Speech & Language Pathologists

Communication is the key to success! Meet the team of 11 at McGuire whose purpose is to effectively help our nation's heroes with the ability to communicate. The pathologist team specializes in helping patients who have suffered a neuro complication while dealing with medical issues such as stroke, brain injury, cancer and other serious conditions.

The team uses two exams to determine the best course of action for a patient. A clinical exam is the first test. This is when a patient is given food to consume. The pathologist will then observe how the food is swallowed and look for any difficulties the patient is experiencing. The second exam is a formal instrument test known as a fluoroscopic swallowing exam. The exam consists of having an X-ray of the gastrointestinal track, which provides a clear picture of how food particles are consumed.

The team has a common goal: to bridge the gap when a Veteran is unable to communicate for themselves. There is a famous quote by Daniel Webster the team believes embodies their department: “If all my possessions were taken from me with one exception, I would choose to keep the power of communication, for by it, I would soon regain all the rest.”

Back row, from left: Jenny Sites, Caitie Kane, Stacy Gross, Rachel Burnette, Jackie Fitzsimmons. Front row: Robyn Natoli, Katina Sokol, Jenna Sturges, Brittany Reed, Monique Jones

Cover photo: Veteran Milton Wells received a red, heart-shaped balloon from Nutzy, the mascot of the Richmond Flying Squirrels, a minor league baseball team, Feb. 13, during National Salute to Veteran Patients Week. Shannon Parker, physical therapist at McGuire VA Medical Center, works with Wells and other Veterans at the facility's Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center.

Back photo: Chap. Dewane Stone and Kristy Coie-Day pictured after the facility's vow renewal ceremony, held Valentine's Day. Stone serves as the chief of Chaplain Service and Coie-Day is the chief of Voluntary Service.
NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH

March is widely recognized as National Nutrition Month, and this year’s VA exclusive theme is #OwnIt: Make Nutrition Work for You!

Too often when trying to make healthy changes to our diet, we jump on the bandwagon of fad diets or having an “all or nothing” mindset. When we get busy, have special occasions, or get burned out, these changes fall to the wayside and we might throw our arms up in defeat. Taking on a lot of changes all at once can be overwhelming, but it doesn’t have to be this way! Small changes in your diet can have a big impact on health especially if we can make them manageable in the long term.

Think of 1 or 2 things that you can improve right now. Some ideas to start with include:

1. **Reduce your consumption of sugary beverages.** Could you try sugar free varieties of your favorite drink or simply have water infused with fruit?

2. **Add 1 additional serving of fruits and vegetables to your daily intake.** Try including extra veggies in pasta sauce such as mushrooms, spinach, or peppers.

3. **Switch from refined grains such as white bread and white rice, to whole grains like brown rice, oatmeal and whole wheat bread.**

Work on these changes and try to make them a part of your individual lifestyle and not just a temporary diet. Make a plan, try new recipes, and seek out support from family or friends. If you slip, don’t feel discouraged! Get back to your positive changes at your next meal. Once you feel like you have accomplished them, begin to think about additional changes you could make.

If you would like more information there are many useful resources available on the internet. One example for healthy eating is Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics’ website at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org). For Veterans seeking individualized nutrition recommendations, contact McGuire VA Medical Center for more information regarding how to make an appointment with a registered dietitian.

Pictured are a few members of McGuire’s team of dieticians. From left: Claye Paca, Lauren Early, Christine Lacy, Jenn Hanson, Milissa Janisko, Ka Wong, Susan Tatum, and Jenn Wilson.
St. Valentine himself may have been smiling down upon those gathered in the McGuire VA Medical Center chapel to see four Veteran couples renew their wedding vows.

The chapel was decorated with rose petals and lit candles lined the main aisle, down which saw a procession of brides and bridegrooms profess their undying love for one another.

By the time the ceremonies were over, there was hardly a dry eye in the house.

The four couples who renewed their vows were: Thomas (Tommy) and Carol Briggs, Pompay and Clementine Bailey, Matthew and April Gill and Al and Sherry Branch.

The vow renewal ceremony was part of the National Salute to Veteran Patients Week at McGuire, and it was a joint effort between Voluntary and Chaplain services.

Voluntary Service Chief Kristy Coie-Day brought the idea of a vow renewal day with her from a former position at another VA.

“This is part of recognizing the sacrifices of Veterans and their spouses,” said Coie-Day. “We bring them back together to show our support through their union.”

For the Briggs family, the renewals may have evoked a sense of déjà vu, for they were married in the same chapel in 2006 after being introduced at American Legion Post 137 in south Richmond. The couple currently volunteers at McGuire and have a combined total of more than 17,455 volunteer hours.

For Carol, who is now 70, it was her first marriage (at 58) but she said even though she had to wait,

“God gave me the perfect husband.”

“Well, I’d marry her again tomorrow,” said Tommy.

“Isn’t he sweet?” asked Carol, the couple as giddy as teenagers.

A particularly dramatic moment came after the Gill family exchanged their vows in front of Chaplain James Johnson. Matthew broke into a sonorous love song for his bride: an a cappella verse from K-Ci & JoJo’s hit song “All my Life.”

Chief of Chaplains Dewane Stone said that moment typified the sincerity of the entire ceremony.

“When he sang that song – you can’t script that,” Stone said. “That comes right from the heart.”

Stone felt the ceremony was one of joy and one of hope – that true love thrives.

“These couples showed us that real love is still alive, and all we have to do is look for it,” said Stone. “It still is out there.”

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Richmond unveils new Patriot Brew café

Is it possible to get excited over coffee?

Well, ask the dozens of McGuire VA Veterans and staff patiently waiting outside the new Patriot Brew, Feb. 15, for the 9 a.m. grand opening. The smell of the Starbucks coffee was already wafting into the lobby.

“As a dedicated coffee drinker, I was meant to be here,” said Unique McKibbens, who works in Education. “When I started here at the VA, I worked in the Starbucks.”

“This has been so highly anticipated, and I’m so excited for the staff here,” McKibbens went on to say. “They have a good team, and they have a good space.”

At 9 a.m., the ribbon was cut and the crowd poured in for complimentary coffee. It had been a moment Veterans and staff had waited a long time for and smiles were well in evidence.

Just before the ribbon fell, a beaming Donald French thanked everyone responsible for making the new shop happen. French is the chief of the Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) at McGuire.

“And now we’re looking forward to stepping up everything and having more in store for you,” French said.

The Patriot Brew, now adjacent to the retail store, is not only big, shiny and new but also offers more in the way of food, seating and hours of operation according to Veteran Canteen Service (VCS) Regional Supervisor Liz Johnson.

“We’ve been space confined here for quite a while and so the expansion allows us to offer more in the way of hot and cold food and beverages all day long,” Johnson said.

In addition to the Starbucks brand coffee and cold brew beverages, fresh pastries, healthy grab-n-go salads, sandwiches, parfaits and bottled beverages are also part of the food lineup. Johnson said adding another espresso machine will help speed up service and convenience as well.

The hours of the shop will expand to meet the needs of Veterans and their families, Johnson said. Prior to the new store opening, the old store closed at 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Now, the new café will be open until 7 p.m. and on Saturday from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

“A lot of Veterans and their families are here past 4:30 and because of that, we’ve had the retail shop open until 8 p.m.,” Johnson said.

As an upgrade to their prior space, the new coffee shop also has a larger dining space that holds six to ten tables (with charging ports for phones and laptops) that are all wheelchair accessible. In addition, there is comfy bar-style seating around the perimeter of the store.

VCS operates 173 Patriot Brew coffee shops nationally in VA medical centers and outpatient clinics. Established in 1946, the VCS provides merchandise and services to Veterans, their families and caretakers. Revenues generated from VCS are used to support a variety of programs for Veterans around the nation. •
On Jan. 31, McGuire said farewell to its interim medical center, Alan Lombardo. Over 13 years, Lombardo went from working as a physical therapist to serving as the facility’s associate director with several positions in between. Thanks for your dedication to Veterans and the greatest healthcare mission.

A great big Thank You to the Military Order of the Purple Heart of Virginia and Chapter 1965 for their generous donation to sponsor one of the flagpoles on our Avenue of Flags! Pictured at left: Dick Wise, Commander, MOPH Chapter 1965; Gordon Sumner, Junior Vice Commander, MOPH of Virginia; Thomas House Jr., Chapter 1965; Kristy Coie-Day, Chief of Voluntary Service, Richmond VAMC; Denis Bartholomew, Commander, MOPH of Virginia; Ben King, Chapter 1965; and Cliff Johnson, Adjutant, MOPH of Virginia.

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