

HEALTH BEAT

A health and wellness newsletter published by the VA Medical Center Huntington



March 2009

2009 Brings Renovations & Expanded Services to Veterans

This is going to be another busy year at the Huntington VA Medical Center in terms of construction and renovations. Our Medical Center has been approved for several major construction projects this year. All of this work will help prepare us to provide additional services for Veterans in the 21st Century.



John W. "J.B." Finlay, Associate Director

One huge project will expand Mental Health services offered at this Medical Center. We currently have

an outstanding outpatient mental health clinic. However, we often must transfer patients to another VA Medical Center when they require mental health services beyond those provided through outpatient care.

We realize that patients want to be near their families and travel to other facilities can be difficult for them.

Designs are now underway to convert three buildings to mental health facilities that will provide transitional mental health services. These buildings are located on the west end of our grounds in an area employees often refer to as The Point. Renovation on one of the buildings will begin later this year for a Psychosocial Rehabilitation Recovery Center, which will serve as a day center for mental health services.

A more significant transformation will occur later for a residential rehabilitation program for patients with PTSD and Substance Use Disorders. Based on current timelines, the construction project will be awarded by October 2009 resulting in major renovation and expansion of two buildings that will house up to twenty patients in a supervised environment.

Renovation plans have already been designed and construction bids are

being received to remodel another building that will provide us with a much larger outpatient mental health building. Upon completion of these projects, this Medical Center will be able to provide Veterans with substantially more mental health services than currently offered. Although we will not have inpatient psychiatry care, the two new programs will provide a much needed level of care and will help us avoid many transfers for inpatient psychiatric treatment.

Realizing that patients want and deserve a higher degree of privacy while hospitalized, a significant remodeling project in the design stage is the elimination of 4-bed inpatient rooms. Plans are in the final stages of design, and the renovations will be phased in a manner to minimize disruption to staff and patient care.

We're very pleased to be installing an MRI unit at the Medical Center. MRI is a standard diagnostic tool used commonly in medicine today. Up until this time, the Medical Center had to purchase MRI services in the community at a considerable cost. Most importantly, once completed, it will eliminate patients having

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Important Numbers

If you have an emergency please dial **911** or your local emergency number.

If you are feeling unsafe or having thoughts of hurting yourself please call **1-800-273-8255**.

Huntington VA Medical Center (HVAMC)

Toll Free	800-827-8244
Local	304-429-6755
Charleston Outpatient Clinic	304-926-6001
Prestonsburg Outpatient Clinic	606-886-1970
Logan Outpatient Clinic	304-752-8355
Williamson Outpatient Clinic	304-235-2187
Huntington Vet Center	304-523-8387
Charleston Vet Center	304-343-3825
VA Regional Office	800-827-1000

Important Extensions for VA Medical Center Huntington

Appointments - Cancel or Check	2311
Audiology	2768
Billing	2440
Care Coordination	3262
DAV	2212
Dental	7117
Eligibility	2540
Fee Basis	2556
Help Desk/Enrollment	3451
Medical Specialty	3580 or 7121
Mental Health	2722
MICU	2190
MOVE! Program	2531
Nutrition & Food Service	2531
Optometry (eye)	7115
Pharmacy	7120
Phone Unit	3580 or 7121
Physical Therapy/Rehab Medicine	7118
Prescriptions - Order or Check	2311
Primary Care (Blue/Green Team)	3580 or 7121
Prosthetics	2709
Radiology	2749
Release of Information	3150
Same Day Surgery	2862
Social Work	2837
Surgery	3580 or 7121
Volunteer Services	2952
4-South	2130
5-South	2170

Adults Also at Risk of Poisoning Death

by *Tricia M. Whittaker, Pharm.D., Pharmacy Practice Resident*

Poisonings happen every day – and not just to children. They can happen to anyone, at anytime, and in any place.

More than 2 million possible poisonings are reported to the nation’s poison control centers every year. Fifty-one percent of all poisonings involve children, but more than 70 percent of all poison-related *deaths* occur in adults aged 20-59. About 90 percent of all poisonings happen in the home.

Poisons can be found all around us. Poisoning is a matter of dose – too much of anything can be dangerous. The most common poisonings in children include cosmetics (such as perfume or nail polish) and personal care products (such as deodorant or soap). Cleaning products such as laundry detergent and floor cleaners are also common poisonings in children.

In adults, medications are the main causes of poisoning – including pain killers, sedatives, and sleeping pills.

Where can I get help for poisonings?

If a poisoning victim is having trouble breathing, won’t wake up, or is having seizures, **call 911**. Otherwise, the toll-free, confidential, nationwide poison control center number is **1-800-222-1222**. This line is available 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Poison Centers are staffed by pharmacists, nurses, and physicians. Most people can have their questions answered by the Poison Center without having to go to a doctor or the hospital.

National Poison Prevention Week was established by the U.S. Congress in 1961 to focus national attention on the dangers of poisonings and how to prevent them. To learn more about how to help prevent poisonings, visit the following websites:

- PoisonHelp.hrsa.gov
- www.usa.safekids.org
- homesafetycouncil.org.

Make Healthy Eating Part of Your Healthy Lifestyle

by Ramona C. Anderson, MS,RD,LD- Nutrition and Food Service

The American Dietetic Association celebrates National Nutrition Month each March. The campaign brings attention to the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

Eating right is part of a healthy lifestyle. You should choose nutrient-rich foods to provide the most nutrients (vitamins, minerals and fiber) per calorie to meet your personal nutrition needs. Here are some tips for making healthy food choices.

- Plan meals ahead of time so that you are making healthy decisions.
- Eat until you are satisfied, not stuffed. Watch out for second servings.
- Focus on fruits. Fresh fruit, fruit canned in its own juice or frozen fruit without added sugar are the best ones.
- Vary your vegetables and eat a rainbow of colors from the vegetables. Each color provides a different nutrient.
- Aim for 5 or more servings a day of vegetables and fruits.
- Use low fat dairy products for calcium-rich foods.
- Increase your whole grains to 3 or more servings daily. Read the food label and make sure the word “whole” is first in the list of ingredients.
- Select lean meats, poultry and fish. Avoid fried or breaded meats.



VAMC Huntington's Dietitians. Front: Rebecca Mitchell, Shanna Kiser, Faith Hay, Ramona Anderson. Back: Steve Ferguson, Natalie Bullins, Lynn Stanley, Anna Perkins, Candy Holbrook, Annette Johnson.

- Choose and prepare foods/beverages with less salt, fat or added sugars.
- Limit regular soft drinks and alcohol.

Registered Dietitians are the food and nutrition experts. At VAMC Huntington, dietitians work with patients in the hospital and outpatients. Registered dietitians are located in the Blue Team Primary Care area. You do not need a scheduled appointment.

If you need food and nutrition information or want to know how a good diet improves health and fights disease, let a registered dietitian help. You can telephone 1-800-827-8244, extension 2351 with any questions.

Choosing Over the Counter Medications Confusing Task

by Phillip McDowell, Pharm.D., Pharmacy

The overabundance of over-the-counter (OTC) common cold medications can make selecting a product an intimidating and confusing task. The knowledge of some basic principles of drug classes can help you find the product best for you.

Symptoms of the common cold may include stuffy nose, runny nose, sneezing, cough, sore throat, pain, and fever. The goal of OTC products is to reduce and limit, not cure, these bothersome symptoms.

Decongestants are used to help with stuffy nose and cough due to sinus drainage. Decongestant nose sprays should not

be used for more than 2-3 days, as symptoms may worsen or continue with extended use. If you have high blood pressure, you should avoid decongestants, but may get relief from a nasal saline spray.

Antihistamines, such as Benadryl or Diphenhydramine, are used to help with itching, sneezing, and runny nose. Many antihistamines can cause sedation, and elderly patients may experience dry mouth, blurry vision, and urinary retention.

Local anesthetics are used to treat sore throat. They are available as lozenges, mouthwashes, and sprays. Antitussives

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Blasts Pose Serious Threat of Traumatic Brain Injury

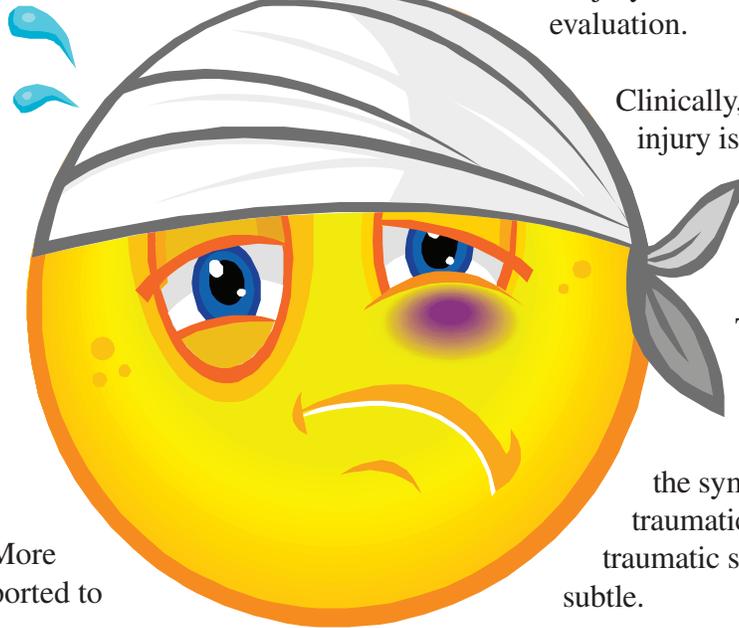
By Cheryl Hill, RN BSN

Trauma care on the battlefield has greatly improved and is one of the great success stories of modern medicine. A concerning situation is when badly wounded soldiers survive their injuries with multiple and often severe disabilities. Survival rates have increased, but an acceptable quality of life might be an entirely different matter.

Traumatic brain injury is increasingly common in soldiers returning from the Middle East, which poses serious challenges for medicine and society. More than half of all combat injuries are reported to be resulting from explosive devices.

Blasts from rocket propelled grenades, landmines, and improvised explosive devices have definitely increased the number of soldiers with traumatic brain injury; perhaps because of the changes in atmospheric pressure caused by an explosion. A soldier does not have to sustain

a direct blow to the head to be diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury, but does require further evaluation.



Clinically, post-concussive injury is difficult to distinguish from post traumatic stress disorder, which is also common in soldiers. The two disorders have some characteristics in common, and the difference between the symptoms of mild traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress disorder can be subtle.

Some similar problems that can occur with each of these diagnoses might include:

- difficulty with memory,
- attention and/or concentration,
- headaches,
- sleep disturbances,
- irritability, and
- depression.

Screenings for head injury are now done routinely on all returning Veterans that join an estimated 1.4 million cases of traumatic brain injury among civilians that occur each year in the United States alone.

The screening definitely poses a challenge and takes a specially trained provider to complete when signs of head injury are acknowledged and reported by Veteran, family member, friends or another provider.

The VAMC Huntington Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation is very fortunate to have Dr. Melissa Tinney, Dr. Ramon Lansang and their dedicated staff completing these screenings whether the injury has occurred in combat or stateside.

For more information, call 1-800-827-8244 ext. 2772, ext. 2774, or ext. 2776

NATIONAL

SUICIDE

PREVENTION

LIFELINE™

1-800-273-8255

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VAMC Huntington Offers Area Veterans Many Commonly Performed Tests for Heart Disease

by Deborah Neal, RN and Karen Bailey, FNP

For the evaluation of the heart there are many commonly performed tests at the VA Medical Center Huntington. If your provider orders a specialized study on the heart these tests are performed on the second floor of the hospital.

Here is a brief overview of the more common examinations of the heart.

Echocardiogram and Bubble Studies

An echocardiogram is a simple, non-invasive test that uses a small tool called a transducer and gel to take moving pictures of your heart. This is an ultrasound of the heart and allows the cardiologist to look at the heart's valves and chambers. The echo takes 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

If a bubble study is performed during the echocardiogram, the cardiologist is looking for a small hole in the heart's wall. You will need an intravenous (IV) device, and the registered nurse will give a small amount of agitated, sterile saline into the blood stream which can be viewed while the echocardiogram pictures are being taken. The bubble study adds about 5 minutes to the echocardiogram.

Nuclear stress testing

A common first step in the evaluation of chest pain is a stress test. If your provider orders a stress

test, the test may be on a treadmill or bicycle, or it might be a chemical, or medicated stress test. An x-ray liquid, or tracer, such as Cardiolite is given through an intravenous device (IV) and a camera is used to take pictures or images of the heart before and after the stress test. This test is safe and easy, but it does require that the person not eat or drink at least 8 to 12 hours before the test, and not have any caffeine (which can reverse the effect of the test) for at least 24 hours. If you smoke, you should not smoke for at least 24 hours as well. The test takes about 4 hours to complete. Your provider will give you additional information if you ask.

Heart Catheterization

If necessary, your provider may need to follow this test with a cardiac catheterization, or heart cath as it is commonly called. A specially trained cardiologist will make a small opening in the skin of the groin, and a long thin tube, called a catheter is inserted into your leg artery. A special dye is injected into the catheter to show the flow of blood into the heart's vessels. The cardiologist watches the blood flow through the heart and blood vessels to see if there are any blockages, and the exact location and severity of the blockages if they are present. Pictures of the heart and blood vessels are taken as well. Following this procedure you will be asked to lie flat with your leg straight for two to eight hours depending on the type of sealing device used.

**OTC Medications
Continued from Pg. 3**

are used to help with a dry, hacking cough. Expectorants are used to loosen mucous and make it easier to cough up. Sugar-free should be selected if you have diabetes.

Many drugs are used to treat aches and pains (analgesics), and fever (antipyretics) caused by the common cold. Aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen are common. Talk to your doctor

before taking these if you take a blood thinner such as warfarin. Acetaminophen is also common — do not take more than 4000 mg of acetaminophen daily. This maximum daily dosage is for normal healthy adults and not for children or adults who are alcoholics or who have liver disease.

Many OTC common cold products contain multiple medications. Because each person may experience different

symptoms, it is important to select products with ingredients to treat your symptoms. Always inspect product labels to see which medications are included. Be careful, as using combination products may cause you to take an unneeded medicine, cause duplicate therapy, and lead to drug interactions.

If you ever have any questions about product selection, ask your physician or pharmacist.

**Renovations
Continued from Pg. 1**

to leave the Medical Center for an MRI. The MRI is being installed in Radiology/Imaging Service and anticipated to be completed by June.

With the addition of 100 new employees to our staff in the past year, space has become a scarce resource. The mental health projects mentioned earlier will help free up some space in our main building, however, we will continue to experience some growing pains and space shortages in the future. You may notice modular buildings being set up around the hospital in the next few months. This is not a long term solution but it will help with space shortages until we receive the title to the Army Reserve Unit located

at the foot of the hill. Based on information from VA Central Office, the Army Reserve Unit property will be turned over to VA in 2010. Once that happens, plans can be drawn up to relocate some of our non-patient care functions to the new property.

Many of you who live in the Kanawha County area have noticed the space shortages at the Charleston Community Based Clinic. The clinic moved into its current location in 2000, and since then, we have had a significant expansion in enrollment for care at the clinic. Today, over 6,500 Veterans receive primary care and outpatient mental health services at the Charleston Clinic. It's been somewhat of a challenge to find a larger facility, but we are pleased that we have now found a suitable location. We are currently

radiology services and provide sufficient space for subspecialty clinics on a rotating basis.

A new outpatient clinic is planned this year in Gallipolis, Ohio. Formal approval has been received and negotiations are already occurring for a clinic site. The clinic will provide primary care and mental health services for Veterans in that area that choose to enroll at the clinic. We anticipate opening the Gallipolis clinic by October 2009.

There are other initiatives that have occurred in the last year with many more in some stage of completion. Those include expansion of Audiology, renovation in Prosthetics and Rehabilitation Medicine, upgrading the CT Unit, installation of new equipment in the Operating Room and Urology, replacement of the nurse call system, increasing security and upgrading monitoring systems, and a number of other projects to upgrade our infrastructure systems, heating and cooling, electrical and emergency power systems. All of these projects have one goal in mind – improving care and services for our patients!



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October 2009

Director Announces Launch of Patient Newsletter of VA Medical Center

Some articles will have information about existing services and provide information on how to best access those services. Others will give information on new or planned services. Many of the articles will be short. We believe a variety of articles in a subject that are short and to the point will be more readable.

As the newsletter evolves, we will be seeking input from you, the readers, for suggestions for improvement.

Flu: The Holiday Gift You Do Not Want to Give, or Get

The best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated each year. But, there are other things that can help keep you from getting sick.

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Go to the Medical Center's Web site at www.huntington.va.gov, and click on the News by E-mail link to sign up.

negotiating a lease agreement. The new clinic will nearly double the space of the current clinic, and is expected to be open by the end of the year. The new clinic will offer

Tips for Proper Glaucoma Medication Use

By: *Tricia M. Whittaker, Pharm.D., Pharmacy Practice Resident*

Glaucoma refers to a group of diseases that involve increased fluid pressure in the eye. This increased pressure can lead to nerve damage, which may result in loss of vision. Lowering eye pressure, through the use of medications, may help slow the disease process in some people.

Often times people with glaucoma experience no symptoms and so they are tempted to stop taking their medications. If you are currently being treated for glaucoma, it is very important to be sure to take your glaucoma medications every day as they can help slow the disease process.

There are several different medications used to treat glaucoma. Commonly used medications are latanoprost (Xalatan®), travoprost (Travatan®), timolol (Timoptic®), brimonidine (Alphagan®), and dorzolamide (Trusopt®).

These medications treat glaucoma by lowering eye pressure, either by decreasing fluid production in the eye or by helping fluid to flow out of the eye. Many of these medications work together to lower eye pressure.

How to properly use your eye drops:

1. Wash your hands.
2. Hold the bottle upside down and tilt your head back.
3. While holding the bottle with one hand, place it as close to your eye as possible.
4. With your other hand, pull down your lower eyelid – this will form a pocket for the drop.
5. Place the prescribed number of drops into the lower eyelid pocket.
6. Close your eye or press your lower eyelid lightly for about one minute – this will allow the eye drops to be absorbed into your eye.

Other information about your eye drops:

- If you use two different types of eye drops, wait at least 5 minutes between drops to be sure both medications get absorbed properly.
- If you wear contacts, take them out before using your eye drops. You may reinsert them after 15 minutes.
- Unopened bottles of latanoprost (Xalatan®) should be refrigerated. Once a bottle is opened, it may be kept at room temperature for up to 6 weeks.

For more information about glaucoma, check out the National Eye Institute website at: <http://www.nei.nih.gov>.

Did You Know Patients Can Request Amendments to Records?

An individual has the right to request an amendment to any information or records retrieved by the individual's name or other individually-identifiable information contained in a VA system of records, which includes designated record sets, as provided in 38 CFR 1.579 and 45 CFR 164.526.

The right to seek an amendment of information or records is a personal right of the individual to whom the record pertains.

The request must be in writing and adequately describe the specific

information the individual believes to be inaccurate, incomplete, irrelevant, or untimely and the reason for this belief.

The written request needs to be mailed or delivered to the VA health care facility that maintains the record.

A request for amendment of information contained in a system of records must be delivered to the facility Privacy Officer.

The amendment request will be referred to the health care provider or physician who is the author of

the information to determine if the record needs to be amended. If the health care provider, or physician, is no longer on station, a physician(s) designated by the health care facility Director must determine if the record needs to be amended.

When a request to amend a record is denied, the facility Privacy Officer, or designee, must promptly notify the individual making the request of the decision.

The denial may be appealed to Office of the General Counsel.

VA Offers National Rehabilitation Events for Veterans

For more than 20 years, VA has sponsored four national rehabilitation special events for Veterans – The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic; National Veterans Golden Age Games; National Veterans Creative Arts Festival; and the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

Last year, two additional programs were added to this roster – the National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic and the National Veterans Summer TEE Tournament.

These programs provide disabled and elderly Veterans with challenging opportunities to accomplish feats that many may have believed were no longer available to them because of their disabilities or their age. The programs enhance the physical, social and emotional well-being of the Veterans who participate.

This year the Huntington VA Medical Center has registered four disabled Veterans to participate in the Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass, Colorado, March 28-April 4. Their trips are made possible through various donations and funds raised through Voluntary Service. These Veterans will be instructed in adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing, and other winter recreational sports. No doubt, these Veterans will have an unforgettable week as they become Miracles on a Mountainside!



Veterans work on arts and crafts project during the VA's National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Photo courtesy of MediaNet.



Veterans participating in an archery event at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Photo courtesy of MediaNet.

The next event coming up is the National Veterans Golden Age Games, June 1-5, 2009 in Birmingham, Alabama. This event is the only national multi-event sports and recreational seniors' competition (for age 55 and older) designed to improve the quality of life for older Veterans, including those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. The deadline for registering for this event is March 31, 2009.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games will be held in Spokane, Washington, July 13-18, 2009. This is the largest annual wheelchair sports competition in the world! Competition events include basketball, rugby, softball, handcycling and others. This event allows newly disabled Veterans to gain sports skills and be exposed to other wheelchair athletes.

Additional information about all of the National Rehabilitation Events is available online at www.specialevents.va.gov.

Eligible Veterans from our area that are interested in participating in these events may contact Voluntary Service at 304-429-6755, extension 2952 or Public Affairs at 304-429-6755, ext. 2518.