

VA New England Healthcare System

SPRING 2012

VETERANS'

healthy living

**On Solid
Ground**
A Veteran's
Journey

**Strong
Heart,
Strong
Home**

Vet Centers —
Here for You Every Step of the Way



VA
HEALTH
CARE | Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century



Dear Veterans

A Message from the Network Director

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

Spring reminds us of renewal and change—the hope for change, a vision for change, and the choice to make a change!

You made a choice to serve in the Armed Forces and made sacrifices to keep our country and everything it represents safe. Today it is our turn to serve you, by providing exceptional health care focused on your individual needs, and your overall well-being. We are here for you every step of the way!

On page 3, “On Solid Ground,” is the poignant story about Veteran Gerry Maguire who, with help from the VA Medical Center in Bedford, arose from physical, mental, emotional, and homeless challenges in his life to begin again and obtain his college degree.

On pages 4 and 5, the article, “Strong Heart, Strong Home,” serves as a reminder that you, as a Veteran, are not alone. Our VA Boston Healthcare System “Strength At Home” programs are there to help you and your spouse or partner enhance relationships, improve anger management skills, and prevent conflict within intimate relationships. The programs were created to target the areas of counseling, training, and support for Veterans.

Page 6, “Vet Centers – Here for You Every Step of the Way,” focuses on our Vet Centers, what they provide and how they work together with our medical centers.

Warming temperatures and blooming flowers and trees tell us change is coming. You may be considering making some changes yourself such as planting a garden and thinking “green.” “A Growth of Opportunities” on page 7 is an article about the VA Medical Center at Leeds, which is well-known and recognized for its horticulture therapy for Veterans. In September, 2011 the VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System held Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Rain Garden training that included the installation of the first rain garden at the VA Medical Center.

Be sure to check out the article on page 7, “Play it Safe with Home Oxygen Use” and read about important tips and reminders on oxygen safety in the home.

Thank you for your service. Now let us serve you!

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



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VA Mission:

Honor America’s Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

Veteran Gerry Maguire, using VA services to get his life back on track.

Gerry Maguire, Veteran, business owner, and proud father of three had a wonderful life until he started experiencing back pain and was forced to undergo surgery. Diagnosed with degenerative joint disease, he said, "I woke one morning to find I could not stand on my own two feet and fell to the floor."



On Solid Ground: A Veteran's Journey

Unable to work, Gerry looked into collecting workers' compensation, which he had always paid into, only to find that he didn't qualify for the benefits. This left Gerry without an income and overwhelmed with financial obligations. In a short time, he lost his business, had his truck repossessed, and was evicted from his apartment. Without a home, Gerry was forced to surrender custody of his three children to their mother, which was the toughest and most heartbreaking of all his trials and tribulations.

"I began having thoughts that maybe my children would be better off if I were not among the living," he said. Alone, feeling helpless, and full of "empty resentment," Gerry contemplated suicide not once, but twice and it was only the

thoughts of his children that saved him.

"On the advice of a fellow Veteran, I went to the Bedford VA Medical Center, just to talk to someone," said Gerry. At the hospital, in tears and unable to speak, he was approached by a nurse who began simply with, "Are you okay?"

Realizing Gerry was in crisis, the nurse quickly connected him with a social worker and the Homeless Coordinator, who was, "a young, petite, button of a woman, who I would learn later could move mountains," Gerry related.

Gerry received emergency funds, was signed up for vocational rehabilitation, and made contact with the Compensated Work Therapy Manager. He said,

"Suddenly, I had a job!" Along with employment assistance, Gerry was set up with housing. "I entered into the Housing and Urban Development/VA Supported Housing program in July 2008 and used my VASH voucher to obtain housing. I have been able to provide a good home for my children and myself ever since."

Overcoming all obstacles, Gerry obtained a college degree that came "four years after I found the courage to ask for help." With both feet firmly on the ground and his head held high, Gerry offers this valuable message for others:

"Please ask for help! You may never meet the angel who saved my life, but as I witnessed, she is part of a network of people who do care. They really do care!"



Strong Heart, Strong Home

Stress, stressors, and trauma are a part of life, and these challenges come in many forms. We all have stress, but upon returning home from deployment, it is not unusual to experience a different kind of stress than what may have been felt on the battlefield. For some people, seeing, experiencing, or learning about a traumatizing event causes fear, helplessness, or horror.

Returning Veterans often deal with a broad range of feelings and emotions such as anger, sadness, and anxiety. Understanding why these

feelings are occurring can be difficult and add to the stress of readjustment and transition for a Veteran and his or her loved ones. If negative feelings and emotions are prolonged, or if it is difficult to positively communicate with others, counseling with a health care professional could help.

According to Casey Taft, Ph.D., at the National Center for PTSD in Boston, and the director of the “Strength At Home” program, the decision to develop the program four years ago was based on need. Dr. Taft has been working with Veterans and

military couples to teach them how to manage anger, improve their communication skills, and deal with any post-traumatic stress issues.

The 12 session “Strength at Home” program is designed to provide in-depth counseling support and training for male Veterans and service members. These sessions focus on ways to manage stress and anger, how to improve communication, and how to strengthen relationships. The counselors understand the stressors of serving in the military and the challenges that occur in the cycle of deployment and reintegration with family and community. The class focuses upon understanding



Vet Centers – Here for You Every Step of the Way

Veterans returning from the battle front can face many challenges in readjusting to civilian life. For young Veterans coming home from Iraq or Afghanistan, homelessness, unemployment, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are higher than the national average. According to William Busby, Northeast Regional Director of the VA Vet Centers, the Vet Centers provide a broad range of services to make the transition from the battle front to the home front an experience with a positive outcome.

“We provide readjustment counseling to help our Veterans return to a reasonable lifestyle,” said Busby. “All the Vet Centers have a marriage and family life counselor on staff. When a Veteran who served in a combat zone comes in, they register at the Medical Center and they are checked out medically. If

they are dealing with issues that require medication, we refer them to the Medical Center.”

The Vet Centers work with the Medical Centers to screen and offer readjustment counseling, military sexual trauma counseling, substance abuse assessments, and bereavement counseling. “Often, we partner to provide VBA benefits counseling, community outreach assistance with job training and re-training, small business services, and educational opportunities,” Busby said.

Although they are under the same health care branch as VA, the difference between Vet Centers and the Medical Centers is that a Veteran can only be seen at a Vet Center if they served in a combat zone or if they experienced sexual trauma while on active duty. “Many of our Veterans are

suffering from PTSD,” Busby said. “There’s a higher suicide rate among our soldiers now; that’s another reason why it is imperative we work together with the Medical Centers.”

Additional services the Vet Centers provide are Yellow Ribbon events for families to receive training on how to help Veterans readjust. Post Deployment Help Reassessments are also available.

There are currently 300 Vet Centers nationwide. To reach Veterans in remote areas, VA also provides mobile Vet Centers. Busby said, “We are on the same team, and we are here for our Veterans every step of the way.”

For contact information for each of the New England Vet Centers, please visit www.vetcenter.va.gov or contact your local VA Medical Center.



Volunteers hard at work planting the rain garden near the VAMC at Leeds.

Opportunities for Veterans are Being Planted

Last September, the VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System (VACWMHCS) in Leeds, Mass., hosted an Environmental Protection Agency Rain Garden Training for area VA Medical Centers and private hospitals. The event provided hands-on training on how to site, size, design, install, and maintain a rain garden. “We installed all the planting in three hours. I was amazed at how people stuck with it despite the sweat on their brow,” said landscape architect Tom Benjamin.

The 800-square foot garden was constructed in a low-lying area near the VA Medical Center at Leeds. The garden captures 30 percent more run-off water than regular lawns or gardens the same size, giving a positive environmental impact by

preventing pollutants collected in run-off from going into storm drains and on to streams, rivers, and ponds.

The garden not only provides an environmentally friendly function, it is also in sync with the mission and purpose of the horticulture therapy program at medical centers where Veterans participate in therapeutic, vocational, and wellness programs. In Leeds, Veterans plant and sell a variety of plants from their onsite greenhouse called Bear Hill Gardens.

Lorraine Brisson, coordinator for the Incentive Therapy Program at VACWMHCS, says the rain garden is, “In the perfect spot...right outside the greenhouse and potting area, so anyone working will be able to enjoy and admire it.”

Play it Safe with Home Oxygen Use

Oxygen is a fire hazard that causes a flame to burn fast and hot. In the home, oxygen therapy increases the amount of oxygen in the environment, saturating clothing, fabric, hair, or any porous objects in the area where oxygen is being used.

Here are some life-saving oxygen safety tips:

- Stay 15 feet away (five giant steps) from any open flame.
- Do not use equipment that could cause a spark such as an electric razor, and avoid combustible petroleum-based products such as vapor rubs.
- Use oxygen in a well-ventilated area and do not use or store it in a closet or cabinet.
- NEVER smoke while using oxygen and make sure you are at least 15 feet away from anyone who is smoking.
- Install smoke detectors in your home and check the batteries regularly.
- Keep a fire extinguisher on hand and make sure you know how to use it.
- Have a plan for evacuation out of each room.

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

VA Maine Healthcare System
1 VA Center
Augusta, ME 04330
(207) 623-8411
(877) 421-8263

MASSACHUSETTS

Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hosp.
200 Springs Road
Bedford, MA 01730
(781) 687-2000

VA Boston Healthcare System

Brockton Campus
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

VA Central Western MA Healthcare System
421 North Main Street
Leeds, MA 01053
(413) 584-4040

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Manchester VAMC
718 Smyth Road
Manchester, NH 03104
(603) 624-4366
(800) 892-8384

RHODE ISLAND

Providence VAMC
830 Chalkstone Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
(401) 273-7100
(866) 590-2976

VERMONT

White River Junction VAMC
215 North Main Street
White River Junction,
VT 05009
(802) 295-9363

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
35 State Hospital Street
Bangor, ME 04401
(207) 561-3600

Lincoln Outreach Clinic (Bangor Satellite Clinic)
99 River Road
Lincoln, ME 04457
(207) 403-2000

Calais CBOC
50 Union Street
Calais, ME 04619
(207) 904-3700

Caribou CBOC
163 Van Buren Road, Ste. 6
Caribou, ME 04736
(207) 493-3800

Fort Kent CBOC
3 Mountain View Drive
Fort Kent, ME 04743
(207) 834-1572

Houlton CBOC

Houlton Regional Hospital
20 Hartford Street
Houlton, ME 04730
(877) 421-8263, ext. 2000

Lewiston/Auburn CBOC
1072 Minot Ave
Auburn, ME 04210-3746
(207) 623-8411, ext. 3900

Portland CBOC
144 Fore Street
Portland, ME 04101
(207) 771-3500

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

Fitchburg CBOC
275 Nichols Road
Fitchburg, MA 01420
(978) 342-9781

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Framingham, MA 01702
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(978) 282-0676

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143 Munson Street
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Haverhill, MA 01830
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233 Stevens Street
Hyannis, MA 02601
(508) 771-3190

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130 Marshall Road
Lowell, MA 01852
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Lynn CBOC
225 Boston Street, Ste. 107
Lynn, MA 01904
(781) 595-9818

New Bedford CBOC

175 Elm Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
(508) 994-0217

Pittsfield CBOC
73 Eagle Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 499-2672

Quincy CBOC
114 Whitwell Street
Quincy, MA 02169
(617) 376-2010

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25 Bond Street
Springfield, MA 01104
(413) 731-6000

Worcester CBOC
605 Lincoln Street
Worcester, MA 01605
(508) 856-0104

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Conway CBOC
71 Hobbs Street
Conway, NH 03818
(603) 624-4366, ext. 3199
(800) 892-8384, ext. 3199

Keene Outpatient Clinic
640 Marlboro Street
Keene, NH 03543
(802) 295-4900

Littleton CBOC
658 Meadow Street, Ste. 4
Littleton, NH 03561
(603) 444-1323

Portsmouth CBOC
302 Newmarket Street
Portsmouth, NH 03803
(603) 624-4366, ext. 3199
(800) 892-8384, ext. 3199

Somersworth CBOC

200 Route 108
Somersworth, NH 03878
(603) 624-4366, ext. 3199
(800) 892-8384, ext. 3199

Tilton CBOC

630 Main Street, Ste. 400
Tilton, NH 03276
(603) 624-4366, ext. 3199
(800) 892-8384, ext. 3199

RHODE ISLAND

Middletown CBOC
One Corporate Place
Middletown, RI 02842
(401) 847-6239

VERMONT

Bennington CBOC
186 North Street
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 447-6913

Brattleboro CBOC
71 GSP Drive
Brattleboro, VT 05301
(802) 251-2200

Colchester CBOC
162 Hegeman Ave., Unit 100
Colchester, VT 05446
(802) 655-1356

Newport Outpatient Clinic
189 Prouty Drive
Newport, VT 05855
(802) 334-4131

Rutland CBOC
215 Stratton Road
Rutland, VT 05701
(802) 773-3386

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