

VETERANS BENEFITS & BEYOND

National 'Access Stand Down' Successful

As part of a large-scale and immediate effort to assess the urgent health care needs of Veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs recently conducted a second "Access Stand Down". The countrywide, one-day event resulted in VA reviewing the records of more than 80,000 Veterans to get those waiting for urgent care off wait lists. Newly released results of the Access Stand Down show that 93 percent of Veterans waiting for urgent care have been contacted, with many receiving earlier appointments.

"VA's ability to meet the primary and urgent health care needs of our Veterans is a priority for us, and why we established MyVA, which focuses all that we do around our Veterans," said VA Secretary Robert McDonald. "The Access Stand Down is just another way we are changing VA's culture, processes and capabilities to put the needs, expectations and interests of Veterans and their families first."

In determining priority of need for the stand down, VA broke down the urgent care requests into four categories:

Important and Acute, clinical concerns with highest impact on patient outcome and more time-sensitive such as cardiology;

Important and Chronic, services that address primarily long-term problems with medium risk and time sensitivity such as primary care or audiology;

Routine, clinical activities judged to have low relative risk and time sensitivity or focusing on non-medical matters such as genomic medicine or telephone case management; and

Support Services, which contribute to Veteran well-being such as nutrition and dietetics.

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who need care most urgently," said Dr. David Shulkin, VA Under Secretary for Health, who continues to see patients. "That was the focus of this Access Stand Down: to look at the patients who needed our help the most and were waiting too long. As a result of this nationwide effort with that attention to urgency in mind, I'm proud that our physicians, nurses, other health care professionals and administrative support personnel all came together on a Saturday to work to find earlier appointments for 93 percent of our Veterans with urgent-care needs."

INCREASING ACCESS TO CARE

- Lasting improvements in access to VA care, expanding capacity by focusing on staffing, space, productivity and VA Community Care.
- Staffing in the Veteran Health Administration is up more than 14,100 net — to include over 1,400 more physicians and 4,100 more nurses.
- Activated over 3.9 million square feet in the past two years.
- Increased authorizations for care in the community 46 percent in the past two years.
- Clinic production is up 10 percent as measured by the same productivity standard used by many private-sector healthcare systems. This increase translates into roughly 20 million additional hours of care for Veterans.
- As VA improves access to care, more and more Veterans are choosing VA care — for the quality, for the convenience, or for the cost-savings so even though VA is completing millions more appointments, they continue to have more work to do.
- VA facilities across the nation recently completed a second Access Stand Down to connect with Veterans who have urgent health care needs, address their needs and reduce the number of Veterans waiting greater than 30-days for urgent care. This event also aimed to improve VA's employee experience by streamlining access to care processes.

Source: www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2758

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JAN'S LETTER

Welcome to the Spring Edition of our newsletter for Veterans Benefits! As always, I am excited to share some good news and helpful information for our Veterans and their families, as well as the latest news from the Jan Dils team.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has recently made great strides in reducing patient wait times, and they are showing their commitment to keep moving toward faster care with programs like "Access Stand Down"—be sure to read the article we have included for more details.

More good news: we have included information on expanded funding that is now allowing VA to provide increased drug therapy for hepatitis C at facilities nationwide. And disabled Veterans and

injured Service members have new "HOPE" in a program offering therapeutic golf.

In addition to these news items, we have included some news from our team members, a delicious and easy new recipe, and a couple of surprises along the way. If you have any questions about this edition's articles or about applying for and receiving the Veterans benefits you deserve, feel free to give us a call or send an email. We are looking forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
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 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.



VA Partners with PGA to Support PGA HOPE Program for Veterans with Disabilities

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is partnering with PGA REACH, the philanthropic arm of PGA of America, to bring a specialized golf program to disabled Veterans. The program, PGA HOPE – Helping Our Patriots Everywhere – is a therapeutic program to aid in the rehabilitation process for disabled Veterans.

The purpose of PGA HOPE is to help Veterans assimilate back into their communities through the social interaction the game of golf provides. Led by PGA professionals certified in golf instruction for Veterans with disabilities, Veterans will learn the rules of the game, and for those already familiar with it, the professionals will help them refine their skills.

"We are grateful to PGA REACH for their commitment to our nation's disabled Veterans," said VA Secretary Robert McDonald. "When you think of rehabilitation, golf is not always the first thing you think of, but it can play an integral role in the healing process through social interaction, mental stimulation and exercise. This is a great complement to the care many Veterans receive at VA. I am confident that our Veterans will use this introduction as a platform to reenergize their competitive spirit, as well as to reengage back into their communities."

PGA HOPE is a two-step program, beginning with an introductory, "Down Range Clinic." There are currently 50 programs across 20 PGA sections, enhancing the lives of more than 2,000 Veterans nationwide.

"As many Veterans struggle with the transition back into civilian life, the game of golf delivers camaraderie and a new level of enjoyment that provides them with hope," said PGA President Derek Sprague. "We are thrilled to collaborate with VA to offer PGA HOPE programming nationwide, as the PGA of America is committed to making a more meaningful impact on the lives of America's Veterans."

For more information about VA's adaptive sports program, visit www.va.gov/adaptivesports/index.asp. For information about PGA REACH or the PGA HOPE program, visit www.pgareach.com/.



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SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE

Andrea Parsons

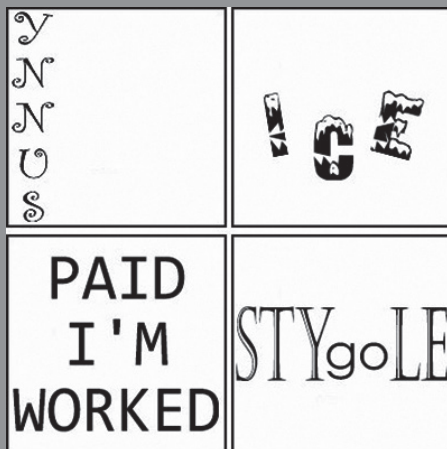
After a very successful stint as a C-file reviewer, Andrea Parsons is currently transitioning into the new role of Hearing Clerk/Appeals for the VA. "It is very important to me that my job reflects my heart," said Andrea. "We spend so much time at our place of work, I can't imagine not doing a job that doesn't lend itself to making the world a better place, for at least one person every day. I am honored and humbled to understand that what we collaboratively do within this office each day is making life better for numerous Veterans! Each of us is responsible for putting together one part of a puzzle that creates a better, more financially stable life for those who have given so much to each of us."

When she's not busy helping our Veterans, Andrea enjoys spending time with John, her husband of 15 years, and her boys Trent, 12, and 9-year old Bryce. She's also active in her church, where she leads a group for Single Moms. When she has a minute between her kids' sporting events, she pursues her favorite hobby: photography.

Please join us in thanking Andrea for all of her hard work, and congratulating her on her new position on the team!

BRAIN GAME

A wuzzle is a saying/phrase that is made up of a display of words, in an interesting way. The object is to try to figure out the well-known saying, person, place, or thing that each wuzzle is meant to represent.



ANSWERS: 1. Sunny Side Up 2. Breaking the Ice 3. I'm Over Worked and Under Paid 4. Go in Style

OFFICE INBOX

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.

Congratulations to Social Security Attorney **Linda Petit**, who celebrated her 38th year of practicing Social Security law in April. Great job, Linda!

Congratulations are also in order for **Camy Dight**, who will be moving from our Leads Department to Case Management very soon, and for **Darian Farley**, who will be transitioning from our VA Department to a new position as a Management Support Specialist.

Jan Dils team member Cheryl Wingrove has been very busy handing out Golden Apple Awards this school year to teachers who have made a difference in the lives of our students, our schools and our communities! Cheryl was proud to present February's award to Mineral Wells Elementary School teacher **Karen Branch**. Nominated by her husband Mike, who wanted to honor her before she retires in June, Karen is known for putting many stickers on her students' papers, and always has a positive spirit. "This school is just like family. Everybody gets along, everybody is doing what's best for all of the kids," said Mrs. Branch, who plans to travel with her husband when she retires this summer.

Our winner for March proves that learning is a lifelong process. **Misty Dawson**, an adult education teacher in Ritchie County, was nominated by her students who say that her classroom is welcoming, and that she puts her heart and soul into her job. She goes the extra mile, sometimes literally, to make sure students are able to get to and from school, even offering her students rides when there is a problem. "I'm still just in shock, I can't believe it," said Misty. "I put my whole life into this class and these programs, and helping my students. I tell them they're all my kids, and to be recognized is wonderful—I never expected it. It's just amazing!"

If you have a teacher you feel is deserving of the Jan Dils Golden Apple Award, be sure to send in your nomination letter at www.thenewscenter.tv!



This month's recipe for Pea Salad comes from Leads Specialist Shyla Gherke; it mixes up as quickly as it disappears!

INGREDIENTS

4 slices bacon

1 (10-ounce) package frozen

peas, thawed and drained

1 cup shredded Cheddar

2 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and chopped

3 tablespoons mayonnaise

2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions: In a large skillet, cook the bacon over medium heat until crisp. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain. Let cool. In a medium serving bowl, combine the bacon, peas, cheese, and eggs. Stir in the mayonnaise, lemon juice, and salt and pepper, to taste. Serve immediately or refrigerate until ready to serve.



IT'S TIME TO...

... Send in your Golden Apple Award nomination. **May 3rd is National Teacher's Day.**

... Whip up a batch of margaritas. **May 5th is Cinco de Mayo.**

... Call your mom! **May 8th is Mother's Day.**

... Forget about calories and carbs. **May 11th is Eat What You Want Day.**

... Fly Old Glory and show your pride. **June 14th is Flag Day.**

... Call your dad! **June 19th is Father's Day.**

... Hug a Mountaineer. **June 20th is West Virginia Day.**

... Surprise someone with a perfect bloom. **June 26th is Rose Day.**

MAY/JUNE 2016



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VA Expands Hepatitis C Drug Treatment

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it is now able to fund care for all Veterans with hepatitis C for fiscal year 2016 regardless of the stage of the patient's liver disease. The move follows increased funding from Congress along with reduced drug prices.

"We're honored to be able to expand treatment for Veterans who are afflicted with hepatitis C," says VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. David Shulkin. "To manage limited resources previously, we established treatment priority for the sickest patients. Additionally, if Veterans are currently waiting on an appointment for community care through the Choice Program, they can now turn to their local VA facility for this treatment or can elect to continue to receive treatment through the Choice Program."

VA has long led the country in screening for and treating hepatitis C. VA has treated over 76,000 Veterans infected with hepatitis C and approximately 60,000 have been cured. In addition, since the beginning of 2014, more than 42,000 patients have been treated with the new highly effective antivirals. In fiscal year 2015, VA allocated \$696 million for new hepatitis C drugs (17 percent of the VA's total pharmacy budget) and in fiscal year 2016, VA anticipates spending approximately \$1 billion on hepatitis

C drugs. VA expects that with the expansion, many more Veterans will be started on hepatitis C treatment every week this fiscal year.

In addition to furnishing clinical care to Veterans with hepatitis C, VA Research continues to expand the knowledge base regarding the disease through scientific studies focused on effective care, screening, and healthcare delivery including

to female Veterans and Veterans with complicated medical conditions in addition to hepatitis C.

"We are excited by this opportunity to work in partnership with VA to reach Veterans and their families where they live and to deliver high-impact programs to support sustainable success."



Source: www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2762