



VA Outpatient Clinics located in Beaumont, Conroe, Galveston, Lake Jackson, Lufkin, Richmond, and Texas City

Innovative Interventional Pulmonology Service Offers Life-Changing Options for Veterans with Respiratory Problems

HOUSTON - Using advanced, minimally invasive techniques, the Pulmonary Department at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) now offers a new Interventional Pulmonology Service to treat Veterans with respiratory problems.

Interventional pulmonology is a relatively new field within pulmonary medicine that focuses on the use of advanced diagnostic and therapeutic techniques to manage patients with lung cancer and any other diseases that cause airway obstructions. With the new Interventional Pulmonology Service, the Pulmonary Department is ready to handle a wide variety of breathing issues.

"Our bronchoscopy suite is fully equipped now. The Interventional Pulmonology Service that we assembled provides the highest level of care possible within this new field," said Interventional Pulmonologist Roberto Casal, M.D., Bronchoscopy Laboratory director. "We have developed a great team of dedicated respiratory therapists,

nurses, anesthesiologists, pathologists, and pulmonologists. The combination of advanced procedures we perform are not available at any other VA in the country."

The Interventional Pulmonology Service offers different techniques to unblock windpipes obstructed by a tumor and improve breathing. Some of these techniques include argon plasma coagulation which is the application of heat produced by an electric current to destroy tumor tissue or stop bleeding; cryotherapy, the destruction of airway tumors by freezing the tissue; and microdebrider bronchoscopy where a rotating blade cuts a tumor and removes it simultaneously. After tumors are removed, stents (artificial pipes) are sometimes placed to maintain an airway.

Advanced diagnostic procedures such as Electromagnetic Navigation and Endobronchial Ultrasound (EBUS) are also performed on a daily basis. The former is like a "GPS" system that

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Photo by Quiana Moore, Public Affairs Specialist, (CC) Image

"When I was first referred to Dr. Casal, I could barely breathe. He recommended the right bronchoscopy procedure," said Clara Traylor with Interventional Pulmonologist Roberto Casal, M.D., Bronchoscopy Laboratory director. "I saw him the beginning of the week, the procedure was the middle of the week, and by the end of the week, I was breathing like normal again."

Free ice cream for Veterans at the MVP Ice Cream Social, July 5, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m., 4th Floor Auditorium

Navy Veteran is 3,000th Houston Enrollee in Million Veteran Program



Photo by Public Center Communications Division

HOUSTON - In late May, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) reached the milestone of enrolling 3,000 participants in the Million Veteran Program (MVP): A Partnership with Veterans, and is leading the nation in enrollment efforts.

Navy Veteran Gerald Blankenship was not showered with balloons and confetti when he was told he was the 3,000th Veteran to enroll from the Houston area; however, the Houston MVP staff did present him an "Ask Me About MVP" pin and an enthusiastic round of applause.

"My primary care doc told me about the Million Veteran Program and I decided to get involved because I think the program will help other Veterans," said Blankenship. "I especially think the younger troops coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan will benefit most from this research."

The MEDVAMC is one of 40 VA medical centers serving as an enrollment site for this national, voluntary research program conducted by the VA Office

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"My primary care doc told me about the Million Veteran Program and I got involved because I think the program will help other Veterans," said Navy Veteran Gerald Blankenship pictured Rayan Al Jurdi, M.D., a psychiatrist and co-primary investigator of the MVP at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.



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Michael E. DeBakey VA is one of only a handful of hospitals where this procedure is performed.

New OR Hormone Testing Unwrapped at Houston VA

HOUSTON - The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center recently added a new intra-operative hormone test for parathyroid surgery patients.

The parathyroid glands are four small endocrine glands in the neck that produce the parathyroid hormone (PTH). Among other functions, these glands control the amount of calcium in the bones. Sometimes, they produce too much PTH resulting in a condition called hyperparathyroidism. Too much PTH can lead to Vitamin D deficiency and chronic kidney disease and symptoms such as fatigue, depression, and bone pain.

A recent study suggests that 90 percent of individuals with hyperparathyroidism have only one diseased gland. Once the illness is properly diagnosed and the patient is scheduled for surgery, the surgeon's challenge is to successfully find the diseased gland. A hormone test is performed in order to find the overactive gland.

"In the past when a patient needed a parathyroid hormone test, we had to send the blood samples to Oklahoma,"

said Carla Braxton, M.D., M.B.A., F.A.C.S., a member of the MEDVAMC surgery staff. "Being able to do the test here while we are in the operating room allows us to do a much more focused operation and zero in on the parathyroid gland that is overactive."

Along with specialized training, Braxton has extensive experience with the intra-operative technique of PTH testing in the operating room. Hired last September, she brought these unique skills with her to care for Veterans at the MEDVAMC.

"In November, our labs were able to get the machinery and the reacting chemicals in order to do parathyroid hormone testing here," said Braxton. "At the same time, we were able to implement the intra-operative protocol I had developed at my previous hospital."

These new techniques were immediately helpful to local Veterans. A Pearland Veteran, who was recently treated for hyperparathyroidism and had a small benign tumor removed from his parathyroid, was extremely pleased with the results.



"There are not many medical centers that even offer this operation. Out of the few that do, even fewer offer an intra-operative protocol," said Staff Surgeon Carla Braxton, M.D., M.B.A., F.A.C.S. with (from left) Laboratory Manager Rafael Andujar, Navy Veteran Clifford Schoeffler, and Pathology and Laboratory Section Chief Michael Ittmann, M.D.

"I was happy to know that there was a new technique available to help with my parathyroid surgery," said Navy Veteran Clifford Schoeffler. "The surgery was very successful. I am delighted with Dr. Braxton and the new ideas that she has brought to the Houston VA."

The new intra-operative parathyroid hormone testing protocol is available for all patients whose health care practitioners suspect elevated parathyroid hormone levels. The MEDVAMC is one of only a handful of hospitals where this procedure is performed.

"This is a specialized diagnosis and a specific procedure," said Braxton. "Relatively few medical centers offer

minimal-access parathyroid surgery with intra-operative parathyroid hormone measurement. Using this protocol, we are able to get test results back – not just the same week or the same day, but in the same hour so that real-time decisions can be made in the operating room."

"We strive to offer the latest, surgical techniques for our Veterans," said Samir S. Awad, M.D., Interim Operative Care Line executive at the MEDVAMC and associate professor of Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine. "We are proud the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center has talented and skilled doctors like Dr. Braxton." ☆ *Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)*

A Word from the Director . . .

Serving Veterans by Going Lean

HOUSTON - I am quite proud of the progress we have made in our "Journey to Lean." Transforming our thinking, management, and culture to a pursuit of perfection through Lean Management is no small task and one which involves every employee at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. I am committed to providing all the appropriate tools to our employees to help enhance our Veterans' health care experience.

Lean Management is originally developed for use in the automotive manufacturing industry at Toyota, but it has been adapted to many operating environments over the years. We have seen the powerful impact of Lean Management in health care organizations such as Virginia Mason and Denver Health, and the Lean methodology can be applied here at the MEDVAMC as well.

Lean Management fundamentally involves evaluating every one of our processes and identifying waste from the perspective of the customer - you, the Veteran. Waste includes not only material waste, but also unnecessary waiting and pointless steps.

A Lean Management System uses various tools to evaluate processes, identify value added, non-value added but necessary, and non-value added and not necessary steps. This system connects the purpose (providing value to Veterans) to the process and people.



Bryan T. Bayley, MHA, FACHE
Acting Medical Center Director

We have already taken many steps to transition to a culture of Lean Management. This includes forming an Organization Excellence Board and identifying key Value Streams to focus on over the next year. We have trained staff at different levels of Lean to include Yellow Belts, Green Belts, and Black Belts. In addition, we hold weekly classes open to all staff in the Fundamentals of Process Improvement. Nearly 300 employees have attended this training so far.

The success of Lean Management depends on the commitment from each one of our employees to continuously improve the processes that add value to the Veteran health care experience. I know that our staff will be better equipped through these training opportunities to better serve you - our Nation's heroes.

The dozens of team projects already completed and currently underway will further reinforce our pledge to provide you with the best health care anywhere! ☆

Progress of Tomball and Katy Outpatient Clinics

The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center has the responsibility to ensure both facilities meet quality standards for our Veterans. These clinics are large financial investments so VA also has a significant responsibility to ensure taxpayers are satisfied with their investment.

May 2012	Construction drawings finalized for both clinics
May 2012	Staffing requirements finalized
May 2012	Interior design selections finalized
Jun 2012	Purchasing for interior begins
Aug-Sep 2012	Hiring and credentialing process begins
Jan 2013	Estimated construction completed by Contractor
Jan-Feb 2013	Inspections by VA
Jan-Feb 2013	Punch List Resolutions
Late Feb 2013	Estimated acceptance by VA
Mar 2013	Installation of medical equipment, computers, telephones, furniture, etc.
Mar 2013	Installation of Radiology Equipment
Mar 2013	Installation of Audiology Rooms
Apr 2013	Inspections of Radiology Equipment
Apr 2013	On-site training/orientation of staff
May 2013	Estimated activation

Free Weight Loss Program to Improve Veteran Health



Photo by Fran Burke, Public Affairs Specialist

The MOVE! Program is definitely worth it," said Army Veteran Francisco Ortiz with Registered Dietitian Jordyn Forsyth. "Veterans who try it will not be disappointed. The help and support you get from VA staff is super."

HOUSTON – Tired of feeling bad and having little energy, Army Veteran Francisco Ortiz decided he wanted to be healthier and live a long, happy life. A registered dietitian at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center

(MEDVAMC) encouraged him to try a unique weight loss program for Veterans. Managing Overweight and/or Obesity for Veterans Everywhere (MOVE!) is a Department of Veterans Affairs weight management program

designed to help Veterans lose weight, keep it off, and improve their overall health.

Veterans have several options within the MOVE! Program to help them lose weight.

Ortiz chose *TeleMOVE!*, a telehealth weight reduction program that Veterans can do at home. *TeleMOVE!* provides qualified Veterans with a home messaging device such as the Health Buddy, a digital scale, a pedometer, direct access to a Care Coordinator, and a team approach to helping participants reach their goals.

"The *TeleMOVE!* Program helped me stay motivated; the Health Buddy made it much easier," said Ortiz. "It makes you accountable and teaches you how to make better food choices and gives you the tools you need to achieve a healthy lifestyle."

Other options in the MOVE! Program include MOVE! Individual, one-on-one nutrition counseling with a registered dietitian; MOVE! Group, four two-hour sessions to learn about nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle changes; and MOVE! Support Groups.

The MOVE! Program teaches Veterans how to become healthier by emphasizing health and well-being as achievable goals. Through a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach using behavioral changes, nutrition, and physical activity, Veterans individually

tailor the program to meet their specific goals.

"My ultimate goal is better health and this program is definitely worth it," said Ortiz. "Veterans who try it will not be disappointed. The help and support you get from VA staff is super."

The VA serves more than six million Veterans, of whom approximately 77 percent are overweight or obese. Approximately 38 percent are obese. The MOVE! Program is the largest and most comprehensive weight management and physical activity program associated with a medical care system in the United States.

"I have lost 9 percent of my body weight," said Ortiz. "The support group meetings make you realize that you are not alone in this journey and others have the same issues as you."

The MOVE! Program provided at MEDVAMC addresses three of the nine Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Healthy Living Messages which include "Maintain a Healthy Weight," "Eat Wisely," and "Be Physically Active." It also provides guidance in areas of nutrition, behavior change, and physical activity, and allows the Veteran to participate in personal goal setting.

Any Veteran receiving care at the MEDVAMC or one of its outpatient clinics can participate by talking with their primary care provider. ☆ Fran Burke, Public Affairs Specialist

'Best Doc' Leads New Rehabilitation/Extended Care Department

HOUSTON – Helene K. Henson, M.D. has been selected to lead the newly formed Rehabilitation & Extended Care Line at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC).

"With her strong leadership skills and personal drive, Helene has a proven track record of ensuring VA health care is more attentive to Veterans and their families; more performance-based and quality-driven; and better supported by medical education and research," said Medical Center Chief of Staff J. Kalavar, M.D.

Listed as one of the best doctors in the nation in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation by Best Doctors, Inc., Henson has nearly 14 years of experience with the Department of Veterans Affairs and has served as the Rehabilitation Care Line Executive at the MEDVAMC for the past eight years.

Founded in 1989 by Harvard

Medical School professors, Best Doctors, Inc. serves nearly 30 million members in every major region of the world. By focusing on people and their doctors and seamlessly integrating its trusted services with employers' other health-related benefits, Best Doctors has pioneered a cutting-edge service, clinical advocacy, which is transforming health care around the globe.

During her tenure, the Rehabilitation Care Line Polytrauma Network Site at the MEDVAMC has grown into one of the largest and most clinically acknowledged sites in the VA. Henson is the lead physician for the MEDVAMC Polytrauma Amputation Network serving Veterans throughout the South Central VA Health Care Network. Recognized for her work on the Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence Steering Committee, she was named to serve on the National



Photo by Beth Deane, Communications Director

Listed as one of the best doctors in the nation in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation, Helene K. Henson, M.D. examines Veteran Anthony Thompson during a recent visit. Henson is board certified by the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and is actively working to develop clinical practice guidelines for the management of amputation rehabilitation for VA and the Department of Defense.

Advisory Committee for the Care of Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury, as well as the national VA Physical Medicine Field Advisory Board.

The mission of the Rehabilitation & Extended Care Line is to provide Veterans the right rehabilitative medical intervention at the right time in the right place. Care is managed on the acute medical and surgery units, through the Comprehensive Integrated Inpatient Rehabilitative Program, in the Community Living Center, on the Palliative Care Unit, at seven outpatient clinics, in Veterans' homes, as well as in community nursing, medical foster, and

personal care homes.

Henson is also an associate professor in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Baylor College of Medicine. She completed medical school and her internship at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston and her residency at Baylor College of Medicine.

Henson is board certified by the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and is actively working to develop clinical practice guidelines for the management of amputation rehabilitation for VA and the Department of Defense. ☆



Don't Be a No-Show.

Make sure the clinic clerk has your most up-to-date contact information when you check-in or call the Appointment Center at 713-794-8985 or 1-800-639-5137.

Event encourages older Veterans to continue leading active lives and reminds them that age doesn't have to slow you down.

31 Houston-area Veterans Compete in Annual 26th National Veterans Golden Age Games



Army Veteran John Smith competes in bowling at the 26th National Veterans Golden Age Games held in St. Louis, Missouri in June. More than 900 Veterans from across the United States came to battle for medals and demonstrate the warrior spirit.

HOUSTON – Thirty-one Veterans from the Houston area recently participated in the 26th National Veterans Golden Age Games held in St. Louis. The team brought home six gold, four silver, and six bronze medals. The Games are open to all U.S. military Veterans age 55 or older who receive care at a Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility.

More than 900 Veterans from across the United States came to compete and demonstrate the warrior spirit. For six days, Veterans competed in events like horseshoes, air rifle, nine-ball, golf, croquet, and swimming.

"The Golden Age Games is truly a life-saving program for our Nation's Veterans and life affirming for all those who have attended them," said Marilyn Iverson, Veterans Canteen Service director. "An active lifestyle is vital to everyone's health and well-being, and can serve as one of the best tools to health maintenance as well as disease prevention. The Veterans Canteen Service is committed and proud to serve as a co-sponsor to the 26th National Veterans Golden Age Games."

"We are thrilled that 11 of our Veterans brought medals home for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center this year," said Recreation Therapist and Golden Age Game Coach Stacey Spicer. "Everyone had a great time during the competitions, plus the Veterans thoroughly enjoyed the trapshooting exhibition and visiting the Gateway Arch and Riverfront, historic Union Station, and attending a Grizzlies baseball game."

The other coaches for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center were

JeMarques Handy; Kelly Roux, R.N.; Billie Jean Sanders; and Solomon Green.

Veterans who brought home medals include:

- * Army Veteran Rena Dugat
Bronze in checkers
Gold in bowling
- * Air Force Veteran JoAn Lance
Bronze in checkers
Gold in bowling
- * Army Veteran Mack Thrash
Bronze in shuffleboard
Bronze in bowling
- * Navy Veteran Joseph Bartholow
Bronze in shuffleboard
- * Army Veteran Billy Lacy
Silver in bowling
- * Army Veteran George Henry
Gold in dominoes
- * Army Veteran Norris Honeycutt
Silver in horseshoes
- * Air Force Veteran August Gonsoulin
Silver in table tennis
- * Air Force Veteran Marvin Weatherspoon
Gold in cycling (1/4 mile)
Gold in cycling (1/2 mile)

"Help Hospitalized Veterans is extremely proud to co-sponsor VA's National Veterans Golden Age Games," said Mike Lynch, the organization's president and CEO. "We sincerely hope that each and every one of this year's Veteran participants enjoyed a memorable event of camaraderie and competition, and will continue their quest to maintain good physical and mental health throughout their lives."

The Buffalo, New York VA Medical Center will host the Games next year. For more information, visit the website at www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov. ☆ Fran Burke, Public Affairs Specialist

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Smaller Meal Portions, More Variety!

HOUSTON - Because the size of food portions in restaurants, as well as at home, has increased over the last decade, our waistlines have grown larger. Over-eating can quickly lead to a weight gain. On top of that, unfortunately, the variety of foods we eat has grown smaller.

A healthy diet should consist of many different types of foods including proper portions of meats, fruits, dairy, nuts, grains, and vegetables of all colors, as well as starchy vegetables like potatoes and peas.

But, the one food that is often served in portions too large is red meat. When we eat lots of red meat, we increase our fat and calorie intake.

Also, with too much protein on our plate, we do not have room for fruits, vegetables, and starches. Therefore, try to order a smaller cut of meat or enjoy fish instead. Make room for other foods and more variety.

In today's diet, portions of starchy foods like rice, potatoes, and pasta have also increased in size. The size of servings in some restaurants is twice the size the average person requires. Have half of a

baked potato to make room for one or two vegetables.

A serving of fruit should also be enjoyed with every meal. Fruit is the perfect dessert or snack.

Vegetables are full of fiber and antioxidants; but, they are not well represented on our plates. If we reduce the size of other foods to their proper proportion, we will have enough room for a wider variety of red, orange, green, and dark green leafy vegetables. Vegetables are also an excellent snack without a bunch of calories.

Finally, keep your portions small because the most compelling part of a meal is the first three or four bites. The perfect time to part ways with a plate of food is when you are still wishing for one more bite. So, have less and savor more!

For more information, contact a VA Dietitian at (713) 791-1414, ext 3976, 4296, or 6166. ☆ Vaughn T. Bell, Jr., MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern



I'm fine . . . Why should I get a HIV test?



Photo by Tommie Parker, Adams Specialist

Supervisory Medical Technologist Ramiro Garza sorts samples into the robotic processor racks. The robotic processor runs up to 600 tests per hour and includes such safety and quality-control features as cap piercing, "flags" when irregularities appear or results are outside normal ranges, automatic creation of slides when abnormalities are detected, and automatic dot detection.

HOUSTON – Human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired immune deficiency syndrome or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). The illness alters the immune system, making people much more vulnerable to infections and diseases. This susceptibility worsens as the disease progresses.

HIV is found in the body fluids of an infected person (semen and vaginal fluids, blood, and breast milk). The virus

is passed from one person to another through blood-to-blood contact, contaminated hypodermic needles, and sexual contact. In addition, infected pregnant women can pass HIV to their babies during pregnancy, delivering the baby during childbirth, and through breast feeding.

HIV infection causes AIDS to develop. However, it is possible to be infected with HIV without developing AIDS. Without treatment, the HIV

infection is allowed to progress and eventually it will develop into AIDS in the vast majority of cases.

HIV testing can identify infection in the early stages. This allows the patient to use preventive drugs which will slow the rate at which the virus replicates, delaying the onset of AIDS.

Symptoms of HIV vary widely. A person may have HIV symptoms or AIDS symptoms without knowing it until they get HIV testing. For the most part, the symptoms of HIV are the result of infections caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. These conditions do not normally develop in individuals with healthy immune systems, which protect the body against infection.

Public health experts recommend all adults get tested for HIV as part of their routine medical care.

Why should I get an HIV test?

- An HIV test is the only way to be certain about your HIV status.
- A person with HIV could show no symptoms for years, but could still pass the virus on to others.
- It is better to diagnose and treat HIV early rather than late.
- There have been many advances in the treatment of HIV. People with HIV often live much longer and healthier lives than before.
- The earlier HIV is detected, the sooner a person can receive excellent care provided by VA and begin taking steps to remain healthy for years to come.

What does the test involve?

- HIV testing within VA is voluntary and confidential.
- You will be given education materials on HIV and HIV testing. VA encourages you to ask your provider any questions you may have.
- If you give consent to be tested, an HIV test will be done with either a sample of blood or saliva from your mouth.
- If the HIV virus has been found, the test result is "positive." The blood is re-tested several times before a positive result is given to the patient.

Treatments can slow the course of the disease - some infected people can live a long and relatively healthy life. Remember, the most important part of treatment is knowing your status. Get tested. Talk with your VA health care provider today. ☆

Program for Cocaine Users

You may be eligible to participate in a 4-month research study, conducted by the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and Baylor College of Medicine, to test a study medication for cocaine abuse. We are seeking volunteers who will be compensated for study participation. Call toll-free 1-877-807-3072. All calls are confidential.

Million Vets

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of Research & Development. The knowledge gained will help better understand how genes affect Veterans' health and illness, with the goal of transforming health care.

"It was easy; only a few minutes, gave one small tube of blood, and filled out a questionnaire," said Blankenship. "Amazing that something so simple can possibly lead to developing treatments for military-related conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder and common medical illnesses like heart disease."

Participants are asked to complete a one-time study visit (approximately 20 minutes in length) to provide a blood sample for genetic analysis. Participation also includes filling out health surveys, allowing on-going access to medical records, and agreeing to future contact. This research program will establish one of the largest databases of genes and health history.

"In only ten months with the help of our primary care teams and laboratory staff, we are making great progress toward reaching our goal of enrolling 20,000 southeast Texas Veterans in the next five years," said Laura Marsh, M.D., Mental Health Care Line executive and co-primary investigator of the MVP in Houston.

Genes are made up of DNA and are inherited. They are the instructions for building and maintaining bodies. Genes determine the color of eyes and hair, height, and other personal traits. Through complex interactions with the environment and various lifestyle factors, certain genes may also contribute to the risk for disease, including illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

"Genes may be a critical part of why some people get diseases and others do not," said Rayan Al Jurdi, M.D., a MEDVAMC psychiatrist and co-primary investigator of the MVP in Houston. "Genes may also affect how we respond to certain medications. Because of their genetic makeup, some people may respond better than others to a particular treatment, or experience different side effects. Overall, a better understanding of how genes work may help to prevent and improve treatment of disease."

Results from MVP will help improve health care for not only Veterans, but all Americans. MVP has extensive safeguards in place to keep Veterans' personal information secure and confidential. Veteran participation does not affect access to VA health care or benefits.

Tammy Natividad, Doralene Smith, R.N., Sarah Torres, and Emily Boeckman are the Houston MVP representatives. They are located at the MEDVAMC in Room 6B-310. Walk-ins are also welcomed.

For more information, visit www.research.va.gov/mvp or call the MVP information center toll-free 1-866-441-6075. ☆

HEART attack

Heart health should be important to everyone regardless of their medical history. However, every year, about 785,000 Americans have their "first heart attack."

Local physicians are conducting a research study of the investigational use of a medication in its ability to reduce your risk of future heart attacks and other cardiovascular events such as a stroke.

You may qualify to participate if you have had at least one heart attack. Participants may continue their current medications throughout the study. All study-related care and study medication will be provided at no cost.

To learn more, contact
Cathy Anderson
at 713-794-8912.

Proper nutrition can neutralize damage from the sun.

Protect the Skin You're In

HOUSTON - This year, about 75,000 Americans will be diagnosed with melanoma, the most lethal form of skin cancer, according to the American Cancer Society. Are you taking precautions this summer to make sure you are not one of them?

Avoiding the sun completely is not always possible or practical. Ultraviolet rays (UV rays) are dangerous for everyone; but, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) is especially concerned about the health and safety of our Veterans.

The sun's energy comes from ultraviolet radiation. Over time, UV rays can cause skin damage such as freckles, wrinkles, or even skin cancer. The primary cause of all types of skin cancer is exposure to the sun.

However, one way to care for your skin is with proper nutrition. Three nutrients that can help are beta-carotene, lycopene, and cocoa-flavonol. These nutrients are all found in some great foods.

These nutrients act as antioxidants. Antioxidants are chemicals that protect cells by neutralizing external forces such as damage from the sun, pollution, wind, and temperature. Research has shown that they can also increase skin density, thickness, and even hydration. This means your skin can look healthier just by eating certain foods.

The first nutrient, beta-carotene, is found mainly in carrots. However, kale, spinach, broccoli, sweet potato, and cantaloupe are also foods that contain beta-carotene.

In addition, people sensitive to the sun should eat foods containing beta-carotene to help protect their skin. Other health issues that eating foods with beta-carotene can help are eye diseases like cataracts and age-related macular degeneration; heart disease; and even asthma.

Foods containing lycopene include tomatoes and tomato-based products, watermelon, red peppers, and cabbage. In addition, lycopene can also help reduce the risk of developing cancer of the lung, stomach, and colon.

Cocoa-flavonol is found in cocoa powder and chocolate. The amount of this nutrient in sweets is low because of the cooking and baking methods. Therefore, the best source is dark chocolate. Besides, this nutrient can also help improve blood flow to the brain.

By eating five servings of a variety of fruits and vegetables each day, you consume nutrients that are helpful for reducing skin damage.

You can also protect your skin by using sunscreen and wearing hats. Furthermore, do not forget to stay hydrated while out in the Texas sun.

So, to protect yourself against



Veteran Craven Woods discusses protecting his skin from sun damage through proper nutrition with Dietetic Intern Jennifer Caeres. If you want to learn more about healthy diet options, speak with a registered dietitian at 713-791-1414, ext. 6616/4295.

harmful UV rays, slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen, slap on a hat, and wear sunglasses to protect your eyes and the sensitive skin around them!

For more information on how to protect your skin this summer with proper nutrition, visit the American Cancer Society online at www.cancer.org or talk with a registered dietitian at 713-792-1414, ext. 6616/4295/3976. ☆ Jennifer Caeres, MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern

Veterans are never alone . . . Support Groups are Available

Amputee Support Group

Meets 4th Wednesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Dining Room. Facilitators: Stacy Flynn, 713-794-7819 & Rosa Lane-Smith, 713-791-1414, ext. 4034

Breast Cancer Survivors' Support Group

Meets last Tuesday every month, noon, Cancer Center Family Room 4C-365. Facilitators: Magdalena S. Ramirez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5289 & Gail Menchaca, 713-791-1414, ext. 3936

Cancer Support Group

Meets 3rd Tuesday every month, 1-2 p.m., Cancer Center Family Room 4C-345. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

Cardiac ICD Support Group

Meets 3rd Friday of every Month, 2 p.m., 3rd Floor Cardiology Department Patient Education Room. Facilitator: Regina Bell, 713-794-7363

Depression & Bipolar Support Group for Veterans

Meets every Wednesday, 7 p.m., Homeless Domiciliary, 7329 Fannin Street, Facilitator: Anthony Morris, 713-791-1414, ext. 2323

Liver Transplant Support Group

Meets every Tuesday 3 p.m., Room 5B-166, Facilitator: Juleena Masters, 713-791-1414, ext. 6286

Lung Cancer Support Group

Meets 1st Tuesday every month, 1:30 p.m., Cancer Center Family Room 4C-365. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

MOVE! Weight Management Support Group

Meets 1st and 3rd Friday every month, 9 a.m., Room 4C-122. Facilitator: Alicia Merritt, 713-791-1414, ext. 6166/3976

Talk to the Social Worker in Your Clinic or on Your Unit for more information.

Parkinson's Disease Education & Support Group

Contact facilitator for more information: Shawna Johnson, 713-794-8410

Prostate Cancer Support Group

Meets 3rd Thursday every month, 1-2 p.m., Cancer Center Conference Room 4C-345. Facilitator: Maria Lozano-Vasquez, 713-791-1414, ext. 5273

Stroke Support Group

Meets 3rd Tuesday every month, 3 p.m., Nursing Unit (NU) 2A Day Room, Room 2B-210. Facilitators: Kathryn Kertz, 713-791-1414, ext. 4192 & Laura Lawhon, 713-794-7814

Vet-to-Vet Support & Education Group

Meets every Wednesday, 6 p.m., Room 6B-118; every Thursday, 9 a.m., 6B-117; and every Thursday, 11 a.m., Room 6C-167. Veteran facilitator. info: Crisly Gamez-Galka, 713-791-1414, ext. 4378

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Veterans Affairs Medical Center
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Lean on VA Social Workers When You Feel Overwhelmed

HOUSTON - At the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC), social workers are available to help you with most any need.

Social workers throughout all programs can help obtain services or resources from the VA or from community agencies; apply for benefits from the VA, Social Security, and other government and community programs; help if you feel depressed, lost, scared, or anxious; provide assistance with completion of advance directives (medical power of attorney and living wills) and other end-of-life issues; secure in-home assistance or services; and arrange for respite care.

These health care professionals can also assist with personal concerns such as marriage or family problems; transitioning to a nursing home, assisted living facility, or personal care home; information and referrals for financial and housing assistance; grief counseling; issues of mistreatment, neglect, or abuse; and assessment and treatment for alcohol, drug, and/or tobacco abuse or dependency issues.

Assessment: The first step is generally for a social worker to meet with you and, often, with your family. He or she will ask questions about your health, your living situation, your family, other support systems, your military experience, and the things you think you need help with. The social worker will then write an assessment to help you and your VA health care team make treatment plans.

Crisis Intervention: In a crisis situation, social workers provide counseling services to help you get through the crisis; then, help with more long-term needs. They are also available to help you apply for services and programs in your community and through the VA to meet emergency needs.

High-risk Screening: Social workers work particularly close with those Veterans who are at high risk, such as those who are homeless, those who have been admitted to the hospital several times, and those who cannot care for themselves any longer.

Discharge Planning: When you are admitted to the MEDVAMC, a social worker is available to help you make plans for your discharge back home or to the community. If you need services in your home or if you can no longer live at home by yourself, the social worker can help you make arrangements for the help you need.

Case management: Social workers often provide long-term case management services to Veterans who are at high risk of being admitted to a hospital, those who have very complex medical problems, and those who need additional help and support. They provide and coordinate a variety of services including counseling or support services or just help you figure out what you need and how to get it.

Advocacy: Sometimes, it is hard for a Veteran to speak up for himself or herself. VA is a big, bureaucratic agency. Social workers can advocate when you have a hard time doing it by yourself.

Education: Social workers can help educate you and your family about your medical condition, how you can live a more healthy life, and how you can find support groups and other self-help programs in your community.

Psychotherapy: Clinical social workers provide therapy to address emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs.

Social workers help with all of these services and many more. If you have a problem or a question, just ask a social worker. They are here to help you when you feel overwhelmed or need a hand. ☆



Social Worker Maria Lozano-Vasquez consults with Air Force Veteran Carlos Rodriguez. You will find social workers ready to help you in all program areas at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and its outpatient clinics.

SPRINT Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial

Supported by:



If you join the SPRINT Research Study, you will receive at no cost:

- ✓ Blood Pressure Medication(s)
- ✓ Physical Exams
- ✓ Lab Tests
- ✓ Memory Tests
- ✓ EKGs (Electrocardiograms)

You must be at least 50 years old; have high blood pressure, with systolic (upper) number of at least 130; and have no history of diabetes or stroke.

To learn more, contact Cathy Anderson at 713-794-8912.

New Pulmonology Service Lets Veterans Breathe Easy

(continued from page 1)

allows doctors to navigate through airways and biopsy small lung nodules. It has a very low risk of complications and a high level of accuracy. The EBUS technique uses a special bronchoscope with an ultrasound transducer at the tip that lets doctors see and take samples of objects like lymph nodes and tumors near the windpipe. This is a very safe procedure that has increased the yield of these biopsies to more than 90 percent. It is routinely done before surgery for patients with lung cancer, avoiding a more invasive surgical procedure called mediastinoscopy.

A combination of advanced techniques was recently used to treat Clara Traylor. While sedated, a rigid bronchoscope was inserted through Traylor's throat and into her trachea, and a large benign tumor that blocked 90 percent of her main windpipe was easily removed. This non-surgical procedure was life-changing for this patient.

"When I was first referred to Dr. Casal, I could barely breathe. He

recommended the rigid bronchoscopy procedure," said Traylor. "I first saw him the beginning of the week, the procedure

took place in the middle of the week, and by the end of the week, I was home breathing like normal again."

Also an assistant professor of Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, Casal has advanced training in flexible and rigid bronchoscopy, bronchoscopic electrocautery, LASER bronchoscopy, cryotherapy, balloon bronchoplasty, endobronchial stent placement, endobronchial valve placement, endobronchial brachytherapy, photodynamic therapy, auto-fluorescence bronchoscopy, endobronchial ultrasound, electromagnetic navigation bronchoscopy, and pleuroscopy.

With specialized training in

interventional pulmonology from MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Casal brought a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the MEDVAMC.

"When I was first referred to Dr. Casal, I could barely breathe," said Clara Traylor. "By the end of the week, I was home breathing like normal."

"I spent an entire year in fellowship training at MD Anderson for interventional pulmonology, performing more than 800 procedures" said Casal. "When I arrived at the Houston VA, I began to assemble the equipment and tools for an Interventional Pulmonary Service. Dr. Caraballo, our Medical Care Line executive, and Dr. Kalavar, our chief of staff, were especially helpful once they saw the improved quality of life benefits for our Veterans."

Using techniques of interventional pulmonology, Casal has been able to assist patients who would otherwise be

hospital-bound in their last days.

"Without this treatment, many patients with airway blockages would have to stay in the hospital because they would be unable to breathe without high oxygen supplements, and even morphine assistance to relieve their feeling of suffocation," said Casal. "With the therapeutic treatments the Interventional Pulmonology Service offers, we are able to non-surgically remove blockages in the windpipe and return patients to their homes to be with loved ones."

"Beyond a doubt, our Interventional Pulmonology Service improves the quality of life for our patients," said Blase A. Caraballo, M.D., Medical Care Line executive at the MEDVAMC and the W.A. "Tex" and Deborah Moncrief, Jr. Chair at Baylor College of Medicine. "We are proud the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center has some of the best doctors, nurses, and experts in the country and offers the latest, minimally invasive alternatives for our Veterans."

☆ *Quentin Melson, Public Affairs Specialist (TCF Intern)*

Veterans' Questions

Answers

provided by
Patient Advocates
in Consumer Affairs

Room BA-200 (Basement)

(713) 794-7884

or e-mail

va@housgeneralquestions@va.gov

Q: How do I find out about clinical trials?

A: In collaboration with the Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. National Institutes of Health established a website, www.ClinicalTrials.gov, that offers up-to-date information for locating federally and privately supported clinical trials for a wide range of diseases and conditions. A clinical trial (also clinical research) is a research study of human volunteers to answer specific health questions.

Interventional trials determine whether experimental treatments or new ways of using known therapies are safe and effective under controlled environments. Observational trials address health issues in large groups of people or populations in natural settings.

Q: Is the VA going smoke-free?

A: In an effort to improve the health of Veterans, volunteers, visitors, and staff, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center will severely limit smoking on its campus this year. Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of disease, disability, and death in the United States. Smoking at the MEDVAMC will only be allowed in designated smoking areas. Veterans, employees, volunteers, and visitors will be ticketed and/or fined for smoking outside of these designated areas.

Q: Where did the Optical Shop go?

A: Responding to suggestions from patients, the Optical Shop at the Houston VA moved in April from the second floor Prosthetics Department to a location adjacent to the renovated Eye Clinic on the first floor near the nursing home entrance and increased the size of the floor plan.

Q: How do I get more news about the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center and Veterans' health care?

A: Send an e-mail to bobbigruner@va.gov to sign up to receive news releases and information. You can also visit www.houston.va.gov, like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter.

Use VA's MyHealthVet website at www.myhealth.va.gov. It is fast, easy, convenient, and secure.

To obtain a new prescription when no refills are left, Veterans must speak with their health care provider or contact the 24-hour VA Telecare Center at 713-794-8985 or toll-free 1-800-639-5137.

Q: I heard the Outpatient Pharmacy stopped doing refills at the Window. Is that true?

A: The Outpatient Pharmacy at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center fills almost 2,000 prescriptions at its window every day. Many of these are for routine refills and non-urgent medications; consequently, creating long wait times for Veterans who have critical medication needs, are being discharged from the hospital, or were seen in the emergency room.

In an effort to reduce unacceptable, long waits for urgent medication needs, the Outpatient Pharmacy no longer accepts routine prescription refill requests or fill new, non-emergency medications at its window. Refills and non-urgent medications are mailed to Veterans.

The Outpatient Pharmacy will make exceptions for emergency situations on a case-by-case basis. This might include a Veteran who has run out of critical medications such as insulin or blood pressure medications.

To help solve this problem and to avoid running out of medicine, Veterans are urged to order their next refill as soon as they receive a delivery.

Q: Traffic is so bad in Houston and I have an early doctor appointment. Can I stay at the Fisher House?

A: The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center is fortunate to have housing options available for Veterans and their families who have a medical need for temporary lodging. The general criteria for staying includes: 1) housing is medically necessary for pre- or post-care; 2) Be medically stable and capable of self-care or be accompanied by a caregiver able to provide care; 3) Be required to travel more than 100 miles from their home to the VA; 4) Can stay in an unsupervised setting; and 5) Have no communicable diseases.

Q: Does the VA have a nursing hotline?

A: The Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center operates the VA Network Telecare Center Hotline at 713-794-8985 or toll-free 1-800-639-5137. Registered nurses, social workers, and mental health professionals are ready to provide emergency counseling assistance, make appointments, and answer Veteran health care questions 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Important VA Telephone Numbers

Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center.....	713-791-1414
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278
VA Network Telecare Center.....	713-794-8985
	toll-free 1-800-639-5137
Beaumont VA Outpatient Clinic.....	409-981-8550
	toll-free 1-800-833-7734
Conroe VA Outpatient Clinic.....	936-522-4000
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 1949
Galveston VA Outpatient Clinic.....	409-761-3200
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12600
Lufkin - Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic.....	936-671-4300
	toll-free 1-800-209-3120
Lake Jackson VA Outpatient Clinic.....	979-230-4852
Richmond VA Outpatient Clinic.....	832-595-7700
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12800
Texas City VA Outpatient Clinic.....	409-986-2900
	toll-free 1-800-553-2278, ext. 12900
Pharmacy Refills.....	713-794-7648
	toll-free 1-800-454-1062 or www.myhealth.va.gov
Veterans Crisis Line.....	toll-free 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Caregiver Support Hotline.....	toll-free 1-855-260-3274
Appointment Center.....	toll-free 1-800-639-5137
Automated Appointment Information.....	713-794-7648
	toll-free 1-800-454-1062
VA Eligibility & Enrollment.....	713-794-7288
Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program.....	713-794-7848
Homeless Veterans Drop-In Center (1418 Preston St.).....	713-794-7533
Hotline for Homeless Veterans.....	toll-free 1-877-4AID VET

Assistance for Returning Troops from Iraq/Afghanistan

Team Members..... 713-794-7034/8825/7928

Vet Center (701 N. Post Oak Road)..... 713-682-2288

Vet Center (2900 Richmond Ave.)..... 713-523-0884

Vet Center (14300 Cornerstone Village Dr.)..... 713-578-4002

Vet Center (990 IH 10 North, Ste. 180, Beaumont) ... 409-981-8576

Patient Advocates

Houston/Lake Jackson..... 713-794-7884

Beaumont..... 1-800-833-7734, ext. 113

Conroe..... 936-522-4010, ext. 1952

Galveston/Texas City..... 713-791-1414, ext. 6586

Lufkin..... 936-671-4362

Richmond..... 832-595-7700

Houston VA National Cemetery..... 281-447-8686

Houston VA Regional Office..... 713-383-1999

toll-free 1-800-827-1000

Changes to Beneficiary Travel Pay

Beginning July 1, 2012, the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) and its outpatient clinics will transition to a new way of processing travel reimbursement claims. Except for rare exceptions, Veterans will be reimbursed for beneficiary travel using Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) to a checking or savings account. During the transition period, Jul. 1 - Sep. 30, 2012, Veterans will still be able to receive cash payments at the Agent Cashier Offices.

Benefits of the new EFT method include streamlining the travel claim process, improving tracking claims, cutting down on long lines at the Agent Cashier, and making your VA visits more convenient.

How do I start my EFT Payments?

Complete a form available from the Agent Cashier Office. Once you have a checking or savings account, and your EFT has been established, you can expect to receive reimbursement in 3 to 5 days from the date your claim was submitted to the MEDVAMC.

How will EFT affect me?

You should make sure you have sufficient funds for your travel to and from your VA appointment since immediate cash reimbursement will no longer be an option.

Will this affect the outpatient clinics?

The Agent Cashier Offices at the Beaumont and Lufkin outpatient clinics will close permanently on Sep. 30, 2012.

Who can I call if I have questions or need help?

For more information, contact the Agent Cashier at 713-794-7498.

