

# Veteran CenteredLiving

Personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care in the VA MidSouth Healthcare Network | SUMMER 2013

*The Many Faces of*  
**Multiple  
Sclerosis**

*You Want to*  
**MOVE It!**

**Palliative Care**  
We're with You Every  
Step of the Way!

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## NETWORKING: Patient-Centered Care

Dear Veterans,

Health care used to mean you saw a doctor about your symptoms, and he prescribed a treatment and sent you on your way. This may have worked well for the “system,” but it didn’t work for patients. But patient-centered health care revolves around YOU! With this concept, we work *with* you to improve your health and well-being so that you live life fully in a way that matters to YOU.

Patient-centered care is “personalized” to your unique situation: your condition, preferences, and circumstances; and the physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and environmental influences in your life. It means giving you ready access by appointment, phone, or e-mail to an entire health care team beyond just your physician — a team that includes professionals like nurses, pharmacists, clerks, social workers, nutritionists, psychologists, etc. It also means the team will work together, but we need YOU to be involved — we need YOU to lead the team!

We encourage you to ask questions, make informed decisions, and tell us what works for YOU. In return, we will do our very best to provide health care services that exceed your expectations.

In this issue, you’ll find some excellent examples of how VISN 9 is promoting patient-centered care. We will continue to do what we do best, and we look forward to having you coach us every step of the way.

Vicki Kendrick  
Interim Network Director

*Veteran Centered Living* is published quarterly by the Department of Veterans Affairs MidSouth Healthcare Network (VISN 9). *Veteran Centered Living* is for Veterans and their personal caregivers. The magazine is designed to promote wellness and to offer personalized, proactive, patient-driven health care information to better access 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 or other VA health care provider.

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# My HealthVet Means Easy Access to Your Health Team and Records

We all know that we should be active partners with our health care team, but it can be hard to keep up with medical records these days. VA recognized this and created an e-health website called My HealthVet to give Veterans the ability to quickly, safely, and securely access their personal medical records and history. It's an easy way to keep up with all your medical information!

My HealthVet offers Veterans, active duty service members, dependents, and caregivers online access to VA health care services. It helps you to not only partner with your health care team, but also provides the information, opportunity, and tools you need to make informed decisions about your health and health care.

New and updated features have been added to My HealthVet, too. Now, when you go to [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov), you can view your VA appointments and check lab results. You can also refill prescriptions. And the best part? Your medical information is right at your fingertips at the touch of a "Blue Button," and it's stored and saved just for you unless you choose to share it.

With an upgraded account, you have the ability to send a non-urgent secure message to participating members of your VA health care team. So, if you want to ask your dietitian about your meal plan or check with your doctor about your new exercise program, you can send the person a quick message. This feature keeps your messages safe

and personal within My HealthVet. To obtain an upgraded account, you must complete the In-Person Authentication process at your local VA Medical Center or Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

An upgraded account also allows you to view:

- Information you self-entered into My HealthVet
- Parts of your official VA health record (as it becomes available)
- Your Department of Defense Military Service Information

My HealthVet gives you the freedom to partner with VA and your health care team. Remember, by working with your health care team and knowing your health conditions, you have your information right where you want it. Plus, you can learn to make healthy choices and better manage your health. Register today, and get your upgraded account the next time you visit your VA facility.



# Palliative Care: We're with You Every Step of the Way!

**W**hen a patient has received the diagnosis of one or more chronic, often serious conditions, the impact can be devastating. Palliative care serves as a means to change all that.

While hospice care is palliative care, palliative care is not the same as hospice care. Hospice focuses on patient care in a person's remaining days, usually six months or less. But palliative care is specialized medical care that helps patients and their families live as fully as possible when facing life-threatening illnesses.

Palliative care centers on the patient's needs, as well as the needs of caregivers. It aims to address the patient as a whole person, including his or her physical comfort, confidence, emotional well-being, spirituality, and dignity while dealing with a medical condition. Palliative care is simply a part of good, overall care focused on an improved quality

of life for the patient and the person's caregivers. A team of doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, nutritionists and chaplains are involved.

Through studies with VA and a major university hospital, palliative research has come a long way. Research has proved that palliative care, along with medical treatment, lowered depression and provided both a higher quality of life and a longer life for patients in three areas: it relieves physical and emotional suffering; it improves and strengthens the patient-physician communication and decision-making process; and it assures coordinated continuity of care across multiple health care settings such as a hospital, home, hospice, and long-term care.

If you or a loved one is facing a serious illness, find out how VA programs such as these can help. For a complete list of the points of contact for Hospice and Palliative Care, visit [www.vish9.va.gov/services/hpc.asp](http://www.vish9.va.gov/services/hpc.asp).

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**Veterans  
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# The Many Faces of Multiple Sclerosis

What do former talk show host Montel Williams, country music star Clay Walker, Mitt Romney's wife Ann, and Jack Osborn (son of Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne) have in common? All have multiple sclerosis (MS), a nervous system disease that affects your brain and spinal cord.

Researchers think MS is an autoimmune disease, which means the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. The resulting damage interrupts communication between your brain and your body, causing symptoms such as:

- Facial pain
- Double vision, eye discomfort
- Dizziness
- Muscle weakness or spasms
- Decreased attention span, memory problems, difficulty solving problems
- Tremors, numbness, tingling and/or burning in arms and legs
- Bowel and bladder issues
- Depression or sadness
- Slurred speech, trouble chewing and swallowing

MS can be difficult to diagnose because symptoms mimic those of other diseases and can worsen for days, weeks, or months and then suddenly disappear. Even so, approximately 200 people are diagnosed every week in the United States: more women than men, often between the ages of 20 and 40.

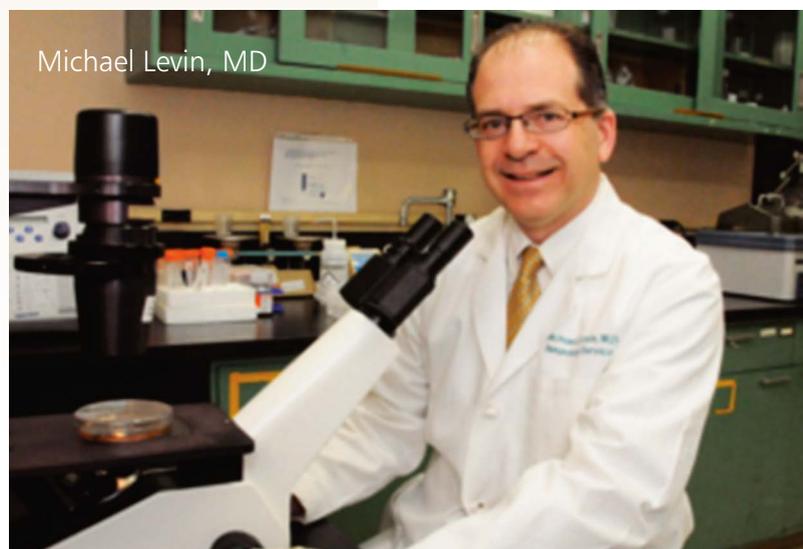
Most patients are mildly affected — experiencing short bouts of symptoms followed by long stretches of relief — and life expectancy can be almost normal. There is simply no way to predict how the disease will progress in each individual.

While there is no cure (yet!) for MS, scientists are working hard to develop new medicines and therapies to treat symptoms, slow the disease's progression, and even repair damaged brain and spinal cord cells. Meantime, physical therapy and exercise can help preserve remaining function, and some people use alternative treatments such as acupuncture, aromatherapy, biofeedback, yoga, and tai chi.

To learn more about Veterans with MS and VA's efforts to fight the disease, go to [www.va.gov/ms](http://www.va.gov/ms).

"We've been studying how antibodies attack nerve cells for years, and now this mechanism is gaining national and international scientific recognition," said Dr. Michael Levin, researcher at the Memphis VA. MS is an autoimmune disease in which a person's own immune system attacks nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, and MS is one of the most common neurological diseases to affect middle-aged adults. Traditionally, the immune response was thought only to destroy the protective coating of nerve cells, known as myelin. However, there has been an important shift in thinking. Recent studies indicate that the immune response also directly attacks nerve cells, leading to neuronal injury, in a process known as neurodegeneration.

For more information, visit [www.memphis.va.gov](http://www.memphis.va.gov).



# You Want to MOVE It!

**I**t feels as though it happened suddenly. As you put away those winter clothes and pull out the spring and summer wardrobe, you think “Hmm, it didn’t fit like this last year.” Your jeans won’t zip and your shirt won’t button. We’ve all been there. If you are gaining weight, it’s likely you took in more calories over the winter months than your body used.

The body stores that extra food as fat. If you are losing weight, chances are you are eating fewer calories than your body is using. Sounds pretty simple, right? For some of us, managing a healthy weight is easy. For the rest of us, knowing what a healthy weight is for us and balancing our lifestyles and eating habits can be difficult, and we could use a little help.

So, how can you know if you are at a healthy weight? According to the MOVE (Managing Overweight/Obesity for Veterans Everywhere) program, the simplest way is to find out your body mass index (BMI), which is a measure of your

weight by your height. If your BMI is less than 18.5, you are underweight. If it is 25 to 29.9, you are overweight. A BMI over 29.9 indicates obesity.

Why are these numbers important? As a general rule, your risk for heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol problems, gallbladder disease, arthritis, some types of cancer, sleep apnea, and other issues increases if you’re overweight. For a man, that means a waist measurement over 40 inches; for a woman, a waist over 35 inches.

If you want to improve your BMI or your waistline, the VA wants to help you MOVE it! MOVE is a weight management program developed by the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention to help deal with the growing concerns about obesity as a significant health care problem and a growing health care cost — over 100 billion dollars annually. All VA facilities have a MOVE program or an alternative weight management program, and there is no co-pay required to join.

Over 70 percent of Veterans receiving care at VA facilities are overweight or obese. If you are interested in finding out your healthy weight, or if you need help to reach your healthy weight goals, visit the MOVE website at [www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov) for more information.





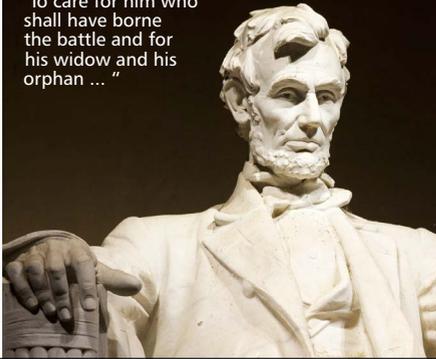
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# VA MidSouth Healthcare Network

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1101 Veterans Drive  
Lexington, KY 40502  
(859) 233-4511  
Toll free: 1-888-824-3577  
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### Robley Rex

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## WEST VIRGINIA

### VA Medical Center

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### VA Medical Center

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