RECREATION ASSISTANT’S WORK IS A LABOR OF LOVE

One look at Marlena Regus in action and you’ll see she loves her job and the Veterans who surround her.

As a recreation assistant in VA Pittsburgh’s Voluntary Services, Regus organizes activities for all Veterans.

For women Veterans, Regus plans and hosts off-campus excursions to movie matinees, restaurants, ball games, museums and fishing or hiking day trips. On campus, Regus hosts jewelry-making workshops, an annual women’s tea and an annual birthday celebration for all women Veterans.

In May, Regus added a baby shower to her lineup of women Veterans’ events. American Legion and VFW members donated $6,000 worth of baby care products and clothing for the shower at University Drive.

A typical Monday for Regus starts in the Women’s Health Clinic at University Drive, where she meets Veterans for Gentle Yoga for Women. A certified yoga instructor leads the gentle-flow yoga class.

After yoga, Regus and the Veterans head to the cafeteria for “breakfast club,” a social event where they enjoy comradery and exchange stories. Afterward, the Veterans take an art class, often led by an artist Regus invited to the campus.

Regus said helping Veterans is the best part of her job.

“I love spending time with and getting to know Veterans,” said Regus, smiling.

For more information about events for women Veterans, contact Marlena Regus at 412-360-3756.

Thirteen Veterans whose maternity care was coordinated through VA Pittsburgh received donated car seats, strollers, clothing, toys and other baby items during the first-ever Women Veterans Baby Shower at University Drive in May.
VA Pittsburgh offers an array of mental health care options for women Veterans in a gender-sensitive environment of safety, privacy, dignity and respect. Whenever possible, we accommodate requests for same-sex or opposite-sex providers. We also have psychotherapy groups specifically for women.

**PRIMARY CARE MENTAL HEALTH INTEGRATION** Mental health, primary care and social work services in a primary care setting at our main campuses.

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH LAB** Telephone-based screening for mental health, substance abuse and cognitive problems; education about medication and psychiatric issues; and referrals.

**POST-DEPLOYMENT PROGRAM, H.J. HEINZ CAMPUS** Co-located primary and mental health care, dental, vision, polytrauma, rehabilitation, family benefits counseling and social work services for OEF/OIF/OND Veterans.

**INITIAL EVALUATION AND MEDICATION WALK-IN CLINICS** Scheduled and walk-in mental health care appointments. Same-day service for psychiatric medication. Both clinics are located at University Drive, Building 29, Reception Area 1. Hours: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

**COMBAT STRESS RECOVERY CLINIC, CENTER FOR TREATMENT OF ADDICTIVE DISORDERS, AND THE NEUROBEHAVIORAL PROGRAM** Specialty clinics evaluate and treat combat-trauma related disorders, substance abuse, and cognitive disorders, respectively. Provider referrals required.

**COMMUNITY BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS** Care for psychological, psychiatric medication and social services either in-person or via secure videoconferencing with Pittsburgh-based providers.

**DOMICILIARY RESIDENTIAL WORK READINESS PROGRAMS** Includes our recovery-oriented Psychosocial Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program.

**INPATIENT PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALIZATION** is also available at our University Drive campus for veterans who require a more intensive level of care.

Call the Behavioral Health Call Center at 412-360-6600 to make an appointment or to learn more about our programs.

---

VA Pittsburgh Women Veterans Mental Health Staff

**INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE COORDINATOR**
Dr. Karianne Bilsky
412-360-3842

**LGBT CARE COORDINATORS**
Dr. Dawnelle Paldino
412-360-1210
Sarah Merlina, LCSW
412-822-1069

**MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA COORDINATOR**
Dr. Roksana Korchynsky
412-360-1040

**WOMEN’S MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPION**
Dr. Jennifer Fabrizio
412-360-6506

**REPRODUCTIVE MENTAL HEALTH**
Dr. Danielle Novick
412-360-6267
(preconception/prenatal evaluations and therapy)

Veteran in crisis or having suicidal thoughts should call the 24-hour VETERAN’S CRISIS LINE 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) AND PRESS 1.
Life is full of hurdles and transitions, including one that Veterans know all too well – the abrupt switch from the military back to civilian life. When everyday issues become too much, we sometimes struggle trying to shake off the stress so we can reach our life goals.

VA Pittsburgh can help. Join us for Moving Forward, a problem-solving class that helps Veterans achieve their life goals. We can help you learn to tackle money problems, relationship concerns, employment struggles, health challenges and more.

Moving Forward is a free educational series that teaches practical, problem-solving skills to help you navigate life’s challenges, big or small.

These challenges may include:
» Job search
» Career change
» Parenting stress
» Relationship stress
» Marriage
» Divorce
» Negative memories or moods
» Financial instability
» Uncertainty about the future
» Lack of motivation
» Feeling misunderstood

The series will also help you set goals, brainstorm solutions, make better decisions, and know what to do when things aren’t going well.

Participation is free and consists of four weekly 1-hour sessions, either co-ed or women only (University Drive), at our main campuses.

To sign up or learn more, contact Jenna Renqvist at 412-360-1051 or Jody Tomoko at 412-822-2386.
If your body cannot use insulin properly, you can develop type 2 diabetes, or insulin resistance. Over time, you lose the ability to maintain normal blood glucose levels, risking health problems.

Poorly controlled or high blood glucose can damage your vision, heart, kidneys, feet, blood vessels and nerves. There is no cure, but diabetes can be managed with diet, exercise and medication. Oral and injectable medications such as insulin can help keep your glucose normal. Treatment and lifestyle changes may prevent or delay problems associated with diabetes.

**Heart Disease**
People with diabetes are more likely to develop heart disease and have a greater chance of heart attack or stroke. Managing your diabetes can help lower your chances of heart disease, heart attack or stroke.

**Nerve Damage**
About half of all people with diabetes have neuropathy, or nerve damage that can cause tingling, pain or numbness in your feet and hands. It is important for people with diabetes to get regular foot exams. Proper management of blood glucose can help prevent or delay nerve damage.

**Eye Problems**
Yearly eye exams are important because diabetes can cause vision loss (see Common Eye Problems in Women on page 6).

**Kidney Disease**
Kidneys filter waste and extra water out of your body, help control blood pressure and make hormones. Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney disease. High blood glucose and high blood pressure damage the blood vessels in your kidneys so they can no longer filter blood properly, allowing waste to build up in your body. Kidney failure may require dialysis to remove waste. Managing diabetes and blood pressure helps slow or prevent kidney damage.

While there is no cure for diabetes, it can be managed. It is important to take your prescribed medications to manage blood glucose and to help prevent or delay diabetes-associated complications.

*Sources: American Diabetes Association and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases*
OVARIAN CANCER
Caitlin Burley and Amy Plumley, Pharmacy

Ovarian cancer is the eighth most common cancer and the fifth leading cause of cancer death nationally. Approximately 21,000 U.S. women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year, resulting in 14,000 deaths.

Ovarian cancer starts in the ovaries, fallopian tubes or peritoneum, which are all parts of the female reproductive system. The most common type is ovarian epithelial cancer, which begins in the tissue that covers the ovaries. Ovarian cancer is often not found until it is in advanced stages.

Risk Factors
Risk factors increase your chance of getting a disease. Having one or more of the following risk factors does not mean you will get ovarian cancer, but may increase your risk of developing it:
» Middle-aged or older: Most ovarian cancers develop after menopause.
» Family history of ovarian cancer.
» Genetic mutation (changes in genes).
» History of breast, uterine or colon cancer.
» Eastern European or Ashkenazi Jewish background.
» History of endometriosis.
» Never gave birth or had trouble getting pregnant.

Signs and Symptoms
There is no simple or reliable way to screen for ovarian cancer in patients without signs or symptoms. You may have received a Pap smear in the past to screen for cervical cancer, but it is not a test for ovarian cancer.

Signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer include:
» Abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge.
» Pain or pressure in the pelvic area.
» Abdominal or back pain.
» Bloating or feeling full too quickly.
» Changes in your bathroom habits.

If you notice any abnormal changes in your body that you believe are a sign of ovarian cancer, talk to your doctor.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Cancer Institute and American Cancer Society
COMMON EYE PROBLEMS IN WOMEN
Contributed by Brenda Shaffer CRNP

Vision problems occur more often in women than men for a variety of reasons. Those reasons include fluctuating hormonal levels, eye anatomy and the fact women outlive men. It is important for women to have their eyes checked and follow up with treatment. Knowing the problems that can occur will help you maintain healthy vision.

Cataracts
A cataract clouds the eye lens, impairing vision. Cataracts are more likely after age 40. Corrective lenses and lighting can sometimes improve vision, but only surgery can restore vision lost to cataracts.

Glaucoma
Glaucoma occurs when increased pressure in the eye damages the optic nerve. Open-angle glaucoma is often painless and may not be identified until 40 percent of the optic nerve is destroyed. The first symptom is often black spots to side vision. Closed-angle glaucoma symptoms include a sudden sharp pain in the eye with nausea and blurred vision. It is a medical emergency because vision can be lost within three hours after symptoms appear. Glaucoma is treated with prescription eye drops or surgery.

Macular Degeneration
Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) destroys fine-detail vision by affecting the retina. Dry AMD occurs when the retina shrinks and develops clumps of debris, blocking sight. Neovascular, or wet AMD, develops when new blood vessels grow between the retina and the eye’s outer layer. Scars form from leaking vessels. There are typically no early symptoms, but some people develop a blank spot or haziness in their central vision and color perception. Risk factors include genetics, age, smoking, light-colored eyes and obesity.

Dry Eye Syndrome
In dry eye syndrome, too few tears are produced or tear development is disrupted. Eyes may burn, sting, feel gritty or water excessively. Vision blurs and blinking increases. Treatment includes eye drops, placement of silicone plugs in tear-duct openings to slow draining, or surgery to close the ducts.

Diabetes
Diabetic retinopathy can result in blind spots and vision loss when eye blood vessels bleed. There are no warning signs. In its most dangerous form, blindness occurs when new blood vessels grow and bleed, causing the retina to detach from the back of the eye. Individuals with diabetic retinopathy
require checkups every six months. Controlling blood glucose is essential to limiting development of diabetic retinopathy.

**Pregnancy**

Hormonal shifts, high blood pressure or gestational diabetes during pregnancy can cause dry eye syndrome, corneal swelling, blurred vision, increased eye pressure, light sensitivity or other vision changes. Lubricating eye drops or discontinuing use of contact lenses may be necessary. Eye exams and close blood pressure monitoring are recommended. Pregnant women with glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy may need to see an ophthalmologist.

**AS WOMEN AGE,** vision and eye health may deteriorate. Blurred vision, watery eyes and a need for glasses may seem inevitable with age, but they don't have to be. Regular checkups with a physician can help prevent or slow progression of many common eye problems.

DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?
Chaplain Gretchen Hulse

What does it mean to be well? What types of things make you feel well? How do you pursue wellness in your life? Most people might describe wellness as including three main components: growth, balance and absence of illness. Wellness is a holistic approach to the integration of mind, body and spirit (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000).

According to current wellness theories, six dimensions comprise our overall wellness: social, emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual and occupational.

SOCIAL includes interpersonal relationships and engaging in one’s community.
» How we relate to others
» Who we surround ourselves with

SPIRITUAL includes our values, morals, spiritual beliefs and practices.
» Establishing peace
» Discovering meaning and purpose in life
» Living concurrently with our values

EMOTIONAL includes our feelings and reactions and how we process those feelings.
» Handling our emotions (sorrow, fear, anger, joy, etc.)
» Coping with emotional challenges

OCCUPATIONAL is about finding our niche when matching skills and fulfillment with our contributions.
» Financial planning, goal setting and financial well-being
» Balancing work and leisure

INTELLECTUAL includes critical thinking, lifelong learning and openness to new ideas that promote growth.

PHYSICAL includes nutrition, physical fitness, stress reduction, mind-body wellness, medicine and healthy living.
» Maintaining a healthy quality of life

Ideally, we would give each dimension optimum attention to achieve a completely balanced life and overall stellar wellness. In reality, we all struggle with various dimensions of our lives at different times. Sometimes, we are really good about eating well and exercising regularly. Other times, we are really focused on connecting well with others. Rarely do we maximize our potential in all dimensions so that none lack attention.

Please contact me if you would like to try an awareness exercise to help you identify whether or not you live a balanced life and areas that may require growth and attention. The awareness exercise can help you visualize aspects of your life that might benefit from added direct attention and growth. You can use the information to decide how much energy you want to devote to improving your wellness and to identify steps you will take to reach that goal.

Don’t delay—seek wellness today!

Contact Chaplain Gretchen Hulse at 412-360-1826 to learn more.