The Office of Community Care: Transforming the Veteran Experience through Improved Partnerships and Processes

Access: this is what the Office of Community Care (OCC) is centered around. Currently OCC is undergoing a Veterans Affairs-wide transformation with the goal of creating a high performing network that delivers timely and quality care to Veterans, said Hampton VA Medical Center OCC Business Manager, Carla Garcia. Patients and staff should think of the OCC as an extension of the VA. “We recognize we cannot provide all services or be everything to everyone all the time,” said Dr. Karin Soobert, Hampton’s OCC Chief Director. “And that is why partnerships and relationships with our community are so important.”

Because of this the VA does not take its commitments to Veterans or taxpayers lightly. “First and foremost, we take ownership of our Veterans,” said Garcia.

Continued on Page 6
WHO IS A WOMAN VETERAN?
A woman is a Veteran if she served in the active military, naval or air service and separated under any conditions other than dishonorable. There are more than 2 million women Veterans living in the U.S. today. Women are the fastest growing group in the Veteran population. In 2000, women were only 4% of the Veteran population. By 2040, women will be 18% of the Veteran population. Today’s women Veterans are the best-educated and most diverse generation. They are generally younger than male Veterans and will have many opportunities to receive VA care.

WHY DO WOMEN CHOOSE VA?
VA understands women Veterans. VA’s approach to care is unique for women Veterans. Women Veterans are assigned one Designated Women’s Health Provider to coordinate your care, and provide primary care and gender specific care. A woman Veteran isn’t limited to just one hospital or clinic to receive care. She has access to the entire VA health system, which is 144 hospitals, 1,221 outpatient clinics, and over 300 Vet Centers across the US.

WHAT SERVICES DOES VA OFFER?
VA provides comprehensive primary care that includes services for acute and chronic illnesses, preventive services, and gender-specific care, and other services. VA’s medical staff are experts in providing medical care and services beyond primary care, including:

- Mammography
- Gynecology
- Military sexual trauma-related care
- Counseling
- Military and environmental exposure

Women Veterans can apply for VA health care enrollment and other Veterans benefits by completing VA Form 10-10EZ. To complete the form:

Apply online at www.1010ez.med.va.gov
Visit, call, or write to any VA health care facility or Veterans’ benefits office or call the VA Health Benefits Call Center toll free at 877-222-VETS (8387)

Get more information online about VA benefits (www.vba.va.gov) and eligibility (www.va.gov/healtheligibility/)
A group of Veterans gathered to celebrate hope and healing at the Hampton VA Women’s Center, Feb. 13.

The celebration recognized the one-year anniversary of the newly formed group known as Veteran ‘Hope’ which is an inspirational group for female Veterans. The group is affiliated with Veteran ‘X,’ an inter-gendered group.

Both groups are designed to help empower Veterans in recovery, for mental illness and substance abuse addictions, to live independently in the community of their choosing.

“I feel safe here,” said group member Lisa Sweeney.

“I originally came for treatment for my Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and that is when I met my mentor Jill.”

“The VA played an important role in my own personal recovery from alcohol more than 20 years ago,” said Jill Lindsay, Hampton VAMC Peer Support Counselor and facilitator for both groups.

“I have seen first-hand how Veteran ‘Hope’ and Veteran ‘X’ provide the support and camaraderie so many Veterans need when attending these programs.”

During the two-hour session, Veterans meet and are given a scenario about a fictitious Veteran facing any number of issues from medical, anxiety, domestic violence, and childcare to name a few.

“The group comes together as a team and we decide how to help the fictitious Veteran,” said Sweeney.

“The problem we try to solve may actually be what someone in the group is dealing with. This provides a safe way for problems to be discussed without disclosing all the details and provides answers and solutions or resources to help ‘them’ which helps them overcome personal barriers.”

Sweeney is a 20-year Army Reserve Veteran who has battled substance abuse throughout the years which she attributes to a traumatic sexual experience in boot camp.

“I would encourage Veterans to get help and not to wait,” said Sweeney. “Take control now don’t sit on it—there are better services available and opportunities to get the help you need.”

There are currently eight Veteran ‘Hope’ Programs ongoing at eight VA Medical Centers nationally, said Lindsay.

Currently, there are 10 female Veterans who attend Veteran ‘Hope’ on a regular basis at the Hampton VAMC. “My goal is to bring in as many Veterans as possible. The larger the group, the better the input and the dynamic of the group,” said Lindsay.

“I used to feel judged by my past,” said Sweeney.

“Sometimes you can feel like you are alone but I don’t feel that way anymore. This is a good group. I just have to stay connected.” #

History of Veteran ‘Hope’ In 2010, after attending several Veteran X sessions, two female Veterans wanted to start an all-female session to help encourage women who felt uncomfortable sharing their issues in an inter-gendered group. These Veterans were instrumental in establishing the group but sadly one suddenly passed away during that same year. Since then, her sister took up the project and the first group session was conducted in 2011, it was reorganized and the first meeting under the reorganization was held February 2017.
Patient Safety Week: March 11-17
What Should Patients Do to Help Make Care Safe?

The responsibility for safe care lies primarily with the leaders of health care organizations and the clinicians and staff who deliver care, but patients and families can also play a roll in preventing medical errors and reducing harm. Although barriers to patient engagement exist, being an active partner in your health care team is well worth the effort.

Among the things patients can do to help stay safe during medical care are the following:

1. Ask questions about the risks and benefits of the recommendations made by your health care provider. It is essential that they understand your goals, values, and beliefs, and that their recommendations reflect those.
2. Don’t go alone to the hospital or to doctor visits: Bring a sibling, spouse, friend, or neighbor— anyone you trust to be your ally. They can speak up, help you remember, and provide emotional support.
3. Always know why and how you take your medications, and their names. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality suggests asking the following questions about medications:
   - What is the medicine for?
   - How am I supposed to take it and for how long?
   - What side effects are likely? What do I do if they occur?
   - Is this medicine safe to take with other medicines or dietary supplements I am taking?
   - What food, drink, or activities should I avoid while taking this medicine?
4. Understand the plan of action for your care: medical information and terminology is complex, so if you don’t understand something, don’t hesitate to ask. Use the Ask Me 3™ questions if you don’t know what to ask:
   - What is my main problem?
   - What do I need to do?
   - Why is it important for me to do this?
5. Say back to clinicians in your own words what you think they have told you. By practicing this step on a regular basis, it may help you remember the instructions after you leave and helps clinicians know if you’ve understood.
6. Arrange to get any recommended lab tests done before a visit. This way you can discuss the results during the visit.

During the month of February the Hampton VA Medical Center held its annual Go Red event in Bldg. 83 where women were encouraged to care for their hearts. Vendors were present to make sure this happened to include: Healthy Eating, Nutrition, including Move! Physical Therapy with heart healthy exercises; Smoking cessation; De-stressing activities such as mindfulness coloring pages, crochet lessons (pictured), arts & crafts, and two massage chairs. MyHealthyVet was also present as well as Veteran Health Education, Blood Pressure checks and flu shots were also available. If you missed this year’s event be sure to look for it next February and in the mean time, take time to take care of your heart and health by signing up for care at our Women’s Clinic. Learn More.

During the month of February the Hampton VA Medical Center is proud to join the nation in celebrating African American History Month. This year’s theme is “African American’s in Times of War.” Hampton VAMC held an event Feb. 21 in Bldg 48 with special guest speaker Dr. Antipas Harris, Pastor, Professor and Public Theologian (pictured) who received a letter of appreciation from Hampton’s Director, Ronald Johnson along with Ms. Shevette Thoroughgood (pictured) for their participation in the program and helping ensure the VA is a place of diversity and inclusion. (Also pictured is Leon Walker Hampton’s Equal Employment and Diversity and Inclusion Officer).
YOUR EMERGENCY RESOURCES

Get help right now

Contact the resources below to get immediate help for yourself or a friend. These resources are designed to support Veterans during difficult times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT SERVICES CAN VA PROVIDE?</th>
<th>VISIT US ONLINE</th>
<th>GIVE US A CALL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veteran’s Crisis Line</td>
<td><a href="http://www.veteranscrisisline.net">www.veteranscrisisline.net</a> (click “chat”)</td>
<td>(800) 273-8255 (press 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>text 838255 24 hours a day/7 days a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Suicide Prevention Line</td>
<td>suicidepreventionlifeline.org (click “chat”)</td>
<td>(800) 273-8255</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24 hours a day/7 days a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Sexual Trauma Support</td>
<td>vets.gov/facility-locator (Find a Medical Center)</td>
<td>Call your local Medical Center or Vet Center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(VA offers free counseling services for Military Sexual Trauma survivors. You don’t have to be enrolled in VA Health Care to access MST services.)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter.asp">www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter.asp</a> (Find a Vet Center)</td>
<td>At Medical Centers, ask to speak to the MST coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Call Center for Homeless Vets</td>
<td><a href="http://www.veteranscrisisline.net">www.veteranscrisisline.net</a> (click “chat”)</td>
<td>(877) 424-3838</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>24 hours a day/7 days a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women Veterans Call Center</td>
<td><a href="http://www.womenshealth.va.gov">www.womenshealth.va.gov</a> (click “chat”)</td>
<td>(855) VA WOMEN</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(855) 829-6636 M-F, 8 AM-10 PM EST</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sat, 8 AM-6:30 PM EST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA Caregiver Support Line</td>
<td><a href="http://www.caregiver.va.gov">www.caregiver.va.gov</a></td>
<td>(855) 260-3274 M-F, 8 AM–8 PM EST</td>
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WHERE CAN I FIND IN PERSON HELP?
To locate your nearest VA Medical Facility, Regional Benefits Office, Regional Loan Center, Vet Center, National Cemetery, and other VA facilities, visit vets.gov/facility-locator

HEAR FROM OTHER VETERANS
To hear stories from Veterans who sought help, visit www.maketheconnection.net
She explained the hierarchy of care within the VA system is set up to ensure, if a local VA Medical Center cannot provide a needed service, care first stays within the VA, by utilizing a sister facility.

“It’s important we work together as a team by using knowledge sharing, talents and abilities across the VA,” she said.

When a service or care is not available within the VA, then the Department of Defense services are utilized followed by community agreements and traditional community care.

One aspect of the national transformation includes the negotiation of legislation to overhaul or replace program known as VA Choice. Other laws have already been put in place to mandate the consolidation and modernization of the Community Care Programs which have existed for more than 70 years.

As a result, the Veterans Health Administration Office of Community Care (VHACC) is working with all local facilities to deploy innovative solutions, including business process improvements and information technology enhancements. The overall goal is to improve the community care experience for Veterans and their families, community providers, and VA staff.

While the VA undergoes this transformation, the OCC staff at Hampton VAMC is preparing by going back to the basics.

One major project their staff is working on is building a clinical inventory within the Medical Center.

“With more than 180 providers, we find providers aren’t always aware of what services are available in-house,” said Soobert.

The clinical inventory list will provide oversight of all services available at the Hampton VAMC. The list provides knowledge and accountability at the local level and provides a truer understanding of what will need to be sent into the community. This is also important because services can change with the coming and going of providers. This means as some capabilities become unavailable new capabilities are established.

“We also recently established an Office of Community Care Oversight Council which includes all of the key clinical, nursing and administrative services as well as a representative from the Medical Centers executive leadership team,” said Soobert.

“This team will be reporting on a regular basis to the Medical Executive Council and this is how we will be able to formally provide information and keep everyone abreast and updated of the services offered at our VA and in the community.”

The Hampton OCC is conducting a market analysis of services available in the community through a work study group, said Garcia.

“We need to ensure the services we send out are right and the level of care is appropriate. This means they are scrutinized by our quality standards,” she said.

“We must assess where we are sending our patients and ensure our community providers have the right credentials.”

One major part of community partnerships includes timely billing and payment to community providers. Recently, the VA announced a business solutions agreement with a new company to help with its claims processing technology. This company will develop a centralized processing system to replace the VA’s current legacy commercial-off-the-shelf...
(COTS) claims adjudication system. The Virginia region has been selected as one of the first to fall under the new contract.

“This will ensure we are not the middle man,” said Garcia. “Furthermore, this will better enable us to establish excellent customer service with our patients and rebuild our relationships with our community providers.”

“We are committed to the relationships with our community partners and re-engaging them,” said Garcia. “We need them, without them we cannot do what we do.”

During the three years Garcia has worked for the VA the OCC office has grown from four staff members to more than 30, which includes the addition of the Chief of the department. Local offices are responsible to manage consults, referrals, and authorizations, as well as schedule appointments, coordinate health information and care. They must also manage funds that will be used for community care, and departmental funds as well as answer veteran and provider questions.

“Right now, I have two people dedicated just to answering Veteran questions we receive on a regular basis,” said Garcia. To her relief, the office has been identified as a foundational service and will continue to grow.

Garcia said, even though there are several changes coming, she believes it will prove to be positive for everyone. “This transformation will help all local offices establish clear roles and responsibilities and consistent processes,” said Garcia.

“The ultimate goal is to have active partnerships, standardized care coordination and responsive customer service.”

The vision for the OCC is to ensure there are easy to understand eligibility requirements, support timely access, provide a seamless exchange of information with a quick resolution of questions, provide a network of high quality care, and ensure timely payment to community partners.

The VA’s goal is to deliver community care through a single consolidated program that is easy to understand, simple to administer, and meets the needs of Veterans, their families, community providers and VA staff.
**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION:** March is is Women’s History Month

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**MARCH:**

**Around the Campus**

March 6 and 20th Tax Assistance for Vets. 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Free Tax Assistance Bldg. 52, Conference Room. Bring all required documentation and proof of ID.

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**SAVE THE DATE**

Informational Town Hall Sessions. Representatives will be available to answer questions. You can pre-submit questions to: VHAHAMPublicAffairs@va.gov

May 16 - Elizabeth City
August 23 - Chesapeake
November 7 - Hampton

Locations and times TBD, information will be forthcoming.

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**Patient Orientation:** 1st Thursday of each month - YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE A NEW PATIENT - ALL PATIENTS WELCOME! Attend a brief session to learn about VA healthcare and resources available through the Hampton VA Medical Center. During this session you can plan your first appointment, learn about the VA model of care, and identify services and support that matters to your health. Staff will be available to answer many of your questions. Call to register! 757.722.9961 Press 2 for appointment then 2 for Primary Care. Tell the operator you want to enroll. Walk-ins welcome (upcoming dates: April 5 * May 3 * June 7 * July 5 * Aug. 2 * Sept. 6 * Oct. 4 * Nov. 1 * Dec. 6)

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**March Food Trucks**

March 2 - Sofrito & Vicki Vail’s
March 9 - Hangry’s & JK Style Grill
March 16 - JK Style Grill & Pelican Pete’s
March 23 - Capt’n Crabby & Get Stuffed
March 30 - JK Style Grill & Taste of Asia

Vendors interested in bringing their trucks to the Medical Center must contact: Cassandra Ayala of Eat the Streets 757 at 757-408-2245

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

March 30th is National Doctors Day. It is a day to celebrate the contribution of physicians who serve our country by caring for its’ citizens. The first Doctor’s Day observance was March 30, 1933 in Winder, Georgia.

VA Data: In order to be transparent the VA provides data that is freely available to the public. It is a by-product of the work the VA does for Veterans, and is not personal data. Explore

DVS: Virginia has a Department of Veterans Services that can help you with benefits, education and employment and more. Go to their website to learn about locations, times and offerings.

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**Veterans, Have you?**

Joined our Facebook Page, get fast facts, information on benefits and upcoming events

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**Hampton VAMC Employees, Have you?**

Checked out our intranet page for information on events, celebrations and more?

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**The Hampton Focus** is a monthly publication. Articles and information should be submitted no later than the 10th of each month. Please contact the Public Affairs Office at VHAHAMPublicAffairs@va.gov

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**Next months focus:** Primary Care Enhancements, National Counseling Day, Sexual Assault, Patient Experience Week