First Veterans Honored at New Cemetery
VA’s processes. A key component is training our workforce to validate issued government electronic devices are turned in prior within 24 hours of the form’s completion. It is expected to save money by requiring the Office of Information and Technology to streamline out-processing for VA NWIHCS employees.

LEAD team members Megan Hollibaugh, Dee Fultz, Dawn Brdicko and Stephanie Siemsen created an automated version of the out-processing form they envision will save departing employees time, increase data security and save the organization money. The new form is estimated to take an employee 30 to 60 minutes to accomplish online. For example, they project it will reduce the time for Army nurses in 1897 to understand and prescribed some possible remedies.

The reception area was easy going and accommodating

We want to hear from you

Veterans receive several surveys after in-patient and out-patient visits. If you receive one, please fill it out and return. Feedback is shared with staff and helps improve services across the health care system.

VA HISTORY TIDBIT

National Homes Opened to Women Veterans

Darlene Richardson, VHA Historian

On Sept. 14, 1923, the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (VHA’s origins) officially authorized the admission of women Veterans for the first time in its history. Hospitalization and medical care benefits for women Veterans was the third major benefit provided to them by Congress. The first benefit—pensions—was approved in 1892 for women nurses who provided support to the U.S. military during the Civil War. The second benefit—burial benefits, including burial in national cemeteries—was authorized for Army nurses in 1897. Medical care and hospitalization for women who served as Army or Navy nurses was first authorized by Congress in Public Law 65-326 on March 3, 1919.

WHAT OUR PATIENTS ARE SAYING

“The doctor was a welcome breath of fresh air - took time to hear me out, understood and prescribed some possible remedies.”

“You thanked me for my service. I thank you for yours!”

These past 11+ years have been a very rewarding time for me. I have worked with an extremely talented team of health care professionals dedicated to the health and well-being of our Veterans. I will miss that teamwork and wish Nebraska-Western Iowa continued success.”

Kirk Kay (leaving after 11 years of service)
Chief Financial Officer, VA NWIHCS
U.S. Army Veteran

FACT:

VA performed better than the private sector in 96 percent (45 of 47) of outpatient measures according to a 2016 RAND study. Nearly 60 percent of veterans surveyed in June 2016 “trust VA to fulfill our country’s commitment to veterans,” which is up from 47 percent in December 2015.

Cover: Active duty service members hand ums to cemetery staff during the first burials at the Omaha National Cemetery on Sept. 27. Photo by Bruce Thiel
After 15 years in health care management, Packard-Fales went back to school to become a dietitian. She completed her dietetic internship at the Minneapolis VA, but her goal was always to come back to a rural area.

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

“Advising patients on how to live a healthy lifestyle and meet their health-related goals.”

WHAT DO YOU ABOUT YOUR JOB?

“Helping Veterans problem solve to lead a healthier lifestyle. One of the reasons I went back to school to become a dietician was I had a family member diagnosed with diabetes and realized there wasn’t the same access to services in rural areas.”

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN NOT AT WORK?

“I enjoy photography and taking my yellow lab, Gunner, for walks.”

Deck the halls... with Veteran-centric art

Those entering the front lobby of the Omaha VA Medical Center might notice some new artwork adorning the walls. The Omaha Veterans Advisory Group kicked off their art project this spring with a collection of bronze statues in the main lobby. The mural was added in September behind the information desk in the main lobby and depicts Veterans from all services.

CONTACT A VETERANS ADVISORY GROUP

Veterans Advisory Groups meet at the Omaha, Lincoln and Grand Island campuses to bring the voice of the Veteran to VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System leadership. The groups conduct surveys of Veterans who use VA services and report back on the good and bad comments they receive. They look for ways to improve services and provide feedback based on Veterans’ comments. The groups help Veterans navigate the health care system and host outreach events to bring new Veterans into the system.

Grand Island
This group meets the fourth Thursday of each month at 2 p.m. at the Grand Island VA. To contact the group, call 308-395-3299.

Omaha
This group meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at 2 p.m. at the Omaha VA. To contact the group, call Edna Hamperston at 402-516-6626. Find the group on Facebook at Omaha Veterans Advisory Group, or email them at omahavag@va.gov.

Lincoln
This group meets the second Tuesday of each month at 5 p.m. at the Lincoln VA. To contact the group, call Dena Johnson at 402-465-7904.

NWIHCS celebrates milestones for homeless Veteran housing

Lincoln and Grand Island lease projects move forward

For years, Veterans have been hearing about the Enhanced Use Lease projects underway at the Lincoln and Grand Island VA campuses. In November, both projects reached milestones, one with a ground-breaking and the other a ribbon-cutting.

On Nov. 4, Victory Place, a 26-unit apartment complex, opened at the Grand Island VA campus. Five Veterans had already moved in, and the apartments were expected to be full by the end of the year.

The day after Veterans Day, stakeholders in Lincoln ceremoniously turned shovels of dirt in the Lincoln VA auditorium to celebrate the beginning of construction at the Lincoln campus.

Outside, construction crews had already begun to move dirt for site preparation on the first phase — a 70-unit apartment complex for homeless Veterans. When complete, the Lincoln EUL project will include Veteran and senior housing, medical offices and a renovation of the former hospital building.

EUL projects are designed to lease underutilized real estate to private developers to create housing for homeless Veterans and their families and those at-risk of becoming homeless.
Four-Ingredient Ice Cream (2 servings)

What Ingredients Do I Need?
- 2 medium bananas, sliced
- 6 oz. non-fat plain Greek yogurt
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla

What Do I Do?
1. Place banana slices on a plate, separating each. Place slices in the freezer for two hours (overnight is best).
2. Remove strawberries and bananas from freezer and place in a food processor; blend until they are the consistency of soft serve ice cream.
3. Transfer ice cream to a freezer container and freeze until solid. (Do not have to wait if fruit is frozen; it is like soft serve ice cream).
4. Scoop with ice cream scoop and serve.

Low-Fat Chicken Salad (4 servings)

What Ingredients Do I Need?
- 4 oz. skinless-boneless chicken breast, pre-cooked, cubed
- 6 oz. non-fat plain Greek yogurt
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 celery stalks, chopped
- 2 tbsp. oregano
- 1/2 tbsp. garlic powder

What Do I Do?
1. Place cubed pre-cooked chicken breast into medium bowl.
2. Add Greek yogurt, onion, celery, oregano and garlic powder and mix well.
3. Scoop with ice cream scoop and serve.

Avocado-Yogurt Dip (8 servings)

What Ingredients Do I Need?
- 1 ripe avocado, peeled and pitted
- 1/2 cup, nonfat plain Greek yogurt
- 1/3 cup packed fresh cilantro leaves
- 2 tbsp. chopped onion
- Juice from 1 lime
- 1 tsp. salt; 1/4 tsp ground pepper

What Do I Do?
1. Place avocados, Greek yogurt, cilantro, onion, lime juice, salt and pepper in a food processor.
2. Process until smooth. Season with hot sauce, if desired.
3. To make ahead: Cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days.

Nutrition Facts
- Total Fat: 4 g
- Saturated Fat: 1 g
- Cholesterol: 0 mg
- Sodium: 87 mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 4 g

Nutrition Facts
- Calories: 110
- Total Fat: 4 g
- Saturated Fat: 1 g
- Cholesterol: 0 mg
- Sodium: 87 mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 4 g

Nutrition Facts
- Calories: 10
- Total Fat: 1 g
- Saturated Fat: 0.4 g
- Cholesterol: 18.1 mg
- Sodium: 78 mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 0.4 g
- Dietary Fiber: 0 g
- Sugars: 2.6 g

Teaming Up

Recently, Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System’s clinical nutrition staff (pictured above) from across the state came together to promote a high-functioning team and positive work relationships.

Staff get together twice a year to participate in team building that strengthens organizational performance and enhances the employee experience. The group also shares ideas on how to improve care for Veterans.

The group’s latest meeting included promoting critical skills and strengthening connections during an escape room challenge, and understanding communication styles using a personality colors exercise.

Communities donate to VA’s mission

The goodwill of organizations and community members can be seen throughout the halls of VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System’s facilities. Donations of time, money and goods are an important avenue for providing extra services to Veterans and their families.

In Fiscal Year 2016, NWIHCS received more than $60,000 in monetary donations and more than $200,000 worth of items. More than 400 volunteers donated time manning information desks, baking cookies, escorting patients and providing other needed services. Their time was worth more than $1.5 million.

For more information about donations and volunteer opportunities, contact, Voluntary Services at 402-995-3284 or click the Volunteer or Donate link at www.nebraska.va.gov.
The National Cemetery Administration marked the dedication of its 135th National Cemetery on Aug. 5. On Sept. 27, the first Veterans were interred representing each branch of the armed services: Marine Cpl. John “Frank” Ernst of Omaha, Army Spc. Michael Brabec of Fremont, Air Force Sgt. James Edgell of Council Bluffs and Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Russell Rosberg of Omaha were buried, along with Cpl. Ernst’s wife, Ruth.

Since then, almost 200 Veterans and family members have been interred in the hallowed ground, which rests just east of Highway 50 off of Schram Road in Sarpy County.

The 236-acre cemetery will be completed in phases, and accommodate burial needs for more than 112,000 Veterans over the next 100 years. Family members can schedule the burial of a loved one by faxing discharge documentation to the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 866-900-6417 and calling 800-535-1117.

The day before the cemetery dedication, VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald visited the Omaha and Lincoln VA campuses and hosted a press conference with supporters of a public-private partnership to build a new clinic on the Omaha campus. During his visit, McDonald also met with Omaha VAMC staff, toured the facility and spoke to leadership.

Wreaths Across America

On Dec. 17, volunteers will place wreaths on each grave at the Fort McPherson and Omaha National Cemeteries in Nebraska to remember those service members and thank them for their service.

Volunteers also are needed to pick up wreaths on Jan. 21, 2017. For more information about the ceremony at Fort McPherson, call Howard Gebhardt at 308-532-7455. For more information about the Omaha ceremony, call Mary Blodgett at 402-980-1263.
**Mobile Sim Team comes to NWIHCS**

A new team is coming to VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, and will be taking to the roads to provide simulation training to providers at all levels across the region. VHA's Simulation Learning, Education and Research Network (SimLEARN) is headquartered in Orlando, Fla., and the Mobile Simulation Training Team coming onboard in Omaha will be a pilot for others to come.

“Clinical simulation training is the gold standard for provider-level training, and by taking the training to the providers, we’re reducing their time away from care, bringing them new skills, new procedures and helping them hone their current skills,” said Phil Hargreaves, project manager for SimLEARN.

Up to nine MSTT staff members, including physicians, nurses and techs, will tailor training to meet the needs of VA clinicians. Types of training may include eye exams, joint injections and advanced assessments – types of care that might have to be referred to a specialist. Training clinicians to provide some of these procedures can cut down on referrals to specialists and ultimately open access in those areas while cutting down the number of appointments for Veterans.

Hands-on simulation also helps teams prepare for low-frequency, but high-risk procedures while building team rapport and cohesion. If the team doesn’t have a needed training on hand, they will develop it, and can also support systems testing. Scenarios for systems testing can help teams improve their processes and systems.

While not on the road, MSTT members will supplement training and care at VA NWIHCS to keep their own skills sharp. Hands-on simulation helps teams prepare for low-frequency, high-risk procedures while building team rapport and cohesion. If the team doesn’t have a needed training on hand, they will develop it, and can also support systems testing. Scenarios for systems testing can help teams improve their processes and systems.

**Celebrating Sobriety**

*Grand Island’s Friends of Four North support recovery program*

In 2003, Veteran Jason Hiels was only worried about himself, managing money to spend on drugs and alcohol. Today, giving back is a key to his sobriety. Hiels, along with more than 80 other Veterans, make up a group dedicated to giving back by helping those who are standing where they have been – the fourth floor of the Grand Island VA Medical Center.

The floor, designated as Four North, houses the Substance Abuse Treatment and Recovery Program, a 31-day residential program for Veterans struggling with drug and alcohol abuse. Veteran Allen Chessmore, president of Friends of Four North, has been with the group since the beginning, almost 15 years ago. Chessmore struggled with addiction and went through the VA residential program twice in the 1980s, in 2002 and again in 2003. Friends of Four North is what made the difference this time around, Chessmore said.

“It’s been a big part of my recovery, working with other Veterans,” Chessmore said. Besides the normal recovery program, which includes groups, classes and activities, the Veterans on Four North get regular visits from members of the Friends of Four North. Sometimes it’s for pizza, sometimes for games, or maybe a summer barbecue.

Recently, almost 150 Veterans and their family members got together to celebrate sobriety and recovery. During the alumni gathering, Veterans received medals celebrating every hour from 30 days to 36 years of sobriety. The group encourages Veterans in all stages of recovery and promotes family, giving back, reestablishing relationships and finding joy in other activities, Chessmore said.

The SATRP is very unique in that it has such a large alumni group, said Dean Wamke, SATRP program coordinator.

“We’re very good forgetters,” Wamke said. Anytime (alumni) come up on this ward it reminds them of when they were there.”

Anyone interested in learning more about the group can call Jason Hiels at 308-750-1969 or Allan Chessmore at 308-258-3908. Friends of Four North meets at 4 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of each month in Room S403 at the Grand Island VAMC.
Employees can be leaders no matter what their level within VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. It’s that thought that led to the name of the leadership program, which recently turned out its latest group of graduates.

Leading At All Levels is the facility-level program that mirrors the criteria of the graduates. Completing the yearlong program, and eight new participants began their network-level and national-level leadership programs. It is targeted toward leadership journey.

**MENTEE**

Deb Russell
Program Support Assistant, Patient Care

Azi Fatoye-Akgia
Licensed Practical Nurse, Ambulatory Care

Desiree Kochen
HUD/VASH Housing Specialist

Pam Neujahr
Registered Nurse, Mental Health

Jessica Benak
Eligibility Clerk, Business Office

Marsha Fields
Program Support Assistant, Mental Health

**MENTOR**

Joyce Clayton
Administrative Officer, Grand Island

Kathy Bruning
Chief, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service

Linda Swenson
Chief, Clinical Nutrition

Lori Wardlow
Admin Officer, Transition & Care Management

Dee Fultz
Nursing Coordinator, Ambulatory Care

Jon Booth
Administrative Officer, Patient Care

**MENTEE**

Brenda Gawrych
Physical Therapist

Velvet Hunt
Registered Nurse

Jim Jacobs
Licensed Practical Nurse

Sam Keel
Licensed Practical Nurse

Sam Lloyd
Registered Nurse

Terry Scales
Program Support Assistant, Research

Jacob Uffners
Physical Therapist

Darrel Willoughby
Lithrarian

**MENTOR**

Janelle Wormuth
Chief, Pharmacy

Laurie Fahey
Manager, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Linda Swenson
Chief, Clinical Nutrition

Adam Oldehoff
Manager, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Susan Dover
Manager, Laboratory

Lori Johnson
Manager, Equal Employment Opportunity

Angela Williams
Site Manager, Grand Island

John Hudson
Group Practice Manager

Staff use patient feedback to improve care, services

VA has identified five strategies as a part of the MyVA transformation to create a world-class, customer-focused, Veteran-centric organization. Recently, 22 VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System staff members participated in a train-the-trainer session that spoke to the second of these five priorities – improving the employee experience.

CREW training, or Civility, Respect and Engagement in the Workplace, was created by VA in 2005 and is designed to foster healthy work environments. CREW was brought to VA NWIHS to usher culture change into the organization, said Equal Employment Opportunity manager Lori Johnson. CREW trainers will work with groups on team building and engagement activities that will help turn good teams into great teams, Johnson said. Sessions will be tailored to each group and can run over the course of six months to a year depending on the desires of the team.

Johnson and Rachal Pender, a maintenance mechanic from Engineering and CREW trainer, did their first test run of CREW with a group of skeletal staff in October. The group took time during a staff meeting to participate in a bingo-type activity to get to know a bit more about each other.

*By the end everyone was out of their seats, talking to each other – it was such a drastic change to watch,* Pender said.

Pender said she genuinely believes the CREW training can help make a difference in workplace culture, especially because it is a priority with leadership.

“The biggest thing is to give it a chance,” Pender said. “Human connection means more than we give it credit for.”

Improving the employee experience will also lead to improvement in the Veteran experience, the first priority of the MyVA transformation. According to VA’s National Center for Organization Development – the creator of CREW – higher rates of civility are linked to higher patient satisfaction, higher employee satisfaction, fewer sick days used and fewer EEO complaints.

Emergency Room staff: Exceeded VA and community peers in nine of 10 measured dimensions of care; received high scores in important areas, such as “treatment of family and visitors” and “nursing quality at NWI Emergency Department” and “likelihood of recommending NWI Emergency Department.”

**RECENT RECOGNITION:**

Five East staff: Staff were involved to drive change on the unit and demonstrated excellent team work to make change work; the team increased their survey scores by several points and exceeded both their VA and community hospital peers.

Emergency Room staff: Exceeded VA and community peers in nine of 10 measured dimensions of care; received high scores in important areas, such as “treatment of family and visitors” and “nursing quality at NWI Emergency Department” and “likelihood of recommending NWI Emergency Department.”

Emergency Room staff members Dr. Jose Novoa, Dr. Walter Wood, Adam Bruhs, Lynn Smith, Dr. Thaddeus Woods, Patricia Pinks, Tom Trahan, Stacy Bundy, Alex Kohls, Roy Rivers and Jennifer Davidson celebrate the ER’s patient satisfaction scores. Each month, a new group or department is recognized for its accomplishments in increasing patient satisfaction based on survey data from Veterans.

Staff get in the game at the Bellevue Veterans Home

For the ninth year in a row, VA NWIHS staff helped out at the Veterans Games at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home in Bellevue.


Front row: Kristen Beiermann, Berna Schrader, Samantha Baker-Gregory, and Nicole Becker.
WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs released a major update Nov. 9 on the MyVA transformation, Secretary McDonald’s effort to transform VA into the top customer service agency. This third edition of the program’s semi-annual report shows progress with more services, and better timeliness.

“Guided by Veterans’ needs, we’ve left old, unresponsive ways of doing business behind,” writes Secretary Robert McDonald. “We’ve changed leadership. We’ve added staff. We’ve adjusted policies. We’re eliminating bureaucracy and unproductive work. We’re encouraging innovative approaches to serving Veterans, and we’re sharing best practices across the Department. In short, we’re making VA the high-performing organization that it can be, and that my fellow Veterans, expect and deserve.”

Key results in the report include:

- Veteran trust of VA is on the rise. In June 2016, nearly 60 percent of Veterans said they trust VA to fulfill our country’s commitment to Veterans – up from 47 percent in December 2015.
- More appointments are being completed more quickly. In FY 2016, VA completed nearly 38 million appointments – 1.2 million more than in FY 2015 and 3.2 million more than FY 2014. More of them were provided by a network of more than 350,000 community providers – a 45 percent increase in the number of providers since last year.
- Processing of disability claims is faster and more accurate. The average wait time to complete a claim has dropped by 65 percent, to 123 days.
- Urgent care is available when a Veteran needs it, and for non-urgent appointments, wait times are down. By September 2016, the average wait time for a completed appointment was down to less than five days for primary care, less than seven days for specialty care, and less than three days for mental health care.
- Veteran homelessness has been cut in half; it’s down 47 percent since 2010 nationwide, thanks in part to VA’s work with nearly 4,000 public and private agencies.
- In the last 18 months, VA has facilitated dozens more collaborations, bringing in more than $300 million in investments and in-kind services to support America’s veterans.
- Quality is improving. 82% of VA facilities improved quality overall since the fourth quarter of FY 2015.

The report details the changes and innovations, large and small, which produced these results. More information on the MyVA Transformation is available at www.va.gov/myva.

Multi-year effort shows improvements in homelessness, health care, claims

VA Releases major report on MyVA progress

More than 12,000 Veterans are treated for diabetes across VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. After high blood pressure, it is the second most common condition treated at the Omaha VA Medical Center.

Through education, Donelle Romano-Bell, a registered dietitian and diabetes educator, is teaching those Veterans how to cope with the disease, which makes it difficult for the body to manage glucose.

“Most people don’t understand diabetes, and a lot of what we talk about are lifestyle changes,” Romano-Bell said.

Romano-Bell coordinates two classes, an eight-hour comprehensive class and a four-hour refresher course. Content developed with Pharmacy, Physical Therapy and Nursing includes information on foot care, meal planning, stress, exercise, use of blood sugar meter and monitoring, preventing complications and medication. The classes are also a good time to debunk myths about the disease, Romano-Bell said.

Diet and exercise changes can be 58 percent effective in decreasing blood sugar levels to prevent full-blown diabetes. While change can be hard, Romano-Bell said classes are designed to be places Veterans can attend and follow up with educators via phone or other appointments.

For more information on diabetes education, call Donelle Romano-Bell at 402-495-3511. www.veteranshealthlibrary.org

DIABETES EDUCATION DEBUNKS MYTHS, PROMOTES HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHANGE

*Anna Morelock/Staff

PA DRIVER LICENSE / PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

Go Big Red

Husker football players took time from their schedules to visit with Veterans at the Lincoln VA Clinic.
Your Life
Your Health
Your Schedule

Get the Apps.
Visit the VA App Store to learn more:
mobile.va.gov/appstore

Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System
402-346-8800 | 1-800-451-5796
www.nebraska.va.gov