

# HEALTH BEAT

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

December 2008

## Director Announces Launch of Patient Newsletter at VA Medical Center

With this first issue of *Health Beat*, and those to follow, we are rededicating ourselves to keeping our patients and staff up to date on VA programs and general health care issues.



Edward H. Seiler  
Medical Center Director

The articles in each issue will be written or compiled by members of the Medical Center staff who have acquired knowledge and practical

information that should prove useful for patients, their families, and our newest employees.

Some articles will have information about existing services and provide information on how to best access these services. Others will give information on new or planned services.

Many of the articles will be short. We believe a series of articles on a subject that are short and to the point will best serve our readers.

Many articles will focus on health care. Some will be disease specific and will try to provide reference material.

Because not all patients have access to today's technology, we will provide information from quality, computer-based resources. These will be summarized and written for those who might benefit from the information most. Our goal is to help patients get the information they need to better care for themselves. We will provide information by simply telling it as we see it in a style everyone can understand and, perhaps, enjoy.

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

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

*By Rita Thomas, RN, BSN, MRSA Prevention Coordinator*

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.

- Avoid close contact with people that have flu-like symptoms. These include fever, headache, fatigue, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Keep your distance from others as well.
- Stay home when you are sick. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that you stay home from work or school.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the used tissue in the trash. This keeps germs from spreading.
- Practice other healthy habits. Get plenty of rest, exercise, eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water.
- Keep household surfaces clean. This includes counter tops, bed rails and wheelchairs. Use a disinfectant on these surfaces daily.
- Wash your hands! This is the most important habit of all. Wet your hands with warm water, apply soap and rub hands together for at least 15 seconds. Rinse your hands with water and dry with a towel used just for you. Alcohol-based hand cleaners also work well. You also should use lotion to keep your hands from getting dry and cracked.

## 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
Optometry (eye) .....	7115
Pharmacy .....	7120
Phone Unit .....	3580 or 7121
Physical Therapy/Rehab Medicine .....	7118
Prescriptions - Order or Check .....	2311
Primary Care .....	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

## Tips to Avoid Holiday Accidents

### Christmas Trees

- Purchase green, moist Christmas trees, never old or brittle ones. Check the needles. Find a tree with needles that bend, not break.
- After purchasing a live tree, be sure to cut the bottom of the tree to expose new wood that will soak up water.
- Always keep live trees watered.
- Keep trees (and any other combustibles) away from ignition sources such as fireplaces, space heaters, candles, overhead lights, and radiators.
- Ensure that artificial trees are fire resistant and UL (Underwriters Laboratory) or FM (Factory Mutual) listed. This ensures the tree was manufactured and tested to meet specific safety standards.
- Make sure the base is steady so the tree will not tip over easily.

### Christmas Lights and Extension Cords

- Only use UL or FM approved extension cords.
- Make sure the extension cord is large enough to carry the intended load. (The thicker the cord, the greater the load it should be able to carry without overheating.)
- Inspect the cord for damaged insulation, splices, or loose plugs before using. Never use an extension cord that has any of these conditions.
- Do not overload outlets! Use surge protectors if multiple outlets are needed.
- Immediately replace any broken bulbs that have exposed filaments.
- Never use electric lights on old metal artificial trees.
- Don't run cords through doorways or under rugs. The insulation on the cords can become damaged if the door closes on the cord, or if people step on it under the rug, causing a potential fire and/or shock hazard.
- Match plugs with outlets. Don't force a 3-pronged plug into a 2-pronged outlet or extension cord.

### Toys and Ornaments

- Purchase appropriate toys for the appropriate age. Some toys designed for older children might be dangerous for younger children.
- Electric toys should be UL/FM approved.
- Toys with sharp points, sharp edges, strings, cords, or parts small enough to be swallowed should not be given to small children.
- Place older ornaments and decorations that might be painted with lead paint out of the reach of small children and pets.

# Homeless Veterans Offered Services Through VA Medical Center

*By LeeAnn Bills, Social Work*

An estimated 154,000 veterans are homeless on any given night, and twice as many face homelessness during the course of a year.

Additionally, 97% of homeless veterans are men and have little or no income. The number of homeless veterans and their families is growing daily.

It takes efforts from federal, state and local governments to deal with homelessness. The community, and everyone, needs to be actively involved in addressing the needs of our homeless veterans.

The VA Medical Center, Huntington offers many homeless services which include:

## **Outreach**

Frank Boggess, Outreach Social Worker, is located at the Huntington City Mission and provides direct help to homeless veterans including screening for service needs,

referrals to VA and non-VA resources, transportation, clothing help and community support.

## **Transitional Living**

Faith Stuart-Martin, Grant Per Diem Liaison, is providing oversight to the Transitional Living Facility and Service Center located in Charleston, WV. The program goals are to help veterans get on their feet and re-learn skills for living on their own. The Service Center will link veterans with local, state, and federal resources and provide laundry and bath facilities to those in need.

## **Permanent Housing**

LeeAnn Bills, Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program Coordinator/Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, is managing the new housing program for homeless veterans. From direct referrals, eligible veterans are linked with Section-8 housing and helped with obtaining and setting up housing.

If you know of a veteran who is homeless, contact the HCHV team at 1-800-827-8244 ext. 3711.

## **Facility Directory Listing is Your Choice**

*By Patsy Bleyle, Business Office*

Maintaining your privacy is important to the VA. As an inpatient at our facility, you have the right to request exclusion from the facility directory.

When you're admitted, you will be asked if you want to be included in the facility directory, and your decision will be documented.

If you're incapacitated or unable to make this decision at the time of your admission, a facility health care provider will make a determination based on your prior admissions and in your best interest, and the provider will document his or her decision.

Please remember, you may change your decision to opt-out at any time during your stay at our medical facility.

If you decide to opt-out, those who inquire about you will be told that we have no information that we can give regarding whether you are a patient.

## **What is the Role of The Transfer Office?**

*By Julia Spence*

The role of the Transfer Office is to ensure safe, timely and efficient transfer of veterans to and from VA and non-VA facilities to ensure that necessary medical treatment is provided.

Although it is our goal is to obtain specialized care within the VA system of care whenever possible, at times it is necessary to use resources outside of the VA system of care.

In addition to facilitating referrals for treatment, the Transfer Office assists veterans who relocate, either temporarily or permanently, to establish care at his or her nearest VA facility -- helping to ensure a smooth transition in health care services.

## Tips to trim fat and calories from the Holiday Feast

The holiday season is a wonderful time to spend with family and friends. Each of us has holiday traditions that involve food.

One such tradition is the “feast” or table filled with turkey, side dishes, breads and desserts. Did you know that the typical turkey dinner has about 4000 calories and can be high in fat?



Here are some smart and easy ways to lower calories and fat at this year’s holiday feast.

1. Serve fresh fruit and vegetables with low fat dips or salsa as appetizers.
2. Bake or roast the turkey instead of deep frying.
3. Do not eat the turkey skin.
4. Bake stuffing outside the turkey so that it does not soak up the meat fat.
5. If using a stuffing mix, don’t add margarine or butter.
6. Chill the turkey broth and skim off the fat before making gravy.
7. Try baked sweet potatoes and top with a cinnamon/ sugar substitute mixture rather than the “candied” casserole.
8. Make mashed white potatoes with low fat milk and lower fat or fat free margarine.
9. Prepare vegetables with herbs instead of oil, bacon grease, butter, margarine or sauces made with cream, whole milk or cheese.
10. Bake desserts with fat-free evaporated milk and egg substitute or egg whites.
11. Drink calorie free and non-alcoholic beverages.
12. Limit second helpings.
13. Slow down when eating. It takes about 20 minutes for the brain to tell your stomach that you are full.

If you would like other ideas for healthy eating, call the VA Medical Center’s registered dietitian at 1-800-827-8244, ext. 2351.

## Medication Refills Are Easy at VA

Did you know that medication refills can be conveniently mailed to you, when requested by you or your doctor?

Allowing your medications to be mailed makes things easier for you and other veterans. Receiving medication by mail means:

- No waiting at the pharmacy.
- Less waiting for veterans who need to start medications right away. Our goal is to keep the wait times in the pharmacy less than 30 minutes after you see a pharmacist. For this reason, only new, urgently needed medications should be picked up at the pharmacy.
- Pharmacists are allowed to spend more time with veterans answering questions or explaining new medications.
- Saves you time and money – transportation costs and gas to get to the VA are reduced.

The VA offers four easy ways to request refills:

1. Call 1-800-827-8244 or 304-429-6755, ext. 2311 and use the automated refill system, available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.
2. Drop refill slips in the box in the pharmacy waiting area.
3. Use MyHealthVet to request refills online at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).
4. Mail your refill slips to the return address on your prescription label.

Refill slips may appear as either of the examples below.

Send refill requests at least two weeks before they are needed. The Pharmacy needs 10 working days to allow time to fill and mail the prescription.

For questions about your medications, Pharmacy technicians are available for questions at 304-429-6755 or 1-800-827-8244, ext. 2305, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays.

PHONE IN OR MAIL YOUR REFILL REQUEST	
Follow the refill instructions provided with your prescription.	
Veteran, Joe A 00-0000	
Rx# 000000	MAR 29,2004 Fill 1 of 4
Qty: 90 TAB Days supply: 90	
LEVOTHYROXINE 0.025MG TAB	
3 refills left until MAR 30,2005	
NO COPAY	HUNTINGTON VAMC-581
	

 Department of Veterans Affairs <small>Pharmacy 119, P.O. BOX 6768, HUNTINGTON, WV 25704</small>	Page 3 of 6	
	 <small>Rx# 0000000 581-31122031-2</small>	 <small>581-31122031-2</small>
 <small>5810215201598</small>	LEVOTHYROXINE NA (SYNTHROID) 0.15MG TAB Quantity: 90 Provider: Smith, John Refill: (2of4) Date: 06/16/2004	
Joe A. Veteran	HUNTINGTON VAMC P.O. BOX 6768 PHARMACY SERVICE 119 HUNTINGTON, WV 25704	
Refill Document 6633 <small>Tear Here See reverse side for address correction.</small>		



## Department of Veterans Affairs

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Your comments, suggestions, ideas, and questions regarding this newsletter can be sent to the Medical Media Section of Learning Resources by phone at 304.429.6755 ext. 3206, toll-free at 800.827.8244, by fax at 304.429.0272 or by e-mail at [brian.arrington@va.gov](mailto:brian.arrington@va.gov).



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## Women Veterans program now in Huntington

By Pamela S. Neal, Women Veterans Program

More than 15 percent of today's military is made up of women. That is why the VA Medical Center, Huntington, is busy developing a program designed especially for them.

Women Veterans Program Manager Pamela S. Neal is excited about the opportunity to build a comprehensive program dedicated to improving services offered to our women veterans. "They deserve a place at the VA Medical Center," said Neal. "And, we are committed to improving the services offered to women veterans."

Currently a broad range of services are offered, including:

- primary care;
- family planning and birth control;
- gynecological care, including pap smears and mammography;
- maternity care;
- mid-life and menopause issues;
- osteoporosis;
- wellness and healthy living,

- including nutrition, weight management, smoking cessation programs; and,
- infertility evaluation and treatment.

Mental Health Services include:

- management of depression, anxiety, and stress;
- adjustment from deployment;
- counseling and medication for military sexual trauma, family and parenting issues;
- interpersonal violence; and,
- treatment for alcohol and drug dependence.

Other Special Programs offered for women include:

- vocational rehabilitation;
- education opportunities;
- links to job and career counseling;
- services for homelessness; and,
- MOVE! (Managing Obesity in Veterans Everywhere).

For more information about the new Women Veterans Program, call Pamela S. Neal at 304-429-6741 ext. 3423.

## Travel reimbursement to increase for eligible Vets

Eligible veterans will see an increase in the mileage reimbursement they received for travel to VA facilities for medical care. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake will use his authority to raise the mileage reimbursement from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile for all eligible veterans.

Congress, which mandates such increases, recently provided funding to VA to increase the reimbursement rate, effective November 2008. Service-connected veterans, those receiving VA pensions and veterans

with low income are eligible for the reimbursement.

While increasing the payment, the current deductible amounts applied to certain mileage reimbursements will remain frozen at \$7.77 for a one way trip, \$15.54 for a round trip and capped at a maximum of \$46.62 per calendar month. On January 9, 2009, deductibles will decrease to \$3 for a one way trip, \$6 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$16 per calendar month. Deductibles can be waived if they cause financial hardship to the veteran.

# They Say I Have C. Diff., Now What? Answers to FAQs

You've had diarrhea stools for a week and have had a low-grade fever and pain in your abdomen. When you tell your doctor, he orders a stool culture. Now the results are back from the Lab. "You have C. diff.," your doctor tells you. He explains about the antibiotic he wants you to take. But your mind is filled with questions.



*Roberta Messner,  
R.N., Ph.D., Infection  
Control Practitioner*

Here are some of the most common answers to most peoples questions:

## What is C. diff.?

C. diff. is an infection of the colon and small bowel. It's caused by a bacteria called *Clostridium difficile*. C. diff. makes a toxin that can cause diarrhea. People in good health usually don't get C. diff. You're at greater risk for it if you've been on antibiotics, are over age 65, or have had a serious illness or surgery.

## What are the signs and symptoms of C. diff.?

Persons who have C. diff. often have diarrhea with up to 6-12 stools per day. Stools are watery, foul smelling, and are often a yellow-green color. Persons also may have a fever, loss of appetite, nausea, and abdominal pain or tenderness.

## What does it mean to be colonized or infected with C. diff.?

Being colonized means that C. diff. is present in your body without making you ill. Infection means that C. diff. is making you sick with symptoms such as diarrhea.

## How is C. diff. treated?

C. diff. is often treated with an oral antibiotic called Metronidazole (or Flagyl) or Vancomycin. Treatment lasts seven to ten days. These drugs are effective and have few side effects. Your health care provider will decide what is best for you. Be sure not to take medicines to stop the diarrhea such as Lomotil or Imodium. These can make your illness worse.

## How is C. diff. spread to others?

The C. diff. bacteria are found in the stool. People can

become infected if they touch items or surfaces that are contaminated with stool and then touch their mouth or mucous membranes. It's important not to touch your hands to your lips. Also, don't place your food or utensils on any surface except your plate.

If you're infected with C. diff., you can spread it to others. But only people who are hospitalized or on antibiotics are likely to become ill from it.

## What will happen in the hospital when I have C. diff.?

You will be placed in a private room with your own bathroom. A sign will be placed on your door that says, "Contact Precautions." Your visitors will need to follow the directions listed on the sign. Your health care providers will wash their hands often. They will also wear gloves and a gown. Your visitors should wash their hands before and after the visit. Because alcohol hand sanitizers do not kill C. diff., hands should always be washed with soap and water.

## When can Contact Precautions be stopped?

Contact Precautions can be stopped when your stools become formed and you have not had diarrhea for several days.

## Is there anything special I should do at home?

You should wash your hands very well before eating and after using the toilet. Use antibacterial soap for hand washing. Be sure not to share dishes, utensils, or food with anyone.

Items that have been found to have the most bacteria are toilets, chairs, bedpans, beds, sinks, bedrails, and telephones. Clean these surfaces well with a household disinfectant. Use wipes containing bleach if possible.

## What should I do if I think I have C. diff.?

Let your healthcare provider know if you have symptoms of C. diff.

**National  
Suicide Hotline**  
**1-800-273-TALK**  
**(8255)**

## Always Remember Those Who Have Served

By *Tim Canterbury, MD, Chief, Surgical Service*

After being asked to write a newsletter article, I was debating over which surgical disease to write about — something common like gallstones or some rare tumor that is rarely seen, but something changed my mind.

I was sitting at home on my comfortable couch in my warm TV room watching a movie on Nov. 11. It happened to be “The Longest Day” a movie about D-day. My wife looked at me and said, “I have chill bumps.”

I could barely answer her because my eyes were full of

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***“I pray with all my heart, THAT WE NEVER FORGET.”***

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tears and my throat just wouldn’t seem to work. As I considered the men who climbed over those ships into those landing crafts, who parachuted behind enemy lines, who did this knowing there was a good chance they would die, I couldn’t imagine the courage, the love of family, the love of country, the love of freedom that inspired these men.

It was not just that day or that war where men and women of our armed forces have risked all for freedom. Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and others I either can’t remember or don’t know about.

Please allow me this opportunity, no this privilege, to thank each and every one of the veterans we are allowed to serve here at the VA Medical Center, Huntington, for your service, your courage, your sacrifice so that I and my family can be free.

Frequently, we become so busy with our jobs that it probably seems to you we have forgotten. When that has been true of me, let me say I am sorry.

I pray with all my heart, THAT WE NEVER FORGET.

## Holiday eating can cause GERD or Reflux

With the holidays fast approaching we find ourselves in a constant state of enjoying all the smells and foods of the season.

Many also find themselves with an extra holiday gift, Gastroesophageal Reflux (GERD). GERD occurs when the lower esophageal muscle either relaxes inappropriately or is very weak, allowing acid contents of the stomach to back up, or reflux, into the esophagus.

The most common symptoms associated with this is heartburn. Other symptoms include, but are not limited to, persistent sore throat, hoarseness, chronic cough, asthma, heart-like chest pain, and a lump in the throat.

There are ways to help control these symptoms, even during the holidays. These include: limit portion sizes during meals; avoid fried or fatty foods; stop or decrease smoking; elevate head of bed 4-6 inches; limit carbonated beverages; eat meals at least 2-3 hours prior to bedtime; take medication as prescribed; and, lose weight if you’re overweight.

Serious complications and conditions can occur if frequent or constant heartburn goes untreated. Contact your primary care physician if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.



## Steps You Can Take to Help Have a Less Stressful Holiday Season

Holidays should be a joyful and peaceful time of the year. Everyone wants peace and happiness. However, for some, holidays can bring emotional burden, stress and anxiety.

There are many reasons why the holiday season can cause stress and anxiety. Some of the causes are unrealistic expectations, financial constraints, illness and the inability to be with one's family and friends. However, through simple tips we can overcome stress and anxiety during this holiday season.

1. Pamper yourself. Do not worry about unnecessary tasks. Spend quality time for yourself. Realize that time for relaxation is a way to help keep your holiday season less stressful.
2. Listen to your favorite Christmas music. Do Karaoke and sing-along Christmas carols with your family and friends. Music can be helpful and therapeutic.
3. Keep your sense of humor. Laughter detaches us from our problems and releases negative emotions. It stimulates our brain cells and releases the natural chemical in our brain that regulates our mood and emotions. It transforms our thoughts, which in turn transforms our feelings for the better.
4. Lower your expectation. Not every job can be easily done. You will live a healthier life without all of the stress and demands that you place on yourself. Do what you can; sometimes it will be perfect and sometimes it will just be enough. If you don't expect perfection from yourself and your family, imperfections are less likely to create anxiety.
5. Limit your activities. There are so many pressures and activities during holiday season. You may receive many invitations from family and friends. Commit yourself only to what matters most to you, and graciously decline other invitations.
6. Examine your traditions. Allow yourself to cut down



7. Discuss holiday plans as a family. Simplify and make plans together to avoid hurt feelings when activities are dropped.
8. Define the meaning of holidays: People often forget the purpose of the holiday season. Defining what holidays mean to you is important to get the full sense and enjoy it.
9. Avoid overspending. Money can be an issue during the holiday season and overspending can create financial burden in your family. Be innovative by taking time to create handmade gifts for family and friends. Shop at the Dollar Store or Bargain Store. You can find holiday greeting cards, gift wrappers and other items that are inexpensive. The value of the gift, not the cost, makes all the difference.
10. Take time to exercise. Exercise can improve your mood. Look for ways to combine physical movement with other activities. Park far away from your destination and take the stairs instead of the elevator. Take a brisk walk with your family and friends.
11. Ask for help: Look for services for gift wrapping. Pay a few dollars less for the gift and pay to have it wrapped. Share tasks with your spouse and children. Ask guests to bring a side dish or dessert or ask your friends to help with setting up food and invitations.
12. Help someone else: Remember that helping others enhances your sense of well-being. We can help others by serving a meal at a homeless shelter, church, or volunteering in the community nursing homes. Remember to help our veterans who have served our country. Some may be spending a lonely holiday season on the ward in our hospital. Others may be getting back to their homes and community. Offer your help and show your gratitude for the sacrifices they made for our country.