improving the patient experience
Welcome to the first installment of The Link, a monthly publication for the Veterans Affairs Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, and the newest addition to our growing toolbox of communication methods.

Our goal with The Link is to begin building a linkage between every campus, every clinic, every staff member and every Veteran to share what great things we are doing in VA NWIHCS.

Among the great initiatives and projects under way at VA NWIHCS, as acting director, I have committed to focusing my energies on three priorities – facility improvements, continuing the NWI Way program and continuing implementation of patient-aligned care teams at each location.

Championing the capital improvement projects under way includes keeping up with the design of the new medical center in Omaha, the design of a new clinic in Lincoln, and the design and construction of homeless initiatives throughout NWI.

My goal of hardwiring the NWI Way culture includes re-establishing a strong partnership with NWI’s union presidents; establishing a triad leadership model in Lincoln and Grand Island; and continuing the work to move the three elements of the NWI Way – ownership, leadership and value improvement – to frontline supervisors.

To maintain VA NWIHCS’ competitive edge, I am focusing on the full implementation of PACT; closely monitoring the executive-level dashboard to ensure our performance doesn’t wane; and working closely with our fiscal team to ensure our budget is closely monitored into the future.

My challenge to you is not to keep all of this good news to yourself. Please share The Link with family, friends and colleagues in the community.

Nancy Gregory, FACHE

Acting Director

Will Ackerman
Public Affairs Officer

Anna Morelock
Editor
Joe Fogarty
Staff Writer
Bruce Thiel
Photographer
Becky Brown
Designer
Alex Olds
Jan Youngblood
Other Contributors

OpenInbox
FACT: VA NWIHCS HAS A SERVICE AREA OF MORE THAN 2.1 MILLION ACRES IN THREE DIFFERENT STATES.

Cover: Flag Day Celebration at the Lincoln CBOC, Photo by Joe Fogarty.

"I like working at the VA because every day is like Veterans Day."

Jason Dotzler, Security Assistant, Police Services

meet a volunteer, NWI Updates

Employees and Veterans Design New Omaha VA Medical Center

VA NWIHCS Food Service Caters to Patients’ Needs

The Veterans’ Advisory Council

Caregiver Support Program

VA Views

Research in the News, Employee News

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.

CONTACT US
Have a story idea? Call the VA NWIHCS Public Affairs Office: Will Ackerman at 402-995-4719, Anna Morelock at 402-995-5547, Joe Fogarty at 402-995-3943 or email vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
The Link welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not contain any libelous statements or personal accusations. Letters accepted for publication must include the writer’s full name and phone number. Letters may be edited for space, but never for content. Email letters to vhanwipublicaffairs@va.gov.
meet stan zyla

Volunteer | Omaha

Q: How long have you been a volunteer?
A: “Since November 2009, and I have 722 volunteer hours to date.”

Q: Why did you become a volunteer?
A: “After my fourth heart attack, I couldn’t work anymore and I needed to get out and get some exercise. I saw volunteers while I was here as a patient, and I wondered, how can I do that? So, I asked about it. Now I’m here, and I love it. If it hadn’t been for the VA staff and the care I receive here, I would have been dead a long time ago. I’m happy I can give something back.”

Q: What’s your favorite thing to do as a volunteer?
A: “I like it all: delivering stuff, wheeling patients around and making popcorn. People see me on the elevator and call me Mr. Popcorn Man and ask me if I’m making any today.”

Q: What do you do as a volunteer?
A: “On top of the other stuff I deliver prescriptions to room, and I just do a little bit of everything.”

Q: When you’re not volunteering, where can you be found?
A: “Fishing. I can’t hunt anymore, but I can still fish. I love to watch boxing and football on TV. I also like cop shows. I also like to play online poker on my computer because it’s free.”

For more information about volunteering:
Omaha: 402-995-3283
Lincoln: 402-489-3802 ext. 6900
Grand Island: 308-382-3660 ext. 2146

representative visits

Grand Island CBOC

U.S. Rep. Adrian Smith, who represents Nebraska’s 3rd District, visited staff and Veterans June 8 at the Grand Island Community Based Outpatient Clinic and Community Living Center.

The congressman received a briefing about the design of the new Omaha VA Medical Center, which is projected to open in 2018, before taking a tour of the Grand Island facility.

Smith learned about major renovations under way at the Grand Island CBOC, which include a new dental clinic and a major lobby project that will completely change the appearance of the facility’s entry.

He also learned about the new patient-aligned care teams, which focus on a collaborative approach to providing care. The team approach puts the Veteran at the center of the decision-making process.

Veterans and staff had the opportunity to talk with the congressman at the end of his visit during a coffee and cookie social in the CLC’s recreation hall.

Photo By Will Ackerman

Angela Williams, Grand Island site director and Rep. Adrian Smith greet a Veteran during a visit June 8.
Three primary driving factors that are influencing the design process are: the facility needs to have a “healing environment” that honors Veterans’ service; it must promote “collaboration” centered upon patient outcomes; and it is focused upon “continuous improvement” that protects the patient’s health, safety and privacy in an efficient, cost-effective and environmentally friendly manner.

These factors were the outcome of an earlier process called a “design accelerator” that occurred over five days in two separate sessions in June and July 2010. Employees including physicians, nurses, patient-care staff, executives, managers, supervisors and front-line staff met to envision what health care of the future might entail. Planners from VA Central Office and project architects also participated.

The goals of the design accelerator were to build a shared understanding of emerging and projected forces impacting the future of Veterans’ health care, create a vision for Veteran-centric care in the new VAMC and generate (continued on page 14)
he VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System strives to provide the best care anywhere and the Omaha VA Medical Center Food Service staff exemplifies this goal.

For the past two years, Omaha’s Food Service staff has been engaged in a continuous improvement process to accommodate the needs of patients and improve their experiences within the health care system.

Beginning in fall 2009, Food Services began offering select menus to patients on the medical and surgical floors, as well as patients in Omaha’s Outpatient Residential Substance Abuse Program. The select menu service involves a Food Service host or hostess personally visiting Veterans who are on special diets to discuss their food preferences.

Prior to this new effort, patients were only offered whatever food was available for the day and had no choice in what they were given to eat.

Now Veterans can choose from a variety of menu options and, in some cases, may even be able to request items not on the menu.

The program reached full implementation this spring with even more menu options than when the program launched. In addition to improved patient meal options, Food Service also has improved food options available to patients’ families and other guests.

Since March, patients have been allowed to choose what time of day they receive their food rather than all patients receiving food at once. Further improvements to the patient and visitor experience include coffee being available on all floors and coordination with Voluntary Services to provide fresh-baked cookies.
Beyond changes patients can directly see, there also have been improvements behind the scenes. One problem was certain foods did not retain heat for long. With more than 50 patients to serve at once, there were times when food that normally retained heat well had cooled by the time it reached the patient. The customized delivery times helped to alleviate some of the problem by allowing the food serving to be staggered over a longer period of time. This improvement meant less food had to be prepared and delivered within a specific timeframe. Another solution to the lukewarm food was replacing menu items that did not retain heat well.

The biggest change to the food serving process came in the form of newly adopted procedures designed to maximize staff efficiency. To determine what areas needed the most attention, Food Service began collecting data on tray-line times and food temperatures.

They determined areas where food sat for too long, such as in the kitchen or at a nursing station prior to patient delivery, and then took measures to eliminate or shorten those waits. Food Service also has devoted as much kitchen... (continued on page 15)
Today’s U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has a solid reputation as one of the best health care providers in the country. That wasn’t always the case. Many Vietnam-era Veterans have an unfavorable view of VA health care because of past experiences. This is becoming an even greater problem now that these men and women are starting to reach the age where regular medical check-ups are an important part of maintaining good health. Part of improving the VA’s image among this population is the Lincoln Veterans’ Advisory Council.

The council for the Lincoln Community Based Outpatient Clinic was started about a year and a half ago, when Terry Gillespie, a Veteran himself, approached Dr. Christie Emler, the associate chief of medicine for the Lincoln CBOC, about figuring out a way to reach Veterans who may be intimidated or distrusting of the system.

“The VA in the seventies was totally different and left a bad taste in a lot of peoples’ mouths, and we’re trying to change that image.”

-Terry Gillespie

So far, the Lincoln Veterans’ Advisory Council has hosted two Veterans health fairs, a chili cook-off, and, most recently, a Flag Day music celebration. The aim of the health fairs is to get Veterans into the VA health care system and educate them about their benefits. This is accomplished by having representatives from various departments within the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System available to answer questions and, if possible, enroll the Veteran into the system on the spot.
It’s not just Vietnam-era Veterans being targeted by the council. Gillespie expressed concern for the current generation of service members.

“It’s getting these young Vets in that worries me,” he said. “I’m afraid if they don’t get involved now, they’re not going to get the help they need.”

He described common problems among Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, both serious problems that can cause a lifetime of problems if not carefully managed.

Part of reaching out to younger Veterans involves a mentoring system in which Veterans like Gillespie volunteer to help them understand the VA system.

Another group the council is focused on helping is women Veterans. Women are one of the fastest growing segments of the Veteran population. Their prominence in military fields being relatively recent in regards to history has led to some difficulties in meeting their specialized needs. To this end, there are several women Veterans on the advisory board to help make sure their concerns are considered when planning new outreach initiatives.

Although the program has achieved a good deal of success so far, the process hasn’t been entirely smooth. Gillespie said the hardest part has been getting other Veterans organizations on board. Some Veterans groups will sit off and voice concerns about the VA, Gillespie said, but he wants to find a way to turn that dissatisfaction into action.

“Instead of complaining about the VA, get involved and try to solve the problems within the VA. VA employees are human, and they make mistakes like anybody else, but they also want to help and they’ll also listen if you make an effort to talk to them.”
NEW SERVICES FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Caregivers for Veterans who sustained serious injuries incurred or aggravated in the line of duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, may be eligible for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits under the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010.

Under the new law, these caregivers may be eligible for assistance that includes a monthly stipend, mental health services and access to health care insurance if they are not already entitled to care or services under a health plan. The stipend portion of this service will be backdated to the date of application.

The program also provides comprehensive caregiver training and medical support.

Caregivers can apply through the VA's Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274, by mail or online by completing the caregiver application, VA Form 1010-CG, at http://www.caregiver.va.gov. The website application also features a chat option that provides the family caregiver with a live representative to assist in completing the application form.

Alternatively, caregivers can apply in person by contacting Joni Dittbrenner, the caregiver support coordinator, at 402-995-4618 or via email at joni.dittbrenner@va.gov. Dittbrenner also provides training and education to eligible caregivers.

It’s important for Veterans and their family caregivers to apply to see if they are eligible for the benefits, she said.

“These Veterans served this nation with honor. VA is committed to helping these family caregivers who are sacrificing to care for the injured Veteran in their family.”

-Joni Dittbrenner, Caregiver Support Coordinator

Who is eligible?

- Veterans who sustained a serious injury—including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma or other mental disorder—incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, on or after Sept. 11, 2001.

- Veterans in need of personal care services because of an inability to perform one or more activities of daily living and/or who need supervision or protection based on symptoms or residuals of neurological impairment or injury.

- Veterans enrolled in VA health services.

Will Ackerman, VA NWIHCS Public Affairs Officer, contributed to this story.
WHAT DOES independence day MEAN TO YOU?

1. David Ridge | U.S. Marine Corps Veteran
   "It’s important to celebrate Independence Day because it is a time that should remind us of the documents that created this nation and the duties Veterans have to citizens and citizens have to Veterans."

2. Bridget Parizek | Program Support Assistant
   "It is important to celebrate Independence Day because it is a reminder of the sacrifices that were made to give us the many freedoms that we have today."

3. Marty Didamo | VA Volunteer
   "It’s important to celebrate Independence Day because it’s about history and the fact that that’s the time we declared independence and became a nation."

4. Walt Doty | U.S. Navy Veteran
   "It’s important to celebrate Independence Day because we’re one of the only free countries that can do that."

5. Ken Walde | VA Volunteer
   "It’s important to celebrate Independence Day because I’m a Veteran and I fought for the country."

5 Reasons You Should Be Using My HealtheVet
1. Be empowered to control your health
2. Avoid duplicate tests and procedures
3. Move easily from doctor to doctor
4. Improve the efficiency and safety of your health care
5. Get personalized VA wellness reminders

For more information: 402-995-4966

My healtheVet
www.myhealth.va.gov
My Health, My Care: 24/7 Access to VA

LOG ON. SIGN UP. TODAY!
In medical shows, viewers often see the doctors yelling for a “trache” in the middle of a chaotic emergency room. Everyone looks on in suspense as the doctor tilts back the patient’s head and inserts a tube.

In the Omaha VA Research Service, Dr. Ben Boedeker and his team—Mary Bernhagen, Thomas Nicholas and Bosseau Murray—are training real-life medical students and military health care providers on tracheal intubation, the process of inserting a tube to open or examine patient airways.

While it isn’t played out on cable television, hemorrhaging or profuse bleeding in the throat can cause service members in the field, or Veterans in the operating room, to lose their breathing capability. Using a video laryngoscope, Boedeker and his team, provide training from afar on properly opening airways.

The video laryngoscope is a metal device with a MAC 3 blade that curves in the shape of an “L.” The instrument slides into the mouth, through the vocal cords and down the throat. The blade tip has a light and video camera attached to show the airway on a video monitor.

The video laryngoscope statistically improved the view of the glottis, the slit-like opening between the vocal cords in the larynx, when compared to a standard laryngoscope. Studies have shown it is ideal for teaching orotracheal intubation by allowing the trainer and student to share the same airway view.

In his other research, Boedeker also has worked in developing airway management tools that include a malleable bougie, a video suction blade, a novel video stylet (fiberscope) and a tongue retractor for difficult airway intubation. With these tools, Boedeker hopes to facilitate the intubation process and improve the outcome of the patient.
Catch the Courtesy Bug

Start an Epidemic

**WHY?**
- Increase employee awareness of courtesy.
- Provide a visible indication of courteous employees.

**HOW?**
1. Observe another employee’s act of courtesy
2. Email Stephanie Dush or Coral Selden for Grand Island; Wendy Inselman, Danielle Powell or Donelle Romano-Bell for Omaha; and Rob McCrory for Lincoln to receive the bug.
3. Employee presents bug to fellow employee

PRRC Veterans Showcase Their Art

Veterans from the Omaha VA Medical Center Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center painted a barrel with a poem and summer scene as part of their recovery program.

The barrel was displayed at the Omaha Summer Arts Festival from June 10-12.

Employees Walk and Roll for Homeless Veterans

The Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island VA facilities had more than 300 participants in the June 2 VA2K Walk and Roll event. The national event was organized locally by the Wellness is Now program.

Across the country, more than 150 VA facilities participated. Walkers who donated at least two items to the VA’s homeless program were able to wear jeans for the day. VA NWIHCS employees gave almost $3,000 in donations for the homeless program.

O’Neill CBOC to Occupy New Space

Avera Medical Group hosted an open house June 22 for the new addition to its facility, which includes the VA O’Neill Community-Based Outpatient Clinic. The clinic opened June 27. The $16.1 million project provided 23 new private medical and surgical inpatient rooms, including two end-of-life rooms adjacent to the nursing station. One of two operating room surgical suites was expanded to add space for surgical equipment and to assist in orthopedic procedures.

The lower level of the project included a new primary care clinic with 24 exam rooms, two large procedure rooms, one additional radiology room, a centralized laboratory, eight mini nursing stations and centralized registration for hospital and clinic patients. Also included in this level was a new physical, occupational and aquatic therapy department.

The O’Neill CBOC is located at:

300 N. Second Street
O’Neill, Nebraska 68763

The phone number to the clinic:

402-336-2982
Employees
How is your area doing? Keep an eye on your Press Ganey scores and think of ways you can help improve patient satisfaction.

Veterans
What did you think of your visit? When you receive a patient satisfaction survey after your visit to a NWIHCS facility, make sure to fill it out and share your thoughts. Your input helps VA NWIHCS to improve.

what drives patient satisfaction improvement?

1. Sharing decision making with patients
2. Responding to patient concerns and complaints without delay
3. Meeting patients’ emotional needs
4. Describing procedures in layman’s terms

Veterans also were consulted for their opinions and input into the new facility design during multiple focus groups that Yager and the NWIHCS Public Affairs Office held at locations across the service area. Participants represented women, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, and those in rural areas. The focus groups were videotaped, and selected clips were played for staff and architects throughout the design accelerator process.

“It is critical to include the customer – the Veterans’ – input, since this is not just any medical center,” Yager said. “This is a facility that will provide a healing environment for our patients through our employees providing exceptional health care. However, it also needs to honor our men and women with a Veteran-centric ambience.”

Although there are myriad factors going into the design process, key criteria include adaptability and future growth, sustainability, urban design, building expression, infrastructure, physical security, cost, speed and value.

Not only will the new facility nearly double the space available from 560,000 square feet to about 1,000,000 square feet, there are also many unique features that will enhance the patient experience. These include outdoor healing areas, lighting, arrival and mental health gardens, and a Veterans’ memorial.

The project is estimated to cost about $600 million to construct. Although $56 million was appropriated for design and planning in the fiscal year 2011 federal budget, the first submission for construction funds is projected to be in the fiscal year 2013 federal budget. The goal is to break ground on the new facility in 2014 and open the doors in 2018.
Food Service continued from page 7

staff to the delivery of food as necessary to get warm food to patients in a timely manner. Food Service coordinators observed the food preparation and delivery line every day to monitor the quality of the food and fix problem areas immediately.

Collaboration also has played a part in the food improvement process.

In addition to coordination with Voluntary Services to provide cookies, Food Service teamed up with nursing staff to develop a communication tool that better allows nurses to prepare their patients for meal times, such as clearing off their over-bed table and timing medications appropriately to avoid interactions.

This was all accomplished through the new Patient Satisfaction Food Service sub-group, which includes Food Services, Nursing and Voluntary Services under one umbrella and allows them to share ideas and communicate more effectively.

“It used to be everyone had their own job and that was that, and now we’re more together, which leads to food prepared and delivered faster.”

-Emily Rotkvic, Dietitian and one of the coordinators of the new service

Nursing has even allowed patients’ families and guests access to ward kitchens under this new arrangement.

The program has only been fully implemented for a little more than a month, and will continue to make minor improvements as it goes along. The new and improved Food Service currently serves about 50 patients, which accounts for 75 percent of all patients at the Omaha VAMC.

What’s going on?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 1-2</td>
<td>Veterans Interagency Outreach, Kearney, Neb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 4</td>
<td>Independence Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 6-12</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s Awareness Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21</td>
<td>VA created in 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 22-23</td>
<td>Veterans Interagency Outreach, O’Neill, Neb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1-6</td>
<td>National Veterans Wheelchair Games</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

AMiON

Online On-Call Scheduling for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System

What is AMiON?

- Amion is a program used to view residents’ and attendings’ on-call schedules
- This system is used for patient care issues requiring immediate medical attention. Alternate secure methods of communication should be used for non-emergent issues.

How Can I Access Amion?

- On the VA NWIHCS Intranet, click on the “Services” link.
- On the CPRS tool bar
- Amion’s website, www.amion.com
- Enter VA NWIHCS, Omaha’s password (contact your supervisor, or lead clerk)

For More Information:
Administrative officer for resident education 402-995-4259

Photo by Joe Fugate
STAND BY THEM
HELP A VETERAN IN CRISIS
Confidential help for Veterans and their families
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1
Confidential chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa
Health Care System
4101 Woolworth Ave.
Omaha, NE 68105
402-346-8800
1-800-451-5796
www.nebraska.va.gov
2501 Capehart Road | Bellevue, NE 68113
2201 N. Broadwell Ave. | Grand Island, NE 68803
1118 Burlington St. | Holdrege, NE 68949
600 S. 70th St. | Lincoln, NE 68510
710 S. 13th St. Ste. 1200 | Norfolk, NE 68701
600 E. Francis, Ste. 3 | North Platte, NE 69101
300 N. Second St. | O’Neill, NE 68763
512 S. Fremont St. | Shenandoah, IA 51601