

VETERANS' ADVANTAGE

FALL 2008

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR NEW YORK / NEW JERSEY VETERANS

**Visit VA—
in cyberspace!**

**Reaching out
to our newest
veterans**

**Keep the flu from
bugging you**





From the Network Director:

Where every day is Veterans Day

Dear Veteran,

On Veterans Day, our nation will pause to thank you for your service. Veterans Day is the official day to honor you, America's veterans, for securing and protecting our democracy and ensuring the freedom that we enjoy—and others in the world envy.

At VA, we come to work each day with a clear and noble purpose. It's our privilege to keep President Lincoln's 1865 promise: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." These immortal words are VA's motto, and we consider it our sacred mission to provide the very best health care, because you who have served in uniform deserve nothing less.

I'm honored to be with an organization that serves veterans. And I'm proud to work side by side with our great staff and volunteers, many of whom are veterans themselves. November 11 may be the official day to honor American veterans, but every day is Veterans Day at VA.

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<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>



Get your prescriptions online

You asked for it, and you got it! You can now use My Health Vet—VA's online service for veterans—to refill your prescriptions and view your prescription history online. To take advantage of this service, you must be a registered user of My Health Vet. As a registered user, you'll also have access to a Personal Health Journal where you can record and track your health statistics online. To register for these important benefits, visit www.myhealth.va.gov.

We're just a phone call away

Veterans, do you have questions about your health? During weekdays (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), staff at your VA Medical Center or VA Clinic are available to assist. After 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, weekends, or holidays, call the VA Nurses Helpline at 1-800-877-6976 if you have a medical question. Remember to call 911 at any time if you're having a medical emergency.

It's time for your flu shot

Here's what you need to know about being vaccinated

BY LOIS ANNE KATZ, M.D., AND MEREDITH KING-JENSEN, R.N., M.S.N.

Flu is a serious disease. Each year in the United States, about 5 percent to 20 percent of the population gets the flu and about 36,000 people die from it. The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year.

Who should be vaccinated?

- people ages 50 and older
- anyone with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease
- anyone at high risk for serious flu complications or people who live with or care for those at high risk
 - health care workers
 - children ages 6 months to 19 years
 - pregnant women

Who shouldn't be vaccinated?

- people with a severe allergy to chicken eggs

Questions?

For more information about the flu vaccine, go to www1.va.gov/visns/visn03/ or www.cdc.gov/flu.

- those who have had a severe reaction to flu vaccine

How it works

The flu shot made with killed virus is the vaccine most commonly used by VA. You won't come down with the flu from receiving the vaccine.

A nasal-spray vaccine, which is made from live, weakened flu viruses, is also available. It's only recommended for people ages 2 to 49 and women who aren't pregnant.

The flu vaccine protects against three different flu viruses. Since the viruses change, a new vaccine is prepared each year. For protection against the flu, you need to be vaccinated yearly.

It takes about two weeks after receiving a flu shot to develop antibodies that protect against flu. Side effects are few—soreness, redness or swelling at the site, a low-grade fever or some aches may occur—and usually disappear in one or two days.



Prevent the spread

Besides getting a flu shot, here's how to avoid getting—or spreading—the flu virus:

- Cover your mouth when you cough.
- Wash your hands often.
- Stay home if you get sick.

Protect yourself

Yearly flu vaccination begins in October and continues until late spring. The best time to get your shot is in October or November. All VA medical centers have the flu vaccine, and most have walk-in flu clinics. The flu vaccine is also available in primary care clinics. Call VA to find out where to get your flu shot. ■



Let's talk it over

Focus groups help newest veterans adjust to civilian life

BY JULIANA LAURENZI, M.S.W.

One night every week, 10 veterans being treated for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder gather to talk about how they've been dealing with life since returning from combat. The VA medical center director and staff from the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Program may join the group during a session. Veterans discuss their care at VA, offer suggestions for improvement and engage in positive banter with the VA staff. This focus group is one way VA reaches out to our newest veterans.

Focus groups are a significant component of the OEF/OIF

Program at each VA Medical Center. New veterans, their spouses or partners and VA staff are encouraged to attend. VA staff welcomes input from service members, and changes to programs have been initiated as a result of feedback from these groups. For example, evening clinics have been added to accommodate veterans who work or attend school during the day.

Each VA Medical Center also hosts a Welcome Home event annually for returning veterans and their families, which may include a job fair or family picnic. Contact your local VA Medical Center or check its Web site for dates and times for these programs. ■

Brave new world

VA connects with veterans in cyberspace

VA is reaching out to veterans and their families through the Second Life virtual world at www.SecondLife.com. Virtual worlds are three-dimensional online spaces that enable people to interact with

each other and their environment through an animated character called an avatar, which is similar to characters used in video games.

Avatars can watch videos, listen to audio, view pictures, participate in presentations before a live audience, link to external Web sites and set up a live conference to communicate with other avatars. The features provide a creative way to access information that's also posted on VA's Web site.

Michael J. Kussman, M.D.,



VA Under Secretary for Health, says the virtual world "provides an imaginative, light-hearted approach to offer veterans who like to go online for information they need and can use."

The Second Life project came about through research VA conducted on how to better connect with veterans through the Internet. ■

Reality check

For more information about VA's presence in Second Life, visit www.va.gov/health/VHainSecondLife.asp.



Take it easy

Be good to yourself this holiday season

Regardless of a person's race, ethnicity, culture or religion, the period between Thanksgiving and the New Year is known to most as the "holiday season." While it is often experienced as a joyous time of celebrating with family and friends, for many others the holidays can bring loneliness, depression, anxiety and stress.

Try these coping strategies if you find yourself struggling through the holidays:

- **Take care of you.** You simply can't do everything, so don't overextend yourself. Rest and relaxation should be a priority. Pace yourself. Be careful about what you spend, eat and drink. Keep alcohol use to a minimum. Exercise regularly.

- **Communicate.** Reach out to others and express how you feel. E-mail, call and write letters to loved ones. Stay positive when communicating.

- **Be creative.** Celebrate in your own way, which may be different from how things are usually done. You don't need to be tied to the

past. Do the things you enjoy!

- **Be of service to others.**

Visit a lonely veteran, help out in a food pantry or find some other way to volunteer your time to another.

- **Be realistic.** Know your boundaries. This includes being aware of your financial situation so you don't overspend. Don't expect it to be a happy time for everyone. Plan ahead to avoid unpleasant surprises.

Remember that the holidays last only a short time. Seek help for depression, anxiety or stress. Call or visit your local VA Medical Center, which has expanded services to address your care needs. Best wishes to all veterans and their families for peaceful and healthy holidays! ■

Help is here

If you need help, call your local VA Medical Center or vet center. If you're in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention toll-free hotline at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.

Are you depressed?

Common symptoms of depression include feeling sad, guilty and worthless and having trouble sleeping. There may be physical problems like headaches and digestive disorders. There may also be:

- anger and violent behavior
- weight loss
- trouble concentrating
- isolation from family and friends

- avoidance of pleasurable activities
- fatigue
- alcohol or substance abuse
- thoughts or talk of suicide

If you experience an emotional crisis and need to talk to someone, or if you're thinking about harming yourself, qualified and caring VA professionals are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Competitive edge

BY COLLEEN ROONEY

Wheelchair Games give veterans a chance to connect

VA Hudson Valley Health Care System's Crusaders were ready for another action-packed summer when they headed off to Omaha, Neb., for the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The theme of this year's Games was "Quest for the Best."

What began in Richmond, Va., in 1981 with 74 competitors has now grown into an event involving more than 500 competitors each year. Basketball, swimming, air rifle and wheelchair slalom are among the 17 competitions featured at the Games.

Besides being a great therapeutic outlet, the Games give athletes a chance to see old friends in a new city every year, which helps ease the stress of being wheelchair-bound. Competing also gives them a chance to connect with other

veterans, and strong friendships often result.

Remembering colleagues

For two of Hudson Valley's Crusaders, Joe DeWeever and Caleb Smith, this is their sixth and seventh time, respectively, competing. For Joe, the competitiveness is the main reason he loves going to the Games each year. "Seeing friends from other VAs is also a big reason for going to the Games," he says.

The Crusaders dedicated this year's Games to two teammates who died earlier this year. They had contributed much time and won many medals for the team. In the opening ceremony, the Crusaders carried a banner proclaiming, "New York dedicates 2008 Wheelchair Games in memory of their fallen teammates."

Finding inspiration

Caleb and Joe were inspired to participate in the Games by their coach, Ellen Varian. Joe says he didn't know about the Games—or even his veterans' benefits—until he was approached by Ellen. She encouraged him and he began competing in Long Beach, Calif., five years ago. "If it wasn't for her, we would be lost," says Caleb. "What inspires the Games, for us, is her."

This year the team won 23 medals—eight gold, seven silver and nine bronze.

VA and Paralyzed Veterans of America co-sponsor the annual Games. VA Hudson Valley athletes, who rely on financial donations from civic and Veteran Service Organizations to fund their trips, are extremely grateful for the continued support. ■



VA Hudson Valley Health Care System

www.hudsonvalley.va.gov

www.castlepoint.va.gov

www.montrose.va.gov

◀ Joe DeWeever, an Air Force veteran from Newburgh, N.Y., competes in softball at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

▼ Navy veteran Edward Horvat of Wappingers Falls, N.Y., prepares to take a shot in the nine-ball event.



▲ Army veteran Donald Plunkett of New Windsor, N.Y., competes in a race at the Wheelchair Games.



▲ Optometrist William O'Connell, O.D. (standing), shows veteran Robert Allen how to use a lighted hand-held magnifier to read.

◀ O'Connell assists Allen with another low-vision portable device.

The eyes have it

Low-vision services are expanded

Thanks to an initiative by VA, low-vision rehabilitation services are now available to veterans in the Hudson Valley. The VA Hudson Valley Healthcare System (VAHVHCS) Optometry Program is actually among the first in the country to expand low-vision services. What makes the program unique is that care for low vision will be offered at most clinic sites, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics, via a mobile unit.

Low vision is any reduction of vision that can't be corrected with standard glasses or contact lenses.

Among the causes of low vision are macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, glaucoma, optic atrophy and the ocular effects of stroke or traumatic brain injury.

Low vision makes daily activities difficult. It's hard to read, write, watch TV or walk if you can't see well. Many veterans who visit the optometry clinics need specialty services to maintain their independence and improve safety. At the clinics, the staff carefully assesses a patient's vision and designs an individualized rehabilitation program based on the patient's goals and visual needs.

Ways to adapt

Visually impaired veterans are trained to use a combination of adaptive techniques and tools. They may need new eyeglass prescriptions, specialized eyewear for glare protection or low-vision devices such as hand and stand magnifiers, microscopic eyeglass lenses or electronic magnifiers. Modifying the lighting in a patient's home or workplace may help. Vision therapy may also be prescribed.

The low-vision staff includes William O'Connell, O.D., an optometrist with more than 30 years of experience in low-vision rehabilitation. Working with him is Ron Texley, a low-vision rehabilitation specialist who is a certified orientation and mobility specialist. Karen Byrnes, program assistant, manages appointments. ■

See here!

If you think you're a candidate for low-vision services, call your primary care provider.

Where YOU CAN FIND US—ANYTIME

Bronx

Medical Center:
130 West Kingsbridge Road
Bronx, NY 10468
(718) 584-9000

Community Clinics:
23 South Broadway
White Plains, NY 10601
(914) 421-1951

124 New Main Street
Yonkers, NY 10701
(914) 375-8055

41-03 Queens Boulevard
Sunnyside, NY 11104
(718) 741-4800

953 Southern Boulevard
Bronx, NY 10459
(718) 741-4900

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**VA New York Harbor
Health Care System**

Medical Centers:
Brooklyn Campus
800 Poly Place
Brooklyn, NY 11209
(718) 836-6600

New York Campus
423 East 23rd Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 686-7500

VA Primary and Extended
Care Center
179th Street & Linden Boulevard
St. Albans, NY 11425
(718) 526-1000

Community Clinics:
40 Flatbush Extension—8th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 439-4300

1150 South Avenue
3rd Floor—Suite 301
Staten Island, NY 10314
(718) 761-2973

55 West 125th Street—11th Floor
New York, NY 10027
(646) 273-8125

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**VA New Jersey
Health Care System**

Medical Centers:
East Orange Campus
385 Tremont Avenue
East Orange, NJ 07018-1095
(973) 676-1000

Lyons Campus
151 Knollcroft Road
Lyons, NJ 07939
(908) 647-0180

Community Clinics:
970 Route 70
Brick, NJ 08724
(732) 206-8900

654 East Jersey Street—Suite 2A
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
(908) 994-0120

171 Jersey Street—Building 36
Trenton, NJ 08611-2425
(609) 989-2355

385 Prospect Avenue
Hackensack, NJ 07601
(201) 487-1390

115 Christopher Columbus Drive
Jersey City, NJ 07302
(201) 435-3055

317 George Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
(732) 729-0646

340 West Hanover Avenue
Morristown, NJ 07960
(973) 539-9791
(973) 539-9794

20 Washington Place
Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 645-1441

Patterson Army Health Clinic
Stephenson Avenue—Building 1075
Fort Monmouth, NJ 07703
(732) 532-4500

275 Getty Avenue
Paterson, NJ 07503
(973) 247-1666

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**VA Hudson Valley
Health Care System**

Medical Centers:
Montrose Campus
Route 9A/P.O. Box 100
Montrose, NY 10548-0100
(914) 737-4400

Castle Point Campus
Castle Point, NY 12511
(845) 831-2000

Community Clinics:
Jefferson Professional Plaza
60 Jefferson Street
Unit 3
Monticello, NY 12701
(845) 791-4936

150 Pike Street
Port Jervis, NY 12771
(845) 856-5396

20 Squadron Boulevard—
Suite 400
New City, NY 10956
(845) 634-8942

30 Hatfield Lane—
Suite 204
Goshen, NY 10924
(845) 294-6927

488 Freedom Plains Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603
(845) 452-5151

1875 Route 6
Warwick Savings Bank—
2nd Floor
Carmel, NY 10512
(845) 228-5291

2881 Church Street
Route 199
Pine Plains, NY 12567
(518) 398-9240

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Northport (Long Island)

Medical Center:
79 Middleville Road
Northport, NY 11768
(631) 261-4400

Community Clinics:
4 Phyllis Drive
Patchogue, NY 11772
(631) 758-4419

1425 Old Country Road
Plainview, NY 11803
(516) 694-6008

Westhampton Air Base
(by appointment only)
150 Old Riverhead Road
Westhampton, NY 11978
(631) 898-0599

NY/NJ Veterans Integrated Service
Network 3
130 W. Kingsbridge Road
VISN Office
Bronx, NY 10468

<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn03>

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