

the link

MARCH
2015



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

SEE HOW IMPORTANT
YOUR VISION IS:
ROUTINE EYE HEALTH
CAN PREVENT
PROBLEMS LATER

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As we charge forward toward the upcoming season of change with spring knocking on our doorstep, it is also a time of change at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. We will be welcoming a new director this month.



Mr. B. Don Burnam will take the helm of VA NWIHCS after leading the Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics, White City, Ore. With more than 28 years of health care leadership roles, we are privileged to have a person with his experience guiding our health care system. He will join us March 26. You can read more about Mr. Burman on page 4.

I have been privileged to be your acting director since September 2014. Although I am returning to the Associate Director for Patient Care/Nurse Executive, a role I've enjoyed since 1996, stepping into the acting director role has been a wonderful opportunity to expand my understanding of all of the service lines and people who make this health care system a wonderful place to work.

During the past seven months, you have reinforced to me that each of you is critical to the success of this organization, regardless of where you work. You demonstrate every day what I already knew, that you embody the VA Core Values of Integrity-Commitment-Advocacy-Respect-Excellence (I CARE) in all that you do.

Our entire executive team is excited to welcome Mr. Burman into an organization of professionals who deliver timely, excellent health care to our Veterans.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eileen Kingston".

**ACTING DIRECTOR
AND PUBLISHER**

Eileen Kingston, RN, MPA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

Will Ackerman

THE LINK EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor | Lori Bultman

Photographer | Bruce Thiel

Designer | Becky Brown

FACT: VA HAS HAD NEARLY HALF A MILLION CALLS FROM VETERANS AND PROVIDERS ABOUT THE VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM, AND ROUGHLY 24,000 VETERANS HAVE MADE APPOINTMENTS THROUGH THE PROGRAM.
SOURCE: ROBERT MCDONALD, SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Cover: Sandy McKinney, eye technician, Omaha VAMC, checks intraocular pressure with applanation tonometry on Veteran Joseph McGovern during his eye exam. Photo by Lor Bultman



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“I consider it an honor to serve our Veterans. My father was a World War II and Korean war Veteran. I served in the Army and enjoy seeing and helping other Veterans. Working at the VA is very satisfying, and another way to serve our country and Veterans.”

Greg Schaeffer, Staff Pharmacist
Grand Island CBOC | U.S. Army



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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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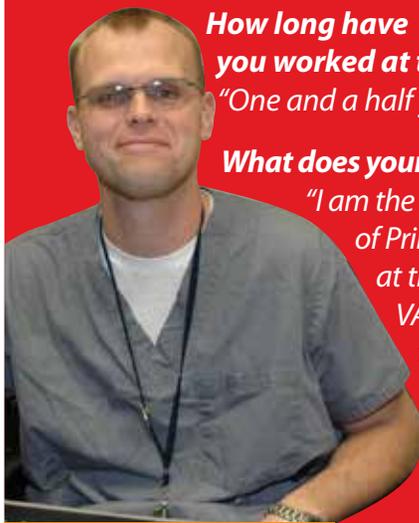
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MEET

michael hughes, RN

Nurse Manager, Primary Care
LINCOLN VA CBOC | U.S. ARMY VETERAN



How long have you worked at the VA?
"One and a half years."

What does your job entail?
"I am the supervisor of Primary Care at the Lincoln VA CBOC, and the acting patient advocate. I ensure the clinics- which include

25 RNs, LPNs and clerks-run smoothly."

What do you like best about your job?
"I love serving my fellow Veterans, and the great benefits that come with working for the federal government."

When not at work, where can you be found?
"I can be found spending time with my family, and giving my wife a break from our six children."

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VETERANS AFFAIRS ANNOUNCES APPOINTMENT OF NEW DIRECTOR for Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announces the appointment of B. Don Burman as the new director of the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS).

"We are excited to bring Mr. Burman on board as the new director of the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System," said Steven Julius, M.D., acting Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23 director. "His sound leadership qualities and proven experience will be valuable assets for the health care system, the employees, volunteers, and most importantly, for the Veterans we are honored to serve. We anticipate he will arrive at the health care system within the next 30 days to begin his appointment."



Courtesy Photo

Burman has served more than 28 years in health care leadership positions within VA and private health care. He most recently served as medical center director, Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics (SORCC), White City, Ore.

Burman holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas, and a master's degree in Health Administration from Washington University, School of Medicine, St. Louis, Mo. Burman is a member in the American College of Healthcare Executives. He is a 10-year Veteran of the U. S. Air Force.

Burman has an exceptional background and possesses the leadership, knowledge and skills necessary to successfully lead the VA NWIHCS into the future, Julius said.

VA NWIHCS is a Joint Commission-accredited, level-1c facility, which consists of a tertiary medical center in Omaha, Neb., and two larger clinics in Lincoln and Grand Island – which includes a community living center – five community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC) and one contract clinic. VA NWIHCS is part of the VA Midwest Health Care Network (VISN 23), which serves an estimated Veteran population of 161,000 in 101 counties in Nebraska, western Iowa, Kansas and Missouri with an estimated 593,000 annual outpatient visits, and an operating budget of \$334 million as of October 2014. 

New Chapel, Renovated Recreational Hall Cater to Veterans' spirituality

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs



Photos by Will Ackerman

Employees are known for providing excellent care to improve Veterans' health and well-being at VA.

A new chapel at the Grand Island Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) provides solace and a place for the VA to minister to Veterans' "spiritual needs." The chapel, on the second floor, was dedicated in a ceremony Nov. 19.

"We believe spiritual care is an integral part of a person's whole care," said Rev. Lonnie Logan, chaplain, Grand Island CBOC. Veterans have "wounds and scars that run very deep" from their military service, he said.

“They need a place like this that is quiet and non-threatening and non-judgmental where they can work through those battles to reach a point of health as they put their lives back together.”

Rev. Lonnie Logan, Chaplain | Grand Island CBOC

Vietnam Veteran Thomas Jarvis said during his military experiences and recovery at the VA he "definitely had a higher power" watching over him. "I believe in it," he said.

"I spent many nights sitting down there (in the old chapel) ... reflecting and getting my head back together," Jarvis said.

The new chapel occupies space that was formerly part of the recreation hall. In addition to renovating the space for the new chapel, the remaining half of the old recreation hall adjacent to the chapel was updated. It has new flooring and a renovated kitchen.

Like the chapel, the recreation hall is a place where Veterans who are residents in the Community Living Center or residential substance abuse treatment program can come to "get their minds off of things going on in their lives," said Ken Ward, recreation therapist.

Activities recreation therapy offers in the hall include bingo and football or other sport tailgate parties, Ward said. Veterans can also come and relax.

"It's a chance for the Veterans to get away and have a cup of coffee and get involved with activities," he said. 📞



Top left: Reverends Lonnie Logan and Sidney Bruggeman, Grand Island VA chaplains dedicate the facility's new chapel Nov. 19.

Above: Don Lee a Vietnam Veteran who is a resident at the Grand Island Community Living Center, plays bingo in the newly renovated recreation hall.

VA Professional Education Resources Center offers hands-on training, access

The VA Professional Education Resources Center (VAPER) at the Omaha VA Medical Center was introduced in April 2014 in the former medical library on the third floor. This new concept of merging information with hands-on training is designed to showcase the technology and information available to employees in one centralized location.

The VAPER simulation center provides trainees with numerous practice mannequins. The mannequins have varying degrees of specialized mechanical systems that allow for life-like training scenarios without disturbing actual patients, said Kami Willett, RN, simulation center coordinator. Trainees can move the mannequins from beds with lifts, or they can perform procedures like cardiac pulmonary resuscitation. They also can perform more specialized procedures to prepare for actual treatment on real patients, she said. Currently, there are training sessions for advanced cardiac life support, endoscopy, central venous catheter placement and out-of-operating-room airway management. A nursing skills fair is also held monthly.

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS) employees have access to the simulation training, which can provide them with these vital experiences, Willett said. VAPER staff are ready to take the show on the road and provide training to VA NWIHCS employees at locations convenient for them, Willett said.

In addition to hands-on simulated training, employees can also gain access to a wealth of information through various websites with which VA NWIHCS has memberships or user agreements. Darrel E. Willoughby, chief librarian, is available to assist individual employees navigate through the websites. He offers group presentations to educate employees about search techniques for gathering the information they need.



"Most of what VAPER provides now is electronic," Willoughby said. "There are very few actual books located here."

EBSCOhost is one of the resources VAPER offers. It can be accessed on any networked computer within VA NWIHCS.

"EBSCO is a research database, which is accessible at work, and some employees and students can gain Athens Authorization to access it from their home computer," Willoughby said. Anatomy TV is also a good resource, he said. Books 24/7 can be accessed through the Talent Management System (TMS).



Resources Center to information

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

For those who have an interest in learning more about websites and databases available through VAPER and how to use those resources, Willoughby will offer a class starting in April. Introduction to Library Resources will be open to all VA NWHCS employees and students. Registration for the class begins in March.

VAPER is open 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, for scheduled simulation training and computer access. Simulation training can be scheduled through the VA NWHCS SharePoint under VAPER, or call 402-995-5755 for assistance. To schedule Introduction to Library Resources for an individual or group, call 402-995-3530.

Left: Scott Menolascino, M.D., emergency department director, performs a procedure on a VAPER mannequin during Ebola concept training.

Below: Mattie Jenkins, CNA, left, and Heather Batt, RN, practice safe patient handling and moving techniques while Annette Kolter, RN, center, and Sally Haferbier, CNA, assist with assisting in the competencies at the VAPER.



Photos by Kami Willett



VA Goes Red for Women

Go Red for Women is an annual event to raise awareness about women's cardiac health. For this year's event Feb. 6, employees at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System wore red and visited information tables at Omaha VA Medical Center, Lincoln and Grand Island VA CBOCs. "The Women's Veterans program is delighted to bringing awareness and knowledge about heart disease and stroke to all Veterans," said Donna Higgins, LCSW, Women Veteran Program Manager. "As the VA places more emphasis on disease prevention, education is significant," she said. "Being able to provide

this in a fun atmosphere in collaboration with dietary services, Health Promotion, Disease Prevention (HPDP), occupational health, and medical media is a great way to promote this disease."



Photos by Lori Bultman, Bruce Thiel and Coral Selden

SEE
HOW
IMPORTANT
YOUR VISION IS

routine eye care can prevent problems later

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

Save Your Vision Month is sponsored by the American Optometric Association every March as a reminder about the importance of eye health and regular eye exams.

"I recommend those over age 60 have an eye exam every year," said Dr. Thomas Hejkal, retina specialist, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS). "Glaucoma has no symptoms until it is advanced, so regular eye exams are important."

"Diabetics should have eye exams yearly, regardless of symptoms," said Dr. Patricia Terp, chief resident, VA NWIHCS. "Patients can develop severe diabetic eye disorders and not have any symptoms." There are preventive treatments available for some of these disorders if treated early, she said.

Sunglasses also are essential for eye health because they offer UV (ultraviolet) protection, Terp said. "UV exposure can cause cataract formation and can also contribute to worsening of macular degeneration."

Terp also recommends the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), when appropriate. "Most ocular trauma I see is caused by eye injuries, which could have been prevented with the use of PPE," she said.

Eye care services are available at VA NWIHCS in Omaha and at several of the community-based outpatient clinics. Grand Island and Lincoln VA CBOCs have optometrists who can complete annual eye exams. The Omaha VA Medical Center has ophthalmologists who can perform surgeries, laser procedures and intraocular injections," Terp said.

Cataracts affect nearly 22 million Americans age 40 and older; by age 80, more than half of all Americans have cataracts, according to Prevent Blindness America. Glaucoma affects almost 2.3 million Americans; diabetic retinopathy affects more than 4.4 million Americans 40 and older.

EYE EXAM ELIGIBILITY While all Veterans receiving care at the VA may not be eligible to receive eyeglasses through the VA, they are entitled to an eye exam, if needed. Eyeglasses may be provided to the following Veterans as authorized in 38 CFR 17.149, provided they are receiving VA care or services:

- Veterans with any compensable service-connected disability
- Former prisoners of war
- Veterans awarded a Purple Heart medal
- Veterans who receive benefits under 38 USC 1151 (e.g., benefits for persons disabled by treatment or vocational rehabilitation).
- Veterans who receive increased pension based on the need for aid and attendance benefits or by reason of being permanently housebound
- Veterans who have a visual or hearing impairment that resulted from the existence of another medical condition the Veteran is receiving VA care for or that resulted from treatment of that medical condition
- Veterans with significant functional or cognitive impairment evidenced by deficiencies in activities of daily living (not including normally occurring visual or hearing impairments)
- Veterans with severe visual or hearing impairment and hearing aids and/or eyeglasses are necessary to ensure Veterans' active participation in their own medical treatment

In addition to these, Terp said, insulin dependent diabetics and patients with only one eye may receive eyeglasses through VA NWIHCS.

If VA patients have eye issues or major eyesight changes between eye exams, Terp recommends they contact their eye clinic directly. A Veteran can call a VA NWIHCS eye clinic to discuss a new problem. Clinic staff can assist in determining if the issue requires an office visit. However, she said new patients to VA NWIHCS eye clinics should contact their assigned primary care provider first for a consultation.

Omaha VAMC Eye Clinic: 402-995-3216

Grand Island CBOC Eye Clinic: 308-382-3660, ext. 92406

Lincoln CBOC Eye Clinic: 402-489-3802, ext. 96991

Eye technician Brady Petersen checks refraction on Veteran Michole Larson during his eye exam at the Omaha VAMC Eye Clinic.



How Often Do You Get Your Eyes Examined?



“I last got an eye exam in 2012. It had been five years since the one before that.”

Joe Heatherly, Social Worker
Lincoln VA CBOC

“I go occasionally, every two or three years. I only wear reading glasses.”



Clair Kathol, Staff Therapist
Respiratory | Omaha VAMC



“I get my eyes checked every two years, and I always wear sunglasses to protect my eyes, unless it is cloudy.”

Sherrie Kimmen, LPN
Lincoln VA CBOC

“I go to the eye doctor one time a year, around November.”



Marilyn Robinson, Volunteer
Information Desk | Omaha VAMC



Photo by Lori Bultman

VA Named Co-Recipient of ‘Making a Difference Award’

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

The Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA) presented VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (NWIHCS) and several community partners its “Making a Difference Award” at a conference Feb. 4.

The award was presented to recognize a partnership that resulted in “exceptional outcomes in communities and people’s lives,” according to Susan Pulec, NIFA.

The award honored the partnership that led to the development of Victory Apartments, a 90-unit permanent, supportive housing project at 825 Dorcas Street, Omaha, Neb. The development involved complete renovation of the 65-year-old Our Lady of Victory Wing of the former St. Joseph Hospital, which had been vacant for 13 years, and was uninhabitable.

The 65 one-bedroom and 25 studio units are specifically designed to house formerly homeless or low-income Veterans.

VA NWIHCS’ Mental Health Specialty Services leased 10,000-square feet of office space in the building and is co-located to offer myriad services that include homeless support, vocational rehabilitation, primary and mental health care and a VA Pantry to these Veterans.

The award recognizes the development by America First Real Estate Group in partnership with VA and Grace University. It also names the City of Omaha, U.S. Bank, Omaha State Bank and Douglas County Housing Authority as partners.

Linda Twomey, director, VA NWIHCS Mental Health Specialty Programs, said, “We had no idea we were receiving an award along with our partners for this development.”

“This recognizes that critical success can occur when VA collaborates with the community to support America’s Veterans. Victory Apartments and our office’s co-location are even more critical because it is improving the lives of some of our most-vulnerable Veterans who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.”

Linda Twomey | VA NWIHCS mental health specialty program director

Taking a look at VETERANS CHOICE

VHA Communications | VA Office of Public Affairs

President Obama signed the **Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA)** into law **Aug. 7, 2014**. **Technical revisions to VACAA were made on Sept. 26, 2014, when the president signed the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2014 into law.**



To improve VA's ability to deliver high-quality health care to Veterans, section 101 of the VACAA requires VA to expand the options for eligible Veterans to elect to use non-VA health care for a period of up to three years, based either on the distance a Veteran lives from a

VA facility, or if he or she is experiencing wait times beyond the 30-day standard.

Additionally, a Veteran must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

- The Veteran is told by his/her local VA medical facility provider he/she will need to wait more than 30 days from his/her preferred date, or the date medically determined by his/her physician.
- The Veteran's current residence is more than 40 miles from the closest VA health care facility as determined by a direct line on a map.

If an eligible Veteran has another health-care plan, VA will be secondarily responsible for costs associated with non-service connected care and services furnished to eligible Veterans through the Choice program and primarily responsible for service-connected care.

When a Veteran receives care from an eligible non-VA health care entity or provider, the entity or provider must submit a copy of any medical record information related to the care and services provided to VA. This information will be included in the Veteran's medical record maintained by the department.

Veterans who are eligible based upon their place of residence will be eligible to use the Choice program for any services that are clinically necessary. Veterans who are eligible because of the "wait-time" criterion will only be able to receive a non-VA appointment for the episode of care related to the service that cannot be scheduled within 30 days from his/her preferred date or the date medically determined by his/her physician.

Currently, VA is in the process of providing a Choice Card to all Veterans who were enrolled in the VA health care system as of Aug. 1, 2014, and to recently discharged combat Veterans. 

events WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Mar. 2 *Food Pantry, Lincoln VA CBOC*
- Mar. 4 *Food Pantry, Community Resource and Referral Center, 825 Dorcas St., Omaha*
- Mar. 8 *Daylight Saving Time*
International Working Women's Day
- Mar. 8-14 *Patient Safety Awareness Week*
- Mar. 13 *Free tax assistance for Veterans and Employees at Lincoln VA CBOC*
Bloodmobile blood drive, Grand Island VA CBOC
- Mar. 17 *St. Patrick's Day*
- Mar. 18 *Food Pantry, Community Resource and Referral Center, 825 Dorcas St., Omaha*
- Mar. 20 *First Day of Spring*
VA Coffeehaus, Lincoln VA CBOC
- Mar. 25 *National Medal of Honor Day*
VA Community Book Club, Lincoln VA CBOC
- Mar. 30 *National Doctors' Day*

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



Omaha | Aug. 8-12

Volunteer to support more than 800 Veterans from across the country as they come to Omaha to compete in the 2015 National Veterans Golden Age Games.

To volunteer, call 402-995-5748 or send your contact information to VHANWIGoldenAgeGames@va.gov.



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



National Salute to Veteran Patients Week



The week of Feb. 14 each year is your opportunity to say thank you to a special group of men and women, more than 98,000 Veterans of the U.S. armed services who are cared for every day in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, outpatient clinics, domiciliaries and nursing homes. The week also provides an opportunity for the community to become acquainted with volunteer opportunities. Below, Linda Varejcka, Navy Veteran Spouse and a member of the American Legion Ladies Auxiliary, District 12, gives a Valentine card to Joe Rico at Lincoln VA CBOC on Feb. 11 as part of National Salute to Veteran Patients Week.



Photos by Bruce Thiel

Trekking up the Tower



Courtesy Photo

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System had several participants in the Trek Up the Tower event Feb. 21. Among those was Dr. Grace Stringfellow, chief of staff, and Dr. Edward "Ned" Greene, lead dentist, Lincoln VA CBOC. Green won his division at the event. Trek Up the Tower is the region's premier vertical challenge race and involves participants climbing 40 floors, 870 steps, and 633 feet into the sky at the First National Tower in Omaha, Neb. The tower is the tallest building between Chicago and Denver.

employeeUPDATE

HELLO

- MARILYN BARNES**, *Mental Health*
- SCOTT BERNIER**, *Prosthetics*
- LORI BULTMAN**, *Director's Office*
- JOHN CALABRO**, *Surgery*
- RACHELLE CARVER**, *Nursing*
- NONA GREEN**, *Mental Health*
- JARROD HOSKINSON**, *Prosthetics*
- DESIRAE JOHNSON**, *Mental Health*
- EUGENE KIMSEY**, *Veterans Canteen Service*
- DARIN KRUEGER**, *Mental Health*

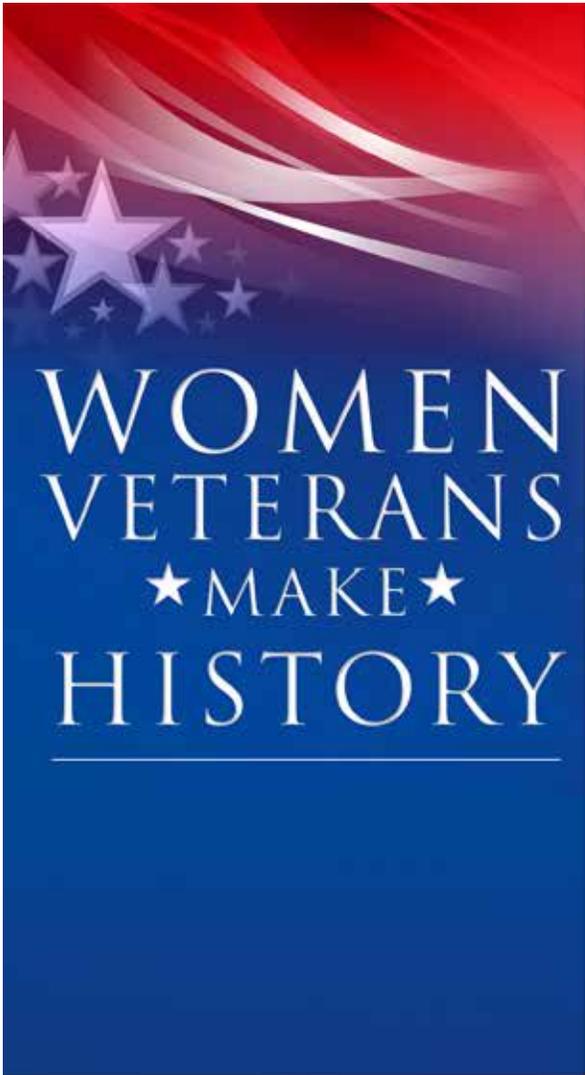
- SHAWNENE NICKERSON**, *Mental Health*
- JESSICA ORTH**, *Business Office*
- RACHAL PENDER**, *Veterans Canteen Service*
- ANGELA PHILLIPS**, *Business Office*
- MEGAN SPATH**, *Business Office*
- LACEY TUTTLE**, *Mental Health*
- GARY WALKER**, *Environmental Management Service*
- CHRISTINE WHITE**, *Engineering*
- SHARLY YOWELL**, *Mental Health*

GOING

- TODD ALLEN**, *Nursing*
- BRIANNA AGBEKPONOU**, *Nursing*
- LYNN CROGHAN**, *Nursing*
- DEAN DEGNER**, *Mental Health*
- FRANCES FINES**, *Mental Health*
- CHAE HIATT**, *Food Production*
- KELLY PURDY**, *Nursing*
- VERA SOMADO-HEMAZRO**, *Mental Health*
- ROBERT VICE**, *Environmental Management Service*
- STEPHAN WOODMAN**, *Imaging*

RETIRED

- BRENDA DAVIS**, *Laboratory*
- MARY CARROLL**, *Nursing*
- MARY DOUGLAS**, *Nursing*
- DIANNE FRAZIER**, *Laboratory*
- JEAN SOPPE**, *Mental Health*
- DEBRA STEENSON**, *Nursing*
- CHANNING WARBELTON**, *Environmental Management Service*



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