Cover photo: Erin Brandon, a physical therapist at McGuire, demonstrates a wheelchair used for adaptive sports during the facility’s Assistive Technology Open House, held April 17.
McGUIRE VA TRAINS FIRST RESPONDERS TO HELP SUICIDAL VETERANS

For the second year, the McGuire VA Medical Center Police Service held a training program for local police and first responders to help combat Veteran suicide. The program helps first responders understand the mindset of Veterans they may encounter in a crisis.

VA Police Chief Kevin Guidry was pleased that around 50 people attended the training compared to the dozen or so last year.

“This year we invited fire and EMS in addition to local police agencies,” said Guidry. “We reached out to anyone who might encounter Veterans.”

The training also gave attendees techniques on building trust with Veterans they may encounter in order to get them the help they need.

But, it was more than tips and techniques as McGuire’s chief of chaplains, Dewane Stone, would explain. Also, McGuire’s suicide prevention coordinator, Laura Pond, talked about the stressors Veterans share with police officers – stressors that are relatable to first responders.

As part of the presentation, two VA chaplains, Kenneth Linder and Mark Flores role played a scenario as police officers where Flores had seen too many suicides. Now, wondering if he really makes a difference as a police officer, Flores tells his partner that “maybe they were the lucky ones; they don’t have to be in pain anymore.”

Linder then talks to Flores about getting help from the police department chaplain and discusses other places to get assistance. Linder then escorts the distressed officer to the chaplain.

That scenario mirrors both the suicide prevention training the military gives its members, and the training the VA gives its own employees. Both Veterans and cops can come from a place where they’ve seen and experienced too much trauma, Stone said.

Stone said that’s where the concept of moral injury comes into play. Moral injury is the damage done to one’s conscience when that person experiences acts that violate one’s own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct.

“Does justice always prevail?” Stone asked the audience. Many in the audience shook their heads.

“In your positions, you see things that violate your own moral code all the time,” Stone continued.

“That can wear a person down. The same thing has happened to many Veterans.”

Pond urged attendees to be aware of the ‘Ask the Question in Virginia’ program, which is a statewide initiative designed to get first responders to ask, “have you or a member of your family served in the military?”

“If you ask and know you’re dealing with a Veteran, you can ask yourself: what are the different set of circumstances or cultural awareness I need to know to relate to this person?” said Pond. “But just know that by being there and listening to what they say and being respectful goes a long way; you can build rapport in a relatively short time.”

For Guidry, that summed up what the day’s teaching was all about.

“This is all about Veterans and saving their lives,” said Guidry. •
Although the VA doesn’t have a Star Trek-like transporter or a time machine, using telehealth, time and space can be transformed for Veterans.

No longer must Veterans travel long distances or schedule their lives around appointments. With a computer screen or a smartphone, they can consult with a clinician anytime and literally anywhere.

The TeleRehabilitation program is funded by the VA’s Office of Rural Health to increase access to specialized rehabilitation services through the use of telehealth, according to program manager Jessica Barton.

McGuire was selected as one of four hub sites for what has become known as TREWI – TeleRehabilitation Enterprise Wide Initiative. There are seven total spoke sites within TREWI with McGuire serving the Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center in Clarksburg, West Virginia. The TeleRehabilitation program at McGuire has been fully staffed since 2017.

Barton and her staff were able to set up more than 50 TeleRehabilitation clinics throughout Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) within the first year. Those telehealth clinics serve local Veterans, as well as, Veterans at other medical centers who do not have access to certain specialty care services. The idea is simple – use telehealth technology wherever medically appropriate to better serve our Veterans.

“TeleRehabilitation can really enhance the overall rehab process,” said Barton. “It allows the provider to see the Veteran in their home or community environment actually following through with their recommendations. This could be an exercise plan, equipment issued or even follow up after discharge from an inpatient unit.”

Occupational therapist Brian Niedermayer has provided Veterans with durable medical equipment through telehealth, and he can tell if a piece of equipment is being safely and correctly used by seeing inside Veterans’ homes.

“The Veteran can walk through their house with their smart phone and show me the set up in their bathroom, we can see at a glance if there’s enough room for other equipment in the bathroom as well” said Niedermayer. “Before telehealth we could have a Veteran come into the clinic and tell us they have a
Another benefit of TeleRehabilitation is being able to include the Veteran’s family in the rehab process.

“For instance, when a speech therapist issues a communication device there is a lot of training necessary for both the Veteran and family on how to use the device,” said Barton. “By using telehealth, we can incorporate the caregiver and any other family members into that training.”

Occupational therapist John Moosa, of the wheelchair mobility clinic, remembered a telehealth session with an outside facility where the Veteran’s daughter was able to join the telehealth appointment from out of state to help order her dad a new wheelchair.

“The daughter really spoke up on the Veteran’s behalf and her input for her father was vital,” said Moosa. “The supply representative was there too, and we were able to make sure that the Veteran received the correct wheelchair.”

Providers are using their clinical judgement when it comes to recommending telehealth to their Veterans, Barton said. Safety is always the number one priority. “With the use of telehealth, we are now able to serve our Veterans in a way we were not able to before,” Barton said. “It really bridges the gap between home and clinic.”

Barton has been spreading information about the ways TeleRehabilitation can simplify care for Veterans. Between marketing efforts, a newsletter and her own staff’s word of mouth, she’s seeing progress. But if Veterans ask for telehealth, that would be the biggest boost, she said.

“I want Veterans to feel they can ask their providers about it – we’re seeing that in little spurts,” said Barton. “One Veteran wrote and encouraged us to find a way to communicate this service to more Vets. He said, ‘it saved me so much time!’”

Barton said her team’s goal is to have 100 percent of the clinical staff in PM&R ‘tele-ready’ by the end of the year. “We want it to be embraced in their care plans when appropriate,” said Barton. “We know telehealth can improve access for Veterans by saving drive time, but we also feel telehealth can improve the quality of care we are providing.”

No matter where it’s an initial consult, a follow up appointment, staff training or specialty care, Barton said she is sure of one thing: “There’s always a place for telehealth.”

D. Karissa Serio, physical therapist, is providing patient education on spine anatomy via telehealth in preparation for a Veteran’s treatment to address neck pain. E. Chelsea Boyd, kinesiotherapist, connects with Veterans via telehealth prior to hip and knee surgery to review necessary durable medical equipment that may be needed for their home after surgery. F. A Veteran connects with occupational therapist, Mary Griessbach, for a home safety evaluation via telehealth which saved a Veteran over six hours of drive time to visit Richmond VAMC.
McGUIRE VA MEDICAL CENTER OPERATES CHRONIC WOUND CLINIC FOR VETERANS

McGuire VA Medical Center is currently operating an outpatient wound care clinic for Veterans. This specialized clinic treats chronic wounds and is operated as part of McGuire’s Wound Healing Program. The Outpatient Wound Care Clinic manages select chronic wounds and evaluates ostomy complications. The team, which consists of a doctor, three nurses and a physical therapist, are focused on treating non-healing wounds that have been around for at least six weeks or longer.

The clinic operates with select hours, five days a week in the hospital, and the team can call in a host of ancillary services when needed, such as a social worker and nutritionist.

“Our goal is to significantly improve the quality of life of Veterans with chronic wounds and hopefully to return them to their style of life before the wound,” said Kimberly Williford, who works in the clinic and holds a doctorate of physical therapy.

Clinic Hours:
Mon., Wed. & Fri.: Specialty Clinic Area, from 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Tues. & Thurs: 1K clinic area on the first floor (by appointment only).

Services:
Specialized Dressings
Advanced Wraps
Debridement
Negative Pressure Wound Therapy

Wounds treated:
Diabetic Wounds
Complex Chronic Wounds
Surgical Wounds
Pressure Ulcers
Venous Stasis
Arterial Ulcers
Insect/Spider Bites
Neuropathic Ulcers

VHA PATIENT FLOW COORDINATION COLLABORATIVE

Members of Richmond VA Medical Center’s Patient Flow Coordination Team were recognized by VA’s Office of Systems Redesign & Improvement for completing a collaborative effort with dozens of teams from across the U.S. The purpose of the FY18 Patient Flow Coordination Collaborative was to optimize patient flow across the healthcare delivery system by providing an opportunity for training and application of improvement principles to the 36 teams. Richmond’s group focused on reducing length of stay in the Emergency Department for patients receiving point-of-care creatinine testing and reducing CT scanner wait times. This core team of four clinicians, along with a multidisciplinary team from the medical center, achieved this through the application of flow optimization principles for local process improvement. This initiative stemmed from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and their national improvement initiative model. Richmond’s Patient Flow Coordination Team worked collaboratively to help share strong practices and lessons learned. The event was very successful for the Richmond team, and we congratulate them on their achievement!
MEET THE TEAM

My HealtheVet

What makes a McGuire employee? They embodied the I Care motto. They have a “can do” spirit and, they are motivated to show those I Care characteristics every day to peers and patients. However, most importantly they driven because they have a heart for our Veterans. Meet Gwendolyn McMillian, My HealtheVet Coordinator at McGuire VA Medical Center. Gwendolyn has served at McGuire since 2002 with her roots starting in Primary Care. Mrs. McMillian shares that her main duty is to provide amazing quality of care and provide access of care to our nation heroes with a click of a button. The My HealtheVet program is an online portal for Veterans to take control of their health and wellness by having access to their personal health records with an easy to use web-based resource.

McMillian bridges the gap between Veteran and provider; she teaches introductory classes on how to navigate the portal to Veterans and VA staff. My HealtheVet allows Veterans to be an active partner in their health care. Patients have the ability to refill their VA prescriptions, check lab results, request and schedule appointments, and communicate with their providers, patient advocates, nurses, or chaplain when they need to reach them.

“Keeping up with how the world is changing is important to us,” shared McMillian. Technology is the future. To grow stronger in taking care of our Veterans, we must keep up with the changing culture and technological advances in healthcare today. Mobile apps are available to our Veterans and they can visit the My HealtheVet office to receive assistance in installing these apps. This tool offers another line of communication for Veterans and the care they deserve.

A special thank you to Gwendolyn McMillian for your hard work and dedication to McGuire and VISN 6 with being the lead coordinator for My HealtheVet and helping Veterans find their voices and be heard.

Each year, McGuire’s Voluntary Service helps organize a community event with the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) to help recognize their great service to the country.
In April, McGuire VA Medical Center held two groundbreakings to initiate new construction projects and bring expanded facilities and resources to Veterans in our Community Living Center and Spinal Cord Injury units.
**SCI Groundbreaking**

When finished, the SCI addition will bring approximately 13,600 square feet of space and 15 private rooms to the medical center. Besides more room for staff and patients, the new space will also increase McGuire’s capacity to house SCI patients during emergencies - like in 2018 when Hampton VA Medical Center evacuated due to Hurricane Florence.

**CLC Groundbreaking**

The CLC addition is expected to deliver approximately 17,000 square feet of space and 10 private rooms for Veteran residents. The addition also will provide an enhanced home-like environment with dayroom, living room, dining room, working kitchen and pantry and staff support areas.
McGUIRE VA CELEBRATES NURSES WEEK

McGuire VA nurses celebrated National Nurses Week in early May. Their theme this year was “4 Million Reasons to Celebrate” and the activities planned for that week lived up to its title. McGuire is home to more than 1,600 nurses and the facility held several events in their honor, such as a breakfast, potato bar for lunch and a hand blessing ceremony provided by McGuire’s Chaplain Service. Nurses held their annual Excellence in Nursing Awards ceremony where they acknowledged nurses with outstanding performance for the past year. They also enjoyed their first annual “Memorial Walk,” where they honored past members of the nursing staff who made memorable contributions to Veterans and McGuire VA.

While reflecting on the week, Marva Griffin, nurse manager in the Medical Specialty Clinics said, “Nursing is not only a profession, it’s a calling. You must be able to enjoy giving to others and saving lives. It is a dedication.”

During the week, Griffin acknowledged how the celebration affects the morale of nurses. Nurses Week is an opportunity for the medical center to formally recognize nurses who have worked hard throughout the year, she added. It’s an opportunity to take a moment to say, “thank you.”

The medical center always looks for new ways to increase participation and involvement, according to Griffin. “Even though this year was a tremendous success, I still would like to see more nurses get involved in the celebrations,” she added. “They are always so busy taking care of patients, and even though they try their best to come out to events, we know that they love their patients.”

Next year, Griffin hopes more nurses get the opportunity to enjoy the celebration and experience the love. •
CLINICIANS EDUCATE STUDENTS THROUGH UNIQUE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Recently, McGuire VA hosted thirty female students from Douglas Freeman High School as part of a school program to mentor young women and expose them to careers in healthcare. The visit to McGuire VA was entitled “Females in Medicine,” and the students learned directly from health care professionals.

The students had an opportunity to work with McGuire staff members in an adult basic life support demo, experience an introduction to anesthesia, ultrasound demo, fluoroscopy simulation demo and a vital signs overview. The objective of the visit was to provide the students with exposure to the medical field through selected simulations to encourage their interest in a healthcare career path.

Dr. Denise Lester, anesthesiologist at McGuire, coordinated the event. Medical center staff worked with the female students to simulate operating room situations with a robotic mannequin that resembled a real patient. The mannequin responded to chest compressions, produced body fluids, had eye movement and could talk. The mannequins have organs and muscles that appear real and are used by medical students as they practice surgery simulations.

“The experience working with the students was wonderful,” Lester said. “You could see in their eyes that they were eager to learn, and they were making connections. I could also see myself in them, and that was good for me because I was in a position to give back.”

This is the first year the program collaborated with McGuire VA. Lester and the other staff members were able to mentor high school students and hopefully leave a lasting impression to become a health professional.

“Being in a position like this makes me hope that at least one student will choose to pursue a career in the medical field,” she added. “It was very inspirational to see how some of the students who struggled in the very beginning of the visit ended up blossoming throughout the day. I watched how they played their roles in each simulation and as they began to learn and experience some of what we experience every day on the job. I saw them get inspired. I hope that we get the chance to do this again next year.”
Chaplain Mark Flores performs a blessing of the hands ceremony during National Nurses Week. The ceremony was part of a Memorial Walk by McGuire nurses.
McGUIRE NURSE GETS AROUND: COACHES OLYMPIANS & MAKES TV APPEARANCE

Kelvin Allen gets around. For 14 years, a licensed practical nurse with McGuire’s Spinal Cord Injury & Disorders (SCI&D) service has accompanied the hospital’s wheelchair athletes to the National Veterans Olympic Games all over the nation – most recently last summer in Orlando, Florida.

While there, the Games started a new competition – VA team coaches and one wheelchair athlete could compete against other VA teams.

McGuire athlete Leigh Summer was chosen to compete, and she wanted Kelvin as her teammate.

“When Leigh asked me, I asked myself ‘am I in shape for this?’ because I didn't want to disappoint her,” said Allen. “But she kept on encouraging me saying ‘come on, come on,’ so I said, OK let's do this.”

The competition was rowing machines. And Leigh and Kelvin rowed their way to victory, winning the first Director’s Challenge Award.

Afterward, Allen and his family swung across the country to the lights of Los Angeles to enjoy the sun and join host Wayne Brady on a taping of "Let's Make A Deal.”

Back to that in a bit. Allen has earned a tremendous amount of respect for his work with wheelchair athletes (who have insisted on him remaining their coach for 14 years) and the people he works with at McGuire’s SCI&D.

Allen’s nurse manager Eric Grunwald sings his praises.

“(Allen) is one of Richmond VA Medical Center’s most outstanding employees,” said Grunwald. “He provides excellent patient-centered care for the SCI&D populations. He is popular equally among the patients that he serves, as well as with his peers. As a U.S. Army Veteran, he is able to understand the unique needs of his patients.”

When Allen attends the Wheelchair Games, Winter Games or Golden Age Games he sticks with his athletes from sunup through sundown.

For Kelvin, his work with the athletes is a labor of love.

“I got recruited by a lot of the Vets because they know that I will be here 24-7 because the days are long during the competition,” said Allen. “Once you get out there, there is no ‘off time.’”

For off time, the Allen family likes going to Southern California. Allen and his wife, Antionette, also like game shows. Before their California excursion last summer, they purchased audience tickets to "Let's Make a Deal.”

And after passing the three question ‘personality’ test, Kelvin and Antoinette made it on the show too.

“We really didn't expect to make the show but just were happy to be there,” Allen said.

True to his VA employment, Allen was dressed in scrubs and a stethoscope. Antionette dressed as a patient, in a hospital gown with an Ace wrap around her head.
Allen was the second of three people called and picked one of Wayne Brady’s three envelopes. Two envelopes contained $250 and one had $1,000. Choosing the $1,000 envelope allows a participant to play for the “Deal.” Kelvin chose a $250 envelope and didn’t make the first deal, but, on the second round, he got the $1,000. He was offered a Deal on a curtain and wisely kept the cash. By doing so, he avoided a “zonk” that would have given him an automatic bed on wheels!

All in all, $1,250 and a spot on nationwide TV isn’t bad.

“Not a bad day – it helped me out with some of the expenses I incurred out there,” said Allen.

As for being up on stage?

“You have to kind of calm yourself down and all the things you thought you were going to say if you got up there – you just lose that when you get up there,” said Allen. “My daughter Taniya wanted me to give her a shoutout if I got picked, but I disappointed her because when I got up there I was so excited I forgot.”

On the day of the show’s broadcast, many of Allen’s co-workers had a watch party, leaving the TV on in the day room for those who could grab a few minutes to watch.

“I heard different wards in the hospital did the same thing,” Allen said.