

# Veterans

The VA MidSouth Healthcare Network Wellness Journal

# Health Watch

Winter 2009

**Comfort for  
caregivers**

**Complete  
women's care**

**Recognizing our  
accomplishments**





# An exciting 2009 for Veterans

*Dear Veteran:*

**T**he Department of Veterans Affairs MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9) recently ended an eventful year that will continue to move VA into the 21st century. Health care systems from West Virginia to Memphis are poised to make 2009 even more eventful.

On the national front, we are pleased to welcome retired Army Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, who took the oath of office January 21 as the nation's seventh Secretary of Veterans Affairs, assuming leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Shinseki's military decorations include three Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts. Key issues on his agenda include the smooth activation of an enhanced GI Bill education benefit that eligible Veterans can begin using next fall; streamlining the disability claims system; leveraging information technology to accelerate and modernize services; and opening VA's health care system to Veterans previously unable to enroll in it while ensuring access for returning Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans.

In this edition of *Veterans Health Watch*, turn to pages 4 and 5 for a brief look back at 2008 and what you, our Veteran, can expect to see in the coming year at VISN 9.

John Dandridge, Jr.  
Network Director

*Veterans Health Watch* is a wellness journal published quarterly by the VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9). *Veterans Health Watch* is designed to promote healthy lifestyles and give Veterans and their personal caregivers insightful information about managing and accessing health care from VA Medical Centers within VISN 9.

This publication is not a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor.

Your feedback is welcomed. If you would like to comment on any of the articles or submit information for possible publication, please write to:

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The new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki (left), makes his first official hospital tour at the Louisville VA Medical Center in February. As part of the visit, Shinseki met with 107-year-old Robley Rex (seated), the only known surviving WWI-era Veteran residing in Kentucky, as well as Wayne Pfeffer, Medical Center director, and John Dandridge, Jr., VISN 9 director.



# Stuck in the middle and stressed? Here's help

**S**andwiched between two generations—that's where more of us are finding ourselves these days. With folks living longer, it's not uncommon to have both children and aging parents in need of care. And with the 85-plus population the fastest growing in the nation, the trend shows no sign of slowing.

Are you caught in the middle these days? If so, these strategies may help you meet the challenge.

**1 Find alone time.** Fifteen minutes doesn't sound like much, but a short break can have a surprisingly restorative effect. Use that time to escape to a quiet corner where you can read, listen to music or just close your eyes. Remind yourself that you deserve this special time and that you can't help others if you feel frazzled.

**2 Make time for family.** Between holding down a job and tending to elderly parents, your spouse and kids may feel left out. Plan one family activity a week and stick to it. Catch a movie, enjoy a special dinner together, visit a museum or take a hike.

**3 Say no.** It's okay ... really! If you're too tired to pay your parents' bills or play Scrabble with your 10-year-old, say so. Pushing yourself past your limits will only create resentment.

**4 Evaluate.** Take an objective look at your situation. How many hours a week do you spend caring for Mom and Dad? Do they really require that much attention? If your mother is recovering from a stroke, for example, is she ready for a bit more independence? Are your kids ready to branch



out on their own? Remember, encouraging independence should be your primary goal as a caretaker and a nurturer.

**5 Express yourself.** You may be feeling a mix of guilt, love, resentment and maybe even anger. What you'll need: patience, understanding and a loving ear. To keep things in perspective, share your feelings with your spouse or a friend.

**6 Take pride.** Remember that giving of yourself is cause for pride.

**7 Share the care.** Finding a friend or relative who can assist with caretaking, run errands or babysit can offer tremendous relief. And when others offer to pitch in, take them up on it.

If depression and fatigue start setting in, talk to your health care provider. He or she may recommend a support group or refer you to a counselor. ■

# Recognizing our accomplishments

VISN 9 celebrates an eventful 2008 and looks forward to 2009

**L**ast year proved to be a year of continued growth and achievement for hospitals in the VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9). Read on to learn about how our VA Medical Centers continued to meet the needs of Veterans—and what some of our facilities have in store for 2009.

## Louisville VAMC recognized in 2008

Louisville VA Medical Center (VAMC) is proud to receive the prestigious 2008 Robert W. Carey Performance Excellence Award. This marks the second consecutive year the medical center has been recognized with a Carey Award.

The Robert W. Carey Performance Excellence Award is an annual award sponsored by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs that recognizes organizations within VA that have implemented management approaches resulting in sustained high levels of performance and service. It provides a model by which organizations can assess quality transformation efforts, organizational effectiveness and performance in delivering service.

Louisville VAMC is in the design phase of renovation to its surgical intensive care unit and inpatient mental health unit. Because a facility's physical environment is as vital to the healing process as excellent health care, facility designs include efficient layouts that support patient dignity and enhanced workspaces for physicians, nurses and support staff. Renovations are expected to be completed later this year.



## Lexington VAMC strives for easier access for Veterans

In 2008, Lexington VA Medical Center (VAMC) made strides in patient access. "In the past six months, we've initiated changes that have reduced the numbers of Veterans on waiting lists for appointments longer than 30 days," says Sandy J. Nielsen, Lexington VAMC director. "We've completely eliminated waiting lists for appointments to key clinics, including eye care, dermatology and podiatry. And we continue to work on improving access to specialty clinics such as neurosurgery and rheumatology."

Closely monitoring scheduling and appointments by staff on the front lines ensures that Veterans are seen in a timely manner and at their convenience. "One of our priorities for 2009 is continued improvement of patient satisfaction,"

Nielsen reports. "Our goal is to continue to develop a truly patient-centered culture: To anticipate and exceed our patients'

and families' needs." Lexington VAMC will pilot new approaches to gathering patient and family feedback and use that feedback to improve policies and processes that will better serve patients.

According to Nielsen, "We'll also focus on our staff in a similar manner to make sure we can recruit and retain a high-quality staff."



## Huntington VAMC serves as a referral center for bariatric surgery



As an enhancement to the Managing Obesity in Veterans Everywhere (MOVE!) Weight Management program, in 2008 Huntington VA Medical Center's (VAMC's) surgical weight-loss program expanded to include overweight and obese Veterans who receive their care at other VA facilities in West Virginia and nearby states.

"We have an epidemic of obesity in this country," says Timothy Canterbury, M.D., chief of surgery services at Huntington VAMC. "Our goal is to improve the care of obese Veterans across the board through several levels of treatment. Bariatric surgery is the last level."

David Denning, M.D., chairman of the

department of surgery at Marshall University's Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine and a consultant to VA, performs the medical center's gastric bypass surgeries. "Last year, we began increasing the number of bariatric procedures we do here and offered state-of-the-art laparoscopic adjustable band surgery," Dr. Canterbury says. "The Lap-Band surgery places a band around the top of the stomach that can be adjusted to limit how much can be eaten." The procedure is easier to reverse, if necessary. Blaine Nease, M.D., with Marshall University's Department of Surgery, performs Lap-Band surgery at Huntington VAMC.

All patients must complete the MOVE! program to be considered for the bariatric surgery program. For more information, contact Eva Maynard, R.N., at (304) 429-6741, ext. 2105.

## Tennessee Valley Healthcare System increases staff

2008 was an exciting and rewarding year for VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS). TVHS increased its staff members and employees to an unprecedented strength, allowing them to raise the bar in the care they provide to Veterans. This year, TVHS will expand its reach with six new community-based outpatient clinics in Warren County, Christian County, Ky., Roane County, McMinn County, Giles County and Maury County.

The addition of a partnership clinic with Meharry Medical College's Metro General Hospital in Nashville and a Women Veteran's Clinic will address specific medical needs of our female Veterans. The clinic, set to open in the spring, will be staffed by female health care providers and provide a variety of health care services needed by our women Veterans at one convenient location.





# The right care, just for women

VA offers dedicated services



As the front lines of battle and rules of warfare have changed dramatically in the last 50 years, so has the face of the U.S. military. Women make up 14 percent of today's active duty soldiers, serving alongside men as fighter pilots, gunners, warship commanders and military police in locations around the world. Today's women soldiers are tomorrow's women Veterans.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) currently treats record numbers of women while preparing for a greater influx in the coming years. Women make up 11 percent of Veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF). VA expects the number of women who seek care at a VA health facility to

## VISN 9 Women Veterans Program Managers

Every VA facility has a full-time Women Veterans Program Manager who is available to help women Veterans access the health services they need. For assistance with your health care needs, please contact the Women Veterans Program Manager at your nearby VA facility.

### **Huntington VA Medical Center**

Pamela Neal, (304) 429-6741,  
ext. 3423

### **Lexington VA Medical Center**

Myra Bushong, (859) 281-3888

### **Louisville VA Medical Center**

Linda Warren, (502) 287-6050

### **Memphis VA Medical Center**

Margaret Sousoulas,  
(901) 523-8990, ext. 6767

### **Mountain Home VA Medical Center**

Judi East, (423) 979-2989

### **Tennessee Valley Healthcare System**

MaryAnn Woodward-Smith,  
(615) 327-4751, ext. 5130

double in the next five years.

While women and men wear the same uniforms, salute the same flag and suffer similar battle wounds, the health care they require can be drastically different. The challenge for VA is to deliver care of comparable quality to both women and men while addressing the unique health care needs of each.

## Comprehensive care

VA's goal is to ensure that every woman Veteran has access to a VA primary care provider who can meet all her needs, including gender-specific care, in the context of an ongoing patient-clinician relationship. In December 2008, VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9) hosted a mini-residency in women's health for VA primary care providers to enhance their skills delivering gender-specific care to women Veterans. VISN 9 also announced plans for a new VA Comprehensive Women Veterans Healthcare Center at 1919 Charlotte Ave., Suite 300, in Nashville.

The Comprehensive Women Veterans Healthcare Center has been developed to provide a variety of health care services needed by women Veterans at one convenient location. Designed specifically with the needs of women Veterans in mind, the center offers a private, comfortable setting with all female providers, state-of-the-art equipment and spacious exam rooms with private bathrooms. Convenient and plentiful parking, on-site security and a comfortable waiting area with coffee are available. (A



shuttle service transporting patients between the Nashville VA Medical Center and the Comprehensive Women Veterans Healthcare Center will also be available.)

The Comprehensive Women Veterans Healthcare Center provides full array of services, including:

- primary care outpatient services for the treatment of acute and chronic medical conditions
- healthy living services including immunizations, smoking cessation assistance, weight management and stress management
- cancer screening
- gynecological services
- assistance with midlife and menopause issues
- osteoporosis screening and treatment
- family planning and birth control
- maternity care
- mental health services including readjustment counseling and treatment for military sexual trauma, depression or anxiety
- domestic violence services
- social work assistance including services to homeless Veterans
- substance abuse screening and referrals

The Comprehensive Women Veterans Healthcare Center is scheduled to open this spring. For more information about the center or to discuss enrollment, call MaryAnn Woodward-Smith, Women Veterans Program Manager, Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, at (615) 327-4751, ext. 5130. ■





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# VA MidSouth Healthcare Network

[www.visn9.va.gov/](http://www.visn9.va.gov/)

The right care,  
the right time,  
the right place



## TENNESSEE

### James H. Quillen VA Medical Center

PO Box 4000  
r of Sidney and Lamont  
ntain Home, TN 37684  
(423) 926-1171

Toll free: 1-877-573-3529

[www.mountainhome.va.gov/](http://www.mountainhome.va.gov/)

### VA Medical Center

1030 Jefferson Avenue  
Memphis, TN 38104  
(901) 523-8990

Toll free: 1-800-636-8262

[www.memphis.va.gov/](http://www.memphis.va.gov/)

### VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System

Alvin C. York Campus  
3400 Lebanon Pike  
Murfreesboro, TN 37129  
(615) 867-6000

Toll free: 1-800-876-7093

[www.tennesseevalley.va.gov/](http://www.tennesseevalley.va.gov/)

### Nashville Campus

1310 24th Avenue South  
Nashville, TN 37212  
(615) 327-4751

Toll free: 1-800-228-4973

## KENTUCKY

### VA Medical Center

1101 Veterans Drive  
Lexington, KY 40502  
(859) 233-4511

Toll free (Kentucky only):

1-888-824-3577

[www.lexington.va.gov/](http://www.lexington.va.gov/)

### VA Medical Center

800 Zorn Avenue  
Louisville, KY 40206  
(502) 287-4000

Toll free: 1-800-376-8387

[www.louisville.va.gov/](http://www.louisville.va.gov/)

## WEST VIRGINIA

### VA Medical Center

1540 Spring Valley Drive  
Huntington, WV 25704  
(304) 429-6741

(304) 429-6755

Toll free: 1-800-827-8244

[www.huntington.va.gov/](http://www.huntington.va.gov/)

