**EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT**

Meet **Robyn Jones**

**How many years have you worked at the VA?**
I have been working here nine years.

**What was your first impression working at the VA?**
When I first started working at the medical center, we had a lot of young Veterans. They would all hang out around the spinal cord patio area; they would play music and loved to talk about fashion and were so funny. I remember just thinking these Veterans were so young and so full of life. They loved sitting out there and talking with staff, joking and sharing their stories.

**What has been your most memorable experience at the VA?**
My most memorable experience was working in the spinal cord unit. I never realized how much they go through and achieve day to day. You see it, but you don’t understand it until you work in that area.

**Tell us something about you that most people would not know.**
I received an award March 8 at the second annual Honors Awards benefiting the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) for outstanding and continued work in the renal community as an educator, advocate, advisor and consistent supporter of the NKF.

Another fun fact: By day, I am a nurse; by night, I am in the movie business. I am an executive producer for multiple projects.

**What does being a VA employee mean to you?**
Honor. It’s humbling. My brother was in the service and passed away. Working with Veterans every day is a true pleasure.

Cover photo: Beverly Hatcher (right), physical therapist assistant for cardiothoracic care, holds up a heart pillow bearing the signatures of staff members from the McGuire VA Medical Center. Hatcher, pictured with Dr. Gundars Katlaps (back) and Lisa Martin, all work together in McGuire’s cardiothoracic program. Hatcher recently had a quadruple bypass surgery. She went from treating Veterans with heart problems, to being a Veteran patient herself at McGuire.

Back photo: Retired VA employee Barbara Williams performs at the McGuire Black History Month event.
VA INNOVATORS GATHER AT McGUIRE

Innovation specialists from around the country gathered at the McGuire VA Medical Center in January to share ideas to improve quality of life for Veterans. The quarterly meeting brought together more than 60 VA innovation specialists from 33 VA Medical Centers to deep dive into skills around human centered design, developing a business model, marketing, and how to develop and track innovation through metrics.

Melissa Oliver, an innovation specialist at McGuire, hosted the event, which ran from Jan. 23-25. Featured speakers included Jeff Gallagher, CEO of Virginia Bio, and David Chen, from the University of Virginia’s Department of Biomedical Engineering.

Scott Bryant is a National Innovation Specialist at the Chillicothe VA Medical Center in Ohio. His facility has created significant value for both the medical center and Veterans by using 3-D printing to create under-the-counter jar openers.

The facility used to purchase the devices for $80 each. 3-D printing reduced the cost to about $2. This project has saved the facility more than $20,000 per year. In addition to saving money, this “print in-house” concept often means the Veteran gets the item they need in a fraction of the time. The Innovators Network focuses on the Veteran experience, so getting them the items they need as quickly as possible is a priority.

Bryant said the VA Innovators Network has helped spur the spread of 3-D printing to VA facilities.

“Innovator specialists work to teach others about tools available and give employees a clear pathway to spreading ideas across VA,” Bryant said.

In the past, VA innovation has resulted in significant medical technology breakthroughs. VA has been involved in the creation of the artificial pancreas, nicotine patch, first electronic health record, cardiac pacemaker, and more.

“VA has always been innovative,” Bryant said. “We’ve always been leaders.”

In the future, Bryant said he expects to see more projects help Veterans gain needed employment and job skills, as well as a rise in projects dealing with dementia and suicide prevention efforts.

Attendees toured the Richmond VAMC Assistive Technology Design Lab, which features individualized rapid prototyping through electronics and 3-D printing. The conference helps VA employees share ideas about how to integrate innovation into the culture of their local medical centers.

Oliver, the Assistive Technology Program Coordinator at McGuire, said the event gave her fresh perspectives and new ideas.

“Human Centered Design training with David Chen always challenges me to look at things differently when facing a problem,” Oliver said. “It was great to exchange innovative ideas and share what our VA employees are developing through innovation.”
The McGuire VA Medical Center is the only VA hospital to conduct in-house heart transplant surgeries and one of four facilities to implant Ventricular Assist Devices (VAD).

According to Dr. Gundars Katlaps, chief of cardiothoracic surgery, McGuire provides the most comprehensive list of heart enhancement options in VA healthcare. Nearly all cardiothoracic services are performed on site, with success rates higher than the national average.

“The key to this success is caring for the whole patient” said Lisa Martin, lead coordinator of McGuire’s VAD program. “Not only do we use VAD as a bridge to transplant, we also bring the family on board to provide positive support from all angles.”

These lifesaving devices are most often implanted into the left ventricle to provide a continuous flow of blood. When patients are at the end stages of heart failure, the improved blood flow helps condition the body for heart transplant, restore organ function, and improve overall health.

“Life can change in a minute,” Martin said. “As a team, we do what we can for our patients. We don’t put a lot of restrictions on them so they can live the best life they can.”

In 2001, Navy Veteran Merrick Bunstone experienced how quickly life can change after a near death experience left him with only three percent heart function.

“The doctor’s diagnosis – I only had 72 hours to live,” he said. “I was this close to dying. I still have the death certificate locked away in my lock box – not signed, of course.”

Struggling to recover, Bunstone eventually arrived at McGuire. He received one of the first generations of Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD). Early on, LVAD was a sizable machine requiring inpatient stay and continuous access to power. Now, modern technology allows patients to return home with limited restrictions.

“I was in the hospital for seven weeks,” he said. “I couldn’t come home, I couldn’t be unplugged for more than 30 minutes. The first generation was like a washing machine, everyone knew I was coming.”

Bunstone became the youngest patient ever to receive a heart transplant at McGuire.

Brothers and Navy Veterans Merrick and Timothy Bunstone have both received cardiothoracic care at McGuire VA Medical Center. Over the course of the past 17 years, the two Veterans have each had a Ventricular Assistance Device and heart transplant surgery at McGuire.
“At 21, spending several months sick in the hospital,” he said, “I couldn’t have asked for a better place to be.”

After witnessing the excellent care received by his brother 15 years prior, Navy Veteran Timothy Bunstone turned to McGuire when his own heart failed him.

“[My wife and I] knew what this hospital can do; we already saw the results,” said Timothy. “We felt very comfortable coming here. They obviously know what they are doing and do it well.”

After working with McGuire cardiac team, patients become more than just patients, Martin said.

“When Veterans work with us, we let them know right away they are joining one big family,” Martin said. “We stay in touch with not only the Veteran, but their family as well.”

Pictures of the Bunstone brothers and other heart transplant recipients at McGuire are on display entering the cardiothoracic surgery wing. Each portrait represents more than just the Veterans served, it represents family.

At left: Merrick (left) and Timothy Bunstone. Bottom: Members of McGuire’s Cardiology Team celebrated Cardiovascular Professionals Week and National Cardiac Rehabilitation Week during the same week, Feb. 11-17. These dedicated professionals are the heart of cardiac care for the facility.
McGUIRE’S CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION CENTER RECEIVES ACCREDITATION

On Dec. 4, staff at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond celebrated accreditation of the new Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) center.

McGuire’s CPE center originally launched in 2015 as a satellite of Virginia Commonwealth University and is now independently accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE).

Led by Chaplain Ken Linder, McGuire staff trains the next generation of VA chaplains through the CPE center, one of more than 300 ACPE-accredited centers across the United States.

“The accreditation means that we can now train new VA chaplains so they will be able to provide compassionate and effective spiritual care to our Veterans, families, and staff,” Linder said.

Chaplain residents in the CPE center participate in an inter-professional training program, which was recently granted to McGuire by the Office of Academic Affiliations. This inter-professional program is co-taught by social worker Lynn Anderson, psychologist Thomas Campbell, and Linder. It includes four chaplain residents, two psychology interns, and one social work intern.

The term “inter-professional” refers to members of multiple professions (e.g., medicine, nursing, psychology, social work, chaplaincy) who share responsibility for a set of patients through coordination among team members in generating treatment plans and delivering services. Like interdisciplinary, it involves an enhanced appreciation of, and respect for, the professional expertise of each profession on the team.

According to Linder, chaplains provide spiritual and emotional support to people of all faiths and cultural backgrounds. They also facilitate spirituality groups and various services to provide for Veterans’ and families’ spiritual needs.

“Chaplains help struggling people find comfort and make meaning of their experiences,” Linder said. “They provide a compassionate presence to those who are suffering to help them to cope with their losses.”

Each CPE graduate has extensive knowledge of and respect for the potential contributions of other team members and how they complement one’s own profession. The focus is on fostering collaborative, patient-centered care with emphasis on team interaction, communication, evidence-based practice, and quality improvement.

According to the World Health Organization, “Collaborative practice happens when multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds work together with patients, families, careers and communities to deliver the highest quality of care.”

“This inter-professional program is helping to take McGuire into the next frontier of patient care,” Linder said.
February 12-16 marked National Salute to Veteran Patients Week. McGuire would like to thank all of our Veteran patients and the many staff members who helped to make this great occasion a success.