

the link

February
2013



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



**6 Health Care Without
the Commute**



February brings with it thoughts of love and caring as many of us celebrate Valentine's Day with our families. At VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System we also have several opportunities to focus on the heart this month.

Women's Heart Month is a prominent feature in February. Our women Veterans program manager, along with our employee and

Veteran health promotion coordinators, will be promoting heart health throughout the month with information tables at our facilities.

On the lighter side, our Christmas tree, which is standing unadorned in the lobby in Omaha, will do double duty as a Valentine's tree. Each year at this time, Voluntary Service receives hundreds, if not thousands, of Valentines for Veterans. Volunteers will decorate the tree with Valentines, as well as hand them out to Veterans to show appreciation for their service. The Valentines come from schools and community members across the area.

Our feature story this month focuses on an important caring initiative that brings us as health care providers closer to Veterans in rural areas. VA NWIHCS is a leader in telehealth, a service that continues to expand as the telehealth team moves into new areas and pilots new technology.

Whether brightening a Veteran's day with a handmade card, promoting health and well-being or delivering medical care across the miles, VA NWIHCS is in the business of caring. Throughout February I hope everyone takes a moment to reflect on how they can best show our caring spirit to Veterans and their fellow employees.

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FACT: HEART DISEASE CAUSES ONE IN THREE WOMEN'S DEATHS EACH YEAR, KILLING APPROXIMATELY ONE WOMAN EVERY MINUTE. (SOURCE: AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION)

Cover: Tia Bieber, LPN, uses an electronic stethoscope at the Grand Island clinic while a provider listens from the Omaha VAMC. Veteran Lester Chilcott (pictured) had a consultation the day before his scheduled surgery in Omaha. Photo by Kate O'Dell.

“This is my way to give back to Veterans. I always feel, even when I’m doing administrative work, I am helping them. My passion as a nurse is at the bedside. If the bottom line from my work didn’t affect the Veteran, I wouldn’t be with leadership.”

Suzanne Hale
Nursing Director, Grand Island CBOC



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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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meet

michelle warner

Medical Records Technician, Release of Information Office | Lincoln CBOC

How long have you been a VA employee?

"Four and a half years."

What does your job entail?

"We send out records for claims to patients, insurance companies and providers. All medical record requests come through our office. We have a lot of paper on our desks."

What is your favorite thing about your job?

"I get to work with Veterans. I like my co-workers. I get a lot of variety, and it is challenging every day. I like a challenge. There are lots of changes, and we have to keep up with the latest policies and procedures."

When not at work, where can you be found?

"Occasionally I will go home to Norfolk on the weekends and spend time with my nieces and nephews. I go out with my friends. I like to paint. When I took art in high school, I started oil painting and really liked it. Now I like to paint abstract." 



STAFF AND COMMUNITY

Salute Veterans

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

Employees at Department of Veterans Affairs health care facilities honor the men and women who served in the U.S. armed forces every day by providing them exceptional patient-centered care. However, VA designated one special week to pay tribute to and express appreciation during National Salute to Veteran Patients, Feb. 10 to 16.



Courtesy Photo

Residents at the Grand Island Community Living Center enjoy a Valentine's Day banquet in February 2012.

The purpose for this week is to express appreciation to Veterans, increase community awareness about the role of the VA's medical centers, encourage citizens to visit hospitalized Veterans and become involved as volunteers.

During the week, the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Voluntary Service plans events to honor Veterans. Events include free cookies, popcorn and a Valentine's banquet, to name a few.

"Although we can never fully repay our men and women for their sacrifices and service, these events and the national salute week are our way to say thank you."

Chris Shipp, VA NWIHCS Chief of Voluntary Service

(continued on page 10) ▶

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Get news, information for patients and upcoming events

National Salute to Veteran Patients Week Activities

All Activities are Free to Veterans

Lincoln CBOC:

Feb. 11 to 15

From 8 a.m. to noon each day:
Free cookies, Valentine cards presentation and special community and military guests

Grand Island CBOC

Feb. 12 – Cookie and Brownie Day
Feb. 14 – Valentine Banquet for Community Living Center residents

Omaha VAMC:

Feb. 11 – American Red Cross Breakfast
Feb. 12 – Brown Bag Lunch
Feb. 13 – Popcorn Day
Feb. 13 and 14 – Coffee Mug Giveaway
Feb. 14 – Annual Salute Cookie Day
Feb. 15 – Free buffet lunch for Veterans; Bingo from 1 to 5 p.m. in the Education Conference Room with Metropolitan Community College

All activities sponsored by the site's respective VA Voluntary Service Committee, with the exception of those specifically noted.

The Omaha Veterans Advisory Group gives a voice to Veterans

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

the purpose of the Omaha Veterans Advisory Group is to serve as an advocate for Veterans and help them improve their health care.

The Omaha Veterans Advisory Group recently redefined its mission and initiated its newest members. The mission ends with the motto, "Of the Veterans, for the Veterans."

The group is comprised of 10 members including Veterans from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation New Dawn, three women Veterans and VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Director Dr. Marci Mylan.

U.S. Air Force Veteran Dick Harrington is a volunteer at the Omaha VA Medical Center and is the chairman of the advisory group. Harrington has been involved with the group since it was formed in 2011. "I consider myself fortunate to be able to give something back to my fellow Vets," he said.

Although Mylan is not a Veteran, she is married to a Vietnam Veteran and her father served in World War II. Mylan asked to be involved when Harrington was giving a presentation to leadership about the purpose of the group. "Halfway through the presentation she said, 'Can I get in on this?'" Harrington said.

The Veterans Advisory Group gives Veterans a voice. In December, comment boxes were added throughout the medical center for this purpose. Comments may be made anonymously, and any topic is open for submission. The boxes are an outlet for comments, complaints or compliments regarding visits to the Omaha VAMC.

The group also conducts "Vet-to-Vet" interviews with outpatients and inpatients. ►



Photo by Kate O'Dell

The Omaha Veterans Advisory Group meets once a month to address Veteran concerns and to make plans to improve the care Veterans receive.

► "In order to do any good for the Veterans," Harrington said. "We need to get feedback from them."

U.S. Air Force Veteran Dominic Damone was in the sleep clinic when he heard a fellow Veteran ask if there was any coffee or snacks available as he had just finished an overnight sleep study. Damone thought this was a relevant request, so he filled out a comment card asking that coffee and snacks be made available for sleep study patients. Because of this request, a continental breakfast, juice and coffee are now delivered on a cart outside of the sleep clinic for patients who complete studies.

"I think it is awesome that (the advisory group) acted on it. It's nice to see the feedback put to use."

Dominic Damone | U.S. Air Force Veteran

He said not to hesitate to use the comment box, because the suggestions can make positive changes for Veterans and their families.

Any Veteran interested in getting involved with the Veterans Advisory Group should leave their name and contact information for Harrington in a comment box at the Omaha VAMC. ⓘ

The Lincoln and Grand Island facilities also have Veterans groups. To find out more about these groups, call Rob McCrory in Lincoln at 402-486-7879 or Coral Selden at 308-395-3299 in Grand Island.

HEALTH CARE *without the commute*

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

A Almost 30 percent of the U.S. Veteran population resides in rural areas. This percentage is even higher for Veterans in VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's coverage area with a total of 52 percent living outside of the cities.

With so many Veterans in rural areas, delivering health care closer to home, through telehealth, has become a growing practice. VA NWIHCS led the nation for clinical video telehealth appointments in 2012; VA NWIHCS had 16,621 encounters with patients through telehealth services.

Clinical video telehealth, home telehealth, and store and forward are all used to provide health care for Veterans who can benefit from the features.

Clinical Video Telehealth

Clinical video telehealth is done in outpatient clinics throughout VA NWIHCS. A patient, with nursing assistance, can be seen through a video conference by doctors located hundreds of miles away. Before the capabilities of CVT, if a patient had a scheduled surgery at the Omaha VA Medical Center, he or she would need to travel to the Omaha VAMC two or three times prior to the surgery date ▶



▶ for consultations and exams. Now these patients can avoid the hassles and be seen at clinics closer to their home for pre-surgery appointments. This not only saves the Veterans' cost for travel, it saves the VA on travel reimbursement.

Tia Bieber, a licensed practical nurse, has worked in telehealth at the Grand Island Community Based Outpatient Clinic for a year and a half and knows what it means for Veterans. "It saves a lot of travel time. Vets love it, and that is the goal," she said. ▶

“Providing health care to those who wouldn't have access or would have to travel to get it, it's efficient and just as effective as face-to-face.”

Tia Bieber, LPN | Grand Island CBOC



Photo by Bruce Thiel

Left: Physician Assistant Lindsay Heilman in Omaha talks with a patient at the Grand Island CBOC via clinical video telehealth conference.

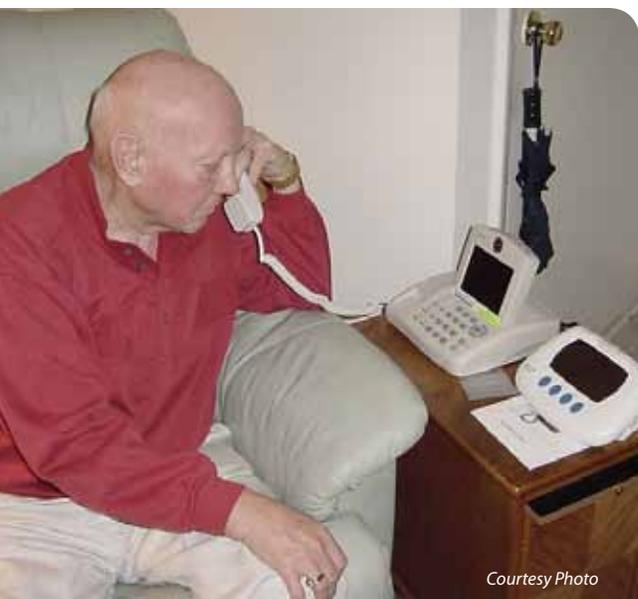
Right: Health Buddy systems (pictured) allow providers to monitor Veterans conditions while they stay home. Vital statistics are sent periodically and recorded at the patient's clinic. These systems are also capable of secure messaging, making them more personal.

► *Home Telehealth*

Home telehealth provides Veterans with equipment for home use. Portable systems send data from the Veteran to be monitored and recorded by health care providers. This helps providers track conditions of patients, and allows them to make educated health care decisions without the Veteran leaving home. Prescriptions can be changed, activity can be monitored and patients can recover at home.

“We have a lot of patients in Kansas and beyond North Platte. This allows our Veterans to not have to make so many clinical visits,” said Elizabeth French, registered nurse and lead care coordinator in home telehealth at the Grand Island CBOC. “We are changing meds with providers’ recommendations, and they are staying home.”

VA NWHCS is one of several VA facilities piloting a new program for home telehealth called American Well. The web-based program allows patients to be more involved with their health care by bringing it into Veterans’ homes through the internet. The software allows patients and health care providers to have immediate, live and clinically meaningful visits through video, secure text and phone conversations. ►



Omaha VA Medical Center nurse practitioner Sarah Anderson evaluates a patient during a clinical video telehealth appointment. Tia Bieber, LPN, assists Anderson from the Grand Island clinic.

► *Store and Forward*

Diabetic Veterans are able to have retinopathy testing done in Omaha and evaluated at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. Patients have images taken of their eyes at the Omaha VAMC. Those images can then be transmitted to an ophthalmologist in Minneapolis for review. The results are sent back to physicians in Omaha and reported back to patients.

Dr. Ahsan Naseem, the Midwest Health Care Network Telehealth physician lead, wrote the proposal for the telehealth program in 2009. Since then the program has grown significantly. In 2012, there were four times the amount of overall encounters as there were in 2009. He said he sees a great future for telehealth in the VA health care system.

“The technology is evolving. It started out with simple video conversations. Now, we can use stethoscopes. We envision the technology to continue to grow.”

Dr. Ahsan Naseem
Midwest Health Care Network Telehealth Physician | Lincoln CBOC

To learn more about telehealth at VA, visit www.telehealth.va.gov.



Crossing the Country for Care

Kate O'Dell | Public Affairs

Mary Hilpert started seeing Dr. Temple Brannan almost four years ago. Brannan made an impression on the U.S. Air Force Veteran, enough of an impression that Hilpert's move out of state has not kept her from seeing Brannan.

When Hilpert decided to move to St. Louis two years ago, she knew she would continue her health care with Brannan at the VA Bellevue Community Based Outpatient Clinic. Hilpert drives nearly 500 miles for her appointments. "She is what medicine is all about," Hilpert said. "She loves what she does, and you can tell."

To Hilpert, patient-centered care means not only knowing her as a patient, but knowing her as a person.

"(Brannan) takes the time to know who I am; she listens to me."

Mary Hilpert | U.S. Air Force Veteran

"She's such a sweet lady," Brannan said about Hilpert. "When I first started to see her, she had a complicated medical history. One of those things where she just needed to talk to somebody, and I was able to talk to her."

Brannan has between 500 to 600 patients on her own panel. Beyond that, she also helps with her residents' patients, totaling around 1,000 patients that she cares for. She said she keeps very detailed notes of her patients, and if there is an interesting or unique detail about them, she always writes it down.

The doctor-patient relationship is so important, Brannan said. Health care is personal, and trust is an important part of the relationship between a patient and health care team. Hilpert said she believes this is a huge part of her own health care. "If a doctor doesn't trust you, how can you trust them?" she said. ▶



The Patient-Centered Care Grapevine is a feature to highlight activities and training. Watch the Daily Briefs and the Intranet for this logo.

If your department or program has a unique way of being patient centered and wants to be featured, contact Michele O'Connor in Omaha at ext. 5809 or micheleoconnor@va.gov.

For more patient-centered care information, visit the Intranet page at vawww.nebraska.va.gov/PCC.asp.



Dr. Temple Brannan has worked for the VA since 2009. She sees patients at both the Omaha VAMC and the Bellevue CBOC.

"It's not just me that Mary loves. The nurse manager, the LPN, the front desk clerk, they are all part of her team-based care. We all work together to take really good care of the patients."

Dr. Temple Brannan | Bellevue CBOC

▶ Once in a while, she has a telephone appointment for consultations. In the past, Hilpert has been able to get prescriptions refilled with a phone call. "If I have an issue, or she suspects I have an issue, she takes care of it right then," Hilpert said.

In December, Hilpert plans to move to South Carolina. She will still make the trip to visit Brannan. "It took me a long time to find Dr. Brannan," Hilpert said. "I won't let her go." 📍

What do you do to pass the time **DURING** *winter* months?

"I read. I also go to high school basketball games to watch Central City. I enjoy watching the competition."

David Breece
Addiction Therapist
Grand Island CBOC



"I have a greenhouse at home, and I grow vegetables. I grow cooler crops in the winter like spinach, lettuce, radishes and snow peas. I also do stained glass, and I love to read."

Elizabeth French, RN, MSN
Lead Care Coordinator and Case Manager,
Home Telehealth | Grand Island CBOC



"Pinterest and crafts. There is a lot on Pinterest from food to craft ideas and home decorating ideas."

Vita Derun
Dental Assistant | Lincoln CBOC



"Play bingo; go shopping. I like hanging out with my kids and my grandkids."

Linda Crowe
Medical Support Assistant,
Orange Clinic | Omaha VAMC



"I've got a '55 Chevy pickup that I show and do some work on. I usually take a vacation in the winter to escape the snow. This year, I am heading to Cabo."

Ed Cope, Engineer | Lincoln CBOC



"Read. I love to read. When it is cold I put my fireplace on, I curl up and it just relaxes me."

Cathy Cleveland
Program Support Assistant,
Business Office | Omaha VAMC

Women's Heart Health Month

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

In a video recently released by the American Heart Association, actress Elizabeth Banks scrambles through her morning routine getting lunch made for the kids in time to catch their carpool. She tries to ignore the symptoms but ends up sprawled on the kitchen floor with chest pains. ▶

According to the American Heart Association, if you experience any of the following symptoms you should not wait more than five minutes before calling 911 and getting to the hospital.

- Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of your chest. It lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back.
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort.
- Other signs such as breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. Women are somewhat more likely to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain.

▶ "I think I might be having a little heart attack," she says to the 911 operator.

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women, and is more deadly than all forms of cancer combined. It causes 1 in 3 women's deaths each year, compared to breast cancer, which kills 1 in 31 American women.

At VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, women Veterans are encouraged to "know their numbers," said Donna Higgins, VA NWIHCS Women Veterans Program manager. The numbers include blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood sugar and body mass index. To make healthy lifestyle changes, numerous programs are in place to help including nutrition programs and smoking cessation.

Things women can do to lower their risk of heart disease include not smoking, managing their blood sugar, getting their blood pressure under control, lowering their cholesterol, knowing their family history, staying active, losing weight and eating healthy. ⓘ

Watch "Just a Little Heart Attack," a short film made by Elizabeth Banks to educate women about the realities of heart disease at www.YouTube.com/GoRedForWomen.



HELLO

Dec. 2 to Dec. 29

James Beber,
Veterans Canteen Service

Craig Bechtolt,
Veterans Canteen Service

Robert Durham,
Veterans Canteen Service

Melissa Fieldgrove,
Veterans Canteen Service

Jennifer Gliwa, *Nursing*

Michele Gortemaker, *Audiology*

Teresa Krumm,
Sterile Processing Service

Brook Lichtenberg, *Nursing*

Elizabeth Madson, *Surgery*

Brittany Manganaro, *Imaging*

Alyce Mayfield, *Imaging*

Florence McQuade, *Research*

Kathy Olberding, *Audiology*

Nicholas Sanchez,
Veterans Canteen Service

Britney Stamm, *Mental Health*

Sarah Thompson-Krug,
Veterans Canteen Service

Brent Timperley, *Surgery*

Odilia Underwood, *Nursing*

GOODBYE

Dec. 2 to Dec. 29

Kevin Atkins, *Imaging*

Mary Jo Bade, *Nursing*

Ryan Flugge, *Pharmacy*

Dawn Frizell,
Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Michele Gortemaker, *Audiology*

Jason Kearnes,
Environmental Management Service

Christina Klima, *Human Resources*

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Chief of Staff's Office

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Quality Management

Pamela Patterson, *Mental Health*

Joseph Peters II,
Office of Information and Technology

Cleveland Reagan, *Business Office*

Kevin Reagan,
Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Troy Schulz, *Mental Health*

Janice Szymborski,
Human Resources

August Van Wie,
Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Nathan Webster,
Environmental Management Service

Catherine Yelkin,
Human Resources

Paula Zielinski,
Learning Resource Service

RETIRING

Dec. 2 to Dec. 29

Sheryl Aldridge, *Nursing*

Ernest Alexander Jr., *Logistics*

Richard Baltaro,
Pathology and Lab

Terrance Barnes, *Logistics*

Michael Gates, *Facilities*

Evangeline Goff, *Fiscal*

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Lawrence Kipperman, *Vet Center*

Terrance O'Neill, *Biomedical Engineering*

Curtis, Owens, *Logistics*

Melvin Patterson, *Logistics*

Judy Roan, *Nursing*

Claude Roberge, *Surgery*

Terrance Seffron, *Logistics*

► *Salute to Veterans Week continued from page 4*

VA invites individuals, Veterans' groups, military personnel, civic organizations, businesses and school children to visit Veterans who are patients at the Omaha VA Medical Center and Community Living Center in Grand Island.



University of Nebraska - Lincoln Husker cheerleaders visited Veterans at the Lincoln CBOC during the 2012 National Salute to Veteran Patients Week.

An additional way for citizens to show their appreciation is by participating in the Valentines for Veterans program. Drop off or mail Valentine cards to your local VA health care system facility and staff will distribute these to Veteran patients and display some within the facilities.

A final but exciting opportunity for citizens to salute Veterans is to talk to Voluntary Service staff about becoming a volunteer at a VA health care facility. Volunteers perform a variety of functions to include office filing and greeting Veterans at the facility entrances. ①

For information about volunteering or visiting during National Salute to Veteran Patients week, or to send Valentines for Veterans cards, contact:

For central Nebraska:
Voluntary Service
VA NWIHCS
2201 N. Broadwell Ave.
Grand Island, NE 68803
308-382-3660, ext. 92146

For eastern Nebraska and western Iowa:
Voluntary Service
VA NWIHCS
4101 Woolworth Ave.
Omaha, NE 68105
402-995-3284 or 3283

Visit VA Voluntary Service website at: www.volunteer.va.gov





DAISY AWARD **Winner**



Photo by Anna Morelock

Andy Maasdam, RN, BSN, accepts the DAISY Award from Tammy Bockman, VA NWIHCS acting associate director for patient care.

Andy Maasdam, BSN, RN, was named the latest winner of The DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses Jan. 22 in a ceremony at the Omaha VA Medical Center.

Maasdam is a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit who was nominated by a Veteran's family and three co-workers for the honor. According to his co-workers, Maasdam goes above and beyond to ensure the comfort of his patients, staying past his shift to see them through their final moments. The

family member wrote, "As my husband says, he is in good hands with Andy, and I can rest comfortably when he is in his care." 📌

EVENTS

what's going on?

- Feb. 1** Wear Red Day
- Feb. 1** New Volunteer Orientation, Omaha
- Feb. 2** Groundhog Day
- Feb. 4** Veterans Food Pantry, Lincoln
- Feb. 5** PACT Open House, Omaha
- Feb. 6** Hiring Our Heroes Job Fair, Beatrice
- Feb. 8** Free tax preparation, Lincoln
- Feb. 10-16** National Salute to Veteran Patients Week
- Feb. 13** Free tax assistance, Grand Island
- Feb. 13** Veterans' Forum, Lincoln
- Feb. 14** Valentine's Day
- Feb. 15** New Volunteer Orientation, Omaha
- Feb. 18** President's Day (federal holiday)
- Feb. 22** Blood drive, Omaha
- Feb. 23** VA Community Book Club, Lincoln

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



VA Joins in NATIONAL HISTORY MONTH OBSERVANCE

Rafael A. Torres | Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs

the Department of Veterans Affairs joins the nation in commemorating National African American History Month during February. This year's national theme is, "At the Crossroads of Freedom and Equality: The Emancipation Proclamation and the March on Washington."

The Emancipation Proclamation led to the 13th Amendment, which made slavery illegal everywhere in the United States. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the march on Washington, D.C. for jobs and Freedom where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., gave his famous "I have a dream" speech. For African Americans and blacks this event led the way to political, social and economic equality.

Within VA's workforce, 23.45 percent (74,798 employees) are African American or black. Also, VA employs 100,158 Veterans, of which 30.81 percent (30,858 employees) are African American or black. However, African American and black men still have a lower than expected participation rate at the GS 11-15 and Senior Executive ▶

▶ Staff pay levels and African American and black women have a low participation rate at the GS 10, 12-15 and SES pay levels.

VA will continue to market and encourage application of employees who are African American or black and from other groups with low participation rates in career development and leadership programs.

VA's goal is to create a diverse, inclusive and high-performing workforce that reflects the communities it serves and the diversity of the nation. 📌

To participate in Equal Opportunity Employment's Black Employment Program at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, contact BEP Manager, Charles Evans at 402-995-4023 or EEO Manager, Laura Neal at 402-995-3109.



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of Veterans Affairs



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