



Horizons

A NEWSLETTER OF WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER // SEPTEMBER 2020



WE ARE VA NURSES

As Veterans begin returning to the medical center for services following the pandemic, they will see a very special display on the wall at each entrance, a poster titled "We are VA Nurses, Our Nightingale Pledge has no expiration date."

VA Nurses are guided by a code of ethics and principle standards in which they take great pride. Since COVID-19 cancelled the official celebration of National Nurses Week, Sandy Domkosky, Wilkes-Barre, Nurse Recruiter, was able to find a unique way to commemorate the week by encouraging VA nurses to sign a poster surrounding the "Nightingale Pledge."

Many nurses became emotional during the signing, reminiscing about the time they committed to becoming a nurse by reciting the pledge.

The displays are a great testament to the daily dedication of our VA Nurses. It serves as a reminder of the compassion and professionalism Nurse's demonstrate and it should be celebrated everyday throughout the year.

"The Nightingale Pledge drives the way I practice my nursing everyday."
— ALICE TURNER RN, MSN - WILKES-BARRE VA RN OF THE YEAR

A Message from the Director



Since the onset of the COVID-19 in March, we've all experienced some level of physical, emotional or financial anxiety. Not all of us have adapted well to the unprecedented challenges brought forth by the pandemic. For struggling Veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre may be able to help.

Enrollment statistics indicate that less than two thirds of eligible Veterans take advantage of the healthcare benefits they've earned through their service. It is true that not all Veterans qualify for VA Healthcare, but just because you haven't qualified in the past, doesn't mean that you won't qualify today. Just as your health and income level may have changed over time, so have the eligibility requirements for VA Healthcare.

A Veteran's eligibility for health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center is based on a variety of criteria related to their service. Most Veterans who served on active duty with an other than dishonorable discharge are eligible to receive some level of care through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

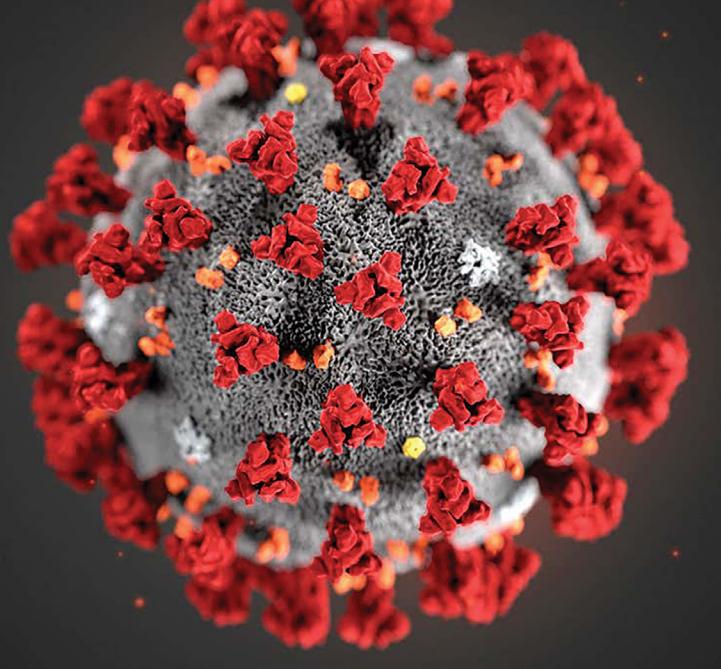
I realize that healthcare isn't something we think about every day, but the pandemic may be opportunity for us all to take a minute and consider our future care plans.

If you're a Veteran and not enrolled in VA healthcare, I'd encourage you to contact our Eligibility Department to discuss the benefits for which you may be entitled. If you're a family member or friend of a Veteran, I would encourage them to do the same. It's a quick call and with a few necessary questions, basic eligibility can be determined within minutes.

Hopefully, the pandemic won't last forever, but for our Veterans, access to safe and reliable healthcare should last a lifetime. We'd appreciate the opportunity to be your healthcare provider of choice.

Sincerely,

Russell E Lloyd, Director



Is It the Flu or COVID-19? Facts Veterans Should Know

Flu? COVID-19? What are the differences between the two? Are the symptoms similar? Can I get both at the same time? Should I receive the flu shot? Let's talk about it.

Just based on symptoms, it's hard to distinguish between the flu and COVID-19. That's because a lot of symptoms overlap like a runny nose, headache, cough, fever, chills, and muscle aches/pains. Many people with influenza say they can pinpoint a day that their symptoms started, as symptoms start abruptly. Symptoms from COVID-19 can start abruptly but usually start out mild and progress slowly. Some different symptoms that could alert you that it's COVID-19 and not the flu are the loss of taste or smell and noticing a purplish discoloration in your toes (called COVID toes). Also, if it's COVID-19, about 10-20% of people experience symptoms of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Both the flu and COVID-19 are mainly transmitted by droplets or small virus particles that can linger in the air and infect others if inhaled. Another difference is that a low percentage of COVID-19 infections can also be transmitted through surface contact. This involves touching a contaminated surface and then touching your nose, mouth, or eyes.

We are learning more and more about COVID-19 every day. Patients with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and obesity are at higher risk of developing complications that can require hospitalization. We've also learned that the symptoms and their intensity differ from person to person. For example, a person in their late teens or early twenties may have an active case of COVID-19 and show no or very mild symptoms, but they remain a carrier capable of transferring the virus to others. This is one reason Michael Surdy, PharmD., Associate Chief of Staff Research & Development and Infectious Disease Clinical Pharmacist at the Wilkes-Barre VA is a big proponent of mask wearing to curb the spread.

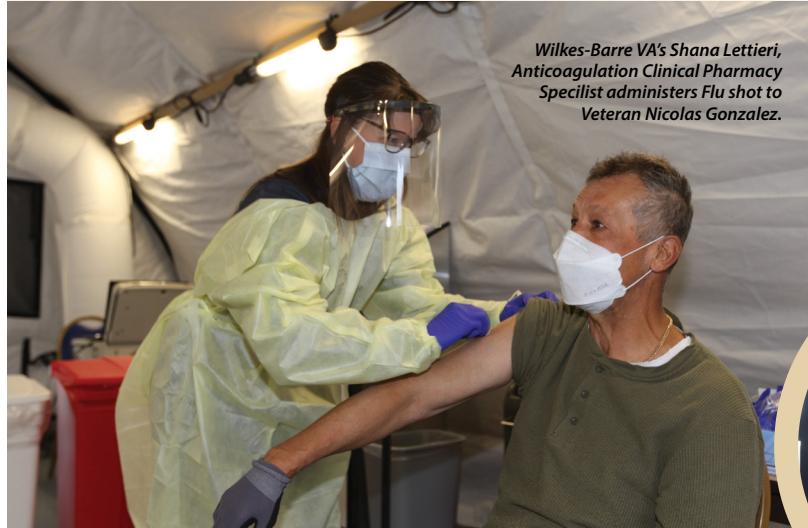
Stay Safe: Get a Flu Shot

One of the main reasons to get the influenza vaccine this year is to keep hospital beds open in the event of a second wave of COVID-19. If you get the flu shot you are less likely to be hospitalized, therefore freeing up hospital beds for those that have COVID-19.

According to Michael Surdy, having both the flu and COVID-19 at the same time is possible, but rare. Since the symptoms are similar, one way we can determine whether it's the flu or COVID-19 is to perform a flu test. If the flu test comes back positive, that is likely what you have. If it comes back negative, then we can go on to perform a COVID-19 test. There are also tests available that can detect both influenza and COVID-19.

With a COVID-19 vaccine still not ready, the most effective way to prevent both the flu and COVID-19 is to get a flu shot, continue practicing social/physical distancing, avoiding any non-essential social contact, washing your hands regularly, and wearing a mask when you need to engage others. Stay Healthy!

With prevention being the best medicine, the Wilkes-Barre VA and all our Community Based Outpatient Clinics are now offering flu shots at scheduled face to face appointments. Otherwise, you can call and schedule your flu shot by calling 1-877-928-2621 and choose option 2. The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center has scheduled appointment times for both the Drive-Thru Vaccination Clinic on Wednesdays and Saturdays and Tent Vaccination Clinic on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.



"The person who has it may be asymptomatic and not know it. So, if I have a mask on and have COVID-19, the chances of transmitting it to someone else is significantly lower. If we both have masks on, the chances are even lower. The mask is serving two purposes. That's why mask wearing is so important to curb the transmission. Masking is one of the few effective bullets in our arsenal right now."

—MICHAEL SURDY, PHARMD, ACOS RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE CLINICAL PHARMACIST- WILKES-BARRE VAMC

Community Living Center (CLC) Staff Finding Creative Ways to Help Families Communicate Safely

Understanding that social distancing is necessary, but patient and family isolation can also have impacts, the Wilkes-Barre CLC staff have been finding creative ways to keep essential lines of communications open for Veterans and their loved ones. Early on during the pandemic, the Wilkes-Barre VA prohibited visitors to the CLC, including close family members, to help stop the spread of COVID-19. It was a difficult decision, but it proved to be the best for the health and welfare of our Veterans.

Realizing that not physically seeing one's family comes at an emotional price, the CLC staff have been using virtual meeting software such as Skype and Zoom to resemble face-to-face visits in real time. They have also arranged face to face no contact through the glass visits, where family members can see and converse with their loved ones without the fear of unintentionally putting them at risk. The encounters have been both joyous and emotional for our Veterans and their families.

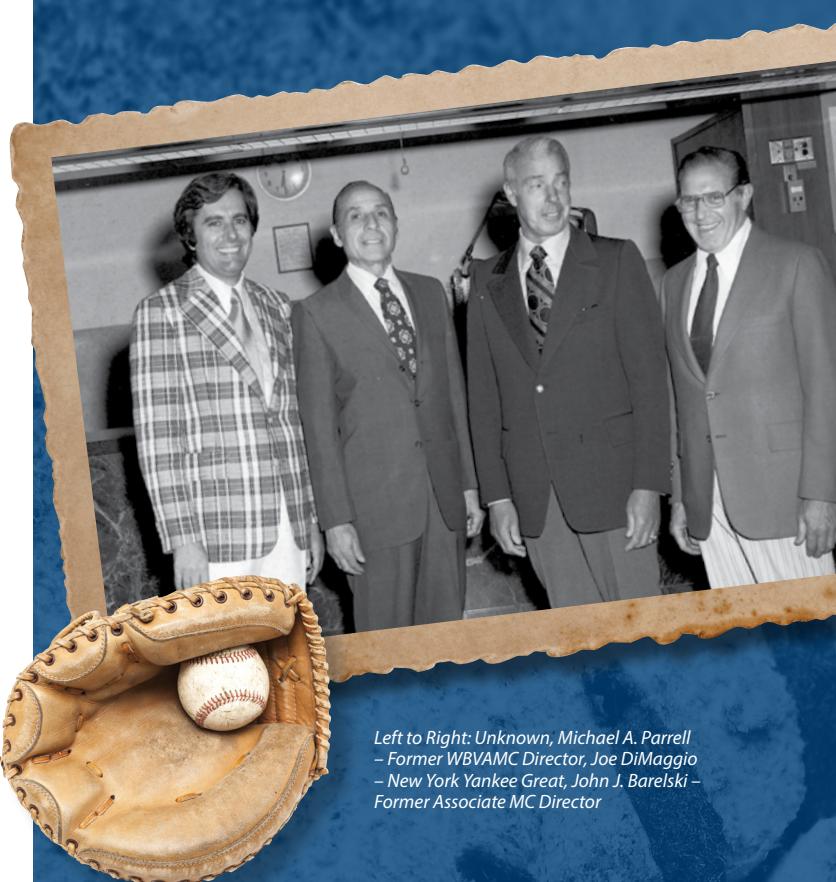
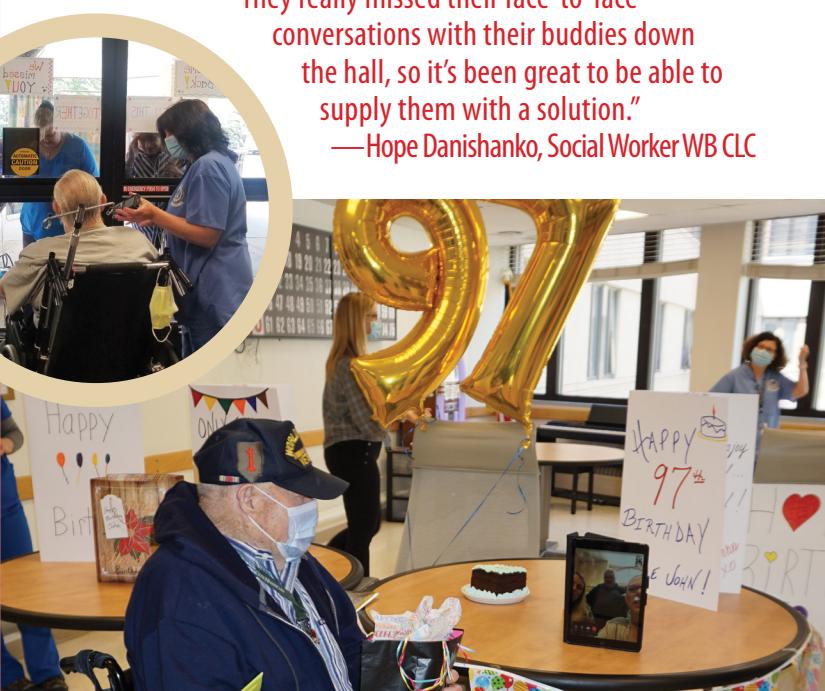
Celebrating special events in each of our Veterans lives has also been a CLC priority. In addition to the virtual celebrations, drive-by birthday parties and anniversary parades have been a great way to communicate and lift their spirits.

Restricted movement throughout our CLC has also limited the socialization between our Residents. Realizing this, "walkie talkies" were purchased so Vets can speak to their fellow comrades in other areas of the facility.

Moving forward, we hope to be able to offer outside physical distancing visits with two family members at a time. Of course, all this is contingent on the continued decline of the Coronavirus.

We realize that socialization is so important to the CLC residents and their families. We all hope to get back to normal soon, but if we must continue with our Coronavirus precautions, rest assured that the CLC staff will do their best in assist our Veterans and their families in making their visits as special as they can be.

"They really missed their face-to-face conversations with their buddies down the hall, so it's been great to be able to supply them with a solution."
—Hope Danishanko, Social Worker WB CLC



Left to Right: Unknown, Michael A. Parrell – Former WBVAMC Director, Joe DiMaggio – New York Yankee Great, John J. Barelski – Former Associate MC Director

Remembering When a Sports Legend Stopped by the Wilkes-Barre VA

When researching the history of the Wilkes-Barre VA, one can often stumble upon an interesting photograph and wonder what is the story behind this picture. That was the case when we recently discovered a photo of four dapper men posing for a picture at the Wilkes-Barre VA. In that picture was New York Yankees legend Joe DiMaggio. In researching this moment in time, it was discovered that it happened on July 23, 1974.

According to a Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader article, Joe DiMaggio was in town for Italian American Night at Pocono Downs. He also made several other stops in the area, including paying a visit to the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center after some patients contacted organizers expressing an interest in meeting him.

"One thing is for sure," DiMaggio said. "I'm not leaving this area until I get to that hospital."

DiMaggio was insistent on meeting the patients since he too was a Veteran. He enlisted in the United States Army Air Force on February 17, 1943, rising to the rank of sergeant. He spent a little over two-and-a-half years in the service during the prime of his baseball career. Reports state that DiMaggio requested a combat assignment but was never given one. He spent most of his military time playing exhibition games and boosting the moral of his fellow comrades.



Top Photo: Meadowview Nursing Home deployment group with Yuri Pelecko-Filak and Jason Allen; Photo on right: Carly Hack, left, East Orange VA Volunteer, Right

VA EMPLOYEES

Volunteering to Help Others

One of the Department of Veterans Affairs missions during crisis is to support national, state, and local emergency management, public health, safety and homeland security efforts.

With the rise in COVID-19 infections around the country, the VA Disaster Emergency Medical Personnel System (DEMPS) program was activated. Through the VA's DEMPS program, VA employees across the nation could volunteer and become part of an effort to assist with medical support in some of the most infected areas around the country.

Yuri Pelecko-Filak, Nurse Manager at our Community Living Center, was one of two VA Volunteers from Wilkes-Barre to join the mission at Meadowview Nursing Home in Northfield, New Jersey. Meadowview is a state-run long-term facility which has a full wing of Veteran patients.

"When we showed up, we were immediately greeted with applause from the staff. They were so happy to finally get the relief they needed. One of their units had around 60 active COVID cases and virtually all the nursing care staff previously tested positive. We told them, whatever or wherever you need us, that's what will do."

—Yuri Pelecko-Filak

Some days Yuri was helping with paperwork, other days he was providing direct patient care or dispensing medication. Their staff told them that this was the first time they were able to breathe and get caught up since the pandemic started.

The second Wilkes-Barre volunteer Jason Allen, CNA, helped patients in an Alzheimer's unit with everyday activities such as washing, brushing their teeth, feedings and getting dressed.

"I volunteered because I've had family members pass away from tragic things, one being COVID-19 and I just felt it was very important to give back." —Jason Allen, CNA

Jason also felt that it was important for someone to be there for the residents when their family could not be. They couldn't understand why their families weren't there or what was happening to them.

For Angela Henning RN, BSN, dedication and loyalty to the Armed Forces is in her blood, so volunteering for deployment to San Antonio, Texas granted her a chance to be part of something bigger, a personal challenge and a means to contribute specialized skills and knowledge in a time of need.

"It was beyond eye opening. To see first-hand the struggles of not only the patients, but families and all levels of staff, was way more impacting than just reading it somewhere." —Angela Henning RN, BSN, - Deployed to Audie Murphy VAMC in San Antonio, Texas

Carley Heck, MSA Timekeeper, at our Williamsport CBOC, feels that her VA DECON training taught her to always strive to "Protect the House." I worked with clinical staff and the Area Emergency Manager daily to make sure everyone is safe and to limit the spread of COVID-19.

"Any opportunity to help our Veterans, whether it be big or small, I would give it all I could." —Carley Hack, MSA Timekeeper – Deployed to East Orange VA Medical Center, East Orange, New Jersey

Nicole Parsons, CNA, deployed to Blackwood, New Jersey to supply direct health care to all patients at the facility.

"The patients felt like I was always there. Occasionally, I did Doubles or 12-hour shifts. They depended on me and when I would finally leave for the day, they would ask if I was coming back tomorrow. It was a nice feeling."

—Nicole Parsons, CNA

What Nicole felt seemed to be a re-occurring theme amongst all the other Wilkes-Barre VA workers who volunteered. They each expressed a sense of satisfaction and felt very rewarded leaving every day and they looked forward to going back the next.

It was long hours of very important care for the people who needed it most. All the deployed Volunteers stated that they would absolutely do it again and would honestly encourage others who have an opportunity to Volunteer, to do it. It's was a great experience.

EIGHT CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center
1111 East End Blvd, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
507-824-3521 / 877-928-2621

Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic
3110 Hamilton Blvd., Allentown, PA 18103
610-599-0127

Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
226 Columbia Mall Drive, Bloomsburg, PA 17815
570-316-4116

Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
701 Slate Belt Blvd., Bangor, PA 18013-9341
610-599-0127

Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic
1537 Elmira Street, Sayre, PA 18840
570-888-6803

Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic
Tobyhanna Army Depot, Bldg. 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
570-615-8341

Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
600 Maple Avenue, Honesdale, PA 18431
570-251-6543

Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic
1705 Warren Avenue, 3rd Fl, Ste. 304
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-322-4791

Call Center

1-877-928-2621

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