Director’s Briefing

Suicide prevention is the Department of Veterans Affairs’ top clinical priority. Our focus is on saving lives. It is important for Veterans and former service members to know there is someplace they can turn if they are facing a mental health emergency.

Two recent policy changes have made VA health care resources for mental health emergencies available to more Veterans and former service members.

On January 9, President Trump signed an executive order that allows newly minted Veterans transitioning from active duty to contact the nearest VA medical center or Vet Center today, ask for mental health services, and start receiving care. To receive care, these new Veterans must (1) have served in the active military, naval, or air service, and (2) have been discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

Additionally, since July 5, 2017, any former service member with an Other-than-Honorable (OTH) administrative discharge may qualify for a 90-day episode of care which can include inpatient, residential or outpatient care.

Simply put, these individuals and other Veterans can go to any VA medical center or Vet Center with an emergent mental health need. A VA provider will assess each individual to determine the extent of the mental health emergency, and provide care and resources appropriate to the assessment.

There are many ways Veterans can get help.

All Veterans in crisis, or anyone concerned about a Veteran, can call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 (press 1), or text 838255, or chat online at https://www.veteranscrisisline.net. Help for Veterans is also available by calling 911 or going to the nearest emergency room. For emergency room visits by Veterans for mental health emergencies, the local ER is
asked to notify the St. Cloud VA at 320-255-6340 so we can make every effort to provide benefits appropriate to the individual Veteran. Help is always available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at the St. Cloud VA. Veterans can seek care at our Urgent Care clinic in Bldg. 1, which is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, seven days per week. After 6 p.m., Veterans can go Bldg. 111, where we maintain a mental health triage service. These services are available 365 days of the year.

The rate of death by suicide among Veterans who do not use VA care is increasing at a significantly greater rate than that among Veterans who do use VA care. VA data tells us that on average, 20 Veterans a day die from suicide in the United States. Of those 20, fourteen have not used VA care.

We seek everyone’s help in eliminating suicide among Veterans—a necessary first step is getting them the care they need, when it is needed.

Help us #Be There for Veterans. Community hospitals and providers, civic groups, and individuals who seek to help Veterans by raising awareness about mental health wellness and suicide prevention programs should visit: https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/BeThere.aspx, or contact Mary Jo Pine, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, at 320-255-6480, ext. 6719.

Stephen D. Black, FACHE
Director, St. Cloud VA Health Care System

**Go Red for Women Veterans**

Every February, the Women Veterans Program at the St. Cloud VA joins the American Heart Association’s efforts to raise awareness and provide education about heart disease and stroke among women Veterans.

Women Veterans are invited to join the effort by wearing red on Feb. 2, and by learning more about heart disease in women while helping to paint a mosaic in support of heart disease prevention, on February 15, at 6 p.m. in Bldg. 4, Room 129, at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, located at 4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud.

For more information or to confirm attendance on Feb. 15, contact Amber Willert, Women Veterans Program Manager at amber.willert@va.gov, or call (320) 252-1670, ext. 6655. Confirmations are requested by Feb. 13.

**New Online Tool Will Provide Veterans with Customized Instructions for Discharge Upgrade Process**

A new web-based tool that will provide customized guidance to Veterans who
desire to upgrade or change the conditions of their military discharge is now available.

By answering a few short questions, Veterans will receive information on the specific armed services board to contact, the form/s to fill out, special guidance applicable to their case, where to send their application and helpful tips for appealing their discharge.

The military has estimated that tens of thousands of Veterans with less than honorable discharges are especially likely to have unjust discharges deserving of upgrades. These are Veterans who were discharged due to incidents relating to post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or sexual orientation. Fragmented and confusing information has historically deterred Veterans from obtaining crucial information and — in many cases — necessary benefits.

The discharge upgrade tool is available at https://www.vets.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions.

Vietnam Era Veterans Recognition and Town Hall Meeting

A ceremony honoring Vietnam era Veterans living in Douglas County and surrounding areas followed by a town hall meeting focused on improving VA health care services and programs is scheduled on Feb. 20, at 5 p.m., at Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 936, located at 1102 3rd Ave East, in Alexandria.

The first item on the agenda is the Vietnam era Veterans recognition ceremony, which recognizes all men and women who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces from November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975. Vietnam era Veterans and families desiring to participate in the commemoration event can simply show up and check in. The town hall meeting will take place immediately afterwards.

In addition, County Veteran Services and VA staff will be available beginning at 4 p.m. to discuss enrollment in VA health care and provide information on the full range of Veterans benefit programs.

St. Cloud VA Hosts Local Veterans Art Show

Artwork by Veterans will be on display at the Veterans Art Show on Wednesday, February 7, from 12:30 to 6:30 p.m., and Thursday, February 8, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., in the Auditorium (Building 8) on the St. Cloud VA Medical Center campus. The show is open to the public.

The art show is part of the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition, which is an opportunity for Veterans to express themselves through various artistic
mediums and to gain recognition for their creative accomplishments. Winning entries at the local show move on to the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition.

For questions about the show, contact Madge Scherer at 320-252-1670, ext. 7336.

**VA Becomes First Hospital System to Release Opioid Prescribing Rates**

VA has begun publicly posting information on opioids dispensed from VA pharmacies, along with VA’s strategies to prescribe these pain medications appropriately and safely. VA becomes the only health care system in the country to post information on its opioid-prescribing rates.

An interactive map shows data over a five-year period (2012-2017) and does not include Veterans’ personal information. The posted information shows opioid-dispensing rates for each facility and how much those rates have changed over time.

It is important to note that because the needs and conditions of Veterans may be different at each facility, rates may also be different for that reason, and cannot be compared directly.

The prescribing rate information will be updated semi-annually, on January 15 and July 15 of each year.

VA currently uses a multifaceted approach to reduce the need for the use of opioids among Veterans. Since 2012, the Opioid Safety Initiative has focused on the safe use and slow and steady decrease in VA opioid dispensing. VA also uses other therapies, including physical therapy and complementary and integrative health alternatives, such as meditation, yoga and cognitive-behavioral therapy.

A link to the interactive map, including St. Cloud VA’s prescribing rate on opioid use, may be found here.

**Calling All Artists**

The 2018 National Veterans Day Poster Contest is underway. Each year the Veterans Day National Committee publishes a commemorative Veterans Day poster. The poster is selected from artwork submitted by artists nationwide and is distributed to VA facilities, military installations around the world, and across cities and towns in our nation. It also serves as the cover of the official program for the Veterans Day Observance at Arlington National Cemetery.

2018 marks the Centennial Commemoration of the end of World War I on November 11, 1918. The theme for the 2018 Veterans Day Poster is: “The War to End All Wars.”

The deadline for submissions is April 1, 2018. To learn about poster guidelines and submission process, visit https://www.va.gov/opa/vetsday/.

**Wanted!**

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System is dedicated to providing exceptional health care to our service men and women. Join our team as a volunteer to honor our Nation’s Veterans today!

Volunteers are needed for numerous assignments throughout the health care
system and we need your help to meet a growing demand. Voluntary Service offers flexible scheduling, assignment specific training, and a commitment to excellence for all customers. Day, evening, and weekend opportunities are available. Please call the Voluntary Service office at 320-255-6365 or email us at vhastcvavsstaff@va.gov for more information.

Veterans and Family Members Welcome

Coffee Talk
Non-enrolled Veterans, Veterans new to the VA health care system, and enrolled Veterans who want to learn how to most effectively use VA systems of care are invited to attend Coffee Talk on Friday, Feb. 9, at 2 p.m., in Building 4, Room 114, at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center (enter via Bldg. 1 entrance). Can’t make the Talk in person? Dial-in via telephone at: 800-767-1750, participant code 11242#.

Mental Health Recovery Outreach Group
This informal group meeting hosted by the St. Cloud VA to help Veterans begin their own recovery journey meets the first Wednesday of each month. Veterans and family members are welcome to attend the next meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 7, from 5 to 6 p.m., at the Good Earth Co-Op, 2010 Veterans Drive, in St. Cloud. VA enrollment or pre-registration is not required to attend the meeting.

Application Process for New Veteran ID Card Now Available

The application process for the national Veterans Identification Card (VIC) is now available.

Veterans with honorable service can apply for the ID card, which will provide proof of military service, and may be accepted by retailers in lieu of the standard DD-214 form to obtain promotional discounts and other services where offered to Veterans.

The VIC provides a more portable and secure alternative for those who served the minimum obligated time in service, but did not meet the retirement or medical discharge threshold. Veterans who served in the armed forces, including the reserve components, and who have a discharge of honorable or general (under honorable conditions) can request a VIC.

To apply for a VIC, visit vets.gov, click on “Sign In” in the top right-hand corner and establish an ID.me account. When your identity is verified, request to “Apply for the Veteran ID Card.”
Veterans who apply for a card should receive it within 60 days and can check delivery status of their cards at vets.gov.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Veterans Affairs Radio Show
Monday, Feb. 5  8:10-8:30 a.m.
KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.

Veterans Law Clinic (by appointment only)
Tuesday, Feb. 6  Noon-2 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 20  Noon-2 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 28, Room 126
Free legal consultation for Veterans. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320-253-0138 or 1-800-622-7773 to schedule an appointment.

Veterans Art Show and Reception
Wednesday, Feb. 7  12:30-6:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 8  9 a.m.-3 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Auditorium (Bldg. 8)
Local Veterans artwork will be on display. Open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

Mental Health Recovery Outreach Group
Wednesday, Feb. 7  5-6 p.m.
Good Earth Co-Op
2010 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud
Hosted by the St. Cloud VA, Veterans and family members are welcome to attend. VA enrollment or pre-registration is not required to attend the meeting.

Coffee Talk
Friday, Feb. 9  2-4 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 4, Room 114
Learn how to most effectively use VA systems of care. If you can’t come in person, dial-in via telephone at: 800-767-1750, participant code 11242#. All Veterans are welcome.

St. Cloud VA Goes Red for Women Veterans
Thursday, Feb. 15  6-8 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 4, Room 129
Help paint a mosaic in support of women’s heart disease prevention.

Outpatient Clinics Closed
Monday, Feb. 19
In observance of Presidents’ Day, a federal holiday, St. Cloud VA Health Care System outpatient clinics will be closed. Urgent Care at St. Cloud VA Medical Center will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Vietnam Era Veterans Recognition & Town Hall Meeting
Tuesday, Feb. 20  5-6 p.m.
A ceremony honoring Vietnam era Veterans begins at 5 p.m. and is followed by a town hall meeting focusing on VA health care services. Beginning at 4 p.m., County Veteran Services Officer and VA staff will be available to talk about benefit programs.

Voices for Veterans Radio Show
Wednesday, Feb. 21  8:10-8:30 a.m.
WJON AM 1240.

For a complete Calendar of Events, go to
https://www.stcloud.va.gov/calendar.asp
Need a Copy of Your Medical Records?

Your records are available anytime via MyHealtheVet. Visit the Health Hub in Bldg. 29, Room 20, to set up an account.

You may request records anytime by using the VetLink service kiosks located throughout our facilities.

Need help?

Customer service representatives are available in Bldg. 5, Rm 121, for records requests and inquiries, Monday to Friday, from noon to 3 p.m.

Phone inquiries may be made by calling 320-255-6336, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. Simply leave a message with your name, last 4 of SSN and a contact phone number. An ROI representative will return your call by the next business day.

Questions About VA Bills or Co-Pays?

Billing service representatives are available in Bldg. 5, Room 121, Monday through Thursday, from 9 a.m. to Noon.*

You can also call the Veterans Health Resource Center at 1-866-347-2352, Monday to Friday, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

*Please note: assistance is available for Veterans with billing issues for VA care only.

-For assistance with Veterans Choice Program claims contact 1-800-979-9620.

-For assistance with Care in the Community (Non-VA Care programs) claims contact 320-252-1670, ext. 6483.
Quick Reference Phone List

Main St. Cloud VA HCS Phone Number  320-252-1670 or 800-247-1739
TDD User  320-255-6450
Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria  320-759-2640
Brainerd VA Clinic  218-855-1115
Montevideo VA Clinic  320-269-2222
Veterans Crisis Line  800-273-8255 Press 1
Homeless Veteran Hotline  877-424-3838

Billing  866-347-2352
Chaplain Service  Ext. 6386
Discrimination Complaints  Ext. 6304
Eligibility  Ext. 6340
Non-VA Medical Care Billing  Ext. 6483
Non-VA Medical Care Referrals/Choice  Ext. 6401
Nutrition Clinic  Ext. 6376
Transition & Care Management Program  Ext. 6453
Patient Advocate  Ext. 6353
Pharmacy Refill Line  855-560-1724
Privacy Officer  Ext. 6408
Public Affairs Office  Ext. 6353
Release of Information (Medical Records)  Ext. 6336
Transportation  Ext. 7622
TRICARE  877-988-9378
Voluntary Service  Ext. 6365
VA Police  Ext. 6355

Stay in Touch

Visit our Website:  www.stcloud.va.gov

Like us on Facebook:  www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS

Sign up for our automated email service. Visit the St. Cloud VA Website at:  http://www.stcloud.va.gov and on the right-hand side of the page is a request to sign up for email updates. Enter your email address and you are automatically signed up to receive email updates from our web page. There are also options presented to sign up for updates from other government sites.