

HEALTH BEAT

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On The Inside

Long, healthy life possible with HIV infection

Pg. 2

Falls pose serious risk for those 65 & Older

Pg. 3

Huntington VAMC Starts New Medical Foster Home Program

Pg. 4

Announcements and Meetings

Pg. 5

VA research offers insight into Parkinson's Disease

Pg. 6

Rural Health Outreach Clinic site announced

Pg. 7

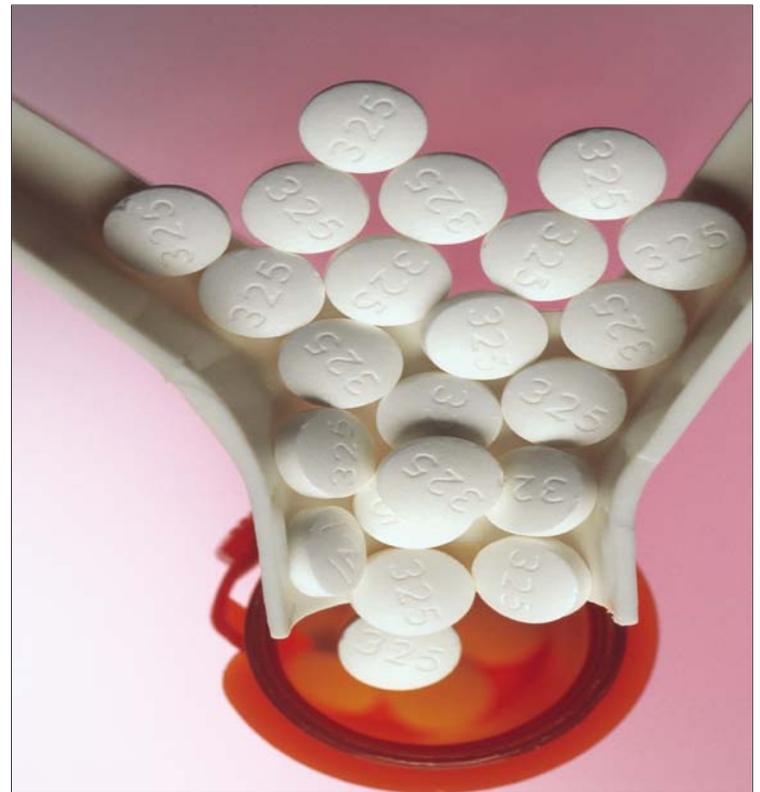
Local veteran medals at The Golden Age Games

Pg. 8

VA medication copay to increase July 1

Effective July 1, 2010, the **Department of Veterans Affairs** charge for a 30-day or less supply of medication provided on an outpatient basis for treatment of a non-serviced connected condition will increase from \$8 to \$9 for Veterans who generally have higher incomes and no service connected disabilities – referred to as Priority Groups 7 and 8. As a result, the charge for a 60-day supply of medication will be \$18 and for a 90-day supply will be \$27.

Veterans in Priority Groups 2 through 6 will not be impacted by this change and will continue to pay \$8 for each 30-day or less supply of medication provided for a non-service connected condition unless otherwise exempted. Priority Group 2-6 Veterans will also continue to have a cap on the amount they can be charged in a calendar year of \$960.



Veterans who have an injury or illness connected with their military service resulting in a disability rated 50 percent or greater — enrolled in Priority Group 1 — are exempt from this copay.

VA generally sets its outpatient medication copay rate based upon a regulation which ties the rate to the Medical Consumer Price Index for prescription drugs.

We understand that this change may result in a financial hardship for certain Veterans and encourage Veterans to contact 1.877.222.VETS (8387) or your local VA health care facility. For benefit questions concerning copays or other programs please contact us at the above number or visit our health eligibility Web site at www.va.gov/healtheligibility.

Long, healthy life possible even with HIV Infection

Medical science has made great advances in fighting HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). Many effective treatments are available that let people with HIV

find out they have HIV after they have gotten sick already have serious immune system damage. This is why early testing for HIV is so important.

We do not know how many Veterans have HIV and do not know it. A 2009 survey found that less than one out of every ten Veterans receiving care from the

three-quarters of the Veterans answering the survey said that they would “very likely” accept an HIV test if their provider offered it. This is why the VA

Now health care providers recommend voluntary HIV testing to all patients who receive medical care, even if a patient does not have an obvious risk factor.

lead long and healthy lives. However, they have to know they have the virus before they can get these new, improved treatments.

Get Checked

Many people think there is no way they could have HIV. The only way to know is to take the HIV test. You could have HIV and still feel healthy. This virus can cause serious damage to your body’s immune system. Your immune system is your defense against infections and cancer. Without treatment, a damaged immune system will result in AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), illness and death. People who

In the past, health care providers tested for HIV only when:

- A patient had symptoms that could be from a damaged immune system;
- Their medical history suggested they may have been exposed to the virus.

Routine HIV Testing

VA’s goal is to make HIV testing more “routine,” like testing for cholesterol or diabetes. Routine testing and early treatment can give people with HIV life-saving care before they become sick. Hundreds of thousands of Americans are infected and are not aware of it!

VA had ever been tested for HIV. And only one in every forty were tested for HIV in 2009.

Say Yes to the HIV Test

Take time to check your own HIV status. Talk to your health care provider about getting an HIV test if you have not had one. Remember, the results of the test are confidential and will not affect your VA benefits. In 2009, VA asked Veterans who use My HealthēVet if their VA health care provider had offered them an HIV test in the last year. Only 9% said they had been offered a test for HIV in the last 12 months. Compare this to over 80% who had been offered a cholesterol test. Nearly

is dedicating the week of June 27 to July 3 to HIV testing. If your health care provider does not bring up HIV testing, you should. Remember, it does not hurt to be sure. Finding out about HIV and being treated early can keep you healthy. It can even save your life!

World-Class Care

The VA provides world-class care for Veterans who are diagnosed with HIV. For more information about HIV testing, treatment and prevention, visit www.hiv.va.gov/vahiv?page=pt-home.

Falls pose serious risk for those 65 & older

Anyone can fall at any time, but the risk of falls increases with age. Falls are the leading cause of injury in those over the age of 65.

Falls are more common in women, and those who have a history of falls are more likely to fall again. They can lead to many injuries such as head trauma, soft tissue injuries, dislocation and fractures.

Fractures of the hip and leg are especially worrisome; as elderly individuals with hip and leg fractures are more likely to develop additional problems such as pneumonia. They also may require nursing home placement for a least a short period of time.

The elderly are at the greatest risk for many reasons. This is because of changes in the body that occur with age. Things such as weakness, poor vision, illness, medication side effects, and environmental issues can contribute to a fall.

While one cannot eliminate all of the risks



for falls, many can be reduced or eliminated.

To assist in this you could begin an exercise program. Exercise does not need to be strenuous to be effective. Discuss exercise options with your healthcare provider to determine what is best for you.

Poor vision contributes to falls because the individual is unable to see objects that are in the way. It is important to

have your vision checked yearly and replace glasses as needed.

Also make sure that lights are working. Ensure burned out light bulbs are replaced and use night lights to make it easier to see at night.

Medications can also contribute to a fall, as they can cause sleepiness, dizziness, and other problems related to side effects.

The more medications you take the greater the risk. Have your healthcare provider review all medications you take, both prescription and over the counter, to determine the side effects and possible interactions that can occur.

Some common health problems such as high blood pressure and diabetes also may put you at risk for a fall.

Keep a close eye on your blood pressure and blood sugar readings and review them routinely with your healthcare provider.

The risk factor that most people have the greatest control over is the environmental one.

Risks from your home environment can easily be reduced by taking a close look around to determine how you can make your home safer. These may include:

- Remove clutter from areas such as walkways, hallways and stairs.

***Continued on Pg. 5
See Falls***

Medical Foster Home program gives Veterans alternative to nursing homes

by *Trina Touchton*

Have you heard about the **Medical Foster Home Program** (MFH)? The **Huntington VAMC** is proud to be one of a number of VA's throughout the country in the process of establishing this exciting new program at our facility.

MFH programs already have successfully been established in approximately 31 VA's across the nation.

The Medical Foster Home Program gives Veterans the opportunity and choice to live in a family environment when health issues prevent them from being able to live independently.

The Veteran lives in the home of a caregiver who provides 24/7 support and care. Veterans living in the MFH receive medical services through Huntington VAMC's Home Based Primary Care team. The Veteran also receives a monthly visit from the

MFH coordinator to discuss progress or any concerns that may arise.

The Veteran usually has a private room with the opportunity to be part of a community and extended family. The cost of the MFH is paid by the Veteran directly to the caregiver. The MFH coordinator assists the Veteran in applying for benefits he or she may be eligible to receive to offset costs.

Medical Foster Homes must be within a 40-mile radius of the Huntington VA Medical Center, meet all state and locate licensing requirements and pass a VA team

The Medical Foster Home Program gives Veterans the opportunity and choice to live in a family environment when health issues prevent them from being able to live independently.

inspection. Caregivers must be at least 21 years of age, physically able to provide care, have an FBI background check and provide three references.

Veterans who have been a part of this program throughout the nation have

responded very positively. If you or your loved one is a Veteran who is at a point of no longer being able to live independently, or if you are interested in being a potential caregiver, this program may be for you.

For more information, please contact Medical Foster Home program at 304.429.6755 or 1.800.827.8244, ext. 2725.

Trina Touchton, LCSW, LICSW, is a licensed clinical social worker with the Huntington VA Medical Center's Social Work Service and serves as the Medical Foster Home Coordinator.



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Announcements & Meetings

Veterans Chapel Services Held Weekly

Weekly chapel services are held in the Veterans Chapel, located in room 1C106 on first floor of the Medical Center. These interdenominational services are held every Sunday at 8:30 a.m., and are open to all patients, families, visitors and employees. We look forward to seeing you there!

Mental Health Consumer Council Meeting

If you are a Veteran who receives mental health services, come check out the **Mental Health Consumer Council**. The council is looking for interested members. The purpose of the Council is to work with the **Mental Health Clinic (MHC)** of the Medical Center to improve our services, by listening to the needs of the Veterans we serve, and exploring solutions together. This Council is NOT a treatment group. The Council meets the third Friday of each month in the large group room of the MHC (ask at check-in desk for directions), from 1-2:30 p.m. Contact **Chuck Weinberg**, ext 3721, or **Mike Ellis**, ext 2804, for more information.

SAFE (Supportive and Family Education) Group Meetings

The **SAFE (Supportive and Family Education)** group for family members of Veterans with mental illness, meets the second and fourth Fridays of each month, and offers education and group support about mental illness. This group, which is only for family members (not Veterans), is held from 3-4 p.m. in the large group room of the MHC. (Ask at the check-in desk for directions). Contact **Chuck Weinberg**, ext. 3721, for more information.

Falls from Pg. 3

- Remove throw rugs or make them more secure with a skid proof backing.
- Wear shoes or slippers with nonskid tread at all time. Avoid walking barefoot or in socks.
- Keep electrical and telephone cords out of walkways.
- In the bathroom, use a nonskid mat or slip resistant appliques in the tub. You may also consider use of a shower chair.
- Install grab bars in the shower and by the commode and be sure they are securely installed and can bear your weight.

- Keep items frequently used near waist level so that they are easy to reach.
- Have furniture with armrests to assist getting up and down.
- Keep the phone within reach and have more than one phone if possible.
- Consider use of a personal alert system such as the Guardian Alert used here at the VAMC. Discuss with your provider to determine if you qualify.

Falls result from a variety of reasons, but many can be prevented by determining your risk and looking for ways to reduce or eliminate that risk.

VA research offers insight on Parkinson's Disease: *Collaborative research on "Deep Brain Stimulation"*

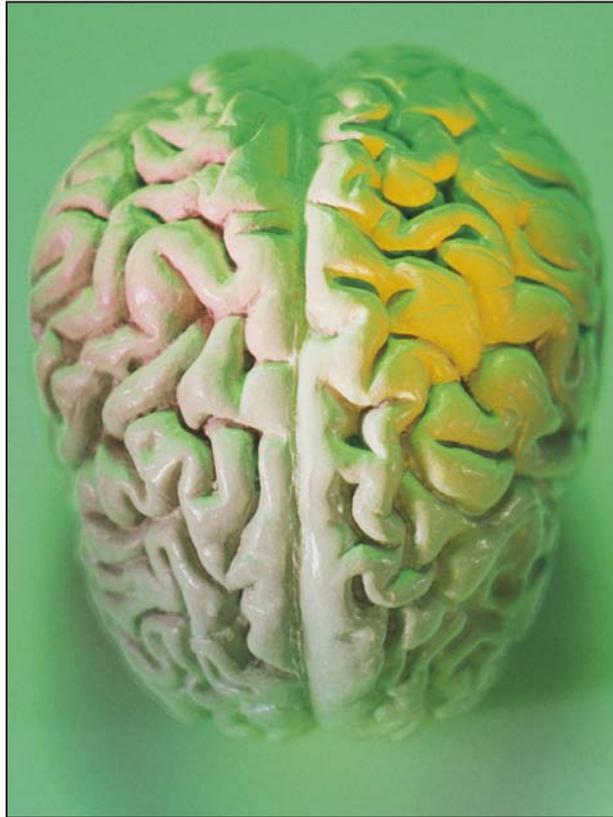
Veterans and others with Parkinson's disease who undergo deep brain stimulation (DBS) may benefit from research co-sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs and published recently in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*.

"VA is proud to partner with the National Institutes of Health on this research, the largest trial of its kind to date," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "This and other ground-breaking research on Parkinson's disease ensure we provide the best care possible for Veterans with this common, debilitating disease."

VA cares for about 40,000 Veterans with Parkinson's disease. DBS is often recommended for people who no longer respond well to medication alone.

The new report shows DBS is equally effective at either of two sites in the brain. Earlier results from the landmark study appeared last year in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, indicating that DBS overall is somewhat riskier than carefully managed drug therapy but may hold significant benefits for appropriate patients.

In DBS, surgeons implant electrodes in the brain and run thin wires under the skin to a pacemaker-like device. Electrical pulses from the battery-operated device jam the brain signals that cause motor symptoms such as stiffness and tremors. Thousands of Americans have seen successful



results from DBS, but questions have remained about which of the two stimulation sites in the brain yield better outcomes.

The new analysis finds both sites roughly equal for patient outcomes relating to movement symptoms. There were subtle differences between the sites in terms of cognitive skills and mood, but the clinical significance of the differences is not clear.

Researchers will follow the study participants several more years to examine the relative benefits and risks of each DBS approach.

The study was sponsored by VA's Cooperative Studies Program and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, part of the National Institutes of Health.

Research Program Receives AAHRPP Accreditation

Congratulations to Dr. Bill Leidy and the Huntington VA Medical Center's Research staff on receiving full accreditation of the human research program from the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Program (AAHRPP). The staff was able to demonstrate, through an intensive accreditation process, that extensive safeguards are built into all elements of the human research program.

VA Rural Health Outreach Clinic site announced

On June 16, Medical Center Director Edward H. Seiler joined with Congressman Charlie Wilson to announce that a site had been selected for a VA Rural Health Outreach Clinic in Gallia County, Ohio.

The VA staffed clinic, to be located at 323 Upper River Road in Gallipolis, will undergo

necessary renovations this summer and is planned to open in September.

“Veterans from the Gallia County area who currently receive their health care at the Huntington VA Medical Center will be given the opportunity to transfer their primary care services to the

new Clinic in Gallia County,” said Mr. Seiler. “Those patients will be identified by the Medical Center and contacted by letter.”

“I’m so pleased that the Veterans in this area will have care closer to home,” Congressman Wilson said. “I’m proud that this clinic will be staffed by VA personnel

and will give our Veterans the healthcare they deserve.”

The clinic will initially operate two days a week, with expansion possible depending on the needs of Veterans in that area. The clinic will provide primary care services on an outpatient basis.

Did you know there’s a connection between heart disease and diabetes?

by Paula Solar

If you are diabetic, you are twice as likely to develop heart disease as someone who does not have diabetes. People with diabetes tend to develop heart disease at an earlier age than others. A middle-aged person with type two diabetes has as high a risk of having a heart attack as someone without diabetes that has already had one heart attack.

Women who have not gone through menopause usually have less risk of heart disease than men of the same age. But women of all ages with diabetes have an increased risk of heart disease because diabetes cancels out the protective effects of being a woman in her child-bearing years.

People with diabetes who have already had one heart attack run an even greater risk of having a second one. In addition, heart attacks in people with diabetes are more serious and more likely to result in death. High blood glucose levels

over time can lead to increased deposits of fatty materials on the insides of the blood vessel walls. These deposits may affect blood flow, increasing the chance of clogging and hardening of blood vessels (atherosclerosis).

You can lower your risk by keeping your blood sugar (glucose), blood pressure, and blood cholesterol close to the recommended levels suggested by your health care provider. Reaching your targets also can help prevent narrowing or blockage of the blood vessels in your legs, a condition called peripheral arterial disease. You can reach your targets by choosing foods wisely, being physically active, quitting smoking, and by taking medications as your provider has prescribed. If you have already had a heart attack, taking care of yourself can help prevent future health problems.

Paul Solar, RN, is a registered nurse in the Huntington VAMC’s Cardiology Department.

Local Veteran Medals at Golden Age Games

Air Force Veteran Kenneth Willis, from Ironton, Ohio, joined with the more than 700 Veterans in their golden age who participated in the 24th National Veterans Golden Age Games held in Des Moines, Iowa, May 26-31.

The Golden Age Games is the largest sporting event in the world for senior Veterans. All athletes are U.S. military Veterans from across the country age 55 and older, receiving medical care through VA.

Willis, 67, took home a bronze medal in horseshoes. He also competed in Shuffleboard, Checkers, and Bowling.

This event is sponsored by VA, Help Hospitalized Veterans (HHV) and Veterans

Canteen Service (VCS). Hosted this year by the VA Central Iowa Health Care System, the Games demonstrate the value of regular exercise, recreation and friendly competition for all Veterans, especially those dealing with age-related illnesses.

Veterans compete in seven age categories in ambulatory, wheelchair or visually impaired divisions. Events include swimming, cycling, table tennis, dominoes, shuffleboard, horseshoes, nine-ball, bowling, checkers, golf, croquet, shot-put, discus and air rifles. The Games serve as a qualifying event for competition in the National Senior Games in a number of the competitive events.



Kenneth Willis shows off his Bronze Medal he won playing horseshoes at The Golden Age Games in Des Moines, Iowa. He also competed in shuffleboard, checkers, and bowling.

The Huntington VAMC was pleased to have a Veteran from our area participate in the National Veterans Golden Age Games,

which is one of the most progressive and adaptive rehabilitative senior sports programs in the world.



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