Navy Veteran finds hope, recovery and employment
57 year-old Jeffrey McLaughlin credits Bay Pines for turning his life around

Neurosurgeon hired to lead spine care program
New surgeon expects to begin performing surgeries soon for patients suffering from degenerative disc disease
From the Director

Nearly five years ago, the President of the United States and VA Secretary issued a plan to end Veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. That same year, VA launched the End Veteran Homelessness initiative, which sought to provide permanent housing to homeless Veterans and supportive services to those at risk for homelessness. The Bay Pines VA Healthcare System has made significant progress in the local effort to end Veteran homelessness across the communities we serve. This year alone, more than 1,300 Veterans have been housed by Bay Pines and our partners across southwest Florida. That is 1,300 heroes who have a safe place to sleep at night and ability to access high quality health care and supportive services available through VA. On page four, you will read about a U.S. Navy Veteran who overcame homelessness and struggles with addiction through our Domiciliary Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program available at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center. Today, he is a proud Bay Pines employee at the medical center and maintains his own home.

As we approach the end of the calendar year, we will continue to make VA’s goal to end Veteran homelessness a priority across the communities we serve through innovative agency and interdepartmental partnership programs and Veteran outreach in the community. The bottom line is that America’s Veterans should never be without a place to call home, living without care.

To conclude, if you know a Veteran at risk or you yourself are struggling with homelessness, I encourage you to reach out to VA for help.

Sincerely,

SUZANNE M. KLINKER
Director, Bay Pines VA Healthcare System
Navy Veteran finds hope, recovery, housing and employment through VA

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“I was 100 percent committed to the program, and they helped me get my life back,” Jeff said.

Although humble and soft spoken, the 57 year-old St. Petersburg native often shares his story of recovery with his peers in an effort to support personal growth.

“I got my first DUI when I was 19 years old,” he said. I was a binge drinker back then and didn’t think anything of it. By 1998, I received my fourth DUI and thought I had lost his driver’s license for life. From there, things only got worse.

He increasingly struggled with addiction and was divorced from his wife in 2003. Later, Jeff was sentenced to prison after violating probation.

While incarcerated in Bushnell, Fla. he reflected on his life decisions and had an epiphany. “I needed to get sober and find God,” he said.

Because of this moment of self-reflection, Jeff completed substance abuse treatment and reengaged with the church during this time, which inspired him to remain clean, sober and help others.

He continued his journey of self-development and earned a physical training certification, providing him the credentials to teach a Wellness and Fitness Class in the prison. He also became active in the recovery community, and engaged in the Veterans program at the facility.

“I wanted to come to a VA program that would help with employment when I got out, so I started to prepare,” he said.

As he prepared for his March 2014 release date, he met with the regional VA Prison Reentry Social Worker and applied to the Bay Pines DRRTP program. Jeff was formally admitted to the DRRTP program on June 10, 2014.

“I was relieved to have a place to stay,” he recalled. “I had been homeless for about a month, and just needed a fresh start after being in prison for 9 years.”

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Neurosurgeon selected to lead Spine Care Program

The Bay Pines VA Healthcare System (VASHCS) remains focused on providing accessible, high quality healthcare to Veterans residing across southwest Florida by hiring more doctors and nurses and expanding existing facilities and services. Spine surgery will soon be added to the list of expanded services.

In early July, Dr. Anthony Jabre was selected to lead and grow the Bay Pines VASHCS’s new spine surgery program at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center. Jabre is a neurosurgeon with nearly 30 years of experience in the public and private sectors.

Prior to coming to Bay Pines, Jabre was the attending neurosurgeon for the VA Boston Healthcare System. He received his medical degree in 1978 from Saint Joseph University in Lebanon and completed his neurological residency at the University of Cincinnati Hospitals in 1985. Jabre also completed neurosurgical fellowships at the National Hospital in London, England and University Hospital in Zurich, Switzerland and is also a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

In addition to seeing patients routinely for outpatient appointments, Jabre said he expects to begin performing surgical interventions by the end of the calendar year for patients suffering from degenerative disc disease—a condition in which pain is caused from a damaged disc in the spine.

“I view my role as part of a larger, multidisciplinary team focused on providing treatment options for Veterans experiencing neck and back pain,” Jabre said. “The option of spine surgery will soon be added to the variety of services offered at the medical center.”

Dr. Dominique A. Thuriere, the healthcare system’s Chief of Staff, noted that Jabre will help enrich the range of treatment options for Veterans experiencing back pain with a focus on improved physical function. “I really see our spine surgery program as icing on the cake for our pain program here at Bay Pines,” Thuriere said. “While we have always been able to provide this level of care for Veterans through community providers, the establishment of an in-house program improves health care continuity and access to pain management services.”

Spine Care Program

Robert Larson, Assistant Chief, Social Work Service, facilitated a breakout session on various VA initiatives to include the National Resource Directory (NRD), the Community Provider Toolkit, and VA smartphone applications. NRD is an online resource developed by VA and the U.S. Department of Defense to connect wounded warriors, their families, and caregivers with community agencies and providers who have the knowledge and skills to support them. The Community Provider Toolkit is a VA mental health internet site with an array of links to resources to include benefits, educational, mental health program locator, and the Veteran’s support line. The discussion on mobile computer applications (apps) generated extensive interest. Veterans may download apps to their smart phones to use in conjunction with a course of evidence based psychotherapy, such as the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Coach, the Cognitive Processing Therapy Coach, and the Mindfulness Coach.

The apps may be individualized to include pictures or voices of friends and families, motivational phrases, and contact telephone numbers for support.

Visit the websites below to learn more about resources discussed in this article.

Caregiver Support Program - www.caregiver.va.gov
Community Provider Toolkit - www.medicalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders
VA Smartphone Apps - mobile.va.gov/appstore
Nearly two years ago, U.S. Army Vietnam Veteran John Brouwer contracted an aggressive bacterial infection in his legs that ultimately resulted in a double leg amputation at a hospital in the community. Following his surgery, medical professionals at the hospital told John he would never walk again and would forever be confined to a wheelchair.

“The end result was not satisfactory,” John said referring to the surgery. “I would never walk again or be able to have weight bearing again on my legs.”

At the time, he was not enrolled in the VA health care system, but was informed about his potential health care benefits by a nurse involved with his early rehabilitation activities at the hospital.

“I heard about the VA from a nurse,” he said. “And since it was almost 50 years since I had served, I decided, well, I’ll try this. I just didn’t think of it on my own.”

After being assessed by clinicians at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center, it was determined that a surgical revision was needed to correct his residual limbs. Following a successful surgery at the James A. Haley Veterans’ Hospital in Tampa on February 14, 2015, he returned to the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center to start the lengthy process of rehabilitation. The turning point in John’s care was his involvement in the healthcare system’s Recreation Therapy program – a program tailored to help Veterans overcome illnesses, disabilities and other conditions through treatment, education, and recreation services. The ultimate goal of the program is to enhance Veterans’ health, function, independence, and quality of life.

“The first thing that woke me up here at Bay Pines was Recreation Therapy,” John said. “My first excursion was to a local restaurant for a fish fry. After the dinner was over these ladies were lining up wanting to dance with me. I couldn’t believe it. I spent about an hour on the dance floor being twirled around in a wheelchair. I thought, you know, I may just fit in this world again.”

From that point forward, John never looked back as he got involved in adaptive biking, kayaking, balloon volleyball, water skiing – almost anything and everything the program offered.

Today, John is strong enough to wear prosthetic legs and is getting closer to his goal of walking again.

“Before, I was relegated to living a life in a wheelchair in a nursing home or assisted living facility. I came here (Bay Pines), and the VA set me free.”

Watch John’s full video story and previous Veteran Viewpoint episodes at: www.baypines.va.gov/news/viewpoint.asp

**About Veteran Viewpoint**

Veteran Viewpoint is an ongoing video series developed by the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System that highlights personal VA health care stories from Veterans residing in southwest Florida. Through personal, one-on-one interviews these heroes share detailed and private accounts of their experiences as users of VA health care – a system dedicated to providing Veterans with timely, accessible, high quality care that is personalized, proactive and patient driven.

Do you have a story to share? If so, please email the Bay Pines VAHCS Office of Public Affairs at vhabaypublicaffairs@va.gov.
The Power of 1: Once Click, one call, one text - one life

One small act can make a big difference in the life of a Veteran or Service member in crisis. The Veterans Crisis Line is asking you to think about The Power of 1 and how a single act can encourage Veterans to access confidential support and resources. Everyone can be the person who makes a difference in a Veteran’s life, and connecting with support doesn't have to be hard. The Veterans Crisis Line can help.

Free, Confidential Resources
The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource that Veterans, their families, and their friends can access every day at any time. Trained responders are ready to listen, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Since launching in 2007, the Veterans Crisis Line has answered more than 1.6 million calls and made more than 45,000 lifesaving rescues. Locally, the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System (VAHCS) has responded to more than 4,000 calls since 2009. In 2015 alone, Bay Pines initiated more than 1.6 million calls and made more than 45,000 lifesaving rescues. Locally, the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System’s Suicide Awareness Walk at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center will include guest speakers from VA and MacDill Air Force Base; musical performances by the Keswick Christian School Choir; a special parade of colors provided by local Veteran Service Organizations; and traditional military presentations to include the posting and retiring of the U.S. Flag, a firing salute, a taps performance and more. For questions call 727-398-6661 extension 15031.

Identifying Signs of Crisis
VA urges groups and individuals nationwide to stay alert for signs of suicide risk. The first step in preventing suicide is understanding the warning signs; people may show signs of risk before considering harming themselves. Warning signs include:
- Hopelessness, feeling as if there’s no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling as if there’s no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug abuse
- Withdrawing from family and friends

If you notice these warning signs in a Veteran, tell him or her about the Veterans Crisis Line, or make the call yourself. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text to 838255 for free, confidential support, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Spread the Word
Help Veterans Crisis Line show how the Power of 1 single act can save a life. Visit VeteransCrisisLine.net/SpreadTheWord to download free outreach materials, including flyers to print and distribute, digital ads and more. For additional information, please visit VeteransCrisisLine.net or call the Bay Pines VAHCS Suicide Prevention Team at 727-398-6661 extension 10433.

The presence of the following signs requires immediate attention:
- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself
- Looking for ways to kill yourself
- Talking about death, dying or suicide
- Self-destructive behavior (drug abuse, weapons, etc.)

Veterans, employees and community partners participate in the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System’s Suicide Awareness Walk at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center on Sept. 10. The walk was hosted by the healthcare system during Suicide Prevention Month which is recognized each September.

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