

the link

NOVEMBER 2015
VA NEBRASKA-WESTERN
IOWA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM



6 | CELEBRATING
VETERANS DAY
AT VA NWIHCS



Our Mission: Veterans

B. DON BURMAN Director, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

Every time I talk with our staff at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, there is one message I am focused on delivering; we have one mission at the VA, and that is to fulfill the promise President Abraham Lincoln made to Veterans returning from the Civil War. That is, "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." I have adapted that message to reflect female Veterans who make up a large part of our population. Today, the promise is, "to care for those who shall have borne the battle, and for their widows and their orphans."

Within the VA health care system, everything we do is focused on the singular mission to provide Veterans high-quality care that improves their health and well-being. This dedication is reflected in the MyVA tenant of improving the Veteran experience. Regardless whether you directly provide clinical care, or keep the facility clean, or process medical payments, I remind every one of our terrific staff that whatever their job function, it supports the mission of caring for our Veterans and providing world-class customer service.

As a Veteran myself, I consider it a privilege and obligation to lead this organization with each of you as we continue to keep the commitment to our Veterans that President Lincoln charged Americans with so eloquently more than 200 years ago.

Although Veterans Day is officially celebrated on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month each year, at the Department of Veterans Affairs, "every day is Veterans Day!"

Thank you for your service. Happy Veterans Day!

WHAT OUR PATIENTS ARE SAYING

“My physical therapist is always courteous and very attentive to my description of pain. She does an exceptional job of treatment and scheduling to make sure I receive ongoing treatment along with providing me with strengthening and other helpful ideas to speed my recovery. I want to thank her very much and let you know she is an excellent representative for the VA, someone who cares about Vets and their well-being!!”



Courtesy Photo

VA HISTORY TIDBIT

Twenty-seven years ago, on Oct. 25, 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed Public Law 100-527, known as the Department of Veterans Affairs Act, and elevated the Veterans Administration to the 15th Cabinet-level department in the federal government. The historic bill-signing took place at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C., roughly a week before the 1998 presidential election. For political reasons, the law delayed full implementation of the act until March 1989 when the new incoming president could appoint someone of his own choice to head the new department. For this reason, VA celebrates both dates—when the law was signed and when it became fully effective—as they are both significant to its history.

the link

this month

FACT: CONTINUED EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE - FOR FIVE CONSECUTIVE YEARS, VA'S CONSOLIDATED MAIL OUTPATIENT PHARMACY RECEIVED THE HIGHEST CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SCORE AMONG THE NATION'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE MAIL-ORDER PHARMACIES. -ACCORDING TO A J.D. POWER STUDY

“Military is a way of life for me, and I feel as though working for the VA is an extension of that.”

Julie Moullet, Program Support Assistant
Omaha VAMC | U.S. Army Veteran



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Coffeehaus Volunteer Receives Award for Her Support

Cover: The American flag flies high over the Lincoln VA Clinic. (Photo by Bruce Thiel)

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VISIT US ONLINE

Scan with your smart phone to view more issues of The Link online.



DONALD



SCOTT

**Voluntary Service
Assistant**

2 MONTHS

LINCOLN VA CLINIC

4 YEARS SERVICE

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

"Supervising volunteers we have; accepting monetary and in-kind donations, getting that recorded into the system, making sure donations get to those who need them."

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN NOT AT WORK?

"I like to use the employee fitness center here. I try to make it three times a week, but if I make it twice I'm happy. And I like to do some reading."

WHAT DO YOU ❤️ ABOUT YOUR JOB:

"It's the interaction with the Vets that come in. I did a lot of scheduling and appointments and got to know a lot of these guys on a personal basis. In Voluntary, it's helping the Veterans in need with the donations; we get cash and in-kind. I really enjoy that aspect. In both cases, it's why we're here – to serve the Veterans."

become A VA VOLUNTEER

Volunteer opportunities are found in the medical center and community-based outpatient clinics. Our goal is to meet the needs of our Veterans while meeting your interests, skills and talents as a volunteer.

See What You Can Offer:

Omaha: 402-995-3283 or 3284

Lincoln: 402-489-7938

Grand Island: 308-382-3660, ext. 2146

Photo by Anna Morelock



VA Staff, Community Connect WITH HOMELESS VETERANS

BY ANNA MORELOCK Public Affairs

Veterans and other community members who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless connected with services' staff at Project Homeless Connect Oct. 22 in Grand Island.

Jane Lewis, a Homeless Veterans Outreach social worker from Grand Island, was one of the VA staff on hand to help.

Lewis has only been with the VA since July. In that time, she said she's been surprised to learn about all of the services available to help Veterans.

As an Army Veteran, Lewis was able to connect with Veterans. She also made sure the Veterans were registered in the VA system and receiving the services they need. Besides setting Veterans up with health care services, the staff also provided coats, clothing and other goods to the Veterans in need.

Omaha will host its Stand Down from 3 to 6 p.m. Nov. 13 at the Grace University Field House, 820 Pine St.

Above: Sandra Miller, the Veteran Justice Outreach social worker from the Lincoln VA Clinic, discusses VA health care benefits with a Veteran Oct. 22 at Project Homeless Connect in Grand Island.

Veteran-Focused Digital Experience



Putting Veterans First



Courtesy Photo

This fall, Veterans will experience the first iteration of Vets.gov, a unified site that allows Veterans to learn about benefits they've earned and offer a clear path for applying for them.

As a part of the MyVA initiative, the Veterans Experience team listened when Veterans told them they wanted simple, clear information that is easy to find and use.

Vets.gov initial release will be in November and will provide clear instructions and steps for some of VA's most popular services and transactions. Vets.gov will evolve over the upcoming year and will include existing and build new self-service functionality and tools. The ultimate goal for Vets.gov is to become the single, one-stop shop for information and self-service for Veterans and those who care for them. The initial launch will be the first

look into how VA is modernizing the Veteran experience. New content and functionality will be added week by week, with improvements based on user feedback and usage data, incrementally evolving to become a valued Veteran-focused digital experience.

What inspired you to choose your PROFESSION



Gina Frerichs
Clinic Nurse, LPN-C, Norfolk VA Clinic,
U.S. Army Reserve Veteran

"After 9-11, I felt compelled to want to help our country more and decided to switch majors to nursing. I've been a nurse for a little over 12 years now, and this has been the best professional fit for me. I've worked in various nursing facilities and recently started employment with VA NWHCS in May. I truly consider myself blessed to work with such a dedicated group of individuals and can relate/feel camaraderie amongst fellow Veterans."



Patricia Miller
Readjustment Counseling Therapist,
Lincoln Vet Center, U.S. Army Veteran

"I worked in the world of physical health; but even back then (1970) I realized some physical complaints didn't have a physical origin."



Sandra Miller
Veterans Justice Outreach Social
Worker, Lincoln VA Clinic

"I felt like I personally could make a difference in people's lives."

NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL FAMILY CAREGIVER'S SUPPORT MONTH



VA is here to support YOU!



Take time to celebrate those who dedicate themselves to caring for others. From all of us at VA NWHCS, thank you to our caregivers for providing excellent care to our Veterans.

For more information, contact:
Joni Morin, Caregiver Support Coordinator
402-995-4618

Call 1-855-260-3274 toll-free
www.caregiver.va.gov

CELEBRATING

VETERANS DAY AT VA NWHIHCs

BY WILL ACKERMAN *Public Affairs*

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was the Supreme Allied Commander during the D-Day invasion for the liberation of Europe during World War II, issued a Veterans Day proclamation in 1954 to establish a committee to oversee and create a national Veterans Day observance. This was the first official proclamation by a president to honor America's Veterans from all eras on Nov. 11 each year. In addition to honoring Veterans, the goal was to ensure younger generations understand the true meaning of Veterans Day, and the sacrifices that Veterans have made to secure Americans' freedom.

According to B. Don Burman, director, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, every day is Veterans Day at VA. Employees commit themselves to provide each and every Veteran the highest quality of care, and world-class customer service. More importantly, employees celebrate Veterans Day every day at VA by showing Veterans the respect they have earned.

One of the goals of VA is to hire Veterans to serve Veterans. At VA NWHIHCs, there are Veterans working in nearly every area of the system. NWHIHCs celebrates these Veterans for their continued service. In this Veterans Day edition of *The Link*, we feature some of the Veterans who work at NWHIHCs. If you know a Veteran who works at NWHIHCs, consider thanking them for their service.



Top from left: Capt. Amy Boyle, U.S. Army, RN, Omaha VAMC Red Clinic; Col. (ret.) Jim Brown, U.S. Air Force, MD, Lincoln VA Primary Care; Petty Officer Second Class Steve Miller, U.S. Navy, Electrician, Omaha VAMC

Middle from left: Master Gunnery Sgt. (ret.) Bettie Green, U.S. Marines, Supervisory Accountant, Fiscal, Omaha VAMC; Commander (ret.) Mary McElmeel, U.S. Navy, Nurse Manager, Patient Care Support, Omaha VAMC

Bottom from left: Staff Sgt. Jedediah Struck, Nebraska National Guard, Release of Information Clerk, Lincoln VA; Seaman Apprentice Deb Smith, U.S. Navy, LPN, Green Clinic, Omaha VAMC; Sgt. Dennis Carlson, U.S. Army, Program Support Assistant, Mental Health, Omaha VAMC

Courtesy Photos



Nurse's Example Exemplifies VA VALUES AND PROFESSIONALISM

BY ANNA MORELOCK *Public Affairs*

In October, Deb Shimerdla, RN, nurse manager for the Primary and Specialty Care Clinics at the Omaha VA Medical Center, presented the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses to Lara Colton, a registered nurse in the Gastroenterology Lab. According to one of the write-ups, Colton "has always been very committed and dedicated to her patients and coworkers with such enthusiasm, excellent care, respect and integrity, along with excellent customer service skills and professionalism... She is definitely an excellent example of what I CARE is all about at the VA."

From another coworker: "She makes me want to come to work every day to be the best that I can be. She shows how much she really cares ... I admire her work ethics and what she does for the VA and our Veterans."



Photo by Anna Morelock

For more information about the DAISY Award, visit www.daisyfoundation.org.



November is

Be Tobacco Free

Month

Board Leads Employees in Achieving Strategic Initiatives

The strategic plan sets the overall direction and priorities of the organization. This information should be used when making day-to-day as well as future decisions that impact the organization and the care provided to Veterans at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

The strategic plan will be highlighted frequently in The Link to keep Veterans and employees informed of successes and opportunities.

BY AMY ROSAUER
Staff Assistant to the Director

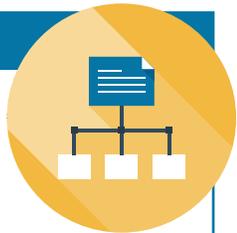
The strategic plan cannot be accomplished without everyone's support and involvement.

The VA NWIHCS Strategic Plan was set by the Executive Leadership Board, and is reviewed on an annual basis. The goals and objectives outlined were based on the Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Integrated Service Network 23 strategic plans, which include VA's core values and the Blue Print for Excellence themes. The Strategic Planning Committee has been chartered with overseeing the initiatives, which link and support the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. This committee reports strategic planning progress and barriers through the governance structure to the ELB.

THESE ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MANY STRATEGIC INITIATIVES VA NWIHCS COMPLETED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS:

THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance structure was implemented to ensure VA NWIHCS maintains its direction and focus on providing exceptional health care in line with the VA mission and I CARE values. With this structure, the creation of a new ELB was implemented. Members of the board include the executive team and the clinical and administrative service chiefs. The ELB oversees and presides over organizational decisions. Nine councils report to the ELB to ensure issues are elevated to the appropriate level, when necessary, and that the ELB is informed and aware of operations within the organization.



QUALITY, SAFETY, VALUE COUNCIL

The Quality, Safety, and Value Council was restructured and reports quarterly to the ELB. A new process for department tracers was implemented, and includes department managers who are required to report findings and action plans to the council.



TELEHEALTH

Telehealth services have been expanded to include sleep disorder evaluations, pre-op and telederm services. A process to enroll Veterans with a primary diagnosis of chronic heart failure in home telehealth services has also been put into place. VA NWIHCS also has a telemedicine sleep clinic.

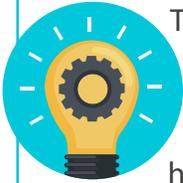


DECREASING READMISSION RATES

A work team was developed to review heart failure readmissions. The team developed an action plan, which led to a decrease in readmission rates from

27%  **6%.**

SIMULATION LAB



The Simulation Lab has been recognized as an Intermediate Tier Simulation Lab. Over 1,200 employees and students have received training in a variety of areas, including code situations, nursing competencies, ultrasound and women's health care, to name a few.

SERVICE-LEVEL PATIENT ADVOCATES



Service-level patient advocates were identified at all sites, and receive ongoing training by the facility patient advocates. The training was designed to promote continuity and consistency for handling patient concerns, provide awareness on discovering system-wide process issues and introducing service-level advocates to each other to facilitate communication across service lines.

HOMELESS VETERANS

The Community Resource and Referral Center, co-located with the Victory Apartments, was established to provide services to homeless Veterans. It includes bathing and laundry facilities, social work services, computer access to assist with job searches and a food pantry.

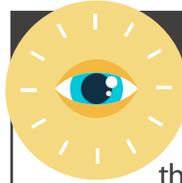


More information about these initiatives will be provided in upcoming issues of The Link, as well as in the 2015 VA NWIHC Annual Report.

HEALTH CARE ANALYTICS PROGRAM



A Health Care Analytics Program was established. This program is a collaborative effort, which consists of four courses that teaches students to perform complex analyses, translates information into knowledge, coaches and mentors others in the use of data, and leads teams in identifying relevant data to support systems improvement.



CULTURALLY COMPETENT ORGANIZATION

VA NWIHCs achieved the Human Rights Campaign Health Equality Index "Leader" status by exemplifying the four criteria related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender health care for the second consecutive year.

Cultural Competency training was offered to all staff members. This training focused on the importance of creating and sustaining a culturally competent workforce and organization.

PATIENT SAFETY



VA NWIHCs achieved gold status in the 2014 Root Cause Analysis (RCA) Cornerstone Recognition Program sponsored by the VA National Center for Patient Safety. Award recipients met certain criteria focused on quality, timeliness and quantity.

CARE COORDINATION

Leadership from VA NWIHCs and Offutt Air Force Base's medical facility, the 55th Medical Group, meet quarterly to discuss opportunities to collaborate to provide care to beneficiaries enrolled at each facility.



THE VETERAN'S CHOICE PROGRAM



The rollout of the Veteran's Choice Program via the Veterans Access Choice and Accountability Act provides new authorities, funding, and other tools to help support and reform VA. The Program provides eligible Veterans with a Veterans Choice Card, and allows those Veterans who are unable to schedule an appointment within 30 days of their preferred date or the clinically appropriate date, or on the basis of their place of residence, to elect to receive care from eligible non-VA health care entities or providers.

BEHAVIOR STANDARDS

Behavior standards were created to ensure VA NWIHCs employees are demonstrating the VA core values of I CARE, and to help foster an organization that exemplifies high-quality customer service.



DOCUMENTATION

A Clinical Documentation Improvement Program was established to ensure accurate documentation in the medical records.



LEADER IN LGBT HEALTH CARE

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System has been recognized as a "Leader in LGBT Healthcare Equality" by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, the educational arm of the country's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights organization.

The honor is given to facilities that meet LGBT-inclusive benchmarks that are part of the HRC Foundation's Healthcare Equality Index, a unique survey that encourages equal care for LGBT Americans by evaluating inclusive policies and practices related to LGBT patients, visitors and employees.

For more information about the Healthcare Equality Index, or to download a free copy of the report, visit www.hrc.org/hei.

DRAG KING SHARES ENTERTAINMENT, POWERFUL MESSAGE

Chrys Whitmarsh, drag king and transgender man, danced across the Education Conference Room in Omaha to Andy Grammar's "Good to be Alive."

"I've been waiting for this moment all my life/Now all my dreams are coming true."



Drag performance is how members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community express themselves. "It's entertainment," said Rachal Pender, LGBT special emphasis program manager for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS).

Pender and other members of VA NWIHCS' Special Emphasis Programs gathered Oct. 15 for Coming Out Day, which is celebrated nationwide Oct. 11.

While the dance got everyone's attention, the message was more powerful.

"We all have the same struggles," Pender said, "I just want to humanize it."

EMPLOYEE Update

WELCOME

Ty Andrews, Environmental Management Service

Meghan Bailey, Surgery

Jennifer Christo, Audiology

Raymond Conant, Surgery

Shana Condrey, Inpatient Nursing

Jeffrey Coontz, Environmental Management Service

Ceisha Deitering, Outpatient Nursing

Kristin Friehe, Audiology

Brittany Garrelts, Social Work

Deborah Janssen, Inpatient Nursing

Renee Jensen, Finance

Julia Koley, Social Work

Casha Lasley, Veterans Canteen Service

Benjamin Laster, Biomedical Engineering

Mary Lawry, Outpatient Nursing

Ritu Madan, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Kossi Mamah, Sterile Processing Service

Megan McCarthy, Outpatient Nursing

Kenneth McLaughlin, Inpatient Nursing

Danielle Merithew, Extended Care and Rehabilitation

Christy Moreno, Dental

Christine Mummaw, Inpatient Nursing

Rick Nagy, Sterile Processing Service

Laci Namken, Audiology

Julie Nichols, Outpatient Nursing

Jeffrey Ostwald, Environmental Management Service

Lisa Papic, Extended Care and Rehabilitation

David Payton, Engineering

Amanda Remarke, Inpatient Nursing

Jilleen Robinson, Audiology

Vall Robinson-McDonald, Engineering

Kristen Scheele, Audiology

Brittany Schwartz, Outpatient Nursing

Catherine Sheridan-Jones, Outpatient Nursing

Preetinder Sidhu, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Kevin Smith, Environmental Management Service

Thomas Stallings, Inpatient Nursing

Shelby Tessendorf, Dental

GOODBYE

Thomas Anderson, Nurse Exec's Office

Lori Fox, Lab and Pathology

Brad Hucke, Engineering

Denise Johnston, Lincoln VA Nursing

Nicole Keil, Quality Management

Carlos Lee, Environmental Management Service

Briann Moore, Business Office

Loretta Pierce, Nurse Exec's Office

Yoland Powers, Extended Care and Rehabilitation

Molly Shimerdla, Inpatient Nursing

Dwight Stone, Environmental Management Service

Lisa Tipton-Wylie, Extended Care and Rehabilitation

John Torchia, VA Police

Roger VanEpps, Office of Information and Technology

Sean Wagner, Business Office

BE FOR ALL

BY ANNA MORELOCK *Public Affairs*

With each presentation about LGBT rights and issues, Pender said it gets easier. VA NWIHCS has policies in place for Veterans, employees and families, but it isn't always easy to be one's self.

"I want every Veteran, no matter their gender identity, their sexual orientation to feel welcome when they walk in these doors. I want every employee at this VA to be able to put a photo of their loved one on their desk without fear."

More information about diversity in the workplace can be found on the Equal Employment Opportunity SharePoint site, or at www.diversity.va.gov.



On behalf of the Lincoln Veterans Advisory Group and the Coffeehaus Committee, Ed Schnabel presented volunteer Patty Niemann with an engraved granite tile Oct. 16 in honor of her support of the Lincoln Coffeehaus.

The tile, which was engraved by Vietnam Veteran Gregory Holloway, was presented to Niemann as a thank you for all of her hours spent volunteering to make the Coffeehaus a success. The monthly event is designed to improve the health and well-being of Veterans through music.

The next two sessions will be from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 20 and Dec. 18 in the Lincoln Auditorium. Everyone is welcome to attend; no musical experience needed.

NOVEMBER calendar

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

National Caregiver Support Month for more information visit www.caregiver.va.gov

Transgender Awareness Month for more information visit www.diversity.va.gov

AIDS Awareness Month for more information visit www.hiv.va.gov

National American Indian and Alaskan Native Heritage Month for more information visit www.diversity.va.gov



Nov. 11
Veterans Day

STAND
DOWN

Nov. 13
Omaha



Nov. 17
Laughter Yoga



Nov. 20
Coffeehaus, Lincoln

- 11** Veterans Day (*federal holiday*)
- 13** Stand Down for Homeless Vets, Omaha, Grace University Field House
- 15** America Recycles Day
- 17** Laughter Yoga, Omaha
- 19** Great American Smokeout
- 19-20** Bring You're "A" Game to Work, Omaha
- 20** Coffeehaus, Lincoln
- 26** Thanksgiving Day (*federal holiday*)

WALK-IN FLU SHOT CLINICS

(No Walk-In Clinics Nov. 11)

Veterans may receive their flu shot at regularly scheduled appointments.

BELLEVUE

Through Nov. 20; Mon-Fri, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

GRAND ISLAND, Southeast Clinic

Through Nov. 13; Mon-Fri, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

HOLDREGE

Through Nov. 20; Mon-Fri, 1 to 4 p.m.

LINCOLN, Canteen

Through Nov. 6; Mon-Fri, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

NORFOLK

Through Nov. 20; Wed-Fri, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

NORTH PLATTE

Through Nov. 20; Mon-Fri, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

OMAHA, Main Lobby

Through Nov. 20; Mon-Fri, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Veterans Day

November 11, 2015



*HONORING ALL WHO SERVED
IN TIMES OF WAR - IN TIMES OF PEACE*



**Veterans Health
Administration**

*Nebraska-Western Iowa
Health Care System*

402-346-8800 | 1-800-451-5796
www.nebraska.va.gov