



**Veterans Health
Administration**

VA NEBRASKA-WESTERN IOWA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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NEWS RELEASE

**NEW NORFOLK VA CLINIC OPENS DOORS;
VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE TOUR NOW AVAILABLE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OMAHA, Neb. – Most years, the opening of a new VA clinic would be a cause for great fanfare, open houses, ribbon cuttings and other public gatherings. As everyone knows, though, 2020 has been anything other than a normal year.

That’s definitely the case in Norfolk, Neb., where a much-awaited new medical clinic opened earlier this year just as much of Nebraska and the United States were closing down due to the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This caused the staff at the new clinic to take new measures, including limiting face-to-face appointments and public gatherings, to ensure the safety of Veterans and their families.

“COVID kind of put everything upside down,” said Katie Rasmussen, nurse manager for the Norfolk VA clinic. “We were planning our open house and opening (slowly) to kind of learn how to work in the new space. Everything stopped. Everything froze.”

That didn’t mean that the Norfolk VA clinic closed though. Far from it, in fact. Rasmussen said as the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled itself in Nebraska, the Norfolk staff quickly changed their operations from face-to-face visits to telephone calls and video conference appointments to ensure that their Veteran patients were still able to be provided with medical care.

“The staff worked so hard to stay on top of Veteran phone calls and stay connected with them through video conferencing,” Rasmussen said. “It was really stressful, but I have just such a good staff here... we made it through it.”

The new Norfolk VA Community Outpatient Clinic, located at 3204 Raasch Drive, now features roughly 3,000 additional square feet of space that includes an expanded Veteran waiting area, a new hearing aid booth, and expanded space for mental health, group therapy, tele-health, tele-retinal services, larger and modernized procedure rooms, and more efficient spaces for the VA staff. The clinic has also expanded its services to include physical therapy.

The Norfolk clinic is just one of many projects currently underway within the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. A similar clinic was recently renovated in Holdrege, while other projects are currently underway in North Platte, Shenandoah (Iowa) and Lincoln. VA NWIHCS is also in the final stages of opening a new \$86 million Ambulatory Care Center in Omaha.

The projects are part of the largest upgrading of VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System medical facilities in more than a generation, according to Julie Rickert, VA NWIHCS associate director who oversees construction and infrastructure improvements. In the case of the Norfolk, Lincoln, Shenandoah and Holdrege clinics, which are all leased buildings, the end of the leasing contracts allowed VA officials to redesign and modernize the facilities to meet the changing needs of current and future Veterans.

“In the case of our clinics, many of them were aging facilities that, while functional, did not meet the changing ways that we provide health care to our Veterans,” said Rickert. “The fact that our leases at the older facilities were ending at approximately the same time allowed us to redesign and expand our clinics to better meet our Veterans’ needs and provide the care they deserve.”

The Norfolk clinic was the first VA NWHCS facility to be completed. Rasmussen said the new clinic is a significant upgrade over the old clinic, which simply didn’t have adequate space to hold all the clinic’s operations effectively.

“It’s very exciting,” Rasmussen said about the new clinic. “We have been waiting to have enough space for a long time... It’s neat to be able to open up and (start) new modalities like physical therapy here.”

Rasmussen added the new clinic will also allow Veterans to better connect with medical providers located at the larger facilities in Omaha and Lincoln through digital technology.

Rasmussen said the clinic has recently begun conducting more face-to-face appointments with Veterans. She said those Veterans who have seen the clinic have been impressed.

“The Veterans who have been here just love the new look of things,” she said. “It’s just so big, it’s so spacious, it’s so nice looking. So, we’ve had a lot of good feedback from everybody.

To allow Veterans, their families and the greater northeastern Nebraska community to get a glimpse of the new clinic, VA NWHCS has put together a virtual tour of the new clinic, located here: <https://www.facebook.com/NebraskaIowaVA/videos/1354266274764151/>

Rasmussen said the Norfolk staff is looking forward to seeing even more Veterans in the future and introducing them to their new medical clinic.

“We are so excited to start seeing people face-to-face,” she said. “We do ask that (Veterans) be patient as we move forward and ramp up. We will have a lot of rules that we have to live by such as masks, face shields and guests in the waiting room.”

“Please bear with us. We’re going to ask you a lot of questions every time you come in to ensure that you’re safe and that our staff stays safe,” Rasmussen added. “We are very excited to have you come back in and we’re very excited to show off our new building.”