

VA New England Healthcare System

SUMMER 2017

VETERANS'

healthy living



Honored for Service



VA
HEALTH
CARE

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century



A Message from the Network Director

*Michael Mayo-Smith, MD, MPH
Network Director*

Dear Veterans,

Our goal at the VA is to make sure you have what you need to live a healthy life. That's why we're always looking for ways to improve the quality and access to health care for Veterans. That starts with listening to Veterans about what's important, and then addressing any concerns.

On April 10, Boston VA held a Tele Town Hall where Veterans got the chance to ask questions, express opinions and provide valuable feedback directly to VA leaders. Read more about this event on page 3.

Those who serve in the military put their lives on the line to protect their country, and they deserve full recognition for all they've done. Read on page 4 about one Veteran who finally received the honor he deserves for his exemplary service during World War II.

Helping Veterans sometimes also means helping their families. When a Veteran needs care at a VA Medical Center, it's important for loved ones to stay close by. A new Fisher House in Connecticut is helping to make that possible – free of charge! Read more on page 6.

Making sure Veterans receive great care is our number one priority. But, we also want to find ways to prevent illness before it starts. The Million Veteran Program (MVP) is doing just that – finding ways to treat Veteran-related illnesses, one DNA sample at a time. Learn on page 7 about the various MVP research programs starting soon!

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

Michael Mayo-Smith, MD, MPH
Network Director



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ON THE COVER:

Air Force Veteran Eugene E. Shannon poses with his wife Mary following the ceremony where he received nine medals and ribbons for his exemplary service during World War II. See the full story on page 4. *Photo courtesy of Kristin Pressly, Public Affairs Officer, Manchester VAMC.*



Massachusetts VA Rallies Together for Vets

Leaders answer Veterans' benefits questions and concerns during Tele Town Hall



Vincent W. Ng, medical center director of VA Boston Healthcare System, moderates the Tele Town Hall on April 10.

Recently, 585 Veterans from around Massachusetts had the chance to make their voices heard. On April 10, Veterans called in and listened to an hour-long teleconference at the VA Boston Healthcare System. The "Tele Town Hall" included members of the National Cemetery Administration and Veterans Benefit Administration from Boston, Bedford and Central Western Massachusetts.

Nearly 20 callers spoke directly with VA leaders, while many others left messages with VA staff. They discussed topics about health care, access, customer service, pain management, disability claims, burial benefits, and more.

Many Veteran callers said they needed help finding out what VA benefits they are eligible for, and understanding how to receive those benefits. VA leaders briefly answered questions during the live event. Then, they connected callers with VA support staff who could provide more information.

VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System Director John P. Collins said this was an excellent example of collaborative teamwork to better serve Veterans.

"That's the reason we're here—it's why we're all here as VA staff—to serve Veterans," he said. "The Tele Town Hall model is an innovative approach, especially when we combine forces and connect with Veterans directly in their homes."

Karen Acerra-Williams, the acting medical center director at Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital (Bedford VA), said timely follow-up with Veterans is important.

"The greatest impact happens after the town hall when staff members can assist callers and offer personalized resolutions," said Acerra-Williams.

The Massachusetts VA medical centers often host in-person town hall meetings, as well. But weather, transportation issues, and other factors can affect a Veteran's ability to attend. The Tele Town Hall is just another way VA can connect with Veterans where they live.

Call your local VA medical center about upcoming Tele Town Halls and in-person town hall meetings in your area. To find your nearest VA, visit www.vets.gov/facilities.

Against All Odds

Veteran Shannon receives medals for World War II service



Air Force Veteran Gene E. Shannon (center, bottom row) poses with his family during his medal ceremony at the American Legion Post 27 on April 6. Photos courtesy of Kristin Pressly, Public Affairs Officer, Manchester VAMC.

Air Force Veteran Gene E. Shannon has always lived his life as a man on a mission. Growing up during the Great Depression, he worked odd jobs to help his family survive. And as World War II dawned, he did what he could to fight the good fight. Thanks to the tireless work of his son Paul, on April 6 Veteran Shannon finally received the medals he earned over 70 years ago fighting in the Pacific with Torpedo Squadron 81.

"It was an honor to be in the presence of a true American hero, a WWII Veteran," said Ritchie Taylor, Deputy Commander, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. Taylor and New Hampshire Secretary of State Bill Gardner presented Shannon with his medals during the ceremony at the American Legion Post 27.

During the ceremony, Shannon received the:

- Air Medal
- Navy Good Conduct Medal
- WWII Victory Medal
- American Campaign Medal
- Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with 4 bronze stars
- Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon
- Combat Action Ribbon
- Philippine Liberation Medal with two bronze stars award by Philippine Government
- Air Crew Insignia
- Other accolades

A Man of Honor

Shannon is known for his tenacity and determination. In fact, without it he may have never served. In 1941, Shannon stood in line with his best friend Johnny at the Boston Marine Corps recruiting office. Although Johnny was selected to serve in the war, doctors initially rejected Shannon due to a heart irregularity. At that point, he could have walked away from service. But Shannon insisted on a second chance. A Navy Doctor finally passed Shannon into service. He soon began his training in aviation.

Shannon first trained with the Torpedo Squadron (VT) 15. Air Group 15's Commander would become legendary Medal of Honor recipient David McCambell, a WWII Navy Ace.

Shannon was later re-assigned to the newly formed Torpedo Squadron 81 (VT-81) as the "veteran" Senior Radioman. He served on missions aboard the aircraft carrier USS Wasp (CV-18) across the Pacific. He fought in Iwo Jima, Guam, Okinawa, Formosa, Hong Kong, Saigon, and in anti-shipping strikes in the South China Sea.

Eventually, VT-81 would attack Tokyo in the first strike since Jimmy Doolittle's raid in April 1942. VT-81 flew strikes across the Pacific as part of the "fast carrier" strike force under Admiral Marc Mitscher. Just before the war's end in 1945, Shannon's squadron rode out a huge typhoon where many men lost their lives and the fleet sustained heavy damage.

"I did what I had to do at the time, and you didn't think much about it," said Shannon. "In spite of all the difficulties of the war, I was very fortunate."

Homecoming

After his service ended in 1946, Shannon married his wife Mary, and raised two children, Christine and Paul. He flew as a private pilot for 15 years, and remained an avid outdoorsman.



Veteran Shannon receives his medals from Ritchie Taylor, Deputy Commander of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

Summer Fun around VISN 1



During the 1st annual "Rev It Up for Heroes" car show, the Best Original award went to Jim Kempf (pictured) for his 1959 Chevrolet Corvette. Other 2016 winners included: The Veterans Choice award winner, John Slavin (Cadillac Series 75), the Best Modified award winner, Paul Boucher (1956 Ford Sunliner), and the People's Choice award winner, John Roller (1968 Mustang California Special).

Laconia Motorcycle Week

June 10-18
Laconia, New Hampshire
www.laconiamcweek.com

NASCAR

July 16
New Hampshire Motor Speedway
www.nhms.com/events/new-hampshire-301

Westfield Air Show

August 12-13
Westfield, Massachusetts
www.westfieldairshow.org

Champlain Valley Fair

August 25-September 3
Essex Junction, Vermont
www.champlainvalleyfair.org

The Great State of Maine Air Show

August 26-27
Brunswick, Maine
www.greatstateofmainearshow.us

The Big E

September 15-October 1
West Springfield, Massachusetts
www.thebige.com

Attend the "Rev It Up for Heroes" Car Show

Come to the 2nd Annual "Rev It Up for Heroes" Car Show on Sat., Sept. 16, 2017, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Manchester VAMC. (A rain date is scheduled for Sept. 17.) View more than 150 vehicles, including military vehicles, a City of Manchester Fire Department Truck, and more. Vote for your favorite! While there, enjoy live music and a Veteran Recognition Ceremony. Check out the car show parade at the Seacoast entrance for our Community Living Center Residents. While there, visit informational booths for Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA), Vet Center, DAV, NH State Veterans Cemetery, Veteran Service Organizations, and others!

American Legion Commander Visits VA Boston



American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt stands with VA leaders from throughout Massachusetts during his visit on March 31.

For nearly 100 years, the American Legion has worked to unite Veterans and ensure they receive the programs and benefits they need. Leaders within the Legion take their jobs seriously – listening to what matters most to Veterans and representing those interests to lawmakers.

On March 31, American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt visited the Jamaica Plain Campus of VA Boston. Schmidt met with leaders from VA Boston to discuss patient care, Veteran-related research programs, enrollment, training and retention of medical staff.

“The American Legion believes in the VA, and will continue to stay involved with the VA to make sure this benefit remains in place for Veterans,” said Schmidt.

Fisher House Coming to West Haven Campus



Once completed, the new Fisher House Connecticut at the West Haven VAMC will resemble the Walter Reed Army Medical Center Fisher House (pictured here) in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Fisher House Foundation. Photo credit: Bowman Ashe

When a Veteran is receiving care at a VA medical facility, it's important to have loved ones close by to offer support and encouragement. But such a long stay can come with a hefty price tag. Fisher Houses provide housing, free of charge, to Veterans' families. This helps ease their financial burden and bring some peace of mind. Now, the first Fisher House in Connecticut will come soon to the West Haven VA campus.

The groundbreaking for the 16-suite Fisher House Connecticut took place Tuesday, April 11. Much like the Ronald McDonald Houses, Fisher Houses offer a “home away from home” at no cost to the family. These are situated close to VA Medical Centers so that loved ones can be near while the Veteran receives treatment.

This new Fisher House will also have a common kitchen, laundry room, dining area, living room and a play area. The estimated \$6 million construction cost is funded 100 percent through donations.

“We are honored to have the first Fisher House in the state of Connecticut,” said Gerald Culliton, Director of VA Connecticut Healthcare System. “The Fisher House will provide the families and caregivers of our Veterans with a safe, comfortable, supportive environment while their Veteran receives care.”

To learn more about Fisher House Connecticut, visit www.fisherhousect.org.

New England VA Doctors Join MVP Research

Fighting diseases starts with good research. Like a puzzle, the more pieces you can fit together, the clearer the picture becomes. More than 500,000 Veterans have donated blood samples to the Million Veteran Program (MVP). Now, the picture is becoming clearer on how to combat a wide range of conditions affecting so many Veterans.

The MVP is a national research initiative of the VA Office of Research and Development (ORD). The eight research projects will use the donated blood samples. They will study the relationship between genes and Veteran-related conditions. The VA Healthcare System's integrated electronic health record system will also prove helpful. Researchers will use this perfect model to develop an MVP data resource that will help them make advancements in Veterans' health care.

"This is exactly what MVP was created for. We're excited to see the data is being used in research that is important to Veterans," said MVP Program Manager Jennifer Deen.

Of the eight research projects, three involve New England VA Healthcare System doctors:



Dr. Donald Humphries, Scientific Director of the VA Central Biorepository in Boston, stores Veteran-donated specimens in the cryogenic storage chamber.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) risk factors

Researchers: Dr. Murry Stein, San Diego VA Medical Center, and Dr. Joel Gelernter, VA Connecticut Healthcare System

The study looks at the genes involved in PTSD development in combat-exposed Veterans.

Genetic vulnerability of sustained multi-substance use in MVP

*Researchers: Dr. Daniel Federman and Dr. Amy Justice, VA Connecticut Healthcare System
Dr. Henry Kranzler, Philadelphia VA Medical Center*

The study examines genetic risk factors for chronic alcohol, tobacco and opioid use. They will look at the dangerous use of all three together.

Cardiovascular disease risk factors, prevalent cardiovascular disease and genetics in the Million Veteran Program

*Researchers: Dr. Peter Wilson, Atlanta VA Medical Center
Dr. Kelly Cho, Boston VA Healthcare System*

The study examines how the genes involved with obesity and lipid levels affect heart risk.

Other studied topics include: genetic risk for age-related macular degeneration (AMD) in diverse Veteran populations; pharmacogenomics of risk factors and therapies outcomes of kidney disease; genetics of cardio-metabolic diseases in the VA population; functional disability in schizophrenia and bipolar illness; and Gulf War Illness (GWI) risk factors.

VETERANS'

healthy living

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CONNECTICUT

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Newington Campus
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Newington, CT 06111
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950 Campbell Avenue
West Haven, CT 06516
(203) 932-5711

MAINE

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1 VA Center
Augusta, ME 04330
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(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

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Leeds, MA 01053
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NEW HAMPSHIRE

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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

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215 North Main Street
White River Junction,
VT 05009
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CONNECTICUT

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Danbury, CT 06810
(203) 798-8422

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New London, CT 06320
(860) 437-3611

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

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Fort Kent, ME 04743
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20 Hartford Street
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Lewiston, ME 04240
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New Bedford, MA 02740
(508) 994-0217

Pittsfield CBOC

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Springfield, MA 01104
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Portsmouth, NH 03803
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Burlington Lakeside CBOC

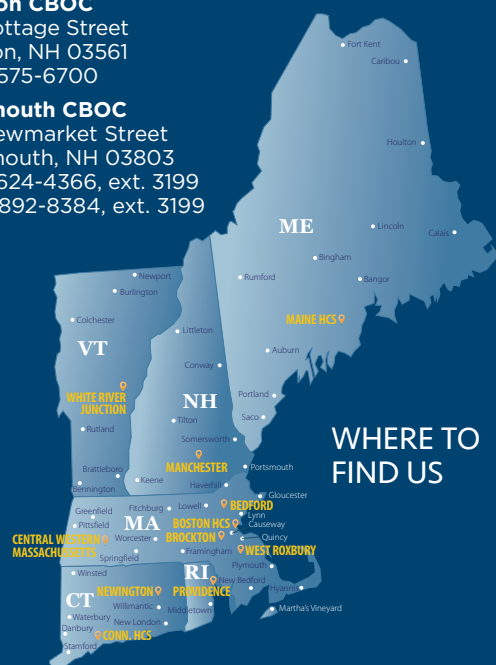
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