

Spring 2016

Bay VISIONS

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Bay Pines projects attract national attention

Project poised to improve Veterans' VA healthcare experience nationwide

Special to Bay Visions

Military Sexual Trauma: Effective Treatments are Available

Evidence shows MST treatment works with significant reductions in PTSD and depression symptoms by the end of treatment





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Bay Visions is a quarterly publication designed for Bay Pines VA Healthcare System (VAHCS) stakeholders. Its purpose is to inform and educate. Contents of Bay Visions are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by the U.S. Government, Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Health Administration or the Bay Pines VAHCS.

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www.baypines.va.gov

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From the Director

Welcome to the Spring issue of Bay Visions. As you will soon read, we continue to move forward on many fronts to improve health care delivery for the Veterans we serve. From the implementation of innovative programs and cutting edge medical research to ceremonial events held to honor the service and sacrifice of Veterans and their families - we are committed to providing accessible, high quality care and a customer experience befitting America's heroes. But we are not stopping there.

As part of VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald's set of breakthrough priorities, we have identified several initiatives that will further improve health care services, customer service and the employee experience, among other things. A few initiatives I will mention here include furthering same day access to care in areas like Primary Care and Mental Health, improving health care continuity and coordination within our Care in the Community programs, and continuing our efforts to support and assist homeless Veterans and those at risk. To do this, we know we must be steadfast in our support of creating a workplace for employees where they can thrive, feel engaged, and provide holistic care to meet the unique needs of the men and women we have the privilege and honor to serve.

To learn more about what we are doing to further improve health care for America's heroes, I encourage you to visit www.baypines.va.gov and subscribe to receive email updates. Thank you and please enjoy this issue of Bay Visions.

Sincerely,

SUZANNE M. KLINKER
Director, Bay Pines VA Healthcare System

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Do you have a story to share? If so, send an email with your story idea to vhabaypublicaffairs@va.gov or call (727) 398-6661 extension 15031.

Two Bay Pines Projects Attract National Attention

By Susan Wentzell, Deputy Communication Mgr., VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)
Jason Dangel, Public Affairs Officer, Bay Pines VAHCS

Two Bay Pines VA Healthcare System projects were among the top 13 'Promising Practice' finalists selected as part of the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Promising Practices Consortium competition, a new platform hosted online where VHA employees can share successful operational, clinical and program practices with the potential for enterprise-wide implementation.

The Promising Practices Consortium is championed by David J. Shulkin, M.D., VA Under Secretary for Health. It was created to foster a culture of innovation, enable system-wide dissemination of standardization of best practices and recognize VA employees in the process.

VA employees were invited to submit practices through December 15, 2015. Over 250 projects VA-wide

were submitted and reviewed since launch. Of those, 41 were selected as semi-finalists including seven projects from VISN 8 facilities to include Bay Pines, North Florida/South Georgia and the network office.

The two Bay Pines finalist projects, "Audiology and Optometry Direct Scheduling" and "Unit Tracking Board: Where We Stand at a Glance," made the final cut and were selected as "Gold Standard Practices." And two Bay Pines' employees who spearheaded the projects – Dr. Michelle Menendez, Chief, Audiology and Speech Pathology Service and Michael Finch, Quality Management Specialist and Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL), Quality Systems Service -- were recognized as "Gold Standard Fellows."

Project leads were offered the opportunity to present their ideas in front of a panel of Network and Medical Center Directors from across the country who will be supporting the spread of Gold Standard Practices through funding, dedicated personnel, and other resources.

Audiology & Optometry Direct Scheduling Pilot Improves Veterans Access

The 120-day Audiology and Optometry Direct Scheduling Pilot began at Bay Pines in March 2015. Its primary goal was for patients who needed Audiology (hearing) and Optometry (eye) services to be able to schedule their appointments directly--without having to be referred by their primary care provider, which required a visit to their doctor and was the current practice. An additional goal was to reduce the Primary Care workload, thereby improving access for other patients.

By the end of 2015, Veterans who chose to schedule appointments directly reduced their wait times for appointments by 19 days in Audiology and nine days in Optometry. And other changes made as a result of the pilot have made a big difference in patient access and experience. "By simply eliminating an appointment with a primary care provider, we were able to free up primary care physicians to treat more patients," said Menendez. "And the Veterans love the ease of scheduling an appointment themselves or simply walking in and receiving the (audiology) services they need at our highly utilized walk in clinic for established patients and same day access for new patients at our larger sites. It was a WIN-WIN for everyone," she said.



Dr. Michelle Menendez, Chief, Audiology and Speech Pathology Service and Michael Finch, Quality Management Specialist and Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL), Quality Systems Service, pose for a photo at VA Central Office in Washington, D.C. while there to present their improvement projects to a panel of Network and Medical Center Directors from across the country. (Photo courtesy of Michael Finch)

Unit Tracking Board Makes Data Come Alive for Nurses

Collecting core measurement data—like the fall rate among patients—and communicating it to the medical staff can lead to new and better ways to take care of Veterans and a better overall patient experience. Tracking core measures helps staff monitor the outcomes of recommended treatments that scientific evidence shows produces the best results.

But core health care data is often complex and difficult to display. Nurses and other clinical professionals may struggle to understand it and as a result, important information can be overlooked or neglected by those who provide direct patient care and are in the best position to make positive changes that can improve patient outcomes.

Finch knew there was a better way to communicate this important information to front line staff—and it wouldn't cost a lot to do it. In March 2014, he created a Unit Tracking Board of core measures that's simple, easy to understand and dynamic in that it can be changed and customized for different medical units with ease.

The board allows staff to quickly glance at the numbers, understand their importance and apply it to

their daily practice in order to continually improve the patient experience.

When there is no new data—such as no new patient falls or infections—the laminated board shows the number of days since – for example: "30 days since our last fall." It also displays Veteran satisfaction scores for the medical center along with other data.

Together, the information provided on the tracking board can instill pride about the successes of their unit along with a reminder to continually improve through staff collaboration and a shared goal of providing the very best care to Veterans.

"Both of the projects recognized nationally as Gold Standard Practices speak to our organization's goal to be a national leader, innovator, and early adopter of new programs aimed to improve the Veteran experience," said Suzanne M. Klinker, Director, Bay Pines VAHCS.

"While these projects are large in scale, smaller and equally as important improvements are made by Bay Pines employees every day," she continued. "I am very proud to be associated with these professionals and admire their commitment to building a high performing network equipped to meet and exceed health care needs of America's heroes."

Dr. Joseph Miller, Optometry Section Chief, Bay Pines VAHCS, examines a patient during a routine appointment at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center. Miller, along with many others, was instrumental in managing the direct scheduling pilot within Optometry.



Vietnam Veterans Honored During Ceremony a Bay Pines

By Jason W. Dangel, Public Affairs Officer, Bay Pines VAHCS

On April 5, a long overdue “thank you and welcome home” was rendered to Vietnam Veterans and their families during a ceremony to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center.

A crowd of nearly 1,000 people made up primarily of Vietnam Veterans attended the event where they heard directly from local VA leaders, U.S. Congressman David Jolly and Medal of Honor Recipient Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Gary Littrell.

Each Vietnam Veteran also received a commemorative lapel pin with the words “A grateful nation thanks and honors you.” The pins were made available to the Bay Pines VA as a commemorative partner of the United States Vietnam War Commemoration Commission. A short news video of the event is available at: www.baypines.va.gov/news/BVNB.asp.

The week prior to the ceremony, on March 29, a separate event was held as Bay Pines VAHCS leaders and representatives from Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 522, dedicated a special wall display to recognize the service and sacrifice of Vietnam Veterans and their



families. The wall display is located at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center (building 100) in the history hallway. The hallway is located on the west side of the building on the first floor.

The recognition activities were just two of many events planned by the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System to honor the service and sacrifice of Vietnam Veterans. To be notified about future events, please visit www.baypines.va.gov and subscribe to receive email updates.

(Left) Medal of Honor Recipient Gary L. Littrell delivers remarks to hundreds of Vietnam Veterans and their loved ones during the Vietnam War Commemoration Ceremony at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center on April 5, 2016.



(Below) On March 29, Bay Pines VAHCS leaders and representatives from Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 522, dedicated a special wall display to recognize the service and sacrifice of Vietnam Veterans and their families. The wall display is located at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center (building 100) in the history hallway. The hallway is located on the west side of the building on the first floor.



Military Sexual Trauma: Effective Treatment is Available

By Jessica Keith, PhD, Clinical Psychologist and Program Manager for the Center for Sexual Trauma Services, Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences Service, Bay Pines VAHCS

Increasingly the suffering of our military service members who have experienced sexual trauma while serving the country is being recognized. Military sexual trauma, or MST, is the term used to describe the experiences of thousands of current and former male and female service members who were sexually assaulted or repeatedly sexually harassed while on active military duty. MST may involve being pressured into sexual activity, often with threats of physical, emotional, or career consequences for refusing; being sexually assaulted while unable to consent, for example, while drugged or intoxicated; unwanted sexual touching or grabbing, or being physically forced into sexual activities. Perpetrators of MST may be other service members, including those within the same military unit and those higher ranking, or may be civilians.

Sadly, the experience of MST is not uncommon. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national MST screening program, in which every Veteran seen at VA is asked directly about MST, about 1 out of 4 female Veterans reports experiencing MST. And, despite popular conceptualizations of sexual trauma as something only suffered by women, male Veterans also report experiencing MST - about 1 in 100, according to VA screening data. Because there are far greater numbers of men than women who have served in the military, the number of male and female Veterans reporting an experience of MST is about the same.

It is important to note that MST is an experience and not a mental health condition in and of itself. Indeed, some Veterans who report MST are remarkably resilient, have no psychiatric diagnosis, and indicate no

interest in treatment. However, for many Veterans, MST is linked to a host of detrimental outcomes that last for years or decades. Research indicates that Veterans with a history of MST are at least twice as likely to have a mental health condition compared to those without MST, with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosed most commonly. Major depression and other mood disorders, physical health problems, chronic pain, substance abuse, insomnia, relationship problems, decreased quality of life, and suicide attempts are also more common in Veterans who report a history of MST. A prior history of trauma, whether the MST was a one time or a repeating event, and, crucially, whether any supportive response was received at the time of the MST influence the later impact of the MST. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing stigma of sexual assault on victims, many do not report or seek help for MST while in the military. Coming forward for help is likely especially difficult for male survivors.

Despite this devastating impact, it is possible for those who experience MST to heal, and help is available. It is a federal law that any Veteran who has experienced MST can receive VA treatment free of charge for mental and physical health conditions related to the MST, regardless of whether the Veteran is eligible for other VA care. The Veteran does not need to have reported the MST or have documentation it occurred - if the Veteran requests treatment for MST, it is provided. Services are based on substantial research about what helps sexual trauma survivors recover. For some Veterans, this might include focusing on strategies for coping with challenging emotions or relationship difficulties. For others, this might involve processing the trauma in more depth, decreasing avoidance, and challenging negative thoughts related to the trauma, such as self-blame or difficulty trusting others. Gold-standard, evidence-based, cognitive-behavioral treatments such as Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE) have been found effective for treating PTSD due to MST, and are used across VA.

Some Veterans suffering from the impact of MST may need even more intensive treatment, which can be provided in a residential setting. The Bay Pines VA Healthcare System's Center for Sexual Trauma Services (CSTS), established in 2000, was the first residential program for MST and continues to serve male and female Veterans from across the country. CSTS includes a

16-bed, approximately 2 month, residential program that provides intensive, personalized evidence-based treatment for the impact of MST. Individual CPT and PE, as well as education, coping skills, recreation therapy, community reintegration, mindfulness, and gender-specific special topics groups are provided. Approximately 100 male and female Veterans, roughly evenly split and in mixed gender cohorts, are treated in the program each year by an interdisciplinary team of MST experts.

The good news is, evidence shows this treatment works - with significant reductions in PTSD and depression symptoms by the end of treatment. This program, like many of its kind across VA, continues to develop innovative, evidence-based treatment to serve

our Veterans recovering from the impact of MST.

If you feel you are a victim of MST, talk to your Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) to see what treatment options may be available to you. You can also contact the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System's MST Coordinator, Lisa Shoemaker, by calling 727-398-6661 extension 17170. Additional information about MST is available at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp.

NOTE: This material is the result of work supported with resources and the use of facilities at the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, Department of Veterans Affairs, Bay Pines, Florida. The contents of this paper do not represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States Government.

"The good news is, evidence shows (MST) treatment works - with significant reductions in PTSD and depression symptoms by the end of treatment."

Jessica Keith, PhD, Clinical Psychologist
Program Manager, Center for Sexual Trauma Services, Bay Pines VAHCS

Did You Know?

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) is an annual campaign in April to raise public awareness about sexual assault. In VA, we focus in particular on sexual assault and sexual harassment occurring during military service - also known as "military sexual trauma" or "MST." This year, VA's national theme for SAAM activities is **"Recovery from Military Sexual Trauma: Strength in Community."**

Learn more at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp or call 727-398-6661 extension 17170.

Bay Pines Researcher selected to Receive Grant to Study Gulf War Toxins

By Jason Dangel, Public Affairs Officer, Bay Pines VAHCS

Dr. Bruce Citron, a Molecular Biologist with the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System (VAHCS) Research and Development Service, was selected to receive a Department of Defense (DoD) research grant for a three-year study to examine the relationship between toxin exposure and neurological issues experienced by Gulf War Veterans.

Grant funding is being provided by DoD's Office of Congressionally Directed Research Programs (CDMRP). The grant award totals nearly \$545,000.

The study will test the hypothesis that exposure to Gulf War toxins such as nerve agent protectant, insect repellent and insecticides produce measurable negative neurological changes impacting cognitive performance, neuronal connectivity in the brain, and normal brain cell function. Citron will also test the hypothesis that antioxidant therapy may stop or slow down disease processes associated with diagnosed neurological issues like Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

"The data tells us that about 20 percent of Veterans who served in Operation Desert Storm have some type of Gulf War illness. Within this group, neurological conditions are very common," said Citron, who also serves as a professor with the Department of Molecular Medicine, Morsani College of Medicine, University of South Florida.

"This is obviously a significant health concern and one that we are trying to better understand through research," he continued. "Understanding the brain and neurological mechanisms has been a research focus of mine for many years. This grant is allowing us to expand research into these areas as well as further explore possible therapeutic agents that may arrest or slow down neurological decline."

The study is scheduled to begin this month and conclude in March 2019 and includes the participation of members of his lab, Drs. Jessica Chang and Whitney Ratliff, and collaborators from the University of South Florida, Drs. Clifton Gooch, Ronald Mervis, and Getachew Dagne.

"Research is a critical part of our mission here at Bay Pines as well as the entire Veterans Health Administration," said Dr. Allison Williams, Associate Chief of Staff for Research, Bay Pines VAHCS. "VA Research is also unique because of its focus on health issues that affect America's Veterans."



Dr. Bruce Citron, Molecular Biologist, Bay Pines VAHCS and Professor, Dept. of Medicine, Morsani College of Medicine, University of South Florida

"We are very proud that Dr. Citron has been selected to begin research work in an area that affects so many Veterans that bravely served during the Gulf War," she continued. "It is our aim to better understand the relationship between toxin exposure and neurological issues while contributing to advancements in health care for Veterans and others."

When active, Citron's study will become one of many active research protocols ongoing within the Bay Pines VAHCS. In 2015 alone, the healthcare system's Research and Development Service managed 54 active research projects funded at more than \$1.6 million. Active areas of study include neurological disorders, cardiology, mental health, audiology, infectious disease, dermatology, pulmonology, oncology and long-term care.

To learn more about VA Research, please visit www.research.va.gov.

Mark your calendars...

for these upcoming events



Event: Veterans Town Hall Meeting

Date/Time: Tuesday, May 3, 2016 | 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Location: J.C. Cobb Room (building 100, first floor), C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center

Description: The Bay Pines VAHCS in collaboration with the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office will host a quarterly Veterans town hall meeting on Tuesday, May 3, 2016 at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center. The event will take place from 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. in the JC Cobb room located on the first floor of the main hospital building. VA outreach services and special program representatives will also be available to assist Veterans. Services available will include VA health care enrollment and eligibility; VA benefits and claims assistance; and patient advocate services. Veterans and their families, congressional stakeholders, Veteran Service Organizations and other community partners are invited to attend. For questions, please contact the Bay Pines VAHCS Office of Public Affairs at 727-398-9531.



Event: Annual Memorial Day Ceremony

Date/Time: Monday, May 30, 2016 | 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Location: Bay Pines National Cemetery

Description: The Bay Pines VAHCS will commemorate Memorial Day with a ceremony on Monday, May 30 at 10:00 a.m. The event will take place at the Bay Pines National Cemetery. This is the only National Cemetery in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties and the largest observance of Memorial Day in Pinellas County with more than 3,000 expected attendees. Veterans, their families and friends, and the general public are invited to attend. More information will be communicated when available. For questions, please call 727-398-9531. To receive current information about the ceremony, visit www.baypines.va.gov and subscribe to receive email updates.



Event: Primary Care Salute to Vietnam Veterans

Date/Time: Flag Day - Tuesday, June 14, 2016

Location: All Bay Pines VAHCS facilities

Description: As part of scheduled events intended to honor the service and sacrifice of Vietnam Veterans and their families, the Bay Pines VAHCS will be conducting a Primary Care Salute to Vietnam Veterans at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical center and outpatient clinics located in Bradenton, Cape Coral, Naples, Palm Harbor, Port Charlotte, Sarasota, St. Petersburg, and Sebring. As part of planned activities, commemorative lapel pins will be distributed to Vietnam Veterans by their respective Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT). More information will be communicated when available. For questions, please call 727-398-9531. To receive current information about the ceremony, visit www.baypines.va.gov and subscribe to receive email updates.

Note: All events listed on this page are subject change. For the most up-to-date information, please visit www.baypines.va.gov. While your there, sign-up for our free E-News service!

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Palm Harbor VA Community Clinic

35209 U.S. Highway 19 North
Palm Harbor, Florida 34684
(727) 734-5276

C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center

10000 Bay Pines Blvd.
Bay Pines, FL 33744
(727) 398-6661 or 1-888-820-0230

St. Petersburg VA Community Clinic

840 Dr. MLK Jr. St. N.
St. Petersburg, Florida 33705
(727) 502-1700

Bradenton VA Community Clinic

5520 State Road 64, Suite 101
Bradenton, Florida 34208
(941) 721-0649

Sarasota VA Community Clinic

5682 Bee Ridge Rd., Suite 100
Sarasota, Florida 34233
(941) 371-3349

Port Charlotte VA Community Clinic

4161 Tamiami Trail, Suite 401
Port Charlotte, Florida 33952
(941) 235-2710

Sebring VA Community Clinic

5901 U.S. Highway 27 S.
Sebring, FL 33870
(863) 471-6227

Lee County VA Healthcare Center

2489 Diplomat Parkway E.
Cape Coral, FL 33909
(239) 652-1800 or 1-888-513-0045

Naples VA Community Clinic

2685 Horseshoe Drive S.
Naples, Florida 34104
(239) 659-9188

Pinellas

Manatee

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Highlands

Sarasota

Desoto

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Important VA Phone Numbers

Bay Pines VA Healthcare System

(727) 398-6661 or toll-free 1-888-820-0230

Lee County Healthcare Center

(239) 652-1800 or toll-free (888) 513-0045

Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-8255 press 1
The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline.

Scheduling an Appointment

(727) 398-6661 or toll-free 1-888-820-0230, press 2
Veterans who need to schedule, cancel or reschedule appointments can call Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Prescriptions

(727) 398-6661 or toll-free 1-888-820-0230, press 1
Veterans who need to request a prescription refill or check the status of refills can call Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Billing Questions

1-866-793-4591
Veterans who have questions about a bill received from the Bay Pines VAHCS can call the VA Revenue Center.

Patient Advocate

(727) 398-6661 or toll-free 1-888-820-0230 ext. 15024
Patient Advocates serve as liaisons between patients and the healthcare system, act on the patient's behalf, and help patients understand their rights and responsibilities.

My HealtheVet

www.myhealth.va.gov
Veterans can manage their health by logging onto My HealtheVet, which offers access to Veteran health benefits and services

VA Benefits (other than health care)

1-800-827-1000
Veterans who need information on VA benefits including VA compensation and pension, home loans, and education can call the VA Regional Office.