McGuire VA Medical Center Offers An All Women Therapy Program

Women are the fastest growing group among Veterans. This steady influx of women has provided the VA fresh opportunities to evolve into an organization where women are not only welcomed, but celebrated.

To meet the ever-changing needs of the Veteran population, the recreation therapy section of the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Department at McGuire VA Medical Center offers female Veterans the chance to participate in leisure activities known to them and/or acquire and develop new leisure interest and skills. In addition to receiving therapy, the members of this all-women group enjoy camaraderie and support from one another.

While participating in the recreation therapy program at McGuire, women Veterans begin to understand they are not alone. Shari Hicks, Veteran and Chief of Recreational Therapy speaks on the benefits of an all-female group, “They develop a sense of community as they meet together to share experiences, ideas and provide emotional support for one another. They are also able to learn more about themselves and build interpersonal relationships in a positive and welcoming environment.” This can be difficult to accomplish when men are present. According to Hicks, “Women are more comfortable around other women.”

When asked about the group and what it means to her, Army Veteran, Debra Austin, became emotional. “I deal with a lot of different things…this group plays a major part in my recovery. God bless whoever thought of it.” Michaun Harrison, an Army Veteran who says she is legally blind, has PTSD, and travels with a guide dog, said she refrained from social gatherings because of her disabilities. However, after attending several outings with the group, Harrison had an epiphany, “You don’t have to stop living because of your disability.”

A popular get-together among the ladies is the monthly “Ladies Night Out.” These gatherings feature a variety of activities which reinforce or introduce new leisure activities. A recent “Ladies Night Out” featured a Paint Night led by local artist, Amiri Richardson-Keys. During this activity, the group is shown a completed piece of art, which is used as a guide. Then, the group is collectively led in an introductory painting lesson. The result was a collection of fine art whose diversity reflected the women in the room.

Recreational Therapy reinforces the notion that leisure is an important aspect of life. Ample amounts of research suggest there is a strong correlation between leisure and quality of life. According to Hicks, the female Veterans recreational therapy program at McGuire provides not only therapeutic benefits, but it fosters sisterhood.

Any Veteran interested in being a part of this up-and-coming group of women, should consult their primary care or mental health provider.
Local Toastmasters Group Aims to Help McGuire Employees Grow Their Skills

From the moment Barbara Mulvaney sat down, she was fascinated. It was her first meeting, and she knew this club was just the right environment to develop much-needed skills.

Mulvaney heard about the local Toastmasters club about a year ago in new employee orientation, when she started in the Health Information Management service at McGuire VA Medical Center. She wanted to elevate her speaking skills and interact with people she may not ever interact with at the large medical facility.

So, she decided to join the Very Articulate Master Communicators (VAMC) Toastmasters club with members from entry-level employees to service chiefs.

"Increased confidence in my speaking skills is an obvious benefit, but for me, it is more than that," Mulvaney explained. "I truly appreciate the feedback I receive from other members when I give a speech..."

During the meeting, the toastmaster serves as the host—introducing the various speakers—while other members are assigned to fulfill one of the many roles within the club, such as grammarian, timer, evaluator and table topics master.

Each role performs a task throughout the meeting. For instance, the grammarian notes the number of instances a speaker uses filler words such as "so" or "um" during a speech. Later during the evaluation portion, this information is relayed back to the speaker so they can be aware. Additionally, the role of the table topics master is to challenge members to give an off-the-cuff speech of about 1-2 minutes on a random topic.

Club President James Moser said the local club began 10 years ago and is part of a larger non-profit organization named Toastmasters International. The aim of Toastmasters is to help members around the world improve their communication, public speaking and leadership skills.

This is accomplished by two different advancement tracks within the program, explained Moser. The tracks focus on developing skills in Communication and Leadership. To progress, members must present a number of speeches and perform the many different roles within the club. Members are able to set their own pace.

Stephen Freeby, another VAMC member, joined to become more comfortable speaking with energy and confidence in front of people. In a recent meeting, Freeby, a clinical applications coordinator within the hospital’s Medical Service, gave a timed speech about vacationing by cruise.

"I have been with Toastmasters for only about three months, and so far I have gained a much broader perspective of where my speaking skills are, and the improvements I need to become a well-rounded speaker," Freeby stated.

Meetings typically last about an hour, and are held three times per month, currently on the first and third Wednesdays at noon. The third is an evening meeting offered on the second Wednesday of each month at 4:30 p.m., to accommodate employees in the evening time. Membership is 40 dollars per six months, said Moser. People are welcome to join anytime and the dues can be prorated.

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For more information about Toastmasters membership, please contact James Moser at James.Moser2@va.gov.

NATIONAL CRNA WEEK JANUARY 25-29

Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) are Advanced Practice Registered Nurses who, since 1990 have been educated at the Masters or Doctoral degree level and have passed the National Certifying Exam. Nurse Anesthetists have been providing anesthesia care in the U.S. for over 150 years, and are the main providers of anesthesia care to U.S. military personnel on the front lines since World War I. Richmond VAMC employs 19 CRNAs, almost half of whom are Veterans. At left, available CRNAs gathered for a recent photo.
American Heart Month is recognized each February. This month we offer some heart healthy tips to help you make better dietary choices and achieve a happy and healthy lifestyle. Be sure to check with your provider before beginning any exercise program. Kick start the new year in the right direction!

- Keep track of your caloric intake to maintain or reach your weight goal
- Maintain a consistent exercise schedule to stay active
- Eat various healthy and nutritious foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables as well as lean protein
- Drink alcohol in moderation
- Cut back on high sugar soft drinks and juices
- Limit saturated fats in your diet and explore healthier eating options
- Explore healthy options when eating out at a restaurant

SOURCE: The American Heart Association’s Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations.

The McGuire VA Medical Center will soon offer a new service aimed at improving communication and the Veteran experience with an additional option within our patient appointment reminder system.

Beginning in February, McGuire will pilot a program in the podiatry clinic to give Veterans the option to replace traditional telephone call appointment reminders with reminders via text messages.

McGuire is offering a simpler alternative to traditional phone calls as appointment reminders, explained Ed Gallon, Health Administration Service.

In a survey of more than 5,200 Veterans, approximately 51 percent said they would rather receive text message reminders instead of telephone calls, according to Gallon.

The program will be piloted in the podiatry clinic for about a month, and from there, it will branch out to other areas, and continually grow.

“Once a Veteran has chosen to opt in to text message reminders, they will no longer receive reminder phone calls from the facility,” said Gallon.

The system will work like this: When a text message reminder is sent, Veterans are asked to respond to one of three options: Press 1 to confirm, 2 to cancel, or 3 to reschedule. If the Veteran chooses to cancel or reschedule they will receive an immediate response, and if needed, a follow-up phone call from the facility. Additionally, when the Veteran chooses option 2 or 3, the facility is quickly notified and can try to give another Veteran the unused appointment time.

In addition to the text messaging option, the medical center is adding the ability to send pre-recorded messages to a select group of Veterans. The feature can be very useful to Veterans, explained Gallon, because the facility can send important information directly to the group of Veterans who need to know. For example, when there is a drug recall or formulary change, the facility can send a brief automated message to the Veterans. Also, the system can be used to highlight special events or inform Veterans of clinic closures.

Both of these systems will work to improve customer service and create a better line of communication between Veterans and the medical facility, Gallon said. Although the service is free to use, Veterans should keep in mind that standard text messaging rates from your carrier may apply.
Left: Mee Mee Graham, Voluntary Service, and Vanessa Falden, EEO Manager, helped organize this year’s celebration in honor of Dr. King. Above: Participants were invited to share their thoughts about Dr. King’s impact on the civil rights movement.