

# Veterans

The VA MidSouth Healthcare Network Wellness Journal

# Health Watch

Winter 2011

**Personalized  
health care  
is here!**

**Reaching out to  
at-risk Veterans**

**Are you taking  
too many pills?**





# Enhancing Veteran services

**Dear Veteran:**

**W**hile another year has come and gone, our mission remains the same, “to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan ...”

This means caring for you—America’s Veterans.

In 2010, we demonstrated how very serious we are in fulfilling this promise by serving more Veterans than ever before. We added to the ways in which we serve you by launching several new programs, including those to assist the most rural Veterans and Veterans facing homelessness. And despite the challenging budget we faced, we further enhanced services by leveraging new telehealth technology, expanding clinic capacity, and modernizing our facilities.

Heartened by our numerous successes in 2010, we’re confident that we can face whatever challenges 2011 presents us. The honor of serving you is a sacred trust committed to us and we’ll continue our efforts on behalf of Veterans on every front—increasing your access to health care services, ending homelessness, and providing you with the most patient-centered, results-driven, and forward-thinking services in VA history.

Thank you for your continued faith and confidence in us, your VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9). I look forward to serving you in the new year.

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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# Serving up the New Year

By Joe Mayer, VA Volunteer, Lexington, KY

**C**elebrating the new year was first observed by ancient Babylonians more than 4,000 years ago. Traditions you might observe today include eating special foods to bring luck, attending parties, and stopping unsafe or unhealthy habits and starting anew. Your resolutions may include:

- spending more time with family and friends
- fitting in fitness
- battling the bulge
- quitting smoking and/or drinking
- getting out of debt
- learning something new
- helping others
- getting organized

## → Tune up your driving skills

Why not resolve to drive safely in the new year? Check out these tips:

- **Clean off/turn on headlights and taillights.** Dark winter days make it more difficult to see and to be seen. Using lights can help.
- **Keep windshields and mirrors clear.** Invest in a long-handled scraper, and wait for the defroster to warm up before you start driving.
- **Buckle up.** Wear your safety belt every time you get behind the wheel, even for short distances, and make sure your passengers do too!
- **Start early and slow down.** Allow plenty of time to get to your destination.
- **Be aware of distracted drivers.** Avoid talking or texting, eating or drinking, reading, and personal grooming while driving.
- **Share the road.** Trucks and other large vehicles need extra time to stop. Avoid braking suddenly and making unnecessary lane changes.
- **Keep an emergency kit in your vehicle.** Include a blanket, flashlight, candles, matches, jumper cables, and a shovel. Bags of kitty litter or sand provide traction if you get stuck on ice.



These proven strategies can help you succeed:

- **Be realistic and set attainable goals.** Don't set yourself up to fail.
- **Write down your reasons for changing.** Motivate yourself when the going gets tough.
- **Plan ahead.** Know what steps you'll take when temptation arises.
- **Find a buddy.** A companion can offer support and keep you on track.
- **Track your progress.** Record steps that bring you closer to your goals.
- **Reward yourself.** Treat yourself to something you enjoy that's consistent with your resolution.
- **Stick to it.** You need 21 days to form a new habit and six months for it to become second nature.
- **Keep trying.** Don't give in or give up! If your resolve runs out, take a day off and start again. ■



# Lending a helping hand

## Serving at-risk Veterans

**O**n any given night, homeless Veterans are living on the streets or in shelters. According to Kelly Vance, M.D., director of Mental Health services at Lexington VA Medical Center (VAMC) many persistently homeless Veterans experience high rates of mental illness and suffer from acute and chronic medical problems. “These Veterans need the same basics that other single adults or families need—jobs, affordable housing, and access to medical and behavioral health care,” says Dr. Vance.

“Veterans who have served this nation should never find themselves on the streets, living without care and without hope,” says Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki. With this vision, the Secretary introduced a comprehensive five-year plan to end homelessness among Veterans, including:

- discharge planning for incarcerated Veterans re-entering society
- support services for low-income Veterans and their families
- a national referral center to link Veterans to local service providers

The plan also calls for expanded efforts to help Veterans obtain access to education, jobs, health

care, and housing. Some plan highlights and programs are outlined here.

### Health Care for Re-entry Veterans

Health Care for Re-entry Veterans addresses the community re-entry needs of incarcerated Veterans to prevent homelessness; reduce the incidence of medical, psychiatric, and substance abuse problems upon community readjustment; and decrease the likelihood of reincarceration for those leaving prison. Services include:

- outreach and pre-release assessment services for Veterans in prison
- referrals to medical, psychiatric, social, and employment services upon release
- short-term case management assistance upon release

### Veteran Justice Outreach Initiative

This initiative works to avoid the unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration among Veterans by ensuring that eligible justice-involved Veterans have timely access to VA mental health and substance abuse services when clinically indicated, and other VA services and benefits as appropriate.

At VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9), each Medical Center has a designated facility-based Veterans Justice Outreach specialist who is responsible for direct outreach, assessment, and case management for justice-involved Veterans.

## Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program

A new program, the Supportive Services for Veteran Families, provides assistance to very low-income Veterans and their families who are in or transitioning to permanent housing. VA awards grants to private nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives that assist these Veterans and their families in obtaining permanent housing.

## Stand downs

Stand downs are one-to-three-day events that offer food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, and VA and Social Security benefits counseling to homeless Veterans. Referrals are provided for services such as permanent housing, employment, and substance abuse treatment. These events are coordinated between the local VA and other government and community agencies serving the homeless. Annual stand downs are hosted by the Huntington, Lexington, Louisville, Memphis, and Mountain Home VAMCs, and Tennessee Valley Healthcare System.

## National Call Center for Homeless Veterans

The National Call Center for Homeless Veterans ensures that at-risk and homeless Veterans have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. These counselors assist homeless Veterans and their families; VAMCs; federal, state, and local partners; and community agencies. Call 1-877-424-3838 to be connected with a trained VA staff member. Call for yourself, a friend, or a loved one to receive information about VA programs and services in your area.

## Enhanced Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement

The Enhanced Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement program (Enhanced RANGE), provides intensive case management with an emphasis on recovery for rural Veterans who suffer from serious mental illness and are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. To receive assistance, Veterans must:

- be eligible for VA health care
- currently live farther than 50 miles from an urban center
- be experiencing homelessness or a lack of reliable housing
- have a diagnosis of any severe or chronic mental health condition, such as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar affective disorder, major depression, or PTSD



### → Reach out

Contact your local VA Medical Center for more information about these programs or visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).

## Our road map to recovery

Risk factors that can lead to homelessness include mental illness, physical disability, PTSD, poverty, drug or substance abuse, job loss, illness, domestic violence, or divorce. “Recognizing and understanding these risk factors and how they can affect a person’s circumstances allows us to guide Veterans to a plan of action—a road map to recovery,” says Dr. Vance. Our five-year plan is our road map to end homelessness. The challenges before us are threefold:

**1 Prevention:** provide services to keep Veterans and their families from ever experiencing homelessness

**2 Partnerships:** engage community partners to raise awareness about programs and services available to Veterans, identify needs that

aren’t being met, and expand community networks and resources

**3 Perseverance:** be unrelenting in our efforts and unwavering in our commitment to end homelessness among Veterans and their families ■

# Patient-centered care is all about you!

**A**s VA MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9) becomes a more people-centric organization, patient-centered care will be emphasized. This isn't a fixed set of guidelines, but rather an approach that recognizes your unique needs, preferences, and wishes.

Here are some highlights of patient-centered care:

- You'll be treated with dignity and respect.
- You'll be actively involved in all aspects of your care.
- You'll receive treatment from a highly trained staff—experts in their respective fields.
- You'll be provided with and encouraged to seek information about your illness and treatment options.
- We'll respect your right to make informed decisions regarding treatment options and outcomes.
- We'll strive to maximize your comfort and privacy in waiting and treatment rooms, and to minimize outside distractions and noise.
- We'll openly communicate with you and your family about information that pertains to your health and well-being, and address any questions and concerns you might have.

At VA, a key feature of providing patient-centered care is the implementation of PACTs (Patient-Aligned Care Teams). Partnering together to plan and make decisions that focus on the whole person is the first step toward lifelong health and wellness. This is comprehensive



## → Our PACT with you

You have many ways to access VA health care. In addition to personal visits with your primary health care provider, you can schedule visits with other members of your team such as the nurse, clinical pharmacist, behavioral health specialist, or social worker. A wealth of information is available to you on the Internet through My HealthVet at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).

personalized care to meet your individual health care needs. It's positive and proactive, as it promotes health, wellness, and prevention.

In short, a PACT is a partnership between you and your VISN 9 facility to make sure you receive the personalized care you need. This is our PACT with you—to *deliver excellence in every aspect of your care*. Patient-centered care and Patient-Aligned Care Teams are just two of the many ways VA is “Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century.” To learn more, visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov). ■

# How many pills are too many?

By Joe Mayer, VA Volunteer,  
Lexington, KY

**W**hen asking yourself this question, you might find there's no simple answer. Fortunately, we have more medicines and can treat more diseases than ever before. Unfortunately, because of this, it may be that you're taking too many medications. While medicines can improve your health, the risk of unwanted or unforeseen side effects and adverse interactions increases along with the number of different medicines you use. An important consideration at any age, this risk is especially important to the nearly 20 percent of adults ages 65 and older who take 10 or more different medications daily. "This isn't the result of shoddy care, but can happen when doctors prescribe medicines for several common conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, and depression," says Joseph A. Pellecchia, M.D., FACP, Chief of Staff, Lexington VA Medical Center. "Some medications that are prescribed for short-term or occasional use are often refilled even after a patient's condition improves."

It's important for patients to routinely review their medications with their health care provider. "Patients take lots of medications for lots of reasons. We want to make sure that our patients are taking the right medications for the right reasons," says Dr. Pellecchia. "So, we're reminding our patients to bring all of their prescription and over-the-counter medications with them to their next visit so their provider can review each one and determine whether some can be safely eliminated." ■



## → Time for a medicine check-up

When you bring in your medications at your next visit, your primary health care provider, with input from a clinical pharmacist when necessary, will review them with you and also provide you with valuable tips on how to:

- understand and comply with dosing instructions
- store your prescriptions properly
- identify duplicate and outdated medicines
- manage adverse interactions and side effects
- communicate any concerns with your health care providers

To learn more about this important service, visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).



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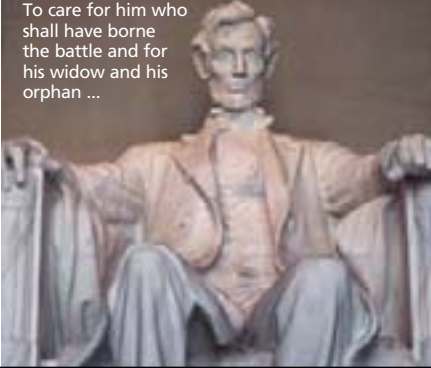
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## Keeping the promise

To care for him who  
shall have borne  
the battle and for  
his widow and his  
orphan ...



# VA MidSouth Healthcare Network

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

## Keeping the promise

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(304) 429-6755  
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[www.huntington.va.gov/](http://www.huntington.va.gov/)

### **TENNESSEE**

#### **James H. Quillen**

#### **VA Medical Center**

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Corner of Veterans Way and Lamont  
Mountain Home, TN 37684  
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#### **VA Medical Center**

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