



Proud of our Veterans,  
Proud of America!

# THE epicenter

Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) • June 2003

## Nurse Competency Faire a Success!

It is time once again for our annual General Medicine and Surgery (GM&S) Nursing Competency Faire! Last year, we tried to make our faire informative, interactive, and fun. Many of the staff loved the format that we used, with the “Tic Tac Toe”, “Name that Sound”, “Jeopardy” and the “Wheel of Fortune” games to reinforce clinical concepts. Our GM&S Management team, along with SCI and Rehab, developed a reader, “Clinical Practice Pearls” that we shared with all of the Nursing staff, with the expectation that the nurses studied the reader and passed an exam that focused on the key points of each chapter. Last year, we emphasized the importance of the Basic Assessment, and offered the staff clinical pearls to focus on identifying the subtle differences between the normal versus the abnormal physical assessment.

This year, we once again used the “Clinical Practice Pearls” Reader, and we supplemented the reader with new chapters on the Cardiac, Respiratory, Urinary, Gastrointestinal and Neurological Systems. Nurses were given the printed supplements, as well as had access to these materials on the vapaweb site. The focus this year was on “Response to Med/Surg Emergencies”, with a sub-theme: “As American as Baseball and Apple PIE” to tie in the 25 new “Problem-Intervention-Evaluation (PIE) documentation electronic templates we had developed for the GM&S areas.

Amid a backdrop of red, white and blue patriotic and baseball decorations, a baseball video playing in the background, and huge plates of apple pie, each station had a teaching component, as well as an interactive game that reinforced key clinical concepts of managing Med/Surg emergencies. The GM&S Nurse Managers, (David Renfro RN, Virginia Ulanimo RN, Ella Benadam-Lenrow RN), 4A

Clinical Nurse Specialist Connie Yabes-Sabolboro RN, and 3C Nurse Educator Shahina Zindani RN, developed creative games based on “Hollywood Squares”, “Family Feud”, “Hit or Miss”, and “Outburst” that were engaging, interactive, and lots of fun. Staff response to the faire has been tremendous, with many even commenting that, despite having to take a comprehensive exam at the end, they had learned a lot and were looking forward to next year’s faire!



*Virginia Ulanimo, RN, 4A Nurse Manager,  
presenting the Respiratory station at the  
General Medicine and Surgery Nursing Competency Faire.*

### What’s Inside ...

A Word From Our Director .....	2
Things to Know About CARES .....	3
VAPAHCS Recognizes its Nurses! .....	4
VA Teaches Disabled Veterans to Ski .....	5
Employee News .....	6

VA Learning Online .....	7
Blood Drive at Palo Alto Division .....	7
CARES Comment Form .....	8
Cartoon .....	8

# A Word From Our Director



**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, Director  
VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

During the month of May, we took time to honor our staff in Nursing Service and all registered nurses, licensed vocational nurses and nursing assistants and other nursing staff across our health care system. We also recognized the contributions of the clerical staff within Nursing Service. Due to our many and diverse sites, we have expanded "Nurse Week" to "Nurse Month" at

VAPAHCS. Particularly in the state of California, with the recently imposed nurse staffing ratios and the infamous shortages of nursing staff both now and in the future, the importance of attracting and retaining highly qualified nursing staff is critical. With the advocacy and support of the Chief of Staff, Associate Director and our Nursing Leadership, we have implemented some new financial incentives for all of our nursing staff, including our clerks.

While those incentives are important, educating other staff and the public on the critical contributions nurses (of all descriptions) make in bettering the lives of their patients must be improved - and never taken for granted. While I commend the staff of every inpatient ward and outpatient clinic and service for their outstanding contributions this year, I want to especially recognize the long term care nursing staff at the Livermore and Menlo Park Divisions. Over the past year, they have and continue to experience an unprecedented amount of disruption in the form of moves and relocations due to construction. Not since the activation of Buildings 100 and 101 at the Palo Alto Division have so many moves occurred for a prolonged period. I extend my special thanks to you for your infinite patience and the superb care you provided throughout these moves. My sincere thanks to all of our nursing staff at all sites for your continued dedication and commitment to our veterans.

On May 15, Dr. Wiebe, VISN 21 Network Director, and Judy Daley, VISN 21 Quality Manager, conducted our second quarter performance review. Our performance results continue to be outstanding. Despite some of the challenges we are experiencing with the external peer review process in gauging our performance on clinical practice guideline adherence and other quality measures, our second quarter performance showed marked improvement. Our clinic waiting times are well below mandated levels in five of six areas. We are on course to exceed our MCCF collections goal of \$13 million. We are performing well in all of the special emphasis measures. We are taking steps to increase the numbers of patients we treat in the special capacity areas. This performance is particularly outstanding given that we operated under a continuing resolution for most of the first two quarters of FY 2003. Congratulations to all of you for these stellar results.

During the week of May 19, VAPAHCS hosted officials from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) while they conducted an Environmental Management Review (EMR). VAPAHCS is one of several pilot sites within VHA for this new EPA review process. Executive Order 13148, "Greening the Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management", requires every agency to have an environmental management system (EMS) in place by December 2005. The EPA definition of EMS is much broader than the activities in our Environmental Management Service. As a result of this review, we will be improving our communication of the many actions we are taking to preserve and protect the environment. We will also be heightening the awareness of all employees as to the role they play in our plan. I want to thank Pat Allyn, Quality Manager, for coordinating this comprehensive assessment and all the staff who participated in this process. Of all the many reviews we undergo, I believe our VAPAHCS employees will readily embrace the actions required to achieve the overall goal of this review, protecting and improving the environment.

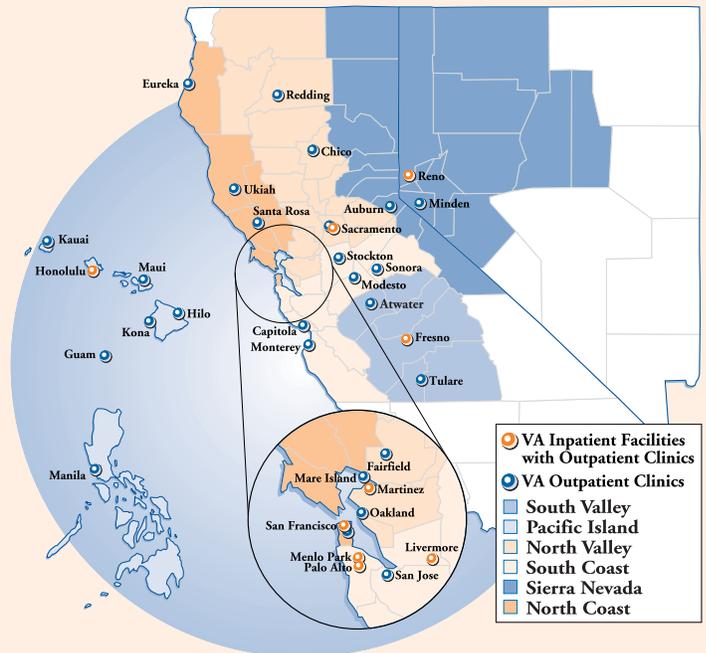
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth J. Freeman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Joyce Freeman  
Director

## Things to Know About CARES

- CARES is about preparing for the future. The CARES process will predict the need for VA health care services in the future, assess our current capabilities and recommend changes to realign and enhance VA health care services.
- CARES Phase II will become a benchmark model for future planning in the VA.
- The VA health care system was designed and built decades ago when the focus was on hospital care. With new methods of medical treatment and changes in where veterans live, VA wants to be sure it can continue to provide health care where it is most needed.
- Any savings that result from the CARES process will be used throughout each Network to enhance inpatient and outpatient care, as well as special disability programs and long-term care.
- Hospital beds do not equate with quality or quantity of medical care. VA should not keep unneeded beds open at the expense of access and quality. VA must make the most efficient use of its resources.
- CARES will allow VA to put investment dollars where the veterans are going to be and where the services will be required.
- The VA Sierra Pacific Network has six markets:
  - North Coast
  - South Coast
  - North Valley
  - South Valley
  - Sierra Nevada
  - Pacific Island
- The VA Sierra Pacific Network serves a population of 1.13 million veterans.
- In FY01, the VA Sierra Pacific Network provided care to more than 167,000 veterans with an operating budget of \$902 million.
- The VA Sierra Pacific Network operates 653 hospital beds, 802 nursing home beds, 100 domiciliary beds and 89 Psychiatric Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program beds.
- Nearly 1.9 million outpatient visits are provided in the VA Sierra Pacific Network each year.
- The VA Sierra Pacific Network has 482, 687 Priority 1-6 veterans residing in its catchment area, representing 43 percent of the total veteran population.
- The Network has enrolled 260,425 veterans, of which 193,199 (74 percent) are Priority 1-6.
- Each year, the VA Sierra Pacific Network provides care to 185,437 outpatients and 13,165 inpatients.
- The central strategy the Network has adopted to deliver services to its enrolled veterans is development of an integrated system of care sites. Across these sites, veterans will have timely and convenient access to a full continuum of coordinated, high quality care.

### VA Sierra Pacific Network Market Areas



# VAPAHCS Recognizes its Nurses!

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has one of the largest nursing staffs of any health care system in the world. Numbering nearly 55,000 nationwide, the VA nursing team - composed of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, vocational nurses and nursing assistants - provides comprehensive and compassionate care to the nation's veterans, helping them to maintain or regain health, to learn to live with disabilities or to die with dignity.

VA provides training and cooperative education in undergraduate and graduate programs at numerous colleges and universities. VA nurses are valued members of the VA health care team, contributing their knowledge and expertise to the care of patients.

In 1921, shortly after the end of World War I, Congress established the U.S. Veterans Bureau. A year later, Public Health Service hospitals were assigned to the Veterans Bureau, transferring 1,400 nurses. The Veterans Administration was established in 1930 to consolidate and coordinate government activities affecting war veterans. Approximately 2,500 registered nurses were employed in VA Nursing

Service. During World War II and the Korean War, the military demand for nurses caused a shortage at VA hospitals.

In the 1950s, VA expanded its affiliations with nursing schools to produce steady growth in the number of nurses receiving clinical experience in VA medical centers and, thus, aiding recruitment. In the following decade, advancements in medicine required specialized training programs creating the need for advanced nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists in such areas as coronary care. Research became an integral component of VA Nursing Service.

During the Vietnam era, the VA medical system was faced with patient needs that were different from those of previous wars. Nurses were required to care for disabilities on a larger scale due to the increased efficiency with which wounded veterans were evacuated and treated. Geriatric and long-term care became specialized needs for veterans of earlier conflicts. VA nurses met the new challenges and continue to respond with competent caring approaches to constant changes in health care.

## VAPAHCS Nursing Award Winners



**Andrea Jaramillo, RN,  
Staff Nurse**



**Maribel Jimenez,  
License Vocational Nurse**



**Julie Johnson,  
Medical Clerk**



**Isidora Pascua,  
Nursing Assistant**



**Dave Renfro, RN,  
Expanded Role**

# VA Teaches Disabled Veterans to Ski



More than 350 disabled veterans skied the Rocky Mountains at the 17th annual Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village at Aspen, Colo., March 31 to April 5, 2003.

Sponsored by VA and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the clinic was hosted by the Grand Junction (Colo.) VA Medical Center and VA's Rocky Mountain Network. At the clinic, disabled veterans learned adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing, and were introduced to a variety of other adaptive activities and sports, such as rock climbing, scuba diving, snowmobiling and sled hockey. The U.S. Secret Service also taught self-defense.

Known as "Miracles on a Mountainside," the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic showed that the lives of disabled veterans can be changed forever when they discover the extraordinary challenges they can overcome.

"The Winter Sports Clinic is an excellent program. It challenge our veterans to try new things and helps them realize that physical limitations don't have to stop you from participating in demanding activities," said Tom McCarthy, Recreation Therapist.

This rehabilitation program is open to all U.S. military veterans with spinal cord injury or disease, certain neurological conditions, orthopedic amputations, visual impairments or other disabilities, who receive care at any Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility.



*Clockwise from top: Peter Axelson, inventor of the "sit ski" and member of VA SCI Palo Alto team; Denis Schnacky on "race day"; Floyd Bethany with instructor; VA SCI 2003 Winter Sports Clinic Team; Paul Eddy with instructors.*



# EMPLOYEE NEWS

## New Employees

Acquisition & Materiel Mgmt.  
**Christopher Roberts**

Blind Rehabilitation Svc.  
**Jennifer Smith**

Director's Office  
**Lisa J. Rogers**

Domiciliary Svc.  
**Herbert J. House**

Environmental Mgmt. Svc.  
**Herbert Atkins**  
**Pete B. Calibo**

Human Resources Mgmt. Svc.  
**Alberto D. Villarreal**

Medical Svc.  
**Beth A. Martin-Kool**

Nursing Svc.  
**Edita Buran**  
**Cesario Carino**  
**Amelia Claudio**  
**Adam Dorsey**  
**Vanessa Farinas**  
**Diane Maes**  
**Nardito Manaois**  
**Niesha McKnight**  
**My Nguyen**  
**Matthew Raboca**  
**Lisa Song**  
**Jesse Trasmonte**

Nutrition & Food Svc.  
**Rizaldo Almacen**

Pathology & Laboratory Svc.  
**Meihle Encina**  
**Katherine J. Trujillo**

Pharmacy Svc.  
**Michelle Junge**  
**Charleen Ragsac**

Psychiatry Svc.  
**Shamala Kanchan**

Radiology Svc.  
**Tasha McNeal**

Research Svc.  
**Nelson Andrade**  
**Hilary F. Byrnes**  
**Danielle Fernandez**  
**Kelvin W. Li**  
**Lenore Sheridan**

Social Work Svc.  
**John Sutherland**

Ward Admin. Svc.  
**Andrew Freedman**

## Retirees

**Ruth Gilchrist (22)**  
Business Office

**Marta Grimes (27)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Joyce Kasper (21)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Arlene Nyikes (26)**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

*(Years of service are indicated in parentheses.)*

## Employee Service Awards

### 10 Years

**Joyce Bell**  
Social Work Svc.

**Kristin Collins**  
Physical Medicine & Rehab.

**Bellaflor Fontanilla**  
Nursing Svc.

**Francisco Guarin**  
Prosthetics Svc.

**Victoria Lewit**  
Nursing Svc.

**Kristi Ford-Mitchell**  
Nursing Svc.

**Jeffrey Peterson**  
Nursing Svc.

**Joan Smith**  
Social Work Svc.

**Maria Tolentino**  
Nursing Svc.

### 15 Years

**Charles Anderson**  
Anesthesiology Svc.

**Ralph Bell**  
Engineering Svc.

**Magdalena Calubiran**  
Nursing Svc.

**Joni Drobick**  
Director's Office

**Rosalie Gregorio**  
Nursing Svc.

**Maribel Jimenez**  
Nursing Svc.

**Evangeline Kelly**  
Nursing Svc.

**Bonnie Marty**  
Pharmacy Svc.

**William McCray**  
Fiscal Svc.

### Kenneth Sugiyama

Information Resources Mgmt.

**Jane Tran**  
Director's Office

**Hazel Voorhies**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

**Ariana Wyle**  
Fiscal Svc.

### 20 Years

**Darlene Aguirre**  
Pathology & Laboratory Svc.

**Robert Barber**  
Radiology Svc.

**Dennis Carter**  
Research Svc.

**Karen Doi**  
Engineering Svc.

**Thomas Snell**  
Nursing Svc.

**Robert Smith**  
Acquisition & Materiel Mgmt.

### 25 Years

**Bobby Fontela**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

**Michael Gire**  
Pathology & Laboratory Svc.

**Samuel Nichols**  
Pharmacy Svc.

**Evelyn Shinoda**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

### 30 Years

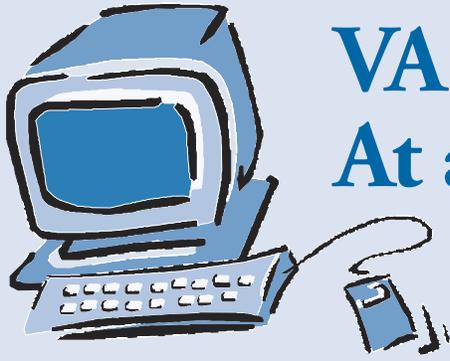
**Ellen Caldwell**  
Nursing Svc.

**Virginia Concepcion**  
Director's Office

**Lorraine Guerrero**  
Pathology & Laboratory Svc.

### 35 Years

**Victoria Wolfe**  
Nursing Svc.



# VA Learning Online: At a Computer Near You!

*(Taken from EES NEWS Volume 3, No.1)*

Getting smarter just got easier—thanks to a new Employee Education System (EES) initiative and cyberspace. The EES has partnered with the VA Learning University (VALU) to create a new web-based campus for VA staff. VA Learning Online (VALO) was launched last July. This campus now houses nearly 1,500 courses and allows VA employees to take online courses from work at home or anywhere they have access to a computer with Internet access. Courses range from application Development and Programming to Business Law and can be completed for General Education Diploma (GED) or college credit. VALO is another option for us to provide quality education and training to employees, and yet another way to create

a high-performance, continuously learning work-force, giving all VA employees the opportunity to get the essential education they need from one place at their own pace and convenience. Courses are at no cost to employees and can be taken in 15 to 30 minute intervals and book-marked to return and complete at the employee's convenience. In its first three month, VALO has had more than 10,000 VA employees from all administrations enrolled in the campus. You can access VALO from the VALU website at <http://vavw.va.gov/> or at [www.vcampus.com/VALO](http://www.vcampus.com/VALO). Overall, VALO is easily accessible and a great way to take a variety of quality online courses. Ladies and Gentlemen, start your computers...VALO has taken off!

## Blood Drive at Palo Alto Division

VA Palo Alto Health Care System will be hosting a Blood Drive with the Stanford Blood Center on Friday, July 11, 2003, from 09:00am to 1:00pm in the Auditorium of Building 101 at the Palo Alto Division. To schedule an appointment please call Julie Harper at (650) 617-2665 / x22212 or e-mail [Julie.harper@med.va.gov](mailto:Julie.harper@med.va.gov) please have a 1st and 2nd choice available. Appointments are scheduled in 15 minutes increments. If you have any medical questions please call (650) 725-9968.

Since each blood donation is split up into its many different collection parts (red cells, white cells, plasma, platelets, and cryo-precipitate), each person who donates can help save 3 to 4 different lives! It takes approximately 45 minutes to an hour for the complete donation process. Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments have first priority. Refreshments (cookies, ice cream, juice, and pretzels) will be available for all donors. All participants will get a free total, cholesterol level screening.

Stanford Blood Center provides blood and blood products for many Peninsula and South Bay Hospitals, including VAPAHCS and its own Stanford Hospital and Lucile Salter Packard Children's Hospital.

### Requirements for Donating

- Must be between 17 - 74 years of age
- Must weigh at least 110 pounds
- Must be feeling well and healthy
- Allergies and allergy medication are OK
- Must be well hydrated- Drink plenty of fluids
- Must have eaten within 4 hours prior to donating
- Must bring a photo ID at the time of registration

## CARES: Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services Comment Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

My relationship to the VA is: \_\_\_\_\_

Veterans Service Organization (VSO). Please name VSO: \_\_\_\_\_

Congressional Office. Please name office: \_\_\_\_\_

Veteran/Patient

VA Employee

Medical School Affiliate. Please name Medical School: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer

Department of Defense. Please name Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Labor Union. AFGE 1601 \_\_\_\_\_ AFGE 2110 \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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Due to space limitations, it is not  
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We welcome any comments,  
suggestions or story ideas  
you may have; please contact the  
Communications Officer (00A) at  
ext. 64888 or directly at  
650-858-3925.

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**Chuck Revell**



**Tommy and Joey  
enjoyed the  
many facets of  
Little League  
Baseball.**