Mental Health Medical Support Assistants

It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s McGuire’s Mental Health Medical Support Assistants! Meet the team of women boosting morale and spreading cheer in mental health. Together, they created a way to break up the normal routine of the work week while strengthening relationships with each other, all with the main goal of bringing unity and positivity to everyone who comes into their area.

This team brings fun to work by coordinating outfits and celebrating with themes like floral prints, matching colors and more. Their favorite theme has been Superhero Friday.

“The Veterans love it!” said Ashley Jones, MSA. “It allows conversations to start up between Veterans and staff and really boosts morale.”

The team said they enjoy bringing a smile to someone’s day with something as simple as a T-shirt.

“I look forward to Fridays and working with these ladies,” said MSA Deona Mansour. “It’s a wonderful way to connect and bring us all together.”

MSA Karla Otero said the team believes they need to be the change they want to see in the world, and that positivity is what they want to share with the Veterans.

From left to right: Nicole Rosario-Torres, Karla Otero, Ashley Jones, Sourphear Brown, Deona Mansour, Shandale Harris, Sharmalee Mohabir, and LaTesha Ollison
HURRICANE FLORENCE EVACUEES TAKE REFUGE IN RICHMOND

McGuire sheltered more than 60 inpatient Veteran evacuees from Hampton VA Medical Center as a precautionary measure for the arrival of Hurricane Florence.

An Incident Command Center was established to ensure everyone was prepared for extreme weather and to coordinate patient movement from Hampton. Ambulances and buses filled with evacuees arrived in waves. The first group of 13 inpatients arrived Sept. 12, followed by the bulk of Veterans the next afternoon. Dozens of employees came from Hampton to help care for their displaced patients.

“We had excellent support from personnel and volunteers in the facility,” said Joseph Nicholls, emergency management coordinator. “McGuire was ready for the worst, but our processes ensured the best outcome.”

McGuire staff greeted the evacuees from Hampton with food and essentials. Each Veteran received a welcome gift as they arrived. Additional food, medical supplies and pharmaceuticals were on standby and the community living center, spinal cord injury, and medical surgical wards prepared for the influx of patients.

Hampton’s mandatory evacuation was lifted the morning of Sept. 14, and Veterans and employees returned to the following day.

Throughout the week of Sept. 10, McGuire staff prepared for Hurricane Florence and responded successfully to a mandatory evacuation of patients and staff from the Hampton VA Medical Center.
On Jan. 9, 2017, McGuire’s engineering department began construction on a new parking garage for the hospital. After more than a year of hard work, the parking garage is officially opened Sept. 12 and is available for use.

The garage and surrounding parking areas create 647 new parking spaces, which will alleviate some parking difficulties at the hospital.

Levels are color coded to provide clarity for drivers, and the area is lit with LED energy efficient lighting. There are approximately 50 new handicapped spaces in and around the structure and elevators to assist those parking on higher levels.

Nestled between McGuire’s primary care clinics and the mental health wing, the garage is conveniently located to decrease walking distances for Veterans.

“We strategically located [the garage] in an area with heavy parking demands for outpatients in mental health and primary care,” said Jim Dudley, Chief of Engineering. “This garage was one of our most needed and anticipated initiatives due to recent clinical growth at the hospital.”

By Sydney Dudley
Healthcare rapidly evolves as researchers continue to craft new medications and surgeries for healing physical ailments. However, many of these methodologies fail to address issues that lie beneath the surface or they utilize chemical treatments where alternative medicine could work instead.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. VA aims to reform healthcare through a VA-wide whole health initiative. The new patient-driven initiative is starting in VA hospitals throughout the nation. It involves taking a step back and observing all areas of wellness, to include relationships, stress levels, work and home environments and other contributors to underlying health issues. Medical personnel assess a patient’s motivations and goals, opening a direct line of communication that can help foster holistic wellness. This active partnership between a patient and their healthcare team yields a personalized treatment and lifestyle plan.

Ryan Ballon, a kinesiotherapist and McGuire VA Medical Center’s wellness coordinator, recently attended a conference in Nashville, Tenn., to learn more about whole health. He describes the new program as a roadmap from what [patients] see now to better versions of themselves.

Ballon believes VA employees can also benefit from whole health. Sometimes, employees experience stress from busy schedules or events outside the workplace. Whole health provides resources and instructions on how to channel and reduce anxiety by directing employees to methods that focus on healing both the mind and body. It is expected to provide numerous benefits to patients by establishing plans based on the true definition of health.

“Prevention will be a big positive due to increased self-awareness,” Ballon says. “Fewer individuals will require medication as they learn to assess themselves using the fundamentals of whole health.”

From mindfulness and yoga classes to acupuncture and recreational therapy, there are many opportunities to uncover the underlying components required to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Other whole health initiatives offered at McGuire include Tai Chi, acupuncture, marriage counseling, music therapy, art therapy and much more. Through these programs, whole health gives the VA a chance to enhance the lives of both Veterans and employees by tackling health in a new and all-encompassing way.
McGuire VA Medical Center brought together community partners and organizations to improve collaboration in Veterans’ mental healthcare at their annual Mental Health Summit held Aug. 17.

Organized by local recovery coordinator Dominique Tarber, the summit served as a gathering of stakeholders in the mental health community with the goals of improving mental healthcare and access to suicide prevention resources.

The event began with a powerful video featuring Veterans who sought help from the VA during mental health crises. In the clip, Veterans share how VA provided resources and support during their experiences with depression, PTSD and other mental health conditions.

Other issues addressed at the summit included proper medicine disposal, firearm safety, the Veterans Crisis Line, warning signs of suicide and the importance of peer support systems.

The Mental Health Summit is part of a massive VA effort to aid Veterans who receive mental health treatment. On Sept. 13, McGuire held its annual Suicide Prevention Fair, partnering with the Chesterfield Suicide Awareness and Prevention Coalition.

October 7–13 is Emergency Nurses Week, which honors the men and women who assist patients requiring immediate, precise medical care.

McGuire aims to use that week to showcase the efforts of VA emergency department (ED) nurses and thank them for their commitment to our nation’s heroes.

Cassaundra Wilson, McGuire’s head ED nurse, calls emergency nursing a unique field due to the multi-faceted nature of the ED. She said it encompasses all medical specialties, from cardiology to mental health.

Wilson explained the nurses in her department work closely with physicians to share information and enhance patient care. She refers to the ED as a melting pot of knowledge, where nurses and other medical professionals combine expertise to evaluate and treat patients.

Wilson is excited for Emergency Nurses Week and appreciates that VA nurses provide the best care possible for Veterans.

“It’s camaraderie,” She said. “No one can do it alone.”