

Veterans'

# HealthMatters

The Wellness  
Magazine from the  
VA Sierra Pacific  
Network

Winter 2001

Network Highlights

Lifting the Darkness  
of Depression

Winter Serenity:  
Combat  
Post-Holiday  
Stress

The Latest  
News on  
Emergency  
Services



# Network

## Highlights

### Looking Ahead

I am pleased to introduce another collection of Network Highlights. As you will read, your VA facilities have a lot to be proud of this year.

As we look ahead to 2001, the Network will continue to emphasize the delivery of outstanding healthcare services to veterans.

This year we will open new clinics and expand services in California, Nevada and Hawaii. We hope to attract new veterans and

reduce waiting times for all veterans.

Finally, we will increase our efforts to serve veterans with special needs — including those who are homeless and those with hepatitis C, spinal cord injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic mental illness.

As always, I look forward to any comments or questions you may have about our newsletter or the Network.

—Robert L. Wiebe, M.D., M.B.A.  
Director, VA Sierra Pacific Network

### VA Central California Health Care System (VACCHCS) Fresno: Reinventing the house call

Fresno's Geriatric and Extended Care Service was recently awarded a \$100,000 VA grant to implement home care telemedicine technology.

Using a special computer station located at the medical center and telephone lines, the system connects homebound veterans to their VA health care teams via telemedicine units installed in their homes. The program serves veterans who have severe chronic physical and/or mental illnesses but live too far from VA health care facilities to make frequent visits.

The 'new-age house call' starts with a simple phone call

that establishes audio and visual contact, allowing the VA primary care team to monitor a patient's vital signs, listen to heart and lung sounds, check on wound healing and other physical and emotional issues.

### VA Medical Center San Francisco (SFVAMC): A national leader in Parkinson's disease treatment

SFVAMC's Center for the Surgical Treatment of Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders is VA's only referral center for Parkinson's disease. Advanced surgical procedures performed at the center have significantly eased symptoms in some patients for whom medication

provided inadequate relief. In particular, the center performs more deep brain stimulation (DBS) surgical procedures than anywhere else in the world. In DBS, a stimulating electrode is surgically implanted into a specific area of the brain. The electrode is connected to a programmable impulse generator that reduces symptoms.

Neurologist William Marks, M.D., is the medical director of the Center, and neurosurgeon Philip Starr, M.D., is the surgical director. This team of world-class physicians has made SFVAMC's Center for the Surgical Treatment of Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders a leader in caring for veterans with these debilitating conditions.

Veterans' HealthMatters is intended to provide supplemental health information. Individuals should consult their primary care provider before pursuing any treatment alternatives. You may visit our web site at the following address: [www.visn21.med.va.gov](http://www.visn21.med.va.gov).

## **VA Northern California Health Care System (VANCHCS): Fairfield VA Outpatient Clinic opens its doors**

**T**he Fairfield Outpatient Clinic is the newest addition to the VA Northern California Health Care System (VANCHCS). The 30,000-square-foot facility at Travis Air Force Base expands access to VA health care for veterans living in the Solano County area. Veterans can go there for primary care, mental health care, physical therapy, nutritional medicine, diabetic education and laboratory and pharmacy services. Additional specialty care clinics are planned for 2001.

A sharing agreement between David Grant Medical Center and VANCHCS will provide 24-hour-a-day access to the emergency room, inpatient care, radiology and radiation therapy. The new Fairfield VA Outpatient Clinic, located next to the David Grant Medical Center, is open Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. To make an appointment or for more information, call (707) 437-1800.

## **VA Medical & Regional Office Center Honolulu: Serving the homeless**

**F**or years, Honolulu VA outreach staff members wanted to do more than existing resources allowed for Hawaii's homeless veterans. With the closing of Barbers Point Naval Air Station, former barracks became available to help the homeless under the McKinny

Act, and Honolulu VAMROC initiated the homeless project at Barbers Point.

In 1994, a plan requesting 5.6 acres and three buildings totaling 65,000 square feet was forwarded to the Navy. The plan was approved.

Acting Secretary of Department of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Hershel Gober; Miss America 2000 Heather French; Miss America 2001 (then Miss Hawaii) Angela Baraquio; Honolulu VAMROC Director H. David Burge; and other dignitaries took part in a blessing and dedication of the facilities on September 18, 2000.

In collaboration with local community agencies, the U.S. Veterans Initiative, Inc., began renovation of the properties at Barbers Point to provide treatment, job training and housing for homeless veterans. Soon, Hawaii's homeless veterans will have a refuge where they will be treated with dignity and compassion.

## **VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS): Advanced care for veterans with spinal cord injury (SCI)**

**T**he VAPAHCS offers state-of-the-art spinal cord treatment through the SCI Telehealth Project. The project promotes the VAPAHCS mission "to serve the veteran through compassionate, innovative, comprehensive, accessible, quality patient care in a safe and supportive environment, while promoting excellence in research and education."

Telemedicine is the use of information and communications technologies to provide and support health care when distance makes it difficult for patients to access care. The Telehealth Project makes the best use of resources for coordinating health care, improving access and promoting education across the VA facilities. Patients with spinal cord injury or disorders can readily obtain the best specialty care, despite the barriers of distance. When surveyed, the vast majority of patients and clinicians reported that better care was provided due to this technology.

## **VA Sierra Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHCS): Check-in made easier**

**V**A Reno Healthcare System now boasts a computerized patient check-in system. As soon as a veteran enters the medical center, his or her VA ID card is scanned at the check-in desk. A simple swipe brings up all appointments, means test updates and demographic and insurance information on a computer monitor. Veterans can update information immediately. Monitors in the outpatient clinics let medical staff know a veteran has arrived so the staff will be prepared to see the patient on time.

Our patients appreciate the streamlined system. They know they will not have to stand in long lines or return to the check-in desk for more information. ★

# Lifting the Darkness of Depression

When sadness lingers, help is available

**L**ife invariably has its ups and downs, and some would say that without the contrast, we wouldn't be able to fully appreciate the good times. Job changes, bills, an illness, the loss of a loved one—lots of life events can make you feel sad. As a result, you may feel down or lack your usual energy for a week or two—a normal response. But if a 'blue' phase lingers for more than two weeks—or if persistent sadness comes on for no apparent reason—it may be a more serious type of depression.

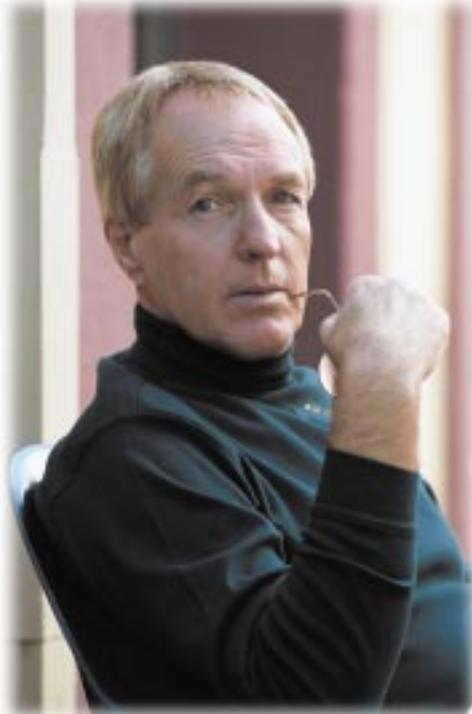
The most significant sign of depression is the loss of ability to experience pleasure. This kind of depression robs you of the ability to enjoy your normal activities and relationships. Depression can be a part of many health disorders as well, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

## Different forms

Depression can take many forms, from mild to severe. It's possible to experience a single episode of serious depression in response to a traumatic event, such as divorce. Once the event is resolved, the depression may lift, never to occur again. A normal life event, such as retirement or seeing a child off to college, may also cause depression.

Some people suffer recurring bouts separated by months or years but feel well in between. Others experience subtle symptoms every day. Often, depression keeps people from leading a normal life. They feel worthless and guilt-ridden and may contemplate suicide. For the deeply depressed, tending to daily needs is often impossible.

Most people are reluctant to admit the possibility of being depressed. But if the symptoms listed are present, do yourself a favor and talk to a professional. The good news is that depression is a highly treatable illness. Nearly nine in 10 depressed people who seek professional help experience some relief. ★



## Could You Be Depressed?

Ask yourself how many of these statements apply to you:

- I no longer get pleasure from activities I used to enjoy, such as reading, spending time in nature or having sexual relations.
- I'm not eating the way I used to. I've either lost my appetite or am eating more than usual.
- I cry a lot.
- I feel as if my life is meaningless.
- I feel worthless and have no hope for the future.
- I have no energy.
- I can't focus and have been letting projects and responsibilities slide.
- My sleeping pattern has been disrupted. I've been sleeping either too much or too little, and whatever sleep I get is fitful.
- Nothing gives me joy.
- The thought of socializing—going to a party, for instance—turns me off.
- I can't make decisions.
- I suffer a lot of stomach-aches and headaches.
- I'm too overwhelmed to carry out normal daily activities.
- I think death might bring welcome relief.
- It's time to seek medical help if at least four of the above statements apply to you, the symptoms are disrupting your daily life and they have persisted for more than two weeks.

# The Next Career Choice: **Volunteering**

**J**oin the federal government's largest volunteer workforce and make a commitment to put veterans first. Today's VA volunteer enjoys excellent opportunities, high job satisfaction and recognition in VA Voluntary Service. As a VA volunteer, you join a special and generous team of people: Last year, volunteers worked a combined 13,420,738 hours, helping to make VA medical centers, long-term care facilities and clinics among the leaders in quality patient care and customer service.



If you're looking for a challenging new career, keep in mind that hospitals offer job diversity unparalleled by any other large employer. As a VA volunteer, you will be able to choose from a wide range of jobs at our medical facilities. For example, many retired teachers are excited by VA's commitment to youth programs, which allows them to continue their work with students.

On the other hand, more than 15 percent of our volunteer force is made up of young adults who are still in high school. Students learn health careers and study Americanism up close through their work with our nation's heroes.

Others are business professionals who have retired from distinguished careers. As volunteers, they are discovering the rewards of giving their time to help unemployed and underemployed veterans. With several million dollars in VA-supported federal grants awarded to homeless veteran programs, volunteers also have many opportunities to "serve those who have served" but are now homeless.

As a volunteer, you will be able to choose from a wide range of jobs at our medical facilities.

## **Want To Live Longer? Volunteer**

**S**urely, you've heard that eating lots of fruits and vegetables and exercising regularly will help you live a longer, healthier life. Now you can add volunteering to your list of health-promoting activities. A study of adults over age 65 at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research found that the people who volunteered for a total of 40 hours or fewer were up to 67 percent less likely to die than the nonvolunteers.

Why do volunteers live longer? Most likely because volunteering gives them a sense of purpose, makes them feel needed and increases their social interaction outside the home. All these benefits help lower stress, which can lead to many diseases and conditions, from headaches to heart attacks.

Working professionals can help initiate a company-sponsored volunteer program. VA Voluntary Service staff can make it easy by tailoring a program for your company and by designing volunteer opportunities for individuals and groups.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or developing a corporate-sponsored volunteer program, please contact the Voluntary Service Program at your local facility. ★

# Winter Serenity

**S**tress is a normal part of everyday life, but it seems that stress is particularly noticeable during the winter months. This stress is often associated with the holidays, but the period after the holidays is just as stressful. Holiday bills come due, parties are over and it's back to everyday home and work life. The few extra pounds from all the great food need to be shed, and the hectic pace just spells fatigue.

With all these extra demands we place on ourselves during the winter, it's no wonder we all feel a little crazed. But you can help combat that stressful feeling by keeping a positive attitude and following these tips.

- Avoid absolutes. Basing your actions on "shoulds," "always" and "nevers" usually leads to disappointment and guilt.
- Cut yourself some slack. Accept any mistakes as part of a learning process—not a sign of incompetence.
- Focus on the here and now. You may find yourself

enjoying life's little pleasures more and worrying about what might happen less.

- Stay true to yourself. Don't reevaluate your actions and decisions just because others may disagree. Instead, do what feels comfortable for you.
- Take credit. Thank yourself for a job well done and accept praise from others. Your successes are not a fluke—you make them happen.

Relaxing may be as simple as deep breathing, petting your dog or meditating.

- Get some exercise. A regular routine of exercise can do wonders for relieving tension. Physical activity serves as a natural outlet for the hormones triggered by stress.

➤ Plan relaxing activities. Focus your mind and body on a calming activity. Relaxing may be as simple as deep breathing, petting your dog or meditating.

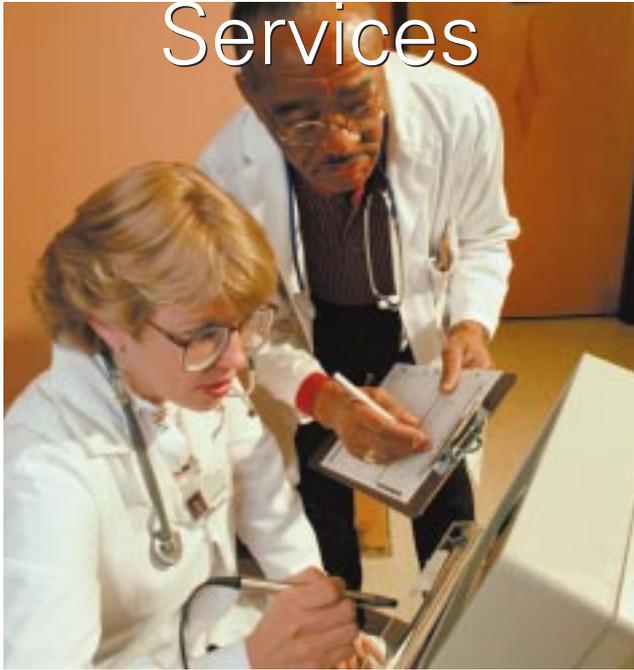
- Rely on social support. The support that family, friends and co-workers have to offer may be crucial to reducing tension. Social involvement with others will also help you avoid isolation and depression, conditions that can increase your stress. ★

## Cold-Weather Workouts

One of the best ways to release stress is through exercise. But with the temperature on the thermometer dipping during winter, many people become "fair-weather" exercisers. Just because there's a chill in the air doesn't mean you have to hibernate until the spring thaw. With the proper precautions, you can still enjoy many outdoor activities during much of the cold-weather months. The following tips can help you protect yourself while working out.

- Warm up indoors to increase blood flow to the extremities.
- Choose lightweight clothing and dress in layers.
- Wear a water-repellent outer layer.
- Avoid tight-fitting garments that hinder blood flow.
- Choose fabrics that wick moisture away from the skin and help insulate the body.
- To keep body heat from escaping, wear a hat and place a scarf or a cold-air mask over your mouth and nose.
- Since staying warm requires extra energy, eat more complex carbohydrates.
- If you begin to feel uncomfortable, seek shelter indoors.

# Emergency Room Services



**Y**ou may have heard or read about new rules for non-VA emergency services contained in the Millennium Bill (i.e., Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act, Public Law 106-117).

The Millennium Bill allows VA to reimburse non service-connected veterans for these services under certain conditions.

In order to be eligible, the veteran must be enrolled in the VA healthcare system and have received VA care within the last 24 months. The condition must be emergent and/or life threatening. VA may reimburse veterans for care in non-VA facilities if a VA facility is not reasonably available and until such time as the veteran can be safely transferred to a VA facility. Additionally, veterans with any other healthcare coverage (private or government) are not eligible for reimbursement.

The regulations regarding reimbursement of non-VA emergency care for service-connected veterans have not changed.

Although this provision of the Millennium Bill became effective on May 29, 2000, final guidance and the legal authority for VA to reimburse veterans are not yet available. In the meantime, if you have any questions regarding emergency care in a non-VA facility you may contact the Fee Basis office at your local VA facility. ★

## Health Q&A

**Q.** *I've read that stretching alone isn't a proper warm-up. Is that true?*

**A.** Yes. To warm up the right way, do about five to 10 minutes of a sports-specific activity, followed by static stretches. If you plan to play basketball, for example, you might jog in place for a few minutes and toss a few baskets. Then concentrate on stretching the muscles you'll be using most—the legs and arms, in this case. Hold each stretch for 10 to 30 seconds without bouncing or jerking and repeat each stretch three to five times. You should stretch to the point of mild discomfort, but never force a stretch or you could wind up with joint and muscle pain.

**Q.** *It's becoming harder and harder for me to walk long distances because my legs start cramping up. Should I be concerned?*

**Q.** Yes. If the cramps go away when you rest and come back when you start walking again, they could be a sign of atherosclerosis—clogging of the arteries. During exercise, your muscles need more blood, but if your vessels are blocked, muscles don't receive the blood they need and cramping occurs. Tell your VA healthcare provider about the problem. He or she can best determine which, if any, vessels are blocked and recommend an appropriate treatment plan. ★

# Where to find us!

## VA MEDICAL CENTER

### SAN FRANCISCO

4150 Clement Street  
San Francisco, CA 94121-1598  
**(415) 221-4810**

## VA EUREKA OPC

727 E Street  
Eureka, CA 95501  
**(707) 442-5335**

## VA SANTA ROSA OPC

3315 Chanate Road  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404  
**(707) 570-3855**

## VA 13th & MISSION CLINIC

205 13th Street, Suite 3280  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
**(415) 551-7300**

## VA UKIAH OPC

238B Hospital Drive  
Ukiah, CA 95482  
**(707) 468-1870**

## VA PALO ALTO HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

3801 Miranda Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290  
**(650) 493-5000**

## VA MENLO PARK DIVISION

795 Willow Road  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
**(650) 493-5000**

## VA LIVERMORE DIVISION

4951 Arroyo Road  
Livermore, CA 94550  
**(650) 493-5000**

## VA CAPITOLA OPC

1350 N. 41st Street, Suite 102  
Capitola, CA 95010  
**(831) 464-5519**

## VA STOCKTON OPC

500 W. Hospital Road  
Stockton, CA 95231  
**(209) 468-7040**

## VA MODESTO OPC

826 Scenic Drive  
Modesto, CA 95350  
**(209) 558-7300**

## VA MONTEREY OPC

3401 Engineer Lane  
Seaside, CA 93955  
**(831) 883-3800**

## VA SAN JOSE OPC

80 Great Oaks Boulevard  
San Jose, CA 95119  
**(408) 363-3011**

## VA NORTHERN CA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

150 Muir Road  
Martinez, CA 94553  
**(925) 372-2000**

## VA REDDING OPC

351 Hartnell Avenue  
Redding, CA 96002  
**(530) 226-7509**

## VA CHICO OPC

25 Main Street, Suite 101  
Chico, CA 95928  
**(530) 879-5000**

## VA SACRAMENTO MEDICAL CENTER AT MATHER FIELD

10535 Hospital Way  
Mather, CA 95655-1200  
**(916) 366-5366**

## VA SACRAMENTO OPC AT McCLELLAN

5342 Dudley Blvd.  
McClellan AFB, CA 95652-1074  
**(916) 561-7400**

## VA MARE ISLAND OPC

201 Walnut Avenue  
Mare Island, CA 94592  
**(707) 562-8200**

## VA MARTINEZ OPC

150 Muir Road  
Martinez, CA 94553  
**(925) 372-2000**

## VA OAKLAND OPC

2221 Martin Luther King Jr. Way  
Oakland, CA 94612  
**(510) 267-7820**

## VA FAIRFIELD OPC

103 Bodin Circle  
Travis AFB, CA 94535  
**(707) 437-1800**

## VA CENTRAL CA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

2615 E. Clinton Avenue  
Fresno, CA 93703-2286  
**(559) 228-5338**

## VA SOUTH VALLEY OPC

850 N. Gem Street  
Tulare, CA 93274  
**(559) 684-8703**

## VA CASTLE OPC

3605 Hospital Road, Suite D  
Atwater, CA 95301-5140  
**(209) 381-0105**

## VA SIERRA NEVADA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

1000 Locust Street  
Reno, NV 89502-2597  
**(775) 328-1263**

## VA SIERRA FOOTHILLS OPC

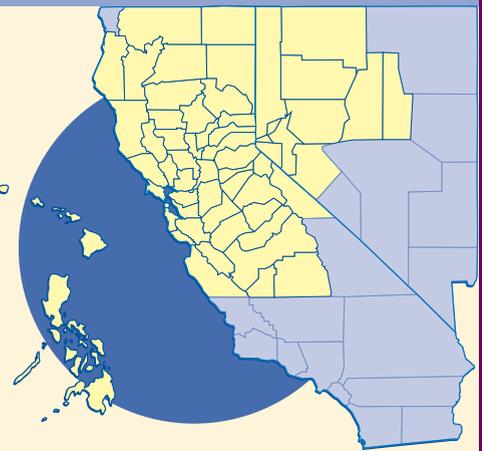
3123 Professional Drive,  
Suite 250  
Auburn, CA 95603  
**(530) 889-0872**

## VA MEDICAL & REGIONAL OFFICE CENTER HONOLULU

459 Patterson Road (E-Wing)  
Honolulu, HI 96819  
**(808) 433-1000**

## VA MAUI CBOC

35 Lunalilo Street, Suite 102  
Wailuku, HI 96793  
**(808) 242-6624**



## VA HILO CBOC

120 Keawe Street, Suite 204  
Hilo, HI 96720  
**(808) 935-3781**

## VA KONA CBOC

75-5995 Kuakini Highway  
Suite 413  
Kailua-Kona, HI 96740  
**(808) 329-0774**

## VA KAUAI CBOC

3367 Kuhio Highway, Suite 102  
Lihue, HI 96766  
**(808) 246-0497**

## VA GUAM CLINIC

US Naval Hospital  
313 Farenholt Road  
Agana Heights, GU 96919  
**(671) 472-7250**

## VA AMERICAN SAMOA CLINIC

P.O. Box 1005  
Pago Pago, American Samoa  
96799  
**(011) 684 633-4206**

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