



# HealthWatch

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER YOU

For Veteran patients of the VA Maryland Health Care System

FALL 2015

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## Practice makes Perfect

Simulation Learning Center training team sharpen skills on mannequin.

**“It’s better to perfect skills with a mannequin like Henry than a real person.”**



On the gurney, a patient is having difficulty breathing. He struggles with a number of issues, but a neck injury interferes with his ability to breathe, requiring immediate intubation. Doctors know that controlling and managing a patient’s airway is crucial for safe patient care. Doctors also know that if a patient can’t breathe, nothing else they do for that patient will help.

Enter “Henry,” a state-of-the art, high-fidelity mannequin that appears and acts human. Henry serves as the training patient in the new Simulation Learning Center at the Baltimore VA Medical Center. To maintain high standards of patient safety, clinicians must undergo ongoing professional training to sustain and sharpen their skills and to keep their privileges to intubate patients.

“Intubating patients is a procedure learned in medical school. In every day patient care, however, it’s not often

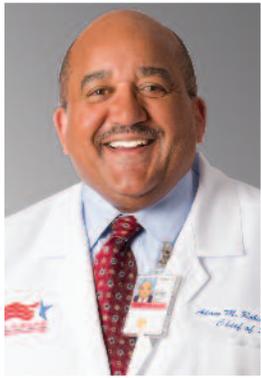
required. As with any skill, practice makes perfect. It’s not unusual at any medical facility for doctors to know the theory of intubating a patient, while their actual practice skills are underdeveloped,” said Edward Norris, chief of anesthesiology at the Baltimore VA Medical Center and clinical professor and vice chair of the Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. “We want to ensure that all our clinicians possess high competency levels and confidence in their abilities to intubate patients in every situation, from the easiest to the most challenging,” he said.

The training team—led by Dr. Nigam Sheth, a staff anesthesiologist and director of resident and student educational affairs—uses Henry and a group of other computerized mannequins to simulate scenarios that clinicians may encounter. Behind the scenes, Sheth operates the computer that animates Henry and designs the scenarios for his fellow physicians. He often designs lessons from less difficult to extremely challenging, depending on what the clinicians need or want to improve and at what level the clinicians are in their careers. Participants in the scenarios range from new trainees to long-established clinicians. At each level the scenarios focus on either a skill that needs perfecting or a new aspect that benefits an experienced clinician.

Certified nurse anesthetist Amanda Beccaloni, and anesthesia technician Karen Patrick, comprise the rest of the Simulation Learning Team, each playing assigned roles to drive the clinician down the wrong path so they can overcome obstacles and confidently make decisions in the best interest of the patient.

“The mannequins are part of a continuum, allowing for increasingly more complex situations,” said Robert A. Brown, director of employee education. “With the mannequins, mistakes are welcome. It’s better to perfect skills with a mannequin like Henry than a real person. The ultimate goal of simulation learning is to continually improve health care for Veterans by providing a safe, supportive and adaptive environment for clinicians to acquire new skills, demonstrate proficiencies and practice high-risk procedures resulting in increased competence, confidence and patient safety.”

# A Message from the **New Director** of the VA Maryland Health Care System



As a 35-year Navy Veteran, I understand the military culture of service. I understand what Veterans have been through and the challenges they face as they transition back into civilian life. Veterans are a unique group of individuals who raised their right hands and took an oath to protect the freedom and democratic values on which our nation was founded.

What matters is that these men and women made the ultimate commitment to uphold the American way of life. I understand that commitment and the sacrifices they made. That is why I am excited to serve as the new director of the VA Maryland Health Care System. It is a privilege and honor to be entrusted with the health care of my fellow Veterans. I am also proud to be part of a team that works hard to deliver safe, quality and compassionate care to Veterans throughout the state.

My role as the director of the VA Maryland Health Care System is to lead the way by focusing our full attention on the individuals before us—our Veteran patients. I want our Veteran patients to recognize that VA employees acknowledge and applaud the sacrifices you've made to ensure that our way of life is fully preserved. My obligation is to make sure that our services are accessible and that we are doing everything in our power to address your needs and concerns in a timely manner.

The VA Maryland Health Care System is dedicated to providing patient and family centered care to Veterans, including women – the fastest growing population of new Veterans. Women Veterans have made sacrifices equal to their male

counterparts and many face some of the same issues, but may display them in different ways. At the VA Maryland Health Care System, we offer a comprehensive array of services that are specifically designed to meet the specialized needs of women Veterans. We have a dedicated team of health care professionals who are available to provide the support and assistance that our women Veterans earned and deserve.

We are privileged to live in the United States where the cost of freedom as we all know it is not free, but paid for by the sacrifices of the men and women who have worn the cloth of our nation. I want to thank our Veteran patients for their service and their sacrifice in defending the freedom and liberty that we all enjoy. I'm proud as the director to know that I can continue a 35-year career in the military by leading the charge to provide safe, quality and compassionate health care to Maryland's Veterans. This is a duty I take very seriously.

Sincerely,

**Adam M. Robinson, Jr., MD**

Director, VA Maryland Health Care System

**Prior to joining the VA Maryland Health Care System, Dr. Robinson served as the 36th Surgeon General of the United States Navy. The Surgeon General is the Chief Executive Officer for the Navy and Marine Corps healthcare systems and serves as the primary advisor on all health related issues and policies for the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Dr. Robinson has more than 30 years of experience as a senior leader in the United States Military Healthcare System, culminating in his selection as the 36th Surgeon General of the United States Navy.**



## One Simple Way to Help Fellow Veterans

If you cannot make a scheduled appointment, please call to reschedule so that another Veteran can fill that appointment spot.



**Call the Appointment Scheduling Center**

**Monday – Friday, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at**

**800-463-6295, ext. 7333.**

**WE WANT**

**TO HEAR**

**FROM YOU**

We're listening to you! Whether it's good, bad, or ugly, we want to know what you think. To foster better communication with our Veteran patients, the VA Maryland Health Care System is holding quarterly Information Fairs, Navigation Seminars and Town Hall Meetings.

During the Town Halls, Veterans and their family members have an opportunity to speak with VA Maryland Health Care System leadership to share their concerns, ask questions and make suggestions about their health care services. At the Navigation Seminars, Veterans can learn important information about accessing VA health care services such as the process for scheduling clinic appointments, tips on refilling prescriptions, and guidance on how to submit a concern or compliment. During the Information Fair portion of the events, VA staff members are available to answer questions and to assist Veterans in completing applications for VA health care and VA compensation benefits. VA staff members are also available to provide information about the services offered to Veterans by the VA Maryland Health Care System and the Baltimore VA Regional Office.

These events, which are held between the Baltimore and Perry Point VA Medical Centers, are designed to enhance the Veteran experience and to ensure that you are getting the care you need, when you need it.

Another way that Veterans can communicate with the VA Maryland Health Care system is online, through the Virtual Help Desk. This online resource allows Veterans and their family members to quickly and easily submit questions or comments about the VA Maryland Health Care System by sending an email message

to the Virtual Help Desk. You can submit questions to the Virtual Help Desk by sending an email to [virtualhelpdesk@va.gov](mailto:virtualhelpdesk@va.gov). When submitting questions to the Virtual Help Desk, please remember not to send any personal health or identification information since email messages are not secure. Veterans and family members can also visit our website at [maryland.va.gov](http://maryland.va.gov) and subscribe to receive email announcements from the VA Maryland Health Care System. This free service allows subscribers to receive email messages about important health care issues, upcoming special events, educational programs, new services, and clinic closures. And finally, Veterans and their families can also follow and like the VA Maryland Health Care System on social media. To follow us on Twitter, go to [twitter.com/mdvagov](https://twitter.com/mdvagov), and to visit us on Facebook, you can find us at [facebook.com/MDVAHCS](https://facebook.com/MDVAHCS).

The VA Maryland Health Care System is proud of the many services we offer to Maryland's Veterans, but we need your feedback if we are going to continue to meet your expectations.

If you have a problem receiving VA health care services, or you have a concern or a compliment about the customer service provided by any of our staff members, we have Patient Advocates available to assist you. Patient Advocates are available Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. to assist Veteran patients in accessing their VA health care services and to help resolve any issues they may encounter. If you need assistance, please contact one of our Patient Advocates:

**Baltimore VA Medical Center,  
Baltimore VA Annex and Glen Burnie  
VA Outpatient Clinic  
800-463-6295, ext. 7099**

**Perry Point VA Medical Center and  
Cambridge & Pocomoke City  
VA Outpatient Clinics  
800-949-1003, ext. 5097**

**Loch Raven VA Community Living  
& Rehabilitation Center and  
Fort Howard, Fort Meade and  
Loch Raven VA Outpatient Clinics  
800-463-6295, ext. 7542**

*The Information Fairs sponsored by the VA Maryland Health Care System are just one example of the many outreach efforts designed to help Veterans gain valuable information about VA services and programs.*



# You Now Have a Choice!

## What is the Choice Program?



**The Choice Program is a new, temporary benefit that allows some Veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling a long distance to a VA health care facility.**

If you are already enrolled in VA health care, the Choice Program allows you to get health care from non-VA providers under certain circumstances. Using this program does NOT impact your existing VA health care or any other VA benefit.

### Am I Eligible?

If you are already enrolled in VA health care, you may be able eligible for the Choice Program. You are eligible if any of these situations apply to you:

- You have been (or will be) waiting more than 30 days for VA medical care (the Veteran is told by his/her local VA health care facility that he/she will need to wait more than 30 days for an appointment from the date clinically determined by his/her physician or, if no such date is provided, the Veteran's preferred date).
- You live more than 40 miles away from a VA health care facility (the Veteran's residence is more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA health care facility).

### How do I Sign Up?

To get started, you'll need to pick a health care provider, gather some information and give us a call in order to set up an appointment. We will work with you to ensure you are approved for care in your community and schedule you with a local care provider of your choice.

**Step 1:** Check if you are eligible by visiting the Choice Program website and completing a short questionnaire, which is available at [va.gov/healthbenefits/apps/choice/](http://va.gov/healthbenefits/apps/choice/).

**Step 2:** Explore which doctors are participating in your area by visiting the following website and entering your address: [va.gov/opa/apps/locator/index.html](http://va.gov/opa/apps/locator/index.html).

**Step 3:** Make sure you have information on hand about any other health insurance coverage you may have.

**Step 4:** Call **866-606-8198** to make sure you qualify and to schedule an appointment. When you call, we will:

- Ask for your ZIP code.
- Ask for your address.
- Check to make sure you are eligible for the Choice Program.
- Check which of your needs are covered by VA.
- Ask for your preferred community provider. Unfortunately, not all providers will be eligible to participate so if your preferred provider is not available, we will recommend other providers in your area.

At the VA Maryland Health Care System, Choice Program Champions can answer all your questions related to this new program. The Choice Champions for the VA Maryland Health Care System are:

**Jennifer Goertz**  
410-642-2411, ext. 1684

**Che Smith**  
410-605-7349

## VA Maryland Health Care System and Baltimore City accept the challenge to **End Veteran Homelessness** by year end

Although the VA Maryland Health Care System has long been addressing Veterans' homelessness by conducting outreach to locate and identify Veterans living on the streets, regularly visiting local shelters, and networking with city landlords, it gained a powerful new ally. Earlier this year, Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake embraced First Lady Michelle Obama's Mayors Veterans Homeless Challenge to End Homelessness by the end of 2015. Spurred by the challenge, the Mayor and her team began working to collaborate with the VA Maryland Health Care System to make homelessness among Baltimore Veterans "rare and brief."

Dr. Adam M. Robinson Jr., director of the VA Maryland Health Care System, accepted the challenge, saying, "We are excited about this collaboration with Baltimore City because it will allow Veterans entering any city-based program to be identified quickly

and then be connected with the necessary support services we provide."

"On any given night, nearly 3,000 people experience homelessness in Baltimore, and approximately 15 percent are Veterans," the Mayor said during a press conference announcing the collaboration. "The men and women who have served to protect our freedom and country should be honored for their bravery and sacrifice and not left uncared for to die on our streets. This is unacceptable to me and unacceptable for Baltimore." We know that homelessness can be solved!"

The VA Maryland Health Care System's Community Integration Services uses a three-pronged approach to addressing Veteran homelessness: outreach, transitional housing, and permanent and supportive housing.

*Continued next page* →

# New Form Expedites Beneficiary Travel Claim Process



Don't like waiting in line for your travel reimbursement? Good news! The VA is now offering Veterans a new and faster way to submit a claim for travel expenses. To take advantage of this expedited process, just follow these simple steps:

- ▶ **Complete the new VA Form 10-3542 Veteran/Beneficiary Claim for Reimbursement of Travel Expenses**
- ▶ **Sign the form**
- ▶ **Place the completed form in the secure drop box marked for travel claims at the Medical Center (the form can also be dropped off at the Beneficiary Travel Desk)**

The new VA Form 10-3542 can be downloaded from the VA website at: [va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/beneficiary\\_travel.asp](https://va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/beneficiary_travel.asp). If you need assistance completing the new form, please call 800-222-VETS (8387).

Payments will be sent directly to your bank account that is on file with the VA.

“The new form makes submitting Beneficiary Travel claims a lot easier,” said Sherry Early, chief of Medical Administration Service for the VA Maryland Health Care System. “Veterans can complete the form at home and drop it off after their appointment. This eliminates the need to stand in line to submit a claim,” she said.

It is important to remember that receipts are required for allowable non-mileage expenses such as: bridge, road and tunnel tolls; parking and ferry fares; meals and lodging; and transportation by bus, train, taxi or other types of public transportation. Please note that prior approval is required for all meal and lodging expenses.

Once the form is submitted, the application will be evaluated to determine eligibility for travel benefits and services received. If eligible, the claim will be processed and the payment will be sent to your bank account by an electronic fund transfer.



## Who is Eligible for Beneficiary Travel?

The Beneficiary Travel program provides eligible Veterans and other beneficiaries mileage reimbursement, common carrier (plane, train, bus, taxi, light rail, etc.), or special mode transport for travel to and from VA health care or VA authorized non-VA health care for which the Veteran is eligible. Veterans may be eligible for Beneficiary Travel services if the following criteria are met:

- ▶ You have a service-connected rating of 30 percent or more
- ▶ You are traveling for treatment of a service-connected condition
- ▶ You receive a VA pension or your income does not exceed the maximum annual VA pension rate
- ▶ You are travelling for a scheduled compensation and pension exam

**For more information about Beneficiary Travel, visit the VA Beneficiary Travel website at [va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/beneficiary\\_travel.asp](https://va.gov/healthbenefits/vtp/beneficiary_travel.asp).**



Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and Dr. Adam M. Robinson Jr.

The collaboration with the VA Maryland Health Care System and the City will enable increased networking with city-based landlords who can help identify housing in a variety of neighborhoods in Baltimore. Available housing is one of the key elements to resolving homelessness among Baltimore Veterans since both Baltimore City and the VA Health Care System use the Housing First Model as a critical tool in tackling the issue of homelessness. “Through the Housing First Model, the VA uses stable housing for Veterans as a platform to address a litany of issues, including mental health, substance abuse and physical health problems. Our case managers also address issues of unemployment, poor credit and rental history,

legal roadblocks, and lack of family support,” said Christopher Buser, the chief of Social Work Service at the VA Maryland Health Care System.

Baltimore City and the VA Maryland Health Care System are also now using the HUD Homeless Management Information System, enabling community partners to track Veterans and their needs and streamline the process for finding adequate housing.

“Already we have seen some positive outcomes! The collaboration with Baltimore City has resulted in an expedited inspection process for potential HUD-VASH units and rental properties for homeless Veterans, making the process more efficient and allowing Veterans to move into rental units much sooner,” said Robinson.

“To truly make this a reality, we need the entire community to work with us. We need the Housing Authority, housing developers and landlords to create more permanent housing opportunities for our veterans,” the Mayor said. “The challenge will not stop at the end of this year.”

# Women: Stay Healthy at Any Age



The most important things you can do to stay healthy are:

- **Be tobacco free**
- **Eat a healthy diet**
- **Get recommended screening tests**
- **Take preventive medicines if you need them**
- **Be physically active**
- **Stay at a healthy weight**

## Daily Steps to Good Health

### Don't Smoke

If you do smoke, talk to your doctor about quitting. If you are pregnant and you are smoking, quitting now will help you and your baby. Your doctor or nurse can help you to quit smoking.

### Be Physically Active

Walking briskly, mowing the lawn, dancing, swimming, and bicycling are just a few examples of moderate physical activity. If you are not already physically active, start small and work up to 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

### Eat a Healthy Diet

Emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and eat foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.

### Stay at a Healthy Weight

Balance calories from foods and beverages with calories you burn off by your activities. To prevent gradual weight gain over time, make small decreases in food and beverage calories and increase physical activity.

### Drink Alcohol Only in Moderation

If you drink alcohol, have no more than one drink a day. (A standard drink is one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.) If you are pregnant, avoid alcohol.

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*"We met in Korea in 1998. Carrie was a combat medic in my unit. I served in the military police, and when I got hurt, she cared for me. That's how we met. We started coming to the VA after she had a bad jump and injured her feet, back and neck. She likes that everyone is very friendly. I think the VA understands the needs of Vets better than other providers."*

— Keith and Carrie Martinez, Army Veterans



**Need information about Women Veteran health care services? Call the Women Veterans program manager at 800-463-6295, ext. 7275.**



# KICKING the Habit is Good for You

Patients, visitors and employees throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System deserve to be treated and to work in an environment that actively supports health promotion and disease prevention, which includes smoke-free campuses.

The leading cause of preventable death is smoking according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Worldwide, tobacco use causes nearly 6 million deaths per year and more than 16 million Americans are living with a disease caused by smoking. The CDC reports that smoking

causes cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung disease, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Creating a smoke-free environment is essential to providing safe, quality and compassionate health care to Maryland's Veterans. During the transition to becoming a smoke-free health care system, you will notice signage and information identifying designated smoking areas and tobacco cessation resources.

## Smoking Cessation Treatment Services by Location

### Baltimore:

For Baltimore VA Medical Center primary care patients, we offer individual counseling and group counseling. Our walk-in hours for individual counseling are Monday through Friday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. We also offer a 4 week tobacco cessation group on Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. Please contact Dr. Ann Brugh at 410-605-7000 ext. 5072, or Dr. Eileen Potocki at 410-605-7000, ext. 4989 for more information about these programs. We also offer a walk-in tobacco cessation group, which is open to all Veterans on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. No appointment is necessary for this group. The group is held on the 6th floor in Room 6C-107. We offer two tobacco cessation groups specifically for Veterans with serious mental illness. Groups are held on Tuesdays at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. in Room

6B-120. For more information about these groups, please contact Dr. Melanie Bennett at 410-637-1850.

### Fort Howard:

The tobacco cessation group at the Fort Howard VA Outpatient Clinic meets on the last Wednesday of the month from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Contact Dr. Mark Nolder at 410-477-1800, ext. 2023 if you are interested in participating in this group.

### Glen Burnie:

The tobacco cessation group at the Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic meets on Tuesday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Please call Steve Sigelman at 410-241-4273 if you would like to schedule an appointment to participate in this group.

### Loch Raven:

The tobacco cessation group at the Loch Raven VA Outpatient Clinic meets on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month at 9 a.m. Contact Dr. Sarah Hansel at

410-605-7000, ext. 4205 to schedule an appointment.

### Perry Point:

The tobacco cessation group at the Perry Point VA Medical Center meets on Wednesdays at 10 a.m. Please contact Stanley Jay Prochaska at 410-642-2411, ext. 6655 for more information about participating in this group.

### Pocomoke City:

Veterans at the Pocomoke City VA Outpatient Clinic can attend the tobacco cessation group via telehealth. Please call Latanya Shockley at 410-957-6908 to schedule an appointment for this group.

## Additional Smoking Cessation Treatment Programs & Resources

**Quit Vet (855-QUIT-VET)** is a toll free telephone smoking quitline. When you call Quit Vet, you will get individualized counseling, help developing a quit plan,

strategies to prevent relapse, and follow-up calls to help you stay quit. Quit Vet is available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m.

**SmokefreeVET** is a mobile text message smoking cessation service. When you sign up for this program, you will get 24/7 encouragement, advice and tips to help you stop smoking for good. To sign up, text the word VET to 47848 from your mobile phone. For more information visit [publichealth.va.gov/smoking/smokefreevet.asp](http://publichealth.va.gov/smoking/smokefreevet.asp).

**VA's Tobacco and Health Website** is available at [publichealth.va.gov/smoking/](http://publichealth.va.gov/smoking/).

**SmokefreeVET Website** is available at [smokefree.gov/veterans/](http://smokefree.gov/veterans/).

# How to Reduce Your Pharmacy Waiting Time

To help reduce your pharmacy waiting times, please use one of the following three options to refill your prescriptions: phone, mail or online. New prescriptions, if needed on the day they are issued by your provider, can still be filled at the outpatient pharmacy window at the Baltimore or Perry Point VA Medical Centers.



## REFILL BY PHONE

- Step 1** Call the Prescription Refill Line at **800-463-6295, ext. 7395**.
- Step 2** After hearing the greeting, enter your full nine-digit Social Security number followed by the “#” (pound) sign.
- Step 3** Press option “2” for Pharmacy Information.
- Step 4** Press option “1” to order prescription refills (press option “2” if you want to check on the status of your prescription).
- Step 5** Enter your prescription number, followed by the “#” (pound) sign.

*All refills ordered by phone will be mailed directly to the Veteran's home address.*



## REFILL BY MAIL

If a Veteran obtains an initial prescription from the VA Maryland Health Care System and is eligible for refills, he or she will be issued a refill request and a return mailing label with their prescription. Simply fill out and sign the refill slip and use the label provided to mail the slip back to one of our two outpatient pharmacies:

Pharmacy Service  
VA Medical Center  
10 North Greene Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

Pharmacy Service  
P.O. Box 1015  
VA Medical Center  
Perry Point, MD 21902

*Please allow 14 days for processing if you mail in your prescription request.*



## REFILL ONLINE

The VA's My HealtheVet system offers a secure online prescription refill service. The refill is sent directly to your home. To access the prescription refill service, users must register for My HealtheVet at [myhealth.va.gov](http://myhealth.va.gov).

## TIMELY REFILLS



## BE PROACTIVE

You must order your refills at least **14 days before** your medicine runs out to receive your medications on time. *It is recommended that you order your refills as soon as you receive your medication in the mail so that the next refill will be shipped to you before you are scheduled to run out.*

## NO REMAINING REFILLS

In the event that you have no remaining refills on your prescription, you may:

1. Call your Primary Care team at the number provided on your Clinic Check Out Sheet.
2. Use the Secure Messaging option on the MyHealtheVet online service to send a message to your primary care team.
3. Call the Telephone Care Line for the VA Maryland Health Care System at **800-865-2441** and select the option for “*Prescription Refills or Questions About Your Medications*” using a touch tone phone.
4. If the medication was prescribed by a specialty clinic provider, contact the specialty provider listed on the prescription label.

## NEW PRESCRIPTIONS

If you were seen by a non-VA physician and need a new prescription, please obtain documentation and/or records from that physician's office and then contact your Primary Care Team Nurse.

## PRESCRIPTION BILLS

If you have any questions about prescription bills or charges, please contact a billing representative at **866-393-0006**.

## MEDICATION SAFETY

Please note that each prescription is handled with individual care and concern. To maintain accuracy, the VA Pharmacy staff uses state-of-the-art technology and system safety checks.



# Give it a Shot!

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, influenza (“Flu”) is contagious and spreads across the United States every year. The flu is caused by influenza viruses, and is mainly spread by coughing, sneezing and close contact. Anyone can get the flu, and it can strike suddenly and last several days. The flu is not like a bad cold. The flu is a dangerous infection and every year thousands of people in the United States die from the flu and many more must be treated in the hospital. The flu vaccine can keep you from getting the flu, make it less severe if you do get it, and keep you from spreading it to your family and other people. The flu vaccine will not give you the flu, but it does take about two weeks for full protection to develop after receiving the vaccine and it will last throughout the flu season.

Veterans enrolled with the VA Maryland Health Care System can get free flu shots at walk-in clinics located at each of our facilities. Veterans do not need an appointment to get a vaccination during one of the walk-in clinics. Veterans can also receive their



Flu season is here and the VA Maryland Health Care System wants to ensure that Veterans are protected against the virus.

vaccination during their routine primary care visits throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System until vaccine supplies are exhausted.

The influenza virus changes every year, so it is important to get a flu shot every year. For a complete list of flu shot clinics throughout the VA Maryland Health Care System, call **800-463-6295, ext. 7273**. If you have questions about the flu vaccination or ways to prevent influenza, please contact your VA primary care provider or call the Telephone Care Line for the VA Maryland Health Care System at **800-865-2441**.

## IT'S IN THE MAIL...



## Track Your Prescription Delivery on MyHealtheVet

There is now no need to wait in line or on the phone to track the delivery of your VA prescriptions. Prescription Tracker is now available on the *MyHealtheVet* web page under the Prescription Refill History tab.

Here's how to access the Prescription Tracker:

- Log into your *MyHealtheVet* account at [myhealth.va.gov](http://myhealth.va.gov)
- Select the Pharmacy tab at the top of the page
- Select either:
  - Rx Refill
  - Rx History
- If the VA Mail Order Pharmacy has sent you a prescription in the last 45 days, a table will display the Track Delivery button.
- Select Track Delivery. This takes you to the Prescription Tracking Information page.

You can see detailed tracking information on your VA prescription. It will also show other VA prescriptions being shipped in the same package.

- Select Carrier Tracking Number to view shipment information. This will take you to the delivery service website.

The carrier will display delivery information about your prescription refill package.

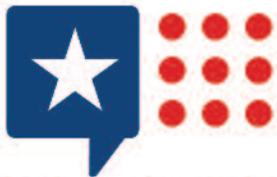
Refill requests should be made **at least** 10 days prior to running out of your medicine. Generally, it takes 3 to 5 days for prescription refills to be delivered.

If you need assistance, please contact your local *MyHealtheVet* Coordinator Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at **800-463-6295, ext. 7045**.

# SUICIDE PREVENTION

Since its launch in 2007, the VA's National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has fielded more than 1.35 million calls and made roughly 42,000 lifesaving rescues.

## Veterans Crisis Line



1-800-273-8255  
PRESS 1



A short HBO documentary titled, "Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1" shifts the camera's eye toward the employees who staff the lifeline. In February 2015, the short won an Oscar award for its touching behind the scenes portrayal of those employees. The documentary depicts the emotional strain, deep compassion, and devotion the hotline staffers have for Veterans struggling on the other end of the line.

At the VA Maryland Health Care System, suicide prevention coordinators work with hotline and local staff members to assist Veterans struggling with suicide. "Our goal is to have a plan of action in place to help guide and support Veterans through difficult moments and keep them safe," says Nikole Jones, Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the VA Maryland Health Care System. "A safety plan can be developed with a counselor or a therapist. It's designed so that Veterans can start with themselves to manage risk and continue by reaching out to their support network until they feel safe. Veterans struggling with suicide should keep their plan in an easy-to-access place such as a wallet or cell phone, so that it's readily available if they

feel like hurting themselves" she said.

Some Veterans may not express thoughts of suicide to others; however, their actions and behaviors may indicate an intent to harm themselves. It is important for the friends and families of Veterans to be aware of the behaviors that serve as warning signs of suicide risk. Some of these signs include the Veteran appearing sad and depressed most of the time, loss of interest, trouble sleeping and eating that doesn't go away, frequent and dramatic mood changes, and talking about feeling trapped. Other signs include feeling anxious, agitated or unable to sleep, among others.

Reducing access to lethal means may be the most critical factor in reducing the risk of suicide. It is important to secure weapons, use gun locks, separate ammunition, and other measures to prevent access for someone with increased risk for suicide. Guns are the most lethal means of suicide. The VA Maryland Health System has a free gun lock distribution program to help Veterans and their families to stay safe. To obtain a gun lock, Veterans can visit their local VA Police Service or they can see their Mental Health provider within the VA Maryland Health Care System.

**Veterans (or family members and friends of a Veteran) who are struggling with suicide can call 800-273-8255 and Press 1 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.**

# Do You See a Non-VA Health Care Provider?

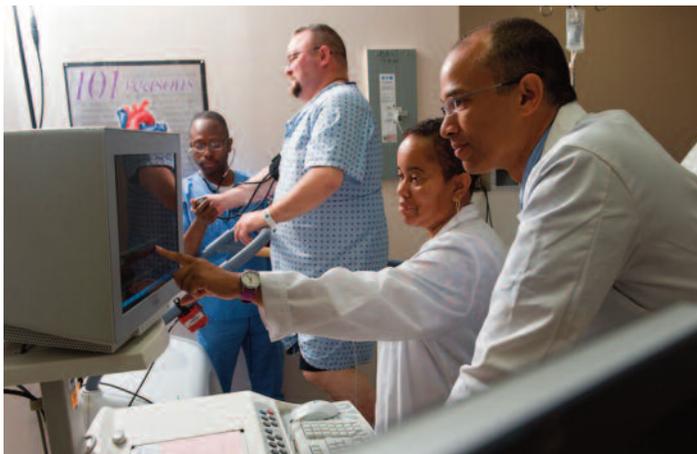
Connect Your Docs by sharing certain parts of your Veteran health record between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Defense (DoD), and selected private health care providers over a secure and confidential network through the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) Health Exchange program. This program is free and voluntary for Veteran patients.

How might connecting my docs benefit me? If you visit non-VA health care providers, participating in the VLER Health Exchange makes it easier for your team of health care providers to coordinate and manage your care. With the VLER Health Exchange, VA and non-VA health care providers can securely share certain parts your health record electronically.

That means both your VA and non-VA health care providers can securely access information on your allergies, health problems, medications, and more. This should help you and your health care providers avoid the need to fax, mail or carry paper health records from one provider to another.



## You can “Connect Your Docs” online, by mail, fax, or in person



It also means VA and non-VA health care providers can access more of your key health care information in near real time, instead of days or weeks — enabling them to quickly make informed decisions that result in better care. In an emergency, immediate access to additional health care information could save your life. Participating in the VLER Health Exchange may also:

- Give your provider immediate access to more of your health care information.
- Reduce your chances of having duplicate procedures done.
- Increase your safety by providing a more complete medical record, such as a list of your medications and allergies.
- Save you time and money.
- Improve your health outcomes by empowering you.

**How do I join?** Signing up is fast and easy. You may sign up in person, through the mail, by fax, or online.

**Online:** Simply visit [va.gov/VLER](http://va.gov/VLER) for a complete list of instructions on how to sign up online.

**By Mail:** To print and fill out the authorization from (VA Form 10-0485), go to [va.gov/VLER](http://va.gov/VLER) and click on “Learn More” under “For Veterans” on the website. Mail the authorization form to:

VA Maryland Health Care System  
10 North Greene Street  
Attn: Release of Information (BT/136)  
Baltimore, MD 21201

**By Fax:** Fax the authorization form (VA Form 10-0485) to the Baltimore Release of Information Office at 410-209-8402.

**In Person:** Simply visit the Release of Information Office at the Baltimore VA Medical Center (Room 3D-121) or the Perry Point VA Medical Center (Building 361, Room GA-104) and fill out and return the authorization form (VA Form 10-0485). You can also visit the Cambridge, Fort Howard, Fort Meade, Glen Burnie, Loch Raven or Pocomoke City VA Outpatient Clinics to fill out and return the authorization form (VA Form 10-0485).

**What if I decide not to join?** Participation is entirely voluntary. Deciding not to participate will not affect your VA health benefits or your relationship with your doctor or the VA Maryland Health Care System. To learn more about the VLER Health Exchange and the benefits of sharing your health care records between your VA and non-VA health care providers, please visit [va.gov/VLER](http://va.gov/VLER).

# Important Phone Numbers

Please report change of address to the Enrollment Center at 800-463-6295, ext. 7324

**Appointment Scheduling Center**  
800-463-6295, ext. 7333

**Automated Appointment Line**  
800-463-6295, ext. 7395  
(Press Option 1)

**Beneficiary Travel**  
800-463-6295, ext. 7318

**Billing Information**  
866-393-0006

**Burial Information & Benefits**  
410-644-9696

**Eligibility & Enrollment Center**  
800-463-6295, ext. 7324

**Family Caregiver Support Line**  
855-260-3274

**Long-Term Care Information Line**  
800-949-1003, ext. 1121

**Medical Records/Release  
of Information**

Baltimore VA Medical Center  
800-463-6295, ext. 7348

Perry Point VA Medical Center  
800-949-1003, ext. 6028

**My HealthVet Coordinator**  
800-463-6295, ext. 7045

## Patient Concerns & Complaints

Baltimore VA Medical Center,  
Baltimore VA Annex and Glen Burnie  
VA Outpatient Clinic  
800-463-6295, ext. 7099

Perry Point VA Medical Center and  
Cambridge & Pocomoke City VA  
Outpatient Clinics  
800-949-1003, ext. 5097

Loch Raven VA Community Living &  
Rehabilitation Center and Fort  
Howard, Fort Meade and Loch Raven  
VA Outpatient Clinics  
800-463-6295, ext. 7542

## Patient Safety Hotline

800-949-1003, ext. 7233

## Prescription Refill Line

800-463-6295, ext. 7395 (Press Option 2)

## Returning Veterans

800-463-6295, ext. 7259

## Telephone Care Line

800-865-2441

## Toll-Free Numbers for VA Maryland Health Care System Facilities

Baltimore VA Medical Center  
800-463-6295

Loch Raven VA Community Living  
& Rehabilitation Center  
800-463-6295

Perry Point VA Medical Center  
800-949-1003

Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic  
877-864-9611

Fort Howard VA Outpatient Clinic  
800-351-8387

Fort Meade VA Outpatient Clinic  
410-305-5300 (Not Toll-Free)

Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic  
410-590-4140 (Not Toll-Free)

Loch Raven VA Outpatient Clinic  
800-463-6295, ext. 7650

Pocomoke City VA Outpatient Clinic  
866-441-0287

## VA Benefits

800-827-1000

## Vet Centers

Annapolis Vet Center 410-605-7826

Baltimore Vet Center 410-764-9400

Dundalk Vet Center 410-282-6144

Elkton Vet Center 410-392-4485

## Veterans Crisis Line

800-273-8255 (Press 1)

## Women Veterans Services

800-463-6295, ext. 7275

CLIP AND SAVE

**HealthWatch**

VA Maryland Health Care System

Public & Community Relations (135)

10 N. Greene Street

Baltimore, MD 21201

Published for the Veteran patients of the VA Maryland Health Care System.  
This newsletter is offered to provide reliable health information. It is not  
intended to take the place of medical advice, which should be obtained directly  
from your health care provider. If you have questions or comments about  
HealthWatch, please call 800-463-6295, ext. 7098.

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A Member of the VA Capitol Health Care Network

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