



# Vision Ahead

Volume 14, Issue 3

A Dept. of Veterans Affairs newsletter dedicated to all stakeholders of the Walla Walla VA Medical Center and its Community Based Outpatient Clinics

Summer 2008

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## New clinics open for business

Several thousand veterans now receive care closer to home



A crowd of nearly 100 people gathered at the Lewiston VA Clinic on May 30 to celebrate the grand opening of the clinic. The clinic provides primary care and mental health care services for veterans who previously traveled to Walla Walla for routine appointments. (Photo by Jake Shaw)

By Jake Shaw  
Public Affairs Specialist

The opening of two new Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Lewiston, Idaho, and La Grande, Ore., along with the expansion of the Richland VA Clinic has greatly enhanced the VA's ability to serve veterans closer to home.

On May 30, U.S. Senator Larry Craig joined Lewiston Mayor Doug Havens and VA management to cut the ribbon on the Lewiston VA Clinic.

In his remarks, Senator Craig said the VA is known for providing, "The Best Care Anywhere." He later added that he was proud to be a part of the process that led to the establishment of the clinic in Lewiston that will serve nearly 3,000 local veterans.

Across the border in Oregon, the La Grande clinic celebrated its grand opening on July 2.

U.S. Senator Ron Wyden was the keynote speaker at the

event, and he was joined by a host of local dignitaries, including Mayor Colleen Johnson from the City of La Grande and staff from every congressional office within 100 miles of the clinic.

In her remarks, Walla Walla VAMC Acting Director DeAnn Dietrich said the clinic will serve about 2,000 local veterans. She also honored the Bell family for the hard work they did to build the clinic

in less than nine months. "You've seen them [the Bell family] here at the VA clinic day and night for the past year. Together with their work crews they've toiled through rain and snow to build this clinic quickly for our veterans. They have gone above and beyond to provide the VA with a beautiful clinic," she said.

The VA clinic in Richland moved to its new, expanded location in mid-May.



The Honors Team from the Oregon National Guard presents the colors at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the La Grande VA Clinic. The clinic provides primary care and mental health care services for veterans who previously traveled to Walla Walla for routine appointments. (Photo by Larry Werst)

# Margie Carlton named Acting Director



Maggie Carlton is the new Acting Director for the Walla Walla VA Medical Center. She has more than 34 years of nursing experience.

Margie Carlton, RN, MS, was appointed Acting Director of the Walla Walla VA Medical Center effective August 17.

Her responsibilities will include direct oversight of the VAMC and its four Community Based Outpatient Clinics located in Richland, Wash., Yakima, Wash., Lewiston, Idaho, and La Grande, Ore.

Her most recent assignment was Associate Director for Patient Care Services at the Oklahoma City VAMC from January — August 2008. As Associate Director for Patient

Care Services, Ms. Carlton was responsible for the clinical and administrative operations of inpatient nursing and for the Nursing Standards of Care and Practice in clinical units throughout the medical center.

Prior to her appointment in Oklahoma City, Ms. Carlton served as the Associate Director of Patient Care Services at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center in Muskogee, Okla. She also previously worked as Vice President of Patient Care Services at Woodward Regional Hospital

in Woodward, Okla. Ms. Carlton began her career at the VA Medical Center in Muskogee as a staff nurse in 1974. She also worked as an assistant nursing care coordinator and nursing officer of the day.

A Muskogee native, Ms. Carlton received her associate degree in Nursing from Bacone College in Muskogee, her bachelor's degree in Nursing from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Okla, and her masters in Nursing from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Okla.

# Meet the new Associate Director for Nursing



Sallieann B. Hoffer is the new Associate Director for Nursing at the Walla Walla VA Medical Center. Sallieann's background includes years of experience in nursing education, nursing management, recruiting and administrative management.

Sallieann B. Hoffer was appointed Associate Director for Nursing at the Walla Walla VA Medical Center on June 24. She recently took time to answer a few questions.

*Why did you choose the VA?* I wanted a job that would allow personal and professional growth and I also want to show my gratitude for the men and women who have served so bravely. I feel honored to participate in caring for veterans in such a significant way.

*Do you have family who are veterans?* My father

served in the Navy, but is no longer alive.

*What is your top priority as Nurse Executive?* The art of leadership focuses on the future and I believe it is my duty to share and inspire our vision at the VA. I want to empower nurses to be outstanding, dedicated to quality and to inspire greatness. I am focused on building a unified team who enthusiastically work together to make care at Walla Walla a cut above.

*I understand you are working on a PhD that focuses on leadership. Can you describe your leadership philosophy?* I am working on a PhD at Andrews University that focuses on leadership. There are a few theories in leadership that I believe are coherent with mine. I resonate with Greenleaf's "Servant Leadership." According to Greenleaf, servant leaders are felt to be effective because the needs of followers are so looked after that they reach their full potential, hence perform at their best. This leadership philosophy forces us away from self-serving, domineering leadership and

makes those in charge think harder about how to respect, value and motivate people reporting to them.

I also enjoy Kouzes and Posner who believe that we should lead with our hearts as well as our heads. But above all, good leaders must know the importance of setting an example.

*What is the top Challenge here at the VA and how can we address it?* I think the challenge is to turn the organizational culture around. When staff see that they are capable of doing a good job, and begin to see changes taking place, they will continue to perform and outstanding care will be delivered.

*Do you have an open door policy?* I am so glad that you raised this question. I want the entire nursing staff here at the VA to know that I live for the opportunity to engage in conversations with them. Their opinions and thoughts regarding the work place are important. I want them to be engaged in making positive changes here in Walla Walla and look forward to hearing their ideas for a bright tomorrow. My wonderful

Associate, Danelle Laiblin and I want to be very visible and accessible to all the nurses and we can be seen on the units and I hope to be able to come to know each of them individually. For the vets, I have had the privilege of talking with many of them, and look forward to hearing not only what we do right but what we can do better.

*What else can you tell us about yourself?* I am married and have a wonderful husband Brad who brings me great joy. I have three wonderful daughters: Cheris Current who is a Professor at Walla Walla University, Amber Gustin, who is a nurse at Vanderbilt University Hospital, and Katelin who is in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade at Walla Walla Valley Academy. I also have an outstanding stepson Zach who is attending Walla Walla University. I am a native of Miami and half Cuban so don't get too close to me while I talk; we are pretty animated! I enjoy learning, being with people, playing dominoes, traveling, music and chocolate. Drop by the office to enjoy some conversation and dig into the chocolate jar!

# Veterans serving veterans

Editor's note: 31 percent of VA employees nationwide are military veterans. At the Walla Walla VA Medical Center, approximately 35 percent of employees are veterans. This story is the third in a series about VA employees who served in the military and now serve fellow veterans. Look for more stories in future issues.

By Jake Shaw  
Public Affairs Specialist

"I have a job and I just do it," says Roger Gotch, the veteran featured in this month's story about veterans serving veterans.

Roger's family has a legacy of military service. His father, mother, three brothers and sister all served in the Navy, for a total of almost 100 years. Roger kept that legacy intact by spending two years in the Navy as a Hospital Corpsman.

"I joined the Navy two weeks after I turned 17. Looking back, it was a trial going through everything but I think it was the best two years of my life," he said.

Roger says the military taught him how to deal with people and challenging situations. And although he wasn't directly involved in combat operations, he felt the impact of it quite often.

"During the summer of 1967-68, I was stationed at the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md. It was a pretty sweet duty station, but it was tough duty because I got to know a lot of guys who were drafted and most of them didn't make it back from Vietnam alive," he said.

During those two years at

Annapolis, Roger spent his free time playing sports.

"I was on the basketball team and the bowling team. It was a good way to spend time when we were all thinking that we might have to go to the war and our lives might be cut short," he said.

Although he says it was the best two years of his life, he does have some frustrating stories that he can't forget.

On one occasion, Roger's quarters (room) was inspected by the Master at Arms. The Master at Arms didn't like a couple of posters hanging in Roger's room, so he took them down.

"I went to see him and asked if I could have my posters back, because they were my property. But he told me that anything that belonged to me belonged to the Navy. That made me mad because those posters were my property," said Roger.

After nearly two years at Annapolis, Roger applied for the Naval Academy but he was not accepted. Although he felt comfortable working in the structured environment of the military, he decided it was time to move on. So he went to college; and that was another eye-opening experience for him.

"I felt older than most people. I didn't want to cruise main street like the other people my age. Military service makes you grow up a lot quicker," he said.

But that was just the tip of the iceberg.

"The summer of 1968 was a heavy year for demonstrations. I found myself at odds with a lot of the demonstrators and activists. I'd often ask them to think about the consequences of what they were doing before

they took action," he said.

The summer of '68 combined with Roger's military service changed his view of the world.

"Sometimes the world can be a nasty place. I learned that there are many people in the world that live in sad conditions, and I think we need to do something to help those people. My military experience helped me to think outside of the sheltered life I had prior to that," he said.

After college, Roger spent about 22 years working as a production manager in the radio entertainment field. Then a few years ago, he lost that job and this job at the VA basically fell in his lap.

"I feel like the Lord got me this job. I got a call about the job from Work Source and three days later I had the job," he said.

Roger thinks the job as a housekeeper is perfect for him, because it will allow him to retire in about ten years, and it has much of the structured, teamwork environment he learned in the military.

"In my department, everyone has the ability to lead, but we all know our role and we stick to that unless we need to step out of that role for the good of the team. Someone always has to take the point, while someone else takes the rear and someone always has to be in charge," he said.

As far as the future is concerned, Roger is a proud father whose son joined...the Air Force. So the family legacy of serving in the Navy is broken. Roger says his son hates the water so the Air Force was just a better deal for him. But Roger doesn't care which branch of service his son joined.

"The important thing is that my family has always served this country; we have a desire to serve. In this country we enjoy a lot of liberties, and I think a lot of people don't know what it's like to be in the military. Some in my family have served more than others, but I am proud of all of them for carrying on the tradition," he said.



Roger Gotch relocates a book shelf from an administrative area in building 68. Roger has worked for the VA for about 18 months. Roger's family has a total of nearly 100 years of military service, including his two-year stint in the Navy. (Photo by Jake Shaw)

# Interns promote diversity, innovation

## Training, educating healthcare providers remains core function for VA

By Jake Shaw  
Public Affairs Specialist

Six interns spent the summer months at the Walla Walla VA Medical Center in various positions, gaining hands-on experience in their respective fields of study.

The internships support one of the VA's core missions, which is to train the healthcare professionals of the future. Internships through affiliations with colleges and universities promote an atmosphere of learning and they support VA's constant need to recruit staff and focus on new trends in healthcare.

The Walla Walla VA Medical Center has affiliations with 18 colleges and universities to support this worthy cause.

The six interns featured in this story traveled from Florida, Texas, California and Oregon to spend their summer vacation time boosting their resumes, and in some cases, reassuring themselves that they were going into a career field that they are passionate about.

Two of the six interns worked in the Optometry Clinic under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Hetrick. Jade Ulmer and David Schwartz are both Canadian citizens enrolled at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon.

They spent the summer observing, assisting and performing all clinical care for eye care patients.

Dr. Hetrick says the interns were solid members of her team in their short time here. And although they are technically here in a learning capacity, Dr. Hetrick feels that the experienced VA staff benefit a lot from the interns.

"We are able to see more patients by using trainees as provider extenders than we could without them. They also bring a level of academic performance to the clinic and help to keep VA care at the highest level of professionalism and current science," she said.

Jade and David heard about the VA internship through their school. Both had heard good things about the organization.

"The VA was highly recommended to me and I knew that I would get to deal with more complex issues here than elsewhere," said David.

"I knew the patients here would have diverse needs and that was important to me," said Jade.

Jade and David said they might consider working for the VA in the future. They said the character of the patients and the ability to get to know patients here made their Walla Walla experience memorable.

Three additional interns came to the VAMC this summer from the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). HACU is the largest Latino internship in the nation and includes about 450 participating colleges and universities.

This was the first time the VAMC has recruited interns from the HACU program. The effort was spearheaded by Carol Archer, acting manager at the Richland Community Based Outpatient Clinic. Carol was the VAMC's Equal Employment Opportunity

manager at the time that she started working with HACU.

"As part of our EEO program, we are always looking for ways to promote diversity, and several managers supported this effort. We attracted students from various areas and backgrounds, and all of them wanted experience working in a rural healthcare setting," said Carol.

The HACU internship provided a stipend and living arrangements for the students, and the VAMC provided coaches in areas appropriate for each student's field of study.

One of the HACU interns was Rocio Uvina-Compean. She is pursuing a double major in Hispanic Studies and Public Health at California State University in Fresno, California.

Rocio teamed up with Cherie Baker during her eight-week internship. Cherie is the Chief of Supply Processing and Distribution (SPD) and Infection Control.

During their partnership, Rocio worked with Cherie on many projects, including the nationwide VA Pandemic Flu drill and plans for the 2008 flu shot season. She also helped to dispose of excess equipment, set up a tracking system for equipment, created a hand hygiene presentation and set up a new spreadsheet used to order and track supplies for her section.

Looking back on her experience, Rocio says that she loved the welcoming staff and community in Walla Walla and she thinks that being away

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Optometry interns Jade Ulmer and David Schwartz demonstrate using an Optical Coherence Tomography machine. Part of the training they received at the VA involved the interpretation of data from the OCT machine. (Photo by Jake Shaw)

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from home helped her to focus on her future and the personal growth needed to set herself up for future success.

Another HACU intern was Kassaundra Escalera. Kassaundra is pursuing a Health Science and Visual Arts degree at Rice University in Houston.

Kassaundra worked with Team C in primary care. Her main projects included entering outside medical records into the VA's electronic medical record system, reviewing clinical performance measures, updating patient education literature for the women's clinic, creating a patient database for the women's clinic and promoting the **MyHealthVet** program.

During her presentation on her final day at Walla Walla, Kassaundra summed up her experience by saying, "I could not have asked to be placed in a better facility."

The final member of the HACU intern trio was Veronica Nunez. Veronica is pursuing a Biology degree at Miami-Dade Honors College in Miami.

Veronica teamed up with Nelda Murri in the Pharmacy for her internship.

Her major projects over the summer included shadowing several clinical and program managers, performing medication and billing audits and taking on procedural projects with a focus on patient safety measures.

Veronica says she learned a lot during her short time at the VA. "But the main thing is that patient care is the top priority here," she said. "I'm taking that experience from here and I will use it in the retail setting where I work in Miami. I want to have more interaction with patients like you do here at the VA," she added.

Some interns spent more time here than others.

Zhenmei Schreck is a Medical Laboratory Technician student at Wenatchee Valley College who has been interning with Teresa Morrison in the Laboratory since March of 2008.

Zhenmei is originally from Guangdong province in China, which is near Hong Kong, but now lives in Walla Walla with her husband. Her internship in the VAMC's Laboratory will continue until August, 2009, when she graduates.

Laboratory Manager Teresa Morrison says Zhenmei performs the same types of duties as other employees after she receives hands-on training. Right now Zhenmei is just learning basic lab functions, but in the future she will focus on managing a specific section within the lab.

Zhenmei says she enjoys working in the team environment with her fellow VA team members, and she appreciates the interaction she has with veterans.

"In a private setting, it's all business, but here we get to know the patients and they all have something in common," she said.

Zhenmei says she will definitely come to work at the VA after graduation if there is an opening.

That's a relief to her Lab Manager, who says there is going to be a major shortage of laboratory professionals in the near future.

"It's hard to recruit for lab positions, and studies show that we will be losing a lot of them in the near future," said Teresa.

All told, the interns featured in this story provided a valuable service to veterans, the staff at the VAMC and to themselves. They found creative ways to improve existing programs, and they helped to put a focus on current or emerging ways of doing business.

The interns were here to learn, and they obviously did.

According to the coaches responsible for managing the interns, it really was a win-win situation.

"They help by keeping us current on academic developments, and many of them express an interest in working for the VA after they graduate," said Teresa.

They have an appreciation for the service we provide to veterans and the personal interaction we share with them. You can't find that in a private setting, added Teresa.

So in an ironic way, the staff at the Walla Walla VAMC might have learned and benefited more from the interns than the interns learned or benefited from the VA.

In the end, the VA's

support for future healthcare professionals all adds up to an improved patient care environment for the veterans, and that's the bottom line.



Medical Laboratory Technician intern Zhenmei Schreck counts the number of white blood cells in a blood sample. Zhenmei is originally from China and is now a student at Walla Walla Community College. Her internship in the Lab will continue until August, 2009. (Photo by Jake Shaw)

## VA-cation?

While other college students spent their summer at the beach or working part-time jobs in their hometowns, Veronica Nunez, Rocio Compean and Kassaundra Escalera each traveled far from home to gain valuable experience working at the VA.

They worked hard, but that doesn't mean they didn't have fun while they were here.

"Our favorite place was

definitely the Farmers' Market, and we made it to Big Cheese every time they had a customer appreciation day," they said.

They also explored the Eagle Cap Wilderness on horseback, went rafting in the Cascades and they even made it to the Caledonian Games in Athena.

So it wasn't a normal summer vacation. It was more like a VA-cation.



Left to right: VA-cationer Veronica Nunez with coach Nelda Murri, VA-cationer Rocio Compeano with coach Cherie Baker and VA-cationer Kassaundra Escalera with coach Joan Leid. (Photo by Jake Shaw)

# VA announces on-line claims process

VA press release

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that on-line applications are now accepted from veterans, survivors and other claimants filing initial applications for disability compensation, pension, education, and vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits without the additional requirement to submit a signed paper copy of the application.

Effective immediately, VA

will now process applications received through its on-line application website (VONAPP) without the claimant's signature. The electronic application will be sufficient authentication of the claimant's application for benefits. Normal development procedures and rules of evidence will still apply to all VONAPP applications.

VONAPP ([www.va.gov/onlineapps.htm](http://www.va.gov/onlineapps.htm)) is a Web-based system that benefits both internal and external users. Veterans, survivors and

other claimants seeking compensation, pension, education, or vocational rehabilitation benefits can apply electronically without the constraints of location, postage cost, and time delays in mail delivery.

VONAPP reduces the number of incomplete applications received by VA, decreasing the need for additional development by VA claims processors. The on-line application also provides a link to apply for VA health care benefits and much more.

Over 3.7 million veterans and beneficiaries receive compensation and pension benefits from VA and approximately 523,000 students receive education benefits. Approximately 90,000 disabled veterans participate in VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program.

For more information about VA benefits, go to VA's website at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call our toll-free number at 1-800-827-1000.

# VA, Monster partner for veteran job seekers

VA press release

WASHINGTON — In a new plan to help veterans find jobs, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has partnered with Monster Government Solutions, a division of Monster Worldwide, Inc., a company that markets online employment services to employers and job seekers.

Part of VA's mission is to assist veterans to gain employment. Monster, in

partnership with VA's Center for Veterans Enterprise, provides veteran-owned small businesses the opportunity to post job openings for veterans, including service-disabled veterans, at a large price discount. Monster will post the job openings for 60 days, twice as long as for other employers.

"This government-corporate partnership represents the best kind of effort to help those who gave

up time in their lives to serve their country and return to an economic community that may not recognize their skills," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake.

"The program should make it easier for employers to find qualified job candidates as well as veteran suppliers and service contractors," he said.

To participate in Monster job listings, veteran business owners must be listed in VA's

online Vendor Information Pages (VIP) maintained by the Department's Center for Veterans Enterprise at [www.VetBiz.gov](http://www.VetBiz.gov).

In addition to helping veteran owners get business from other companies and prospective veteran employees find jobs, VA's VIP pages will allow Monster to purchase services for itself. The VA will refer appropriate, listed suppliers to Monster.

# Health care 'report card' gives VA high marks

VA press release

WASHINGTON — A new "hospital report card" by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) gives the Department's health care system high marks, with VA facilities often outscoring private-sector health plans in standards commonly accepted by the health care industry.

"This report is a comprehensive snapshot of the quality of care VA provides to our veterans," said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "From waiting times and staffing levels to hospital accreditation and patient satisfaction, this report

demonstrates VA is providing high quality care to the veterans we serve."

The report found that all of VA's 153 medical centers are accredited by the independent Joint Commission which accredits all U.S. health care facilities.

The report also noted that although screening for breast and cervical cancer for women in VA facilities exceeds screening in private-sector facilities, women veterans lag behind their male counterparts in some quality measurements.

VA has already launched an aggressive program to ensure women veterans

receive the highest quality of care, including placement of women advocates in every outpatient clinic and medical center.

The report also found minority veterans are generally less satisfied with inpatient and outpatient care than white veterans. That disparity will be the focus of an in-depth study, based upon input from veterans, which will be completed this summer.

"Disparities in treatment and satisfaction based on gender or ethnic background are unacceptable," Peake said. "VA has a robust program to look at disparities and to deal

with the underlying causes."

In February, Congress directed VA to complete the report card, highlighting measurements of quality, safety, timeliness, efficiency and "patient-centeredness."

"This report demonstrates VA's determination to be open and accountable for the quality and safety of the care we provide," Peake said. "No other health care organization provides this much information about its ability to care for its patients."

The report card is available on the Internet at [http://www.va.gov/health/docs/Hospital\\_quality\\_Report.pdf](http://www.va.gov/health/docs/Hospital_quality_Report.pdf).

## EMPLOYEE PULSE

Think you know your fellow employees? How would you answer these 3 questions?

1. What dish do you take to a potluck? 2. What's your nickname? 3. If you were President for a day, what would you do?



Name: Stephon Morris  
Title: Housekeeper  
Years with VA: 11 months  
1. Lasagne  
2. Big Man  
3. Fix the economy



Name: Melissa Humbert  
Title: Optometry Technician  
Years with VA: 19  
1. Watergate  
2. Misdemeanor  
3. Lower gas prices



Name: Michael Custer  
Title: Food Service Worker  
Years with VA: 5  
1. Casserole  
2. Mikey  
3. Guarantee the VA budget



Name: Barbara Schmierer  
Title: Registered Nurse  
Years with VA: 16.5  
1. Chicken  
2. Sis  
3. Regain U.S. independence



Name: Donna Stujenske  
Title: Program Support Asst  
Years with VA: 10 months  
1. Enchilada casserole  
2. Munchkin  
3. Mandate a 4-day work-week



Name: Greg Skirko  
Title: HR Assistant  
Years with VA: 1  
1. Meat  
2. Sarge  
3. Fire Congress



Name: Brian Peace  
Title: Health Systems Spec  
Years with VA: 9 months  
1. Chocolate cake  
2. Global  
3. Nationalize health care



Name: Vern Sinclair  
Title: Addiction Therapist  
Years with VA: 9 months  
1. A plate  
2. Wolfman  
3. Abolish federal taxes

## Employees of the Month - April to August



Employees of the month for May—August: Kendall Kyle (left), Tisha White, Laurie Wolfram and Don Seabrands (right). (Photo by Jake Shaw)

Congratulations to the following outstanding employees for their recent selection as employee of the month.

### April

Jerry Riley, a Medical Support Assistant, was the

employee of the month for April. His nomination said he is trained in all aspects of his job and often stays late or does whatever it takes to get the job done.

### May

Kendall Kyle, an Education

Technician, was employee of the month for May. His nomination said he is a team player who truly cares about the facility and our veterans and he has stepped up to take on many training classes in recent months.

### June

Tisha White, a Financial Accounts Clerk, was employee of the month for June. Her nomination said she has a positive attitude and sets a great example for all employees to follow. She also spends a great deal of time training new employees in her section.

### July

Laurie Wolfram, RN, was employee of the month for July.

Her nomination said her work ethic is above reproach. She is courteous, sensitive to the needs of others, helpful, accountable, dedicated, and she goes beyond what is required of an employee.

### August

Don Seabrands, Accounts Receivable Technician, was employee of the month for August. His nomination said he continually sets high professional standards earning him the respect of his co-workers and supervisor. Additionally, his hard work and dedication to his profession has been instrumental in attaining MCCC's goals.

Each winner received \$100 and eight hours of time off.

## Walla Walla

### VA Medical Center

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#### Acting Director

**Margie Carlton, RN, MS**

#### Acting Chief of Staff

**Clinton Bliss, MD**

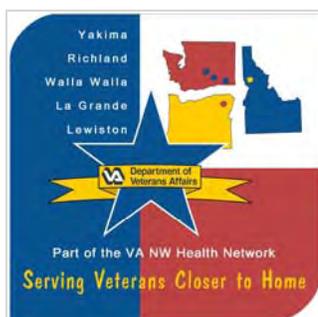
#### Associate Director

**Vacant**

#### Nurse Executive

**Sallieann Hoffer, MSN**

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# Update on Community Living Center

The Community Living Center (nursing home care unit) at the Walla Walla VA Medical Center suspended operations on July 23.

The decision followed an unannounced audit by the Long Term Care Institute on July 15-17. The Department of Veterans Affairs has a nationwide contract with LTCl to audit all Community Living Centers.

During the audit, LTCl found several areas of concern that were immediately shared with local VA management, including: an unsafe physical environment and the lack of a system for documenting training and performance of standardized nursing tasks. The team determined that the CLC did not meet community standards for long term care.

Though the LTCl gave staff high marks for demonstrating compassionate care, the LTCl's

concerns were validated by an internal VA team that visited the facility from July 17-21.

Based on the findings from both teams, VA leadership decided on July 23 to suspend operations and transfer all remaining patients. Some patients were discharged as planned.

Eight patients were impacted by the closure along with 40 employees. Ten temporary employees were released with two weeks notice and 30 permanent employees are being assigned to jobs suitable for their qualifications.

The VA continues to place eligible veterans in regional VA nursing homes or contract facilities, while working closely with the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs to secure a new state veterans home at the Walla Walla VA Medical Center.



## Fan Mail

### Letter to the Director

"Too often, when notice of care is given, it is in the negative aspects. In this case, I'd like to draw your attention to the outstanding care given by...Nelda Murri, Mindi Birdwell, Kathy Vance and Eileen Bow. On May 14, 2008, they took time from their busy schedule to help us when my husband ran short of medications while on vacation...We called our home VA and explained the situation, and they told us to go to the Walla Walla VA...Upon arrival, these ladies met us at the front desk and walked us through the procedures. Their attitudes were outstanding and they cared for my husband professionally and personally...Thank you for turning a stressful experience into a friendly one..."

-- MJB

### Letter to the Director

"I am writing in appreciation for all the services that have been provided for my father. He is a 90 year-old WWII combat vet that would be struggling without the help of your facility. He lost his wife of nearly 60 years a few years ago and he has a mild heart condition and the beginning stages of Alzheimers. The VA has helped in so many ways. He had a pacemaker installed in Spokane a few years ago. While he was at the Spokane VA, a group of ladies watched out for him and advised me of anything specific I needed to know about his condition. We moved him to Walla Walla recently and transferred all his medical files to Walla Walla. Everyone here has been most helpful...it helps to be able to talk to people with a concerned, caring attitude when going through this journey of our seniors who need help."

-- KW

# BRAVO!

Employees continue to use the BRAVO! program to recognize each other's good deeds. Here's a few of the recent first-time award winners. Each of them received a \$75 award, thanks to a co-worker who caught them in the act of doing a great job.

**John Molk** — You are appreciated for helping me keep a letter from being misdirected.  
— Norma Timmons

**Cara Smith** — You are appreciated for doing an awesome job covering clerk duties in Specialty Clinic. You are so appreciated! Thanks for helping with mailings and extra scheduling.  
— Angie Garcia

**Jimmie Daves** — You are appreciated for doing a great job combining lists for space and projects committees so they can be more efficient. — Carol Perfect

**Bess Putnam** — You are appreciated for providing access to MH facilities for fellow employees. Your actions were "key" to our success. — Dave Bellemere

**Brenda Hagfelt** — You are appreciated for sharing insight on and off the job and for making training fun.  
— Monica R. Twitchell