

Veterans'

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Health

S U M M E R • 2 0 0 3



See your doctor ...
and stay at home!

The CARES vision:
Planning for future needs

The SARS scare: What
you need to know

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio





To our readers

As summer approaches, we continue to make your health our priority. Our summer issue highlights ways that we're better serving your healthcare needs, such as our new *Healthwise® for Life* handbook below on page 2, our successful Advanced Clinic Access plan on page 4 and our exciting Home-Telehealth program on page 5. This issue also informs you about various policy changes that affect you, including VA improvements to come from CARES planning on page 6.

Have a safe and enjoyable season!

—Clyde Parkis, Network Director



About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. To help serve you better, we need to know your entire address. If you receive *Veterans' Health*, the easiest way is to clip the mailing panel and send it to us at:

Veterans' Health
VA Healthcare System of Ohio
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249

A healthy handbook



Looking for health information that speaks directly to you? Soon you will find it in our latest effort to provide you with the best healthcare possible.

The VA Healthcare System of Ohio recognizes that many factors influence your overall wellness—from your family history to your social, physical and economic environment to your own individual coping skills. This is why we've invested in a new handbook designed to help you live better. This handbook, called *Healthwise® for Life*, takes into account the physical and psychological benefits that come from living well and features comprehensive information on nutrition, alcohol intake, medical tests, vaccines and more.

Our mission has always been to help you lead the best life you can. Hopefully, *Healthwise for Life*, along with your VA healthcare provider, can help you do just that.

Look for this handbook in October and more details in our next *Veterans' Health* issue. **VH**

Getting dual care

You've probably heard the term *dual care*, a common policy throughout the VA system. It basically means that some patients see non-VA healthcare providers as well as VA providers. Problem is, many patients see non-VA healthcare providers but use the VA pharmacy benefit. This practice uses more resources than the system has available.

To ensure appropriate, safe care for everyone, VA has put new guidelines into effect through July 31, 2007. These rules mandate that veterans seeking medications or supplies from VA be enrolled with VA and have at least one visit with a primary care provider.

You are responsible for letting both your outside provider and your VA provider know about the care you are receiving and for supplying your VA doctor with the names and addresses of all outside sources, as well as necessary records and documentation. The VA provider makes final decisions regarding medications, supplies and ongoing services you may need. A VA clinician cannot rewrite prescriptions from an outside provider. **VH**

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

COVER PHOTO: CAPTAIN TIM KEENE, NAVY VETERAN AND MEMBER OF THE DELHI TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT (LEFT) POSES WITH DAVE SWENSON, ARMY VETERAN AT THE CINCINNATI VA AND BUSINESS OWNER (RIGHT), AT THE RAPID RUN STATION IN DELHI TOWNSHIP.

Veterans' Health Editorial Directors

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Chillicothe VA Campus

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VA Healthcare System of Ohio

Understanding Priority Group 8

Anytime a plan changes or new rules are enforced, there are bound to be concerns. No doubt you've heard about a new enrollment decision called Priority Group 8 and wonder if—or how—it will affect you.

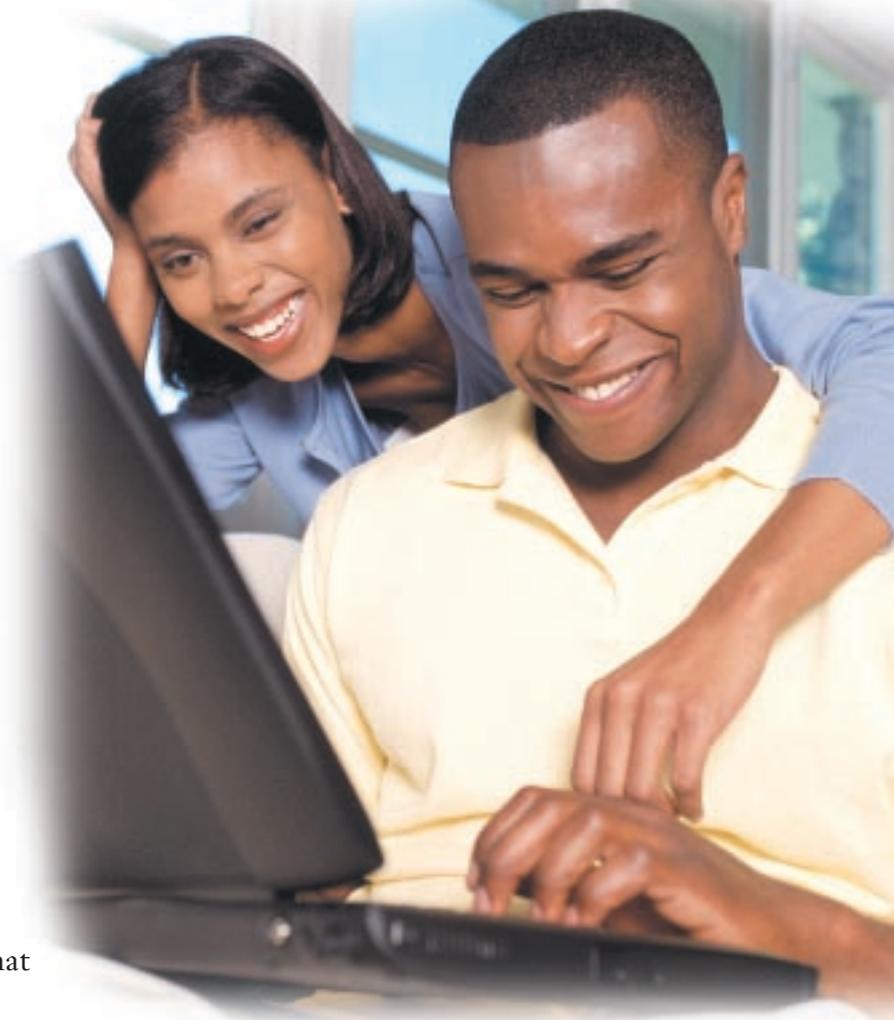
This new group refers to veterans who have no compensable service-connected disabilities or other statuses that make them eligible for higher priority group assignments. Priority 8 also includes people with annual incomes above both national and geographic means tests—in other words, incomes that exceed \$24,644 for those who are single and \$29,576 for those with dependents.

The 'when'

This new policy went into effect January 17, 2003, and only affects those who applied for enrollment on or after that date. If you were already enrolled in VA's healthcare system, you will continue to receive care. Also, if you have a condition requiring immediate treatment, VA will provide care on a humanitarian basis, but it must charge a fee.

The 'why'

The demand for quality health services continues to grow, and VA is working hard to meet everyone's needs. Between October 2001 and September 2002, VA enrolled 830,000 new patients—a stretch for any facility. For this reason, VA has not been able to provide all enrolled veterans with timely access to



healthcare. And already, VA is looking at a multiple billion-dollar shortfall. The law allows VA to provide care to the extent that resources are available and to determine annually whether it has sufficient resources to handle new patients. VA made this decision due to limited resources, not lack of care.

More details

For more information, call the Eligibility Office at 475-6499 or VA's Health Benefit Service Center at 1-877-222-VETS (8387). You can also visit www.va.gov/elig. **VH**

Advanced Clinic Access works!

Recognizing improvements in your healthcare services

Perhaps you've noticed the reduced wait time you've had when making appointments. Or maybe you've seen the signs at various clinics reminding you that when you don't show up for your doctor's visit, you're denying another veteran the chance to see a specialist. It's all part of VA's effort to reduce waits and delays across the entire healthcare system. This plan, known as the Advanced Clinic Access (ACA), has received the most attention (with aims to reduce wait times to less than 30 days) in audiology, eye care, cardiology, orthopedics, urology and primary care. The plan's focus is now targeting other areas like podiatry and mental health, among others, according to Chief Medical Officer Sheila C. Gelman, M.D.

The goal is to eventually offer "open access"—in other words, no wait time at all—seeing veterans when they need to be seen.



Top to bottom: Ron Rice and Bobby Yarborough; Edwardo Padin; Maritza Rivera; and Debra Latta, Randi Johnson and Mary Ann Greene continue efforts to improve wait time for veterans at the Advanced Clinic Access Collaborative.

"We realize it's hard for people to commit to appointments six months away," says Dr. Gelman. However, Dr. Gelman stresses that patients need to be an active part of their care. "We are developing systems to offer patients reminders, but patients need to partner with us and call for follow-up appointments when they need to see their doctors again," she says.

Currently, various clinics across Ohio are trying different strategies to find the best models that work. At group appointments, for example, veterans with diabetes discuss health-related concerns

with a nurse while each individual gets the chance to leave the group to discuss personal concerns with a doctor. Emerging Home-Telehealth technology (*see story on page 5*) will also help improve access and reduce wait times. **VH**

See your doctor ... and stay at home!

Picture this: You're in your favorite arm-chair, in your pajamas, when it's time to check in with your provider. Instead of driving to your area clinic, you use special electronic technology to take your blood sugar, pulse, weight, temperature and blood-clotting status—then send the information to a clinician at the medical center—all within the comfort of your own home!

The future is now, thanks to Home-Telehealth technology. These systems include equipment that measures a patient's pulse, blood pressure, temperature, weight, blood sugar and blood-clotting status and sends the information electronically to the clinicians at the medical center. The equipment also allows for real-time videoconferencing so you can talk to your doctor without ever getting up from your chair.

The VA system is working hard to make the best of available technology. "We recognize that our population is aging and that there is a greater need for services that address chronic concerns," says Susan McCutcheon, R.N., Ed.D., network telemedicine coordinator of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio. Home-Telehealth technology helps clinicians better coordinate care and improve access to healthcare services for those veterans with mild to moderate unstable chronic illness.

Keep watch for further details. **VH**



Elder Care Coordinator Theresa Borchers, nurse practitioner of the Dayton VAMC (left), checks in daily with Mr. Walter Jackson (right) to monitor his diabetes. Jackson's "health buddy" sends his information from his home.



Coping with mental illness

Do you have a loved one with a mental health disorder such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, manic depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder or panic disorder? If so, you may want to look into the NAMI Family-to-Family Education Program. The VA Healthcare System of Ohio has partnered with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), a nationwide grassroots self-help organization dedicated to improving the lives of all those affected by serious brain disorders, to offer the 12-week NAMI Family-to-Family Education Program. NAMI promotes its mission through mutual support, information and referral, education, advocacy and promotion of research.

You'll find the program through many community-based outpatient clinics and other VA facilities. The course is for families of individuals with mental illness and is taught by trained family members. All materials are furnished at no cost to you. Sessions cover a variety of topics, including the clinical treatment of mental illnesses available for your loved one. The class also teaches you the knowledge and skills that you need to cope.

To locate a program in your VA facility or community, contact your mental health provider or call NAMI Ohio at **1-800-686-2646**. **VH**



The CARES vision: Planning for future needs

Look for enhanced healthcare services, such as better ambulatory care, consolidated campuses and a possible new surgical facility in Columbus. It's all part of the CARES plan to expand and improve services nationwide. Central Ohio is one part of the country hoping to capitalize on the program's objectives.

CARES, which stands for Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services, is a nationwide study that began a year ago to better serve veterans' medical needs by providing the right care at the right place. The process involves nine steps. Currently, VA is in step five: the review and evaluation stage. Though nothing is set in stone yet (all recommendations must pass through Washington, D.C., later this year), the hope is that Ohio's various campuses will benefit.

The biggest changes on the table: the Brecksville campus consolidation into Wade

Park and the building of a 260,000-square-foot center in Columbus. This new facility promises an array of specialty and ambulatory surgical services. Provided the "OK" comes from Washington, the clinic will open between 2005 and 2008.

The purpose of CARES is to expand services where necessary and move services from underused areas to needed areas. This means either shutting down old buildings or enhancing them, bolstering outpatient services and using funds that might have gone into building

maintenance and, instead, shifting the funds into patient care. Though you may not notice anything different at your area clinic right now, you can rest assured that positive changes are on the horizon. If all goes according to plan, expect to begin seeing improvements as early as 2004.

Visit www.va.gov/cares/ for further information. **VH**



CARES
Positive changes
are coming to your
area clinic.





The stand

I read in the news, how you made a stand,
you marched in the streets of our country's land,
trying to say who is wrong or right,
telling our country they should not fight;

Marching against Marines, like me, here,
defending the rights you hold so dear,
assuming I love to kill and maim,
acting like this is some sort of game;

I so want to feel the comforts of my home,
where recently I left my family alone,
yet I'll do my duty in this far-off land,
so you can march on Washington and make your stand;

Do not despise me for what I do,
because truth be known, I do it for you,
to hopefully free you from terror's arm,
so you can have your freedoms, free from harm;

I am not bitter, this is the life I choose,
so the rights you express so freely, you will not lose,
you may not support me for what I do,
but you need to know, I do it for you;

When this is over, when we are through,
I would rather you just say, thank you,
for giving you the time you had,
to march in our streets and make your stand.

—MSgt. Billy F. Dial

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This poem represents the viewpoint of one U.S. Marine and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of Veterans' Health.

The SARS scare: What you need to know



Are you worried about SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome)? You should be cautious—and aware of the symptoms of SARS—but rest assured, the VA system is doing all it can to protect the community.

At this time, some suspected cases within the VA network exist, but no confirmed cases, according to Teresa Davis, R.N., CIC, infection control nurse at Chillicothe. VA is following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and is being aggressive in taking the appropriate precautions should a patient show SARS symptoms, such as a fever greater than 100.4° and suspicious respiratory symptoms.

Because SARS mimics other infectious disease, it's tough to identify SARS immediately. "The only wild card in the deck is travel to the Orient or Southeast Asia," says Davis. Nurses who see patients with fevers are asking them about their most recent travel. Most cases of SARS, which originated in Asia in November 2002, have involved people who have either cared for or lived with someone who has recently been to mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Hanoi or Toronto.

While Asia and Toronto have seen the disease spread, no community outbreaks in the U.S. have been reported (so far!). For the most up-to-date information, log on to the CDC website at www.cdc.gov or call its public response hotline at 1-888-246-2675. You'll also find information at www.publichealth.va.gov/SARS/. 

Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

MEDICAL CENTERS

Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
216-526-3030

Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
859-572-6202

Louis Stokes VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

INDEPENDENT OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Chalmers P. Wylie

VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS

Akron VA Campus

55 West Waterloo
Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Canton VA Campus

733 Market Avenue South
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

Clermont County VA Campus

Eastgate Professional
Office Park
4355 Ferguson Drive, Suite 270
Cincinnati, OH 45245
513-943-3680

Dearborn Co. VA Campus

710 W. Eads Parkway
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
812-539-2313

East Liverpool VA Campus

332 West 6th Street
East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Grove City VA Campus

1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Lancaster VA Campus

1550 Sheridan Drive, Suite 100
Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Lima Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1303 Bellefontaine Avenue
Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

Marietta VA Campus

418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

McCafferty VA Campus

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Painesville VA Campus

W 7 Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Portsmouth VA Campus

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Richmond VA Campus

4351 South A Street
Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Springfield VA Campus

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Warren VA Campus

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Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Zanesville VA Campus

840 Bethesda Drive
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740-453-7725

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at: www.va.gov/visn10/.

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