

VA PITTSBURGH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

VETERANS CONNECT

{ ISSUE 7 | 2019 }

Community Clinics Meet Your Needs

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System



Front cover: Navy Veteran Marybeth Homistek prepares to check in with medical support assistant Renee Barkley at the Fayette County VA Outpatient Clinic near Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

Dear Veterans,

Over the past few months, I've had the honor of meeting some of you at our medical facilities and community clinics. Your stories are incredible. You are welcome reminders of the reason I sought this opportunity to serve you here at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System.

In this edition of Veterans Connect, we've focused on innovations and changes in VA health care. VA Pittsburgh is actually a leader in health care innovation, from inspiring employees to pursue better ways to serve you to supporting staff in our robust research program. In fact, a VA Pittsburgh researcher, Dr. Walid Gellad, recently received a Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE). The PECASE is the highest honor awarded by the federal government to science and engineering professionals in the early stages of their research careers.

On the health care side, you now have more options under the MISSION Act, including the ability to visit urgent care clinics such as MedExpress for minor injuries and illnesses. We also recently relocated four of our five outpatient clinics to larger spaces. The relocated, state-of-the-art clinics expand services and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring all Veterans can receive VA health care close to home.

Sincerely,

Donald E. Koenig
Director, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE: WAIT TIME UPDATE

The wait times listed below are the most recent available for our University Drive and H.J. Heinz III sites from VA's **Access and Quality in VA Healthcare tool** as of publication.* The online resource at www.accesstocare.va.gov is easy to use and breaks down data at each of our two main sites and five outpatient clinics.

UNIVERSITY DRIVE

6 DAYS Primary Care **2** DAYS Mental Health Care

H.J. HEINZ III

4 DAYS Primary Care **3** DAYS Mental Health Care

*Data presented is for return appointments for established patients for the 30-day period ending Sept. 2, 2019. Wait time data previously published here and elsewhere since June 2014 was drawn from www.va.gov/health/access-audit.asp, which updates every two weeks. The two sites present data through different, but meaningful, data definitions.



Richard Franklin

Homeless to Employed

by Sheila Tunney

Marine Corps Veteran Richard Franklin was battling depression when he lost his job, car and home. He entered the Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program following an inpatient stay at our University Drive campus. Franklin spoke with us about CWT and how it helped him re-enter the workforce.

Q. Tell us about what led you to CWT? How did you learn about the program?

A. I was diagnosed with depression. It started in 2013 after my brother died and a crime was committed on a family member. I didn't recognize it until 2017, but I lost my job, car, everything. I was sleeping on floors and in nooks and crannies. Then my toe got infected, really bad. My cousin suggested the VA in Oakland. I was in the hospital for eight days for the toe, and my doctor kept saying I didn't look like most people living on the streets. She led me to shelter at "268," the Mechling-Shakley Veterans Center in Armstrong County. Then I met a VA social worker who suggested CWT.

Q. How did CWT prepare you for work? Where do you work now?

A. I first worked in the kitchen then transferred to transportation, shuttling people from Oakland to the federal building. I went on interviews, but I didn't get hits. One day I met a guy in a bank installing office furniture and asked him how long he had been doing it. I had done it for about 30 years before I lost everything. He gave me the company's number. CWT faxed over my resume, and I interviewed the next day. They wanted me to start in a week.

Q. How can this program benefit other Veterans, and would you recommend it?

A. I would recommend CWT, especially if you're going through a downfall like I was. You have time to think about how to better yourself and what's going on with you. If you have questions, their people are always there to help.



Do you need assistance returning to the workforce?

Our Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program can help you achieve your career goals.

CWT provides vocational case management and workplace supports to help you secure and maintain community-based employment.

Our staff will work with you to identify and match your skills, abilities and preferences with employers seeking to hire Veterans. We provide job opportunities through partnerships with private and government employers.



For more information on the **CWT program at VA Pittsburgh**, call **412-822-1285**.

Connect to Your Care

24/7 Nurse Call Center:

412-822-2222, press 3

Audiology: Hearing, tinnitus and balance disorders. 412-360-6400

Behavioral Health: 412-360-6600

Caregiver Services: Help at home and someone to listen.

412-822-2364 or 1-855-260-3274

Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders:

Residential: 412-360-6611

Outpatient: 412-360-6092

Chaplain Services: 412-822-1551

Community Based Care: Services to help chronically ill or disabled Veterans of any age remain in their homes. 412-822-2910

Connected Care: Telehealth, VA Mobile and more. 412-360-3235

Copays: Online at pay.gov, by phone at 1-888-827-4817, or in person at any VA medical center.

Dental: 412-822-2130

Emergency Department: 24-hour emergency physical and mental health care services. 412-360-6322

Eye Clinic: 412-360-6700

Environmental Registries:

412-822-1707

Homeless Veterans: Transitional and permanent housing, case management, dental and medical care. 412-822-1272

Help for Homeless Veterans

hotline: 877-4AID-VET (424-3838)

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and

Transgender Veterans: Culturally and clinically competent care for LGBT Veterans. 412-360-1210

Military Sexual Trauma Support:

412-360-1040

My HealtheVet: Online access to health records, electronic messaging and prescription refills. www.myhealth.va.gov
412-360-6838

Pathology and Laboratory:

412-360-1572

Patient Advocate: 412-360-3614

Pharmacy: Refill prescriptions by phone, mail or the internet.
412-822-3140

Physical Medicine and

Rehabilitation: Inpatient and outpatient physical, occupational, and kinesiotherapy, low vision and blind rehab services. 412-822-2111

Podiatry: 412-822-3000, press 5

Primary Care: Annual checkups, nutrition counseling and more.
412-822-3000

Prosthetics: 412-822-3728

Radiology: X-ray, ultrasound, CT, and MRI. 412-360-6216

Release of Information:

412-822-1135 or ROIPGH@va.gov

Research: 412-360-2386

Speech Pathology: Treatments for speech, language, voice, cognitive communication, swallowing impairments and training for stroke patients. 412-360-6400

Spinal Cord Injury: 412-822-3000

Surgical Services: Same-day surgery, neurosurgery and cardiothoracic, hand, ophthalmology, orthopedic, otolaryngology, plastic, transplant and vascular surgery. 412-360-6700

Transition and Care

Management Program: Health care tailored to post-9/11 Veterans. 412-822-2362

Travel Office: 412-360-3620 or 412-360-6783

Vet Centers: Counseling and referral for combat Veterans, their families, and any Veteran who was sexually traumatized while serving.
Pittsburgh: 412-920-1765
Wheeling: 304-232-0587
White Oak: 412-678-7704

Veterans Crisis Line: Confidential help for Veterans in crisis and their families and friends.

www.veteranscrisisline.net

1-800-273-8255 (press 1)

Text to 838255

Voluntary and Recreation

Services: 412-822-3098

Women's Health Services:

412-360-6289

IF YOU ARE HAVING A MEDICAL EMERGENCY:

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

If it is not a VA facility:

- Request transfer to a VA facility when medically stable.
- Report the non-VA visit to your primary care VA facility **within 72 hours or upon discharge.**

Not all Veterans are eligible for every service listed.

For a more comprehensive list of services, visit www.pittsburgh.va.gov/services



Veterans Health Administration Executive-In-Charge Dr. Richard Stone stopped by our Innovation, Creativity, Engagement and Transformation Expo in July to talk with VA Pittsburgh innovators about new ideas to improve Veterans' health care. Katie Braun of our Veterans Experience Office talked with Stone about our new survey to improve customer service.

A Leader in Health Care Innovation

New Ideas Improve Your Health Care

Developing new ways to improve your health care is among our top priorities. From our annual expo of staff-inspired projects to our longtime partnership with the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL), we are a proven leader in VA health care innovation.

Innovation, Creativity, Engagement and Transformation Expo

VA Pittsburgh staff in July displayed their ideas to improve Veterans' health care at our Innovation, Creativity, Engagement and Transformation Expo. Formerly known as EXPOceptional, the annual expo allows VA Pittsburgh staff to showcase completed or in-the-works projects designed to improve your health care.

Among the 25 displayed ideas were:

- Virtual Cancer Care Network – Our Virtual Cancer Care Network uses telehealth to extend cancer care to Veterans in Altoona, saving them a nearly two-hour drive to Pittsburgh to receive chemotherapy.
- Gerofit – Our supervised exercise program for Veterans ages 65 and older improves strength and aerobic endurance.
- Home visits for mobility devices – An in-the-works project proposes sending VA providers to visit Veterans in rural areas in their homes for fittings and follow-up care for mobility devices.

(Continued on page 8.)

{ PROGRAM Spotlight }

Community Clinics Meet

VA Health Care Close to Home



Did you know you can receive VA health care close to home in outpatient clinics designed to meet Veterans' needs?

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System's five outpatient clinics serve Veterans in Belmont County, Ohio, and Beaver, Fayette, Washington and Westmoreland counties in Pennsylvania.

Each clinic is staffed by caring professionals who provide general medical care, physical exams, and laboratory, dietary, pharmacy and other services.

The clinics in Belmont, Beaver, Fayette and Washington moved to larger spaces recently to make it

more convenient for you to receive VA care without traveling to Pittsburgh. The new, state-of-the-art clinics expanded specialty care available through telehealth and added services such as hearing aid maintenance and repair. The larger spaces are designed to optimize patient and staff flow around VA's Veteran-centered Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs). Your PACT is individualized to your care needs and includes a provider, nurses and other clinicians as necessary.

Westmoreland will move to a larger space soon. Watch for updates:



facebook.com/VAPHS



twitter.com/VAPittsburgh



subscribe to email and text alerts at public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USVA/subscriber/new

Your Needs



Reception area at the Beaver County VA Outpatient Clinic.



CLINIC SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Primary, preventive and mental health care
- Women's health
- Telehealth (specialty care)
- Prescription drug benefits
- Social work services
- Podiatry
- Dietary
- Laboratory and X-ray/imaging
- Hearing aid maintenance and repair (except Westmoreland)
- Hearing tests (except Beaver and Westmoreland)



TO ENROLL:

- Visit a clinic to fill out an application or to speak with an enrollment adviser
- Contact eligibility at 412-360-6162
- Apply online at www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction



VA OUTPATIENT CLINICS

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Monday-Friday

Beaver County

300 Brighton Avenue, Suite 110
Rochester, PA 15074-2135
724-709-6005 (p)
724-774-3169 (f)

Belmont County

67800 Mall Ring Road
Ohio Valley Mall, Suite 215
St. Clairsville, OH 43950-1703
740-695-9321 (p)
740-695-6212 (f)

Fayette County

627 Pittsburgh Road, Suite 2
Uniontown, PA 15401
724-439-4990 (p)
724-439-4155 (f)

Washington County

95 West Beau Street
Crossroads Center, Suite 200
Washington, PA 15301-6800
724-250-7790 (p)
724-250-7568 (f)

Westmoreland County

5274 Route 30, Suite 10
Greensburg, PA 15601
724-216-0317 (p)
724-837-0271 (f)

Leader in Innovation



Photo courtesy of HERL.

HERL's waterproof, air-powered wheelchairs allow users to enjoy water recreation anywhere, from water parks to the beach.

(Continued from page 5.)

Partners with HERL

Our partnership with the Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL) and the University of Pittsburgh develops and tests new ideas in health care to improve the lives of Veterans and all Americans. Founded by Rory Cooper, Ph.D., in 1994 at our former Highland Drive location, HERL has developed:

- A patented pulse oximeter designed by VA Pittsburgh medical instrument technician Cathy Abee that warms body parts like fingers or toes so health

care providers can measure blood oxygen in patients with poor circulation. The device is in the final stages of development for licensure with a major corporation to be produced and distributed worldwide.

- The Mobility Enhancement Robotic Wheelchair, or MEBot, moves smoothly over steps and curbs; rises to standing level so users can reach objects in high places or talk face-to-face during conversations; and makes automatic adjustments

to seat, height and incline on rough terrain.

- Air-powered wheelchair and scooter prototypes are waterproof, easy to maintain and fast to recharge.

 Learn more about HERL at www.herl.pitt.edu

Smoke Free VHA



Lori Clark, VAPHS tobacco cessation coordinator, can help you quit tobacco for good.

To strengthen our commitment to providing you with a safe and healthy environment, we are going smoke free. **Starting Oct. 1, 2019, patients, employees, residents, visitors, contractors, volunteers and vendors will be prohibited from smoking or using tobacco at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System campuses, outpatient clinics, and Vet Centers.**

VA's national smoking policy covers all smoking and tobacco products, including but not limited to:

- Cigarettes
- Cigars
- Pipes
- Any other combustion of tobacco
- Electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), including but not limited to electronic or

e-cigarettes, vape pens, or e-cigars.

Additionally, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System's local policy MCM EC-093 includes:

- Smokeless tobacco
- Dip
- Chewing tobacco
- Snuff

If you use tobacco and are admitted to the hospital, ask about nicotine replacement therapy to prevent withdrawal.

Quitting improves your health and pocketbook: Pack-a-day smokers who quit add years to their lives and save about \$3,000 yearly.

For questions on our new policy, please visit www.va.gov/health/smokefree or contact us at VAPHSSmokeFree@va.gov.



TOBACCO CESSATION

Should you choose to quit or cut back on tobacco use, we offer several smoking-cessation programs and support options:

Tobacco Cessation Group

Thursdays from 1 to 2 p.m. at our University Drive campus. No appointment necessary.

Nicotine replacement therapy

Talk to your primary care provider.

1-855-QUIT-VET (784-8838) toll-free quit line

Weekdays from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Stay Quit Coach mobile app

mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach

SmokefreeVET text messaging

Text VET (English) or VETesp (Spanish) to 47848

Smokefree.gov/veterans

Develop your personal quit plan with 24/7 access to resources.



Contact our **tobacco cessation coordinator** at **412-360-1720** for

additional program information.

FOCUS ON WOMEN'S HEALTH }

Self-Care After Childbirth

Molly Fisher, MD, and Sarina Beasley, PT, DPT, WCS

Caring for a newborn is amazing and challenging, but you must also take care of yourself. Understanding emotional and physical changes in the one-year postpartum period after childbirth is very important for you and your baby.

You may experience dramatic emotional changes after giving birth. The combination of hormones, sleep deprivation and lifestyle changes can deeply impact your mood. It is normal to feel overwhelmed, have ups and downs, or cry unexpectedly. For help, reach out to your support network of family, friends, parenting support groups, and VA resources. Our doctors and psychologists will help you with postpartum depression, anxiety and emotional challenges.



If you ever have thoughts of hurting yourself, your baby or anyone else, seek care immediately: Call 911 or the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1.

You may also experience physical changes. During pregnancy, the baby's weight stresses the muscles of the pelvic floor and organs. These tissues can be

affected even with a cesarean section delivery. The pelvic stress can lead to urine and stool leakage – sometimes from lifting your baby, sneezing, coughing or laughing. Vaginal deliveries can tear vaginal tissues, creating long-term pain.

You may have back, hip and pelvic pain. Sometimes this pain persists and weakens the abdominal muscles. Postpartum vaginal bleeding, vaginal pain and post-surgical cesarean section pain can be expected. Shoulder and back discomfort may also come from improper positioning during breastfeeding.

i If you experience postpartum pelvic issues, ask your VA provider to place a consult for Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy.

The time postpartum can be a whirlwind. Be kind to yourself and contact your VA or civilian provider for help when you need it.

TO YOUR
GOOD
HEALTH



You Earned It

You defended our freedom. We honor and respect you by providing exceptional health care, regardless of gender.

We do not tolerate gender harassment—or harassment of any kind—within our walls. When you walk through the doors of any VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System facility, you will receive the health care and benefits you earned in a safe and positive environment.

So-called “harmless flirting” is not a compliment. It’s harassment. Unacceptable behaviors include catcalls, whistles, stares or ogling; telling women Veterans they are too pretty to be Veterans; suggestive remarks; and following or cornering someone.

If anyone disrespects or harasses you in our facilities, tell:

- Our patient advocates at 412-360-3614 or 412-822-1562
- Any trusted member of your Patient Aligned Care Team

VetQ&A

Answering Your Important Questions

VETERANS
CONNECT
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Q. I heard on the news VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System is short critical supplies because of an unresolved snafu with its supplier. Is this true?

A. All health care facilities must overcome temporary stocking challenges from time to time, including us recently when our prime vendor failed to fulfill complete orders. While we worked with national and regional VA teams to resolve the issue, we closely monitored supply issues at our facilities. If a unit was short an item, we secured the item from elsewhere within our medical facilities or provided an appropriate substitute. When necessary, we purchased items in low supply from other vendors. We are unaware of any patient harm caused by temporary supply disruptions. Our top priority is always to ensure a safe and healing health care delivery environment.

Q. Many people do not know the difference between Veterans Day and Memorial Day. Does VA Pittsburgh educate employees on the different meanings of the two days?

A. Many people confuse Veterans Day and Memorial Day. Memorial Day honors military personnel who died in service to our country. Veterans Day honors all Veterans who served honorably in the military, in times of war or peace. At VA Pittsburgh, we educate all new employees during orientation on the different meanings of the two very important days. We also send reminders to all employees the week prior to each observance and post information to our Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Q. I am not eligible for VA transportation/travel. How can I quickly find other transportation resources in the greater Pittsburgh area?

A. A to B Transportation is a new online resource to primarily help residents of Allegheny County in Pennsylvania explore transportation options that meet their needs, preferences and abilities. VA Pittsburgh and other area agencies worked with Age Friendly Greater Pittsburgh to create the resource. Users simply answer a few questions and A to B will list options to meet their needs. To learn more or to find transportation options available to you, visit A to B online at www.atoballegheny.com/IndividualProfile.

Please note: Information on A to B is provided for Veterans' convenience only. VA Pittsburgh does not endorse this service and is not responsible for its services.

Veterans Connect delivers news and information of interest to area Veterans.

Please send suggestions, comments and requests to VAPHSEditor@va.gov.



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

University Drive | Pittsburgh, PA 15240

www.pittsburgh.va.gov

412-822-2222 | 866-482-7488

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RENEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH WARRIOR TO SOULMATE

Learn communication skills to reconnect with your partner at our Warrior to Soulmate weekend workshops. Couples learn practical skills to promote intimacy and sharing; grow mutual respect; turn negativity into understanding; connect feelings with behaviors; reach goals as a couple; and more. **Ask your provider for a consult or call 412-360-1826.**



Connect with State Benefits

For timely information on state benefits, consider signing up for the Pennsylvania Department of Military Affairs' Veterans Registry at register.dmva.pa.gov.

Please note: Information provided as a courtesy. VA Pittsburgh is not responsible for information distributed through the registry.



#BeThere

for the Veterans in your life.



BeThereForVeterans.com



VA



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