



Proud of our Veterans,
Proud of America!

THE epicenter

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

VAPAHCS Summer Scholars Program

The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Bay Area and Western Chapter and the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Service at VAPAHCS Summer Scholars Program awarded five collegiate undergraduate students/recent graduates the opportunity to spend ten weeks over the summer (June 16 to August 22) in clinical research settings at the VAPAHCS Palo Alto Division.

Each Scholar worked with either a clinical researcher, physician or other clinician who served as a Mentor on an assigned research project. The Mentor supervised the progress of the Scholar's learning experience and research.

Scholars spent approximately one half of each day participating directly in research. The other significant component of this program is clinical exposure achieved through direct patient contact and observation. All Scholars attended clinical and research seminars several times each week, offering an introduction to various medical specialties and services at VAPAHCS. There were also opportunities for hospital rounds and a host of medically-related experiences, including surgery and autopsy observations, outpatient clinics and rehabilitation activities such as physical therapy. Special outside (i.e., social) events were planned throughout the course of the program so that Scholars could enjoy the summer in the Bay Area.

At the conclusion of the ten-week experience, Scholars were required to prepare a written project report and to present their projects

during a final presentation. Medical staff, researchers, friends, and family were invited to attend this symposium.

The goal of the Summer Scholars Program is to expose students to the clinical and research aspects of a career in academic medicine and to provide firsthand experience with the medical and lifestyle aspects of spinal cord injury.



Jenny Kiratli, SCI Service (back row, center) with summer scholars (clockwise from upper left) Neil Mehta, Ben Landis, Wan Bahng, Hannah Moon, and Monica Ho.

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A Word From Our Director



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

I hope all of you have enjoyed some well-deserved rest over the summer months. It has been an especially hectic summer for the VA in terms of media coverage. I will briefly highlight some of the events that have been widely covered recently.

Secretary Principi has encouraged all VA leaders to ensure all employees are aware of the VA eligibility for veterans of a combat theater. This care is available

to veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations in a period of war, after the Gulf War or in combat against a hostile force during "a period of hostilities" after November 11, 1998. VHA Directive 2002-049, titled *Combat Veterans Are Eligible For Medical Services For 2-Years After Separation From Military Service Notwithstanding Lack of Evidence for Service Connection*, issued September 11, 2002, contains detailed information on this. We have been advised these combat veterans should be given the highest priority when scheduling patients for care. All of our VAPAHCS front line clinic clerks and eligibility and enrollment staff have been trained on the requirements of this directive. In addition, Joe Russo, Patient Advocate, will now serve as our VAPAHCS primary point of contact for all issues regarding combat veterans. If you have any questions regarding this directive, please contact Mr. Russo.

VA also recently announced the *Transitional Pharmacy Benefit Program*. VA Central Office recently submitted guidance on a program that will permit VA to furnish medications for new veteran patients enrolled in VA's health care system on or before July 25, 2003, who requested a primary care appointment by that date who are either on a waiting list for their initial primary care appointment or who will be waiting more than 30 days for their initial primary care appointment as of September 22, 2003. This benefit does not apply to new priority 8 veterans seeking to enroll since January 17, 2003. VAPAHCS will identify which of its enrolled veterans are eligible for this benefit and notify those veterans in writing. We are making every effort to provide initial appointments for as many of

these veterans as possible over the next several weeks. We have discussed this program extensively with staff and Veteran Service Officers. Our pharmacy staff, ambulatory care staff and business office staff have been made incredible efforts to understand and comply with this new program. My sincere thanks to all of you for your efforts.

Finally, I want to address the many concerns and questions raised following the release of the Draft National CARES (Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services) Plan. This plan was released on August 4, 2003. The recommendations contained in the plan have been submitted to an independent CARES Commission. All recommendations in the plan will be rigorously reviewed. It is critical to note that the Draft National CARES Plan is an interim step in the process, and that no final decisions have been made. It is also important to remember the plan is based on a 20-year capital planning cycle and will be phased in over a period of years.

The Draft National Plan recommends realigning the services currently located at the Livermore Division. The primary components of the Livermore realignment plan are:

- Relocating 80 of the 120 NHCU beds at Livermore to Menlo Park
- Relocating 40 of the 120 NHCU beds at Livermore to the community
- Opening two large CBOCs - one in the East Bay and one in the Valley
- Relocating the 30 sub-acute beds at Livermore to Palo Alto

I have reviewed the draft plan with the employees of the Livermore Division at two separate town hall meetings. I have held numerous meetings with Veteran Service Officers, Union officials and elected officials. However, I strongly encourage all employees, veterans and stakeholders to review the plan and to submit their comments to the CARES Commission. Written comments may be mailed to Richard E. Larson, Executive Director, CARES Commission, faxed to 202-501-2196, or e-mailed through the website at www.carescommission.va.gov. The Commission will use this information in presenting their recommendations to Secretary Principi in December.

I very much appreciate the comments we have received to date. We have made all of the comments received available to the CARES Commission and will continue to do so. I understand that the uncertainty these processes create is very difficult. I will continue to provide everyone with as much information as possible as this process continues.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Elizabeth J. Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Elizabeth Joyce Freeman
Director

A Message from Secretary Principi



Anthony J. Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

August 22, 2003

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal described how a badly injured veteran of our campaign in Afghanistan failed to receive benefits to which he was entitled because our employees acted in a “business as usual” manner by not making an extra effort to obtain in-

formation they needed to properly and quickly decide the veteran’s claim. VBA and VHA staff missed an opportunity to assist the veteran because our organizational “mindsets” got in the way.

Events like this are unacceptable. They cannot happen again.

Soon, each of you will be given specific directions to ensure that such events do not happen again, but in the meantime, please understand that every VA employee has an obligation to ensure that every veteran who is wounded, injured, or ill from training for, preparing for, or fighting our war against terror receives priority service – and especially to ensure that they do not “fall through the cracks.” If you need information to assist a veteran of America’s new war, you have an obligation to both find that information-and obtain it. And, conversely, if you have information someone else needs, you have an obligation to get that information to where it is needed.

Don’t just send it-make sure it is received and understood by the recipient, so that your fellow employee can properly serve the veteran he or she is helping.

The men and women who embody our Department now have the rarest of opportunities: another chance to make a first impression. VA still carries a burden from the mistrust and anger many Vietnam veterans have as a result of their experiences with VA from thirty-five years ago. Many veterans of Desert Storm have similar feelings. Our actions over the next few months will define our Department for the lifetime of the veterans who are now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Let me remind you of the words of my great predecessor, General Omar Bradley: “We are dealing with veterans, not procedures: with their problems, not ours.” I place tremendous importance on meeting our obligations to veterans returning injured or wounded from combat or military operations. It will be difficult for any VA employee to be overzealous in serving the casualties of the war in which we are now engaged. Conversely, we will have failed to meet our very reason to exist as a Department if a veteran is poorly served-or because we are acting in a routine, “business as usual” manner.

Each of us works for the Department of Veterans Affairs because we believe in VA’s sacred mission to care for veterans and the men and women who now serve in our armed forces. Today’s servicemembers did what was required of them-and some of them have paid a heavy price to meet their commitment to our Nation. It is now our turn to step up to the plate and do what must be done to honor our commitment, and President Lincoln’s promise, to these heroes. In my heart, I know I can count on each and every one of you to do your level best.

“Putting Veterans First”



CARES Commission Hearings

What is the CARES Commission role?

The CARES Commission is an independent commission chartered with the responsibility to provide the Secretary with recommendations on the Under Secretary for Health's Draft National CARES Plan. In making its recommendations, the Commission will consider written comments from all stakeholders and hold public hearings to gather input from organizational representatives.

How were individuals selected to present oral testimony to the CARES Commission?

The Commission worked with the VISNs to identify potential witnesses in the categories of employee organizations, academic affiliates, state and local officials, collaboration relationships (such as with DOD, VBA, or NCA), and other groups with an interest/involvement in the CARES process at the VISN-level (such as historical societies with an interest in VA property). When appropriate, the Commission contacted the [national] organizations or involved entities for guidance.

For VSO witnesses, the Commission contacted the national offices and asked for names for each hearing. From the names submitted, the Commission selected witnesses to invite to appear.

Only state and local officials who were substantially involved in the CARES process were invited to testify. As a result, relatively few such witnesses have been invited.

Can stakeholders who are not selected to present oral testimony provide written testimony?

Within 10 calendar days after a hearing, individuals can submit written comments on issues raised during the hearing. In addition, comments may be submitted on the Draft National Plan until October 7, 2003, during the 60-day period after its publication in the Federal Register.

Comments on issues raised during a hearing or the draft plan may be submitted by fax at (202) 501-2196, through the Commission Web site at <http://www.carescommission@va.gov> or by writing to:

CARES Commission
[Marked "Comments"]
Richard E. Larson, Executive Director
Department of Veteran Affairs (00CARES)
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420.

Will computers be available at hearing sites for those who wish to prepare written testimony?

Yes. VISNs will supply computer(s) and computer operator(s). Blank forms will also be available at the hearings for those who want to write their comments. Individuals also can send comments to the Web or mailing address shown above.

Will written testimony be reviewed and considered by the Commission in its deliberations?

Yes. Written comments will be considered.

Will written comments be recorded as part of the public record subject to the FOIA?

Comments will be compiled and maintained as part of the public record of the Commission. They will be available under FOIA.

EMPLOYEE NEWS

New Employees

Business Office
Virginia K. Thai

Library Svc.
Alison Finch

Director's Office
Gwendolyn Kyle
Christopher Oligny

Engineering Svc.
Pham Nguyen

Fiscal Svc.
Joseph T. Lee

Human Resources Mgmt. Svc.
Emiliana Deleon
Akiko Giordono

Nursing Svc.
Shirley Abraham
Samantha Bagshaw
Larry Cardoza
Erano Carino
Josephine Carlos
Melba Castillo
Debbie Chang
Evelyn Culata

Nursing Svc. (cont'd)
Adrienne Cunningham
Teresita Dela Cruz
Pacita Fernandez
Lina Fine
Ledda Gandeza
Heidy Garcia
Elaine Guernsey
William Herion
Madeline Hernandez
Marjorie Karenga
Luzviminda Laguna
Melissa Lara
Fe Layos
Rommel Lubang
Christina Mao
Nina Nguyen
Cecelia Peters
Veronica Plantado
Tanya Reynoso
Kimberly Rich
Narne C. Ryan
Brenda Salanga
Margaret Smith
Elisa Taylor
Getulio Valino

Nursing Svc. (cont'd)
Lea Velasquez
Sarah Wagner
Helena Walton
Joan Yamasaki

Pharmacy Svc.
Joselito Catoc
Sora Youn

Physicians
Jasdeep Aulakh M.D.
Ann Bogan M.D.
John F. Cesca
Scott Chiang M.D.
Thomas Harrison M.D.
Jennefer Kieran M.D.
Jean Lee M.D.
Hoo Shamord Nayersina
Michael K. Ong
Mahnoosh Seifoddini
Tasha Souter M.D.
Khin M. Zaw

Police Svc.
Armaund Fowler
Lonnie Hinton

Recreation Svc.
Andrew Duprey

Research Svc.
Christine Dairaghi
Catharine Fenn
Joseph Fineman
Sally S. Hui
Valerie Jackson
Robyn N. Lewis

Social Work Svc.
Oona Houston

Surgical Svc.
Catherine Glynn-Milley

Ward Administration
Mark Bouthiller
Kymmonya Gates

Retirees

Julianne Guzman (47)
Medical Svc.
Felix Zajac (28)
Research Svc.

Years in service are indicated in parentheses.

Employee Service Awards

10 Years

Tito Amasol
Acquisition & Materiel Mgmt.
Kedarnath Challakere
Psychiatry Svc.
John Chmielinski
Business Office
Paul Khavari
Dermatology Svc.
John Kodis
Radiology Svc.
John Maddock
Social Work Svc.
Colleen Oelkers
Nursing Svc.
Susan Pejoro
Spinal Cord Injury Svc.
Josephine Relos
Nursing Svc.
Stacy Rosen
Psychiatry Svc.
Roy Sasaki
Spinal Cord Injury Svc.

Tonora Shannon
Research Svc.

15 Years

Shayesteh Ahmed
Nursing Svc.
Eden Batangan
Nursing Svc.
Rosita Diocares
Fiscal Svc.
Florence Foulke
Nursing Svc.
Imelda Garces
Nursing Svc.
Kathryn Haysbert
Nursing Svc.
Christine Jacobson
Nursing Svc.
Consolacion Ongyod
Nursing Svc.
Rogelio Ramirez
Human Resources
Donald Schmidgall
Medical Svc.

20 Years

Pamela Bahr
Pathology & Laboratory Svc.
Richard Diggs
Nutrition & Food Svc.
Carlos Galavez
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.
Lyann Kinoshita
Human Resources
Cherri Leake
Nutrition & Food Svc.
Zina Lopez
Fiscal Svc.
Patrick O'Donnell
Nursing Svc.
Anne Palath
Nursing Svc.
Tyra Sandher
Nursing Svc.
Katherine Yoon
Psychiatry Svc.
Richard Wall
Nursing Svc.

25 Years

Susan Astorga
Human Resources
Lois-Ann Flagg
Nursing Svc.
Sandra Goodman
Business Office
Alberto Nacu
Nutrition & Food Svc.
Richard Wing
Nursing Svc.

30 Years

Perrin French
Psychiatry Svc.
Sylvester McNeil
Engineering Svc.
Alice Naqvi
Nursing Svc.
Frank Schleifer
Voluntary Svc.

35 Years

Linda Lautner
Nursing Svc.

VA Depression Fair

*October 28, 2003
10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.*

Palo Alto Division Auditorium

The Fair will include:

- Prevalence
- Early Recognition
- Signs & Symptoms
- Association with Medical Conditions
- Treatment Options
- Research Innovations

Target Audience:

- Visitors
- VA Patients,
- VA Employees

Sponsored by VAPAHCS
Advance Practice Mental Health Nurses
Refreshments, Games, Interactive Learning
will be provided

For more information call
extension 22503, 64034 or 64393

American Indian Heritage Month Observances

This year's upcoming American Indian Heritage Month observances will be held on the following dates and times:

November 5th	November 12th
Menlo Park Division Chapel	Palo Alto Division Auditorium
11:00 AM	11:00 AM

Respect – short powerful film dedicated to the People – provides information which will enable the viewer to become an advocate for Indian Veterans. It is considered recommended viewing for all VA employees. American Indian Veterans have served in the armed forces at three times the rate of any other cultural groups per capita. Indian veterans from any of the 575 federally recognized tribes visit VA medical centers across the United States. A screening of *Respect* will be presented following the Menlo Park and the Palo Alto program events, followed by a short discussion. The film, which remains relevant today, was originally presented to VAPAHCS employees in November 2001.

Take the Bite out of Sharps!

Try the Newest Safer Sharp Medical Devices



**Safety Device Products Fair
VA Palo Alto HCS
Auditorium, PAD Bldg. 101
Thursday, Oct. 30th
11:30 AM - 4:00 PM**

Door Prizes & Refreshments

**For information
call ext. 65814**

You Make a Difference!

(We welcome more contributions from LVD, Stockton, Modesto, San Jose, and Monterey.)

My husband has been a patient at your facility since 2002. His illness is a difficult one and your Medical staff have shown him a great deal of compassion and care during his hospitalization. I am grateful to **Dr. Chrisophe Gimmler** (PAD), Medical Service and **Dr. Manuel Sierra** (PAD), Psychiatry Service, to name a few of the medical professionals who have given him medical attention. On a daily basis, when he requires nursing attention, **Ms. Shahla Fuller, R.N.** (PAD), Nursing Service, is the best. She can bring a smile to his face and comfort to me to know that he will be cared for with tender patience and a high degree of professionalism. A hearty thanks to you and to your entire staff for all of the medical attention that has been given to my husband. It is appreciated beyond words.

My words cannot begin to express my gratitude to everyone involved in the care of my mother at the **VA Livermore Nursing Home Care Units, 1A & 1B**. Losing my mom is by far the most painful thing I have had to endure in my life. This loss is tempered by knowing that I was truly fortunate to share an extra 14 years with her thanks to the care and love she received from the doctors, nurses, clergy, interns, art & music instructors, food service & janitorial personnel, volunteer musicians & singers, and even other Veteran patients.

I take great pleasure in commending you on the performance of one of your staff, **Bruce Haggerty** (PAD), Pathology & Laboratory Medicine Service. In an effort to accommodate my need, Bruce exhausted all avenues to try to obtain a needed order. He then walked me over to

the clinic to inquire if the staff there could obtain the order. It was a success! A calm and gentle man, Bruce Haggerty exudes a natural ability to sooth and relax the patients. You have a gold mine in the skills and talents of Mr. Bruce Haggerty!

This letter is to give thanks to the VA Palo Alto Veterans Medical Center for the fine treatment and compassion that I have received from you all in the last five years. You have been there for me before the military was popular again. Thanks from all my heart. Special thanks to **Katherine Brown** (PAD), Business Office, who helped me with my disability claim.

A recent e-mail from a veteran's wife was very appreciative of the **Western Blind Rehabilitation Center** staff. She asked us to thank everyone for the excellent job they did with her husband. Recently she had shoulder surgery and thought her daughter would have to come over and take care of her including the preparing of meals. She was very much surprised because her husband stepped in and has been taking care of her and the house. As a matter of fact, he prepares meals and not just sandwiches, full meals. Their daughter comes over and finds herself a guest at mealtimes. One day they ran out of tomatoes for the salad, but that did not stop him. He pulled his cane out and went to the store, crossing major intersections to purchase tomatoes for the salad. She just wanted to thank everyone for giving her back her husband.

Welcome to the VA, Mr. Parks!

I do not often write a letter like this but feel compelled to do so. I recently "joined" the VA Health Care System. I kept putting this move off since WWII as I assumed the VA was just another Government organization and would treat veterans as if they were recruits at boot camp. I want to admit the I was Wrong!

A few weeks ago I had my hearing checked by Barbara at the Audio Department in Palo Alto and today my first VA physical exam by Dr. Nguyen, a Doc at San Jose. Both of these ladies and nurses were highly professional and very nice. I was impressed. All VA personnel, guards, clerks, and others that I talked to at both locations were polite and helpful.

I wish to commend you and the fine personnel in your organization. Thank you for you great service.

William R. Parks

September Word Search

P O R C L Y C A R C O M E D U R
 D E M I A L C O R P I T E D I R I
 V E T O C L A I M V R W N S A G H
 O F S T R A I O N T P O O V I C H T
 O R Y A M E N N D M I M T O T T S
 S T R O F F E R I T G E T E U S O
 I T E D M M E R U L E N R S S O T
 Y S O S D S A T W N N O T E S T M
 T C O N T R I B U T I O N W O M E
 I A E N O T F F O R P T R O T E
 L M V T S A C R I F I C E S T D O
 A E O N O T E W O R T H Y D M O S
 U D O G R A N D P A R E N T S S O
 Q C L A B O R D A Y I T U T I O S
 E O N V I H E R I T A G E O Y S

Find the following words in the letters above:

- | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| Amendment | Efforts | Labor Day | Rights |
| Constitution | Equality | Noteworthy | Sacrifice |
| Contribution | Grandparents | Proclaimed | United |
| Democracy | Heritage | Protest | |



is published monthly
 by and for employees of the
 VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

Submissions should be received by
 the 1st working day of the month to
 be included in upcoming issues.
 Due to space limitations, it is not
 possible to publish all submissions.

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**

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: _____

Please feel free to add additional comments if desired.

Submit to:
 William Ball (00B)