

A Word From Our Director



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

Congratulations to all of our fantastic employees and volunteers for another tremendously successful JCAHO survey! The survey was conducted from March 30 to April 5, 2004, using the new tracer methodology. The (two) Long Term Care, Ambulatory Care and Home Health Care surveyors conducted their surveys for three full days. The physician, nurse, adminis-

trator and behavioral health surveyors conducted their tracer visits over five full days. This was certainly the most comprehensive survey we have ever experienced and we again were accredited with very few areas of required follow up. Unlike past surveys, we did not receive a final score. The absence of a final score is part of JCAHO's emphasis on the need for continual readiness and continuous performance improvement. Given this survey occurred almost six months before the originally anticipated date of September 2004, we certainly have made great strides toward being in the continual readiness mode and will continue to do so. Our superb performance is also a testament to the outstanding care we provide to our veterans.

I very much appreciate the extraordinary efforts of all of you to contribute to our success in this survey. I especially want to thank Ms. Pat Allyn, Chief, Quality Management, and her staff for their superb management of the preparations for this new survey process. I also want to announce our preparations for Employee Appreciation Days at all sites to recognize and celebrate your hard work. Ms. Beth Hardison, Recreation Therapy Service, and a current member of the VISN 21/22 Leadership Development Institute, will be coordinat-

ing this effort. She will be working with the Site Liaisons at each site to coordinate appropriate days and times for these events.

We will be holding our Volunteer Recognition ceremonies this month to acknowledge and reward our stellar volunteers. We continue to lead most of VHA in our numbers of volunteers and hours and their monetary contributions. We have some very ambitious goals for increasing our numbers of volunteers this fiscal year. I know all of you are very appreciative of the terrific and truly invaluable assistance our volunteers provide each day. Please take some extra time to thank your volunteers this month. As I have said on numerous occasions, they are critically important to fulfilling our mission.

I want to be sure all employees are aware of outreach letters that are being sent from VA Secretary Principi to all returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. The letters contain brochures describing VA benefits for veterans and for National Guard and Reserve personnel. These letters may produce increased traffic in our enrollment and eligibility areas. We have made preparations for that increased activity. If you receive or have questions regarding veteran eligibility, please contact Eric Jacobson, Business Office, at extension 65804.

Finally, I want to again acknowledge the professionalism, expertise and dedication of our staff. Despite sensational news programs magnifying the mistakes that can and do occur in health care, you should all be proud of the service you are providing to our nation's veterans. I do want to encourage you to feel empowered to make suggestions for changes in your work areas or other areas within VAPAHCS. There is always room for improvement and with your help, we will continue to ensure our veterans receive the highest quality care.

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

Elizabeth Joyce Freeman
Director