

As I enter my third week as Network Director I am continuing the orientation process, meeting with VISN staff and beginning to visit facilities. To date, I have traveled to Spokane, Alaska and Puget Sound, with trips to Portland, Boise, Roseburg, White City and Walla Walla in January. It is exciting to start the conversation, learn about existing initiatives and prioritize what lies ahead. I am encouraged and energized by the open and friendly attitudes I've encountered, and immeasurably impressed with the obvious passion for, and understanding of, the business at hand.

During last week's Executive Leadership Council (ELC), I explained that my philosophy is "improving our work is our work." VISN 20 has an exceptional reputation, but we can always strive for better. To get better, we must look, not only to leadership, but to those who do the work to lead the way. Service line employees are in the best position to identify waste, procedures that make no sense and opportunities for improvement. By empowering each other with the simple message, "If you see it and you know it's not right, fix it," we can achieve critical and fundamental change. To do so, we need to be open, transparent and trusting of each other, to continue to embrace VA's core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence: "**I Care**". It is my firm belief that "**I Care**" is more than just words. We must be committed to demonstrating that to the Veterans we serve, as well as each other. Beyond understanding our issues and what needs to be "fixed" we must also develop a keen understanding of what it is that we do right. What are our strengths? What do we draw upon to raise all our boats to the highest potential level?

In closing, and during this time of celebration that surrounds the holiday season, I ask you to remember the opportunity we have been given to serve our Nation's Veterans. It is a rare gift that I am grateful for each day. I would also encourage you to hold close your family and friends, those who enrich our lives in so many significant and indescribable ways. Please also keep in your hearts those who experience loneliness, those who may feel helpless, those who have faced loss and those who are experiencing the challenges that come with illness - everyone in need. These are people whose lives you touch each and every day at the VA, our Veterans and the family members who cherish them. A simple act of kindness can change lives, and that too is a gift.

Here's to great happiness, fulfillment and good health in the coming year. Thank you for all that you do. Happy holidays! I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Lawrence H. Carroll  
Network Director