



FOR THE EMPLOYEES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO VA MEDICAL CENTER

AUGUST 2013

Affordable Care Act: What Does It All Mean?

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was created to expand access to affordable health care coverage to all Americans, lower costs, and improve quality and care coordination. Under ACA, people will either have health coverage that meets a minimum standard, or will qualify for an exemption, or will make a payment when filing their taxes if they have affordable options but remain uninsured.

Starting 2014, the Health Insurance Marketplace will be a new way to find health coverage. Using the Marketplace, some people will be eligible for lower costs on premiums and out-of-pocket expenses, based on their income.

So what does this mean for Veterans and employees?

If Veterans are enrolled in VA health care, they don't need to take any additional steps to meet the health care law coverage standards. The health care law does not change VA health benefits or Veterans' out-of-pocket expenses.

As federal employees, the majority are covered by the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. As of now, there is no requirement for employees to utilize the insurance exchanges being established under the Affordable Care Act, despite proposals in Congress to change this.

When discussing this issue with Veterans, please share the following messages:

- If Veterans are enrolled in VA health care, they don't need to take any additional steps to meet the health care law coverage standards.
- The health care law does not change VA health benefits or Veterans' out-of-pocket expenses.
- If a Veterans is not yet enrolled in VA health care, they can apply at any time.

If a Veteran is enrolled in a Veteran's health care program, civilian health and medical program (CHAMPVA), or spina



bifida health care program, they have coverage under the standards of the health care law.

Family members who are not enrolled in a VA health care program may use the Marketplace to get coverage. They may get lower costs on monthly premiums or out-of-pocket costs. They could be eligible for free or low-cost coverage through Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program. Starting October 1, 2013, they can submit an application for health care coverage through the Marketplace, and learn the amount of assistance for which they are eligible.

For information about VA health care and the Affordable Care Act, visit VA's website at www.va.gov/aca, or call (877) 222-VETS (8387). For more information about the Marketplace, visit www.healthcare.gov or for California residents go to www.coveredca.com.

If you know a Veteran who isn't enjoying the benefits of VA health care enrollment, they can call (877) 222-VETS (8387) to apply by phone or by visiting www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll.

Community Living Center Hosts a Wedding

They met 31 years ago in San Diego. They fell in love. Now, after three decades as committed partners and a recent change in laws, they were able to do something they've wanted to do for a long time —get married.

Richard Soukup, originally from St. Louis, was a US Navy electronics technician. After separating from the Navy he worked in electronics. Then he became enamored watching TV chef Julia Child, who inspired him to start a new career in gourmet foods. Richard also became enamored with Phillip Hamm, whom he met in San Diego in 1982. The two were soon inseparable. The couple moved to San Francisco where they've lived ever since.

Phil, originally from Modesto, owns a hair and nail salon in San Francisco, and visits Richard daily at the San Francisco VA Medical Center's (SFVAMC) Community Living Center (CLC), where Richard has resided since April 2012. "Being here, the care has been fantastic," said Phil and Richard. They especially lauded the care received from nurse Maria Lee, nurse assistant Mercedes "Mercy" Santa Maria, and social worker Anne French.

"Right after the law changed, I came to Richard's room, got down on one knee and proposed to him," said Phil. "And I said, yes!" answered Richard with a tear in his eye. Phil met with Anne and asked, "I wouldn't want to offend anyone, but Richard and I would like to get married. Is there any way you can help us figure out how to do this? She came to me the next day and said, 'The VA would love to have it here if you would like to have it here.'" Thanks to the support of the staff, a wedding at the CLC was quickly arranged.

On the morning of July 25, Richard called Phil to say, "I'm going to be married!" and Phil answered, "So am I!" And so they were.

It was a ceremony attended by family and friends, with longtime friend California Superior Court Judge Terry L. Jackson officiating.

"The most wonderful of all things in life is the discovery of another human being with whom one's relationship has a growing depth of beauty and joy as the years increase," said Jackson. "It cannot be found by looking for it or by passionately wishing for it. It is a sort of divine accident...and though it is a divine accident, it is so meant to be for the two of you, and it is so meant to be that you are able to marry in the state of California."

Richard and Phillip exchanged vows and rings. "Now, by the power vested in me by the state of California, I pronounce you, Phil and Richard, married," Jackson said. Applause, many hugs, and a reception followed.

"It was my great privilege and honor to plan this event with them and help make it happen. Working with Richard this past year and a half, meeting Phil and witnessing how they care for each other has been wonderful," said Anne French, LCSW. "It was a pleasure to be able to celebrate something so life affirming. It's obvious to everyone the mutual care and respect they have for one another. Having them request to have the ceremony here, it means we are like 'home' to them, and speaks to how the CLC is a family and how we can celebrate life events with our Veterans. It was a really special day."

--by Kellie Burdette Mendonca



Phillip Hamm-Soukup and Richard Soukup (seated), are pictured with Anne French, CLC Social Worker.

New Office of Patient Centered Care

SFVAMC is proud to announce the creation of a new Office of Patient Centered Care (OPCC), dedicated to increasing patient satisfaction, improving customer service, and fostering a patient-centered health care culture. The new office is charged with ensuring that the voices of Veteran patients and their loved ones have a significant and sustained impact on medical center operations and policies.

Accomplishing this means proactively soliciting Veterans' ideas and thoughtfully responding to their complaints and concerns. In the long term, those ideas and concerns will drive collaborative grassroots projects and system redesign initiatives geared at making the health care experience more convenient and pleasant for patients and more tailored to their individual needs and preferences. Taking the lead from the VHA's Office of Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, our local OPCC is committed to "personalizing, humanizing and demystifying" the health care experience for all of our Veterans.

The OPCC will replace the Quality Management's Customer Service Program, and will reside under the Office of the Director. All of the programs formerly under the orbit of the Customer Service Program—such as Patient Advocacy—will now be part of the OPCC.

One of the first initiatives of the new office has been to increase staffing in Patient Advocacy and to ensure more timely responsiveness to Veterans' concerns, as well as providing increased feedback to managers and service chiefs regarding patients' concerns and requests. To realize these goals, Patient Advocate **Janice Savengrith** has recently been joined by new Advocates **Craig Hill** and **Terrance Jones**—both of whom are Veterans and committed to promoting patient centered care.

The new Office of Patient Centered Care will be led by sociologist and former Presidential Management Fellow **Natalie Purcell, PhD, MPA**. To reach the new office, contact Patient Advocacy at (415) 750-6650.

Civility & Respect in the Workplace

Good behavior in the workplace affects business outcomes in a positive way and is a predictor of excellence. Employee perceptions of a healthy environment show statistically significant relationships to patient satisfaction and to quality performance indicators.

Civility and respect among co-workers improves areas such as job satisfaction, morale, teamwork, and attendance. Not surprising, uncivil behavior in the workplace causes negative business outcomes and, in a health care setting, can harm patient care. These theories are the basis for the CREW model—civility, respect and engagement in the workplace which is a VA-wide culture change initiative. The goal of CREW is to improve the work climate through more civil and respectful interactions.

If you would like to know more about the CREW initiative or general information pertaining to civility in the workplace, please contact **Laurie Anderson**, HRMS, at ext.4044 or **Lynn Hart**, EEO Program Manager, at ext. 4215/4219.



Integrated Ethics Survey: Your Chance to Speak

Every two years, the National Center for Ethics in Healthcare (NCEH) invites all staff to respond to a survey about integrated ethics, to help improve ethical guidance and practices. The next survey will be sometime in 2014. The SFVAMC Integrated Ethics (IE) Committee utilizes this data to improve our local IE program, as well as the experiences of our patients, staff, volunteers, stakeholders and visitors. The SFVAMC IE Committee urges you to view our Medical Center's ethical promising practices and areas for improvement via the Medical Center's SharePoint site.

Highlights Around the Medical Center

Millie Hughes-Fulford, PhD, accepted a team award from NASA for "Top Discovery on the International Space Station in 2012." The award was bestowed for outstanding results on T cell activation in space. Hughes-Fulford's work helps reveal the inner workings of the body's immune system. "The ultimate goal of what we're doing when looking at the bioinformatics is to use that discovery for immune diseases here on Earth," she said. "This work is not just for astronauts going to Mars, though of course we will benefit them too."



Richard Fidler, MBA, MSN, CRNA, ACNP, Director of SFVAMC's Simulation Program, received the 2013 VA Under Secretary for Health's Award for Excellence in Clinical Simulation Training, Education and Research. This award

recognizes clinical leaders supporting and advancing VHA's strategic plan for clinical simulation. Pictured from left: Harry Robinson, SimLEARN National Program Manager, Rich Fidler, and Sheila Cullen, VISN 21 Director.

Maria Isabella Fernandez, MD, received a 2013 NAMI Exemplary Psychiatrist Award for her efforts in advocating access to care and research funding, community education programs, and providing comprehensive treatment to people living with mental illness.

Chief of Radiology **Judy Yee, M.D.**, (pictured right) was inducted as a Fellow in the American College of Radiology (ACR). Only 10 percent of ACR members achieve this distinction.



Jonathan Garber, MD, Chief, Emergency Department, received an EMS Hospital Provider Award at the 15th Annual Emergency Medical Services Awards Program for his innovation and development of VA Emergency Department and disaster preparedness programs.

Natalie Purcell, PhD, (pictured right) was the commencement speaker for the University of California, Santa Cruz graduate commencement.



Joan Wakefield, Administrative Assistant, Research, received an award or donating her 400th unit of blood products at the Blood Centers of the Pacific.

Maggie Chartier, PsyD, won the 2013 James Besyner Early Career Award for Distinguished Contributions to VA Psychology. This award is given for distinguished early career contributions in promoting the practice of psychology in the VA through professional service and innovations in service delivery.

For the third year, the SFVAMC participated in the SF Gay Pride festival. Two booths staffed by VA employees provided information about the many services our facility provides, and a contingent of employees and Veterans marched in the parade. The event was coordinated by **Leh Hickman** with the assistance of the **SFVAMC LGBT Employee Resource Group**.



Keith Armstrong, LCSW, Director, Couples/Family Therapy, recently published a new resource book, "*Courage After Fire for Parents of Service Members*." This book shows parents how to protect and take care of their Veteran sons and daughters after they return from deployment.

Russell Lemle, PhD, received the 2013 Antonette Zeiss Distinguished Leadership Award. This award is for an individual who demonstrates leadership throughout his or her career in support of psychology's unique role in providing health care for Veterans, strong advocacy efforts for VA psychology, especially in times of adversity, and for significant accomplishments.

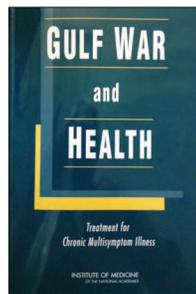
Jennifer Boyd, Ph.D., Director, PRRC, is the recipient of the 2013 Michael Neale Award, recognizing commitment to serving individuals with serious mental illness, demonstrated through advocacy, research, program development and service delivery. This is the highest award bestowed upon public service psychologists (APA Division 18) who serve individuals with serious mental illness.

Eddie Ramirez, AO, Mental Health, (pictured right) was selected by the Disabled American Veterans of California as Outstanding VHA Member 2013 for his service in the community.



Jesse R. Modica, PT, DPT, MS, OCS, Santa Rosa VA Clinic, recently became an APTA board certified orthopedic specialist in physical therapy (OCS).

Health Promotion Disease Prevention Manager **Sandra J. Smeeding, PhD, CNS, FNP**, was a reviewer for an Institute of Medicine book entitled, “*Gulf War and Health: Treatment for Chronic Multi-symptom Illness*,” published this year by the National Academies of Science.



Neurosurgery Nurse Practitioner **Mary Ellen Mannix-Cantillon, MSN, RN, ARNP, CRNN, CNRN**, recently completed all the requirements of the Certified Neuroscience Registered Nurse (CNRN) program.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention’s (AFSP) Greater San Francisco Bay Area Chapter was awarded 2012 Most Outstanding Chapter by the national organization. SFVAMC staff psychologist **Chris Galloway, Ph.D.**, is the board president of the San Francisco Chapter. SFVAMC’s suicide prevention team, **Mark Stalnaker, Ph.D., Thais Williams, LCSW, Megan McCarthy, Ph.D., and Morris Karo** have collaborated on multiple events.

Congratulations to these employees who recently completed the Emerging Leaders Development Program:

Marilyn Benito	NFS
Elfega Bergthold	Engineering
Gerald Carlin	Neurology
Chad Carreon	Anesthesiology
Kevin Cavanagh	Prosthetics
Joon Soo (James) Choi	HRMS
Delia De Los Santos	Clearlake VA Clinic
Jason Fareira	QM
Duane Freeman	Engineering
Jeanette Hausladen	Nursing
Kharen Hockman	HRMS
Kyle Johnson	Geriatrics
Frederick King	Engineering
Luisito Macaraig	SPS
Annie Magat	Anatomic Path
Lauren Moody	HRMS
Sarah Pierce	HUD/VASH
Evangeline Rico	ICU
Melita Rines	Anesthesiology
Antonio Spann	Business
Edwin White	Anesthesiology

Michael Weiner, MD, received a \$6 million grant from the Department of Defense to study the effects of traumatic brain injury and PTSD on Alzheimer’s disease (AD) in Vietnam Veterans with MCI using ADNI.

Leaders of the Veterans Alliance at the City College of San Francisco honored **Keith Armstrong, LCSW**, and the Veterans Outreach Program (VOP) with the “Community Supporter” plaque.

Armstrong was recognized for his leadership of a program that delivers VA services on the campus of CCSF. Additional members of this team include:



Bridget Leach, LCSW, Ellen Herbst, MD, Shannon McCaslin, PhD, Morris Karo, Isaac Ramos, Gerard Choucroun, MSW and Brandina Jersky, MFT. **Gerard Choucroun** also received an award as Director of the Veterans Health and Integration Program, which has partnered with VOP to extend outreach efforts, conduct research and invest the civilian community in Veterans health. Pictured with members of the Veterans Alliance are **Keith Armstrong** (third from left), **Bridget Leach** (second from right) and **Brandina Jersky** (far right).

John McQuaid, Ph.D., Associate Chief, Mental Health, (pictured below) recently spoke at a Capitol Hill briefing on “VA Mental Health Research: Improving the Lives of America’s Veterans.” He was described as doing “an absolutely brilliant job of conveying the work ... in a way that was immediately accessible to Hill staff and press.”



Medical Emergencies at the SFVAMC

Our Medical Center is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any medical emergency that may occur in the buildings or on the grounds of the Medical Center, regardless of location or time of day. This includes immediate evaluation and/or treatment of inpatients, outpatients, and any other persons, including visitors and staff, who might suffer a medical emergency.

The Medical Center has a designated Code Blue Team comprised of highly trained and skilled physicians, nurses, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, and a nursing supervisor, who will respond to any and all emergency calls, anywhere on the SFVAMC campus. If there is a medical emergency, you can activate the Code Blue Team by pushing the “code blue” button located in patient rooms or by calling ext. 2222, a dedicated line to Police Dispatch that operates all day, every day. Give Police Dispatch the location of the medical emergency and answer any brief questions they may ask. Any staff member can activate a code blue response.

During the current fiscal year, the Code Blue Team has responded to more than 80 calls for help across the Medical Center, from the parking lot, to the main lobby, to the clinics, to the ICU. The types of medical emergencies for which the team is called vary from slips and falls, seizures, and fainting, to full blown cardiac or respiratory arrests. Thanks to the excellent clinical skills of the Code Blue Team, our outcomes in all types of cardiac arrest are excellent, far exceeding the national averages for both return of circulation after cardiac arrest and survival to discharge after an arrest.

You can count on the Code Blue Team for immediate help in any medical emergency. We are truly fortunate to have such an excellent resource close at hand, ready to respond anywhere, anytime. Kudos to all members of the Code Blue Team - your skills and knowledge are invaluable!

**CODE BLUE:
Call ext. 2222**

Stop the Line:

The idea of “Stop the Line” started long ago in automobile manufacturing plants when management gave every worker the authority to stop the production line if they saw a mistake. Because of the initiative, quality improved significantly!

VA now has a “Stop the Line” initiative because when staff members speak up about safety, they are ensuring that Veterans get the safest and best quality care. For years, our Medical Center has been doing things similar to “Stop the Line,” such as performing time-outs before surgeries and other procedures. In adopting the “Stop the Line” initiative, our Medical Center leadership is further emphasizing that every employee, regardless of position or department, should speak up regarding patient safety.

“Stop the Line” uses a simple way for anyone to respectfully communicate safety concerns to any other member of the health care team. You can say what you see, what you’re concerned about, and what action would make the Veteran safe. Our leaders at all levels will continue to support our culture of safety, and will “stop the line” to keep Veterans safe.



Commute Smart is Here

Are you tired of our never-ending parking hassles? The Commute Smart SharePoint site is designed to help you evaluate and consider your commuting alternatives. Information on the transit benefit program, public transit agencies, free shuttles (Bauer's and UCSF), vanpools, carpools, and biking -- it's all here. Want to see if anyone in your area is interested in van pooling or carpooling? You can post an announcement, too. Click on “Commute Smart” on the SFVAMC Intranet. For questions, comments, suggestions, contact Jonathan Leong at Jonathan.Leong@va.gov or ext. 6428.

Construction Updates

Dental Clinic Gets a Face Lift

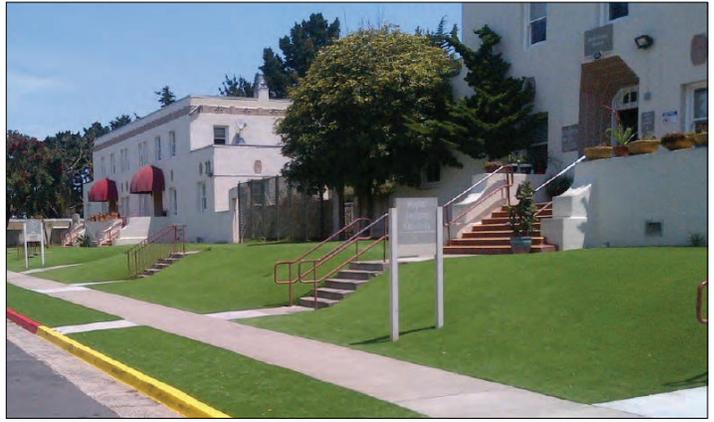
For the past seven months, the Dental Clinic has undergone a complete transformation in an effort to improve the quality of care given to our Veterans, and to facilitate the needs of staff. In addition to having more privacy, every room was built to accommodate current dental equipment, provide efficient lighting, and allow for access to X-ray equipment. These renovations also add the ability to perform conscious sedation through the addition of a nitrous oxide and waste air scavenging system in each room.

To keep the Dental Clinic operational during construction, this project was accomplished in two phases. While one hallway was being renovated in phase one, the second hallway remained completely operational. Once this phase was finished renovation commenced on the second hallway, allowing half the clinic to remain open throughout the construction.



“The Dental Clinic has been long overdue for a renovation. Existing utilities were old and difficult to maintain and flooring and cabinets were in need of repair,” said Christopher Brazell, project engineer. “The Dental Clinic was congested and had lack of storage, lack of privacy, and poor work flow.” After completely gutting and rebuilding the dental clinic, the space is much better suited to its purpose, and Veterans now have a new, state-of-the-art clinic in which to receive care.

Engineering (Operations & Maintenance), IRMS, Space Planning, EMS, Biomedical Engineering, Dental and Pharmacy all contributed to the success of this project.



Synthetic Turf: Attractive and Eco-Friendly

Engineering Service has installed synthetic turf in multiple locations on the campus including: in front of the Building 7 (Canteen); Buildings 9 and 10 (Hoptel); the islands in Parking Lot B, and near Building 1 (Farmers Market area).

Veterans and staff have overwhelmingly expressed their approval at the look of the new synthetic turf. It is common to see Veterans and staff resting and relaxing in these areas, and it is a definite hit at the Farmers Market location.

In North America, synthetic turf conserves more than three billion gallons of water annually, eliminates nearly a billion pounds of pesticides and fertilizers, and recycles more than 105 million used tires. It has also empowered millions of individuals, as well as businesses, to reduce their carbon footprints. Many of the components used in the production and installation of synthetic turf are sourced from 100% post-consumer recycled products. Synthetic turf products have played a large role in the reduction of recent overcrowded landfills. It is also allergen and bacteria resistant because synthetic grass does not produce or harbor airborne allergens. It is also resistant to mold development. Normal contact will not upset even the most sensitive skin.

Not only does the synthetic turf support our Veterans, visitors and staff, with a safe, calming environment, it is also good for the environment.

*In the last edition of “The Beacon,” the article on the electrical upgrade project did not acknowledge all the staff who were instrumental in working on that project. These staff included: **Paul Merriman, Heriberto Robinson, Ivan Barcinas, Jason Soriano, Colin O’Connor, Chris Jocson, Duane Freeman, Anthony Robbins and Elliot Johnson.** Thank you for your efforts!*

Service Awards

The following employees have been honored for their years of service between May - August 2013. [SOURCE: SFVAMC HR Department]

• 10 Years •

Paulette Abadiano
Richard Bain
Rey Berondo
Clifford Berry
Patricia Birmingham
Jennifer Cendak
Frank Contreras
Alicia Deleon
Karen Dunn
Sharon Ezekiel
Wilfredo Fragata
Laurie Handegard
Ruth Hem
Helen Lew
Chuang Lu
Valerie Mallory
Donnell Marshall
Sabrina Mazzei
Linda Moustapha
Nina Ngao
Cheryl Paller
Kent Paller
Susan Phillips
Ronald Strauss
Daniel Tardif
Virginia West
Hermance Williams
Christopher Woodward
Vickie Yee

• 15 Years •

Deborah Chew
David Daikh
Dave Domingo
Grant Gauger
Michael Jackson
Hubert Kim
Dana Kizer
Phyllis Larimore
Mauricio Ramirez
Pedro Rivas
Philip Starr
Charlotte Stockstill
John Teerlink
Purificacion
Valencia
Mary Whooley
Kelly Wommack
Sonia Yballe

• 20 Years •

Theresa Cameranesi
Lee Denton
John Devine
Berdie Harrell
Alvin Legaspi
Marylou Medina-Bolus
Anthony Oakley
Rickie Rivers
Susan Serrano
Renu Sharma
John Straznickas
Phyllis Wysinger
Margaret Young

• 25 Years •

Raymond Balingit
Jerry Brooks
Alicia Dacanay
Quan-Yang Duh
Joseph Kaminski
Elaine Liu
Michael Martin
Nancy Odell
Ofelia Paderna
Deniece Phung
Linda Reilly
Jane Rudolph
Christopher Smallwood
Carol Tiggs
Debbie Wong

• 30 Years •

Bennie Dunn, Jr.
Victoria Gray-Dickerson
Zina Lopez
Dean Morris
Vicki Simon
Albert Stepicevich
Linda Winkler
Sarah Young

• 35 Years •

Charles Caudle
Linda Jones
Lucretia Jones
Barry Massie

• 40 Years •

Bradley Gee
Robert Lee

Correction: The following employees were incorrectly listed as having 10 years of service in the April 2013 edition:

Michelle Bosuego, 15 years
Irene Turman, 15 years

IN MEMORIAM

Margarita Astrero, Nursing Service
Karen Barnett-Incasa, Surgical Service
Ron Patrocinio, Nursing Service

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