

the link

MAY
2014



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



9 VA
PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATION RESOURCE
CENTER OPENS IN OMAHA



When I accepted the role of director at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, I had to leave one thing behind – my clinical practice. However, for this column, I'd like to step back into my role as a psychologist and highlight the importance of mental health care for May's National Mental Health Month.

Mental health care encompasses so many areas including military sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and depression. Each of these conditions takes a toll on the life of the person facing the issue, but we have many wonderful mental health practitioners at VA NWIHCS who can help.

Same-day access is available for Veterans seeking mental health appointments, and they also have access to mental health practitioners through their patient-aligned care teams within primary care. For those Veterans who may not want to come into the medical center for mental health appointments, we also have Vet Centers in Omaha and Lincoln that provide confidential counseling for Veterans and their family members.

We also are supported by many great national initiatives through VA including the Veterans Crisis Line, a 24-hours-a-day resource that is available via phone, online chat or text. Make the Connection is another national site Veterans can use to tailor the information based on their age, gender, era and other factors.

As it states in the Guide to VA Mental Health Services, "it takes the strength and courage of a warrior to ask for help." When you are ready, VA is here to help.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marci Mylan".

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Will Ackerman

THE LINK EDITORIAL STAFF
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FACT: THE VETERANS CRISIS LINE CONNECTS VETERANS IN CRISIS AND THEIR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS WITH QUALIFIED, CARING DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' RESPONDERS THROUGH A CONFIDENTIAL TOLL-FREE HOTLINE, ONLINE CHAT OR TEXT. VETERANS AND THEIR LOVED ONES CAN CALL 1-800-273-8255 AND PRESS 1, CHAT ONLINE, OR SEND A TEXT MESSAGE TO 838255 TO RECEIVE CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK, 365 DAYS A YEAR.

Cover: Aaron Moore, RN, tries out the LAPMentor, which simulates laparoscopic procedures, April 24 during the VA Professional Education Resource Center opening at the Omaha VAMC. Photo by Anna Morelock.



the link

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U.S. Army Veteran
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VISIT US ONLINE
Scan with your smart phone to view more issues of The Link online.





YOUR VA VOLUNTARY SERVICES TEAM

JODY JOHNSON

Voluntary Service Specialist, Grand Island

Johnson has worked in several capacities at VA for the past 21 years in Grand Island. Her jobs have included working as a ward clerk, in the outpatient clinics, compensation and pension, and in Voluntary Service since 2005. Johnson spent eight and a half years in the Army plus three in the Reserves. When not at work, she likes to go four-wheeling and camping with her son, along with visiting her father's cabin near the river.

“I like working with the volunteers. They're just a fun group to work with, and it's actually helped me because I used to be really shy, so it's helped me get over that. They're a nice group to work with.”

Volunteers at Grand Island act as escorts, greeters and coffee makers. They work in outpatient areas, pharmacy, nutrition and other areas. Groups also come in to provide activities and special meals for the inpatient areas. One area where Johnson is looking for volunteers is to help Veterans sign up for My HealtheVet.

HOPE WILKINSON

Assistant Chief
Voluntary Service

Wilkinson joined VA Voluntary Service as a part of the technical career field program in November 2007 at the Columbia VA before moving to the Omaha VA in July 2009. She started with VA in 2005 as a grant writer for the National Cemetery Administration. Before working at VA, Wilkinson served for 10 years in the Army in transportation and logistics, as well as food service. When not at work, Wilkinson spends time with her four children and three grandchildren. She loves to read and watch military channels, especially documentaries about World War II and the Korean War.

“If I can make one Veteran smile in a day, I feel I've done what I wanted to do that day. Being able to talk to the Veterans, to give them a smile, to be able to offer them something as simple as a cup of coffee.”

Wilkinson said Omaha has a need for DAV drivers. The drivers take Veterans to appointments five days a week and are a vital component to the voluntary program.

CHRIS SHIPP

Chief, Voluntary Service

Shipp began his career with VA 30 years ago at the Tuscaloosa VA. In 1986 he decided to make the move to Voluntary Service while at the Indianapolis VA. Shipp said he looked at what Voluntary Service handled and decided it would be a good career move. “There's a diversity. There's a lot of components within Voluntary Service that you get exposure to a lot of things at one time, and I thought that would be a good career step to give me the total picture of VA.” Since then, he's worked at several facilities before landing at the Omaha VA in 2001. Shipp served for five years in the Navy. At this time of year, when not at work, Shipp can be found working in his yard. He also is an avid sports fan and enjoys making travel plans for his retirement in about a year. Shipp also has a diploma in Biblical studies and maintains a small library related to his study.

“I get to work with and around people who aren't getting paid to be here. They're here because they want to be here, and they're good people, and good to be around.”

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System is always looking for more volunteers, Shipp said. “Whatever you have is never enough. We've always had a built-in base because of all of the Veterans service organizations, but this is dwindling nationwide, so we need to focus more on non-traditional sources of volunteers.”

SHAUNIE MOSLEY

Voluntary Service Specialist, Lincoln

Mosley came to Voluntary Service in Lincoln almost a year ago after working in Logistics and a primary care clinic in Omaha for more than six years. Mosley spent four years active-duty Army, and almost five years in the Army Reserve.

These days, when not at work, Mosley can be found performing soccer mom duties, participating in church activities, going on short trips with her son, watching movies and taking Zumba.

“My favorite part of my job is being able to work with Veterans more often than in my previous position, I just get a chance to see a different side of the VA and have a little more personal connection with Veterans.”

To fill out the volunteer pool in Lincoln, Mosley is seeking more volunteers to act as escorts and afternoon greeters, among other positions.

Story and Photo by Anna Morelock

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT

Volunteering

at Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



It's just a way of giving back and to say thank you to Veterans and my parents, who did so much for our country.

Anthony Cato | 3-year volunteer
Omaha VAMC

I'm a Vietnam Vet, and I like to give back and help others, especially the younger ones just coming in.

Ron Schleiger | 4-year volunteer | Lincoln CBOC



Meeting people and being able to help them get to where they need to go.

Ken Maddox | 7-year volunteer
Grand Island CBOC



Being here and able to help others.

Dave Voss | 2-year volunteer | Grand Island CBOC



All the people; all of my friends. And, it's nice to have something to do away from home.

Lyle Cave | 11-year volunteer
Omaha VAMC

Become a Volunteer
Call Voluntary Service to See What You Can Offer:
Omaha: 402-995-3283 or 3284 | Lincoln: 402-489-7938 | Grand Island: 308-382-3660, ext. 2146

OMAHA VOLUNTARY SERVICES RECOGNITION CEREMONY

April 24, 2014



Denise Harrison, VA NWIHCS Associate Director, presents the *Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award* to **J.L. Kems.**



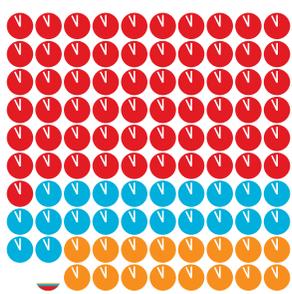
Larry Hall displays his *8,750 Hour Award.*

THE VALUE OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

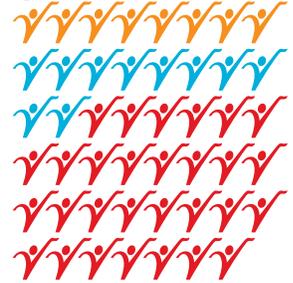
Volunteers play a crucial role in VA NWIHCS. During fiscal year 2013, NWIHCS volunteers had 98,300 hours of labor contributions, which would equate to employing 47 full-time employees and labor contribution of \$2.243 million.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY SITE: **OMAHA** **LINCOLN** **GRAND ISLAND**

V = 1,000 Donated Hours



V = 1 Full-Time Employee



\$100K = \$100,000 of Labor Contributions



Bellevue Clinic to Relocate in

JUNE

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System will relocate its community-based outpatient clinic in Bellevue, Neb., to a new location in June. The clinic will relocate to the Bellevue Professional Center, 2206 Longo Drive, a site 4.7 miles from the current location.

Veterans will continue to receive appointments and health care without interruption during the relocation with their current providers. VA will continue to provide the same array of health care services at the new VA Bellevue clinic including primary care, mental health, telehealth, telemental health and consultative services. Additionally, laboratory services will be provided on site.

"We are excited to move into the new clinic location," said Dennis Miller, RN, nurse manager, Bellevue CBOC. "The clinic will be centrally located in Bellevue to be more accessible to our Veterans."

The clinic is currently at Offutt Air Force Base in the lower level of the Ehrling Bergquist facility, 2501 Capehart Road, Bellevue. The Bellevue CBOC is projected to maintain an enrollment of about 2,400 Veterans annually with the hope of expanding services to additional Veterans in the future, Miller said.

VA NWHCS staff will work closely with each Veteran to ensure a smooth transition of services. A letter was mailed in April to each



Photo by Will Ackerman

Veteran enrolled at the Bellevue clinic to notify them of the relocation.

Veterans who are not enrolled but are interested in VA health care services at the Bellevue clinic are encouraged to stop in between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, or to call 402-591-4500.

Visit www.nebraska.va.gov/locations/Bellevue for more information about the clinic.



THE DAISY AWARD

FOR EXTRAORDINARY NURSES

IN MEMORY OF J. PATRICK BARNES

DAISY Foundation co-founders Bonnie and Mark Barnes (second and third from right) visited nurses April 25 at the Omaha VA Medical Center to thank them for what they do each day. Through their foundation, the Barnes created the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses in memory of their son Patrick who died of an auto-immune disease at age 33. VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System was the first VA to begin recognizing its nurses with the DAISY award. Today, more than 30 VAs use the recognition program, as well as more than 1,500 private-sector hospitals. Since starting the award program, Bonnie said, more than 400,000 people have taken the time to nominate and write about what a nurse has done for them. To nominate a nurse at VA NWHCS, look for nomination forms in the clinics and at the inpatient nurses station. ①



Photo by Anna Morelock



Employee debuts new look

TO SUPPORT A FRIEND WITH CANCER

A logistics technician at the Omaha VA Medical Center wanted to do something special to help a friend with stage-4 pancreatic cancer. So, Bonnie Eriksen shaved her head as part of a fundraiser.

Eriksen's friend, Gerald Cook, 53, was diagnosed with cancer in December. Erickson and several of Cook's friends held a fundraiser to help defray his medical treatment costs.

She came up with the idea to shave her head to increase interest and participation in the fundraiser, and to raise awareness about pancreatic cancer and early detection.

"I wanted to draw a larger crowd to the benefit," Eriksen said. "It was also to show Gerald moral support."

Cook said he wasn't expecting Eriksen to shave her head.

"She offered to do it," Cook said. "It was a great way to let people know that she does care and loves me. "I also got to take the first swipe with the razor."

Eriksen's daughter, Catresia Eriksen, who's in the fourth grade, and her sister, Maria Dillow, also had their heads shaved that day.

"Them shaving their heads was a huge attraction that helped the benefit," Cook said. "You don't usually see women and children shaving off their hair."

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

The hair did not go to waste. The three donated it to Locks of Love, a public, non-profit organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children under 18 who suffer from long-term medical hair loss.

"It meant so much for me to do this for Gerald," Eriksen said.

Cook said having a support system of friends like Eriksen is important, especially when facing a challenge such as cancer.

"We often don't take the time to be grateful for the people in our lives. Life is very short. The support from Bonnie, her family and other friends from the VA is special to me."

Gerald Cook



Above: Bonnie Eriksen, VA logistics technician, hugs Gerald Cook at a fundraiser in December that raised awareness about Pancreatic cancer. (Courtesy Photo)

It's Public Service Recognition Week... You sm;)ed and sent us your selfies! 😊

Proud to Serve!



Donna Higgins, NWHCS Women Veterans Program Manager, 6 years of service; **Jody Ring**, OEF/OIF/OND Transition Patient Advocate, 15 years of service; and **Kim Moore**, Readjustment Counselor at the Lincoln Vet Center, 3 years of service.

Quinn, Grand Island Community Living Center Pet Therapy, 7 years of service; and **Ken Ward**, recreation therapist, 25 years of service.

First-year clinical coordinators **James Pfeifer** and **Rob Heineman** from Research in Omaha.



Cindy Siebke, RN, in the Grand Island Community Living Center, 7 years of service; and **Kayce Sheppard, LPN**, in the CLC, 2 years of service.



Nikki Engel, voucher auditor in Non-VA Care in Omaha, 15 years of service; and **Kim Strausbaugh**, appeals specialist in Non-VA Care, 15 years of service.

Brenda Rish, RN, Grand Island Community Living Center day supervisor, 6.5 years of service; and **Quinn**, CLC Pet Therapy, 7 years of service.



Michelle Warner, medical support assistant at the Norfolk CBOC, 6 years of service; **Denise Albrecht, LPN**, 4 years of service; and **Shantell Kleinschmit**, medical support assistant; 5 years of service.



Synthia Stanosheck, audiology technician, 30 years of service; **Dr. Wanda Johnson**, 3 years of service; and **Dr. Kristen Friehe**, 6 months of service from Audiology at the Lincoln CBOC.

Bottom row: **Jennifer Ragland**, program support assistant in Grand Island's Community Living Center; 11 years of service; **Kim Arends**, Physical Therapist, 6 years of service; **Theresa Yant-Warnke**, Social Worker on the CLC, 19 years of service.
Top row: **Amy Thompson**, clinical pharmacist, for the CLC, 5 years of service; **Deb Stearley**, MDS coordinator for the CLC, 22 years of service.



Thank you to the staff of VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System for your service in support of the VA mission to provide exceptional health care for Veterans.

Making Difference

VA RESEARCH WEEK ★ MAY 19-23★2014

VA Research Week provides an opportunity to learn the role VA plays in Veterans' health care. This year, VA Research Week is May 19 to 23, and the theme is "VA Research: Making a Difference." The focus is to highlight the achievements of VA researchers in providing high-quality care for Veterans and advancing medical science.

“VA Research is unique because it is focused on Veterans. Research week is an opportunity to highlight that service.”

Dr. Debra Romberger | VA NWIHCS Associate Chief of Staff for Research

Historically, VA research contributions include the development of a new shingles vaccine, the nicotine patch, implantable defibrillators, CT scan technology and functional electrical stimulation systems to move paralyzed limbs. VA funds four major areas of research: basic laboratory research, clinical studies, rehabilitation and health services.

Research at VA NWIHCS is being performed in areas including mental health, liver studies, rheumatoid arthritis, lung disease, obesity, dental prosthetics and reproductive endocrinology. In fiscal year 2013, research grants for VA NWIHCS exceeded \$7 million from sources including the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Institute of Health and other federal agencies. 

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

EVENTS

May 19 -23

Omaha VAMC main lobby,
VA research activities displays

May 23, 8 to 11:30 a.m.

VA research poster exhibits,
Education Conference Room, Omaha

May 23, 8:30 to 10:30 a.m.

Research seminar by Mary Brophy, MD,
MPH, and Friends of VA Research
Award presentation,
Education Conference Room, Omaha

Asian-Pacific Islander Heritage



In 1860, the U.S. population was 31,443,321, of which 34,933 were identified as being of Asian-Pacific Islander heritage. Very few soldiers of Asian descent served in the Civil War, but one of them who did lived at what today is known as the VA Black Hills Health Care Center in Hot Springs, S.D.

Edward Day Cohota was born in China around 1843 and brought to America from Shanghai in 1845 by Captain Sargent S. Day of the merchant ship Cohota.

Some accounts of Cohota's life claim that he was a stowaway on the ship, but he would have been too young to do so on his own. Captain Day took the boy to his home in Gloucester, Mass., where he and his wife, Lucy, raised him as their own, along with their other children.

On May 16, 1864, at around 20 years of age, Cohota enlisted with the 23rd Massachusetts Infantry to fight for the Union's Army of the

Potomac. He fought in numerous battles including Drury's Bluff and Cold Harbor, near Richmond, Virginia, and was discharged on June 25, 1865 at New Bern, North Carolina.

In 1869, he enlisted with the regular U.S. Army at Fort Randall in the Dakota Territory. He was stationed with the 15th Infantry in the American West and served for 30 years. After his discharge, he retired with his wife and children to Nebraska. He filed for a disability pension in 1921 and entered the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers' Battle Mountain Sanitarium in Hot Springs, S.D., on June 25, 1922. He lived there for 13 years and died on Nov. 18, 1935. Edward Day Cohota is buried at Mt. Hope Cemetery in Valentine, Neb.

Photo and Story by Darlene Richardson, VHA Historian.

events WHAT'S GOING ON?

- May 2 Volunteer Banquet, Lincoln
- May 4-10 Public Service Recognition Week
- May 5-9 Women's History Exhibit, Omaha
- May 5 VA Food Pantry, Lincoln
Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
- May 6 Veterans Freedom Music Festival
Planning Meeting, Lincoln
Volunteer Banquet, Grand Island
- May 6-12 National Nurses Week
- May 7 Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
VA Food Pantry, Omaha
- May 11 Mother's Day
- May 11-17 National Nursing Home Week
National Police Week
National Women's Health Week
- May 12 Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
- May 12-16 Women's History Exhibit, Lincoln
- May 14 Car Show, Lincoln
Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
- May 16 VA Coffeehaus, Lincoln
- May 19 Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
- May 19-23 Women's History Exhibit,
Grand Island
Research Week
- May 21 VA Food Pantry, Omaha
Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
- May 23 Memorial Day Commemoration,
Omaha
- May 26 Memorial Day
- May 27 Veterans Freedom Music Festival
Planning Meeting, Lincoln
- May 28 Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
VA and Community Book Club,
Lincoln

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



employees | NEW | LEAVING

HELLO

March 9 to April 5

Yawovi Agbessi,

Sterile Processing Service

Adam Bruhn, *Nursing*

Marna Cochell, *Engineering*

Mary Cooper, *Nursing*

Lametria Dunn, *Business Office*

Brian Elliott,

Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Jo Griffith, *Mental Health*

Sarah House, *Imaging*

Kathaleen Junge, *Nursing*

Mercedes Kirkland-Doyle,

Director's Office

Jennifer Koch, *Lab*

Lisa Koch, *Social Work*

Jeffrey Kolter, *Lab*

Quan Ly, *Surgery*

Tracy MacDonald, *Nursing*

Melissa Reidy, *Nursing*

Dana Riter, *Imaging*

Krista Snodgrass, *Nursing*

Joseph Standeven, Jr.,

Veterans Canteen Service

Susan Stone, *Pharmacy*

Jennifer Trompke, *Nursing*

Cathy Tsuchiyama, *Nursing*

Bryan Teruya, *Lab*

Ashley Bracey, *Nursing*

Karen Roundtree, *Pharmacy*

Thomas Heck, *Prosthetics*

Sean Langenfeld, *Surgery*

Bernard Baxter, *Surgery*

LEAVING

Marissa Barner,

Sterile Processing Service

Derrick Carter,

Environmental Management Service

Steven Davis, *Mental Health*

Kathryn Farrens,

Veterans Canteen Service

Brenda Freestone, *Business Office*

Matthew Jordan, *Police*

Terry Kennedy, *Police*

Laura Neal, *Director's Office*

Michael Oltman, *Nursing*

Charles Ross,

Environmental Management Service

James Schrack, *Human Resources*

Lynn Schwieger, *Nursing*

RETIRING

Charles Damico, *Surgery*

Douglas DeGrave,

Environmental Management Service

Alvin Haver, *Research*

Michael Johnson, *Mental Health*

Gary Kilian,

Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Michael Lybarger, *Nursing*

Samuel McCubbin, *Nursing*

Roger Reidelberger, *Research*

Lois Townsend, *Finance*

Appreciation Night FOR WOMEN VETERANS

June 5 2 to 7 p.m. (Open House)

YMCA 430 South 20th Street, Omaha, NE

LADIES: Bring a battle buddy for a night to recognize and celebrate the impact women have made through their dedicated service in the Armed Forces.

Free Child Care (Provided by the YMCA)

**Meet VA's Women's Health Care Providers | Learn About Your VA Benefits
Door Prizes | Appetizers | Cooking Demonstrations**

**Register online at www.nebraska.va.gov/services/women
or call Donna Higgins at 402-995-4906.**

VA Professional Education Resource Center Opens in Omaha

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System celebrated the opening of the new VA Professional Education Resource (VAPER) Center April 24. The center is located on the third floor of the Omaha VA Medical Center and combines simulation training capabilities and the medical library in one area.



Almost 200 staff members stopped by during the open house to try out some of the simulators and learn about library resources available to them including online journals and Anatomy TV, a web resource available to all staff.

Above: Denise Harrison, NWHCS associate director, examines a dental mold during the VAPER Center open house.

Right: Dr. Scott Hofmann, chief of Anesthesiology, and Carl Robinson, anesthesia tech, look at a video laryngoscope with simulation coordinator Kami Willett April 24 during the VAPER Center open house.



Photos by Anna Morelock

IMPROVING HOUSING OPPORTUNITES for Veterans

The Fair Housing Center of Nebraska – Iowa presented VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System's Homeless Program with the 2014 Inez Fitz Community Service Award April 10. The award is given annually to an individual or organization whose work has improved the lives of the people of Nebraska and Iowa while demonstrating a commitment to the principles of fair housing.

VA NWHCS' Homeless Program was chosen because staff exhibited personal dedication, collaboration that resulted in a significant reduction in homelessness experienced by Veterans. The award was named after a retired Family Housing Advisory Services employee who dedicated her life to improving housing opportunities for people historically denied equal access to housing.



Remembering Those Who Served

The Sixth Annual Memorial Day Commemoration will be held at 4 p.m. May 23 at the main flag pole area near the front entrance of the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, Omaha medical center, 4101 Woolworth Ave.

The event's keynote speaker will be Frank Bracken, president, Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 279, Omaha, and assistant Veteran service officer, Douglas County. Music will be provided by the U.S. Air Force Heartland of America Band's Offutt Brass. The event will include a joint color guard from area Veteran service organizations. A VA Police honor guard will perform a retreat ceremony.

Local Veterans organizations are invited to present commemorative wreaths at the May 23 event to honor America's fallen. To participate, contact Will Ackerman, VA NWHCS Public Affairs Officer, at 402-995-4719, or william.ackerman@va.gov.



VETERANS FREEDOM

MUSIC FESTIVAL

JUNE 14

2014
Gates Open - 11 AM
Opening Ceremony 11:45 AM
Closing Ceremony 8 PM

TOP 8 LOCAL BANDS

Donate Non-Perishable Food Items to the VA Food Pantry

INFORMATION FAIR:

VA Health Care & Veterans Organizations

Kids Activities From Noon to 5 pm
Free Parking | Food Vendors
Veterans Color Guard | Taps

FREE ADMISSION

BRING LAWN CHAIRS OR BLANKETS

LINCOLN VA CAMPUS
600 South 70th Street
Lincoln, Nebraska

No Alcohol, Coolers or Pets, Service Dogs Only

Visit www.nebraska.va.gov for more information.



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