

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Letter to Editor

Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center
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Dear Editor:

Each year, the Department of Veterans Affairs celebrates National Salute to Veterans during the week near Valentines Day. This is a very special week and provides VA staff, volunteers, and our community the opportunity to “salute” those who have worn the uniform and who are receiving care at the VA.

We have a host of activities planned for this year’s celebration from February 14, 2016 – February 20, 2016. The week-long celebration will have a kick-off event on February 14, the National Salute to Veterans Dinner and Dance. Additional events throughout the week will include special visits to Veterans by CMU President and students, Saginaw Spirit OHL Team Captains, and WNEM TV 5 Meteorologist, as well as Veteran Service Organization planning visits and activities, a special National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Dinner for hospitalized Veterans and their guests, and a performance by the Saginaw Bay Youth Symphony Orchestra. We want to thank our community supporters of Veterans and our VA in sharing this special week to honor Veterans.

Although this week-long celebration is a very exciting time, we have much to share about the numerous improvements we are making to assure Veterans are receiving timely, quality, and safe care. Our main priority is enhancing the Veterans’ care experience and optimizing the Veterans’ health outcomes.

To promote a healing environment and enhance the delivery of care, many initiatives have been implemented or are planned for implementation. Some of these include our VA constructing a new, three-season greenhouse which will be used for Veteran horticulture therapy, expanding the healing touch program and training staff on tools to decrease pain, aid in comfort, and decrease depression. Staff continue to receive training on PlaneTree principles which promote a healing and caring environment, and a Healing Environment Committee is being implemented to continue enhancements to the care setting. A variety of other initiatives will promote Healing Arts, patient advocacy, and integrative therapies providing massage therapy, auricular acupuncture, aromatherapy, and more.

Our VA has experienced inpatient satisfaction scores which exceeded the national average for Fiscal Year 2015 (October 2014 through September 2015) and received Bronze PlaneTree in 2014 with a goal of Silver for 2016 which supports significant progress in patient-centered care. Most recently, we have also implemented a Pain Resources Team which is a multi-disciplinary team to focus on chronic pain management for Veterans. A provider, psychologist, physical therapist, and pharmacist meets with the Veteran to perform a comprehensive care assessment and treatment program specific to the individual Veteran’s needs.

We have an excellent MOVE! Weight Management Program dedicated to Veterans who may engage on an outpatient basis, or enroll in a 12-day lodger program (MOVE! Intensive) with a dedicated team to help them “jump-start” their journey of improved health. Since the inception of the program initially beginning with an outpatient program in 2005, we have helped 3,568 Veterans achieve better health. Currently, we have the opportunity to register six Veterans for the 12-day MOVE! Intensive lodger program and since August 2012, there have been 219 Veterans who have completed the program with an average weight loss during the 12 days

of 15.5 pounds. Telehealth is also used to connect with Veterans in their homes and 253 Veterans currently receive consultation through this venue for continued weight management success.

You can learn more about the MOVE! Program at www.move.va.gov.

Our VA is pleased to share enhancements being made to our Ambulatory Surgery Department. With the hiring of a Chief, Surgical Service, many improvements are being made to include improved Gastroenterology services and procedures, repair of uncomplicated groin and umbilical hernias, skin biopsies and excisions, expansion of urology services and procedures, and expansion of podiatry services and procedures. All of these efforts will decrease travel to Ann Arbor and Detroit for Veterans. In essence, care can be delivered in a competent, state of the art manner, at the Aleda E. Lutz VA in Saginaw.

We continue to make strides in improving clinic access to Veterans.

- In Mental Health, Veterans are able to be seen within 30 days of their preferred appointment date 100% of the time for new patients, and 99.7% of the time for established patients.
- In Primary Care, Veterans are able to be seen within 30 days of their preferred appointment date 100% of the time for new patients, and 99.94% of the time for established patients.
- Specialty Care averages are slightly lower, at 85.4% of the time for new patients, and 95.8% of the time for established patients. Our current challenges for specialty care are with Echocardiogram, Urology, Audiology, and Podiatry. We are hiring additional staff in these areas, evaluating clinic utilization and profiles to build efficiencies where applicable, and also looking at additional opportunities in our communities to help provide the care to Veterans where available.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve Veterans and I'm pleased with the dedication by our team of over 1,100 employees who strive each day to embrace our core values with each Veteran interaction. ICARE (**I**ntegrity, **C**ommitment, **A**dvocacy, **R**espect, and **E**xcellence) is absolutely what our Veterans and their families deserve from the VA. We will continue to see challenges and overcome them to continuously improve care, delivery of services, and enrich relationships to prove to Veterans our VA and outpatient clinics are devoted to their health and well-being.

Thank you, Veterans, for your commitment, sacrifice, and service, and for allowing us the opportunity to serve you!

With My Sincere Gratitude to All Veterans,

Himanshu Singh, M.D.

Acting Medical Center Director

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