

## Portland VA Medical Center

3710 SW U.S. Veterans Hospital Rd.  
Portland, OR 97239  
503-220-8262 | 800-949-1004

Produced by the PVAMC  
Public Affairs Office

### QUESTIONS / COMMENTS ??

Please email us at...  
VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov  
or call 503-402-2975

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### Calendar

- ♦ Sept. 5, 1:30-3:30 p.m. PVAMC Salem CBOC Grand Opening/Open House
- ♦ Sept. 26, 1:00 p.m. — PVAMC Lincoln City Clinic Open House event; 4422 NE Devils Lake Blvd, Suite 2, Lincoln City, OR 97367

For all the [PVAMC Events and Classes](#)—got to the PVAMC Web page...

<http://www.portland.va.gov/r.asp>

July 2014

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## Welcome from the Director



Joanne M. Krumberger,  
Director, Portland VA  
Medical Center

Greetings to all of the Portland VA Medical Center (PVAMC) partners and welcome to the first issue of the PVAMC *Veteran Connection* newsletter.

This is one aspect of an expanded effort to improve two-way communication between PVAMC and all our stakeholders. As with any effective organization, we could not do this without our partners: Veterans, employees, volunteers, service organizations, elected officials, and the local community. We are proud of the excellent care we provide but there is always room to improve the care experience of our Veterans. We need your input and feedback on how we can best do that.

I thank the nearly 50 guests that participated in our first meet-and-greet event and informational briefing we held on June 16 here at the Portland VA. That was a very productive event that is also part of our expanded endeavor to

communicate with our partners. We will continue to have those meetings in the future and we will be sending you invitations accordingly. If you were not able to attend, we hope you are able to in the future. I anticipate our next one to occur in September or October. We look forward to your on-going participation.

I have included in this letter some questions and answers that were raised during the June 16 event as well as other general information we thought may be of assistance to you and the Veterans and family members you support.

If you have any questions, comments, feedback or suggestions of what information you would like to receive, please reach out to my Public Affairs Office. Their contact information is on the left side of this newsletter.

We were so glad to hear you ask "what can we do to help." You are as invested as we are to help. I greatly appreciate your comments, your questions and the support you all provide to our Veterans and the Portland VA Medical Center. We look forward to working with you as partners.

*Joanne Krumberger*

## Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record is here!

### Do you see a Non-VA Health Care Provider?

VLER Health may benefit you! VLER Health is a program that shares certain parts of your Veteran's health record between the VA and the Department of Defense (DOD) and selected private health care providers over a secure network known as the

eHealth Exchange (eHE).

This program is free and voluntary for the Veteran.

Many Veterans receive a portion of their care from non-VA health care providers. Sharing certain parts of your electronic health record (EHR) will help reduce the need for patients and families to carry records between

health care providers. It also will allow your private health care provider to make informed decisions about your care.

For more information, go to the [PVAMC Web site](#) under Health Care Services, [Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record](#).



## Beneficiary Travel Reimbursement

VA "Go-Cashless" Initiative

Portland VAMC is changing the way we pay  
beneficiary travel reimbursement

**Cash reimbursements  
for travel will end on  
July 15, 2014**

The U.S. Treasury Department issued a mandate in 2013 to all federal agencies to reduce or eliminate the use of cash for beneficiary payments. Across the nation, VA medical centers are implementing this mandate as it applies to beneficiary travel reimbursement and compensated work therapy payments.

### Cash reimbursements at PVAMC for travel ended July 15, 2014

Portland VA Medical Center (PVAMC) has spent the past year upgrading business processes and eliminating administrative backlog in preparation for this change. We are now prepared to make the conversion to cashless reimbursements. On July 15, 2014, with very limited exceptions for low income Veterans, all cash reimbursements to Veterans for beneficiary travel ended at PVAMC. Payments will then be made by electronic funds

transfer (EFT) to bank accounts or credit unions, also known as direct deposit.

For all the details, please check out the main page of the [PVAMC Web site](#).

If you have any further questions, please contact the PVAMC Enrollment Office between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday; Wednesdays are from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The phone number is (503) 273-5069.

**facebook**

Do you Facebook? [PVAMC](#) does.  
A great place for information!

### New PVAMC Former Prisoner of War Advocate

Former American prisoners of war are eligible for special Veterans benefits, including medical care in VA hospitals and disability compensation for injuries and diseases caused by internment. These benefits are in addition to regular Veterans benefits and services to which they, as Veterans, are entitled.

For all the details, go to <http://www.benefits.va.gov/persona/veteran-pow.asp>.

For personal assistance for former POWs with navigating the VA System including the claims process, general guidance such as making appointments along with identifying community based resources, please contact...

Lonnamae Ladke  
OEF/OIF/OND Social Work Case Manager  
Portland VA Medical Center  
Portland, OR  
OFFICE: 503-220-8262- X 58051

### PVAMC hosts 2nd Annual Mental Health Summit — August 8

This event is designed for any community providers who work with Veterans, non-profit agencies, government and VSO organizations, and others who have interest in mental health issues for Veterans and their families.

Sponsored by the Portland VA Medical Center, Mental Health Division, this event provides an opportunity to sustain and enhance the positive working relationships and joint vision with our community partners.

When: Friday, August 8, from 8:00am to 1:00pm  
Location: Camp Withycombe

More details will be made available in the coming weeks. For more information, contact...  
Vinutha Mattigod at 503-220-8262, ext. 54677, or email at [Vinutha.mattigod@va.gov](mailto:Vinutha.mattigod@va.gov)

## PVAMC welcomes new Chief of Staff



PVAMC is privileged to welcome David Coultas, MD as the new Chief of Staff starting in August 2014. Dr. Coultas joins PVAMC from his current position as Senior Vice President for Clinical and Academic Affairs at the University of Texas Health Science Center-Tyler where he has been a member of the faculty since 2005 .

## New Salem CBOC opened June 25



We at PVAMC are extremely happy to present our newest Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) for service to the 9,000+ Veterans in

and around the Salem area. The 25,000 square ft. facility is located at [1750 McGilchrist Street, Southeast, Suite 130](#). Expanded services will include primary care, mental health services, physical therapy, enrollment, laboratory, services, optometry, ophthalmology, podiatry, plastic surgery, tele-specialty services.

## Frequently asked questions — feedback on your questions

### QUESTION 1. How are Veterans prioritized for care for procedures/surgeries?

**ANSWER** 1. We triage surgery patients in the following order:

1. Urgent or emergent surgeries for conditions that are life, limb or vision threatening.
2. Patients who are greater than 50 percent service connected, or who are service connected for the condition requiring surgery.
3. Patients who are less than 50 percent or non-service connected.

All urgent/emergent surgeries and procedures are scheduled as clinically appropriate, including colonoscopy requests that are identified as symptomatic. For those procedures that are elective/routine, Veterans are prioritized based on their service eligibility (e.g. 100% or >50% connected). Therefore, Veterans who are not service connected can end up waiting much longer. The time waiting depends on availability of the specialist MD. Currently we are recruiting for both an Orthopedic Surgeon and a GI Specialist. When special money comes available patients waiting for elective surgery are outsourced into the community.

### QUESTION 2. Dental access has been a challenge for Veterans, can you talk about that and what PVAMC is doing to support Veterans?

**ANSWER** 2. VA Dental eligibility is limited to only those Veterans who have a 100% service-connected disability rating or who have a specific dental-related service-connected disability. There are certain exceptions for times when dental issues inhibit other care and for Veterans enrolled in some educational/rehabilitation programs. For Portland Veterans not eligible for dental care at the VA, we continue to promote the VHA partnerships with MetLife and Delta Dental (VADIP), which is a group insurance policy available to all Veterans eligible for VA health care. There is a monthly premium that is at the Veteran's expense. Here is a link with more information... [www.deltadentalvadip.org/plans/](http://www.deltadentalvadip.org/plans/)

### QUESTION 3. Getting eye care support is a challenge in Vancouver, can you talk about that and what PVAMC is doing about it? (ophthalmologist / optometrist availability )

**ANSWER** 3. Currently only optometry eye service is available in Vancouver and there are no current plans to provide ophthalmology (MD) services. The Eye Service demand continues to grow and over the years we have expanded eye services into Bend, Hillsboro, Vancouver and now the Salem CBOC starting in July 2014.

### QUESTION 4. Why does it take 6 - 12 months to get reimbursed for ED care at a non-VA facility?

**ANSWER** 4. Bill payments are handled by the Network Payment Center, a consolidated function under VISN 20. The NPC has faced staffing challenges over the last several months but has brought on several new employees recently that will hopefully improve

## Frequently asked questions — feedback on your questions (continued)

timeliness in the near future.

### **QUESTION 5. What are Veterans eligible for after they return from deployment to a combat zone? Ref. the 5 years of VA care after redeployment.**

**ANSWER 5.** Recently Discharged Combat Veterans, including activated reservists and members of the National Guard, are eligible for the enhanced Combat Veteran benefits if they served on active duty in a theater of combat operations after Nov. 11, 1998, and have been discharged under other than dishonorable conditions. Veterans discharged from active duty on or after Jan. 28, 2003, are eligible for enhanced enrollment placement into Priority Group 6 (unless eligible for higher enrollment Priority Group placement) for five-years after the discharge date of your DD214 & for one time dental outpatient treatment to veterans who served on active duty 90 days or more are eligible for one-time dental treatment if their certificate of discharge does not indicate they received necessary dental care within 90 days of separation and they apply for a VA dental exam within 180 days of separation. Veterans receive VA care and medication at no cost for any condition that may be related to their combat service. Veterans who enroll with VA under this Combat Veteran authority will remain enrolled even after their five-year post discharge period ends. At the end of their post discharge period, VA will reassess the Veteran's information (including all applicable eligibility factors) and make a new enrollment decision.

For additional information, call the National Hot line at 1-877-222-VETS (8387), PVAMC's OEF/OIF Office at 503-273-5075, or Enrollment at 503-273-5069.

### **QUESTION 6. It is very frustrating navigating the PVAMC phone system - it seems like it is getting worse with the centralized system, not better.**

**ANSWER 6.** PVAMC is the middle of a transition to a centralized phone center as part of a VISN 20 initiative which has greatly improved our ability to answer the phone quickly and address issues timely. However, we still are working out some issues in the process and appreciate your patience as we work to improve.

### **QUESTION 7. Why can't we have an emergency department or urgent care center in Vancouver?**

**ANSWER 7.** Unfortunately, an Emergency Department is not feasible for our Vancouver campus. Instead, when a Veteran presents at the Vancouver campus, we refer the Veteran to a community Emergency Department or to the Portland VA Emergency Department. In life-threatening situations, we call 9-1-1 and send Veterans to the closest Emergency Department.

### **QUESTION 8. We have heard issues about a lack of thoroughness in the Compensation and Pension (C&P) exams - can you talk about that?**

**ANSWER 8.** PVAMC C&P processes approximately 12,000 exam requests per year. This year, Portland's national quality score for exams is 96.5% and Portland was awarded the Gold Award for Excellence in FY2013 - the only C&P unit in V20 to be recognized. Our current processing time for exam requests is 21.1 days, which exceeds the standard of 30 days.

### **QUESTION 9. Some rural counties indicated issues with getting transportation for Veterans as their areas are outside the DAV and VTS supported area. What can be done to help these Veterans?**

**ANSWER 9.** Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is an all-volunteer network that operates from designated point to point service for most routes. Amongst other things, volunteers are unable to transport patients with oxygen, in compromised health, or in a wheelchair. Portland's DAV network is the largest in the country, composed of 11 routes running throughout Oregon and from Longview, Washington. VTS is a PVAMC-funded program that used paid drivers who can transport veterans with issues DAV cannot take. At this time, the program has a limited number of drivers and thus can only support the Portland and Vancouver metro areas. PVAMC also contracts with local companies to provide transportation, but use is limited to veterans who meet certain eligibility criteria set by law. PVAMC is often reliant on community partners to assist veterans who needs can't be met by these programs.

For more information about volunteer opportunities at the Portland VA, please contact our Volunteer Service Office at Portland at (503) 273-5042 and Vancouver at (360) 690-1842, or on the Web at [www.portland.va.gov/giving/index.asp](http://www.portland.va.gov/giving/index.asp)