

SOCIAL WORK MONTH EDITION

“It is All About the Image”

By
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Director, Social Work Service
Department of Veteran Affairs Central Office



The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has launched a major campaign in collaboration with more than 50 national Social Work professional organizations to improve the image of social workers. The campaign is targeting consumers, Congressional leaders, the media and the general public in an effort to help all of them better understand what professional social workers do. The idea for the image campaign came out of national Social Work Summits hosted by NASW in 2002 and 2003, where summit representatives discussed concerns about negative newspaper articles about social workers and the lack of knowledge that appeared to be prevalent in the media regarding professional Social Work education and the variety of services performed by professional social workers in public, non-profit and private agencies.

It’s not just the media and general public who have misconceptions about social workers. VA employees are often unaware of the graduate training and state licensure qualification standards required for VHA employment. Even other clinical staff may have limited perspectives of the functions of social workers, seeing us primarily as discharge planners or as the staff who dispense bus tokens.

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A Quick Read

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I recall as a new Social Work Chief, I attempted to get representation for Social Work on the medical center's research committee. I kept hitting roadblocks until I met face-to-face with the Associate Chief of Staff for Research and realized how little he knew about the training and expertise of social workers. After I explained to him that Social Work Service had a Research Committee, that several social workers were participating in funded and unfunded research studies, and that social workers had clinical training at the graduate level, he became enthusiastic and approved adding the Chair of the SW Research Committee as a full member of the medical center's research committee.

Social Work Month is a perfect time to tackle the image problem of social workers. Did you know that VHA social workers provide 1/3 of all mental health outpatient appointments? Did you know that 28 VHA facilities clinically privilege social workers, and at 13 of those facilities, social workers are members of the medical staff? Did you know that since federal law requires VHA social workers to be licensed at the independent practice level, VHA social workers should be considered Licensed Independent Practitioners (LIP's)? If you didn't know, chances are your colleagues didn't know, either.

Next month as you celebrate National Social Work Month, take the opportunity to promote the image of VHA social workers as compassionate, well-trained clinicians who are key members of interdisciplinary treatment teams. Help educate staff, volunteers and patients about the diversity of functions performed by social workers in your medical center every day. Point out that social workers coordinate medical center programs, such as Community Nursing Home, Community Residential Care, Visual Impairment Services, and Spinal Cord Injury Programs. As a VHA social worker, you are the image of professional Social Work in VHA. Wear your Social Work Month pins, buttons and shirts proudly!



Web Links

If you have some great web sites and you'd like to share them with our readers, please send the e-mail address and a short narrative about the website to:

Jennifer.Summers@med.va.gov

National Social Work Services web links

Intranet: vaww.va.gov/socialwork

Internet: www.va.gov/socialwork

Association of VA Social Workers

Internet: www.vasocialworkers.org

Social Work Month Toolkit

Public Relation Committee Members (Mary AKA "Annette" Harrington (Tampa), Cody Frasure (Mountain Home) and Heather Mahoney-Gleason (Lake City) have just made planning activities for Social Work Month in March much easier. This toolkit puts together some of the great social work month past activities and joins them with new ideas and websites. Here's just a look at what the toolkit includes.

● *The NASW is a good place to start to develop your plans. They provide a theme each year, usually sometime in December. Posters and other merchandise can be purchased through their web site. NASW offers a link to social work month, which provides the current year's theme and a toolkit on ideas for the month. Check out the link at <http://www.naswdc.org>.*

● *This is a great time to educate staff about the Association of VA Social Workers merchandise that makes nice staff appreciation gifts. Membership applications and available merchandise can be located at <http://www.vasocialworkers.org>.*

● *Have a social work service luncheon. Some areas have also invited honorary social workers within their VA or within the community. They have also invited facility leadership to participate in activities.*

http://vaww.docushare.visn22.med.va.gov/dscgi/ds.py/Get/File-21577/SOCIAL_WORK_MONTH_TOOLKIT_5.doc

Synergy Articles

We welcome articles from anyone who wishes to address health care issues within the Department of Veterans Affairs. While social workers are our primary target group, contributors can be from any discipline that works with social work. SYNERGY is an excellent tool for communicating information and ideas with hundreds of your peers. Do you have an article/best practice that you'd like to see in print? SYNERGY welcomes best practice/articles on any topic that relates to social work. Please send via MS Exchange.

Rocco.Bagala@med.va.gov or
Jennifer.Summers@med.va.gov



NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEES

“Who we are and what we do”

Our space is limited; please contact any of the committee chairs for more information about that particular committee.

VHA Social Work has 6 National Committees and the SW Leadership Council. The committees serve as extensions of the Office of Social Work Service in VA Central Office. The Social Work National Committees and the Social Work Leadership Council provide guidance on Social Work practice issues to the Director, Social Work Service and help shape policy and provide direction for Social Work.

A section on frequently asked questions concludes the article on National Committees.

SOCIAL WORK LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

The Social Work Leadership Council is the field advisory group to Social Work in VA Central Office. The Council develops annual strategic plans, with goals for each committee. The Council also oversees SW committee operations and approves committee members and chairs.

Pat Gray, Chair	Cody Frasure	Miguel Ortega
Judy Arnold, Chair-Elect	Robert Kelter	Kate Buike
Terry Harbert, Past-Chair	Julie Laurenzi	Mel Tapper
Sheldon Schelling	Jill Manske-VACO	John Glynn
Kristin Day-VACO	William McKinney	Doug Mitchell
Jerry Satterwhite	Lena Richardson	
Mary Ann Romeo		

AD Hoc Members

Rocco Bagala (Synergy Editor)
Sheila Womack (Recorder)

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Mission: To plan educational programs, maintains the SW Virtual Learning Library, plan the agenda for the annual VHA SW conference, identify new educational resources and co-maintain the VHA SW web page.

Jerry Satterwhite, Chair	Bob Hallett
Sheila Womack, Chair-Elect	Bill Lanning
Rocco Bagala	Dian Leibel
Galen Britain	Judith Talbert
Darlene Contadino	

Darlene Contadino: *Serving on the Education Committee has helped me gain new insight into the VA system and the processes that move an idea into policy. I've become involved in special projects and can really see how my contribution can benefit, not just my program, but also all VA social workers.*

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Mission: Evaluates the ongoing and new needs of professional social workers and social work managers for data collection, maintenance, and retrieval with regard to social work practice, education, and research. Members are available for consultation and advice regarding data collection and electronic documentation.

Kate Buike, Chair	Denise Hamilton
Carroll McShane, Chair-Elect	Julie Irwin
Joan Chipps	Larry Murray
Melissa Creel	Arzenia Redcross
Sandra Dunn	Deborah Sull-Lewis

Kate Buike, Chair: *I was prompted to apply for membership because I was temporarily working outside of social work, as a VISN Clinical Application Coordinator (CAC) and wanted to be involved in maximizing the use of CPRS by social workers. I've learned a great deal about the bigger picture of VA Social Work, beyond just the facility in which I work. I'm very impressed by the level of involvement of Social Workers and managers around the country*

Larry Murray: *Challenging, rewarding, and a great group of people to get to know. I was prompted to apply because I had a desire to contribute to the continuing process of refining and defining what we as social workers do in the VA.*

Deborah Sull-Lewis: *I am new to the Social Work National Information Management Committee. The benefits of national committee membership include awareness of issues before they become policies as well as the ability to shape future policy.*

RESOURCE PLANNING & UTILIZATION “RPUC”

Mission: To provide access to resource information in support of VA goals of cost containment, improved customer service and market comparability.

Julie Laurenzi, Chair	Cathy Dahle
Jane McHenry, Chair-Elect	Joanna Kadis
Emily Baldwin	Jane Price
Paul Burton	Elizabeth Randall
Nancy Campbell	Deborah Walls

Quotes from the Resource Planning Committee “Benefits to committee membership”

- 🔴 *"Work with today's leaders and meet the leaders of tomorrow"*
- 🔴 *"Being on a committee allows you the opportunity to shine!"*
- 🔴 *"You get valuable exposure to a network of social workers across the country"*
- 🔴 *"Being connected on a national level makes the VA system a smaller place!"*
- 🔴 *"The National Social Work Committees allow you to develop leadership skills"*

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Recent and Future Projects

- Staffing and Productivity surveys
- Development of linkages with the CMS web page
- Practical Guide for Clinical Social Workers
- Caregiver Resource Guide and Caregiver Assessment Template
- “Military Facts for Non-Military Social Workers” (in process)
- “Lessons Learned from Viet-Nam to Iraq” (in process)
- Development of a document on writing “Best Practices”
- Promotion of the Social Work Community of Practice.
- Publication of the Content Expert Providers List. (now “owned” by CO)

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Mission: To guide, provide direction, maintain, and enhance the professional integrity of Social Work and the VA health care system.

Miguel Ortega, Chair	Amy Morrow
John O'Brien, Chair-Elect	Jeanne Pautlitz
Jean Bromley	Bruce Tucker
Florence Long	Taylene Watson
Veronica Lucious	

Goals FY 2005

- Case Management Guideline Update
- Care Coordination Standards
- Identify Best Competency Assessments
- Establish Core Competencies (Generalist & Specialist) for Social Work Staff & Supervisory levels (Identify Best Practices)
- Standardized tools to assess competencies
- Establish Core Social Work Practice Performance Standards for ECF Performance Appraisals
- Social Work Clinical Boundaries Guideline
- JCAHO Site Visit Preparation Tool Kit

Documents developed by the Social Work Professional Standards Committee are available online to the VA staff at the VHA Social Work website:
<http://vaww.va.gov/socialwork/>.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Mission: “To promote and market social work practice, activities and leadership as a core and essential component of integrated and holistic health care delivery.”

The Public Relations committee is charged with publishing, polishing and promoting professional Social Work practice

throughout the VA system. Our primary tool for publishing information is through *Synergy*. The Committee plays a supportive role to VACO Office of Social Work, the Social Work Leadership Council, and the other committees.

Sheldon Schelling, Chair	Terry Clark
Heather Mahoney-Gleason, Chair Elect	Victoria Hill
Mary A. Harrington, recorder	Lisa McGuire
Rocco Bagala, Synergy Editor	Erin Butler
Jennifer Summers, Synergy Assistant Editor	Cody Frasure

Sheldon Schelling: *As current Chair of the Public Relations Committee, I have the opportunity to interact with some of the brightest and most hard working social workers in the world. Being a member of this committee has profoundly increased my appreciation and knowledge of the role of social work in the VA system.*

Erin Butler: *Joining the PR Committee has allowed me to make connections with Social Workers all over the nation. This is one of the most productive AND fun committees I've had the pleasure to work with. This committee has allowed me the opportunity to be involved in and part of "the bigger picture of VA Social Work."*

RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD “THE RAB”

Mission: To facilitate research, program evaluation, and practice accountability, which will enhance the quality of social work services provided to veterans.

Mel Tapper, Chair	Stan Remer
Danielle Latimore, Secretary	Milton Ayala
John Shalanski	Debra Volkmer
Mary Lou Guihan	Jill Feldman
Douglas Conley	Jim McGuire

The RAB is the VHA Social Work Service Research Advisory Board. It is comprised of a group of social work researchers, leaders, and line staff who The RAB has engaged in many initiatives that affect every VHA social worker. Recent projects include: the Succession Planning Survey, a Care Coordination project, a survey of Social Work Intern Projects, the establishment of a social work research Web Site, and the initiation of a Cross Clinical Discipline Research Mentor Program.

This site gives any social worker interested in research understandable information about research and resources.
<http://vaww.fp.webdev.va.gov/socialwork/>.

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?? Frequently Asked Questions??

Provided by the Professional Standards Committee and Research Advisory Board

HOW DO I KNOW IF A COMMITTEE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

- *The National Social Work Committee offers the opportunity to utilize your skills as a Social Worker to affect the practice of Social Work across the VA system. If you have a desire to promote the practice of Social Work in VA, I encourage you to apply for membership.*

WHAT ARE COMMITTEE MEMBER OPPORTUNITIES & RESPONSIBILITIES?

- *Each member of a committee is assigned leadership of one major project and may serve on additional workgroups, task forces or subcommittees in order to meet established goals. By applying for membership in any committee, you will be committing yourself to at least one hour (monthly conference call and other calls, as needed). Members commit to a three-year term. Membership may be renewed for one additional term if the member is interested and the committee needs their experience.*

DO I HAVE TO JOIN A COMMITTEE TO BE INVOLVED?

- *Many individuals do not wish to commit to full membership, but may have an interest in a specific project related to a particular committee or one of the identified goals. Any VHA social worker may contact the committee and volunteer to work on a workgroup, task force or sub-committee. They should first discuss this with their immediate supervisor and/or Chief/Executive. All are welcome and encouraged to contribute. Just contact the Chair or any member of the Committee to express your interest.*

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT COMPLETING AN APPLICATION?

- *Every year the Social Work Committees sends out a call for applications. This is generally done in the early spring months. If you don't receive a copy of that e-mail from your Chief or SW Executive, you may call the Social Work Service in VA Central Office at 202-273-8549 and one will be sent to you electronically.*

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT COMPLETING AND SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION?

- *Involve your direct Supervisor and your Social Work Chief/Executive about your interests. Don't forget, they have to sign off on the application.*
- *Look at the committee's goals, determine what interests you and what you can offer the committee based on your experiences (VA and non-VA).*
- *Complete the form as directed.*

- *Don't leave anything out.*
- *Send the application through Microsoft Outlook to the chairperson of the committee you are applying to.*



AWARDS AND RECOGNITION



● **Hugh Taylor**, Social Worker and VIST Coordinator at the Memphis VAMC, was the recipient of the Truebger Award from the Mid-South Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. The Truebger Award is the highest award of the Mid-South Chapter. Hugh was selected to receive the award for his dedication to spinal cord injury and disease while he worked on the SCI unit. He received the award on December 12, 2004 at the Board of Directors meeting. Congratulations, Hugh!

● **Cathy Clancy**, Social Work Training Director at the Michael DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston, presented a summer lecture series at Smith College School of Social Work on "Treating Those Who Have Borne the Battle: The Impact of the Military Experience Through the Lifecycle". An article summarizing her lecture was recently published in Smith's newsletter. Congratulations, Cathy!

● **John Gutierrez**, Social Worker and Program Manager for the Mental Health Integrated Services Program at the Phoenix VA Medical Center, has been appointed to the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners, Social Work Credentialing Committee. Congratulations, John!

● **Jerry Satterwhite**, Chief Social Work Service at the Birmingham VA Medical Center, has been appointed by Alabama Governor Bob Riley to the Alabama Board of Social Work Examiners. Congratulations, Jerry!!

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● **Nancy Campbell**, Care Coordinator for VISN 10, helped plan and moderated the second annual *VHA Care Coordination and Caregiver Conference*, held November 16-18, 2004 at the Doubletree Crystal City in Arlington, Virginia. This very successful conference was attended by close to 200 care coordinators and representatives of national caregiver organizations and featured nationally and internationally-recognized speakers on caregivers and care giving.

● **Fanita Jackson-Norman** of Daytona Beach Outpatient Clinic has been selected as the Associate Chief of Social Work for the clinic, which is part of the North Florida/South Georgia VA Healthcare System. Fanita comes from the Navy.

● **Nancy Whitney** and **Larry Hopkins** are sharing coverage of the SW Executive position at **Loma Linda**, following retirement of Terry Meyer in Dec 2004.

● **Joann Bright**, of **North Texas**, will serve as Acting Chief, SWS while recruitment is underway.

● **Doris Moore-Russell**, of **Fayetteville**, has been selected as the new Associate Chief of Social Work. Doris had been serving as a Supervisory Social Worker in Geriatrics & Extended Care at Fayetteville.

● **Stephen Jankowski** has been selected as the new Assistant Chief of Social Work Service at **Miami**, effective January 9, 2005. Steve was formerly a supervisory social worker at the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany.

● **Gregg Joly** has been selected as the new Social Work Executive at **Minneapolis**, following the retirement of Roxanne Ianovich in Dec 2004. Gregg had been serving as Acting SW Executive and as a supervisory social worker at Minneapolis.

● **Richard W. Anderson** was named the Chief of Social Work at **Clarksburg**, effective October 17, 2004. Richard had been serving as the Social Work Executive at Clarksburg when Social Work was decentralized. The Medical Center Director decided to recentralize Social Work as a separate Service and chose Richard as the Chief.

● **Tina Eyre** has been selected as the new Chief of Social Work at **Alexandria**. She was previously the Acting Social Work Executive at Alexandria

● **Tom Reser**, who has been serving as Acting Chief, was selected in November 2004 as the new Chief of Patient and Community Care Service at **Spokane**, which includes Social Work Service.

● **Nancy Dupke**, of Ann Arbor, is serving as Acting Chief of Social Work while recruitment is underway for a new Chief. Nancy is the SCI Coordinator and the Point of Contact for returning OIF/OEF veterans.

Women's Equality Day Congratulations Three Mountain Home Social Workers are honored

● **Cynthia Chapman** was awarded the Woman of the Year for Customer Service (Clinical)

● **Wilma Davenport** was honored as Woman of the Year for Career Development.

● **Jackie Morales** was also honored as a Leadership Award nominee

VHA Social Work Pioneer Awards

The following were presented the Pioneer Award. Their peers nominated them for exceptional achievements over the course of their careers in the field of social work.

● **PAUL BURTON** (Greater Los Angeles VA Health Care System)

● **TERRY HARBERT** (Eastern Kansas Health Care System)

● **HELEN BOSSHART** (Augusta VA Medical Center)

● **GEORGE CASTILLO** (Houston VA Medical Center)

● **JERRY SATTERWHITE** (Birmingham VAMC)

*Congratulations to Paul, Terry, Helen, George and Jerry!
A Special Edition of Synergy will be coming out honoring these recipients of the Pioneer Awards**



Attention Social Work Interns, Intern Coordinators and Supervisors:

Tell us about your projects, your research, your innovative groups and other endeavors while in placement at the VA.

The VHA SW Education Committee and the Research Advisory Board are again collaborating in surveying and compiling the exciting and innovative activities of VA interns. Last year, 59 social work interns, representing 17 schools of social work and 13 VHA medical centers and outpatient clinics, submitted 50 projects. The projects showcased the exciting education currently being conducted within VHA social work and gave the interns the opportunity to publish their work, thereby increasing their visibility for future employment opportunities.

Please spread the word to all social work interns. We think that there are a lot more projects that our interns are conducting than we collected. School projects, research projects, innovative groups or programs, and upcoming projects for Social Work month that relate to the VA field placement, are welcome. We want to demonstrate the cutting edge nature of some of the projects and their positive impact on veterans we treat.

Please submit your intentions to engage in a project to Mel.Tapper@med.va.gov

Additionally, a one-page summary of the project is due by April 8, 2005, it should be submitted on a Microsoft Word document and include:

- Name of the intern;
- School of social work attending, the VA site,
- Name of the supervisor;
- Intention to publish;
- If the project is a requirement for graduation;
- If the school has a research affiliation with the VA site

Earlier submissions are welcome. It would also be helpful to submit to Mel the number of projects being done at your site as soon as possible.



CALLING ALL SOCIAL WORKERS

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be on a National Social Work Committee?

OR

Do you want to help out on a project as your time permits?

If you answered yes to either question, please send an e-mail to Charmagne.Gravely@med.va.gov with your area of interest.

Check out the next page to see a new addition to our newsletter about seamless transition.

Social Workers Allergic to Research?

By

Karen Burkart Madrigal, MSW, LCSW
VA San Diego Healthcare System

Social workers must be allergic to research. That's the conclusion drawn by many that ponder why social workers don't do more research. Every social work school accredited by CSWE mandates that research courses be part of the graduate school curricula, yet few social workers manage to engage in research and publish when employed as professional clinical social workers.

At the first annual (hopefully!) VISN 22 Social Work Conference hosted by Greater Los Angeles in October 2003, a group of social workers interested in research met, challenging the erroneous belief that social workers don't want to conduct research. Amazingly, a room full of clinical social workers sat around in a group and discussed their desire to engage in research to compliment clinical duties. Despite the desire among these clinicians to do research, however, most were unable to engage in research activities due to several barriers. Some of the barriers identified were: VA social workers had no time allotted for research activities, VA social workers are unfamiliar with how to submit a research proposal to IRB for approval, and VA social workers are unfamiliar with VA library resources available to them for doing literature reviews.

A grassroots group of clinicians dedicated to conducting research formed as an outgrowth of this original meeting held at the VISN 22 Social Work Conference, with the support and guidance of two doctorate level social workers from the National Research Committee, employed at Greater Los Angeles, Jim McGuire, Ph.D. and John Nakashima, Ph.D. This grassroots group of clinicians teleconferenced

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For several months and formed a proposal for a social work research initiative, designed to address and reduce some of the barriers to research identified by the clinicians wanting to do research.

The proposal will allow those enrolled in the social work research initiative to have a one day a month work release from clinical duties to engage in research activities, less than 5% total of a clinician’s time. Through this proposal, social workers will be permitted to attend a year long training program already in existence at Sepulveda VA, created by nursing service. This year, the training program will include both nurses and social workers and will be taught by nursing researchers and social work researchers Jim McGuire Ph.D, John Nakashima PhD, and Len Lenlow, MSW of San Diego. Participants of this social work research program submitted a description of their research question as part of the application process. Those accepted into the program will receive a review of research principles for application to their chosen research topic. Participants will also learn how to do research within the VA system, such as how to obtain IRB approval to engage in research, as well as how to use VA search engines for literature reviews. Grant writing and where to find grant announcements will also be reviewed.

This proposal for a social work research initiative was passed with the support of the Director of Social Work Service, Jill Manske, ASCW, LISW and the Director of Mental Health at Greater Los Angeles, Dr. Robert Ely, as well as the Chief of Social Work at Greater Los Angeles Florence Long, LCSW and the Chief of Social Work at the San Diego VA, Clay King, LICSW, CHE.

On July 28 2004, the first research training session was held at the Greater Los Angeles VA. Six clinicians from the Greater Los Angeles VA and three clinicians from the San Diego VA joined nurses for the start of a comprehensive training program designed to help clinicians apply research principles to their research projects. The long-term goal of this program is to empower VA clinical social workers with the knowledge, skills, and some time to incorporate research into their job, with the ultimate goal of journal publications.

Outcomes of this pilot social work research initiative will be closely monitored. With a little bit of hope, lots of work, and the dedication of those listed in this article, VA social workers may soon be making unprecedented contributions towards advancing the social work knowledge base.

The following individuals collaborated on the ad hoc committee responsible for creating the proposal for this social work research initiative.

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Jessica Blue-Howells | Frances Nedjat-haiem |
| Marla Brundies | Catherine Royer |
| Kendra Deja | Eleanor Spaziano |
| Rosalie Davis-Green | Marti Waite |
| Karen Madrigal | Annette Weary |

NEW

OIF/OEF News Corner

Our November 2004 Synergy focused on Seamless Transition. Because of the positive response we received, we will try to fit in any new articles regarding OIF/OEF under this “news’s corner as space allows.

Serving Those Who Served “Outreach to Combat Veterans” Tuscaloosa VAMC

By: Scott Martin, LCSW

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs sent a message to all VA employees asking us to be especially vigilant in responding to the needs of our nation’s latest cohort of veterans returning from Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Mr. Principi expects the VA to deliver timely, compassionate, and professional care to our newest generation of veterans. The Tuscaloosa Veterans Affairs Medical Center (TVAMC) answered the call by working diligently to ensure easy access to VA healthcare benefits and services for the Combat Veterans returning to the community and surrounding areas. To meet these goals we set up process and have listed a summary of our actions:

Planning

The preparation began with proactively developing a roster of all activated and deployed National Guard and Reserve Units within the TVAMC service area. The roster indicated that there was a potential for nearly 1,600 Combat Veterans in the TVAMC service area. Nearly half of these soldiers come from the largest Alabama Army National Guard Battalion deployed to Iraq. TVAMC has worked closely with key stakeholders to coordinate respective missions on behalf of these veterans. Synergistic partnerships have been developed with the State Veterans Representatives and National Guard and Reserve Units.

Communicating

Mr. John Goldman, Acting Medical Center Director, began sending a personal letter to over a thousand

Outreach to Combat Veterans (Continued from page 8)
veterans of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom who have recently returned from deployment, to thank them for their service and to remind them of

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Outreach to Combat Veterans *(Continued from page 8)*

their eligibility for VA health care and other benefits. "I want these men and women to know that we are grateful for their service to our country," Goldman said. "Those who served in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places around the world have risked their lives to make America more secure. One of the ways the nation shows its gratitude is by ensuring veterans receive the benefits they deserve." Mr. Goldman's letter includes brochures, telephone numbers, and links to web pages at www.va.gov, that contain more details about VA benefits, including an opportunity to apply for benefits online.

Outreach Teams

The TVAMC outreach efforts were expanded to ensure Combat Veterans are provided easy access to the many benefits they have earned. TVAMC established Combat Veteran Outreach Teams charged with the mission of going to the soldiers' hometown to provide information on VA benefits. This included providing information packets with brochures, FAQs, telephone numbers, and VA Form 10-10EZ, Application for Health Benefits. The Outreach Teams assist the veterans with completing the application for enrollment and provide follow-up appointments with the Combat Veteran Case Manager and Primary Care Team as needed.

Outreach Program

Over seven hundred soldiers from the 877th Engineer Battalion were deployed for a year to serve in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 887th specializes in airfield repair. Soldiers from the 887th Engineers, attached to the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), worked with Kurdish laborers to expand an old airstrip into a regional hub airport for flights between Baghdad, Mosul and Turkey. In addition to repairing the Bakrajo Airport, the 877th contributed in other ways. They donated clothes and food to the children in the city's orphanages. The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is committed to serving these soldiers who risked their lives to serve our nation as well as the people of Iraq.

On the weekend of November 6 and 7, the TVAMC Combat Veteran Outreach Teams provided an outreach program for the soldiers in the 877th Engineer Battalion. The programs were held at four Alabama Army National Guard Armories located in Hamilton, Winfield, Vernon, and Fayette, Alabama. The Combat Veteran Outreach Program consisted of two outreach teams. Team One went to the Fayette Army on Saturday and to the Vernon Armory on Sunday. Team Two went to the Hamilton Armory on Saturday and Winfield Armory on Sunday. As a result of this outreach initiative, TVAMC enrolled 60 new combat veterans and provided case management intervention for 135 soldiers. Over three hundred soldiers from the 877th Engineer Battalion are enrolled and receiving services for TVAMC.

Results

The Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center is committed to responding to the needs of our nation's latest cohort of veterans by ensuring easy access to timely, compassionate, and professional care. TVAMC is considered one of the national leaders in providing case management services to Combat Veterans. Currently, over five hundred Iraq/Afghan combat veterans have enrolled and receive services at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center. This has been accomplished by reaching out to the combat veterans to ensure they receive the benefits and services they deserve.

SEAMLESS TRANSITION PROGRAM Developing A New Social Work Role: "The VHA/DoD Liaison"

Glen A Windley, EAMC

The goal is to ensure that the transition of healthcare from the military to the VA is smooth and seamless. The VA Medical Center in Augusta, Ga. determined that a full-time VHA/DoD Liaison was needed at the Eisenhower Army Medical Center at Ft. Gordon. During the previous year, a part time social worker visited Eisenhower a couple of times per week. A full-time position was recommended by the Social Work Executive and approved by the Chief of Staff in July 2004.

The role of VHA/DOD liaison had the following components:

- Establishment of role:
- Development of relationships with case managers and other staff
- Increase referrals and transfers of care to VA
- Evaluation of liaison role: Thus far, we've increased the referrals and the transfers of care to VA by almost 90%. We have begun the process of expanding the liaison role at Eisenhower by reaching out to other Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs) in the Southeastern Region.

Giving these troops the feeling that we care about them by planning for their care and delivering what we've promised, builds trust and reassurance, not only in our VA system but also in our country.

TREATING AMERICA'S NEWEST VETERANS₁

Rosalie M. Bell, Public Affairs Officer
Augusta VA Medical Center

As injured personnel from military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan began to return to America, it became apparent to VA Secretary Anthony Principi that there needed to be a "seamless transition" between the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs. The Task Force for Seamless

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Treating America's Newest Veterans (continued from page 9)

Transition for Returning Service Members was formed by the Under Secretaries for Health and Benefits to improve coordination within VA and cooperate with the Department of Defense.

Treating America's Newest Veterans

In April 2003, VA Secretary Principi directed the Veterans Health Administration to give priority to returning active-duty members. He asked that upon the request of the Department of Defense and through the use of sharing agreements, VA medical centers provide priority care to active-duty members of the Armed Forces.

Treating active-duty soldiers at the Augusta VA Medical Center is nothing out of the ordinary. Augusta is a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Center of Excellence and has an agreement with Dwight D. Eisenhower Army Medical Center for neurosurgery and cardio-thoracic surgery, so this has been a component of Augusta's mission for many years. What is different now is that some of the active-duty arrivals will need rehabilitation for other injuries.

VA Southeast Network (VISN 7) Director, Linda F. Watson, along with the VISN Medical Director, Carter Mecher, M.D., and other dignitaries officially opened the Active Duty Rehabilitation Units on June 22, 2004. The inpatient unit provides services to active duty personnel with complex medical and psychological problems, including upper and lower extremity amputations, traumatic brain injury, complex orthopedic problems, burns and PTSD. Augusta has a full complement of services that may be required for these active-duty soldiers, including, neurosurgery, mental health, blind rehabilitation, spinal cord injury, dental and inpatient rehabilitation beds.

Brigadier General Eric Schoomaker, Commanding General of the Southeast Regional Medical Command said in his remarks during the ceremony, "We in the Army have adopted the warrior ethos; worn around our neck with our dog tags, "mission first, never quit, never accept defeat, and never leave a fallen comrade." I want to tell all the patients here today that your mission now is to get better, and part of not quitting and part of not accepting defeat is overcoming the illness and the injury that you have and we... both the Army and the VA, are committed never to leave you as a fallen comrade." General Schoomaker's words underscore the joint sense of duty and commitment of those responsible for the Active Duty Rehab Unit at Augusta – both Army and VA staff.

Mrs. Watson, Dr. Mecher and General Schoomaker conversed with the active-duty military personnel who were inpatients. The soldiers, sailors, and Marines expressed gratitude and appreciation for the expert care they are receiving from the Augusta VA staff. Many of them spoke openly about their levels of restored functions. One young soldier spoke of how the Augusta staff is facilitating his

transfer to the SCI unit in Seattle, which will enable him to "get on with his life." One of the soldiers who spoke to Mrs. Watson is being cared for following a traumatic amputation and TBI. He was highly complimentary of the care he was receiving and told Mrs. Watson that the staff had assisted him to have his wife, who is not only on active duty but also pregnant with their first child, receive a hardship transfer to Fort Gordon so that she could be near him.

The Augusta VAMC opened an outpatient rehabilitation unit that provides services for active duty personnel with orthopedic problems but do not require inpatient treatment. Some of the amenities that are available to them include access to a Wellness Center for fitness training, adaptive bowling alley, therapeutic pool, an outdoor track with exercise stations and the gymnasium. Recreation Therapists also provide a comprehensive therapeutic and leisure skills recreation program. Through a donation from the United Spinal Association, a computer room with Internet access is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The medical center also serves as the VISN point of contact with the Department of Defense to triage active duty personnel into the appropriate southeastern VA facility, based on the medical needs of the service member. The Augusta VA Medical Center stands ready to serve those who have so proudly served our country.

*¹ Be sure to check out **Vanguard** where information from this article has been used in the January/February edition. This article does not appear in its entirety in Vanguard. Vanguard is aware of the article in Synergy and feels there are no copyright issues.*

VHA SW Monthly Conference Call

The VHA SW conference call is a chance for every social worker to listen, learn and ask questions on issues related to social work. The purpose of the calls will be to share new information, highlight best practices, discuss clinical and administrative challenges and provide support. Topics of discussion are based in part, on social workers suggestions. CEU's will be offered (whenever possible) for a specific topic

Please e-mail Kristin.Day@med.va.gov to identify what you would like included in the calls. Feel free to include best practices too. Let everyone benefit from your initiatives!

The schedule for FY 05 is as follows:

March 11, 2005 3:00 PM EST

April 8, 2005 3:00

May 13, 2005 3:00

As you can see this is the 2nd Friday of the month. The call in number is 1-800-767-1750 and our access code will be **16389**.

This will be the access code for all future calls. Please make calls as a group as there are only a limited amount of lines.



A Very Practical Approach to Social Work

By
Lisa McGuire, MSW
VA Black Hills HCS
Ft Meade, SD Division

The Resource and Utilization Committee has developed a useful guide for new and not-so-new social workers. The *Practical Guide to Managing Clinical Social Work and Administrative Duties* is designed to assist busy social workers balance their duties of providing clinical services to veterans and keep up with the administrative requirements (a.k.a. paperwork) of the job. The guide includes tips on organization, documentation, coping with e-mail, and tips on time management as well as educational information. Have you ever wondered what VERA means? The Practical Guide will tell you!

The guide is concise and well organized. It is a great reference tool for to social work interns and social workers that are new to the VA system. There is an Appendix at the end of the guide that includes: a sample social work referral sheet, nursing home placement check list, examples of social work assessments, and MORE!

The *Practical Guide to Managing Clinical Social Work and Administrative Duties* can be found at

<http://vaww.docushare.visn22.med.va.gov/dscgi/ds.py/View/Collection-491>

- Click on SW Practice, and then click on Practice Guide

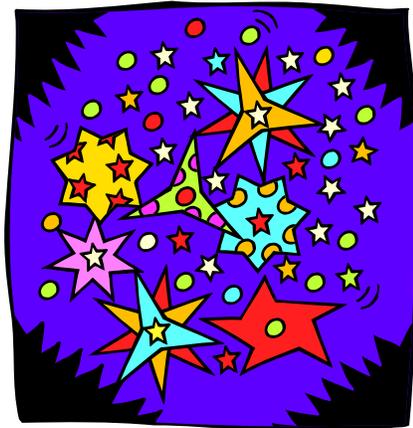
It can be added to your Bookmark or Favorites for quick reference or it can be printed out so you can carry it with you as you roam the vast expanse of VA hallways performing your social work assignments.

Thank you to the Resource and Utilization Committee for developing this guide!



Things to Look Forward to in the Next Edition!!!!

- © *Best Practices for Health Care for Homeless Veterans*
- © *A look at Community of Care*
- © *Best Practices for Palliative Care*
- © *New recognitions and award recipients*
- © *Best Practices for Geriatric Care*



Happy Social Work Month



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