Spreading the Word About VA Health Care
One of the many themes celebrated in March is Patient Safety Awareness Week. Besides just celebrating the week, VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System staff are focused on improving patient safety year round.

Our strategic plan highlights ensuring Veterans receive the appropriate care at the right place and right time as a priority. One way Veterans can help us meet our patient safety goals is to be actively involved in their care. What this means is Veterans should be comfortable asking any questions they may have about their treatments and ask for clarification about diagnoses. We want to be partners in care. Veterans should also ensure they keep their providers informed about changes in their conditions.

On our end, as care providers, we are lucky to work for an organization that has been a long-standing champion of patient safety. By creating a culture where staff feel safe reporting errors and near misses, VA has shifted its safety emphasis from one of blame to one of partnering to provide consistent, quality care at a systems level.

To learn more about VA’s patient safety initiatives, visit VA’s National Center for Patient Safety at www.patientsafety.va.gov.

Marci Mylan, Ph.D., MHA | Director
I’m grateful and honored to serve Veterans. They made such a sacrifice. Any way that I can help them through the scope of my practice, I’m happy to help to the best of my ability.

Tracy Sherwood, PLCSW
Patient-Aligned Care Team Social Worker, Omaha VAMC
Lance Maley
Administrative Officer for the Chief of Staff
OMAHA VA MEDICAL CENTER

How long have you been at VA NWIHCS?
“It will be a month in March.”

Maley, who retired as a Medical Service Corps officer after 20 years in the U.S. Army, worked for four years in the private sector before returning to federal service at the Defense Department’s Fort Belvoir (Va.) Community Hospital.

Being a Veteran himself, Maley said he enjoys giving back to Veterans.

“I’m still capable and able to help provide care. I think (as with) the DoD experience, you’re giving back to folks where you came from.”

Why the move from the east coast?
“I’m from Kansas, and just wanted to get as close to home as I could.” And jokingly, “I came back for your beautiful weather.”

Outside of work, Maley runs marathons, with the last being in October 2013. “I plan to run more until I can’t,” he said.

VA Chief Receives
AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION AWARD

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

The chief of Mental Health and Behavioral Services at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System was named recipient of the 2014 Irma Bland Award for Excellence in Teaching Psychiatry Residents.

Dr. Subhash Bhatia was recognized by the American Psychiatric Association with this award for outstanding, sustained and creative contributions to psychiatry resident education and training.

In addition to Bhatia’s role at VA NWIHCS, he has served as full-time faculty at Creighton University School of Medicine for more than 36 years and in roles that include director of the Psychiatry Clerkship Program and Psychiatry Residency Training.

Bhatia has served for 20 years as a chair of the Creighton University of School of Medicine Continuing Medical Education Committee.

His work includes resident supervision, career counseling and mentoring. He has collaborated with residents to co-author research articles and chapters for a new book on substance use and addiction disorders; diagnosis and management.

In addition to his work at VA and Creighton, Bhatia provides clinical supervision and teaches medical students at Magis Clinic, a charity clinic for disadvantaged members of the Omaha community located at the Sienna Francis House Shelter.

Bhatia has volunteered for the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and assisted with writing questions for part I of the (continued on page 9)
Spread the word about VA health care. This is the challenge VA’s Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, Dr. Tommy Sowers, presented Feb. 21 to employees during his visit to the VA Omaha Medical Center.

It’s critical for VA to conduct “boots-on-the-ground” outreach, Sowers said, because of a recent VA survey where 59 percent of Veterans stated they were unaware of their VA health care benefits and services. In addition, only 47 percent of Veterans in Nebraska, and 44 percent nationally, are accessing their health care through VA.

Sowers announced an initiative where VA will conduct in-person outreach to every county in each state. VA Mobile Vet Centers, which are mobile counseling centers that look similar to recreational vehicles, will be center to this initiative.

“We are going to go to where Veterans are.”

Dr. Tommy Sowers
VA Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs

In addition to increasing awareness about VA benefits, outreach is important to dispel misinformation about the quality of VA health care.

“VA is consistently recognized for excellence by independent reviews and organizations,” Sowers said. “From the Annals of Internal Medicine to the Joint Commission and the RAND Corporation, VA health care outperforms the private sector in care quality, treating acute and chronic illnesses and delivering preventive care.”

(continued on page 9)
Army Reserve Veteran Jeffrey Williams has had a hard time sleeping ever since he returned from Operation Desert Storm in the 1990s. He knows he snores; his fellow Soldiers told him that. It wasn’t until he was told he stopped breathing several times during a recent routine medical procedure that Williams was scheduled for a sleep study at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System and diagnosed with sleep apnea.

Obstructive sleep apnea disturbs the sleep of 5 to 15 percent of the adult population and is now known to be associated with other diseases such as diabetes, heart conditions and obesity. At VA NWIHCS, a multidisciplinary team treats patients across the state and conducts about 1,200 sleep studies each year.

For those who have sleep apnea like Williams, what they may not be aware of while they are sleeping are short micro awakenings that last three to four seconds and cause fragmentation of their sleep. Some signs this may be happening include loud snoring and sleepiness or fatigue during the day. In more severe cases, sufferers of sleep apnea may wake choking or gasping.

Obstructive sleep apnea is caused by narrowing of the airway at the back of the throat, which can be caused by various factors. When a person sleeps, their throat muscles naturally relax. The tongue tends to fall backward, which can block the airway. Some people have larger tongues, or smaller jaws. General weight gain also can put pressure on the airway as a person’s neck size increases. Every person is different, Dewan said.

Home sleep studies and in-lab studies are used to diagnose patients. When diagnosed with sleep apnea after an in-lab study, patients are given a CPAP machine. They are taught how to use it and have a follow-up visit with a sleep technician to ensure they are using it correctly.

“We spend one-third of our lives sleeping, but when we sleep we have no idea of what’s going on at night. What we have learned is there are a lot of things that go on at night when you sleep, which are very relevant and can have a serious impact if you don’t know.”

Dr. Naresh Dewan, chief of Pulmonary Services at VA NWIHCS.
study, patients are sent home that morning with a continuous positive airway pressure, or CPAP, machine. The machine, which is the most common treatment for sleep apnea, continually pushes air through a mask into the airway to keep it from collapsing. The machines also transmit data to respiratory therapists at VA NWIHCS each day so they can monitor patients’ progress and follow up with them.

This model of care is important to success in the treatment of sleep apnea, Dewan said. In many organizations, a patient will complete the sleep study, get the results in a couple of weeks and then wait a couple more weeks while the CPAP is ordered. After this, they will use the machine for a month or so, and then bring a data chip in to their provider at a follow-up appointment to check on their progress.

“That is too late in my mind,” Dewan said. “Four weeks have gone by, the patient didn’t use it, didn’t like it. So now what has happened is he’s built up a negative history that CPAP is no good.”

Using the machines that transmit data wirelessly is a more patient-focused approach, said Dewan who has been with VA for 30 years and is board certified in sleep medicine, as well as internal medicine, pulmonary and critical care. Dewan said the team’s model of care has worked so well, he has even presented information to other VAs on VA NWIHCS’ multidisciplinary approach, which allows them to provide more timely care to more patients. The team is even working with Telehealth to provide sleep services at outpatient clinics.

The morning after Williams’ sleep study, Mary Tjepkes, a respiratory therapist, spent time going over the machine with Williams and teaching him how to wear it properly, how to use the different features and how to clean it. Two days after leaving the VA NWIHCS sleep lab with his CPAP, Williams said he was still getting used to the CPAP, but was happy to have a solution to his restless nights.
Emma L. Miller  
VHA’s First Woman Employee

Miller was appointed as the first matron at the Central Branch National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in Dayton, Ohio (now Dayton VAMC) in the fall of 1867. She helped at the hospital, oversaw laundry operations, ran the home’s hotel, and was eventually elevated to superintendent of the general depot, where much of the clothing and supplies for all of the National Homes were manufactured and distributed – a rare position to held by a woman, in those days. In the 1880 annual report, she reported that the “Matron’s Department” had washed, pressed, repaired, and reissued more than 1,703,648 pieces of laundry and linens, averaging 32,762 pieces per week. Worn out linens were condemned, then washed and reused in the hospital as bandages and dressings, in the engineer’s department as wipers and wrappings for steam-pipes, and as wipers and mops elsewhere.

Essie Davis Morgan  
One of VA’s pioneering women and sister of Hollywood actor-producer Ossie Davis

Essie Mae Davis was born in 1920 in Ware County, Georgia, and grew up in the segregated South where job opportunities for black women were very limited. She graduated from Alabama State College and went on to pursue a master’s degree in social work from Atlanta University. She was hired at the Tuskegee VA hospital in 1949. While at Tuskegee she developed a community placement program for psychiatric patients that became a model for all VA psychiatric hospitals and authored numerous guides and articles that perpetuated new best practices within VA and the field of social work. She developed new techniques to aid in the care of dialysis and spinal cord injury patients. Opportunities for advancement expanded for African Americans and women after the Civil Rights Act became law and, in 1965, she was appointed as Chief of Community Service in the VA Social Work offices at VA Central Office in Washington, D.C. Her VA career lasted nearly 40 years. She retired in 1986.

Irene Parsons  
VA’s first woman executive

In August 1965 Irene Parsons became the first woman executive at VA when she was appointed Assistant Administrator and Director of Personnel by President Lyndon B. Johnson. She oversaw 170,000 employees – 50,000 of them women – in the third largest government agency behind the Defense Department and the Post Office. Equal opportunity for everyone was her personal platform. Her salary was $22,000 per year. Parsons spent her entire career at VA, retiring in 1975 after nearly 30 years of service.

Vivian Malone  
Civil Rights Pioneer

On a blustering hot day, in 1963, Alabama Governor George Wallace stood in the doorway of Foster Auditorium at the University of Alabama in an attempt to prevent two African American students from entering. Vivian Malone and James Hood, recently enrolled, were escorted by federalized National Guard troops into the building and to their classes. They were the only two African Americans in a student body of 9,000. Two years later Vivian Malone became the first African American to graduate in the university’s 132-year history. In September 1965, Malone was hired by VA as an employee relations assistant in the Office of Personnel. It was her second federal position. She later went to work at the Environmental Protection Agency’s Atlanta office, got married, and enjoyed a long career in federal government until her retirement in 1996.

Story and photos compiled from contributions by VHA historian Darlene Richardson.
psychiatry examination and as an examiner for part II oral board examinations for more than 22 years.

Bhatia participated as volunteer faculty for test development for the Psychiatry Resident in Training Examination by the American College of Psychiatrists and served on the Membership Selection and Finance committees.

Since 1996, he has been listed in Best Doctors in America. In addition, he is listed in the Guide to America’s Top Psychiatrists and Best of the U.S. Physicians in Psychiatry. For two consecutive terms, Nebraska’s governor appointed him to serve on the Nebraska Advisory Committee on Substance Use Disorders.

He has published more than 64 peer-reviewed research articles and has made a similar number of oral and poster presentations at national and international psychiatry conferences.

What’s going on?

March 2-8  Patient Safety Awareness Week
March 3   VA Food Pantry, Lincoln
          Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
March 3-10 National Sleep Awareness Week
March 5   Ash Wednesday Services, Omaha
          VA Food Pantry, Omaha
          50th Commemoration of Vietnam Information Booth, Omaha
March 6   Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
March 7   Free Tax Assistance, Grand Island
March 9   Daylight Saving Time
March 10  Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
March 12  Registered Dietician Day
          Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
March 13-19 National Pulmonary Rehabilitation Week
March 14  Free Income Tax Assistance, Lincoln
March 17  Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
March 19  VA Food Pantry, Omaha
          50th Commemoration of Vietnam Information Booth, Omaha
          Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
March 21  VA Coffeehaus, Lincoln
March 24  Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
March 26  VA and Community Book Club, Lincoln
          Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha
March 30-April 4 National Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, Snowmass, Colo.
March 31  Veterans Exercise Class, Omaha

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

Trent Barner, Biomedical Engineering
Joshua Blintz, Geriatric and Extended Care
Essex Bosan, Environmental Management Service
Zach Clark, Business Office
Holly Flugge, Pharmacy
Aly Hassan, Mental Health
Rebecca Hajek, Imaging
Julia Hottovy, Veterans Canteen Service
Keri Ingold, Veterans Canteen Service
Sakshi Malhotra, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Tania Monette, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Christopher Moore, Imaging
Sarah Murrel, Surgery
Cameron Pesek, Veterans Canteen Service
Misty Roomsburg, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Dorothy Ruiz, Veterans Canteen Service

RETIRing

Rensina Blackwell, Inpatient Nursing
John Horner, Business Office
Denise Knoll, Lab
Beverly Lindell, Mental Health
John Lopez, Inpatient Nursing
Jeanne Martins, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Clare Miller, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Robert Neale, Mental Health
Marion Pritchett, Geriatric and Extended Care
Deborah Scott, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Thomas Stearley, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Diane Verkamp, Logistics
Lila Wallace, Mental Health

Hello

Dec. 29, 2013 to Feb. 8, 2014
Isaac Abban, Outpatient Nursing
Elias Bainbridge, Veterans Canteen Service
Jeremy Boxdorfer, Engineering
Rachel Burke, Pharmacy
Michelle Daake, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Vincent Dang, Biomedical Engineering
Silie Dube, Outpatient Nursing
Michael Ehle, Pharmacy
Brandon Ernst, Pharmacy
Paul Ferrin, Engineering
Ezekiel Gardels, Pharmacy
James Gillis, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Sarah Gillis, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Joshua Graf, Surgery
Shirley Holm, Mental Health
Lori Huntley, Business Office
Matthew Jordan, Police
Lois Kalilangwe, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Lynette Kardell, Business Office
Brandon Kehl, Environmental Management Service
Derek Kerr, Environmental Management Service
Breanna Kuhlman, Mental Health
Edward Leaders, Pharmacy
Lance Maley, Chief of Staff's Office
Yamireth Mehler, Lab
Eva Methe, Veterans Canteen Service
Matthew Miller, Veterans Canteen Service
Gina Moulas, Geriatrics and Extended Care
Cindy Nguyen, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Michael Nighswonger, Logistics
Stephanie Nord, Business Office
David O’Dell, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Louis Pena, Engineering
Amy Powers, Pharmacy
Kevin Prichard, Prosthetics
Nirmala Raj, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
John Rohrer, Veterans Canteen Service
William Russell, Biomedical Engineering
Mileka Scurlock, OEF/OIF
Beverlijane Shumaker, Geriatrics and Extended Care
Janette Stallings, Mental Health
Kimberly Stamp, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Ruth Steadman, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Sidney Tangeman, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Regan Taylor, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Benjamin Thompson, Police
Peggy Thompson, Lab
Harriet Tomhave, Surgery
Chad Vokoun, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine
Sean Wagner, Business Office
Thomas Weis, Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

Get Fingerprinted

Bring your drivers license or passport.

Get Sponsored

Ask your supervisor or ADPAC for your PIV sponsor’s contact information after your fingerprints have been accepted.

Get Your PIV Card

Bring 2 valid forms of government-issued ID.

*RENEW UP TO 6 WEEKS PRIOR TO EXPIRATION*
How do you celebrate St. Patrick’s Day?

Bruce Thiel | Medical Media | Lincoln CBOC

We follow my grandmother’s tradition and cook up corned beef and colcannon, which is an Irish dish of mashed potatoes and cabbage.

Paul Safford, U.S. Army Veteran Volunteer | Omaha VAMC

I make brats and sauerkraut at home and celebrate with a few friends.

Todd Fleischer, Ph.D. Chief of Psychology | Lincoln CBOC

My wife is Irish by heritage so we usually go to, or host, a St. Patrick’s Day party.

Lori Armstrong, Ph.D. Clinical Psychologist | Omaha VAMC

I don’t celebrate because I am not Irish. My kids do wear green so that they do not get pinched at school.

Don Haferbier, RN | 5 East | Omaha VAMC

I celebrate with friends and eat corn beef and cabbage.

integratedethics
Improving Ethics Quality in Health Care

Ethics is a priority. Need guidance?

In health care, patients and families often face the difficult question of “what should be done?” The right choice for one patient may be the wrong choice for another.

If you are unsure, or if you can’t agree with your health care team or your loved ones about what is best, you can ask for an ethics consultation.

If you wish to seek help from the Ethics Consultation Service, leave a confidential message:

1-855-ETHICS8
(1-855-384-4278)

Start EXERCISING

VETERAN GROUP EXERCISE CLASS

Mondays & Wednesdays
5:15 to 6:15pm
Omaha VA Medical Center
Third Floor, TV Studio

This class is for Veterans who are starting an exercise program. You’ll learn techniques and exercises to get you started. Adjustments will be made to accommodate all fitness levels and abilities.

For More Information Contact: Kelli Stott at 402-995-4987

Omaha VA Medical Center
Third Floor, TV Studio