Heart Health: Not a One-and-Done Deal

HELP is Closer Than You Think!

VBOI Provides “Street MBA” to Entrepreneurial Veterans

VA New England Healthcare System
Dear Veterans
A Message from the Network Director

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

I hope you are having a safe and happy summer so far in beautiful New England!

Regardless of the season, our Veterans deserve the very best of care—not just for their physical wounds, but also for those we can’t see. So, we included several articles in this issue about programs that help heal Veterans from the inside out.

On page 3, you’ll find an interesting piece about the Veteran Business Owners Initiative, which helps Servicemen and women returning home start or manage their own business. This program is having remarkable success helping many Veterans with post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Healing from the inside out is exactly what Dr. John Michael Gaziano describes in the article on page 4, Heart Health: Not a One-and-Done Deal. In his practice, he teaches his patients how to manage their disease; in this issue, he shares his advice about how to have a healthy heart and an overall healthier life.

We also included a special salute to our women Veterans on page 6 by providing information about some of the retreats created just for them—where they can go to bond, heal, or simply have fun!

Finally, we want to reach all Veterans, regardless of where they reside. Page 7 explains how we’re doing that with our Mobile Vet Centers.

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

Michael F. Mayo-Smith, M.D., M.P.H.
Network Director
VBOI Provides “Street MBA” to Entrepreneurial Veterans

Returning service members may have difficulty finding a job that is a good fit, especially if they face physical and emotional challenges. But the Veteran Business Owners Initiative (VBOI) can help Veterans achieve their ultimate dream job: running a business doing something they love!

VBOI is an organization of 75 members that assists New England Veterans with starting and running profitable businesses. During the past 10 years, VBOI has been involved with the launch of more than 150 businesses and helped its members borrow over $2 million in SBA Patriot Express loans from commercial banks.

The organization’s mentors advise members in all stages of business development, including startup issues like creating a business plan and attaining loans as well as improving daily operations. But unlike sitting across from a stranger, these mentors are like-minded Veterans who have truly “been there, done that” and want to see Veterans succeed.

VBOI members participate in the Business Gymnasium, an 18-module educational course that builds small business development skills. Support groups and networking events also boost Veterans’ entrepreneurial efforts by allowing them to establish relationships with other business owners.

- After being injured while serving in the Marine Corps, Michael Fitzgerald worked with VBOI and ultimately became the successful business owner of Driver’s Side Deli on the campus of Universal Technical Institute. He now serves on the Board of Directors for the VBOI.
- LCDR (Ret) Dan Tereshko served 11 years in the Navy as a Special Operations Officer and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officer. After leaving the service, he decided entrepreneurship was the next logical step, but he had no business experience. Dan discovered the VBOI upon doing an Internet research on franchising opportunities for Veterans and immediately saw the powerful network, support structure and culture that has cultivated so many successful Veteran-owned businesses. He recently closed on an SBA loan and opened in January 2014 in Norwood, MA. Dan serves on the Board of Directors representing the Brockton, MA VBOI group.
- Colonel Andrea Gayle-Bennett (National Guard) graduated VBOI’s Business Gym and plans to open a laundromat in partnership with her husband. She recently was honored at the State Capital and was invited to President Obama’s second Inaugural ceremony.
- Microsoft-certified consultant Gary Tapp (Navy) learned of the VBOI at a Small Business Administration seminar. He feels the Business Gym modules don’t “sugarcoat” information; they realistically present the challenges new businesses face. Gary serves as Chief Financial Officer for VBOI.

Jerry Pinsky, VA Facilitator, accepted the Network Director’s ICARE Award in March 2015 on behalf of the VBOI for working with Veterans to create meaningful self-employment based on their strengths, visions, skills and ambitions. Pinsky said that during the Business Gym, Veterans learn how entrepreneurs think—calling it a ‘street MBA’ of sorts—and the journey seems to relieve issues like post-traumatic stress disorder. “Entrepreneurship ... is very successful at helping Veterans overcome the trauma that they had in combat,” he said.

Recently, Albert Tansey, a VBOI member, reached more than $1 million in sales after completing the Business Gym, and recently was awarded the New England Veteran Business Owner of the Year by SBA.

To learn more, log on to www.veteranbusinessowners.org or contact:
Jerry Pinsky, VA Facilitator, at 781-983-3728 or geraldpinsky70@yahoo.com
Mike Fitzgerald, VBOI President, at 617-413-1956 or utideli@gmail.com

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Heart Health: Not a One-and-Done Deal

Dr. John Michael Gaziano, a VA Boston Healthcare System cardiologist, is passionate about his work for good reason. “My grandfather died from a heart attack in his 40s,” he says. “My father had the same disease in his 50s, but began exercising and managed his cholesterol and diet. He’s still a practicing physician 20 years later.”

Dr. Gaziano admits that improved technology helps treat heart disease and that some situations require medications or procedures, but he believes patients hold the key to heart health—and good health in general.

“Historically, doctors made the decisions,” he says, “and patients just went along because their problem was life-threatening. But I encourage patients to take charge of managing their disease, and most appreciate the opportunity to do so.”

First, Dr. Gaziano figures out what will motivate a patient to change.

“Some people want to see their kids graduate or meet their grandchildren,” he says. Fear of having a heart attack or dying is also a good motivator. Sometimes, it’s money, and people healthy enough to continue working earn much more than those drawing disability. “Our greatest economic asset is our health.”

After assessing a person’s risk factor, Dr. Gaziano makes a list of risk factors that can be changed and then works with a patient to make a plan – a “prevention prescription” that might include medications for blood pressure and cholesterol and quitting smoking. For weight management he negotiates a realistic goal—but nothing too extreme—and he doesn’t prescribe a diet that is difficult to adopt or to cook. “I give them the general rules of the road, but I want them to figure out what works for them.”

He suggests a simple rule: balance calories in with calories out. “If you’re active, your diet is more forgiving, but don’t eat so little that you’re miserable. Good nutrition is more about replacing the bad things with good things, like swapping whole milk for skim.”

Dr. Gaziano also teaches patients about good and bad carbohydrates—too much sugar and starch produce excess insulin, which can lead to diabetes and heart disease. “Whole wheat bread is as bad as regular bread,” he cautions, “and a spoonful of mashed potatoes is as bad as a spoonful of sugar. Good carbs are less processed.”
He explains that our body processes foods such as green leafy vegetables, beans, and nuts differently. “We break those cells apart more slowly and burn sugar as it comes in. That smaller sugar load goes to your muscles instead of your fat tissues and liver.” He also says to avoid low fat diets but eat “good” fats like those in fish and nuts. He recommends a diet that is about 40% carbs, 30% fats and 30% proteins if you are working out and building muscle.

Dr. Gaziano prescribes exercise, too. “If you don’t exercise at all, start by doing something five minutes a day, three days a week. Keep a calendar of your activities, and figure out what works and what doesn’t. Also, make it enjoyable. Exercise with friends or while listening to your favorite music, and time goes by quickly. Eventually, you won’t want to miss a workout.”

**He recommends four exercise components:**

Dr. Gaziano has heard every excuse for why people don’t exercise. “If your knees hurt,” he says, “it may be osteoarthritis but not exercising is the wrong answer, so start with low impact exercise and as you strengthen the muscles and tendons supporting the joint the symptoms may improve.” No time? “Exercise actually gives you more time,” he continues. “When I run every morning, I get more out of six hours’ sleep than I do out of eight. Plus I have more energy and am more productive during the day.”

After several months, Dr. Gaziano reassesses patients. “We see if we were successful or fell short, and we set new goals. But patients ultimately manage their own health, and it isn’t a one-and-done deal. It’s about adopting a permanently healthy lifestyle.”
WOMEN VETERANS: Thank You for Your Service!

All Veterans share a special bond, and the bond among women Veterans is perhaps even more special. Thanks to many fine organizations and individuals, female Veterans now have more opportunities than ever to get together, become acquainted, have fun, help each other heal, and form lasting friendships.

One such event occurred last August when Manchester VA Peer Support Services arranged for a group of women Veterans to spend a memorable weekend at Wounded Warriors @ 45 North, based in Pittsburg, NH. Last year’s free excursion for women Veterans coincided with the Old Home Day celebration in Pittsburg—complete with a parade, fireworks, food, and other festivities. As well as the August trip for women, this organization provides many other activities and trips that involve rest and FUN, including hunting, fishing, archery, and Thanksgiving and Christmas gatherings. For more information, go to www.ww45n.com/trips.html.

Project New Hope, headquartered in Worcester, MA, hosts a Women Veterans and Daughters Retreat one weekend each year. Events take place in a relaxed wilderness setting at the Grotonwood Camp and Conference Center (Groton, MA) and include workshops and activities at no cost to participants. In addition to building friendships, there are workshops that target post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); traumatic brain injury; military sexual trauma; addiction; suicide prevention; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues. To find out more about this retreat or the many others offered by Project New Hope, please visit www.projectnewhopema.org/retreats.

The Warrior Connection hosts two retreats in Vermont annually for women Veterans. This organization uses a unique process to help heal invisible wounds—loss, moral injury, PTSD, and military sexual trauma—so Veterans can safely return to their families, friends, and communities. The group welcomes Veterans from any theater; among its goals are to mitigate loss; decrease suicides; reduce PTSD, depression, and anxiety; improve intimate relationships; and increase inner resources. More information is available on their website at http://www.warriorconnection.org/womensretreat.html.

Finally, Operation We Are Here offers visitors to the website a comprehensive list of national resources—from sea to shining sea, with a lot of others in between—that include seminars, camps, and retreats for Veterans and their families. You can learn more at www.operationwearehere.com/PTSDandTBI Retreats.html. Retreats are just a small part of the information available to Veterans. Be sure to check the site’s links to other resources for women Veterans at www.operationwearehere.com/FemaleVeterans.html.
Mobile Vet Centers look remarkably like recreational vehicles. Inside, however, most MVCs have private counseling rooms, couches for individual or small group counseling sessions, state-of-the-art satellite communications capability, and audiovisual equipment. For emergencies, the vehicle also comes with a medical exam table, defibrillator, first aid kit, shower, refrigerator, microwave, beds and other amenities.

Just like at the 300 Vet Centers around the country and in U.S. territories—where Veterans can get help transitioning from military to civilian life—Veterans do not need to be enrolled with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and there is never a charge for service. No information is released to any person or agency without the written consent from the Veteran, except in circumstances to avert a crisis.

MVC staff not only let Veterans know what benefits and services are available to them through VA, but they also provide Veterans and family members help with issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and military sexual trauma; bereavement, marriage, and family counseling; or suicide prevention referrals. Counseling sessions are one of the most important resources Mobile Vet Centers provide, saving Veterans in rural areas valuable time and travel expenses.

MVCs participate in thousands of federal, state and locally sponsored Veteran-related events nationwide each year.

If a Mobile Vet Center is not available nearby and you need help, please contact the 24-hour toll-free Vet Center hotline at 877-WAR-VETS (927-8387). This confidential call center allows combat Veterans and their families to call and speak to someone about their military experience or any other readjustment issue.

More information about Vet Centers is available at www.vetcenter.va.gov.

HELP is Closer Than You Think!

Veterans in rural areas—or those returning home and dealing with difficult readjustment issues—sometimes can feel isolated and alone. The same goes for families of Veterans, who may need someone to talk to about their loved one’s readjustment. Thanks to the 80 Mobile Vet Centers (MVCs) nationwide, help is closer than you think!

MVCs at the Boston Marathon Bombing

Some MVCs also respond to natural disasters and catastrophic events. After the Boston Marathon bombing, VISN 1 Communications Officer Maureen Heard accompanied five Mobile Vet Centers dispatched to assist Boston area Veterans and first responders. The MVC staff provided counseling and referrals to anyone who needed it. Maureen learned from a pedicab driver that he and some co-workers who transported doctors in and patients out after the bombing were having a hard time.

“When I told him that they were indeed first responders and that they should come over and talk to our counselors, he just started weeping,” she said. “Quite accidentally, I had been the first one to validate what he had done was indeed to act as a first responder. I love my job as VISN 1 Communications Officer, but I couldn’t help but feel that what I did that day was the most important work I had done in a long time.”