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Construction continues to progress on VA Butler’s new Health Care Center (HCC)! The new HCC continues to remain ahead of schedule, and is set to officially open for Veterans on September 5!

VA Butler’s Center for Behavioral Health Recovery Team, AmeriCorps (Suit Yourself), and Dress for Success, put on a fashion show in April to help educate Veterans on how to dress for formal events, interviews, work, and casual situations.

VA Butler hosted the seventh annual VA2K Walk and Roll in May to support homeless Veterans while also encouraging healthy activity. VA Butler’s event was just one of approximately 200 VA2K events taking place at other VA facilities across the country.

World War II Army Veteran William “Bill” Proffitt celebrated his 100th birthday on March 27, and the staff at VA Butler’s Cranberry Township Community-Based Outpatient Clinic hosted a celebration for him.

During National Volunteer Week, VA Butler recognized nine volunteers who were nominated for the Making Lives Better Volunteer of the Year Award for 2017. The nominees were Donna Croft, Helen Fisher, Mary Heilman, Sandy Wilder, Jim Caldwell, Damian Hambley, Richard Mealy, Bill Heilman and Don Swartzlander.

To continue the commemoration efforts for the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, VA Butler Healthcare hosted an Appreciation Breakfast for all Vietnam Veterans. The event was sponsored by American Legion Post 778.

As part of Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April, VA Butler hosted the annual Clothesline Project—to increase awareness of the impact of violence on women and men, to celebrate the strength of survivors, and to provide another avenue to “break the silence.”

Local artist Tom Panei played an acoustic set and sang the National Anthem at the seventh annual VA2K Walk and Roll Event held in May. Thanks Tom!
Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VA Butler Healthcare,

While there are always important messages I like to share, a very important one I want to briefly mention to all of you is the help and resources available locally to help Veterans in crisis. We have a Suicide Prevention Coordinator to make sure Veterans receive needed counseling and services (800.362.8262, ext. 2737). And, the Veterans Crisis Line is available (1.800.273.8255, press 1) 24/7/365. I also want to remind you that I hold regular town hall meetings (see our web calendar) and I have open office hours every Friday afternoon for Veterans, staff, and the public. I always want our Veterans to feel welcome to come to me with questions, comments, concerns, thoughts, and ideas. We’re here for you.

David Cord, Director

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Opening for Veterans in September

VA Butler’s New Health Care Center

Construction is quickly coming to an end. VA Butler Healthcare plans to open the doors to the new Health Care Center (HCC) for Veterans on September 5.

“I could not be more excited to officially open the doors to this new, world-class health care facility for our nation’s heroes this September,” said David Cord, VA Butler’s Director. “I regularly visit the construction site and am continually amazed at the progress. It makes me proud to be a Veteran, and to know our Butler Veterans will be getting the very best!”

Construction is proceeding rapidly, with first and second floor work almost complete. For example, VA equipment installations for the dental operatories, dental imaging, radiology imaging, as well as the Veteran Canteen Service café and coffee shop all have been completed. All site concrete work also is finished.

VA furniture and computer installations are ongoing. Final paving and line striping work also is underway. The remaining work for the site retention ponds will continue. Commissioning efforts for the building also are coming to a close.

Construction is scheduled to end this summer. The completed HCC will be a 168,000-square foot, two-story building located at 353 North Duffy Road in Butler, approximately 1.4 miles away from the main Butler campus. It will be a silver LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) building. LEED certification provides independent, third-party verification that a building, home, or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at achieving high performance in key areas of human and environmental health.

Services provided at the new HCC will include primary care, specialty care, mental health, dental, diagnostic, laboratory, pathology, radiology, podiatry, optometry, pharmacy, physical rehabilitation, and women’s health. (All of the services currently
provided in Building 1 at the main campus will be provided at the HCC.) The HCC also will be fully equipped to continue, as well as expand, the technology used by VA to provide care. There is telemedicine equipment for telehealth, clinical video telehealth, teledermatology, teleretinal exams, and teleaudiology.

All clinical services will be provided on the ground floor, and parking will be convenient with more than 1,300 spaces. “While we eagerly await the new HCC, it is important to note the importance of the existing campus and that it will continue to be used once the new HCC is open,” added Cord.

All outpatient services and support staff will move to the new HCC, but all other remaining VA services such as the Community Living Center, Domiciliary, 10-bed transitional homeless (CWT-TR house), grounds, transportation, maintenance facilities, etc., will remain in operation and exist on the main VA Butler Healthcare campus located at 325 New Castle Road in Butler.

Veterans and the community can keep up-to-date on HCC construction progress by visiting www.butler.va.gov/news/building.asp, or attending a quarterly public town hall meeting. “Town Halls” and other upcoming events are listed on VA Butler’s website calendar on the homepage, www.butler.va.gov.
Millions of people suffer from pain, and opioids are commonly prescribed for pain relief. However, opioid pain medication use presents serious risks, including overdose and opioid use disorder. At VA Butler Healthcare, staff work with Veterans regularly to find other (safer) strategies for Veterans experiencing pain.

“One of the main goals at VA Butler’s Pain Clinic is to use the lowest, effective dose possible in order to keep the Veteran as safe as possible,” shared Emily Gelacek, a pharmacist in VA Butler’s Pain Clinic. “Other strategies we implement to help with pain include acupuncture, physical therapy, aqua therapy, alpha-stim, mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy, injections, and non-opioid medications.”

Army Veteran Greg Cugini has “graduated” from VA Butler’s Pain Clinic. He no longer takes opioids to help with his pain. Having suffered with chronic pain for years, he had been taking very high dosages of drugs. The support of VA Butler’s Pain Clinic allowed him to slowly lower his dose until he no longer needed anything.

“It’s not easy, but the journey was well worth it. I don’t want to take another opioid again in my life,” shared Cugini. What drove him to success was knowing that at each visit his dosage would decrease, until finally he could say “farewell” and graduate. What he found most helpful were the people he worked with at VA Butler Healthcare.

Air Force Veteran James Young agrees with Cugini in regards to the support he found from VA Butler staff. “Every time you go in there [to VA Butler], they smile. That smile means a lot when you walk in the door. You see the people, and they’re willing to go out of their way to help you. Those people bend over backwards to help Veterans.”

Young also had success with VA Butler’s Pain Clinic, going from a very high dosage, to a very low dosage. “With that high dosage, you didn’t know you were living one day to the next. You quit moving. Your quality of life goes down the drain,” he shared. Now, Young has a better outlook and looks forward to doing things, including spending time with his grandkids.

One of many things that helped him were regular acupuncture appointments. Acupuncture is a form of pain treatment that involves hair-thin solid stainless steel needles inserted through the skin. The needles are inserted into defined locations, painful areas, and tight muscles. They are moved by hand or electrical stimulation. Veterans interested in acupuncture can talk to their VA Butler health care team to learn more.

Young’s advice for Veterans dealing with chronic pain is to get into something that will occupy your mind (such as puzzles), and to find support groups. He meets weekly with other Veterans and says it helps tremendously.

VA Butler offers a variety of resources, programs, and support to help Veterans manage pain and reduce/eliminate opioid use. VA Butler also offers a Pain Workshop that meets weekly for eight weeks and focuses on how to maximize self-management of pain in order to improve function and quality of life.

“The benefits of opioids for pain are uncertain, but the risks of addiction and overdose are clear,” added Gelacek. At VA Butler, we want to help our Veterans reduce and manage their pain, but in the safest way possible.”

To learn more about how VA Butler’s Pain Clinic can help you, talk to your VA doctor today.
This spring, VA Butler Healthcare hosted its first fashion show! VA Butler’s Center for Behavioral Health (CBH) Recovery Team, AmeriCorps (Suit Yourself), and Dress for Success partnered to put on a fun and educational fashion show for local Veterans.

The fashion show educated Veterans on how to dress for formal events, interviews, work, and casual situations. Attire was modeled by Veterans, and Veteran models learned about proper grooming prior to the event. They were offered haircuts, and stylists taught women Veterans how to apply makeup.

Marine Corps Veteran Rich Dorson was one of the Veteran models to participate in the fashion show, modeling three different outfits. He had previously modeled in a fashion show put on at the Grapevine Mental Health Recovery Center. He was nervous, but had a good time and would do it again!

“I would be nervous the next time too, but if they asked me again, I’d go for it,” shared Dorson.

The purpose of the fashion show was to promote mental health recovery and success in the community for local Veterans. According to the National Consensus Statement on Mental Health Recovery, “Mental health recovery is a journey of healing and transformation enabling a person with a mental health problem to live a meaningful life in a community of his or her choice while striving to achieve his or her full potential.”

In order to support the rehabilitation and recovery of every Veteran with a mental illness, VA has identified recovery as a guiding principle for its entire mental health service delivery system. Recovery is a journey that involves developing hope, self-direction, empowerment, respect and peer support.

Having had success at VA Butler's Domiciliary, Dorson is regularly at VA Butler Healthcare participating in after-care, and attending the weekly mental health recovery group “Veteran ‘X’.”

In “Veteran ‘X’,” Veteran participants serve as the treatment team for a fictitious Veteran “X”. In the program, Veteran “X” has a number of challenges similar to those faced by the group’s participants. While helping Veteran “X” to solve his issues, participants gain valuable skills and information to resolve their own issues. VA Butler has a similar program just for women Veterans called “Veteran HOPE” that also is offered weekly.

In addition to group programs like Veteran “X” and Veteran HOPE, VA Butler has a Local Recovery Coordinator who assists Veterans and their families with recovery efforts.

Dorson stays involved at VA Butler to give back to the VA. “I like to give back to the VA because the VA changed my life.”

www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mentalhealthrecovery.asp
Sign Up for Monthly VA Butler Updates!

VA Butler Healthcare sends out monthly updates so that Veterans, their family members, and Veteran advocates can keep up-to-date with all the information and events going on at VA Butler.

How to sign up: Enter your email on our homepage (www.butler.va.gov) on the pop-up, or on the right-hand corner where it says “subscribe.” It’s that easy!

New REACH VET Program – Suicide Prevention

VA has launched a new innovative program called Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health – Veterans Enhanced Treatment (REACH VET). Using a new predictive model, REACH VET analyzes existing data from Veterans’ health records to identify those at a statistically elevated risk for suicide, hospitalization, illness or other adverse outcomes. This allows VA to provide pre-emptive care and support for Veterans, in some cases before a Veteran even has suicidal thoughts.

VA’s suicide prevention resources include the Veterans Crisis Line, which provides confidential support from specially-trained and experienced responders to Veterans, even if they are not enrolled in VA health care. Veterans and their families and friends may call 800.273.8255 and press 1; chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text to 838255. VA Butler also has a local Suicide Prevention Coordinator to make sure Veterans receive needed counseling and services: 800.362.8262, ext. 2737.

New (Free) Yoga and Meditation Class for Veterans

VA Butler Healthcare, with community partner Yoga on Mars, now offers a new, free class for Veterans called “Basic Mindful Yoga and iRest Inspired Meditation.” The class focuses on breathing to assist mind/body connection for increasing skills to manage stress and the disconnect that can occur after trauma. This specific style of yoga is designed with a military-audience in mind and strives to return a sense of personal control to issues such as insomnia, anxiety and depression.

This new class is free for Veterans, and is offered every Monday from 1-2:15pm in VA Butler Healthcare’s Auditorium. Veterans may attend at any time; pre-registration is not required. For more information, Veterans may call 724.285.2292.

www.veteranscrisisline.net
Volunteers of the Year 2017

In honor of National Volunteer Week, April 23 – 29, VA Butler Healthcare held its annual Making Lives Better Volunteer of the Year program. The 2017 Volunteer of the Year nominees were Helen Fisher, Mary Heilman, Sandy Wilder, James Caldwell, William Heilman, Richard Mealy and Don Swartzfeger. This year’s 2017 winners were... Damian Hambley and Donna Croft!

Hambley served in the U.S. Navy and is a Korean War Veteran. He has volunteered at VA Butler Healthcare for 17 years and accumulated 13,171 hours of service. He is active with the American Legion and VFW, having served as post commander for both. Hambley was a volunteer driver, and participates in patient activities through the recreation program at the Community Living Center; ADHC, and Domiciliary. Hambley is a member of VA Butler’s Veterans Advisory Committee (VAC) and serves as a Butler VA VAVS Deputy Representative for the American Legion. He is active in the community through the Veterans In Need Program, which serves homeless and other Veterans by providing household and personal care items, as well as food. Hambley volunteers at VA Butler to help his fellow Veterans.

Croft is the daughter of a WWII Navy Veteran. She has volunteered at VA Butler for more than two years and has accumulated 289 hours of service. Croft primarily assists with patient recreation activities in the Community Living Center and with special events. Croft volunteers with her mother at another VA when she visits. She is the “go-to person” when recreation staff need help or assistance with training a new program volunteer. In addition, she serves as a VA Butler VAVS Representative for the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and is an active member. Croft also volunteers at the Community Health Clinic in Butler, and helps families when she visits her sister in Honduras. Croft volunteers at VA Butler in honor of her father and the wonderful Veterans she encounters.

New Access and Quality Online Tool

For many Veterans, deciding when, where and how to receive health care is often one of the most complex and challenging decisions about the entire health care process. Now, the Department of Veteran’s Affairs has a new website with an access and quality tool to help Veterans make more informed choices.

The Access and Quality in VA Healthcare website allows Veterans to access the most transparent and easy to understand wait time and quality of care measures across the health care industry. That means Veterans can quickly and easily compare access and quality measures from VA Butler to other VA's and make informed choices about where, when and how they receive their healthcare. Further, Veterans at some of VA's largest medical centers will now be able to compare the quality of VA care to local private-sector hospitals with more hospital comparisons being added soon.

This new website will be a work in progress as the VA continues to receive feedback from Veterans, employees, media, VSO’s and their congressional partners, to improve the site’s tools and capabilities based on Veterans input. The VA's goal is to continue to improve this tool to help ensure that the access and quality of care website is a Veteran-driven, Veteran-designed point of access for the services our Veterans deserve. Check it out today at www.accesstocare.va.gov.
For six years I suffered in silence. I had put what happened to me away deep down and never spoke of it. I had become a shell of a human, not really living life. I only existed. One day, something major happened in my life and those feelings and memories I tucked deep down inside of me came rushing back. My husband and I began fighting constantly. I didn’t want him to touch me, talk to me or even look at me. One day, I decided to tell him why. I spoke a sentence that I had been dreading to say. Actually choked on the words, “SFC_____, raped me….” He was angry; he was angry at me. He said lots of mean things to me and demanded details that I hadn’t yet processed. In his anger he said one helpful statement, “Call the VA; I can’t help you!”

After a few years of treatment at VA Butler, my therapist and I began discussing the possibility of having a group therapy program. I was constantly told, “You are not alone.” I walked the halls of the VA and every time I saw a female veteran, I thought, “Are you a survivor too?”

After the group therapy began, I started to really live again. With these other five to eight women who joined our group, I was able to laugh again. I was able to live again. These women are the ones who truly helped me heal. Looking at the other females, I see success. I see that I’m not weird or crazy or alone. These women have been where I am. They have felt the way I feel. They have learned to live again. Together, we have learned to enjoy life.

The women I’ve gotten to know have given me the courage to start advocating to others about MST. I’m no longer scared to admit what happened to me. I have spoken at a rally in Harrisburg about being a survivor. I have done several media interviews and reached out to others on social media. I want other women (and men) to know they are not alone and they can get their lives back. Since I have begun advocating, I have had several women and two men reach out to me and tell me that they also are survivors and that I have given them the courage to speak up and get help. One thing I’d like them to know is that you do not have to report the attack in order to get treatment at the VA. You can live again. Life is worth living. You are not defined by what happened to you. You are worth it. My goal for the next year is to become a Certified Peer Support Specialist and start advocating to reservists. Yesterday, I shadowed a speaker at a local reserve center and I felt a calling. This is where my place is, helping others realize they can stop MST and talking to survivors to let them know they are not alone.

—Jessie Truitt, MST Survivor

Veterans Serving Veterans

VA operates one of the largest health care systems in the U.S. VA employs highly trained professionals who are dedicated to providing quality health care to Veterans, and many are Veterans themselves! Currently more than 30 percent of VA Butler Healthcare’s employees are Veterans.

“I choose to work at VA Butler mainly because as a woman Veteran I have had many issues navigating the VA system in the past (1990s). Things have improved greatly since then. The second reason is that I love my job at the Domiciliary. I have worked in Drug & Alcohol treatment for most of the last 15 years and am truly honored to have the opportunity to help other Veterans.”

Hey Veterans! Share your stories with us in Vet Chat. Email Amanda.Kurtz2@va.gov. We’d love to hear from you!

Advance Medical Support Assistant and Navy Veteran Erika Nordberg
May is recognized as National Osteoporosis Awareness Month. Osteoporosis is a disease that thins and weakens the bones to the point that they become fragile and break easily. In the United States, more than 53 million people either already have osteoporosis or are at high risk due to low bone mass, placing them at risk for more serious bone loss and fractures. Although osteoporosis can strike at any age, it is most common among older people, especially older women.

Fortunately, in your older years, you can still take steps to protect your bones. You will need a balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D, a regular exercise program, and, in some cases, medication. These steps can help you slow bone loss. In addition, you will want to learn how to fall-proof your home and change your lifestyle to avoid fracturing fragile bones.

Take this quiz to test your knowledge about osteoporosis and improving your bone health!

1. To maintain healthy bones, adults over 50 should make sure they get:
   a. enough calcium each day  
   b. enough fiber each day  
   c. enough fat each day

2. Important ways to prevent bone loss and fractures include:
   a. eating a balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D  
   b. participating in a regular exercise program  
   c. taking an osteoporosis medication  
   d. cutting your salt intake and substituting herbs and spices

3. The best exercise for your bones is:
   a. stretching  
   b. touching your toes  
   c. weight-bearing exercise

4. Falls can be caused by:
   a. impaired vision or balance  
   b. chronic diseases  
   c. certain medications  
   d. all of the above

Quiz Results 1) A 2) D 3) C 4) D

Source: NIH Senior Health

Who’s Who?

MEGAN TRITT
Health Behavior Coordinator (HBC)

Health Coaching

A health coach partners with individuals through the process of behavior change. Coaches use both their medical expertise along with coaching skills to manage a variety of chronic medical conditions (i.e., heart disease, pain, etc.). Health coaching in conjunction with traditional medicine can optimize health and healing throughout a Veteran’s lifetime.

Just one of the ways Health Behavior Coordinators can assist Veterans is through health coaching. They may be able to offer individual services (in person or by phone) to assist Veterans with weight management, tobacco cessation, and the management of chronic disease.

Megan Tritt is the Health Behavior Coordinator at VA Butler Healthcare. To learn more about health coaching, and how you can live healthier, contact her at 724.285.2211.
HEALTH TECH – NEW APP FOR VETERANS IN CARDIAC REHAB

Cardiac rehab? There’s an app for that. Actually, more than one. But one now in development at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System will stand out from existing products because it targets VA patients—namely, those with a recent heart attack or other heart problem who are undergoing a medically supervised exercise and lifestyle program.

“The unique thing about VA FitHeart is that it is specifically for Veterans and will send its data to the new VA Patient Generated Database,” says project lead Dr. Alexis L. Beatty, a cardiologist and health services researcher with VA and the University of Washington.

Beatty, who holds an undergrad degree in biomedical engineering, points out that while there are glut of general fitness apps on the market, they do not address the specific needs of cardiac rehab patients.

According to the American Heart Association, cardiac rehab lowers death rates, eases symptoms such as fatigue or chest pain, and boosts exercise performance. But studies show that fewer than 20 percent of eligible patients take advantage of cardiac rehab. The reasons vary. Beatty believes her team’s app will help, at least in VA.

“My hope is that efforts to make cardiac rehabilitation more attractive and accessible to patients will improve participation rates and patient outcomes,” she says. She cites an Australian study that showed better participation and completion—and equal outcomes, in terms of exercise capacity—with app-assisted versus traditional cardiac rehab.

The new VA app has four main screens: goal setting, logs, health education, and reminders. So far, Beatty’s team has tested it only among a dozen or so Veterans. The goal was to get an initial idea of feasibility and usability, and to work out some initial design kinks. In some cases, standard app design features needed to be tweaked.

“The plus sign [+] in the upper right hand corner is standard for adding something such as an entry or contact,” explains Beatty. “However, patients had difficulty recognizing that this was how they were supposed to add a fitness entry. So we had to create a button that was easier to see so that they could make an entry. With this change, we went from people not being able to complete this task, to people being able to do so.” The new button has the words “Add an Activity” alongside the plus sign.

The team is preparing the product for wider field testing later this year. Veterans will use it for one month on their phones or tablets and provide feedback. Beatty says, “If the app passes field testing, it will be nationally released for use across the United States.”

She invites anyone interested in field-testing the app to contact her at alexis.beatty2@va.gov.

Source: VA Research Currents
**Health Tastes – Mango Shake**

**Ingredients**
- 2 cups low-fat (1%) milk
- 4 tablespoons frozen mango juice (or 1 fresh pitted mango)
- 1 small banana
- 2 ice cubes

**Directions**
Put all ingredients into a blender.
Blend until foamy. Serve immediately.

*Variations: Instead of mango juice, try orange juice, papaya, or strawberries*

Serving size = ¾ cup, makes 4 servings

Fat: 2g ★ Calories: 106 ★ Carbohydrates: 20g ★ Protein: 5g

**Crossword**

**Brain Training**

Brain training is the idea that regularly putting your brain to work through puzzles and specially designed online games can help improve memory and other types of cognitive function. Some studies have found a positive relationship between crosswords and better brain health! Try some “brain training” today with the below crossword puzzle.

**ACROSS**
1. Molecules (9)
7. Spear (5)
8. Arithmetical operation (5)
9. Light fog (4)
10. Reply (6)
12. Ploy (6)
14. Matured (4)
17. Debate (5)
18. Tip over (5)
20. Study of the universe (9)

**DOWN**
1. Buddy (3)
2. Parts of a ladder (5)
3. Mountain goat (4)
4. Dirge (6)
5. Tendon (5)
6. Made certain (7)
9. Tycoon (7)
11. Turn aside (6)
13. Molten rock (5)
15. Zest (5)
16. Japanese wrestler (4)
19. Plaything (3)

**HEALTH TIP—ASSESS YOUR RELATIONSHIPS**

Determine if you or others you care about are in an unhealthy relationship, and get help if needed. VA Butler has a Domestic Violence (DV)-Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Coordinator who can help you with services you may need related to IPV or other kinds of care. For more information, call 800.362.8262, ext. 2293 or talk to your health care team.
VA Butler Healthcare, located in Butler County, Pennsylvania has been attending to Veteran’s total care since 1947. We are the health care choice for over 18,000 Veterans throughout Western Pennsylvania and parts of Ohio and are a member of VA Healthcare VISN 4 under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VA Butler provides comprehensive Veteran care including primary, specialty and mental health care – as well as management of chronic conditions and social support services for our nation’s finest, America’s Veterans.