Meet

Tommy Briggs

**Where do you volunteer?**
I volunteer mostly with the Chaplains Service and the Women Veterans Program, or wherever I am needed.

**How many years have you volunteered at the VA?**
I have been volunteering for 23 years.

**What was your most memorable experience while volunteering at the VA?**
My most memorable experience while volunteering was when I used to have the bowling alley open on Wednesday morning for the World War II and Korean War Veterans. Just getting to know these older Veterans and how they felt about war and life in general was quite an experience.

**Tell us something about you that most people would not know.**
I would have loved to become a kindergarten teacher.

**What does being a VA volunteer mean to you?**
I have always felt that you can learn so much from both young and old people.
Clinical Command Center Adds Efficiency and Greater Access for Veterans

Behind an ordinary solid wood door on the 2nd floor sits one of the busiest hubs of activity within the sprawling McGuire VA Medical Center.

The 600-square-foot room is home to a multi-disciplinary team of doctors, nurses and social workers charged with managing patient flow for hospitalized Veterans entering and leaving the facility.

The Clinical Command Center operates around the clock, said Dr. Trishana Glover, chief of the command center. It acts as a hub of information for the hospital similar to an air traffic control room.

At McGuire, command center staff members gather, analyze, and distribute information throughout the hospital so clinical staff can make timely and accurate decisions regarding admissions, discharges and inter-facility transfers, Glover said.

Large monitors cover one entire wall within the command center, displaying information vital to the staff members inside. Every two hours, Glover’s iPad dings with the latest patient flow report.

“We get information from so many places,” Glover said. “We identify patterns and are the best-equipped outfit to help areas of the hospital to be efficient.”

The use of data-driven command centers in public sector healthcare is rising, but in the Dept. of Veterans Affairs the concept is still relatively new. McGuire is the only VA hospital in the region utilizing this model.

“By efficiently managing patient flow, we are able to have the patients in the right place at the right time with the correct staffing, and the patient gets the level of care they need,” said Dr. Sandeep Chhahira, deputy chief of staff, McGuire VAMC.

In 2015, John A. Brandecker, director of McGuire, established the command center to streamline patient care and ensure the proper utilization of medical staff, Chhahira said. This is important because Veterans from across the nation receive highly-specialized services from McGuire.

“We work towards seamless coordination of care,” Chhahira said. “If it’s fragmented, it creates bad outcomes for patients and employee dissatisfaction. So, coordination is key.”

In its second year, the clinical command center has proven to be an important commodity for the hospital by increasing positive clinical outcomes, operating room efficiency, employee satisfaction and fiscal responsibility. Just last year, the command center saved the hospital two million dollars through efficient management, increased access, continuous evaluation of processes, and incorporating innovative ideas to overcome barriers.

“VA is unique in the sense that VA staff are the best trained to deal with care for Vets,” Chhahira added. “We have the knowledge the Veterans need.”

The hard work of the command center contributed to a 30 percent reduction in diversion hours between 2014 and 2016, explained Chhahira.
The McGuire Biggest Loser competition encourages activity and exercise through a friendly team weight loss competition. A total of 23 departments and 122 employees are participating. In coordination with employee health, weigh-ins occur bi-weekly and take place at the employee fitness center and employee health. Due to high demand, the competition has been extended to run through May 19.

Each week, the total weight/fat loss percentage is calculated from each department. Percentages are then used to rank each department taking part in the competition.

This friendly competition promotes healthy weight loss with accountability, support from peers, and support from employee health and wellness through various exercise class offerings and education opportunities.

To help our participants with the weight loss challenge, McGuire is hosting a series of “Lunch & Learn” sessions provided by employees Ka Wong and Margaret Gsell to promote healthy eating and education for our staff. Exercise and activity is also provided for employees here as we have employee yoga, Fit ‘N FORMation, total body conditioning class, and basketball as options for our employees to burn calories after work. If you are looking for a quick workout during your break, or after work, the employee gym is free and open daily.

With such great participation from the McGuire team, we look forward to staff getting active and working towards a healthy goal as a team.

Social workers offer a wide variety of supportive services at McGuire VA Medical Center. These services provide Veterans with tools and support they need to overcome adversity to reach their full potential, including assistance with drug and alcohol rehabilitations and mental health support. Social workers complete assessments to assist Veterans with resources for financial assistance, housing, mental health support, transportation, community and legal resources. They collaborate with every discipline in the hospital to provide continuity of care to our Veterans and their families.

At McGuire, social workers can be found in every area of the hospital. We celebrate the contributions social workers make at the Richmond VAMC. Thank a social worker this month for all they do to provide excellent care to our Veterans.
MARCH IS NATIONAL KIDNEY MONTH

McGuire helps Veterans transition into dialysis, through the Peer Up mentor program, which was launched in 2016. Peer Up helps those new to dialysis by pairing with experienced patients who have already adjusted to life with dialysis. Peer Up provides knowledge, social support and increases self-management for participants.

“The program is designed for us folks who’ve been in the program for a while to help the new people coming into dialysis feel comfortable,” said Vietnam Veteran, Calvin Jenkins – a Peer Up mentor.

Kidney disease is a silent killer, said Robyn Jones, one of McGuire’s kidney disease experts, so it is important to know your numbers, improve your health and prevent future damage. Jones said that once a patient is on dialysis, the only way off is to get a new kidney or by passing away.

“I try to make them comfortable and get ready for the transition,” said Jones. “I educate before the process, try to empower them to know their numbers and familiarize future patients with staff and current patients so they don’t feel alone during their treatment.”

Jones shared her knowledge on CBS–6, Virginia This Morning, for kidney month. She is committed to prolonging and improving the quality of life through education on kidney diseases. Her passion comes from her late Aunt, Catherine Anderson, who died from emphysema caused by kidney disease and heart failure.

“At the time I felt helpless,” said Jones. “Like why did this happen. Now I can make a difference. I go to Congress and fight for money, medicine, and options for patients so they have what they need.”

One in three Americans are at risk for kidney disease. Don’t be a statistic; take steps to improve your health by eating right, exercising regularly and knowing your numbers.

CERTIFIED NURSES DAY

More than 130 nurses at McGuire have achieved and maintain their certifications in over 30 different nursing specialty areas. A reception was held in their honor on Wednesday, March 16. We appreciate their dedication to the nursing profession and their commitment to our Veteran patients.
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Diversion occurs when a particular area in the hospital temporarily reaches max capacity.

“Since 2014, diversion has been gradually cut down,” Chhahira said. “In the last six months or so, diversion has been almost eliminated.”

Less time spent on diversion equates to greater access for Veterans, he added.

McGuire VA is a 1A complexity health system serving approximately 60,000 Veterans throughout central Virginia at its main facility in Richmond, and four community-based outpatient clinics located in Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania county, Charlottesville and Emporia.

Making a Difference at McGuire with Red Coats and a Smile

McGuire Staff and volunteers donned red coats and yellow smiley face buttons to celebrate the start of the Ambassador program during a ribbon cutting event, Monday, March 6. The program seeks to increase customer satisfaction by providing assistance to Veterans entering the facility during peak visiting hours, 8:30-10:30 a.m., Monday through Friday.

“A smile is free, and it’s contagious,” says Gerald Westry, voluntary service chief. “I tell everyone to come join us; we are always looking for friendly people to help out our patients. All we ask is that you smile.”

McGuire Doctor Tests New Prosthetics Technology

Marine Veteran William Gadsby was one of the first amputees to test brain-computer interface prosthetic equipment.
STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE WORLD WITNESS PARALYZED VETERAN WALK

Students from Taiwan learned about American medical practices at McGuire VA Medical Center Thursday, March 9.

Virginia Commonwealth University brings students from Kaohsiung Medical University each year, to visit several hospitals in central Virginia. The students gain knowledge of American public and government hospitals, used as a reference in Taiwan.

“In Taiwan we have the same type of hospital,” said Adelina Su, “but it’s not as big, and we don’t have clinics.”

During their visit, KMU students toured Polytrauma, Spinal Cord Injury and Prosthetics.

One of the highlights was watching Army Veteran, Eugene Simpson Jr., use ReWalk after he was paralyzed from an improvised explosive device while deployed in Iraq. ReWalk is a wearable robotic exoskeleton that assists individuals with spinal cord injuries to stand, turn and walk.

“I saw the patient stand up and walk away,” said Aileen Wang. “To see the patient stand up and walk was cool. It’s unbelievable.”

A parade of family, students and staff applauded Simpson, as he made his way down the hallway using the ReWalk robotic legs. McGuire is conducting a study in Spinal Cord Injury & Disorder Research to improve the quality of life for paralyzed Veterans using ReWalk. ReWalk is the first FDA-approved exoskeleton device for both hospital and home use.

After watching Simpson use ReWalk, the students visited the prosthetics lab, where they had hands on experience with state of the art prosthesis, such as micro-processor limbs.

Every moment, sign and event was captured as students took photos and posed for group shots at McGuire VA Medical Center. Thank you KMU students for visiting our facility. We look forward to seeing new students next year. •