Kinesiotherapy Brings Vets Independence

The McGuire VA Medical Center celebrated National Kinesiotherapy (KT) Week, September 7-11. They celebrated the occasion with an information booth in the McGuire mall and answered questions about their profession, the services they provide and how to enroll in one of their programs.

KT has several clinics and programs at Richmond VAMC servicing both outpatients and inpatients, including Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation, Therapeutic Pool, Adaptive Driver Training, MOVE!, acute medicine, surgical, CLC, mental health, polytrauma, functional capacity evaluations, and spinal cord injury.

Kinesiotherapy, formerly known as Corrective Therapy, has been an integral part of the VA's Rehabilitation Medicine Service since 1941. The need to return wounded troops to battle during WWII led to the establishment of physical reconditioning units by the U.S. Armed Forces. In 1946, the Veteran's Administration incorporated this concept of rehabilitation into the treatment of hospitalized veterans.

During a recent session with his KT, patient and Marine Veteran Wendall Williams was working on his mobility while having his heart and breathing rates closely monitored. He was working up to longer walks during the previous two weeks.

Williams came to Richmond from the Cincinnati VAMC for heart surgery. He loves the challenge of his therapy, but is still looking forward to getting back home. “I have been here now for 161 days,” Williams said. “We are out here, every single day, working hard.”

He was excited to finish his walking regimen because the social workers had arranged a special trip off campus to a local restaurant.

KTs design a special program that is unique to each Veteran’s needs. In Williams’ case, that included practicing on a staircase located in the McGuire Polytrauma unit that was similar to the steps in his home.

There are no limits set for therapy; it is part of a treatment plan devised by the Veteran’s medical team, and guided by the patient’s abilities, needs and desired outcome. The time limit exception is the Prosthetics Boot Camp. An intensive, two-week program that assists recent amputees with adjusting to their prostheses and addressing new challenges that comes with them.

Navy Veteran Stephen Hanson, who had his leg amputated in June, welcomed all the work that comes with the program. “I can’t believe how far I’ve come in such a short period of time,” Hanson said.

He proudly pedaled the extra reps his KT prescribed, and did them with a specific goal in mind. “We are having a meetup later in the year, and I have some people that I need to impress,” Hanson exclaimed.

There are roughly 20 kinesiotherapists employed throughout McGuire assisting Veterans to improve and retain their independence through rehabilitation.

From left: Navy Veteran, Stephen Hanson does cycling prior to navigating stairs as part of McGuire’s “bootcamp” program. Center: Marine Veteran, Wendall Williams completes the first lap of his walk with McGuire physical therapist Jessica Pack. Right: McGuire Kinesiotherapists gather to celebrate National Kinesiotherapy Week.
The difference between two and five may seem insignificant to some people, except when this margin represents the percentage of recurrence of skin cancer in the body.

As of July, the McGuire VA Medical Center offers a specialized dermatology surgery to remove skin cancer that offers a lower recurrence rate and better resulting aesthetic appearance.

Mohs Micrographic Surgery, often referred to as just Mohs, has consistently shown a 1-2 percent recurrence rate while standard methods have about 5-8 percent, said Dr. Brett Blake, Mohs surgeon at McGuire.

Over the past year, Blake said he has performed about 1,500 Mohs surgeries—a technique used at only a few VA medical facilities.

“It’s about being able to inspect 100 percent of the skin sample whereas with the old method we saw about only 1-2 percent,” Blake said.

Not all skin cancer is the same shape and size, and with Mohs the initial cut is generally smaller in diameter than with traditional methods. After the initial removal of tissue, the specimen is prepped and analyzed. Cancer containing areas are noted and the surgeon returns to the exact site and removes a smaller bit of tissue. This process is repeated until all cancer is removed.

This method allows us to take only what is necessary to get rid of the cancer, Blake said. Removing smaller pieces of skin leads to smaller scars.

Depending on the size of the lesion, patients can spend only half of a day in hospital, usually under local anesthesia only, Blake said, and repair work can generally be done immediately following the surgery. Sutures are then placed along natural wrinkle lines if possible, which makes scars more easily hidden and less noticeable.

“It’s just tickled to death that the procedure is done here at the VA now,” said James Poe, a military policeman who served in Vietnam.

“The good thing about it is they get results quickly,” Poe said. “I was in and out, and it didn’t take all day to get done.”

Poe said he’s had three Mohs surgeries—each in different places—and he’s extremely happy with the results of the surgery performed at McGuire VAMC.

The dermatology department at the McGuire VAMC sees approximately 12,000 patients a year.
Veterans, staff members and family members gathered Sept. 9, at the McGuire VA Medical Center to raise awareness about Veteran suicide as part of National Suicide Prevention Month.

The Power of 1 was the national VA Suicide Prevention theme for suicide prevention month. One person alone can have a profound influence on someone who is having thoughts of harming themselves.

The goal is to make one pledge; one act to help someone, said Laura Pond, suicide prevention coordinator at McGuire. Whatever action one person can take it can mean the difference to the Veteran. We want people to not be afraid to talk about it no matter how they feel.

Activities included a resource fair and two-kilometer walk around the grounds of the medical facility. The resource fair drew about 15 organizations from the local community, as well as several organizations from within Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

One of the organizations, Full Circle Grief Center, offers free support to people, or families, who’ve lost loved ones. One of their programs is a suicide support group that offers grief support for adults and children who have lost someone by suicide, said Maryse Eubank, suicide bereavement services manager at the nonprofit organization.

In spite of the central Virginia heat and humidity, approximately 75 Veterans, staff and family members walked the two kilometer path to show their support for suicide awareness.

“If we don’t start talking about the risk factors, then we can’t do anything to stop it,” Pond said.

To help a Veteran who might be thinking of harming themselves, please connect with VA responders at any time by calling the toll-free 800-273-8255, then press 1.

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CONSTRUCTION CORNER

Construction efforts to address parking space shortages is still underway at the main facility with a new 80-space parking lot adjacent to the Fisher House under construction. Dirt work is still being done, and concrete curbing is being poured.

The 80-space parking lot is expected to be complete by the end of September, said Jim Dudley, chief of engineering at McGuire VA Medical Center.

Also on the docket to break ground, is the larger 350-space parking garage located in lot 1A, nearby to the new Mental Health Recovery Center addition, Yellow Clinic and the Emergency Department, Dudley said.

Construction bids are expected to begin after the first of the year, Dudley said.

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY

...TIMES 2

Two WWII Veterans and longtime McGuire volunteers Thad Crump (left) and Jack Baker, who together have provided their fellow Veterans with more than 5,000 volunteer hours, celebrated their 91st birthdays this month. Thank you for your service to the country & America’s Heroes and Happy Birthday!
Kristin Beck, advocate for transgendered individuals, and former Navy SEAL, spoke at McGuire as part of the VA’s diversity and inclusion program.

McGuire Equal Employment and Opportunity (EEO) office holds many events such as these to ensure diversity and inclusion are part of the medical center’s commitment to all Veterans.

“We believe educational opportunities like these help us all to have a better understanding of each other and encourage us to draw on the multiple talents of a diverse community,” said Vanessa Falden, Chief of the EEO office. “The VA is proud to serve all who have served our Nation.”

The former Navy SEAL described an event to the crowd gathered in the McGuire multipurpose room that had a huge impact on her and how she viewed stereotypes and human interpersonal connections.

Beck described a mission in Afghanistan where she spotted a wiry, old, dirty man with an AK-47. They both had weapons drawn, but something inside her kept her from shooting him because he looked Taliban.

Disregarding the stereotypes she held turned out to be a great decision for Beck. The Afghan was a shop owner who joyfully greeted Beck weeks later in an open air market.

Beck was very successful as a SEAL, graduating top in her class, and getting selected for many special projects and teams. She emphasized that she is the same person, and still maintains the same qualities.

“Valor, courage, bravery and intelligence are values we put on a person,” Beck told the audience. “Not one of those values has gender, color or religion.”

Beck just wanted the audience to take the time to see the humanity in everyone. “I am asking you for a couple of seconds, for a little smile,” Beck stated. “We get so caught up and so angry, looking for those differences, we look for something to fight about,” she added. “You’ll never get to see the human being.”

Caretaker Theresa Treinen was very curious about transgender individuals and really enjoyed the presentation. “I just think she is really brave, so I really enjoyed hearing her speak.”

Beck sets out on her tour of speaking engagements attempting to educate people. “I came here today to hear Kristin Beck speak because I had never heard a transgender person speak before,” said McGuire patient Harvey McWilliams. McWilliams took away the key points that Beck wanted to deliver. What he thought was so important was that Kristin is still the same person as she was before. McWilliams added that he wanted to know more of how they feel, why they felt they needed to change, and wanted to really understand everything about transgender people.

McGuire staff was invited to ask Beck questions or provide comments. They spoke of experiences with gay family members, and the tough road they had coming out to friends, family and coworkers.

If you would like to learn more about the VA Inclusion & Diversity program, check out their website: http://www.diversity.va.gov/
NEW LANDSCAPING FOR THE FISHER HOUSE

The landscape surrounding the Richmond Fisher House received a complete makeover, August 18, thanks to a landscape company’s philanthropic efforts to serve Veterans and the local community.

Approximately 60 employees from Ruppert Landscaping stepped away from their everyday operation to spend time pruning, mulching, planting and trimming the grounds of the Fisher House as part of the company’s field day.

“That's something I like to think we're experts at: tree pruning, commercial landscaping, irrigation, design and installation services,” said Kevin Hazelgrove, manager for the local Ruppert Landscaping branch out of Ashland, Virginia.

Each year, Ruppert Landscaping sets aside money in their budget to give back to the community. This trip brought approximately 75 percent of the branch's workforce to complete the project within a matter of hours.

Staff members who normally take care of day-to-day office operations had the opportunity to work alongside the front-line staff.

According to Hazelgrove, Ruppert Landscaping provided the labor while all plants and mulch were donated by some of the company’s vendors: Mulch Unlimited, Glen Allen Nursery, and Jones Nursery.

Leadership Development Institute Graduation

Three employees of the McGuire VA Medical Center graduated from a leadership-focused training program, August 13, following a final presentation to VA leaders concluding close to a year's worth of work and research.

More than 30 representatives from medical facilities across Veterans Integrated Service Network 6 (VISN 6) worked on the group project seeking to improve key interactions and communications between the Veteran, doctor and hospital in a Primary Care outpatient setting.

The group presentation to Daniel Hoffman, VISN 6 Director, via video teleconference, was the final step in completing this year’s Leadership Development Institute. John A. Brandecker, McGuire Medical Center Director, presented the graduates with completion certificates and talked about the courage needed to implement changes.

“How you see people working today, that's how they work every day,” Hazelgrove said. “It's physical and demanding. We like to show our appreciation.”

When a community service provides a much needed makeover it's considered a win/win situation for the medical facility, the families and for this house, said Wayne Walker, Richmond Fisher House manager.

“We are really grateful,” Walker said. “It's nice to have the Fisher House [landscape] looking good again.”

Ruppert Landscaping provided a pizza lunch and snow cones to their employees, Veterans, family members and staff of the Fisher House.

Employees who did not participate at this event will come to the Fisher House later in the year to work on another project, added Hazelgrove.

For more information on educational and training opportunities with the LDI program or any trainings under the Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability and Development (LEAD) program, contact John Brownell, healthcare talent management coordinator at McGuire, at John.Brownell@va.gov.