

# VETERANS BENEFITS & BEYOND



## President Trump visits VA, signs VA accountability executive order, and Secretary Shulkin makes new key announcements.

**P**resident Trump recently visited the Department of Veterans Affairs to thank Veterans for their service, and VA employees for their work helping Veterans. While at the VA, the President signed an Executive Order entitled, “Improving Accountability and Whistleblower Protection at the Department of Veterans Affairs,” and Secretary Shulkin made three new key announcements at the VA’s Central Office.

The Executive Order is focused on improving “accountability and whistleblower protection” at the VA by creating an office dedicated to that purpose and the position of Special Assistant to the Secretary who will report directly to the Secretary and serve as executive director of the office.

“We want to make sure that we have employees who work hard and are committed to the mission of serving our Veterans.”

*Dr. David Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs*

The new executive director “will report directly to me as Secretary so that we can identify barriers that are preventing us from removing employees and people that we have identified that should no longer be working at VA,” said Dr. David Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “We want to make sure that we have employees who work hard and are committed to the mission of serving our Veterans.” The VA will establish the office and appoint the executive director within 45 days of the signing of the Executive Order.

The executive director will advise and assist the Secretary in using all available authorities to discipline or terminate any VA manager or employee who has violated the public’s trust and failed to carry out his or her duties on behalf of Veterans. The executive director will also assist the Secretary in recruiting, rewarding, and retaining high-performing employees.

At the signing ceremony for the Executive Order, Secretary Shulkin also announced three new key initiatives at the Department:

### **VA Partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services**

VA is entering a partnership agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services that will allow

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## INSIDE

**VA partners with Department of Energy on big-data initiative to improve health care for Veterans.**

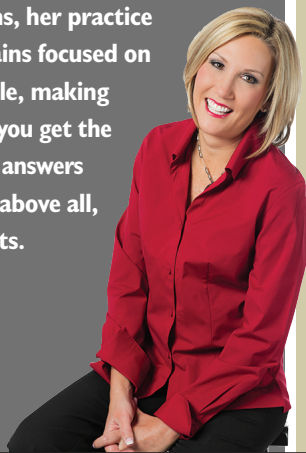
**OFFICE INBOX**  
**Office News and Events**

**WHAT’S COOKING!**  
**Sunkist Orange Soda Pound Cake**

*Jan Dils*



Jan Dils brings her expertise to issues that affect you and millions of other Americans every day. While her knowledge spans the critical areas pertaining to Personal Injury, Veterans' benefits, Social Security disability benefits and related appeals and claims, her practice remains focused on people, making sure you get the right answers and, above all, results.



## JAN'S Letter



The weather may be getting downright hot, but it's still officially spring until late June! After a long winter indoors, my family and I really enjoy getting outdoors at the first sign of spring, dusting off the grill for a family cookout or just soaking up the sun for a few minutes at a time.

Spring is always a time for new beginnings, so we thought it would be appropriate to include news of some new developments that are under way to improve the healthcare services provided to our Veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has recently announced a number of new initiatives to increase the level of care our nation's Veterans receive. Helping our Veterans win the benefits they deserve is just part of the equation for the Jan Dils team, and we are always happy to see improvements in the system. We have incorporated articles from VA in our newsletter that cover the highlights of these new initiatives, including: a

partnership agreement between VA and the Department of Health and Human Services that will allow medical professionals from the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps to provide direct patient care to Veterans in VA hospitals and clinics in underserved communities; amended guidelines removing red tape while increasing access to services for Veterans in state-owned Veteran nursing homes; and a VA partnership with Department of Energy on big-data initiative to improve health care for Veterans.

As always, if you have any questions related to Veterans benefits, please let us know. Give us a call or send an email—we are always happy to hear from you, and to put our experience to work for those who have so bravely served our country.

Sincerely,  
Jan Dils



### STAY PLUGGED INTO THE PRACTICE

Want the scoop on what's new with our business and the team? You can find it right here, so stay plugged into the practice.

Help us congratulate VA Employee **Megan Hutchinson**, who was married on May 29th to her fiancé R.J. After a beautiful honeymoon in Florida, Megan is back to work serving our Veterans!

We are proud to welcome **Alisha Chidester**, **Amanda Hartline**, and **Joyce Kirl** to the VA Leads Team, as well as **Ami Rush**, who joined our team as a medical review specialist.

**Michael Hamilton**, **Megan Hutchinson**, and **Bethany Maze** have all moved into Case Management Support Specialist roles. **Carrie Russell** has joined our team as an Appeals Clerk, **Carrie Flinn** has transitioned into Case Management, and **Devon Burnfield** is now a case manager.

## COMMUNITY CORNER

Our last award of the school year is always a special event—that's why we were delighted to announce **Mrs. Pam McClain** of Parkersburg High School as our May 2017 Jan Dils Attorneys at Law Golden Apple Award winner! We ended the season in dramatic fashion, as the entire student body entered the Field House at Parkersburg High for the presentation. Mrs. McClain's husband and daughter were also on hand for the ceremony, and helped her celebrate the win.

Mrs. McClain is the Accapella Choir Director at Parkersburg High, arranging multiple performances throughout the school year. While most teachers who are awarded the Golden Apple go the extra mile, it was a story about Mrs. McClain helping a pair of students dealing with tragedy that truly made her stand out.

Please join us in thanking Mrs. McClain for her dedication to her students. And we'll be back in a few short months with our first Golden Apple Award winner of the 2017-2018 school year!



### SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE

#### Devon Burnfield

Devon Burnfield started working for the Jan Dils firm as a Case Management Support Specialist, and has recently accepted the position of VA Case Manager, assisting clients with last names beginning with R-Z. His background includes an Associate's degree in Event Management and Coordination, as well as licensure in Nursing. This variety in education and experience give Devon a unique combination of organization skills and genuine caring for people.

"When I think of my favorite part about working at the firm, the first word that comes to mind is TEAMWORK," said Devon. "I have never experienced the incredible sense of teamwork that the VA Department possesses. Everyone is always working hard to make sure that we are doing the absolute best for our clients."

When Devon is not helping our Veterans get the benefits they deserve, he enjoys practicing yoga, traveling, being outdoors and spending time with his family. Please join us in thanking Devon for his incredible focus on helping our Veterans!

# VA partners with Department of Energy on big-data initiative to improve health care for Veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) recently announced the formation of a new partnership focused on the secure analysis of large digital health and genomic data, or so-called “big data,” from the VA and other federal sources to help advance health care for Veterans and others in areas such as suicide prevention, cancer and heart disease, while also driving DOE’s next-generation supercomputing designs.

Known as the VA-DOE Big Data Science Initiative, the partnership will be based within DOE’s National Laboratory system, one of the world’s top resources for supercomputing. The effort will leverage the latest DOE expertise and technologies in big data, artificial intelligence and high-performance computing to identify trends that will support the development of new treatments and preventive strategies.

“VA has developed unparalleled health data trend information from some 24 million Veterans who have used VA for health care over the past two decades,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “We are partnering with DOE to use their high-performance computing capabilities to allow thousands of researchers access to this unprecedented data resource over time in a secure environment. The transformative science that will be developed through this partnership will improve health care for Veterans and all Americans.”

DOE high-performance computing represents the state of the art in global computer science, involving machines capable of millions of billions of calculations per second. VA takes privacy seriously and has ensured all reasonable safeguards are in

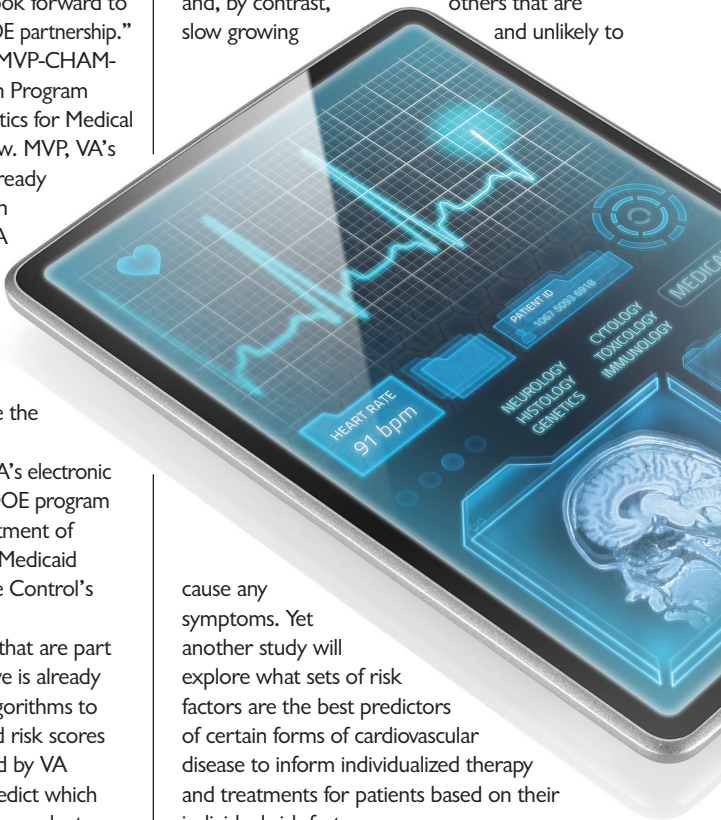
place to protect the records at the DOE National Laboratory. “Driving innovation through our national laboratories in ways that can improve Veterans’ health care is a remarkable opportunity,” said DOE Secretary Rick Perry. “I look forward to working together to shape this VA-DOE partnership.”

One part of the new initiative is MVP-CHAMPION— short for the Million Veteran Program (MVP) Computational Health Analytics for Medical Precision to Improve Outcomes Now. MVP, VA’s landmark genomics program, has already enrolled more than 560,000 Veteran volunteers, who have provided DNA samples; completed surveys about their health, lifestyle and military experiences; and granted secure access to their electronic health records for research purposes. The partnership with DOE will maximize the impact of studies using MVP data.

Along with data from MVP and VA’s electronic health records system, the new VA-DOE program will use health data from the Department of Defense, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Center for Disease Control’s National Death Index.

An initial suite of specific studies that are part of VA-DOE Big Data Science Initiative is already being planned. One aims to build algorithms to generate highly tailored personalized risk scores for suicide. The scores could be used by VA clinicians and researchers to help predict which patients are at the highest risk, and to evaluate prevention strategies. The researchers will work with VA’s Office of Suicide Prevention to enhance

current algorithms already in use in VA. Another project focused on prostate cancer will seek new ways to tell which tumors are lethal versus nonlethal cancer and require treatment, and, by contrast, others that are slow growing and unlikely to



cause any symptoms. Yet another study will explore what sets of risk factors are the best predictors of certain forms of cardiovascular disease to inform individualized therapy and treatments for patients based on their individual risk factors.

Source: [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2896](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2896)

You won’t believe that a cake so moist and delicious could be so fast and easy to whip up! This month, VA Case Manager Carrie Flinn shares her recipe for **Sunkist Orange Soda Pound Cake**—enjoy!



### CAKE INGREDIENTS:

- 3 Cups plain flour
- 2 3/4 Cups sugar
- 1 Cup Sunkist orange drink
- 1 Cup Crisco
- 1 stick melted butter
- 5 eggs
- 1 teaspoon orange flavoring, if desired

### ICING INGREDIENTS:

- 1 (3 oz.) pkg. cream cheese
- 1/2 stick butter
- 1 Cup confectioners' sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla or orange flavoring
- 1 teaspoon orange drink

**Cake Directions:** Cream Crisco, sugar and butter. Add eggs, one at a time, add flour and orange drink (alternately). Bake at 325 degrees for 1 1/2 hours.

**Icing Directions:** Cream all of the above ingredients and spread on cake.

## WORD GAME

A mumbo jumbo is a list of words/hints for you to unscramble. You then take designated letters from each word/hint to come up with the final message that is associated with each hint you have unscrambled.

RIBYLRA	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
HOSLCO	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
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DYTSU	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>
NALRE	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>

Final answer: Education  
Library, School, Book, Study, Learn



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the assignment of medical professionals from the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps to provide direct patient care to Veterans in VA hospitals and clinics in underserved communities.

"My priority has been to improve access to care for our nation's heroes," said Dr. Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "By partnering with our colleagues at HHS, we will enhance the availability of clinical care in those areas most in need."

The initial agreement enables up to 20 officers from the Commissioned Corps to treat Veterans in VA facilities that are most in need of staffing support. The agreement also allows up to 10 more officers to help support coordination for veterans receiving non-VA community care.

#### **New Fraud, Waste and Abuse Taskforce**

The Secretary announced a major new initiative to detect and prevent fraud, waste and abuse in the Department of Veterans Affairs. This initiative has the potential to save tens of millions of taxpayer dollars currently at risk for fraud, waste and abuse that can be redirected to better serve Veterans. The initiative will include bringing in the leading thinkers from the private sector and other government organizations in an advisory committee to identify and leverage cutting-edge

fraud detection tools and coordinate all fraud, waste and abuse detection and reporting activities across the Department through a single office.

The Department has identified potential savings in the area of improper payments to health care providers, major contracts, contracts for pharmaceuticals, and the delivery of benefits to Veterans. "Restoring the trust of Veterans and improving system-wide accountability are among my top priorities. It's essential to ensure that all our employees and the companies that we do business with are being good stewards of the resources available to care for our Veterans," said Dr. Shulkin.

#### **Removing Red Tape at State-owned Veteran Nursing Homes**

VA is amending guidelines to allow state-owned Veteran nursing homes to follow state guidelines in the construction design of their facilities, removing red tape while increasing access to services for Veterans. Up to now, to qualify for federal grant

funding for Veteran nursing homes in their state, Governors and state officials have had to follow federal construction design guidelines. With this announcement by the Secretary, that is no longer the case, and Governors are freed up to follow their own state guidelines in the construction design of these facilities while still qualifying for the same level of federal grant funding as before.

In announcing the move, Secretary Shulkin noted that State design guidelines already are sufficient to the task of providing safe conditions for our Veterans and the Department recognizes the need to move quickly to reduce unnecessary barriers to providing much needed services to our Veterans.



Source: [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2895](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2895)