

JULY/AUGUST 2014



# VETERANS BENEFITS & BEYOND



## Independent 2013 Survey Shows Veterans Highly Satisfied with VA Care

**T**he American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), an independent customer service survey, ranks the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) customer satisfaction among Veteran patients among the best in the nation, and equal to or better than ratings for private sector hospitals. The 2013 ACSI report assessed satisfaction among Veterans who have recently been patients of VA's Veterans Health Administration (VHA) inpatient and outpatient services. ACSI is the nation's only cross-industry measure of customer satisfaction, providing benchmarking between the public and private sectors.

In 2013, the overall ACSI satisfaction index for VA was 84 for inpatient care and 82 for outpatient care, which compares favorably with the U.S. hospital industry (scores of 80 and 83, respectively). Since 2004, the ACSI survey has consistently shown that Veterans give VA hospitals and clinics a higher customer satisfaction score, on average, than patients give private sector hospitals. These overall scores are based on specific feedback on customer expectations, perceived value and quality, responsiveness to customer complaints, and customer loyalty. One signature finding for 2013 is the continuing high degree of loyalty to VA among Veterans, with a score of 93 percent favorable. This score has remained high (above 90 percent) for the past ten years.

"Every day, our dedicated VA employees, many of whom are Veterans themselves, strive to provide millions of Veterans with the excellent care they have earned and deserve," said a VA official. "Our Nation's Veterans deserve the best care, and the ACSI survey results help us better understand how Veterans feel about their overall healthcare experience at VA.

There is always more work to do, and we are focused on continuous improvement to the care we provide."

Additionally, Veterans strongly endorsed VA healthcare, with 91 percent offering positive assessments of inpatient care and 92 percent for outpatient care. When asked if they would use a VA medical center the next time they need inpatient care or outpatient care, Veterans overwhelmingly indicated they would (96 and 95 percent, respectively).

Veterans also responded positively to questions related to customer service for both VA inpatient care (92 percent favorable) and outpatient care (91 percent). Medical providers and appointment personnel were considered highly courteous with scores of 92 and 91, respectively. Additionally, VA medical providers ranked high in professionalism (90 percent positive).

"VA's strategy of providing a personalized, proactive, patient-driven approach to healthcare is positively impacting Veterans' experiences at our 1700 sites of care nationwide. We are transitioning to a health service focused on Veterans' personal healthcare goals, and this is reflected in the ACSI score." With over eight million Veterans enrolled, VA operates the largest integrated healthcare delivery system in the United States. Our mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional healthcare that improves their health and wellbeing. VA provides a broad range of primary care, specialized care, and related medical and social support services. VA provided 89.7 million outpatient visits last fiscal year. VA has 236,000 healthcare appointments per day.

(Source: : [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2537](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2537))

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Effective July 1, 2014

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Banana Split Cake

*Jan Dils*



# JAN'S LETTER

Recently, there has been a lot of news coverage concerning the quality of healthcare that our Veterans have received from Veterans Affairs, with extremely long wait times being a primary concern. But now that these concerns have come to light and are being recognized by lawmakers from the White House on down, there is good news to report, as well.

In our newest newsletter, I wanted to share some of that good news about the progress that is being made by VA. Despite the problems, an independent research firm conducted a survey that showed that a large number of our Veterans are actually satisfied with the care they have received from VA. We have included an article here that outlines the results of that survey. And there's more good news: VA is taking steps to further improve the healthcare services they provide. Be sure to check out the article about how Patient Aligned Care Teams are

providing a more personalized approach to primary care.

I can't stress enough how strongly the entire Jan Dils team feels about the Veterans who have sacrificed so much for the freedoms we Americans enjoy every day. It is our privilege to fight for the benefits these brave men and women deserve, and I am so happy to see and be able to share the good news that, more and more, our country is recognizing and honoring the service our Veterans have provided.

If you have questions about VA benefits or the services we provide, please feel free to call us today. We are always happy to hear from you, and we look forward to helping in any way we can.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Sincerely,  
Jan Dils



JAN DILS brings her expertise to issues that affect you and millions of other Americans every day. Her knowledge across vital areas – including Veterans' benefits, disability benefits and related appeals and claims – and a practice that focuses on the people, ensures you get answers and the right results.

## Patient Aligned “Care Teams” Improve Access to Healthcare

**T**he Department of Veterans Affairs' Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs), VA's model for more personalized and accessible primary care delivery, is improving access to healthcare and Veteran satisfaction, according to data recently released by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Since it was formed in 2010, the PACT program has transformed the way Veterans receive care by offering a coordinated team approach squarely focused on Veterans' wellness and disease prevention. “Every day, VA works to provide Veterans access to the high-quality healthcare they have earned and deserve,” said a Veterans Affairs official. “PACTs provide the right combination of healthcare professionals to develop a personalized health plan for each Veteran and deliver care conveniently at primary care clinics and through new eHealth options. Through PACTs, VA is achieving more personalized, proactive and patient-driven care. As a result, Veterans are increasingly more satisfied with their care.”

VA is the largest integrated healthcare system in the United States, caring for approximately 5.3 million Veterans in primary care settings. Over the past two years, VA has bolstered its support to all medical centers to expand established PACTs. Teams are comprised of a provider, a Registered Nurse care manager, a clinical associate, and an administrative associate. Clinical pharmacists, social workers, nutritionists, and behavioral health staff also support PACTs.

Since implementing PACTs, the number of primary care patients has increased 12 percent, and the number of encounters with Veterans has increased 50 percent, mostly due to telehealth, telephone and group encounters. Communicating with healthcare professionals through secure electronic means has increased dramatically as well. Despite the increase of primary care patients, access to primary care has improved and continuity of care is better.



**“Through PACTs,  
VA is achieving more  
personalized, proactive  
and patient-driven care.”**

Additionally, approximately 65 percent of Veterans requesting a same day primary care appointment with their personal provider are accommodated and 78 percent of Veterans are able to see their own primary care provider for an appointment on the date they desire. Veteran access to primary care during extended hours (non-business hours) has increased 75 percent since January 2013.

Over 72 percent of all Veterans discharged from VA are contacted within two days to ensure they are following discharge instructions and to check in on their condition. These critical post-discharge follow-ups are important to reducing readmissions.

Mental Health Integration is also a critical component of PACTs and the program's goal to provide coordinated care. Veterans now see mental health providers in the primary care setting. In just one year (FY 12-FY 13) using the PACTs model, mental health services offered in VA primary care clinics increased 18 percent.

Overall, PACTs program implementation has been associated with important utilization changes—fewer primary care patients are receiving care in urgent care settings (decreased 33 percent) and acute hospital admissions have decreased 12 percent due to improved care management and coordination from PACTs.

Equally important, both rural and urban Veterans report a high level of satisfaction with VA services. Veterans also indicated they are more likely to recommend treatment at a VA facility than at non-VA facilities. This positive feedback is consistent with the 2013 American Customer Satisfaction Index, which reported that Veterans strongly endorse VA healthcare, with 91 percent offering positive assessments of inpatient care and 92 percent for outpatient care.

(Source: [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2540](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2540))





## SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE

### Tiffany Wentzel

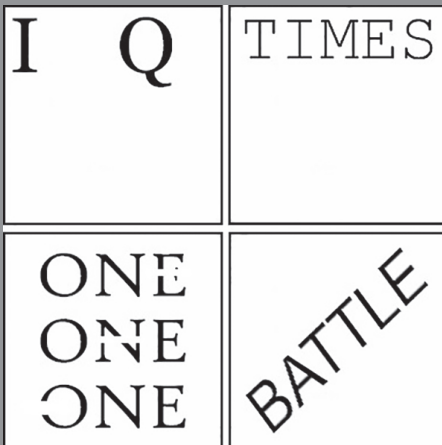
Help us welcome VA Case Manager Tiffany Wentzel, who joined the Jan Dils team in January. Tiffany has an extensive background in Veterans law, and has already become an incredible asset to the clients she works with.

"I can't express how much I enjoy working with Veterans," said Tiffany. "Anything I do for them, even if it is just lending an ear and listening, makes me feel like I am giving something back in a small way to a group of people who deserve our gratitude and respect for their service to our country. It is such an honor to help our Veterans, and it makes my job a real pleasure."

When she is not busy helping Veterans fight for the benefits they deserve, Tiffany can be found spending time with her cats Fuzzhead, Alice and Jasper, and reading (she's a huge fan of the "Twilight" series!) Please join us in thanking Tiffany for all that she does to make life a little easier for our Veterans, and for becoming such a great addition to the Jan Dils 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. High IQ 2. Times Up 3. No One is Perfect 4. Upwards Battle

## OFFICE INBOX

### STAY PLUGGED INTO THE PRACTICE

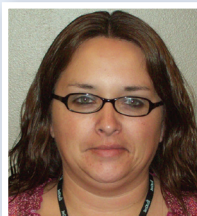
*Want the scoop on what's new with our business and the team? You can find it right here, so stay plugged into the practice.*

**And the Apple Goes To...** Jan Dils Team member Cheryl Wingrove had the honor of presenting **Mrs. Paula Sewell** with the Jan Dils Golden Apple Award for the month of March. The St. Mary's Catholic Elementary School teacher was also honored with lots of hugs and applause from her students. Mrs. Sewell was chosen for the love and dedication she has shown each day throughout her 30-year teaching career. During that time, she has spent countless hours after school going the extra mile by tutoring, serving on committees, updating the bulletin board and more. But her students and co-workers say the best part is that she does it all with a smile, and that her love for the job is contagious. "The kids, it is all about them," Mrs. Sewell said. "So many things have changed over the years and they're just wonderful, they make every day a reason to come back. That is why I'm here."

Cheryl Wingrove also had the pleasure of surprising a teacher who has earned a reputation for being tough, but thorough. **Sam Wilder**, a Chemistry teacher at Warren High School, received the final Jan Dils Golden Apple Award of the 2013-2014 school year. The handshakes and cheers made it clear that Wilder is respected by many—both students and faculty. A teacher for 26 years, Mr. Wilder says that each year he tries to work on something new, whether it's new strategies, topics or other challenges. He was nominated by a graduate, who said that the teacher is truly respected and forces students to meet higher expectations. "You've got to connect with the kids, they've got to know that you really do care for them," explained Mr. Wilder. "You have to push them. You can't let up. You can't take it easy on them, you have to let them know that you have really high expectations and once they know that and once they know you believe in them then they rise to what your expectations are."

### Congratulations to...

A new addition is coming to the Jan Dils family! Intake Specialist **Kevin Rose** and his wife Akiko are all set to welcome a baby girl, due June 19th. We will keep you posted!



## Your New Favorite Treat: A Banana Split That Won't Melt!

Jan Dils team member Amanda Richard shares her special recipe for Banana Split Cake. Whip up this delicious dessert for your next gathering, or anytime you're in the mood for a sweet treat!

### INGREDIENTS

9-10 graham crackers (1 1/2 cups) crushed  
1 cup of sugar (divided)  
1/3 cup of melted butter  
6 bananas (divided)  
2 cups of milk

2 cups of Cool Whip (divided)  
1 cup chopped nuts (walnuts or pecans)  
2 - 8 oz. packages of cream cheese  
1 - 20 oz. can of crushed pineapples, drained  
2 - 3.4 oz. packages of Jell-O® vanilla flavored instant pudding

**Directions:** Mix graham cracker crumbs, 1/4 cup of sugar and butter, then press into bottom of 13x9 pan and freeze for 10 minutes. Beat cream cheese and the remaining sugar with mixer until blended, and spread over crust. Top the cream cheese/sugar layer with pineapples. Top the pineapples with 4 of the bananas, sliced. Beat pudding mix and milk for 2 minutes with whisk, stir in 1 cup of cool whip and spread over the banana layer. Top with remaining cool whip and refrigerate 4 1/2 to 5 hours. Just before serving, top with the remaining bananas and nuts. Enjoy!



## IT'S TIME TO...

...Fly your flag and break out the sparklers. **July 4th is Independence Day.**

...Go ahead and have a second cup. **July 24th is Coffee Day.**

...Thank a sailor. **August 4th is US Coast Guard Day.**

...Take a moment to remember those who served. **August 14th is V.J. Day.**

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## IMPORTANT VETERANS BENEFITS NEWS FOR EVERYONE

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## SGLI Premium Adjustment Effective July 1, 2014

**T**he Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program will adjust its monthly premium rate from 6.5 cents per \$1,000 back to the 2006 rate of seven cents per \$1,000 of insurance, a modest increase to ensure the SGLI program remains in a strong financial position.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is dedicated to placing the interests of Servicemembers first and foremost by keeping SGLI premiums as low as possible, while also maintaining the necessary reserve levels to ensure funds are available to pay claims to Servicemembers' beneficiaries. Since the start of the SGLI Program in 1965, monthly premiums have decreased from 20 cents per \$1,000 to the current 6.5 cents per \$1,000. There have been periodic increases and decreases, but over the past 30 years premiums have fluctuated only 2.5 cents per \$1,000 of insurance.

In July 2008, VA lowered the monthly premium rate for basic SGLI from seven cents per \$1,000 of insurance to 6.5 cents per \$1,000 of insurance to reduce excess reserve funds in the program. Insurance companies hold reserve funds to ensure they can pay future claims. It is common practice in the group insurance industry to adjust premium rates as reserve funds increase and decrease, which typically happens when there are changes in the economy and/or changes in the number of death claims. For a Servicemember

with the maximum \$400,000 of life insurance, this change will mean an increase of two dollars a month.

The new premium rate will take effect on July 1, 2014. Individual Ready Reserve members who are drilling for points toward retirement or who do not receive pay for other reasons will be billed by their branch of service for the higher premium beginning in July 2014.



For information on the new rates, visit  
[www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/sgli.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/sgli.asp)



(Source: [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2538](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2538))