



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Vanguard

DECEMBER 2001

A black and white photograph showing a line of veterans in uniform and hard hats walking through a cemetery. They are carrying a large wreath of flowers. In the background, a large classical building with columns is visible. The scene is outdoors with trees and other people in the distance.

Veterans Day 2001

Americans attend observances in
record numbers — page 9

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On the cover:

Wreaths decorate the Korean Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 11. Still reeling from the terror attacks of Sept. 11, Americans turned out in record numbers at Veterans Day observances across the country to show their patriotism and support for the nation's present and future veterans.

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INTRODUCING

Denise Grant

Understanding different cultures isn't always so easy. Suppose you greet a Native American with the words "Hey, chief." Though you may have intended to show respect by acknowledging his or her American Indian heritage, your greeting might actually be interpreted as an insult.

Fortunately, there's an easy way to avoid common communication gaffes, and Denise Grant is showing employees in the VA Puget Sound Health Care System how it's done.

As minority veteran coordinator for the system's American Lake and Seattle divisions, she's introduced cultural competency training to help employees understand cultural differences among veterans they serve.

"It's just knowing how to treat veterans from unique cultures with respect and dignity, as all veterans should be treated," explained Grant from her office in Seattle. "We started this training because we found that we weren't responding adequately to veterans' cultural needs."

She said the training's benefits are two-fold: it encourages employees to confront their own biases and stereotypes, and it improves the quality of service available to veterans and their families. "This training can make such a difference in the health care we provide our veterans," said Grant. "Not only are we caring for their physical needs, but we're also looking at their spiritual and psychosocial needs as well."

About 25 percent of veterans served by VA Puget Sound are minorities, and having a better understanding of their cultural

background, customs and traditions can help employees avoid common misunderstandings and inappropriate statements.

Grant is holding quarterly "lunch and learn" sessions to introduce cultural competency training. She said the first few sessions, which specifically focused on Native American veterans, were well received by management and well attended by employees. Dr. Rosalie Miller, a primary care physician and resident expert on cultural awareness

in the clinical setting, facilitated the training, which included showing the video "Respect" and talking about cultural issues with Native American veterans.

Cultural competency training is only one aspect of Grant's work, though. She's also an advocate for minority veterans.

She gets out into

the community and establishes relationships with veterans and their families. "It's my job to let them know they're not alone when they come to the VA ... and to be there for them when they come through those doors," said Grant, who has been with VA for 11 years.

Colleagues say she does that and more. They recognized her initiative and professionalism during the annual minority veteran coordinator conference in October by naming her VA co-Minority Veteran Coordinator of the Year for 2001.

"Denise is promoting cultural awareness and diversity throughout the medical center," noted supervisor Robin S. Cook, team leader for customer service. "She's teaching us to treat people like people, regardless of their ethnic background." □



By Matt Bristol

Jeni Cook,
Director,
VA Chaplain Service

Chaplains Provide Needed Disaster Response Services



On Sept. 11, 2001, in the words of President Bush, "Our country suffered a direct, hostile, and premeditated attack." The events of that day left us in shock, fear,

anger, depression, and despair. The World Trade Center became "Ground Zero" as rescue workers rushed to save the thousands of victims. The plane crashes at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania added to the horror we witnessed on television.

Rescue workers at the sites were strongly impacted not only by the human tragedy that was unfolding, but also by the deaths of their fallen comrades. In this national crisis, VA chaplains responded with care both at our medical centers and at the disaster sites.

What is the role of the chaplain in a disaster? Disasters, personal tragedies, and moments of great personal loss always raise questions about the meaning of life, the meaning of suffering, the involvement (or lack of involvement) of a "Supreme Being" that may leave people in shock, spiritual pain, and confusion. The chaplain's role is to walk with them through such moments of pain and spiritual distress, providing comfort, religious consolation, spiritual guidance, grief counseling, and hope for the future.

A secondary role is the mobilization and training of local clergy to maximize coverage at the disaster site. In each role chaplains are leaders in disaster response efforts and are frequently the "calming presence" that is so needed in times of stress.

Chaplain George Kelly, a Roman

Catholic priest from the East Orange, N.J., VA Medical Center, was one of the first to respond to the Sept. 11 tragedy as part of the Red Cross's Spiritual-care Air Incident Response (SAIR) teams. One of the first actions by Chaplain Kelly's team was to recruit and give Red Cross orientation to 200 certified clergy in the New York area.

The SAIR chaplains ministered to the thousands of families who suffered the loss of a loved one. They provided pastoral counseling and crisis intervention and encouraged family members to sustain themselves by relying upon their faith. The chaplains planned ecumenical prayer services for Red Cross volunteers at sites surrounding the city and provided weekly religious services for police officers and firefighters.

Chaplain Kelly spent the last day of his tour of duty providing ministry to the rescue workers who were

horrific loss of the tragedies.

Chaplains participated with staff psychologists in specially scheduled meetings so that both patients and staff could process their feelings. Chaplain Meairs and Chaplain Michael Carr of the Detroit VAMC were then called to New York by the Episcopal Church to participate in a disaster response team, offering training and resources to clergy whose congregations lost members or family in the attacks.

Chaplain Charles Smith, a Lutheran chaplain from the Hampton, Va., VA Medical Center, was immediately recalled to active duty as part of the Air National Guard Crisis Action Team. He was assigned to the Sheraton Hotel Family Assistance Center in Arlington, Va., and was tasked with providing pastoral care to the family, friends, and associates of victims in the aftermath of the attack on the Pentagon.

Though his duties were very stressful and emotional, Chaplain Smith reported that this work had great meaning for him as a chaplain.

The VA National Chaplain Center

has embarked on a plan to expand the disaster preparedness training for chaplains. Discussions have been conducted with the Red Cross to determine current requirements for certification and to develop a specialized chaplain-training model. The National Chaplain Center will be making eight field trips to various medical centers across the country in an effort to provide training and certification to as many chaplains as possible. Additional disaster preparedness field training is also being planned for FY 2003.

In these times of uncertainty, we cannot predict when or where disaster will strike. We *can* predict that chaplains will be there, and they will be ready to serve. □

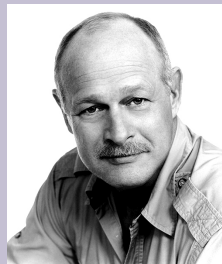
The VA National Chaplain Center has embarked on a plan to expand the disaster preparedness training for chaplains.

still searching feverishly in hopes of rescuing survivors from the rubble, and at the morgue at New York University Medical Center working with the National Disaster Mortuary Team, blessing the bodies of the dead, and providing spiritual support to the staff.

On the day of the disaster, Chaplain Babs Meairs, an Episcopal priest from the San Diego VA Medical Center, like VA chaplains across the system, immediately responded to the shock, anger, and feelings of helplessness of patients and staff within her facility. Special prayer services were quickly organized and held to provide needed support and encouragement to unite a hospital community shaken by the

McRaney Named Salute Chairman

Actor Gerald McRaney, who played a U.S. Marine on the TV series "Major Dad," is chairman of VA's 2002 National Salute to



McRaney

Hospitalized Veterans. As chairman, McRaney will lead VA's annual patient recognition program inviting the public to visit and honor hospitalized veterans across the country during National Salute Week, Feb. 10-16, and throughout the year. He'll also serve as a national spokesperson for the nearly 100,000 volunteers who help veterans in VA facilities.

McRaney has been a strong supporter of the men and women serving in America's armed forces. During the Gulf War, he visited troops in Saudi Arabia with the United Services Organization (USO). Since then, he has been an active participant in USO tours, visiting American troops deployed to Bosnia, Haiti and Somalia. In April 2000, he was recognized for his support of the USO with the organization's Merit award.

A native of Collins, Miss., McRaney began acting in junior high school. He dropped out of college after his freshman year and went to work as an assistant stage manager for a New Orleans repertory company. Several years later, he moved to Hollywood to pursue his acting career.

McRaney is best known for his TV roles as private investigator Rick Simon, a character he played for eight years on the series "Simon and Simon," and as a Marine officer in the comedy "Major Dad." More recently, he played Russell Green on the series "The Promised Land." □

Bush Signs \$51 Billion VA Budget

President Bush signed a \$51.1 billion budget for VA on Nov. 26. This year's budget represents an increase of 6.8 percent over last year's figure.

The total includes \$21.3 billion for health care, which is \$1.5 billion more than last year, and \$27.3 billion for benefits, a hike of almost \$1.8 billion. Cemeteries were allocated \$121 million, an increase of \$11 million.

The \$21.3 billion health care budget will be augmented by nearly \$900 million in estimated collections from third-party health insurance and co-payments from veterans. With the new funding, VA will provide health care to about 4.1 million patients, including 41 million outpatient visits and 681,000 hospitalizations.

Included in the health care budget are an extra \$196 million for long-term care and an additional \$164 million to improve patient access. VA's goal is for patients to get appointments for primary care and non-urgent care within 30 days, and be seen within 20 minutes of a scheduled appointment. A total of \$371 million, an increase of \$21 million over last year, will support VA medical research projects.

The \$27.3 billion allocated for compensation, pension and other VA-administered entitlement programs includes an estimated cost-of-living adjustment of 2.6 percent in compensation and pension programs

that will take effect in January.

The administration's budget authorizes hiring more full-time employees in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to handle the projected workload increase triggered in part by the "duty to assist" law, and the decision to declare adult-onset diabetes in Vietnam veterans a service-connected condition. The budget authorizes a total of 12,714 full-time employees for VBA.

For national cemeteries, the budget doubles to \$10 million the spending dedicated to upgrading them to a level befitting their status as national shrines. Funds will be used to renovate gravesites and to

clean, raise and realign headstones and markers.

The budget also includes funding for land acquisitions

for new cemeteries in the Detroit, Pittsburgh and Sacramento areas; development of a new cemetery in Atlanta; design of a new cemetery in Miami; and columbaria expansion and improvements at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne, and the Tahoma National Cemetery in Kent, Wash.

Other programs funded in the new budget include a VA-wide evaluation of all information technology systems and development of an enterprise architecture. A total of \$183 million was also appropriated for major construction projects, and \$211 million for minor constructions projects. □

Health Care
Benefits
Cemeteries

\$21.3 billion
\$27.3 billion
\$121 million

Are You Watching?

Don't miss your weekly helping of "VA News"—news for and about VA employees delivered each week in a digestible 10-minute video shown daily at 4 a.m., noon, 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. (Eastern Time) over the VA Knowledge Network satellite link to your facility. Check with your facility satellite coordinator for local times and viewing locations. For more information about VA News, call the VA Office of Public Affairs at (202) 273-5730.

VA to Build New National Veterans Museum

A proposal to create a national museum in VA headquarters honoring veterans and their accomplishments was announced at a reception attended by members of Congress and veterans service organization leaders last month.

The National Veterans Museum will tell a story of homecoming—the universal experience shared by all soldiers returning from war to their families, friends and communities. Some exhibits will highlight the impact on American society of such seminal events as the Bonus Army of 1932 and the G.I. Bill of 1944. Others will explain the role of VA and its missions, and the many innovations credited to VA employees.

Secretary Anthony Principi had hoped to create a veterans museum in VA Central Office (VACO) more than 10 years ago, when he served as Deputy Secretary. It didn't happen back then, which he said he now counts as one of the "great regrets" of his past tenure.

In remarks at the Nov. 8 reception, Principi expressed his hope that the new museum will be "world-class" in scope and design, on a par with others in Washington, D.C. He said it should be a place where veterans and their families can feel at



Special Assistant to the Secretary Joe Thompson unveils a proposal to construct a National Veterans Museum in VA headquarters.

home while visiting the nation's capital, and where they can reconnect with old friends and comrades.

He also plans to link the museum with the capital's memorials to veterans, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Korean Veterans Memorial, the Women in Military Service to America Memorial, and the World War II Memorial now under construction.

The museum will have interactive learning areas for visitors, and places set aside for lecture and discussion. There will also be a site for students of all ages to visit, along with their parents and teachers. Admission will be free.

Joe Thompson, special assistant to the Secretary, is heading the effort to

create the museum. He brings relevant experience to the assignment, having led the creation of a highly-regarded veterans museum at the New York VA Regional Office when he served as director there.

VA has commissioned Lord Cultural Resources Planning and Management, Inc., to develop a master plan for the new museum. The plan for an approximately 10,000-square-foot facility on the first floor of VACO is expected to be ready by the end of this month. Included in the plan will be an outreach program that will

make traveling exhibitions and Internet-based programs available to VA field facilities.

Principi said the museum will be funded through private donations. All contributions to the museum fund are tax-deductible. □

Want to Contribute?

To make a donation to the National Veterans Museum, send a check made out to **VA National Veterans Museum to: Central Office Finance (047F), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., 20420.**

Online Policy Access Feature Added to Insurance Web Site

The more than 2 million veterans who have government life insurance policies can now access information about their policies online. A new "Online Policy Access" feature on the VA Insurance Web site at www.insurance.va.gov allows holders of certain policies to get basic information about their plans, like policy descriptions, dividend amounts, premium payment status, and cash and loan values.

Policyholders can also download insurance forms and e-mail questions directly to the Philadelphia VA Regional Office and Insurance Center. Future enhancements to the site are likely to include allowing

policyholders to make simple changes to their policies, request dividend refunds and loans, fill out applications online, view their beneficiary designations, and access their Veterans' Group Life Insurance policies. To use the Online Policy Access feature, policyholders must first request a Personal Identification Number (PIN). They can request the PIN right on the Web site, or by calling 1-800-669-8477. VA will mail the PIN number to the policyholder the next business day.

The Insurance Center directly manages six programs, including U.S. Government Life Insurance, National Service Life Insurance,

Veterans' Special Life Insurance, Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance and Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance. Employees there are responsible for collecting premiums, processing policy actions, paying death and disability claims, performing actuarial functions, formulating policy, plans and procedures, and evaluating program performance.

The center also indirectly supervises two other insurance programs for servicemembers and veterans—Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and Veterans' Group Life Insurance. Policies for both are issued through a group contract with a private insurance company. □

Flag-Raising Opens 120th National Cemetery



The first raising of Fort Sill National Cemetery's flag was the focal point of the dedication ceremony.

"With the potential to serve many thousands of veterans and their family members for the next 100 years or so, we in VA have made a commitment not only to the aging heroes of today but also to future generations of veterans," said Larry Williams, director of the new Fort Sill National Cemetery, as he greeted 1,000 southwestern Oklahomans to the cemetery's opening ceremony Nov. 2.

A warm wind over the prairie made the first raising of the cemetery's flag the focal point of the program that would precede the first veterans' burials on the next business day. The flag-raising, rather than the traditional unveiling of a dedicatory plaque, served as the news media's photo opportunity because the National Cemetery Administration (NCA)'s 120th cemetery opened on a "fast-track" section of otherwise undeveloped property.

Noting that only about 1 percent of the cemetery is open, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Robin

L. Higgins said, "We didn't want to wait two more years to begin to honor the heroes of western Oklahoma." To meet veterans' burial needs sooner, NCA hopes to open future cemeteries through fast-track construction years before permanent buildings and systems are finished.

Referring to the cemetery's origins in an Army fort, Higgins noted, "It is fitting that we do this because the national cemetery system was born about the same time that Gen. Philip Sheridan founded a lovely outpost that he called Fort Sill."

In keynote remarks, Secretary Anthony Principi lauded NCA's reinstating an old tradition by installing a plaque similar to one placed in the original national cemeteries. The aluminum tablet bears the first stanza of a poem, "Bivouac of the Dead," written by a 19th century soldier.

The Secretary credited the cemetery's establishment to efforts by the Oklahoma congressional delegation, state legislators who helped secure the land transfer from the Army, and veteran advocate Col. Hardy Stone (Ret.). Stone recalled that he approached Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.) in the early 1990s to urge support for a national cemetery. Oklahoma's other national cemetery, at Fort Gibson, is more than 200 miles northeast. The new 391-acre facility will serve about 166,000 veterans and family members who live within approximately 75 miles.

The initial burial area of three acres has space for 1,000 gravesites. Operations are being conducted from a modular office, a temporary committal service shelter and an equipment shed. The major construction project, funded by a \$12 million appropriation, will begin soon and produce an entrance gate, an administration/maintenance complex, a public information center, two

committal service shelters and a memorial path. It will provide 10,270 full-casket gravesites, 1,000 in-ground sites for cremation remains and 1,000 columbaria niches for cremation remains.

In the days leading up to the ceremony and Veterans Day, Williams and staff members of the cemetery, the memorial service network based in Denver and NCA headquarters visited more than 600 students in 10 high schools in the Lawton, Okla., area, talking to them about the importance of veterans, the benefits provided by VA and NCA and the historical origins of national cemeteries.

They showed the video "A Sacred Trust," which educates viewers about VA burial services, and distributed Veterans Day posters and other materials. The effort was in support of President Bush's "Lessons of Liberty" educational initiative. □

By Jo Schuda

NCA's 'Bivouac' Tablets Revive an Old Tradition

In the mid-19th century, a U.S. soldier fighting in the Mexican War, Theodore O'Hara, penned a poem about a rousing battle and the aftermath of casualties. Reprinted again and again in the popular press, "Bivouac of the Dead" captured American sentiment and, cast into iron tablets, became a fixture on the landscapes of the oldest national cemeteries.

Today, those who follow the general folklore surrounding cemeteries believe the tablets still exist in all national cemeteries. In fact, most tablets have been lost over the years, but with the opening last month of Fort Sill National Cemetery, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) began an initiative to return the poem to the cemeteries.

"Bivouac of the Dead's" poignant language and association with the national cemeteries' origins as national shrines is the impetus for



Poet Theodore O'Hara's (left) verse was popularly used on colorful Decoration Day postcards (above) in the early 20th century.

resurrecting the first and most-recognized stanza of the poem. "This was an opportunity to restore a small but historic element of our Civil War-era cemeteries, which make up more than half of the National Cemetery Administration's 120 cemeteries," said Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Robin L. Higgins.

"We often forget that so much of our history dates to this emotional chapter in America, and this verse is part of the nation's outpouring of grief and memorialization. If we overlook the artifacts and literature that were part of the wave of patriotism that helped shape our national cemeteries, we risk losing an important link to the past. 'Bivouac' is also the kind of story that can engage the public and foster a new constituency to respect and care for these resources into the future."

"Bivouac" is specifically an elegiac poem, which expresses feelings of melancholy, sorrow, or lamentation—especially for the dead. Every existing national cemetery will receive a new cast-aluminum tablet, as will the five currently under development. Measuring 24" x 18" with raised letters and a black background, it will be visually distinguishable from the few originals—extant in 14 NCA cemeteries—and bronze memorial plaques of similar size.

Theodore O'Hara's military service bridged the period from the Mexican War to the Civil War, which led him to see some of the first national cemeteries created. Born in

Danville, Ky., in 1820, O'Hara studied law before embarking on a military career.

As a Brevet-Major in the Mexican War from 1846 to 1848, he fought at the Battle of Buena Vista, and he served again against Cuba two years later. O'Hara then traded sword for pen, and for a decade was editor of several southern newspapers. In the Civil War, Col. O'Hara commanded the 12th Alabama regiment of the Confederate Army, and saw action at Shiloh and Stones River in Tennessee. The 47-year-old itinerant poet-soldier died in 1867.

Although O'Hara wrote "Bivouac" to memorialize the many casualties suffered by the Second Kentucky Regiment of Foot Volunteers at Buena Vista, the verse was produced long after the confrontation, as part of the dedication ceremony for a monument erected to these soldiers. More Americans fell there—267 dead, 456 wounded—than in any other battle of the war, which concluded with the United States compensating Mexico for the ceded Texas, and New Mexico and California becoming U.S. territories.

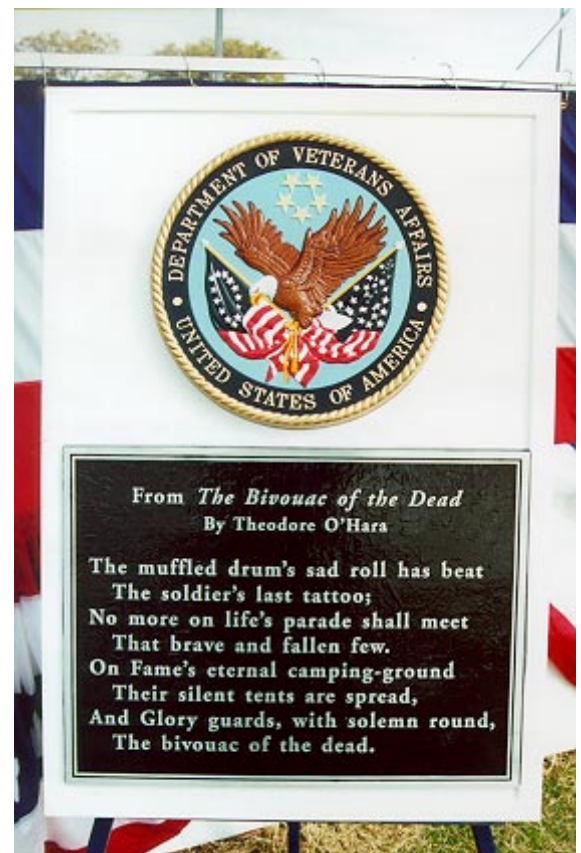
While O'Hara was editor of the *Mobile Register*

in 1858, "Bivouac" was published in what is considered its original 12-stanza form. The poet frequently changed words throughout the verse, however, so different versions of it appeared at different times. He also removed the names of specific locations, to elevate the work as a more pure elegy.

"Bivouac" first found its way into the national cemeteries as crude signs on the transitional landscape of battlefields-turned-burial grounds. One visitor to several cemeteries in 1890 observed, "Quotations from this one poem are repeated over and over, at the gateways and on painted boards at the turns of the avenues among the graves. In Antietam cemetery one might pick up and put together almost the entire production from these inscriptions." The most prominent use of the verse is found on the McClellan Gate to Arlington National Cemetery, 1879.

Recognizing the verse's popularity, in 1881-82 the War Department had at least seven quatrains (half a stanza) produced as cast-iron tablets

(continued on page 8)



Every VA national cemetery will receive one of these cast-aluminum tablets bearing the first and best-known stanza of the poem.

VA Nurse Executive Wins National Fellowship



McCutcheon

Susan J. McCutcheon has been a beacon of hope to families of veterans with mental illness. Her approach to providing health care for veterans with serious mental illness relies heavily on family involvement. And the nation's largest philanthropy devoted to health care is taking note.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation selected McCutcheon as an Executive Nurse Fellow. She is the first in VA to receive this highly competitive honor.

The three-year fellowship is an advanced leadership program for nurses who aspire to help shape the health care system of the future. It includes a grant of \$15,000 for self-directed learning activities, \$30,000 for a leadership project with matching funds from VA, seminars by national health care experts, and a mentoring assignment with a senior executive.

"I believe that veterans with serious mental illness are our most vulnerable patient population," said McCutcheon, a registered nurse who serves as director of the Community Mental Health Division at the Louis Stokes VA Medical Center in Cleveland. "With the Robert Wood Johnson Executive Nurse Fellows Program, I hope to become a leader that veterans with serious mental

illness can rely on to create the system of health care that they deserve."

For her leadership project, she will develop a strategy to implement family education through a partnership between VHA and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), which can serve as a model for implementing evidence-based practice within VHA. She will implement the Family-To-Family Education Program, sponsored by the NAMI, in the VA Healthcare System of Ohio. The program has been shown to enhance family members' sense of empowerment and reduce subjective caregiver burden. "We now need to measure the impact it has on our veteran patients," said McCutcheon.

Laura Miller, VHA Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health,

will be McCutcheon's mentor. "Ms. Miller is a highly successful and respected executive who has been able to impact the entire VA system," said McCutcheon. "I'm very excited that I have this opportunity to work with her."

McCutcheon joined the staff at the Cleveland VAMC in 1983 after earning her master's degree in psychiatric/mental health nursing and has held a number of clinical and administrative positions. In 1989, she earned a doctorate in educational administration.

The deadline for next year's selection for the Robert Wood Johnson Executive Nurse Fellows Program is February 1, 2002. Application materials are available at www.futurehealth.ucsf.edu/rwj.html. Contact McCutcheon via Outlook e-mail for additional information. □

'Bivouac' (cont.)

at its Rock Island, Ill., Arsenal, "to take the place of notices, verses, &c., on painted signboards which had become unsightly and were too costly to renew as frequently as required." Although observers may have recognized the verse, the name of the poet was omitted—perhaps a deliberate obfuscation due to the author's Southern allegiance. The Army apparently removed most of the tablets during the early 20th century, since they are extant in the national cemeteries managed by the National Park Service since the 1930s.

In contrast to the poem's anonymity in national cemeteries, O'Hara was lauded in literature of the late 19th and 20th centuries. "The hold of this elegy upon the popular heart grows stronger and more enduring," wrote his biographer in 1875. "It is creeping into every scrapbook (sic); it is continually quoted upon public occasions." In a literary context "Bivouac" is compared to well-known works by Thomas Gray and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, among others, and in a popular venue, the verse is found on colorful Decoration Day postcards of the early 20th century.

A rare contention with "Bivouac"

and its presence in cemeteries appeared in *The Century* magazine in 1890. The writer had political objections to the poem's origin because it celebrated soldiers who lost their lives "in an unholy war, that with Mexico." He also complained, "A stroll through any of our national cemeteries will suggest the idea that the War Department has official knowledge of but one elegiac poem," and proposed that literary references be expanded to more appropriate occasions and poets—many of whom died in the more "righteous" Civil War.

O'Hara's body was removed from Georgia and buried in the "state military lot" in Frankfort, Ky., in 1874, along with the remains of fellow officers from the Mexican War. His grave, located in front of the Kentucky military monument of 1850, features a portion of his famed verse. At O'Hara's reinterment, a friend read "Bivouac of the Dead" and observed, "O'Hara, in giving utterance to this song, became at once the builder of his own monument and the author of his own epitaph." □

By Sara Amy Leach
NCA Historian

Veterans Day 2001



WHITE HOUSE PHOTO

VA Secretary Anthony Principi and Education Secretary Rod Paige joined President George W. Bush at a Rockville, Md., high school to announce the creation of "Lessons of Liberty," a White House initiative to bring veterans into classrooms all across the country the week of Veterans Day to help students learn more about veterans' contributions to the nation.



More than 5,000 people filled Memorial Amphitheater to hear Vice President Dick Cheney deliver the keynote address at this year's Veterans Day observance at Arlington National Cemetery.

About 5,000 people turned out for the Veterans Day program at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (below left and right). At right, singer Lee Greenwood signs autographs after delivering a rousing, crowd-pleasing rendition of his hit song, "God Bless the U.S.A." The song enjoyed a resurgence during the wave of patriotism following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Many in the crowd waved flags and fought tears during Greenwood's performance. They roared in appreciation when Greenwood added, "God bless our veterans!" at the end of his song.



Rave Reviews for the Creative Arts Festival



Frank Harmon, an Air Force veteran from Prescott, Ariz., and his friend Cynthia "Andy" Landis, perform an excerpt from a play based on Harmon's experiences living with ALS.

who witnessed it. Patricia A. McKlem, NAVAHCS director, gave much of the credit for the week's success to the staff and volunteers who put in so many extra hours planning and hosting the event.

"I received so many compliments from veterans, staff and volunteers about [our staff]," she said. "Our employees and volunteers put in untold numbers of hours during the past year to make this happen." Secretary Anthony Principi honored their efforts by presenting them with the Secretary's Award.

During the week, the veterans' award-winning artwork was on display in the VA Theater on facility grounds. The range of work ran the gamut from wire sculpture, jewelry

making and fine oil paintings, to woodwork, leatherwork, quilting, photography, beadwork and more.

Much of the work was symbolic of the personal struggle each veteran has had to overcome from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical or mental trauma, substance abuse or other obstacles. Each work reflects a step on the road to personal recovery and triumph.

Michael Cruse is a good example. Severe PTSD took a devastating toll on the disabled Vietnam veteran, causing him to live most of his adult life in isolation, even keeping him from his own family. But watching him at this year's Festival, you'd never know it as he stood with his wife Leta next to his artwork (a large porcelain vase hand-painted with flowers and birds), talking to people in the crowd about his work.

Other ailments have left him with little feeling in his hands, so his wife glues Velcro to his hand so he can hold a paintbrush. His breakthrough came last year, when unbeknownst to Cruse, Leta entered his artwork in the Creative Arts competition. He won, but he wasn't used to being around people. He hid out in his hotel room for the first three days of the Festival, but then something happened.

He started meeting other veterans who shared the same struggles and used art to help them heal. "I believe art...made it possible for me to join the human [race] again," Cruse said. "It has been better than anything in my life to make the changes come about."

For the performers, the weeklong regimen of rehearsals paid off in a brilliant spectacle of song, dance, music and drama. Paul Dieke, this year's show director, even included an inspired first-act finale as the entire cast came onstage to sing "America," complete with flags and

It would be difficult to get everyone who experienced this year's National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Prescott, Ariz., Oct.

15-21 to agree on the highlight. Some might say it was the spectacular Festival show at the Yavapai College Performance Hall before a standing-room-only crowd. Others might point to the works of art that sent strong messages without the need for words. And for others, it might have been the remarkable phenomenon of strangers becoming like family in just one week.

Against a backdrop of the quaint western town of Prescott, a picture-perfect Southwest landscape, and the historic VA facility once known as Ft. Whipple and now known as the Northern Arizona VA Health Care System (NAVAHCS), the magic of the Festival unfolded during the week and became infectious to all



John Robison, an Army veteran from Emmett, Idaho, with the award-winning chaps he made from scrap leather.



Wayne Miller, a Marine Corps veteran from Silver Spring, Md., actress Jane Powell, and James Sterrett-Bryant, an Air Force veteran from Van Nuys, Calif., join the rest of the cast for the finale.

pyrotechnics. It brought the sold-out crowd of more than 1,000 people to their feet.

While all the acts gave their best performances of the week on stage, no one who was there could forget the powerfully moving performance

computer to write out his thoughts.

With the help of his friend Cynthia "Andy" Landis, a play was written based on Harmon's stories and letters about what it's like to live with ALS. Harmon and Landis performed a portion of the play at

by Prescott veteran Frank Harmon, who was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) in 1988. The disease has left Harmon confined to a wheelchair and unable to speak. He now uses an erasable board and pen or a

the Festival as a testament to the strength found in a human being's spirit and heart, not the body.

Film and stage star Jane Powell served as mistress of ceremonies for the show that also included dancing life-size puppets, Scottish bagpipes, singing, dancing, poetry, pianos, flutes, guitars and a comedy routine. Also in the audience was actress Bo Derek, honorary chairperson for all four National Veterans Rehabilitation Special Events.

At the closing presentation, Jessie Herndon, a music therapist with the Chicago VA Health Care System, was awarded the 2001 Shirley Jefferies Award for her unending dedication to helping veterans heal through music.

"It's so nice to see people grow beyond where they could be," said McKlem. "This Festival [does] that...it allows them to keep growing." □

By Susan Fishbein
Los Angeles OPA Regional Office

'Healing Art'

Chicago Museum Exhibits VA Patients' Works

The National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago recently featured an impressive array of fine art created by veterans who served in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The exhibit, entitled *Healing Art*, featured 30 pieces of fine art chosen from last year's National Veterans Creative Arts Festival competition. Veterans nationwide were given the opportunity to enter the competition through the VA medical center where they receive their care.

The winners of the competition were veterans who served in Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia between 1962 and 1975. Their works of art, and the museum's collection of more than 700 other works created by Vietnam veterans, relate to the artist's personal experience in the war. A number of the artists traveled to Chicago during the exhibit's run to visit the display.

Jan Scruggs, founder of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, spoke at the exhibit opening in August. "The war evoked many different emotions, including anger and sadness," Scruggs said. "The *Healing Art* exhibit, like *The Wall*, allows visitors to sense these emotions, but also to experience the healing taking place within the veterans."

About 50 people attended the exhibit opening, including a number of Chicago VA employees, veterans service officers and local veterans. Robert

Clark, a Springfield, Ill., resident and Vietnam veteran, traveled four hours to visit the museum and view the exhibit. "I am amazed at the raw emotion that these pieces of art convey," Clark said at the exhibit opening. "Looking at some of these displays brings tears to my eyes. I wouldn't trade this experience for anything."

The *Healing Art* exhibit was sponsored by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, VA and Help Hospitalized Veterans. Help Hospitalized Veterans is a national, nonprofit organization that distributes arts and crafts kits to veterans receiving care in VA medical centers, state veterans homes and military hospitals. Elizabeth Mackey, music therapist at the St. Cloud, Minn., VA Medical Center and coordinator of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, spearheaded this program on behalf of VA.

The National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum opened in August 1996 in Chicago. It houses the only fine art collection of its kind, featuring more than 700 works of art created by 115 artists who served in the military during the Vietnam War. All of the pieces chronicle their individual experiences in that conflict. □

By Maureen Bossch
Chicago OPA Regional Office

Anthrax Discovered in D.C. VAMC Mailroom



Decontamination workers from Greenville, S.C.-based BioCare Inc., conduct environmental cleaning of the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center mailroom on Nov. 6.

A letter filled with the deadly anthrax bacteria and mailed to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) shut down the Hart Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill and contaminated mail-sorting equipment at the U.S. Postal Service's Brentwood facility, the central processing site for mail entering the Washington, D.C., area. Spores from the letter killed two postal workers and cross-contaminated mail destined for federal buildings throughout the city.

VA Central Office (VACO), the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center, and the VA Regional Office all received mail from the Brentwood postal facility. As a result, mailroom employees were evaluated for exposure to anthrax. None developed either the skin or inhalation form of anthrax infection.

Mailrooms also underwent environmental testing. Though there was no evidence of anthrax in the VACO or regional office mailrooms, four surface swipes taken Oct. 31 at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center mailroom did test positive for a trace amount of anthrax. Fortunately, mailroom employees had been taking antibiotics since Oct. 25, when the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention issued a health advisory recommending mail workers take the antibiotics as a precautionary measure.

As soon as he got the test results, medical center Director Sanford M. Garfunkel immediately closed the mailroom and contacted VA Deputy Secretary Dr. Leo S. Mackay Jr. to alert him of the discovery. They

spoke with VA emergency response experts and planned a series of town hall meetings to inform employees of the situation.

"My number one priority was to take all appropriate precautions to ensure a safe work environment and to protect the health and well-being of our employees and patients," said Garfunkel, after industrial hygienist Steve Mabley discovered the anthrax while conducting environmental testing in the mailroom. Medical center microbiologists Sabiha Zubairi and Norma Ryskewich later confirmed the presence of the bacteria through laboratory testing.

"From the minute I heard of the potentially positive findings, I felt it was critical that everyone who wanted to know as much as I did about the issue," said Garfunkel. "Obviously, we don't want to scare people in a situation like this, but the employees of this medical center are all health care professionals, and I think it's in everyone's best interest to be aware of what is going on during critical times like these."

Dr. Fred Gordin, chief of infectious disease at the medical center, and Maureen Schultz, R.N., coordinator of the infection control program, provided medical expertise at the town hall meetings. During the first meeting, Gordin said the anxiety

(continued on page 14)

Other Scares

From suspicious letters to mysterious white powder, a number of VA facilities were affected by the anthrax scare. Some of these incidents are listed below. Many other facilities received anthrax-related threats.

- The Huntington, W.Va., VA Regional Office received an envelope containing a suspicious powder. The incident was later ruled an anthrax hoax.
- The Castle Point, N.Y., VA Medical Center and the Martinsburg W.Va., VA Medical Center both received suspicious letters in the mail.
- Employees of the Manchester, N.H., VA Regional Office had a scare when an IRS employee in the same building found a suspicious powder in their cubicle area.
- A pail containing a suspicious white powder and a note was found at the Anchorage, Alaska, VA Outpatient Clinic and Regional Office. The powder was later determined to be laundry detergent.
- The Hartford, Conn., VA Regional Office received a letter containing a suspicious powder.

Bill and Ginger: A Date to Remember



In the gut-wrenching days following Sept. 11, Bill Nelson kept the faith that his wife Ginger had somehow managed to survive.

Bill and Ginger had a date on the evening of Sept. 11. After work, they planned to meet at an art gallery for the opening of a friend's photo exhibit. Ginger had a passion for art and design, especially photography, and the gallery was featuring one of her favorite forms—black and white stills.

They left their apartment as usual that morning, catching the subway from their neighborhood on Manhattan's Upper West Side at about 7:15 a.m. As the train snaked downtown, Bill flipped through his *New York Times* while Ginger studied her *Wall Street Journal*. It was their morning routine. When they reached his stop at Times Square, he rubbed her leg and told her he'd see her that night. She gave him a wink as he exited the train. Their 10th wedding anniversary was a few months away.

Bill Nelson transferred and took another train to his office in the National Center for Ethics at the VA New York Harbor Health Care System, where he serves as VHA ethics education coordinator. Ginger rode the subway down to Wall Street, where she was senior vice president for the investment firm

Fred Alger Management.

Later that morning, as he sat in his office, Bill watched in horror as thick clouds of black smoke spewed from the World Trade Center's north tower. It was 8:48 a.m. He grabbed the phone and dialed Ginger's number. She worked on the 93rd floor, just a few floors from where American Airlines flight 11 struck the north tower. "I don't know if it was shock or denial, but I just expected that she would get out of there," said Nelson, struggling to recount the day's events. "She was athletic, energetic ... so youthful."

He described the rest of the day as a blur—running back and forth from his office window to a TV screen down the hall, watching in disbelief as both buildings crumbled to the ground in a cloud of fire and dust. He credits colleagues Dr. Ken Berkowitz and Barbara Chanko with helping him through the shock of those first few harrowing moments and the difficult days that followed. "They held me as the horror became more and more real," the former chaplain explained.

As Nelson tried to make sense of the chaos consuming his life, Berkowitz and Chanko were busy

putting together a flyer with Ginger's name, physical description and a photo of her they found on his desk. They printed copies and gave them to him as he ran out and onto 1st Avenue, frantically searching for Ginger's face among the thousands of New Yorkers fleeing lower Manhattan. "There were people covered in dirt and ash, but I just kept looking for her ... she had this grace, beauty and style," he said. "I knew I would spot her."

Nelson searched all day: walking the streets, visiting hospitals and finally trudging toward Ground Zero. "I walked around as close as I could get," he recalled. "I guess I just kept expecting to see her there in a daze or something." Instead, he saw thousands of people who, just like him, were searching for lost loved ones. Exhausted, he walked to their apartment on 106th Street. Before collapsing in bed, he checked to make sure the front door was unlocked. It would stay that way throughout the week.

The next day, he took a few stuffed moose Ginger kept on the bed and propped them on the window where they could keep watch for her. That night, he lit a candle and tried to close his eyes. As the days began to blur, he steeled himself for the worst. He gathered Ginger's toothbrush, hairbrush and other personal items police could use for DNA sampling. After seven days of searching and waiting, he made one more visit to Ground Zero.

He spent hours there that evening, staring at the massive pile of twisted steel and rubble that was once the twin towers. When he got home, he walked inside, closed the door, and locked it. "I guess I just realized that it was highly unlikely that anyone could have survived that," he explained.

A memorial service for Theresa "Ginger" Risco Nelson was held in St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University on Oct. 12. Hundreds attended, including staff from many VA facilities and VA Central Office. Ginger was the wife of Bill Nelson, Ph.D., a 26-year VA employee. □

By Matt Bristol

Special Agent Honored for Work on Gilbert Case

In a crowded Washington, D.C., conference room, officials from the Executive Office for United States Attorneys gathered Nov. 30 to honor the achievements of district attorneys and law enforcement officers who have contributed to the mission of the Department of Justice. Many were involved in some of the year's most visible federal criminal cases.

Attorney General John Ashcroft told awardees, "This is a day for us to recognize your efforts and show our respect and gratitude for your work." Among those honored was Special Agent Steven Plante, from the Northeast Field Office of the VA Office of Inspector General.

Plante, along with Kevin Murphy, of the Massachusetts State Police, received the Director's Award for "Outstanding Contributions in Law Enforcement" for his efforts in the successful prosecution of Kristen



VA Inspector General Richard Griffin (center), congratulates Special Agent Steven Plante (left) as Kevin Murphy, of the Massachusetts State Police, looks on.

Gilbert. Gilbert, a former VA nurse, was found guilty of murdering four veterans and sentenced to four consecutive life sentences in a federal prison. The investigation into Gilbert began in 1996, when three nurses at the Northampton, Mass., VA Medical Center—Kathleen Rix, John Wall and Renee Walsh—became suspicious of her behavior and reported it to authorities.

Inspector General Richard Griffin said the award was the first national recognition his office has received since he came to VA from the U.S.

Secret Service in 1997. He credited the successful prosecution of Gilbert to the hard work of Agent Plante and Officer Murphy. "They hung in there and really made this case," he said.

Missing from the annual award ceremony was Tom Valery, an agent with the Inspector General who is based at the Northport, N.Y., VAMC, and Samantha Lockery, a

special agent with the Inspector General Area East office. Both were members of the team investigating the criminal activities of Michael Swango, the medical doctor charged with poisoning patients.

As a result of the team's investigation, Swango pleaded guilty to four counts of homicide and was sentenced to life in prison. Though the U.S. attorneys on the team were nominated and received recognition for their work, agents Valery and Lockery were overlooked in the nomination process. □

Anthrax (cont.)

level was "pretty high," so he and Schultz provided employees with as much information about anthrax as possible: what it is, how it's spread, how it could have gotten into the mailroom, quantity detected and symptoms of infection.

By the third meeting, Gordin recalled, the fear factor had been significantly reduced. "These meetings were invaluable in dealing head-on with a difficult problem and alleviating employee concerns," he said.

As director of the medical center's occupational and environmental health service, Dr. Patrick

Joyce met one-on-one with about 50 employees concerned about contracting anthrax in the workplace. "They were startled and worried about the unknown," he said, explaining that most employees had questions about how to cope with the fear of uncertainty.

"You need to collect as much accurate information as possible and then assess whether this fear is greater than any other we face as health care professionals," he advised.

The Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center continued to serve veterans throughout the incident.

The mailroom was decontaminated on Nov. 6 and is currently operational.

Dr. Mackay and Garfunkel agreed that immediate and continuing communication with employees, patients and the community was essential in responding to threats of bioterrorism.

More information on anthrax and precautions to take when handling mail is available on the VA Emergency Medical Strategic Healthcare Group Web site at: vaaww.va.gov/emshg/. □

By Matt Bristol

InfoSec2001 Conference: One VA in Action

How does a big, sprawling organization like VA keep more than 200,000 employees, millions of veterans, and countless stakeholders “on the same page?”

That’s a major information technology (IT) challenge. Add to it the need to keep VA information secure yet accessible, meet rising user expectations, and deal with organizational turf divisions, and the challenge could easily become an obstacle to fulfilling the VA mission.

But the Department took a big step toward preventing that from happening by uniting the Office of Cyber Security and three administration information security offices at the first-ever VA-wide information security conference. With a theme of “Security by Design,” VA InfoSec2001, held in Orlando, Fla., drew some 500 attendees. According to VA Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Cyber Security Bruce Brody, “Security by Design” means the Department will:

- build security into all IT initiatives, projects and processes

based on models developed under VA’s IT Enterprise Architecture;

- get beyond the inefficient practice of retrofitting security onto existing projects and processes;

- train every VA employee, contractor and volunteer to help them understand not only the basic security issues, but also their specific roles in information security;

- conduct continuous reviews of what has been done in the information security arena and react to changing veterans’ expectations and the risk environment; and

- be a cyber security leader in the federal community.

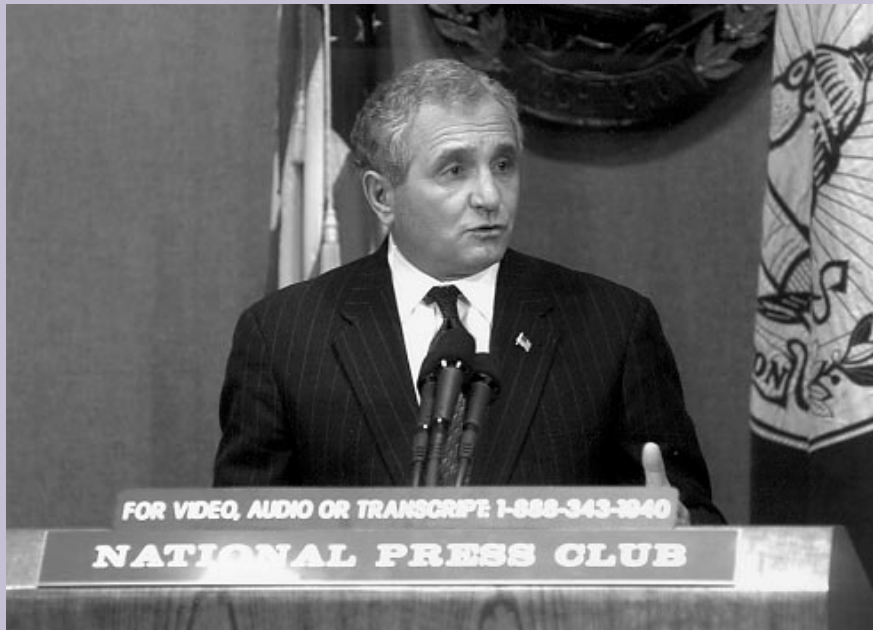
This year’s conference built on the foundation of InfoSec conferences held in past years by the Veterans Health Administration. Extending the scope of the conference allowed the Department’s entire information security community to benefit from the offerings.

At the conference, Secretary Anthony Principi expressed his support for VA’s cyber security program and the security commu-

nity, saying, “Success for this program will require changing our entire organizational culture into one in which security is built in from the start. Bruce [Brody] will be relying on each one of you to help him weave a bolt of VA information security fabric that will be strong and uniform from top to bottom. Every service we offer veterans will be cut from that cloth. How well that cloth fits is up to all of us at VA—how it is designed is up to you.”

Conference attendees had a choice of 80 training sessions, including many hands-on training opportunities. A “Capture-the-Flag” event gave VA technical staff a chance to use hackers’ tools in a safe environment. And for the first time at any InfoSec conference, participants could browse a hall of vendor booths featuring the product lines of VA’s industry security partners. Organizers said the conference set a new standard for government cyber security programs, and planning is already underway for VA InfoSec2002. □

Meeting the Press



In a pre-Veterans Day address to members of the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 6, VA Secretary Anthony Principi spoke about the history, mission, achievements and challenges of the Department of Veterans Affairs. “I would argue that the legacy of the generations of men and women whose service deterred global war is measured in the intensity and openness of debate on any issue you might choose to report, in this city or in any part of our country,” he told the Press Club members. During a Q & A session following his speech, the Secretary took questions from members on such topics as Agent Orange, VA’s response to the Sept. 11 terror attacks, the claims backlog, and the expansion of national cemeteries to meet the growing demand for burials.



First VA Surgery to Correct Atrial Fibrillation and Heart Valves Performed at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Surgery for correction of atrial fibrillation, done in conjunction with replacement of the mitral and aortic heart valves, was performed at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System on Oct. 25.

Atrial fibrillation is the most common form of arrhythmia, affecting more than 2 million people annually. It is characterized by a loss of synchrony between the heart's atria and ventricles. In those diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, a flurry of electrical impulses causes the atria to quiver or fibrillate from 300 to 600 times per minute.

During the corrective procedure, surgeons used a hand-held radiofrequency probe to "draw" ablation lines on the inside of the atria while the patient's heart was exposed. The ablation lines that were drawn mimic the lesions created in the historical surgical operation known as the "Maze Procedure."

This is the first time the innovative procedure was performed in a VA medical facility. A film of the procedure, titled "Radiofrequency Cardioablation for Atrial Fibrillation," was made as part of a research study.

Scientists Identify Protein Involved in Excessive Scar Tissue Growth

Scientists from San Diego and the United Kingdom have identified a protein involved in excessive scar tissue growth that may cause liver fibrosis and cirrhosis. The findings may also apply to fibrous tissue growth in other organs, such as the kidneys, lungs and skin.

Scars are the result of fibrous tissue growth, and an appropriate amount is necessary. However, an excessive build-up of fibrous tissue can cause disfiguring scars externally and clog vital organ functions internally. Such is the case with viral hepatitis, which causes excessive scarring of the liver and can lead to serious medical complications.

The discovery occurred while researchers were examining the cause of excessive fibrous tissue growth. They found a phosphorus molecule activated by chronic illness or injury attaches itself to an amino acid sequence within the C/EBP beta protein, specifically the sequence KTVD—lysine (K), threonine (T), valine (V), and aspartic acid (D). With the addition of this phosphorus molecule, the amino acid sequence blocks the normal activity of enzymes called caspases, which are responsible for halting excessive fibrous tissue growth.

Once the researchers identified the KTVD protein sequence, they developed a mutated version by substituting the amino acid alanine (A) for threonine (T) and bred the new sequence, KAVD, into laboratory mice.

They found the mutated sequence blocked the phosphorus molecule and allowed the caspases to prevent excessive fibrous tissue growth.

Dr. Mario Chojkier, a liver specialist at the VA San Diego Healthcare System, professor of medicine at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD), and the study's senior author, described the significance of the findings to the San Diego Metropolitan. "In some individuals, injury or chronic illness causes fibrous tissue to accumulate. ... In the liver, this can lead to cirrhosis and serious life-threatening medical complications such as internal bleeding, fluid accumulation, and an inability to handle medications or environmental toxins. However, until now, we haven't known how this process occurred at the molecular level and how we might prevent it."

Researchers now hope to modify the KAVD peptide so that it may be administered orally or inhaled by people susceptible to cirrhosis or other disease associated with excessive scarring.

Lead author of the study, Martina Buck, Ph.D., is a research scientist at VA San Diego, UCSD, and the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. Scientists from the University of Dundee, United Kingdom, also participated in the study, which was published in the Oct. 26 edition of the journal *Molecular Cell*.

Study Shows 'Intriguing Evidence' on the Healing Power of Prayer

Though there is no proof that prayer has any effect on physical healing, a group of patients with clogged coronary arteries who took part in a prayer therapy group during a 1997-98 pilot study conducted at the Durham, N.C., VA Medical Center had better outcomes than patients in four other therapy groups. Results of the study were published in the Nov. 1, 2001, issue of *American Heart Journal*.

According to lead researcher Mitch Krucoff, a cardiologist with Duke University Medical Center, the study shows "intriguing evidence that this is worth a more definitive study."

In the pilot study, the names, ages and health conditions of 30 patients were sent to religious groups around the world—Catholics, Baptists, Buddhists, Jewish and others. The religious groups then prayed for the patients, who were unaware that people were praying for them.

Researchers also monitored the outcomes of four other groups made up of an equal number of patients with clogged coronary arteries. These patients participated in other therapies, such as stress relaxation, touch therapy, and positive thinking support. The researchers found patients in the prayer group had better outcomes than the other groups.

A follow-up study is underway, with more than 500 patients—of an eventual 1,500—already enrolled. The follow-up study will take place at nine hospitals across the country.

The concept of measuring the power of prayer has irked some theologians. "It says what we really care about is not God, but rather our health," said Stanley Hauerwas, a professor at Duke Divinity School. "That makes God a function of our narcissistic needs. I don't think God wants to play those games." □



Veterans at the **James H. Quillen VA Medical Center** in Mountain Home, Tenn., are just as likely to have a prescription filled by a medical librarian as a pharmacist. Medical staff can refer patients to the **Quillen Learning Center** with an "information prescription" to help them learn more about their conditions and how to help doctors treat them. Located in the Primary Care Clinic, the center is open to all veterans and their families, as well as to medical center staff. Medical Librarian Patsy Ellis operates the center, with help from the patient health education coordinator, other library staff, and volunteers. It was established at the request of VA staff who saw a need for a place where both patients and families could go for health information. The center serves 65-85 patients per month and mails health information to the homes of others at the request of their health care providers. Patient education resources available include brochures and handouts, books, Internet searches and videotapes.

A new center at the **Minneapolis VA Medical Center** will convert research on colorectal cancer into improved prevention, diagnosis and care as part of the VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) program. Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of death from cancer, after lung cancer. The center is a collaborative effort between the **VA Health Service Research and Development Service** and the National

Cancer Institute. **Michelle VanRyn, Ph.D.**, is research coordinator at the center, and **John H. Bond, M.D.**, is the clinical coordinator. Officials expect the center to become a nationally recognized resource in both colorectal cancer research and in the systematic translation of research findings.

This year, the **VA Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program** awarded grants totaling almost \$10.5 million to 64 nonprofit groups for the development or expansion of programs to assist homeless veterans. The grants will create 874 new beds for homeless veterans and fund 45 new vans for outreach activities and other transportation purposes. Since the program's inception in 1994, VA has awarded 306 grants totaling more than \$60 million. Each night, more than 3,000 veterans sleep in beds funded by the program.

The **Portland, Ore., VA Medical Center** received an unexpected visit from former Senator and 1996 presidential candidate Bob Dole after he met two medical center employees on a nonstop flight out of Dulles International Airport near Washington, D.C. During the flight, Dole left his first-class seat and walked back toward the main passenger cabin complaining about his sore hip. On the way, he met **Deborah A. Burton**, a nurse and director of education at the medical center, and **Dr. Tom Cooney**. As Dole complained about his sore hip, Burton responded,

"You're in good hands, we're with the VA." Dole, a World War II veteran who was wounded in combat, asked her to move over one seat so he could sit between her and Cooney. They chatted for two hours. After the plane landed, Dole told the staff of Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.) that he wanted to schedule a trip to the medical center during his two-day visit to Portland. He spent about an hour at the medical center, visiting with hospitalized veterans in several units and outpatients in the lobby.

More than 6,000 people attended the dedication of the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial at the **Indiantown Gap, Pa., National Cemetery** in October. The Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial Commission sponsored the memorial to honor those who served our nation and the state of Pennsylvania in times of war and peace. Director of the Office of Homeland Security Tom Ridge and Pennsylvania Gov. Mark Schweiker addressed the audience. The dedication drew television crews from the local ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC affiliates, and newspaper reporters from Lebanon, Harrisburg and Lancaster.

The **Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center** in **Bonham, Texas**, celebrated its 50th anniversary with a ceremony and reception on Nov. 9. Planning for the center began in 1943, and construction began five years later. The center received its first domiciliary resident on Nov. 1, 1951, and was officially dedicated on Veterans Day, 1951. It was named in honor of the Texas legislator, congressman and longtime speaker of the United States House of Representatives. His oath of office on April 7, 1913, as a

member of the House of Representatives marked the beginning of more than 48 years of continuous service, the longest record of service in the House ever established (at the time of his death in 1961). The facility is part of the VA North Texas Health Care System.

Nearly 95 people were screened for peripheral vascular disease by staff of the **San Francisco VA Medical Center** during the third annual National Peripheral Vascular Disease Week, Sept. 15-21. The disease, which affects an estimated 13 million Americans, is caused by a degeneration of the blood vessels in the legs and causes severe pain, particularly when walking. **Rajiv Sawhney, M.D.**, chief of interventional radiology, and **Colleen M. Sasso, R.N.**, radiology charge nurse and president of the American Radiological Nurses Association, were the force and energy behind the medical center's participation in the event. San Francisco was one of four VA facilities to participate in the national screening. The **Houston VAMC**, **Jerry L. Pettis VAMC** in Loma Linda, Calif., and the **VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System** were also involved.

Once a month, children from the "Kids R Kids" pre-kindergarten class in Murfreesboro, Tenn., visit the **Alvin C. York Campus** of the **VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System** to meet with residents of the Transitional Care Unit as part of an intergenerational group. After Sept. 11, the group decided to collect teddy bears and other stuffed animals for children and the elderly who lost loved ones in the attacks. Together, they collected more than 800 stuffed animals and donated them to the Red Cross. □

HONORS and awards



VA Under Secretary for Health **Dr. Thomas L. Garthwaite** received the Surgeon General's Medallion, the highest honor bestowed by the Surgeon General and the Public Health Service.



Garthwaite

The award recognizes his vision, outstanding policy leadership, and steadfast support of VA employees who collaborated on VetPro and the Federal Credentialing Program since 1996. VetPro and the Federal Credentialing Program result from the successful partnership between VA and the Department of Health and Human Services in building the now fully operational, secure Internet-based credentialing program. It provides consistent, high quality, efficient credentialing information, assuring safe patient care by appropriately credentialed and qualified practitioners.

In recognition of his many accomplishments as an international leader in the education of health care professionals, **Dr. Lawrence M. Tierney**, of the **San Francisco VA Medical Center**, was named recipient of this year's David M. Worthen Award for Academic Excellence. During his 27-year career as a full-time VA physician, he has been recognized as a premier clinician-teacher in the San Francisco area. The Univer-

sity of California, San Francisco, has awarded him their "Excellence in Teaching Award" 17 times during his career. Tierney has participated in 15 visiting professorships in the United States, six in Japan and one in Australia. He was named editor of the 25th edition of the respected *Current Diagnosis and Treatment*. The "Clinical Problem Solving" series in the *New England Journal of Medicine* exemplifies his many scholarly publications.

Bonnie Britten was appointed to the Employee Relocation Council's Board of Directors. Formed in 1964, the council is a global network of professionals developing and sharing cost-effective, innovative and caring solutions to support the mobile workforce. Britten, who serves as chief of the **VBA Travel Policy Division** in the Office of Resource Management, is one of two federal employees appointed to the board. Other board members are from companies such as Home Depot, Johnson & Johnson, Kraft Foods, Circuit City Stores, Arthur Andersen LLP and BellSouth. The council serves more than 10,000 worldwide corporate and government relocation managers, real estate companies, appraisers and a range of service firms that address relocation issues.

David Pisetsky, M.D., Ph.D., of the **Durham, N.C., VA Medical Center**, received the 2001 Howley Prize from the Arthritis Foundation in recognition of his accomplishments in arthritis research. He

was honored for his scientific leadership, as well as for his groundbreaking research on systemic lupus erythematosus and the immunological properties of DNA. In research spanning two decades, Pisetsky led a team that demonstrated bacterial DNA has powerful immune activities and can stimulate a variety of responses, including the autoimmunity found in lupus. This information has translated into greater understanding of lupus and other arthritic diseases and has provided the basis of new therapies. The potential of bacterial DNA as an immunological agent is wide-ranging, touching upon many useful applications, including new approaches for vaccination, treatment of infectious diseases, and biological warfare. Pisetsky is currently professor of Medicine and Immunology and chief of Rheumatology, Allergy and Clinical Immunology at the Duke University Medical Center.

Members of the post-traumatic stress disorder treatment team at the **Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System** received a 2001 Telly Award in the Health and Medicine category for their non-broadcast video production, *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Families Matter*. The team wrote, narrated and acted in the 29-minute educational video. Since 1980, the Telly Award has recognized outstanding non-network and cable film and video productions and commercials.

Patricia A. Quigley, Ph.D., was named president of the Florida Nurses Association for 2002. She has been a Tampa VA Medical Center nurse since 1983 and currently serves as associate director of the clinical division

in the Patient Safety Center of Inquiry. Quigley is an experienced researcher and principal investigator for several ongoing studies, including "Deployment of an Evidence-Based Program to Prevent Patient Falls" and "A Clinical Evaluation of Veterans' Quality of Life Following Rehabilitation."

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, hosted by the **Grand Junction, Colo., VA Medical Center**, was a finalist for the WM. Thayer Tutt Award for Sports and Recreation. The award is presented by the El Pomar Foundation Awards for Excellence Program to nonprofit organizations throughout Colorado and provides monetary grants to finalist and winning organizations. As a finalist, the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic received a \$5,000 check.

The president of the Central City branch of the Harris County Medical Society in Houston presented a special award to **Dr. Thomas Horvath**, chief of staff at the **Houston VA Medical Center**, for his role in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Allison. Twenty-two people died in the June 2001 storm, which dumped about 28 inches of water on Houston and caused nearly \$5 billion in damages. Horvath was recognized for his role in identifying and allocating clinical resources in response to the storm.

The **Leadership VA Alumni Association** presented its 2001 Honorary Leadership awards to **Dennis H. Smith**, director of the **VA Maryland Health Care System**, and **William E. Cox**, associate director of the **VA North Texas Health Care System**, during the association's ninth annual

forum in San Antonio, Texas. The award is presented annually to honor the leadership and vision of two VA executives.

Jim Adamson, director of the **Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery**, was named an Honoree of the Year of the Greater Dallas



Adamson

Area Veterans Council, an organization that represents local veterans' groups. Before moving to Dallas, Adamson, who served in the Air Force from 1969-73, was director of the Long Island National Cemetery in New York. He arrived in Dallas during the cemetery's construction and found veterans' groups angered over delays. Adamson worked to eliminate delays and ensured the cemetery was ready for its May 2000 dedication.

The **Mental Health Blue Team** (Mood Disorders) in the **VA North Texas Health Care System** received the Celebration Recovery Award Sept. 30 for significant achievements in helping people recover from psychiatric disorders. The award is sponsored by several organizations, including The Irwin Foundation, Region 2 of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and the Coalition of Mental Illness.

Elizabeth Bauer, R.N., a clinical instructor in the **VA Black Hills Health Care System**, was named South Dakota's Diabetes Educator of the Year at the Mount Rushmore Chapter of Diabetes Educators Convention. Bauer has worked at the Fort Meade VA Medical

Center since 1980 and developed the medical center's diabetes clinic to provide diabetes education, counseling and support for veterans and their families.

The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States recognized several VA employees in their 2001 awards program. **John Feussner, M.D.**, chief of research in **VA Central Office**; **Joy Meier, Pharm.D.**, pharmacist in the **VA Northern California Health Care System**; **Charles S. Via, M.D.**, physician with the **VA Maryland Health Care System**; and **Harold F. Morris, D.D.S.**, a dentist with the **VA Ann Arbor Health Care System**, were recognized for their contributions in improving health care for veterans and the nation.

Thomas Bird, M.D., a neurologist with the **VA Puget Sound Health Care System**, received the George W. Jacoby Award from the American Neurological Association and presented the Jacoby Lecture during the association's 126th annual meeting. The honor is presented every third year to a member of the association who has conducted meritorious experimental work. Bird was selected for his investigations of genetic factors in Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, and for research on the genetics of a variety of hereditary neurological disorders.

Ellesha E. Miller, a member of the 6-East surgical unit at the **VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System**, was one of 29 nurses honored during the third annual Cameos of Caring Awards. The awards program was started in 1999 by Ellen B. Rudy, former dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing, to honor

nurses throughout western Pennsylvania who demonstrate excellence in care, initiative and advocacy.

The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy awarded **Carol Neely, Pharm.D.**, clinical coordinator for Pharmacy Service at the **VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System**, their Outstanding Teacher for Clinical Science Award. The May 2001 graduating class in the Doctor of Pharmacy program selected Neely for the award. She has served as a clinical instructor for the University of Mississippi for more than five years.

Two physicians from the **VA Black Hills Health Care System** received Golden Apple Awards from the University of South Dakota. Medical students at the university selected **Dr. Ashok Kumar** and **Dr. Lana Fischer** as the best teachers for the 2000-2001 school year. Both physicians work in primary care at the **Fort Meade, S.D., VA Medical Center** and teach in the university's Department of Internal Medicine. Internal medicine students must spend six weeks at the VA medical center as part of their third-year clerkship.

Dr. Paul Volberding, chief of Medical Service at the **San Francisco VA Medical Center** and vice chair of the Department of Medicine at the University of California at San Francisco, was elected to be the first vice chair of the HIV Medicine Association and will chair the association in 2003. Volberding established the world's first outpatient HIV/AIDS clinic in San Francisco's General Hospital in the early 1980s.

A. Reed Thompson, M.D., a physician at the **Central Arkansas Veterans**

Healthcare System and assistant professor of geriatrics at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, has received the esteemed Humanism in Medicine Award for 2001 from the American Association of Medical Colleges. The award recognizes a medical school faculty physician who exemplifies the qualities of a caring and compassionate mentor in teaching and advising medical students. Thompson is board-certified from the American Board of Otolaryngology and is a member of the American College of Surgeons.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation selected **Allen L. Gifford, M.D.**, a physician in the **VA San Diego Healthcare System** and assistant professor at the University of California at San Diego, to receive the foundation's 2001 Generalist Physician Faculty Scholar Award. The award provides up to \$300,000 over a four-year period to support and develop generalist physicians. Gifford's research focuses on how patients with chronic disease manage and adhere to their complicated treatment regimens.

Northport, N.Y., VA Medical Center associate chief of medicine **Joanne Holland, M.D.**, was chosen by the medical center's primary affiliate, SUNY Stony Brook School of Medicine, to receive their Aesculapius Award. The honor is one of the school's most prestigious awards, and is presented each year to three educators selected from several thousand teaching faculty that make up the Stony Brook consortium. Holland's selection was based on factors including her impact as a teacher and role model for students and residents. □

HEROES

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Staff at the **Riverside, Calif., National Cemetery** lost one of their own in October when long-time employee **Gerald “Jerry” Sanchez** suffered a heart attack while on duty in the mechanic shop. It happened while Sanchez, a former U.S. Marine who served in Vietnam from 1964-66, was working on a truck suspension with mechanic **Bill Brown**. Brown realized his colleague was in serious trouble and called for help. **Paul Cordero**, grounds maintenance coordinator, and cemetery caretakers **Paul Miller** and **Bacillio Martinez** came running and pulled Sanchez from beneath the truck. They administered CPR until paramedics arrived, but sadly, he passed away. “Jerry was loved and respected by the management and staff here at the cemetery and will be sorely missed,” wrote **Daniel Cassidy**, public affairs coordinator for the cemetery. The 55-year-old father of two was buried at the cemetery Oct. 18.

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After suffering a heart attack and stroke, a veteran was spending \$200-\$300 of his disability payment on medications each month and had become delinquent on his mortgage payments for a VA-guaranteed loan. Fortunately, all it took was intervention from **Mary Rose Wynn**, a loan servicing representative in the **Atlanta VA Regional Office**, to put an end to his financial strain. After talking with the veteran to find out why the loan was delinquent, and hearing how much he

was paying for medications, Wynn asked if he or his wife had ever gone to the VA medical center for help. They said they hadn’t and described the veteran’s health care problems as being related to his military service. Wynn explained the steps for applying for disability compensation and told the couple she would contact a VA medical center on their behalf. She called the **Durham, N.C., VA Medical Center** and spoke to **Jerry Corbin**, patient representative. Corbin called the veteran to schedule an appointment. He explained how to apply for VA pharmacy benefits and how to start a disability claim. Thanks to the actions of Wynn and Corbin, the veteran is now receiving his medication through the VA pharmacy service and can put his disability check toward paying his mortgage.

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Marty MacDonald, R.N., knew something wasn’t quite right. As nurse manager for the **community-based outpatient clinic in Hyannis, Mass.**, he was on the phone with a veteran who called to discuss transportation for an upcoming appointment. “One minute we were talking and then he just hung up the phone,” explained MacDonald. “I immediately called him back and asked if he was all right. That’s when he told me he had blacked out ... that it happens all the time and he would be okay. But when he couldn’t tell me the month or even remember his phone number, I hung up and dialed 911.” The 57-year-old

veteran is a brittle diabetic, meaning he has variations in his glucose sensitivity, making it difficult for him to control his blood sugar level. Thanks to MacDonald’s actions, the veteran was transported to a local hospital and stabilized. He later called the **Providence, R.I., VAMC** to express his appreciation. “I’m just glad I could help,” responded MacDonald, who transferred to the Hyannis clinic in June after working seven years in the operating room at the **West Haven, Conn., VAMC**.

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Ralph Williams never thought he’d own a pair of socks worth \$1,000. But when the Vietnam veteran discovered he had a pair of socks with ten \$100 bills stuffed inside, instead of keeping the money, he did the right thing and returned it to its rightful owner. The scene unfolded the first weekend in December at the domiciliary in the **Northern Arizona VA Health Care System. Thomas Bell**, a Navy veteran who served from 1965-76, saved the money to buy a car. He kept it at his girlfriend’s home, but brought it to the domiciliary one weekend to deposit with the agent cashier. Because the cashier was closed, he hid the money in a pair of socks. As the weekend progressed, he forgot about his stash. On Monday morning, he got some new socks and put his old ones in a “free area,” a place residents leave items for anyone to pick up and keep. Ralph Williams saw the socks that morning as he left for a day job. He picked them up and stuffed them into his drawer. Later, Bell realized his mistake and reported the incident to **Carol Hanson**, domiciliary program manager. But it was too late—the socks were gone. Hanson held little hope for the money’s return. “I

thought that guy’s money was so gone,” she told the Arizona Republic. Williams heard about the \$1,000 socks from another Vietnam veteran, **Bob Klipfer**, when he returned to the domiciliary that evening. He checked his drawer and found the socks with the money inside. “Come on, this is going to be fun,” he told Klipfer as they marched to Bell’s room to return the money. To show his appreciation, Bell peeled off a crisp \$100 bill and gave it to Williams. Williams then gave \$50 to Klipfer for telling him about the missing socks and spent the rest buying flowers to place at the Vietnam Memorial in Prescott.

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Jody Kennedy, a supervisor in the Eligibility Office at the Omaha division of the **VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System**, was attending a family gathering at a local hotel when she saw two men pull an unconscious 8-year-old boy from the hotel pool. She ran to see if she could assist the boy, who had been found floating face down in the pool. She’d taken a CPR class several years ago, but had never performed the procedure. Still, she recalled, “Instinct just set in.” Kennedy gave breaths to the boy, while another hotel guest did chest compressions. After a few moments, the boy began breathing, but was unresponsive when he was taken to the hospital. The boy, who had been celebrating his birthday at the pool that day, was hospitalized for a few days but has since made a full recovery. Kennedy later visited the boy and his family, and she received a commendation from the American Heart Association for her heroic efforts. □