Major League Baseball Umpire Jerry Layne visited Veterans at the Butler VA in April. “We have a free country because Veterans made it free and keep it free,” he said.

As part of National Nutrition Month, the Butler VA’s Nutrition Services held a Nutrition Expo featuring cooking and exercise demonstrations, interactive information tables, giveaways, and more.

The Butler VA’s 2019 VA2K Walk & Roll was held in May, and for this year’s annual walk, we asked all participants: Why do YOU Walk? We encouraged all attendees to choose something they wanted to walk for – a person or a cause important to them.

Musician and artist Tom Panei performed during March’s “Music is Medicine Hour” as well as did a live patriotic painting. After completing the artwork, he donated it to the Abie Abraham VA Clinic.

In April, the Butler VA celebrated Patient Experience Week with a variety of activities and recognitions. The ICARE Cup of Excellence Award Winner was presented to Voluntary Services for exemplary dedication and commitment to the Patient Experience.

The Butler VA and the Butler Veteran “X” Program hosted their second annual Vietnam Veteran Commemoration in March to honor and recognize local Vietnam Veterans, welcome them home, and thank them for their service.

Did you know there are 100,000 nurses caring for Veterans at VA facilities across the country and 16% of them are Veterans? The Butler VA celebrated its nurses May 6-12, 2019 during National Nurses Week.

The Butler VA participated in the nationwide “Take Your Child to Work Day” with over 50 kids coming to work. Among the activities were writing (and delivering) “thank you” notes to Veterans, making denture molds using Play Dough in Dental, and learning about the police dog used by VA Police.

As part of the annual VA2K event, we hosted a “Women’s Walk for Homeless Veterans.” In addition to walking together at the 2K Event, women Veterans joined us for a mini women’s yoga session, painting activity (healing rocks for garden), fitness giveaway, and more!
Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of the Butler VA,

The VA has officially implemented the MISSION Act! Through the MISSION Act, VA now has additional opportunities to enhance our high-quality health care to our nation’s Veterans. Read more about this, and so much more in this issue of Living Better.

I look forward to seeing many of you in the upcoming (warmer) months, whether at an event, like the new “Coffee with the Quad,” on your way to the Wellness Center for yoga, or for an appointment with your health team. I encourage you to meet with me if you ever have any questions, concerns, or suggestions.

Jon, Director

Spring Highlights  page 2

Hot Topics  page 10

Vet Chat  page 12

Parenting Health Quiz  page 13

Who’s Who – Robert Kling  page 13

and more…

VA  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Butler VA Health Care System

Editor
Amanda Kurtz

Photographers
Chuck Jennings and Karen Dunn

CONTENTS
Spring 2019

pages 4-5

MISSION Act

VA launched its new and improved community care program June 6 implementing portions of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (the MISSION Act).

pages 6-7

The Moment When

In May, VA observed Mental Health Month by celebrating the many different moments that can make up a mental health journey. The Butler VA also hosted its seventh annual Mental Health Summit in an effort to enhance mental health care services.

pages 8-9

Focusing on Women Veterans

The Butler VA hosted the Women’s Health Mini-Residency for Primary Care Rural Providers and Nurses this Spring, the first and only facility in VISN 4 to do so. In addition, a special women Veteran-only event was held this Spring.

pages 14-15

Health Tech, Tips & Tastes

What’s new and interesting in VA’s health technology? Find out! Also, enjoy a health tip and tasty spring recipe.
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched its new and improved community care program June 6, 2019, implementing portions of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (the MISSION Act), which both ends the Veterans Choice Program and establishes a new Veterans Community Care Program.

“The MISSION Act strengthens the nationwide VA Health Care System by empowering Veterans to have more options in their health care decisions,” said Jon Lasell, Butler VA’s Director.

Under the new and improved Veterans Community Care Program, Veterans can now work with their VA health care provider or other VA staff to see if they are eligible to receive community care.

Eligibility for community care does not require a Veteran to receive that care in the community; Veterans can still choose to have VA provide their care. Veterans are eligible to choose to receive care in the community if they meet any of the following six eligibility criteria:
1. A Veteran needs a service not available at any VA medical facility.
2. A Veteran lives in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility. Specifically, this would apply to Veterans living in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire and the U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
3. A Veteran qualifies under the “grandfather” provision related to distance eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program.
4. VA cannot furnish care in a manner that complies within certain designated access standards. The specific access standards are described below. (*Important: Access standards are proposed and not yet final.*)
   • **Average drive time to a specific VA medical facility**
   • 30-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health and noninstitutional extended care services.
   • 60-minute average drive time for specialty care. 
   *Note: Average drive times are calculated by VA using geo-mapping software.*
   • **Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility**
   • Twenty days for primary care, mental health care and noninstitutional extended care services, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
   • Twenty-eight days for specialty care from the date of request, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
5. The Veteran and the referring clinician agree it is in the best medical interest of the Veteran to receive community care based on defined factors.
6. VA has determined that a VA medical service line is not providing care in a manner that complies with VA’s standards for quality.
   “To help employees prepare for this transformation and others under the MISSION Act, the Butler VA dedicated the month of May to readiness,” added Lasell. “We are honored to reaffirm our commitment to America’s Veterans. Our staff is steadfast in providing health care that meets the needs of our Veterans at the right time and place.”

The VA MISSION Act:
• Strengthens VA’s ability to recruit and retain clinicians.
• Statutorily authorizes “Anywhere to Anywhere” telehealth provision across state lines.
• Empowers Veterans with increased access to community care.
• Establishes a new, urgent-care benefit that eligible Veterans can access in the community.
   “We understand any transformation of this size and on such a rapid timeline is not without risk,” said Lasell. “We are aiming for excellence in this effort, and we will continue to tweak and improve the process.”
   Learn more: [www.missionact.va.gov](http://www.missionact.va.gov).
The Moment When

After serving in the Navy, Richard eventually went back to school, making the dean’s list in his third year. Now, as a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialist in California, he helps Veterans secure employment.

But Richard acknowledges that there was a time after his service when he was lost, and lonely, and drinking too much, and wondering if he even wanted to live anymore.

So what changed? When did things begin to turn around? Richard points to the moment when he began a substance abuse treatment program through the VA. “That meeting saved my life.”

In May, VA observed Mental Health Month by highlighting and celebrating the many different moments that can make up a mental health journey: the little victories and the major turning points.

There’s the moment when John, an Army Veteran, realized he needed help. Or the moment when Kelly, a Veteran of the Air Force Reserve, began to forgive herself.

Whether you’re a Veteran sharing your story, or a family member providing support, every moment marks an opportunity to take a step forward; to lend a hand; to change the conversation about mental health.

We encourage everyone to visit MakeTheConnection.net/MHM to learn more about how you can support the Veterans in your life — and to hear Veterans share their stories about the moments that have been pivotal for them. Moments like the one that Richard still holds close.

“I’m so glad that my mom has had a chance to see me sober, because she’s seen me at my worst,” he says. “And to hear my mom say, ‘Oh I’m so proud of you, you made the dean’s list’ — life is good.”

“The VA’s new Whole Health program really resonates with me and my journey. I didn’t do well transitioning from the Army to civilian life because I was reluctant to change things about myself. It wasn’t until I became aware of self-defeating habits and became willing to change my thoughts and actions was I able to become a better version of myself.”

- Ben Knight, U.S. Army Veteran and Veteran Speaker at the 2019 Mental Health Summit
Mental Health Summit

In an effort to enhance mental health care for Veterans and their family members, the Butler VA Health Care System hosted its annual Mental Health Summit during Mental Health Month in May. The purpose of this summit is to enhance mental health care through dialogue and collaboration between VA and the community. This year’s summit included 94 participants, including VA staff and Leadership and local community members.

“Since most Veterans and virtually all their dependents utilize at least some health care services outside of VA, it is essential that VA and community providers collaborate to support the mental health needs of Veterans and their Families,” said Dr. Jo-Anne Suffoletto, Butler VA’s Chief of Staff.

The Butler VA’s 2019 Mental Health Summit focused on Whole Health and Suicide Prevention, with a special exercise on Mindfulness. There also were breakout sessions for Whole Health Recovery Components specific to family, friends and coworkers, spirit and soul, personal development, and more.

VA Staff Megan Tritt and Meredith Paterson presented on the Whole Health Wheel during the summit.

“We focused on how identifying what matters most to our Veterans will enhance our Veteran’s experience with their health and life,” shared Tritt. “We also focused on how each mental health provider in the room would benefit from identifying what matters most to them personally so that they can positively impact the people they serve. Having balanced and healthy service providers, positively supports the VA mission.”

Several Veterans presented at this year’s summit including Air Force Veteran Bill Barger (who also serves as a Whole Health Facilitator at the Butler VA).

“As a Whole Health Facilitator, I am able to guide my fellow Veterans through the 8 Modules of the Whole Health Circle enabling each to identify their own mission, aspiration and purpose, while incorporating the program in my personal life,” shared Barger. “Taking charge of your life and your health is the true definition of empowerment to focus on what’s important to you.”

This was the seventh year the Butler VA hosted a Mental Health Summit, providing yet another opportunity to sustain and enhance the positive working relationships and joint vision established in past years in order to better address mental health care needs.

To learn more about available Butler VA mental health services, visit www.butler.va.gov/services/Behavioral_Health.asp.
The number of women Veterans is increasing rapidly. Consequently, the number of women Veterans receiving health care from VA tripled from between 2000 and 2016, growing from 160,000 in 2000 to 475,000 in 2016, driving an increase in need for gender-specific health care.

To better support women Veterans’ long-term health and well-being, including those in rural communities, VA launched a new training program to increase providers’ and nurses’ knowledge of women’s health topics. This program—the Women’s Health Mini-Residency for Primary Care Rural Providers and Nurses—launched nationally in June 2018 to staff at rural VA clinical sites. The Butler VA Health Care System hosted local this training in May, the first and only facility in VISN 4 to do so.

“We had seven providers and 11 nurses trained during the Women’s Health Rural Mini-Residency,” said Nicole Thompson, the Butler VA’s Women Veterans Program Manager. “A contract team from Women’s Health Services came for two days in May to provide training to our teams.”

Training included case studies on abnormal uterine bleeding, cervical cancer screen and sexually transmitted infection, contraception, and post-deployment issues. Nursing staff practiced history/triaging patients, while providers reviewed gynecologic products that will enhance their practice. The group discussed interpersonal violence topics with the Butler VA’s IPV Coordinator. The day also included simulation activities and discussions on how Butler VA staff wanted to apply their action plans to their practice.

“Through team collaboration, we have plans to make positive changes and additions to the services we provide to women Veterans,” added Thompson.
One new (national) service now available for women Veterans is the text messaging feature with the Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC). Women Veterans can now connect with the WVCC through text messaging. Similar to the existing call line and online chat, women Veterans will be connected with WVCC representatives who can answer general questions about benefits, eligibility, and services specifically for women Veterans.

The Butler VA also is focusing on providing women Veterans more opportunities to share in comradery and learn about women-specific services through special events just for women Veterans. For example, this spring as part of the annual VA2K Walk & Roll, the Butler VA hosted a “Women’s Walk for Homeless Veterans” event. In addition to walking together at the 2K event, women Veterans joined together for a mini women’s yoga session, painting activity (healing rocks for garden), information on whole health, nutrition, stress management program especially for women, a fitness giveaway, and a maternity bundle giveaway.

Visit www.womenshealth.va.gov to access additional information, materials, and resources for women Veterans.
Service with Integrity

The Butler VA joined VA nationwide for National Compliance and Ethics Week, April 29-May 3, 2019, to highlight the importance of organizational integrity, business compliance, and ethics quality in providing the best service and care to our nation’s Veterans. This year’s theme was “Service with Integrity.” At the Butler VA, we strive every day to put integrity into action.

Do you have an ethics concern but aren’t sure who to contact? Your compliance or health care ethics team can help:

- Compliance and Business Integrity Officer: Heather Weiland, 878-271-6523
- IntegratedEthics® Point of Contact: Tina Hess, 878-271-6485

Meet the Butler VA’s new Personal Trainer – Isaac

Personal trainers possess the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to design safe and effective fitness programs. They instruct and assist people in reaching personal health and fitness goals.

Isaac is available in the Wellness Center at the Abie Abraham VA Health Care Center on Mondays and Wednesdays from 8am – 10am.

Veterans must pre-register before participating, please call 878-271-6484.
Veterans:
If you have been bitten by a tick, get a same day, virtual appointment.
Call your local medical center and press #3.
Monday-Friday
8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Telephone Lifestyle Coaching –
Now Available!

Are you ready to make a plan to learn new habits and make smart decisions to improve your well-being? Do you need a little help getting started? Ask for a Telephone Lifestyle Coaching (TLC) referral today!

With TLC Veterans can connect one-on-one with a health and wellness coach over the phone to help them achieve important health goals. Veterans choose the goals they’d like to work on—including striving for a healthy weight, eating wisely, being physically active, limiting alcohol, and managing stress.

To learn more, contact the Butler VA’s local TLC site lead at (878) 271-6484.

Use Social Media to Help Prevent Veteran Suicide

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently published the Social Media Safety Toolkit for Veterans, Their Families and Friends. This toolkit equips everyone with the knowledge needed to respond to social media posts that indicate a Veteran may be having thoughts of suicide. We encourage you to share the Social Media Safety Toolkit within your networks.

My Why

In April, the Butler VA recognized and celebrated National Volunteer Week, which included testimonials from several Butler VA Volunteers and their “My Why” for volunteering at the VA.

Butler VA Volunteer and Korean War Veteran Don Trapp has been volunteering for the Butler VA since 2015 and has accumulated 618 hours of service. He is a Support Services Volunteer and helps in the Voluntary Services office with mailings, distributions, escorting of patients if necessary, and other tasks as needed.

Don is a young 86-year-old Korean War Veteran. When asked “why” he volunteers, it was a very simple response, “the people.” After Don’s wife passed away, he found himself alone in a big house. He said he tinkered around with fixing lawn mowers, chain saws and doing some home improvement projects, but it wasn’t enough. So, he started volunteering once a week for Meals on Wheels in his area. But he wanted to do more, and he wanted to be around other Veterans. He needed something else, so he decided to look into the Butler VA’s Volunteer Program.

“I just love coming here and talking with the guys (and girls). We have a lot of fun.” What he loves most is the friendships he has made with the other volunteers.

For more information about volunteering at the Butler VA, please contact Paula McCarl, Voluntary Services Coordinator, at 878-271-6957 or Andy Pepe, Voluntary Services Specialist, at 878-271-6960. You also can visit www.butler.va.gov/giving.

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% of VA Butler Healthcare’s employees are Veterans.

“I was hired in 1998, and transferred to the Butler VA in June of 1999. I wanted to work at the VA to better serve the Veterans who served because they deserve it.”

LPN in the Butler CLC and Army Veteran (Military Police) Bob Ryder

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

There’s a lot to know about raising healthy kids, especially that first year! Take the quiz (about a baby’s first year) below!

AND, know that VA is here to support you as a parent. VA provides prenatal and preconception (pre-pregnancy) care, maternity care services, and seven days of newborn care for women Veterans. Learn more at www.womenshealth.va.gov, or call the Butler VA’s Women Veterans Program Manager/Maternity Care Coordinator at 878-271-6989.

VA also provides a free online course for parents and the Parenting2Go App (available on the VA App Store). Learn more by visiting: www.veterantraining.va.gov/parenting/ and https://mobile.va.gov/app/parenting2go.

1. Breast milk is the only food and drink a baby needs in the first six months.
   a. True    b. False

2. Which one of these is not a newborn screening test?
   a. Blood test  
   b. Hearing test
   c. Vision focus test

3. Which of these will your baby’s doctor or nurse do during a well-baby visit?
   a. Measure your baby’s height, weight, and head
   b. Perform a complete physical exam of your baby
   c. Answer your questions about your baby’s development and skills
   d. All of the above

4. Side effects from shots (vaccines) are usually mild and only last a short time.
   a. True    b. False

5. When do you need to start protecting your kids’ teeth from cavities (tooth decay)?
   a. As soon as they get teeth
   b. By the time all of their baby teeth are in (usually by age 3)
   c. Baby teeth don’t get cavities

Correct Answers:
1) A  2) C  3) D  4)A  5) A

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
HEALTH TECH – MEET ANNIE

The Butler VA’s new messaging system to help Veterans Track and Manage Their Health

“Hello, Annie here, please send in your blood pressure in the following format BP 120 80.”

With that simple message, Annie, VA’s new mobile text messaging system, connects Veterans with their health care in a new way.

It works like this: Veterans and their clinicians establish a personalized care plan. Then, Annie helps Veterans stick to that plan by making it easier for them to track their own health data. Clinicians program Annie to send automated text messages on a specific schedule, prompting them to report health readings like blood pressure. Annie stores their responses and lets them know right away if something is wrong and if further action is needed. Annie also can send medication reminders, as well as educational and motivational messages to help patients manage their care and stay healthier.

Who is she?

Annie’s roots are based on two strong women: Lt. Annie G. Fox and Florence Nightingale. Fox, a registered nurse who served in Pearl Harbor and was the first woman to be awarded a Purple Heart, is Annie’s namesake. Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, was the inspiration for Flo, the award-winning text messaging system from NHS England on which Annie is based.

Annie asks Veterans to track health readings every day. She helps them recognize patterns in their data so they can understand what normal looks like for them – giving users more control and providing support and guidance if something is out of the ordinary. For those who may find tracking difficult, Annie provides regular, friendly reminders to help build the habit.

Not just an app

Annie is available as a secure web app that is accessible on any mobile device or computer. Through the app, Veterans can view their data graphically and see all of the messages they have sent to Annie over time.

Annie was designed to help Veterans self-manage their health not for direct communication between patient and care team. Annie should never be used in an emergency situation. Annie will send a message to the Veteran to contact 911 or their health care provider if a high-risk reading is sent in from the Veteran.

Learn more

To use Annie, Veterans must be enrolled by their care team. If a Veteran would like to solely interact with Annie via text message, just a basic cell phone with texting plan is needed. If a Veteran would like to interact with Annie using the app, he or she will need secure logon credentials.

To find out more about Annie, visit the VA App Store at mobile.va.gov/app/annie-app-veterans or talk to your health care team at the Butler VA!
Health Tastes –
Black Bean and Zucchini Quesadillas

**Ingredients**
1/2 c canned black beans, drained and rinsed
2 Tbsp salsa
1/2 c finely chopped zucchini
4 (6-inch) whole wheat tortillas
4 Tbsp shredded Cheddar cheese

**Directions**
Combine beans and salsa in a small bowl; mix with a fork. Stir in zucchini. Layer one tortilla with half the bean mixture, sprinkle with 2 tablespoons cheese, and top with another tortilla. Repeat with remaining tortillas, bean mixture, and cheese. Cook in a skillet on the stove, flipping once to ensure even cooking.

*Serving size = 1 Quesadilla*

*Source: VA Nutrition and Food Services*

---

**Better Brain Health**

Some studies have found a positive relationship between crosswords and better brain health. For example, crossword puzzles may:

1) Delay loss of memory among those with dementia
2) Preserve memory and cognitive function better than some medications
3) Benefits of cognitive training for older adults may last as long as 10 years

Give it a try today!

**Crossword**

**ACROSS**
1. European short-winged hawk (7)
5. Type of duck (5)
7. Young male horses (5)
8. Middle East riding horse (4)
9. Porcupine (8)
11. Nocturnal wildcat (6)
13. Dog house (6)
16. Snake (8)
17. Crustacean (4)
20. Viper (5)
21. Aquatic predator (5)
22. Adult male chicken (7)

**DOWN**
1. Bison (7)
2. African equine (5)
3. Simians (4)
4. Burro (6)
6. Mahimahi (7)
7. Young swan (6)
10. Large flying bird (6)
12. Anteater (7)
14. Shellfish (7)
15. Musteline mammal (6)
18. Bird shelter (5)
19. Extinct bird (4)

---

**HEALTH TIP—TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR DRINKING**

Heavy drinking can lead to dangerous health conditions such as sleep disorders and heart disease. To avoid these risks to your health, you can choose from many treatment options VA provides. VA’s VetChange mobile app and online program also offer proven self-help tools that build skills to help you stop or cut back on problem drinking.

*R. B. Smith, M.D.*
The Butler VA Health Care System, located in Butler County, Pennsylvania has been attending to Veteran’s total care since 1947. We are the health care choice for over 25,000 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. The Butler VA 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.