

Veteran Updates

Canine Connection Lets Vets Help Vets

Our Veterans are loving Canine Connection, a new joint animal assisted therapy program between the San Francisco VA Health Care System (SFVAHCS) and the San Francisco SPCA that cultivates skills of mastery, empathy, and social conscience.

Through Canine Connection, Veterans learn how to clicker train with certified therapy dogs and ultimately bring the dogs for therapy visits with fellow Veterans throughout SFVAHCS. This is a unique form of therapeutic intervention that not only helps participants meet personal challenges but also connects them to their community.

Through the program, Veteran participants visit SF SPCA for six sessions, where experts teach them the basics of dog training and care. Initial sessions focus on understanding how dogs learn and how to clicker train them. As the program progresses, the lessons do too. For instance, the participants gain valuable insight into how grooming can be a bonding experience and how to manage frustration. By training dogs, the participating Veterans also learn about the importance of body language and the benefit of being assertive without being aggressive.

For the Veterans participating in the program, the primary source of

motivation is to connect with dogs and, at the same time, to help other Veterans. The Veterans are able to accomplish both during therapy visits throughout SFVAHCS. After completing six training sessions at SF SPCA, Canine Connection participants and SF SPCA therapy dogs have visited Veterans at locations like the Community Living Center (CLC) and the Downtown San Francisco VA Clinic.

The recent visit to the Downtown Clinic was especially impactful, as it gave participants the opportunity to provide comfort and support for homeless Veterans. “It was a wonderful visit,” says Jennifer Henley, PhD, Animal Assisted Therapy Manager at SF SPCA. “We saw the homeless Veterans feel comfort from the dogs. At the same time, I think they were especially grateful to be visited by their fellow Veterans. They have a special connection through their shared service that is remarkable to see.”

Starting in November, Veterans at the Downtown Clinic will have the chance to take the Canine Connection course and conduct their own therapy visits to fellow Veterans. For questions about the Canine Connection program, please contact Eric Shovein at eric.shovein@va.gov or (415) 221-4810, ext. 2-6194



Don't Let the Flu Get You Down

Did you know that the flu causes 226,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths annually? Don't be a statistic! The flu vaccine is your best defense against this seasonal illness. All Veterans are eligible to receive free flu vaccines. Ask your VA provider at your next scheduled appointment to make sure you are protected.

What can I do if I think I have the flu?

If you have common flu symptoms (fever of 100°F or higher, chills, dry cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and a runny or stuffy nose), stay home and rest, drink fluids, take medicines for fever (such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen), and call your VA healthcare team within 48 hours for advice on what to do next.

Here are your main weapons against the flu, per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Get your flu vaccine!
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water (or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people, coughs and sneezes.

Direct Scheduling for Audiology and Optometry

Starting November 1, 2016, Veterans in the San Francisco VA Health Care System will be able to schedule routine audiology and optometry appointments directly without a Primary Care referral. The direct scheduling service is available at the San Francisco VA Medical Center as well as the Santa Rosa and Eureka VA Clinics.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What do you mean by "routine" audiology or optometry appointment?

A: Hearing tests and regular eye exams are considered routine appointments. However, other types of appointments may also be considered routine. The best way to find out is to call and speak to a scheduler.

Q: Will it take longer for me to get an appointment?

A: No, it should take less time to get routine audiology and optometry appointments because you no longer need a primary care referral.

Q: Will I get travel pay for my appointments?

A: Yes, you will get full travel pay if you schedule in advance.

Q: Can Veterans not in the VA system make an appointment with audiology or optometry?

A: No, Veterans must be enrolled in VA healthcare to be eligible for this service.

Audiology scheduling:
(415) 750-2124

Optometry scheduling:
(415) 750-2208

Please join us for our annual
Veterans Day Ceremony
on Thursday, November 10 at 11 a.m.
in our Auditorium, Building 7, 1st Floor

Guest speakers will be:

Anthony Edwards, VIP-STAR Program Participant (U.S. Navy)

Mary Simms, External Affairs Specialist, FEMA Region IX (U.S. Army)

Benjamin Woo, Student, City College of SF (U.S. Marine Corps)

