This was Sharon Scott's second year working as a volunteer for the gift shop in Grand Island where about 20 people volunteered this year. It was a fulfilling way to give back to Veterans, Scott said, because some of them haven't been able to get a gift for their family for years.

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american men and women voluntarily serve in the U.S. armed forces, often in harm's way. To honor their sacrifices, Omaha Quilters' Guild members presented 31 Quilts of Valor to Veterans at a ceremony Dec. 4 at the Omaha VA Medical Center.

The local Quilts of Valor program for Veterans was the idea of Sandra Pihlgren, who is a member of the guild, and whose husband was a Vietnam Veteran.

"Nobody helped anybody from Vietnam. Nobody acknowledged that they did something to defend our freedom," Pihlgren said. "Four years ago, our guild decided to make quilts for Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan to reward and thank them for serving."

More than 100 guild members work on creating the quilts. Pihlgren said guild members are involved at many levels, which can include donating fabric, or sewing individual blocks or multiple blocks together.

"It takes a lot of hands to make a quilt."

Sandra Pihlgren | Omaha Quilters' Guild

The guild works with VA staff in Omaha to identify Veterans to receive the quilts and to hold the ceremony.

"We ask the guild if there is a specific Veteran era that they want to honor, and then our VA case managers help to identify Veterans to receive the quilts," said Jody Ring, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System returning Veterans transition assistance advocate.



Photo by Will Ackerman

Veterans display the Quilts of Valor they received at a ceremony Dec. 4 at the Omaha VAMC.

Omaha VA's returning Veterans program staff has worked with the quilters' guild to present more than 100 quilts.

U.S. Navy Veteran Melissa Gray said of having strangers honor her with a quilt, "it probably means more to me than those (military) medals meant. This reminds people of why we are over in the other countries, and why we've got troops in America still fighting to keep our freedom."

Although most of the quilts went to Veterans who served in Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn, there was a special recognition at this event – a Veteran who served in World War II. Jack Bigley joined the U.S. Army cavalry in 1940. He said it was very humbling to be recognized for his service today after all of these years.

"It's a wonderful thing to be recognized. Especially at my age of 92. All of my children are waiting for me to see the quilt."

Jack Bigley | U.S. Army Veteran

Wellness Program IS A BENEFIT FOR NWHCS EMPLOYEES

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

What started as Wellness Is Now in 2008 as a pilot program for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System employees has evolved into a bigger program called Employee Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. After WIN became national in fall 2010, NWHCS continued with the program under the new title of EHPDP. Physical activity, nutrition, tobacco cessation and stress management are all addressed in the employee program.

Quin Kelly, RN, BSN and EHPDP coordinator, has been an employee at NWHCS for three and a half years. She said she believes employee health is important not only for the employee but also to ensure Veterans receive the best care.

“We take care of Veterans; we need to set an example for them. Through being healthy we are better able to care for the Veterans.”

Quin Kelly, RN, BSN | EHPDP Coordinator

Sandy Harms, a medical support assistant at the Lincoln VA facility, has been involved with the program since it began. “It’s a lot of fun; we all know each other. It makes it more fun when you have someone to exercise with.” ▶



Photo by Kate O'Dell

▶ Lindsay Heilman, a physician assistant at the Omaha VA Medical Center, said she worked at VA for a year before she found out she was eligible to use the Employee Fitness Center.

“I had been working on weight loss on my own and paying for a YMCA membership,” she said. Once she found out she was able to use the fitness center at the Omaha VAMC 24 hours a day, seven days a week, she was able to cancel her YMCA membership. “It’s one of those employee benefits that is a tangible benefit that not every employer offers.”

In order to use the employee fitness center, employees must complete an orientation through EHPDP.

Yoga

The number of Americans who participate in yoga has increased steadily for the past few years. In 2011, an estimated 22.3 million people in the U.S. participated in yoga, according to the Outdoor Recreation Participation Report released in August 2012.

Yoga combines physical activity with meditation to give an all around better state of wellness. The positions can be more difficult for those seeking a challenge, but also can be modified for beginners. Both men and women benefit from yoga and can enjoy the experience through EHPDP in Omaha and Lincoln.

Harms’ favorite class is yoga. The stretching, the relaxing music and the calm quality of the class are what Harms said she enjoys ▶

Lindsey Stockdale, a registered yoga therapist, teaches a yoga class at the Omaha VAMC. Stockdale teaches classes on Thursdays from 4:45 to 5:45 p.m. Yoga also is available at the Lincoln facility.

► the most. “I really don’t think (yoga) is something I would have pursued on my own,” she said. “But I have done it now for a year, and I will always do yoga.”

Weight Loss

According to the Center for Disease Control, the prevalence of obesity among U.S. adults aged 20 and over has increased from 19.4 percent in 1997 to 28.7 percent in 2011.

The MOVEmployee program is an important part of what EHPDP offers to employees. MOVEmployee is a weight-loss program that usually lasts from eight to 12 weeks. Exercise classes, weekly weigh-ins, one-on-one coaching and health topic luncheons are all part of the program. After an employee enrolls, Kelly meets with each employee for an initial session where measurements are taken including waist circumference, body fat and weight. These same measurements are taken again at the end of the program.

The combination of the consistency, the coaching and the accountability are what make this program a success.

“You can’t fluff it off,” said Heilman. “Regular weigh-ins and hearing from different experts (during luncheons) is helpful.” ►

EHPDP OFFERS

- **Nutritional lunch and learns**
- **Therapeutic chair massages**
- **Employee Fitness Center:** (Building A in Omaha open 24 hours a day; Room 319 in Lincoln open 6 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday through Friday)
- **Tobacco Cessation:** free nicotine replacement provided
- **One-on-one coaching**
- **MOVEmployee Weight Loss Program**
- **Free cholesterol screening**
- **Walking trails**
- **Stairways to Health**
- **Wii bowling**
- **Yoga**



Photos by Bruce Thiel

Mike Nelson finishes painting the four-seasons themed Stairway to Health at the Lincoln CBOC in December.

► Personal Training

Hiring a personal trainer can be expensive. However, using the EHPDP program, employees have access to a less expensive option. Jeff Kernen, NASM-CPT began training NWIHCS employees in April of last year. He believes in the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

“It branches into every aspect of life. If you’re healthier, you’re happier. When you are in good physical condition, everything in your everyday life gets easier.”

Jeff Kernen, NASM-CPT | Personal Trainer at NWIHCS

During sessions, Kernen sets up timed circuit training for his clients. Employees cycle through different machines and work on both strength training and cardio. This is a good set up for the larger classes as everyone is always doing something. Kernen walks around the room to ensure the exercises are being done properly. This not only helps the employee get the most from the workout, but it also helps employees avoid injuries from improper execution, he said.

“He does a good job setting it up so it is successful for everyone,” said Heilman, who attends class with Kernen about once a week. “It is a great opportunity for people who may not have other access to a personal trainer.”

(continued on page 10) ►

VA's Changing to Focus on

Health & Well-Being

The Office of Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation

the focus of VA health care is changing from one focused on disease-based problem solving to one focused on individuals and their overall health and well-being. It is a dramatic change that will impact health care as we know it. The basics of this approach are outlined below. Veterans and VA employees will be learning much more about these changes in the months and years to come.

Health and You as a Whole Person

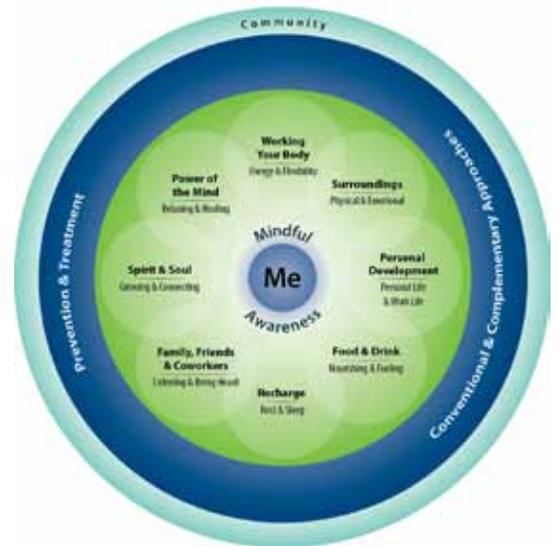
The first step to better health is to know what you want from your health and why. Knowing your health goals may not be a simple task; yet it is an important step toward reaching your full potential. Living life fully and optimizing health and well-being goes beyond not being sick; it means understanding what matters to you and looking at all aspects in life that contribute to a sense of well-being. This tool will help you explore all areas of your life so your health care team can help you plan, not just for your medical needs, but for your life needs.

The Components of Proactive Health and Well-Being

The Components of Proactive Health and Well-Being diagram (above) is a picture to help you think about your whole health. All of the areas in the circle are important and connected. Improving one area can benefit other areas in your life and influence your overall physical, emotional and mental health and well-being.

Me You are the expert on your life, values, goals and priorities. Only you can know why you want your health. Only you can know what really matters to you. This needs to be the driver of your health and your health care.

Mindful Awareness is simply being fully aware, or paying attention. Sometimes, we go through our daily lives on auto-pilot and aren't fully present in the here and now. We often dwell on the past and plan events in the future. We don't spend much time really noticing what is happening right now. Your body and mind send you signals constantly, but if your attention is elsewhere, you don't notice. Then, the signals that began as whispers become screams. Mindfulness connects you to each component of your well-being. ▶



▶ The Eight Areas of Self Care

Self-care is often the most important factor in living a healthy life, which in turn allows you to live your life fully, in the ways that matter to you. Self-care includes all the choices you make on a daily basis that affect your physical, mental and spiritual health. As a matter of fact, how you take care of yourself will have a greater impact on your health and well-being than the medical care you receive.

Working Your Body Movement and exercise increase your energy and flexibility, and affect the state of your body, your mind and emotions. Studies show regular exercise reduces risk factors by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, two major contributors to the No. 1 killer, heart disease. Physical activities of all kinds are beneficial and increase strength, flexibility, endurance and balance. Finding what you enjoy and what works for you is important and may include activities like walking, dancing, gardening, swimming, bicycling, lifting weights or working out in a gym. ▶

► **Surroundings** The environment where you spend time a lot of time, both inside and outdoors, directly affects you and your health. You may have issues with basic needs such as safety, or things like clutter, noise, smells, chemicals, poor lighting or water quality that keep you from being your best. It matters to have safe, comfortable and healthy spaces.

Personal Development No matter what stage of life you are in, addressing your personal and work life is important. This means taking a look at how you spend your time and energy throughout the day, and whether those activities fuel you or drain you. Does the balance of where and how you spend your energy line up with what matters to you? How do you feel about your finances and how are they impacting your life? These factors affect not only your happiness, but also your health. ►

► **Food and Drink** What you eat and drink can nourish and strengthen your body and mind. Your decisions about what you eat and drink impact your mood, energy level, physical health and performance. Developing healthy drinking and eating habits that fit your lifestyle, taking supplements that support your health goals, and limiting substances like alcohol, caffeine and nicotine keep your body properly fueled.

Recharge Rest, relaxation and sleep recharge you. Sleep is critical for important body and mind functions. Rest, relaxation and leisure activities create a sense of peace and calm and lower stress. You may also find that physical activity, spending time with family and friends, spending time in nature, completing a significant challenge, or working on a hobby helps you to recharge. Paying attention to the balance between activity and rest is important for optimal health.

Family, Friends and Co-Workers Your social relationships and whether you feel isolated or connected to others are associated with whether or not you get sick, stay sick and even how likely you are to die prematurely. In good times and challenging times, it helps to have caring and supportive relationships with people you can talk to openly.

Spirit and Soul Where do you turn for a sense of strength and comfort in difficult times? Some people turn to faith, religious practice or time in nature. Some connect with art or music or prefer quiet time alone.

Power of the Mind The mind directly impacts the state of your body. Think of a lemon and you salivate. Think of something that stresses you and your heart rate and blood pressure jump. Using this connection intentionally for positive effects is easy to do.

Professional Care The professional care ring represents your relationship with your health care team. The plan to manage or treat disease, as well as to prevent disease, will all include strategies rooted in your self-care.

Community The outer ring represents your community and the people, customs, cultures, groups, organizations, causes, governments and locations you are connected to. For some people, their community is nearby and local, for others it's far away.

The first step in creating a roadmap to your healthiest life is to step back from your health concerns, and think about your life. What really matters to you? Why do you want or need your health? Your VA care team will be with you on this journey to help you identify the keys to your personal health and well-being. ①



Courtesy Photo

Janet Kerre, licensed massage therapist, gives employee chair massages at the Lincoln facility. Employee chair massages also are offered at the Omaha VAMC.

► *Holiday Gift Shop continued from page 4*

"It's a project that we like to do for the Veterans," said Auxiliary member, Gertrude Johansen, who managed the gift shop in Omaha.

"It gives us the opportunity to tell them thank you for your service and Merry Christmas."

Gertrude Johansen | American Legion Auxiliary



Photo by Kate O'Dell

Veteran David McKinney shopped for his family at the gift shop held at the Omaha VAMC.

The money for the program was raised through fundraisers during the year. This year, the gift shop in Omaha cost about \$6,000, and Grand Island cost about \$1,700.

Don Wottman, U.S. Air Force Veteran and American Legion rider, has volunteered for four years at the Omaha gift shop. This year he helped by pushing the mobile gift shop around to inpatient rooms.

It is the smile on the Veterans' faces that brings him back each year, Wottman said. "For some of them, it's the only Christmas they are gonna have." 📌

► *Wellness Program continued from page 7*

To help employees with their fitness goals, BodyBuggs also are available through EHPDP. A BodyBugg is a monitor worn on the upper arm that keeps track of activity throughout a normal day. At the end of the day, it is plugged into a computer where software uploads the data and helps the individual understand how active he or she was that day.

With its many different activities, Kelly said she encourages employees to make that initial contact to find out what EHPDP can do for them.

"Quin does a good job. She keeps it fun and creative. You are not forced to do anything," Harms said. "She comes at it from all different angles. You can be as involved as you want to be." 📌

THE NEXT MOVEEMPLOYEE 8-WEEK WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAM STARTS THIS MONTH

OMAHA: Jan. 22 LINCOLN: Jan. 24

Contact Quin Kelly at ext. 5972 in Omaha, ext. 7902 in Lincoln or quin.kelly@va.gov, to enroll or for more information.

EVENTS

what's going on?

- Jan. 1** New Year's Day
- Jan. 4** New Volunteer Orientation, Omaha
- Jan. 18** New Volunteer Orientation, Omaha
- Jan. 20** Inauguration Day
- Jan. 21** Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Federal Holiday)
- Jan. 20-26** National Certified Nurse Anesthetists Week
- Jan. 20-26** Healthy Weight Week

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



employees | NEW | LEAVING

HELLO

Nov. 4 to Dec. 1

David Anderson,
Veterans Canteen Service

Rebecca Evans,
Veterans Canteen Service

Shelly Gifford,
Veterans Canteen Service

John Hudson, *Research*

Robert Langenfeld,
Mental Health

Pierre Lavedan,
Extended Care and Rehabilitation

Kristin Malone, *Mental Health*

GOODBYE

Nov. 4 to Dec. 1

Thomas Lynch, *Chief of Staff*

RETIRING

Nov. 4 to Dec. 1

Thomas Halverson, *Imaging*

Kristy Hoover, *Business Office*

Patsy Silvey, *Nursing*

Carol Sutter-Knapp, *Nursing*

What are your biggest goals for NWHCS IN

2013?

“To focus on improving our service to Veterans to meet and exceed their expectations. We will focus on creating ever-improved access for Veterans including delivering health care in adaptable ways such as telemedicine, and bundling appointments for convenience. We will be transparent in our quality and business practices to build trust and accountability.”



Marci Mylan, Ph.D., MHA
Director | VA NWHCS

“To honor Veterans by developing a work environment that supports accessible, safe and high-quality patient care.”

Eileen Kingston, RN, MPA
Acting Associate Director for Operations | VA NWHCS



“To enhance the synergy of the expert physicians we have in working together for the patients. Continuous improvement of how health care providers work together improves patient care and empowers patients as active partners in their care. I also want to grow and enhance our research and educational missions since both of those services markedly elevate the quality of care that we deliver for our patients.”

Dr. JoAnn Porter
Acting Chief of Staff | VA NWHCS



“To facilitate an improved culture of teamwork throughout NWHCS. I plan to continue the great work of integrating the nursing department throughout Nebraska and creating a culture of collaboration.”



Tammy Bockman, RN, BSN
Acting Nurse Executive/Associate Director Patient Care | VA NWHCS

“To create culture-embracing, team-based, world-class, patient-centered care that results in improved access, exemplary customer service, and respectful interactions between patient and staff.”



Duncan Fallon
Site Manager | Lincoln CBOC

“To focus on developing and implementing a plan to reach out to Veterans who are enrolled in our system but not utilizing our services. Also, to actively work on cultivating civility in the workplace.”



Angela Williams, Pharm.D
Site Manager | Grand Island CBOC

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

VA Celebrates the **Holidays**

Veterans Canteen Service celebrated the holidays with Veterans and staff throughout VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System this season. Cookies, coffee, cider, popcorn and more were served to hundreds who came to join in the fun. Santa Claus visited the Omaha facility and shook hands with Veterans as he thanked them for their service.



More than 2,000 cookies were served at the Omaha VA Medical Center, Lincoln, Grand Island and Norfolk Community-Based Outpatient Clinics.

“The turnout at each site was great,” said Roy Mills, VCS chief for NWHCS. “We would love to do this again next year.”



Above: Roger VanEpps, NWHCS chief information officer, serves cookies during the holiday party at the Omaha VAMC.

Left: Lincoln VA employees enjoy treats during their holiday party.

The Veterans Advisory Group Wants to Hear From You

The group has provided comment boxes in inpatient and outpatient areas at the Omaha VA Medical Center for Veterans to record their compliments, comments and complaints.

Comments will go to the Omaha Veterans Advisory Group, who work with NWHCS employees to ensure Veterans' needs are met. To accomplish their mission, they need to hear from you, the Veteran.



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