

Veterans' Healthy Living

VA New England Healthcare System

Fall 2008



**National Veterans
Wheelchair Games**

The Flu and You

**VA Introduces Video
for New Patients**



Plan to Be Prepared

Message From the Network Director



Michael F. Mayo-Smith, M.D., M.P.H.
Network Director

Dear Veterans,
As I begin serving as Network Director for the VA New England Healthcare System (VISN 1), I would like to say how privileged I feel to serve you. From my first days as a resident at the Providence VA Medical

Center, I have felt a special regard for veterans. From those who fought in World War I to vets who survived the Bataan Death March and the jungles of Vietnam to the men and women returning today from Iraq and Afghanistan, I have appreciated hearing your stories. Each of you, whether you served in a conflict or in an office, made a commitment to do whatever was needed for our country. It is an honor to serve you.

My goal as Network Director is to look for ways to improve our services so that both patients and staff have the best health care experiences possible. One way I can do this is by continuing to practice as a primary care provider. This will allow me to stay in touch with you, the patients, and to understand our interactions with you.

As you read our fall edition of *Veterans' Healthy Living*, pay special attention to the article on personal preparedness. In it, you'll learn how to prepare for weather emergencies and other crises. I'm sure you'll also enjoy reading on page 3 about some very special veterans who recently represented VISN 1 at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

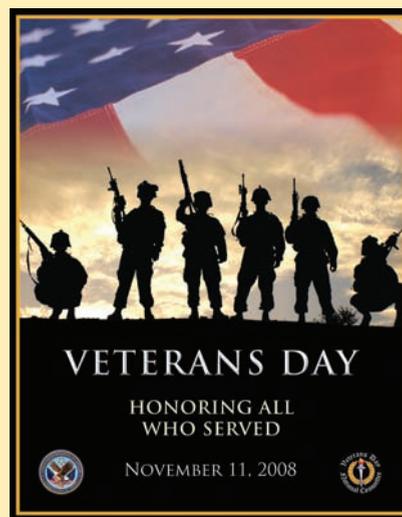
Please enjoy the crisp, cool days of autumn!

Michael F. Mayo-Smith, M.D., M.P.H.
Network Director



Veterans Day Poster

On November 11, our Nation will honor all veterans by celebrating Veterans Day. The Department of Veterans Affairs releases a poster each year to commemorate the special occasion, available online at www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday/gallery.asp. The poster gallery now features the 2008 poster, as well as past Veterans Day posters since 1978, in multiple sizes to print or download. VA also has many other online resources to help you share information with others this Veterans Day; there are history lessons, fact sheets, photos, and activities for kids—all located at www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday/.



Veterans' Healthy Living Editorial Board

Executive Editor | Sandra M. Wunschel, LICSW
Associate Editor | Sally M. Riley

Contributors:

Debra Freed and John Brako
Christopher Laccinole

Website: www.newengland.va.gov

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Air Force veteran Debra Freed, competing in a handcycling event at the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

National Veterans Wheelchair Games Offer Competition, Camaraderie, and More

You could say that the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in 2004 saved the life of United States Air Force veteran Debra Freed of Framingham, Mass. A paraplegic, unemployed, and unsure which direction her life should take, Freed describes herself at that time as “stuck,” unable to lift herself out of depression.

Then one day at the VA Medical Center (VAMC) in West Roxbury, Freed saw a sign advertising the games.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is the largest annual wheelchair sports competition of its kind in the world. VA therapists use wheelchair sports as a therapeutic tool for treating disabled veterans.

The wheelchair games serve as a way to introduce veterans with physical disabilities to a variety of wheelchair sports and recreational activities. By participating, the veterans become aware of their abilities and potential.

This year, the 28th annual games were held in Omaha, Neb., from July 25–29. Over 500 athletes, including 13 from the VA New England Healthcare System region, competed. Among the newest competitors this year were veterans of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

After Freed’s first games, where she participated in air guns, archery, javelin, shot put, and discus—sports she had little or no experience in, she was hooked. “It’s really good to be a part of the games,” Freed says. “The best parts are the team, the camaraderie and the sportsmanship. I’ve made new friends and I look forward to seeing them every year.”

When Freed made the decision to become a wheelchair athlete, her life began to move for-

ward again. She volunteered at the New England Chapter of the PVA and eventually became its Government Relations Director, a position she currently holds.

For Army veteran John Brako of Acton, Mass., the games give him a sense of freedom. Brako, who has multiple sclerosis, had read about the games, but it was his swimming coach at the West Roxbury VAMC, Eileen Craffey, who recommended he give the games a try. “It sounded great to me,” remembers Brako. “Swimming is my favorite event, because while I can’t walk, I can move in the water on my own.” This year in Omaha, Brako won gold medals in both swimming events.

From beginners to those who are experienced wheelchair athletes, from veterans of WWII to those recently returned home from the conflicts in the Middle East, veterans come to the games for the sportsmanship, the health benefits, the camaraderie, and an opportunity to face their personal challenges.

2009 National Rehabilitation Special Events www1.va.gov/opa/speceven/index.asp

National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic
March 29 - April 3 in Snowmass, CO

National Veterans Golden Age Games
June 1 - 5 in Birmingham, AL

National Veterans Wheelchair Games
July 13 - 18 in Spokane, WA

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival
October 5 - 11 in San Antonio, TX

Plan to BE PREPARED

Beginning with childhood and throughout our lives, the value of being prepared is emphasized. The VA calls this way of thinking “personal preparedness” and recognizes the never-ending importance of having a plan to protect yourself and your family in the event of an emergency. According to Christopher Laccinole, VISN 1 Emergency Management coordinator, “Personal preparedness is necessary for our daily lives. It is important to have backup personal plans that will allow you to handle the unexpected.”

Assembling a supply kit for your home and vehicle can keep you from having to worry about basic needs. Laccinole recommends storing your kit in a clear plastic container with a lid, with the following items:

For your home

- Battery-operated radio and flashlights (plus extra batteries)
- First aid kit
- Copies of important documents (medical cards, bank account numbers, insurance policies, and birth certificates)
- Water (enough for 1 gallon per person per day, for at least three days) and food that does not require cooking
- Vitamins, medications and any special health care needs
- Cash, credit cards and/or travelers checks and an extra set of keys

- Extra clothing and shoes
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Fire extinguisher and a whistle
- Large plastic trash bags
- Toilet paper
- Cell phone, charger and a list of important telephone numbers
- Pet emergency kit (a leash, food, water and bowl, blankets and medication)

For your vehicle

- Jumper cables, tools, flares, and fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Food and water
- Gloves and blankets
- Shovel and scraper (for winter seasons)
- Local maps





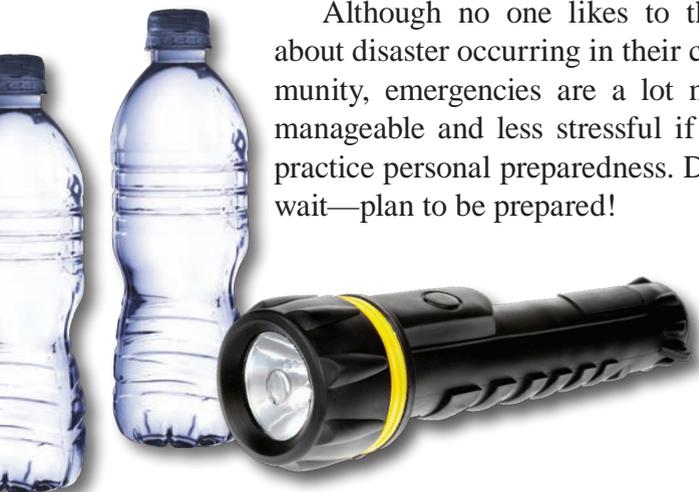
VISN 1 Staff Support Hurricane Relief Efforts

During the recent hurricanes - Gustav and Ike - VISN 1 staff supported relief efforts at Federal Medical Shelters in Texas and Louisiana. A total of 42 staff representing all eight VISN 1 medical centers stepped forward to assist those affected by the aftermath of the storms.

In addition, it is important to know how to contact your family members, especially if evacuation occurs. “Each member of your family should have a list of emergency phone numbers, as well as a plan in place to reach each other if separated,” says Laccinole. “All should also be aware of where the emergency supply kit is located and have copies of important records available (and stored in a water-proof location).”

If you are just getting started with your emergency planning, or would like some tips to help improve your family’s plan, the VA has many resources available on the My Health₂Vet website (www.myhealth.va.gov). There you’ll find information and links for various types of disaster preparation.

Although no one likes to think about disaster occurring in their community, emergencies are a lot more manageable and less stressful if you practice personal preparedness. Don’t wait—plan to be prepared!



During recent disasters caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the VA assisted in emergency response efforts by:

- evacuating veterans with urgent care needs from the path of the storm;
- staging fuel, water, food, medications, and supplies, and making arrangements for essential staff to be on-hand to meet the health care needs of veterans in the area; and
- identifying veterans in the affected areas that receive their checks by mail to issue convenience checks if mail delivery is interrupted for an extended period of time.

Are you ready?

The Department of Homeland Security recommends these steps in preparation for an emergency:

- Get a Kit
- Make a Plan
- Be Informed
- Get Involved

For more information, visit www.ready.gov/

THE FLU & YOU: Tips for Protecting Yourself Against Influenza



Flu season is here! The best defense against the virus is the influenza vaccine. However, there are many other things you can do to avoid getting the flu.

The main way that illnesses such as colds and flu are spread is in the form of respiratory droplets from coughs and sneezes. Therefore it is important to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue (not your hand) when coughing or sneezing.

Washing your hands frequently will help protect you from germs. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.

Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you do get the flu, stay home from work, school or errands to prevent others from catching your illness.

Who Should Get the Flu Shot

Enrolled veterans who:

- ▶ are 50 years of age and older
- ▶ have certain chronic medical conditions
- ▶ are pregnant women
- ▶ live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- ▶ live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu,

including health care workers and out-of-home caregivers for the elderly and children less than six months of age



Contact your nearest VA facility for flu clinic dates.

Now Playing

VA Introduces Video for New Patients

If you are just beginning VA health care or returning after time away from the system, VA New England Healthcare System has an online video that can help guide you through. Located on the New Patient Orientation



Web page, this video helps incoming patients learn about VA health care, including enrollment, prescriptions, insurance, co-pays, available services, and much more. The video portrays the experiences of two veterans starting VA care, giving new patients an idea of what to expect when they enroll in the VA New England Healthcare System.

To view the video and find links to additional new patient information, visit www.newengland.va.gov

AFTER HOURS Telephone Care Program



VA New England now offers telephone advice services to veterans 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Veterans will use this after-hours service by dialing the same telephone numbers used for advice during the day. The After Hours Telephone Care Program staff will have full electronic access to your appointments and health records.

Services provided by the VA Regional Call Center include medical information, pharmacy, services, appointments, and locations of services.

When you call, please have the following information ready: your name, address, Social Security Number, a phone number where you can be reached, what VA hospital or clinic you go

to for treatment, your doctor's name or Primary Care Team, the medications you take, and how we can help you.

The VA is only a phone call away, 24 hours a day!



The Digital TV Transition

On February 17, 2009 all full-power broadcast television stations in the United States will stop broadcasting on analog airwaves and begin broadcasting only in digital. Digital broadcasting will allow stations to offer improved picture and sound quality and additional channels. For more information and to find out whether or not you will be impacted by the digital TV (DTV) transition, go to:

www.dtv.gov



Have you registered to use the My Health Vet (MHV) web site yet? It's a simple process that can open up a wealth of health information to you and your family.

www.myhealth.va.gov

Where to find us



COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS

CONNECTICUT DANBURY CBOC

7 Germantown Road
Danbury, CT 06810
(203) 798-8422

NEW LONDON CBOC
4 Shaw's Cove, Suite 101
New London, CT 06320
(860) 437-3611

STAMFORD CBOC
Stamford Health System
1275 Summer Street
Stamford, CT 06905
(203) 325-0649

WATERBURY CBOC
95 Scovill Street
Waterbury, CT 06706
(203) 465-5292

WINDHAM CBOC
96 Mansfield Street
Willimantic, CT 06226
(860) 450-7583

WINSTED CBOC
115 Spencer Street
Winsted, CT 06098
(860) 738-6985

MAINE

BANGOR CBOC
304 Hancock Street, Suite 3B
Bangor, ME 04401
(207) 561-3600

**LINCOLN OUTREACH CLINIC
(BANGOR SATELLITE CLINIC)**
99 River Road
Lincoln, ME 04457
(207) 403-2000

CALAIS CBOC
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Calais, ME 04619
(207) 904-3700

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163 Van Buren Road, Suite 6
Caribou, ME 04736
(207) 493-3800

RUMFORD CBOC
431 Franklin Street
Rumford, ME 04276
(207) 369-3200

SACO CBOC
655 Main Street
Saco, ME 04072
(207) 294-3100

MASSACHUSETTS CAUSEWAY STREET CBOC

Manager
251 Causeway Street
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 248-1000

DORCHESTER
895 Blue Hill Avenue
Dorchester, MA 02121
(617) 822-7146

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Littleton, NH 03561
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PORTSMOUTH CBOC
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Portsmouth, NH 03803
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(800) 892-8384, ext. 5500

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Colchester, VT 05446
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RUTLAND CBOC
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Rutland, VT 05702
(802) 773-3386

VA MEDICAL CENTERS

**CONNECTICUT
VA CONNECTICUT
HEALTHCARE SYSTEM**
Newington Campus
555 Willard Avenue
Newington, CT 06111
(860) 666-6951

West Haven Campus
950 Campbell Avenue
West Haven, CT 06516
(203) 932-5711

MAINE

TOGUS VA MEDICAL CENTER
1 VA Center
Augusta, ME 04330
(207) 623-8411
(877) 421-8263

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VETERANS MEMORIAL HOSP.**
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(781) 275-7500

**VA BOSTON
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940 Belmont Street
Brockton, MA 02301
(508) 583-4500

Jamaica Plain Campus
150 S. Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02130
(617) 232-9500

West Roxbury Campus
1400 VFW Parkway
West Roxbury, MA 02132
(617) 323-7700

**NORTHAMPTON VA
MEDICAL CENTER**
421 North Main Street
Leeds, MA 01053
(413) 584-4040

**NEW HAMPSHIRE
MANCHESTER VA
MEDICAL CENTER**
718 Smyth Road
Manchester, NH 03104
(603) 624-4366
(800) 892-8384

**RHODE ISLAND
PROVIDENCE VA
MEDICAL CENTER**
830 Chalkstone Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
(401) 273-7100
(866) 590-2976

**VERMONT
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION
VA MEDICAL CENTER**
215 North Main Street
White River Junction,
VT 05009
(802) 295-9363

Veterans' Healthy Living

VISN 1 Communications
Department of Veterans Affairs
200 Springs Road
Bedford, MA 01730