



# Horizons

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



The StatSensor Creatinine Meter is a hand-held, battery-powered, diagnostic laboratory instrument that works in conjunction with creatinine electrochemical test strips to measure creatinine in the blood.

## WILKES-BARRE VA USING THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY TO SPEED UP IMAGING

Many Veterans who need outpatient imaging such as an MRI or CAT scan, can now receive these services in a quicker more efficient manner.

In an effort to improve patient satisfaction and limit patient movement throughout the facility, the Imaging Service at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania has introduced "a point of care creatinine testing" to enhance the convenience of services available to our Veterans.

Checking the function of the kidneys is important before performing certain imaging tests as the "dye" injected for these tests can impact the functioning of the kidneys in those patients with reduced kidney function. This would require the veteran to make an appointment with the laboratory and get a blood test called "creatinine" beforehand adding additional trips and delays before the procedure could be done.

Now instead of an additional trip to the lab the creatinine can be checked in the radiology suite with a fingerpick blood sample similar to those used by patients with diabetes to check their blood sugar and results are available almost instantly.

This point of care testing, which was initiated in the Imaging Suite in April 2020, has been met with overwhelming patient satisfaction while increasing the efficiency of operations within the service.

**Now may be a great time to investigate your eligibility for VA Healthcare.**

Give us call and we'll walk you through the process!

**570-824-3521, ext. 27877**

## A Message from the Director



For the last several months, the Coronavirus pandemic has dominated the news and impacted our daily lives. But for all its negatives, I'd say that the pandemic has also demonstrated the strength of our resolve to support each other.

I'd like to take a moment to express my appreciation for the "Helpers" among us. We all know them; those individuals who are always there to help at a moment's notice.

There are the "Concerned Helpers", those who will check on your well-being, volunteer to assist with your shopping, and run errands.

There are the "Resourceful Helpers", those who find a way to address an issue. Those who produce homemade masks, soaps, and hand sanitizer, coordinate street concerts and drive by graduations in an effort to restore some sense of normalcy.

There are the "Meal Helpers", who start food pantries, or deliver prepared meals to those impacted by stay at home orders.

And then there are the "Healthcare Helpers", the staff at local hospitals, doctor's offices, pharmacies, urgent care centers, and here at the Wilkes-Barre VA. These are the individuals dedicated to helping others. Their positive attitude is infectious, so to speak, as they help us all battle through the challenges of the pandemic.

To all the "Helpers" I say, Thank You! Your caring, selfless and positive actions have made it easier for all of us to battle through these unprecedented times. In a time when we can all use a little help, I'm appreciative of the "Helpers".

Sincerely,

Russell E. Lloyd, Director



Food Pantry distribution included dry food boxes, fresh produce along with protein items such as milk, frozen chicken, and frozen fish.

## Helping Veterans in Need During the Pandemic

One of the many ancillary consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been food insecurity. With stay at home orders, limited ability to travel, and unemployment on the rise, it became apparent that many Veterans would need assistance, specifically feeding themselves and their family. The Wilkes-Barre VA Nutrition and Food Service identified this need and re-initiated the Federal Employee Engagement in a Disaster (FEED) program which enabled them to start a Drive through Food pantry to help Veterans experiencing food insecurity.

Our FEED program partnered with the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Northeast Regional Food Bank, who promptly secured food deliveries for our food pantry.

The Drive through Food Pantry was set up with physical distancing in mind. When Veterans pull up to the loading area all they needed to do was pop the trunk or unlock their doors and we would place food pantry items in their vehicle without the need for them to leave the driver's seat.

Along with aiding Veterans at the drive through, the program was also able to deliver essential food to our homebound Veterans thanks to the help of our voluntary drivers from the Disabled American Veterans, Social Work Service and the VA Home Based Primary Care program.

Participation in the program required Veterans to be enrolled for VA services and to pre-register for the weekly food pantry.

As a result of the pandemic's stay at home orders and temporary unemployment, the financial and nutritional needs of many of our proud Veterans had negatively changed. Veterans who would not normally use these types of services suddenly found themselves in need.

Through the successful implementation of the Drive Through Food Pantry, the Wilkes-Barre VA's Nutrition and Food Service was able to fulfill the unexpected food insecurity needs of many of our Veterans.

**"Being able to feed themselves and their families is a huge relief for participating Veterans during this difficult time."**

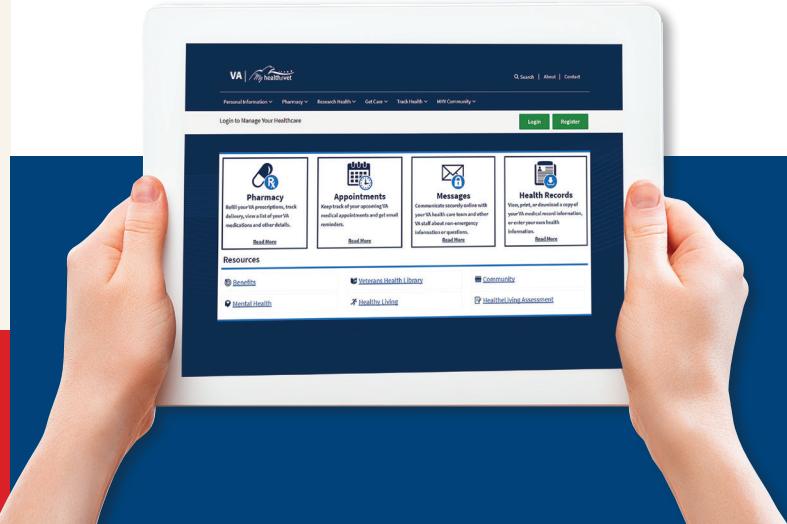
**— EMILY RICHTERS- VA DIETITIAN**

## Having a "My HealtheVet" Account Can Be a Great Asset Moving Forward

Strong communication between our Veterans and their VA Healthcare providers is important. That's what makes setting up a "My HealtheVet" account such a smart decision. The "My HealtheVet" program gives Veterans communication options to control their care remotely, thus eliminating the need to come directly to the Hospital for every appointment. That could really be important during times when physical distancing and minimal face-to-face contact is needed.

The "My HealtheVet" website is a 24/7 online resource that gives Veterans and their caregivers access to look up their medical records, refill prescriptions, and use secure messaging to communicate with their VA healthcare providers. On the site, Veterans can also request, re-schedule, or cancel appointments; speak to their patient advocate; and create Journals to help manage their Personal and Military Health Histories. Trusted health information is available through the website's Veterans Health Library section, which is the VA's equivalent to WebMD.com.

To take advantage of this great asset, log onto <http://myhealth.va.gov> and register to become an active partner in your health care. If you need assistance or have questions about the "My HealtheVet" program, contact the Wilkes-Barre VA's "My HealtheVet" coordinator Alec Barcklow at 570-824-3521 x24219 or by email at [Alec.Barcklow@va.gov](mailto:Alec.Barcklow@va.gov).



# Wilkes-Barre VA Pharmacist served on THE COVID-19 FRONT LINE in New York City

U.S. Army Lt. Col. John Falzone, a pharmacist at the Wilkes-Barre Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center was aboard the Military Sealift Command Hospital Ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) stationed in NYC. Lt. Col. Falzone was working in support of trauma, emergency and urgent care patients at the Javits New York Medical Station. The work of the Hospital Ship acted as an integrated team to help relieve non-coronavirus stress from the New York City medical system.

Read more: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6171715/army-reserve-pharmacists-augment-usns-comfort>



The Hospital Ship was part of the U.S. Northern Command's Defense Support of Civil Authorities as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Volunteering to go to the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic is a true display of our Military Veterans serving those in need. Lt. Col. John Falzone unselfish courage to help was greatly appreciated during these unprecedented times.

## Wilkes-Barre VA Gets Resourceful in the Face of the Pandemic

During the early months of the Coronavirus Pandemic, the nation learned a great deal about the challenges these unprecedented times present. Despite our best preparation and planning efforts, obstacles were encountered. We learned that vital medical equipment breaks down, and replacement parts may not be immediately available. Around the nation, Hospitals and Care Facilities realized the need to create negative pressure rooms that control air flow when treating COVID-19 patients. Air purification units that are used to establish these rooms were not readily available.

The Wilkes-Barre Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center faced some of these same challenges. When the VA placed an order to rent additional HEPA Air Purification Units, they were told the wait time would be at least 12 weeks. Not satisfied with the wait time, a few creative staff members in our Facilities Management Service decided that they could make them on their own.

The Wilkes-Barre VA also had other challenges. When the VA had to press into service reserve Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPRs), used only in emergent situations, it was discovered that these units contain delicate parts prone to damage. While in use, a few of them developed maintenance issues that required replacement parts. Normally these parts are available within a few days, but with the supply chain impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, they were not readily attainable. This prompted the VA to reach out to the Tobyhanna Army Depot for their assistance. The Depot rapidly responded and partnered with the VA to produce the necessary components using 3D printing technology.

"We realized we needed parts, and we were unable to obtain them for at least 6-8 weeks," said William Feher, an Industrial Hygienist at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. "As a veteran myself, I was familiar with Tobyhanna and figured we'd reach out to see if they could help."



*It only took our staff members one week to construct two HEPA Air Purification Units that work just as well as if not better than the backordered units.*

We concluded that we could make a HEPA Air Purification Unit for the cost of one month's rental and have it operational in a fraction of the time that it would have taken to bring one into the medical center.

— MICHAEL URBAN- FMS WILKES-BARRE VA

The global pandemic has caused us all to adjust to emerging situations, to look for other ways to get the job done and continue keeping our Veterans safe. Through the ingenuity and resourcefulness of our dedicated VA staff and our collaboration with the Army Depot, we were able to fulfill immediate needs. Our Facilities Management Service is now undertaking a new project, that of making permanent shields for all clinics at the hospital. If we ever face a situation like this pandemic again, the lessons learned can help us be just as resourceful in the future.

## 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**

CONNECT  
WITH US



ONLINE  
[wilkes-barre.va.gov](http://wilkes-barre.va.gov)



FACEBOOK  
[facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre](https://facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre)



Artist Rendering Future Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic at 226 Columbia Mall Drive in Bloomsburg, PA

## New Location for Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic to Open August 3rd

The Wilkes-Barre Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center is excited to announce the relocation of the Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic from Berwick to Bloomsburg at 226 Columbia Mall Drive.

The new clinic, which will be operational August 3, 2020, will have a new contracted healthcare provider, Valor Healthcare.

Veterans who received care in Berwick were contacted regarding the reassignment of their Primary Care Provider and PACT Team from Dr. Albert Alley to their new Valor Healthcare Team. Current patients will not experience an interruption in service.