

Working Together

Issue 26
Spring 2007



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A Message from the Director



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volunteers, patients and friends of
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On the Cover:

Melanie Erskine, *MOVE!* program coordinator,
helps veteran Carvis Fisher watch his weight.
Mr. Fisher has been involved in VAPHS'
weight management programs for 12 years.

Inset: Diane Rounds, Kelly Starver, and Carole
Collet, VAPHS registered nurses, walk during their
lunch break in order to stay healthy.

WARREN PARK PHOTOS

Dear Fellow Employees, Volunteers, Veterans and Friends of VAPHS,

I am thrilled and honored to lead the complex and diverse VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System during this exciting time. The \$200 million major construction project to modernize VAPHS continues to progress forward.

At our Heinz Division, the new Engineering Service Building is 90% complete and is expected to open this summer. The Residential Living Villas and Administration Building project is about 15% complete and on schedule to be finished in the summer of 2008.

At our University Drive Division, the concrete structure for the parking garage is in place. The parking garage is over 70% complete and will be finished late this year.

Please make sure you check out our feature article on the *MOVE!* program. We want all of our veterans, employees, volunteers, and stakeholders to live the healthiest life they can. What you think drives what you do, but you can change your thinking. Make a firm decision to get serious and get healthy. Think positively! Tell yourself you're worth the effort! Think about exercise and physical fitness as increasing your energy, vitality and well-being.

This issue of "Working Together" also spotlights the many outstanding accomplishments of our dedicated staff. VAPHS Staff recently achieved a 96% response rate for the VHA All Employee Survey. They are all to be commended for taking time out of their busy schedule to share their thoughts, which are of vital importance to the direction and strategic planning of VAPHS.

Sincerely,

Terry Gerigk Wolf, FACHE
Director, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System



WARREN PARK PHOTO

On Flag Day 2007, the construction crew of P.J. Dick Corporation completed the highest point of the parking garage at University Drive and raised an American flag there in honor of the veterans they are building the garage for.



WARREN PARK PHOTO

*Terry Gerigk Wolf, FACHE,
Director, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System*

Vital Signs

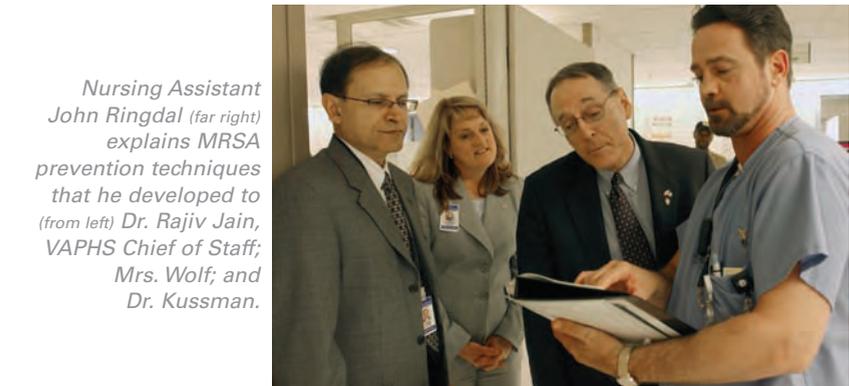
Visit from the VHA Under Secretary

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP, VA Acting Under Secretary for Health, visited the University Drive Division of VAPHS on May 3, 2007. Dr. Kussman learned about several revolutionary initiatives ongoing at VAPHS and was given a tour of the University Drive Division.

Dr. Kussman was confirmed as the new Under Secretary for Health by the Senate on May 25. [VAPHS](#)



Tina Ward, RN, Dr. Mohan Ramkumar, Dr. Michael Kussman, Donna Raley, RN, and Terry Gerigk Wolf, VAPHS Director, take a tour of the VAPHS Dialysis Unit.



Nursing Assistant John Ringdal (far right) explains MRSA prevention techniques that he developed to (from left) Dr. Rajiv Jain, VAPHS Chief of Staff; Mrs. Wolf; and Dr. Kussman.



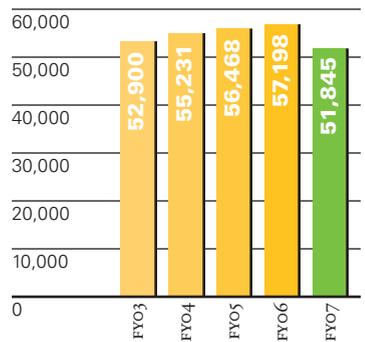
Dr. Jain, Dr. Kussman, Mrs. Wolf, and Larry Daniels, Facilities Management Service, check out a modern Hoptel room.

Visit from Congressman Altmire

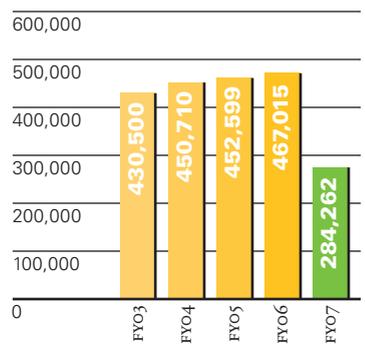


Early in his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives, Congressman Jason Altmire visited the Heinz Division of VAPHS to meet with Dr. Rajiv Jain, Chief of Staff; Carolyn Bechtold, Heinz Site Manager and Vice-President of Geriatrics & Extended Care; and other leadership staff to discuss the major construction project and other veterans' issues.

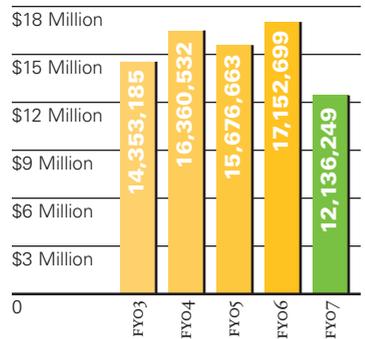
UNIQUE PATIENTS



OUTPATIENT VISITS



MEDICAL CARE COST RECOVERY



OBLIGATIONS/ UNIQUE PATIENT



FY07 as of 4/30/2007

MOVE!

MOVE! is a national weight management program designed in 2006 by the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention to help veterans reduce weight, keep it off, increase activity and improve their health.

For veterans, it is: *MOVE!*—Managing Overweight Veterans Everywhere! Now for VA employees, it is: *MOVEmployee!*—Managing Overweight/Obesity for VA Employees!

The *MOVE!* Program has been tailored to meet the individual needs of each veteran and employee. *MOVE!* provides guidance on nutrition and physical activity, and allows you to set the pace through goal setting and a stepped level approach. At VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, the goal of the program is to change lifestyles and promote quality living. While weight loss is a benefit, it is not the primary goal. The program encourages veterans and employees to eat nutritiously and move their bodies.

where because many overweight people are at major risk for ailments such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart diseases, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea and respiratory problems, joint pain and some types of cancer. Good nutrition and regular physical activity can help individuals have more energy, sleep better, reduce body fat and weight gain, control blood sugar, lower blood pressure, decrease “bad” cholesterol and increase “good” cholesterol.

The basic *MOVE!* program begins with supported self-management in which participants work with *MOVE!* team members to develop a plan to change their eating behavior, improve their nutrition and increase their exercise. *MOVE!* staff continue to keep in touch with veterans to help them track progress and set new goals, as they meet current ones. In addition to Melanie, the VAPHS *MOVE!* program is supported by VAPHS registered dieticians, and Susan Delanko, a kinesiologist.

The individually tailored program allows the patient to determine the level of involvement. Some veterans also participate in regular group sessions and may receive individual

“Movement is a medicine for creating change in a person’s physical, emotional, and mental states.” —Carol Welch, a United Nations coordinator

MOVE! is a program that is designed to help people make changes they can live with. It does not promote crash diets. Melanie Erskine, a psychiatric nurse clinical specialist and the VAPHS *MOVE!* program coordinator, emphasizes that the program is not about counting calories – it is about lifestyle change—incorporating changes in diet and activity level, over time, so that behaviors are more likely to last. Ms. Erskine refers to “tweaking” behaviors until they “stick.” She has led a weight management program at VAPHS for twelve years (long before the VA national initiative was implemented).

The program was developed to target veterans every-

specialty consultations. For those veterans needing additional treatment, more intensive options, including medications and surgery, are also available following successful participation in *MOVE!* activities.

At VAPHS, veterans can participate in a “Boot Camp,” offering four one-hour sessions on proper nutrition, one one-hour session learning appropriate exercising skills, and one one-hour session on managing stress. VAPHS is the only VA to currently offer a phone clinic for veterans who travel, work, or live far away, but would like some support in incorporating behavioral changes. Many veterans in the VAPHS *MOVE!*



GET IN STEP WITH THE DIRECTOR

MOVEmployee! encourages all VAPHS employees to take the stairs instead of the elevator, for your good health. Extra activity each day goes a long way in terms of physical and mental benefits. Perhaps you’ll be one of the lucky employees who the Director, Terry Gerigk Wolf, “catches” taking the stairs. Those caught will receive a token for a bottle of water from the Canteen!



program take advantage of the heated pool at the Highland Drive Division. Ms. Erskine has also made arrangements with several health clubs throughout the area to obtain discounts and better deals for veterans and employees. Almost two thousand veterans have taken advantage of the VAPHS *MOVE!* program.

Research has shown that decreasing simple carbohydrate intake (pop and cookies) while increasing complex carbohydrate intake (vegetables and fruit) can help people better manage stress. Because healthy employees are generally happier and more productive employees, VA encourages employees to take care of themselves. On May 16, National Employee Health and Fitness Day, employees were encouraged to spend their lunch period taking a walk, doing a walking exercise video in a conference room, running steps, etc. Over 430 employees were given a bottle of water and an “I was caught MOVING!” sticker. Since this event was so popular and successful, the *MOVEmployee!* program will now sponsor this event quarterly.

In addition a 12-week, theme-centered program, “The Biggest Loser” was offered via e-mail to motivate and inspire competition among VAPHS employees to get healthy. 197 employees completed the program successfully and demonstrated a total recorded weight loss of over 700 pounds. The employee who lost the most weight at each division was awarded a \$150 Canteen gift certificate. At the request of employees, this program will now be offered twice a year. A support program is now in place for those who participated in the weekly program whereby a monthly Outlook motivational message is delivered. Additionally, employees are able to officially weigh-in with a registered dietician once a month. The VAPHS *MOVEmployee!* program is showcased on the National Center for Disease Prevention and Health Promotion employee website as a successful example of a unique employee wellness program.

Ms. Erskine also partnered with the Canteen so that healthy meals and healthy side dishes are now a daily menu option at all three VA Pittsburgh divisions. A “Wise up and MOVE!” meal, with more healthy selections, was implemented at all three sites.

VA serves over six million veterans, of whom about 70% are overweight or obese. The *MOVE!* program is the largest and most comprehensive weight management and physical activity program associated with a medical care system in the country. VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System would like to encourage you to follow some of the steps outlined here to GET MOVING and GET HEALTHY. **VAPHS**



More Information to help you **MOVE**

To lose weight you need to do the following: eat and drink fewer calories; and become more physically active.

To get started with changing your eating habits, make one or two changes at a time and start with something easy. Drink a glass of water before eating, and plan your snacks and meals ahead of time.

Some tips/advice for eating healthy include:

- aim for at least five servings of colorful vegetables or fruits each day;
- have three servings of low fat milk, cheese, yogurt, or other calcium rich foods;
- make half your grains whole grains;
- know the limits on fat, salt and sugar;
- control calories;
- drink water or other low calorie beverages.

To get started with increasing your physical activity, start slowly, listen to your body, and remember to drink plenty of water. Exercising longer is better than exercising harder—mild to moderate exercise will do the job.

Ways to increase exercise through day-to-day activities include:

- use the stairs instead of the elevator, if possible;
- take a walk (or roll) each day;
- park further away from your destination;
- stretch while watching television;
- move your body every chance you get.

On the Web:

www.move.va.gov (for veterans)
vawww.move.med.va.gov (for employees)

At VAPHS:

Talk to your primary care provider and ask for a referral. Contact Melanie Erskine, *MOVE!* Coordinator, at 412-365-5870 or Melanie.Erskine@va.gov.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Pyramid Plan represents activity, moderation, personalization, proportionality, variety, and gradual improvement as well as the six food groups (**grains, vegetables, fruits, oils, milk, and meat & beans**).

Mailbox

Dear Doctor Khalid,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the wonderful care you have been giving me from the beginning of my cancer treatment.

As you know, you diagnosed me with cancer last year during a colonoscopy at your facility.

Since that time, you have provided me with the finest treatment and surgical skills I could receive anywhere.

You and your wonderful staff have treated me with the utmost concern and respect and both you and they have my undying appreciation for your compassion, competence, skill, and talent.

Throughout my ordeal, you have given me the courage and confidence to proceed with hope for a cure.

The results of yesterday's procedure have given me continued optimism that you and your colleagues "got it all" last year and continue to prevent "it" from coming back.

Kindly accept this letter as my most sincere expression of appreciation for all you have done and are doing on my behalf.

You're great!!

Most sincerely yours,

—P.B.

Dear Director:

This email is to express my sincere appreciation to everyone at the University Drive VA Hospital for the outstanding care that I receive. I have been seen at the Podiatry Clinic, ENT, and several other clinics. The personnel that work in the clinics seem like they are there for one reason: TO PROVIDE CARE TO THE VETERANS.

I cannot thank these people for the kind, compassionate, and outstanding care that they have given me especially over the past five years. I have had several surgeries there and am scheduled again to have my thyroid removed. I am confident that I will once again receive outstanding care for everyone from the surgeon to the nurses on the floors that will be taking care of me.

I would like to especially thank the Podiatry clinic, the ENT clinic, the clinic where they treat for the thyroid and the same day surgery personnel. They all go above and beyond the call of duty. GIVE EVERYONE AT THE HOSPITAL A GREAT BIG THANK YOU FROM ME.

Thank you,

—R.E.B.

"Our Thanks for Your Services to Our Veterans"

Administration Office:

We of the Morningside VFW Post #3945 of the City of Pittsburgh at this time would like to express our sincere gratitude and thankfulness to all of your employees of the veteran's hospital. If it wasn't for the delicate, loving, and gracious care that you, the employees of this hospital, do for our fellow veterans, where else would we go for such good health care? From the bottom of our hearts we want to express to you and also to the Administrative Staff our sincere THANKS. Only if there were more caring people as yourselves out there it would then be such a better place. "Thank you again!"

—Officers of VFW Morningside Post #3945

2006 Hands and Heart Award

Congratulations to the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System recipients of the 2006 Hands and Heart Award!

The winners are Sue Pataky, LCSW, MPH, BCD, a social worker on the hospice/palliative care unit at Heinz; Mary Frances Pilarski, MSN, RN, the Nurse Manager/Coordinator for Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) based at Highland Drive; and Pamela Malicki, RN, of the hematology/oncology clinic at University Drive. All three employees will be recognized during a special ceremony in the fall.

The Hands and Heart Award pays tribute to an employee who has exhibited characteristics that best exemplify the finest in compassionate patient care. These individuals are models of VA's commitment to keep the promise to our nation's veterans.



WARREN PARK PHOTO

Sue Pataky, LCSW, MPH, BCD



WARREN PARK PHOTO

Mary Frances Pilarski, MSN, RN



WARREN PARK PHOTO

Pamela Malicki, RN

Ali F.

Sonel

MD, FACC, FACP

ALI SONEL WAS RECENTLY APPOINTED AS THE ASSOCIATE CHIEF OF STAFF FOR RESEARCH. In this position, he is responsible for overseeing all medical research conducted at VAPHS including basic, animal, and human subject research. He manages 260 active and 65 pending projects conducted by 110 active investigators. He is also responsible for facilitating our research related academic interactions between VAPHS and the University of Pittsburgh. He is in charge of the management of our research budget, as well as, ensuring that all research conducted at or funded by VA facilities are carried out in a safe manner in accordance with federal, state, and local rules and regulations. He is also the Chairman of the Research Compliance Committee and implements policies issued by the Office of Research and Development in Washington D.C.



GLENN HANGARD PHOTO

Dr. Sonel started working at VAPHS on September 14, 1998, after finishing his cardiology and interventional cardiology training.

Shortly after Dr. Sonel started at VAPHS, he became a member of the VAPHS Institutional Review Board, which is responsible for reviewing human subject research proposals. While working at VAPHS, Dr. Sonel has been appointed numerous prestigious positions including Course Director of VA Pittsburgh ACLS (Advanced Cardiac Life Support) and BLS (Basic Life Support) programs, Chairman of the Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Committee, and Chairman of the Medical Clinical Council.

Dr. Sonel received his MD degree from Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey. He then completed his internal medicine, cardiology and interventional cardiology training at the Indiana University School of Medicine and the Krannert Institute of Cardiology in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is a Fellow of both the American College of Physicians and the American College of Cardiology. He is board certified in Internal Medicine, Cardiology, and Interventional Cardiology. Dr. Sonel was born and raised mostly in Ankara, Turkey, but spent a good part of his childhood in Indianapolis, Indiana. He currently resides in Pittsburgh with his wife Elif (also a VAPHS physician) and his two daughters, Yasemin and Derya. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with his family, photography, reading, and traveling. [VAPHS](#)

EMPLOYEES WITH

20 years

OR more OF SERVICE!

The employees listed have reached a benchmark in their years of government service during the period February 1, through June 1, 2007.

35 years

Michael A. Coyne
Geriatrics & Extended Care

Linda Glancy
Business Service Line

30 years

Annette Holloway
Surgical Specialty Service Line

Anzola L. Raines
Patient Care Services

Nancy L. Kennedy
Geriatrics & Extended Care

Lola M. Wells
Primary Care Service Line

James O. Love
Canteen Service

25 years

Adrian A. Darden
Business Service Line

Frank M. Newman
Business Service Line

Kathy K. Downey
*Medical Specialty
Care Service Line*

Larry M. Sanders
Police & Security

Sammy Johnson
Nutrition & Food Services

William A. Ward
*Facilities Management
Service Line*

20 years

Nancy Fertal
*Facilities Management
Service Line*

Jean M. Malinic
Clinical Support Service Line

Lynda M. Holley
Business Service Line

Connie Rickman
Primary Care Service Line

Laura Jenkins
Business Service Line

Patricia B. Salai
*Medical Specialty
Care Service Line*

Frances R. Keltz
Nutrition & Food Services

Ronald J. Walker
*Facilities Management
Service Line*

Lori L. Macklin
Office of the Director

Dennis E. Zaccone
Critical Care Service Line

CONGRATULATIONS!



▼ VAPHS Outstanding Physicians of the Year

National Doctors' Day is celebrated each year to show appreciation to America's physicians for caring for the sick, promoting health, and advancing medical knowledge. A special celebration was held at VAPHS on March 30 to honor all of our physicians for their special skills and dedication to the medical profession and for making a difference in the lives of others.

VAPHS is very proud of all of our physicians. Two physicians, George Eid, M.D., and Emily Jaffe, M.D., were named VAPHS Outstanding Physicians of the Year for their outstanding contributions.

Dr. Eid is the section chief of general surgery, director of minimally invasive surgery, and director of Bariatric surgery at VAPHS. Dr. Eid was recognized for his excellence in patient care, clinical research, education, and administrative leadership. He is a highly accomplished laparoscopic surgeon with skills that far exceed most surgeons. He performed the first laparoscopic, robotic-assisted choledochojejunostomy recorded in medical literature. He developed and initiated a multidisciplinary bariatric surgery program at VAPHS that has been integrated with the *MOVE!* program. Dr. Eid is a nationally recognized leader in the development of technologies for endoscopic management of Bariatric surgery patients and is an innovator in the field of natural orifice transluminal endoscopic surgery. He has published several articles that describe novel therapies for complex patients. Dr. Eid is recognized by both his residents and his colleagues as an outstanding educator and was largely responsible for introducing minimally invasive colon surgery in the Pittsburgh area.

Dr. Jaffe is the medical director of the hospice/palliative care program at the Heinz Division and is a faculty physician for GRECC. Dr. Jaffe was recognized for her dedication to excellence in patient care and for her outstanding contributions to education, performance improvement, and innovations in health care. She developed the geriatric palliative care unit at Heinz and has been the visionary behind the maturation of a more comprehensive palliative care program including units 3-North and 3-South, as well as outpatient care and an inpatient consult service. Dr. Jaffe created an effective rotation of residents, medical students, and GRECC trainees on the geriatric palliative care unit and developed a chaplain residency program for the unit. She facilitated a new policy on hospice and palliative care that provides new guidelines for the comfort of dying veterans and has promoted patient education concerning choices in cure vs. comfort care. Dr. Jaffe serves on the ethics committee and responds to all palliative care consults at Heinz. She always has an open door and focuses her practice on "what is best for the veteran."

Congratulations to both Dr. Eid and Dr. Jaffe for their outstanding medical leadership at VAPHS and for their commitment to "Putting Veterans First!!" **VAPHS**



WARREN PARK PHOTO

Dr. Eid and Dr. Jaffe

▼ VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System Celebrates Vital Research Work

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs celebrated National VA Research Week on May 13-19, 2007. The week paid tribute to the medical advances made to improve the lives of veterans. VA research is a national asset that benefits veteran patients and the entire nation by moving medical science forward into the future.

At VAPHS, the total research funding for last fiscal year was over \$22 million, and we hope that funding will keep increasing. 166 investigators worked on 266 projects last year. **VAPHS**



WARREN PARK PHOTO

In order to kick-start VAPHS Research Week, Congressman Mike Doyle (pictured above) and Dr. Joel Kupersmith, VA Chief Research and Development Officer, were featured speakers at a VA Pittsburgh research and awards ceremony.



WARREN PARK PHOTO

Dr. Gerald Goldstein, Ph.D., was given a plaque to honor his outstanding commitment to excellence in research to improve veterans' lives, in recognition of the significant contributions he has made to the field of research over the past 50 years.

