



health trends

New Mexico VA Health Care System



Volume 13 Issue 3

Treating and Preventing Diabetes: It's Your *MOVE!*

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), diabetes now affects nearly 24 million people in the United States, an increase of more than three million in approximately two years. Another 57 million Americans are estimated to have pre-diabetes, putting them at increased risk of contracting the disease.

Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the nation, and can cause serious health complications, including heart disease, blindness, kidney failure and lower-extremity amputations. The disease is characterized by a 2- to 6-fold increase of cardiovascular disease and death, and a life expectancy which, in high-risk patients, may be shortened by five to ten years.

As serious as it is, diabetes is highly treatable and preventable. According to Stephen P. Thomson, M.D., an endocrinologist at the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System, what's needed is a return to basics. "Type 2 diabetes, the most

common form, is a disease of overeating," he reports, "and the vast majority of patients would show dramatic improvement through diet and exercise."

He adds: "There's nothing magic about it. Simply lowering the amount of saturated fat in the diet, and doing 30 minutes of casual exercise three times a week, can have dramatic results 90 percent or more of the time."

To help veterans with diabetes and other health problems, the VA and the Department of Health and Human Services jointly launched *HealthierUS Veterans* in 2006. Its goal: to improve the health of the nation by increasing healthy eating and physical activity and slowing the increase in obesity and diabetes among veterans and their families.

A key component of the program is the *MOVE! Weight Management Program*. *MOVE!* is an evidence-based, patient-



centered program with a comprehensive focus on behavior, nutrition and physical activity. Typically, the program is offered to veterans who are overweight or obese. *MOVE!* can help you lose weight, keep it off, and improve your health.

To learn more about the *HealthierUS Veterans* and *MOVE!* programs or diabetes care, please contact Janet Chambers, RN, at 505-265-1711, ext. 4656. ●

Suicide Prevention: Everyone's Business

Suicide Prevention Is Everyone's Business – that's the message the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is sending to veterans, their family members and friends, and the general public, as part of its nationwide campaign to prevent suicides among veterans.

VA has launched a series of activities to increase public awareness of the warning signs of suicide. "Preventing suicide among veterans is a top priority at VA," said Dr. Michael J. Kussman, Under Secretary for Health. "Each and every veteran suicide is a tragedy. We are committed to doing everything we can to prevent these sad events from occurring."

The VA Suicide Prevention Hotline (1-800-273-TALK/8255), which makes trained mental health professionals available to speak with veterans in emotional crisis, or with their family members, is in operation around the clock. More than 33,000 veterans, family members or friends of veterans have called the Hotline since it began operating in July 2007. Of those, more than 1,600 have been considered rescues, and have prevented possible tragedies.

In addition, VA has sponsored two previous Suicide Prevention Awareness events and placed announcements about suicide prevention and the VA Lifeline on VA's web site (www.va.gov). The suicide prevention program

also includes two centers that conduct research and provide support to all locations of care.

VA also is distributing brochures, wallet cards, telephone stickers, bumper magnets, key chains and stress balls to veterans, their families and VA employees to promote awareness of the Hotline number and to educate its employees, the community and veterans about how to identify and help those who may be at risk.

Large posters providing the Hotline number and website are displayed at all medical facilities. They feature the slogan: **"IT TAKES THE COURAGE AND STRENGTH OF A WARRIOR TO ASK FOR HELP."**

All VA medical centers have suicide prevention coordinators. New staff at each facility will bring the number of VA staff dedicated to the suicide prevention effort to more than 400. VA also has hired more than 3,900 new mental health employees since 2005 – bringing the total number of mental health employees to more than 17,000 mental health workers.

VA has also announced that by the end of 2009, the Department will add 61 new Vet Centers (bringing the total number to 268) throughout the nation to provide more individual, group

and family counseling to veterans of all wars.

VA's efforts to identify veterans who may be at risk for suicide have also increased. All new patients at VA centers are screened to determine if they are at risk for suicide.

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1-800-273-TALK(8255)**

To raise family and community awareness of the warning signs of suicide, VA suggests that if a loved one is exhibiting any of the following behaviors, he or she should seek help immediately:

- Talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Trying to get pills, guns, or other ways to harm oneself
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting in a reckless or risky way
- Feeling trapped, like there is no way out
- Saying or feeling there's no reason for living.

Additional information is available at VA's web site at www.mentalhealth.va.gov. ●

The Patient: An Important Member of the Surgical Team

By Maureen Dicker, RN, MS, CHE
Network 18 Patient Safety Officer

It doesn't matter that you have the best surgeon and are in a highly reputable medical center – your safety depends on you taking an active part in your care. There have been many reports about incorrect surgery being performed, or even surgery on the wrong person. It sounds frightening, but there are ways you can help!

First, don't think your doctor or nurse is being forgetful when they ask you to state your name and what procedure you're having – this helps prevent communication errors. Many close calls have occurred when patients with similar names arrive on the same day for the same procedure. With the fast pace of the admission area combined with pre-surgery jitters, it's easy

to answer to the wrong name. Question anything that doesn't sound right to you – even if it's something like your doctor's name.

If your surgeon confirms which knee is to be operated on and then proceeds to make an X with a marker, don't think it's a question of short-term memory problems. This assures that all the operating team members have the same information.

More than one person will ask you the same questions. There are a series of checkpoints in place to assure your safety. A time-out will be performed by all the team members to make sure everyone is in agreement on the right patient, the right procedure, and which side of the body is involved.

Be sure you understand instructions both prior to and after the surgery. Call the phone number provided on your discharge instructions if you get home and something doesn't seem right. And, as always, have a relative or friend act as your second set of eyes and ears to help understand what to do before and after your surgery.

As health care professionals, we're committed to providing you the best care in a safe manner. We want you to partner with us.

The Joint Commission has published many brochures to help patients get involved in their own care. You can find them on the Internet at www.jointcommission.org/GeneralPublic/Speak+Up/. ●

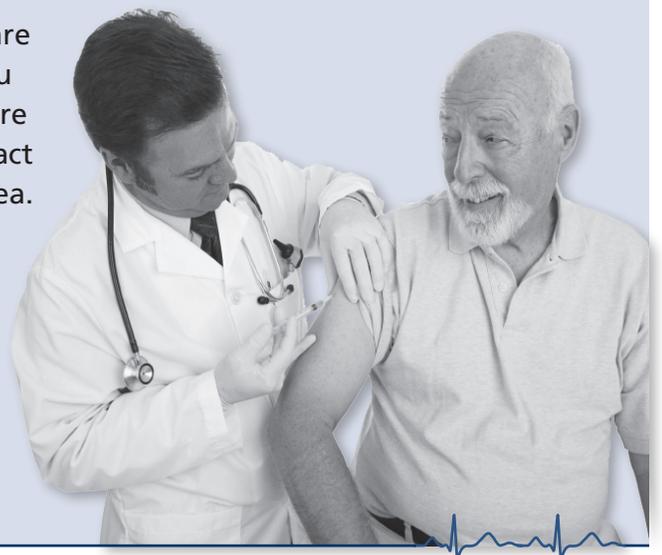
Reminder: Flu Season Is Here!

Once again, the flu season has arrived, which means it's time to think about how you'll avoid getting sick this fall and winter. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized from the flu each year, and 36,000 die.

The best way to avoid getting the flu is to get a flu

vaccination. VA health care facilities now have the flu vaccine available. For more information, please contact the VA facility in your area.

Reminder: please notify your health care provider if you receive a flu vaccine from another health care provider from outside the VA. ●



New Mexico Veterans Score Top Honors at National Arts Festival

New Mexico veterans are among the most talented nationwide. This fact was proven again this year as our veterans won a total of 15 medals at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival: 9 Gold, 4 Silver and 2 Bronze. The Creative Arts Festival, presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Help Hospitalized Veterans and the American Legion Auxiliary, is the culmination of a year-long fine arts talent competition involving more than 3,000 participants nationwide. Overall, the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) placed in the top 5 of all VA Medical Centers

and tied for second in the Visual Arts. NM winners came from Quemado, La Jara, Santa Fe, Grants, Albuquerque and eastern Arizona. 4 NM Gold Medal winners joined veterans from across the country at the national festival in Riverside, California, October 20-26, 2008.



Veterans enrolled in the NMVAHCS are invited to enter our 7th annual Creative Arts Festival on March 4th and 5th, 2009, in Albuquerque. Applications will be available mid-January, 2009. For more information, call Jerry Perea toll free at 1-800-465-8262, ext. 4208 or 2208. ●



Paying by Check?

The NMVAHCS will soon begin converting paper checks received in-person or through the mail into an electronic withdrawal from the check writer's account. If you pay by check, the main thing you need to know is that the withdrawal will usually occur within 24 hours. When your paper check is received by the NMVAHCS, it will be converted into an electronic transaction by the use of a check imaging machine. The machine reads the bank account information on your check and securely stores an electronic image of it. You will walk away from the transaction with the voided check as a receipt. This new process will reduce costs while increasing accountability and security. ●

New Mexico VA Health Care System
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If you are a veteran who is currently smoking and would like to learn ways to stop this habit, help is available through the New Mexico VA Health Care System. Please contact your primary care provider and request a consultation to the Smoking Cessation Program.

healthtrends is designed to provide general health and wellness information and news about services provided by VISN 18. **healthtrends** is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your healthcare provider.

To change your address, contact: Benefits and Eligibility at 505-265-1711, ext. 2741.
For out-of-town patients, please call 800-465-8262, ext. 2741.

For patient concerns or issues, please contact our Patient Advocates at 505-265-1711, ext. 2612 or 2686. For out-of-town patients, please call 800-465-8262, ext. 2612 or 2686.