

Healthy Women's Center

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Winter 2009-2010
Issue 3

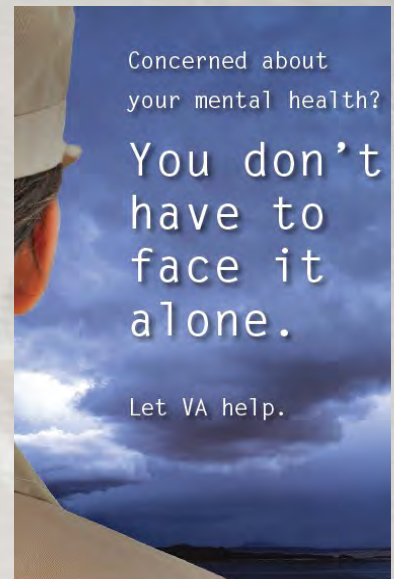
MENTAL HEALTH

The VA has responded to the growing number of Women Veterans by developing a continuum of mental health services to meet their unique needs. Women Veterans can receive a wide range of mental health services from VA Medical Centers including formal psychological assessment and evaluation, outpatient individual and group psychotherapy, and residential/inpatient care. Specialty services target problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, depression, and homelessness.

Military sexual trauma (MST) can be an issue for Women Veterans as well, with 21 percent of women seen in VHA in 2008 reporting to their VA health care provider that they experienced MST while in the military. Recognizing this, VA provides all physical and mental health care for conditions related to MST free of charge and Veterans may be able to receive these services even if they are not eligible for other VA care. In addition, Vet Centers across the nation provide readjustment counseling services for Veterans and their families. The VA has also founded a national suicide prevention hotline to ensure that Veterans who are in crisis have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. Veterans can call the Lifeline number, 1-800-273-TALK (8255), and press "1" to talk to a professional counselor at any time.

Mental health care through VA adopts a strengths-based, recovery orientation, focusing on Veterans' personal values and goals in order to assist them in developing a life that feels meaningful to them. It also recognizes that women may face unique issues in treatment and in seeking care at the VA. As such, VA facilities pay special attention to ensuring women's safety, privacy, dignity and respect. For example, all inpatient and residential care facilities must provide separate and secured sleeping accommodations for women. Veterans can also ask to meet with a clinician of a particular gender if it would make them feel more comfortable.

For more information, Veterans can speak with their existing VA mental health or health care provider, contact the Women Veterans Program Manager and/or contact the Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator, if appropriate, at their nearest VA Medical Center, or contact their local Vet Center. A list of VA and Vet Center facilities can be found online at www.va.gov and www.vetcenter.va.gov.



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The VAPHS
Women Veterans Health Program
has earned recognition as a
National Center of Clinical Excellence



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SHEILA CONLEY

OAKMONT RESIDENT DEDICATED TO HONORING THE VETERANS OF WORLD WAR II

CALENDAR 2011

Navy Retired Senior Chief Radioman Sheila Conley is working on the fourth volume (2011) calendar featuring pictures of Southwestern Pennsylvania's "Greatest Generation". Anyone who is interested in submitting a picture of a WWII Veteran please contact Sheila. Everyone who submits a picture will receive a free calendar.

For information please contact Sheila Conley at: 412-828-3238 or sheila-conley@comcast.net



Gene Kelly and Sheila Conley
London early 1950's

One good deed leads to another and Oakmont resident, Sheila Conley has done her share of good deeds. In 1998 her friend Cody Gomberg, a Veteran of World War II needed a ride to a meeting of Veterans who were trying to establish a monument to the men and women of the Second World War. Sheila did a good deed and offered to take him to the meeting. As she waited for him during the meeting, she took an interest in the project and offered to serve as the publicity chairperson. The group was able to secure a portion of the cost of the memorial from government grants, provided they raise an equal amount in matching funds.

In 2007, the good deeds continued when Sheila came up with the idea of a calendar to help raise funds for the project. She asked for photos of local WWII Veterans to be used in the calendar. She received 172 pictures of the men and women who served. The 2008 calendar included information on the battles during the month in which they occurred. The calendar was a huge success and work began on the 2009 edition. Sheila used music of the war as the theme of the 2009 calendar. Each month featured a song that was popular during the war. The major events of the war were also noted on the dates when they took place. 172 Veterans and families of Veterans sent photos and all were used in the calendar.

The theme of the 2010 calendar is "Posters of the War." It will feature the various patriotic posters of the war. Included in the calendar is a history of service flags. Service flags were placed in the windows of the homes of men and women serving in the war. Each flag contained a blue star. If the soldier died, a gold star was placed over the blue star.

In May, Sheila sent a note to Reg Henry at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette asking for pictures of local men and women who served in the war. The paper ran a small article and as a result, she received 1,000 photos. The Southwestern Pennsylvania World War II Memorial will be located at the Riverfront Park on the North Shore. "The memorial is designated to be an interactive-educational experience" said Sheila. "We want young people to be able to learn about the conflict through the memorial, as well as honor those who served their country." Construction of the monument is scheduled to begin in 2010. For more information, visit the website at www.swpawwii.org.

The cost of the calendar is \$10.00 and all proceeds go to the memorial fund. Locally the calendars will be sold at Mystery Lovers Bookshop.

Article by Gary Rogers

As seen in the November 2009 issue of the Oakmont Community Newsletter

MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

"Military sexual trauma" (MST) is the term that the Department of Veterans Affairs uses to refer to sexual assault or repeated, unsolicited, threatening acts of sexual harassment that occurred while a veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training. MST includes any sexual activity where someone is involved against his or her will - he or she may have been pressured into sexual activities, may have been unable to consent to sexual activities (for example, when intoxicated), or may have been physically forced into sexual activities. Other experiences that fall into the category of MST included unwanted sexual touching or grabbing, threatening, offensive remarks about a person's body or sexual activities, and/or threatening and unwelcome sexual advances.

All veterans receiving VA services must be screened for MST, and each facility must have a

Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator. All counseling and treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST is provided free of charge. Veterans do not need to be service connected and may be able to receive this benefit even if they are not eligible for other VA care. They do not need to have reported the incident when it happened or have other documentation that it occurred

VAPHS has a designated MST Coordinator (Dr. Roksana Korchynsky, Rosana.Korchynsk@va.gov, 412-954-4242) Dr. Korchynsky is a VA-recognized Cognitive Processing Therapy provider, the VISN 4 MST Point of Contact, as well as VAPHS's local Evidence Based Psychotherapies Coordinator with extensive experience in providing trauma-related psychotherapy.

ASK YOUR PROVIDER CORNER...

Welcome to the newest section of our newsletter! This is your chance to have health care questions answered by one of our women's health providers. Please email any questions you may have and watch the newsletter for the answers!

Question 1: What is the best natural remedy for hot flashes?

Hot flashes are experienced by most women as they enter menopause. They may be only mildly uncomfortable or they may be very disruptive to sleep and daily activities. A diet rich in soy products can bring relief to many women. It takes about 4 servings daily of tofu, soy milk (the fat-free version), soy grits, or soy beans to reach an effective level, so a woman might have to make quite a dietary adjustment to consume this much soy. Soy milk can be used on cereal, in cooking or in smoothies. Dietary soy usually works better than soy pills. An herb product that helps some women is black cohosh, available in drug stores and natural food stores. Finally, wearing layers, using fans and opening those windows can help, too.

Question 2: I keep hearing about new birth control methods where you only have a period 4 times a year. Is it safe to not have a period every month? What are the long term effects?

Great new – having periods only 4 times a year is completely safe and healthy for women on birth control pills. This is safe because the pills keep the lining of the uterus from growing too thick. There are no long term problems with this approach, and periods will return to normal when a woman stops the pill. It is a different story for women with infrequent periods who are NOT on the pill, because this may be a sign of a hormone imbalance. Sometimes the lining of the uterus can get overgrown which may be serious, so if this happens to someone NOT on birth control pills, she should see her provider.

Thank you Kathleen Mcintyre-Seltman MD for answering our questions!

THE SKINNY ON WINTER DRYNESS

Boots? Check! Parka? Check! Insulated gloves? Check!

Those of us living in cold climates have a mental checklist we run through to protect our bodies before stepping outside in winter. Yet the season brings challenges in mild zones as well. Humidity drops in wintertime, and the heating systems of our homes and workplaces suck up what little moisture is in the air.

You can often *feel* that it's winter, even when your body is warm enough. That's because when the humidity level drops below 60 percent (either indoors or outside), your skin starts losing the moisture it needs to stay comfortable. You feel as if you're shrinking—hands tighten, face stiffens, feet crack, legs and arms get dull or ashy—and you might feel relief only when standing in a hot shower.

So the answer to winter skin problems must be to take longer, hotter showers, right? Of course, that was a trick question: in winter, your showers should be short and lukewarm, and you should only wash the vital spots (you know what *they* are) on a daily basis unless you've been mucking in a horse barn all day.



More tips to end winter skin woes:

- To preserve skin oils, use very mild soaps (not deodorant or scented types) or non-soap bars or gels along with warm water.
- After a brief (5 to 10 minutes only) shower, pat yourself dry. Enthusiastic towel drying will leave your skin drier than it was before the shower, as will letting water just evaporate off of you.
- Moisturize your body right after your shower to seal in water, and repeat throughout the day. Best moisturizers are ointments, such as petroleum jelly (use a little and rub in well), and even vegetable shortening. Next most effective are oil moisturizers, including baby oil and mineral oil. Cream moisturizers come next, with lotions being the least effective.
- For faces, use a moisturizer with sunscreen; for lips, petroleum jelly or lip balm. You may need a heavier moisturizer than you use in the summer.
- Protect your hands by moisturizing them after each hand washing and wearing rubber gloves when immersing them in water.
- Electric blankets may remove skin moisture, so switch to more natural coverings. Avoid heavy clothing made from wool and other rough fabrics, which can irritate your skin.

The sun still shines in winter. It's especially harsh in snow, which reflects as much as 80 percent of harmful rays, and in higher altitudes, which increase burn risk. Wear sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays, with an SPF of at least 30. For mountain sports, a face mask and goggles protect your skin from drying wind and frostbite.

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TEXT4BABY

Text4baby is a free mobile information service designed to promote safe pregnancy and healthy birth outcomes, particularly among underserved populations.

Text4baby will provide free, weekly health related, brief text messages to pregnant women and new mothers who voluntarily enroll in the service.

Text messages, which will be based on widely accepted scientific guidelines and vetted for accuracy, will promote healthy birth outcomes among underserved populations.

Participating mobile operators have agreed to deliver text4baby to their subscribers at no charge. This is the first time this has been done for a mobile health service in the U.S.

Users can sign up via text (BABY or BEBE to 511411) or website (www.text4baby.org).

Text4baby Mobile Operator Partners:



This is no cost to user, even if she does not have a text message plan with her mobile service provider. If user does have a text plan, text4baby will not deduct from the total number of texts she pays for with her regular plan.

“Text4baby” is the nation’s first free mobile health program for expecting mothers. Messages are sent to your cell phone every week to help keep you informed, confident, and on track during your pregnancy.

“Text4baby” mission:
To educate and empower young women about the importance of having a healthy pregnancy.

Now promoting our: **Pelvic Floor Retraining Program** which is stigma-free and helps patients feel comfortable when dealing with urinary incontinence, fecal incontinence, pelvic pain, interstitial cystitis, post-partum rehabilitation of the pelvic floor, pre-surgical or post-surgical rehabilitation of the pelvic floor. During your initial visit we’ll do a pelvic exam, review of history, measurement of postvoid residual volume and urinalysis. Using these tools we’ll evaluate and develop a customized treatment plan for you. We will also provide you with computerized biofeedback and electrical stimulation, computer game assisted pelvic floor muscle retraining, dietary and fluid modification, urge suppression techniques, elimination diary review, and a home exercise program.

Why active women need a stronger pelvic floor



Learn how to maintain fitness while **ALWAYS** protecting your pelvic floor muscles.
We are looking for women Veterans of any age that are interested in learning techniques to prevent the development of urinary incontinence. You will have an evaluation of your pelvic floor strength and participate in a program to improve pelvic muscle strength.

Call the Healthy Women's Center at 412-360-3753 (Cell) for more information or talk to your primary care provider and ask for a referral.

WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE

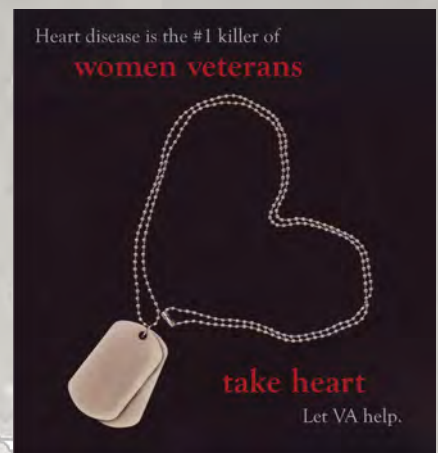
February is American Heart Month, and believe it or not, it is extremely important for women to take note of the signs and symptoms of heart disease, since 8.6 million women die from heart disease each year accounting for a third of all deaths in women.

Yet if you would ask a woman what is the biggest health threat to them, 60% would answer breast cancer, but heart disease kills six times as many women as breast cancer.

First of all the best way to combat the disease is to know the signs and symptoms and to realize what heart disease actually is. A more correct term is “cardiovascular diseases” and includes such diseases as coronary heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure, stroke, chest pain (also called angina), and rheumatic heart disease.

Coronary heart disease is the primary concern as it is the leading killer of Americans. It is a disease of the blood vessels of the heart that causes heart attacks. A heart attack happens when an artery becomes blocked, preventing oxygen and nutrients from getting to the heart. A stroke results from a lack of blood flow to the brain, or, in some cases, bleeding in the brain.

Women are less likely to recognize symptoms of coronary artery disease and women develop symptoms of heart disease an average of 10 years later than men.



SYMPTOMS OF A HEART ATTACK IN WOMEN

- Shortness of breath
- Cold sweat, heart flutters, or paleness
- Dizziness
- Pain or pressure in the back or high chest or that spreads to the shoulders, neck, jaw, or arms
- Discomfort may be described as pressure, ache, or tightness that may come and go, fullness, squeezing in the center of the chest lasting more than a few minutes
- A burning sensation in the chest or upper abdomen and/or stomach or abdominal pain
- Irregular heartbeat
- Nausea
- Unexplained feelings of anxiety, fatigue or weakness – especially with exertion

If you have these symptoms, you should contact your doctor for a full evaluation. This is even more important if you have risk factors for heart disease, such as family history, smoking, diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidemia. A full risk factor evaluation, combined with symptoms and an exam, will help the doctor know your risk for future events and guide additional testing.

If you would like to find out if you are at risk for heart disease, you can take a quiz to find out. The web site is http://www.womensheart.org/content/HeartDisease/heart_disease_risk_quiz.asp and if you have any questions you can talk to your provider here at VA. Make an appt to see your physician or nurse practitioner and talk with them regarding your risks for heart attack and what you can do to prevent from becoming a statistic.

MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT

A whole person includes all that one is: mind, body and spirit. The spirit is a natural dimension of every person. The word *spirituality* describes an awareness of relationships with all creation, for many with God or a Higher Power, an appreciation of this presence that provides for a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Some people find their spirituality in a specific faith tradition; others in nature, and still others through less healthy means—it has been said that all addiction is the result of being separated from God, or creation, or the true self. A distinction is frequently made today between spirituality and religion. Religion focuses on defined structures, rituals and doctrines.

Persons find that their spirituality helps them maintain health and cope with illnesses, traumas, losses, and life transitions by integrating body, mind and spirit. Many persons both inside and outside traditional religious structures report profound experiences of transcendence, wonder, awe, joy, and connection to nature, self, and others as they strive to make their lives meaningful and to maintain hope when illness strikes. Support for their efforts is appropriately thought of as spiritual care because their search leads to spiritual questions such as: Why do I exist? Why am I ill? Will I die? What will happen to me when I die?

Those who provide spiritual care in healthcare settings are often known as *chaplains*, although in some settings they may be described as *spiritual care providers*.

Chaplain Mary Q. Browne is a VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System chaplain with a special interest in women's health issues. She is both an ordained Lutheran pastor and a licensed clinical social worker with experience in pastoral counseling. She has worked with the GRECC Service Line as a chaplain resident and is currently working towards becoming a supervisor of clinical pastoral education. The Healthy Women's Center is pleased to be partnering with her and Chaplain Service to offer spiritual support services to our female Veterans who are interested in focusing on or learning how to develop or enhance their spirituality.

If you or someone you know would like to talk with or meet Chaplain Browne, please contact the Healthy Women's Center or your provider...or look for her in the clinic!

25 Top Heart-Healthy Foods

The foods listed here are the "best of the best" heart-healthy foods; top-performers in protecting your heart and blood vessels.

- Salmon
- Flaxseed (ground)
- Oatmeal
- Black or Kidney Beans
- Almonds
- Walnuts
- Red wine
- Tuna
- Tofu
- Brown rice
- Soy milk
- Blueberries
- Carrots
- Spinach
- Broccoli
- Sweet potato
- Red bell peppers
- Asparagus
- Oranges
- Tomatoes
- Acorn squash
- Cantaloupe
- Papaya
- Dark chocolate
- Tea

The following was written by the late educator-humorist Sam Levinson for his grandchild and read by Audrey Hepburn on Christmas Eve, 1992. It was also used by Ms. Hepburn on occasion when she was asked for beauty tips. [From *Audrey Hepburn* by Barry Paris, 1996, Putnam]

THE BEAUTY OF A WOMAN

For attractive lips, speak words of kindness.

For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people.

For a slim figure, share your food with the hungry.

For beautiful hair, let a child run his or her fingers through it once a day.

For poise, walk with the knowledge that you never walk alone.

People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed and redeemed; never throw out anyone.

Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you'll find one at the end of each of your arms.

As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands, one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.

The beauty of a woman is not in the clothes she wears, the figure that she carries or the way she combs her hair.

The beauty of a woman must be seen from in her eyes, because that is the doorway to her heart, the place where love resides.

The beauty of a woman is not in a facial mode but the true beauty in a woman is reflected in her soul. It is the caring that she lovingly gives the passion that she shows. The beauty of a woman grows with the passing years.



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