Omura chosen as new director

ATLANTA (Duluth, Ga.) – The Department of Veterans Affairs is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. David L. Omura as the new Medical Center Director of the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center in Columbia, South Carolina, with clinics in Greenville, Florence, Rock Hill, Anderson, Orangeburg, Sumter, and Spartanburg.

Omura will oversee a health care delivery system serving more than 81,000 patients in 2016 with a workforce of more than 2,400 employees. Dorn VA is a 112-bed tertiary care facility with a 94-bed Community Living Center and an operating budget of more than $490 million.

“He’s held progressively responsible leadership positions within VA and brings both clinical and administrative experience with him in service of our Nation’s Veterans.”

Omura has been serving as the Interim Director at the Dorn VA since July 2016, having served in that role periodically to provide continuity and leadership during times of transition. Dr. Omura was appointed Associate Director at the Dorn VA in September 2012.

Omura has 10 years of experience with VA beginning as a Chief of Physical Therapy and almost 20 years in the health care field having held roles in private health care systems, research, consulting, and also academic faculty roles in public health and physical therapy.

Omura has served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of South Carolina’s Arnold School of Public Health since 2014. He has also presented nationally on rural telehealth initiatives, patient satisfaction technology, physical therapy, and other topics.

VA, DoD study a major breakthrough for understanding PTSD

WASHINGTON — Researchers from the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense recently released findings of a new study called Prospective Post-Traumatic Stress disorder Symptom Trajectories in Active Duty and Separated Military Personnel, which examines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms in Veterans, compared with active-duty populations.

This is the first known study comparing PTSD symptom trajectories of current service members with those of Veterans, and is the product of a collaborative effort from VA and DoD researchers analyzing data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), the largest prospective health study of military service members.

According to VA’s National Center for PTSD, the PTSD rate among Vietnam Veterans was 30.9 percent for men and 26.9 percent for women. For Gulf War Veterans, the PTSD rate was 12.1 percent. Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans had a PTSD rate of 13.8 percent.

“Knowing there are similarities in how PTSD affects service members and Veterans makes it easier to pinpoint which treatments are the best to control the condition,” said Dr. Edward Boyko, an epidemiologist and internist at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Washington state, and VA’s lead researcher on the Millennium Cohort Study.

Officials involved with the project said they are hoping the collaboration will improve the understanding of Veterans’ health needs, relative to...
Meet the new VA secretary

The Honorable David J. Shulkin was nominated by President Donald Trump to serve as the ninth Secretary of Veterans Affairs and was confirmed by the United States Senate on February 13, 2017.

Prior to his confirmation as Secretary, Dr. Shulkin served as VA’s Under Secretary for Health for 18 months, leading the Nation’s largest integrated health care system, with more than 1,700 sites of care serving nearly nine million Veterans.

Before he began his service with VA, Dr. Shulkin held numerous chief executive roles at Morristown Medical Center, and the Atlantic Health System Accountable Care Organization. He also served as President and CEO of Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City.

Dr. Shulkin has held numerous physician leadership roles including Chief Medical Officer of the University of Pennsylvania Health System, Temple University Hospital, and the Medical College of Pennsylvania Hospital. He has also held academic positions including Chairman of Medicine and Vice Dean at Drexel University School of Medicine. As an entrepreneur, Dr. Shulkin founded and served as Chairman and CEO of Doctor Quality, one of the first consumer-oriented sources of information on quality and safety in health care.

A board-certified internist, Dr. Shulkin is also a fellow of the American College of Physicians. He received his medical degree from the Medical College of Pennsylvania, and he completed his internship at Yale University School of Medicine and a residency and fellowship in General Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh Presbyterian Medical Center. He also received advanced training in outcomes research and economics as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Shulkin has been named as one of the “50 Most Influential Physician Executives in the Country” by Modern Healthcare. He has also previously been named among the “One Hundred Most Influential People in American Healthcare.” He has been married to his wife, Dr. Merle Bari, for 29 years. They are the parents of two grown children.

VA establishes commission to recommend Under Secretary for Benefits

WASHINGTON – In mid-March, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the establishment of a search commission to help identify candidates for the position of Under Secretary for Benefits.

The Under Secretary for Benefits is the senior official within the Veterans Benefits Administration, which oversees a variety of benefits and services to service members, Veterans and their families.

Search commission candidates will be selected based on criteria governed by law, along with appropriate skills, knowledge and attributes as leaders, managers and educators. The commission is a prerequisite to the president’s appointment of a successful candidate, subject to Senate confirmation.

By law, the appointment is made without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of demonstrated ability, both in fiscal management and in the administration of programs of VBA or of similar content and scope.

VBA includes a network of 56 regional offices and more than 21,800 employees. Nearly 4 million Veterans currently receive compensation for disabilities incurred in service or pensions for wartime Veterans, who become totally disabled in civilian life. In addition, more than a half million widows, children and parents of deceased Veterans are paid survivor compensation or death pensions.

Other programs administered by the Under Secretary for Benefits include: education benefits, vocational rehabilitation and employment for Veterans, and life insurance; as well as VA-guaranteed home loans for both active-duty personnel and Veterans.

The commission, once named, is expected to complete its work by April 20.
Leading by example and treating others in the manner you would want to be treated are just two fundamentals followed by Sherree Colvin, chief, Social Work Service at the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center.

Between Dorn and seven Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, she oversees the performances of 145 social workers, who work in a broad spectrum of care for Veterans.

“The social workers are integrated into such areas as acute care, substance abuse, primary care, homelessness, and emergency, just to name a few,” Colvin said.

With the realignment of the homeless program under the social work umbrella, other career occupations have also been placed under her direction. Vocational rehabilitation specialists and outreach workers in the program can be found aggressively out in the streets and shelters looking for homeless Veterans, with the intent of getting them into the Veterans Administration for some sort of relief and care.

“Housing specialists may help the Veterans with the grant and per diem housing,” Colvin said. “Case managers and employment specialists also stand ready to provide assistance.”

Another high priority for the social workers exists in the inpatient medical units. “A lot of the patients there are aging and are no longer able to live independently, so they may require nursing home care,” Colvin added.

Even as patients arrive in the Dorn VAMC Emergency Room, social workers are standing by ready to screen patients in crisis. “If a patient is going to be admitted, an assessment is done within 24 to 48 hours for their care. We assist in coordinating home health, equipment or any other service that they may need upon their discharge,” Colvin said.

The job as the chief of social work has its share of issues. “Many challenges keep me up at night,” Colvin said. “Not every case is easy.”

Colvin admits to getting her social work start here in the Dorn VAMC as a GS-7 in the Primary Care Clinic, and from that point fell in love with the Veterans Administration. “I loved the environment and there were so many different opportunities to branch into. The territory of social work was as yet undiscovered. I got a chance to rotate through the arenas of acute care, substance abuse and mental health. The fast paced environment was exciting, and I liked being busy. They needed me there and it was fulfilling,” Colvin said.

Geriatric patients are among her favorite clients to work with, as she listens to them fondly tell their war stories.

When Colvin took over in 2007, there were only about 40 social workers. With a staff that has more than tripled in size which she now supervises, she proudly says their big accomplishment has been for them to become “credentialed and privileged” in their career field. Just because a person is ‘credentialed’ does not mean he/she has the ability to actually treat you for everything you might need or be able to admit you into the hospital. That comes under the heading of privileges, which in simple terms means granting the social worker the ‘privilege’ of performing a service, such as admissions, to begin with.

Another aspect Colvin says she enjoys about her job is that of process improvement. “I have the capability to make changes so that we can help Veterans and make sure we give them the services they need. As their advocate, our responsibility is to educate the Veterans about their benefits and services they may qualify for to help increase their quality of life.”

See Colvin, Page 6
Sexual Assault Awareness Month: 
Getting Veterans connected with appropriate VA care

by James Leatham
VA’s national Military Sexual Assault Trauma Support Team

Sexual Assault Awareness Month is an annual campaign in April to raise public awareness about sexual assault. In its campaign, VA focuses on sexual assault and sexual harassment occurring during military service – also known as “military sexual trauma” or “MST.”

This year, VA’s national theme for SAAM activities is “Standing Together to Empower Military Sexual Trauma Survivors.”

Reflecting on the theme, Timiko Illion, a MST Coordinator at the Jackson, Mississippi, VA medical center, says it’s about “people from all walks of life embracing one another and providing encouragement to all survivors of military sexual trauma … letting them know that they are not alone and that there is hope, strength and solidarity for better days ahead.”

Rebecca Robinson, also an MST coordinator, but at the White River Junction VA Medical Center, notes that the theme reminds her of the work she does throughout the year to include survivors’ voices in any outreach or educational efforts she engages in.

Image of Sexual Assault Awareness Month poster“Veterans in my groups offer thoughts that I subsequently read to the participants I’m presenting to,” Robinson said. “It gives survivors a chance to speak for themselves and advocate, and feel empowered to be part of our MST response in Vermont.”

At the VA, Veterans who experienced MST have access to a wide range of services to assist them in their recovery. MST-related treatment is available at all VA medical facilities and all treatment for physical and mental health conditions related to experiences of MST is provided free of charge.

Veterans may be eligible for free MST-related care even if they are not eligible for other VA services, and service connection (VA disability compensation) is not required. No documentation of MST experiences is required.

In addition, every VA health care system has an MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues at the facility and can help Veterans access relevant VA services and programs.

Sadly, about 1-in-4 women and 1-in-100 men seen for VA health care report a history of MST when screened by a VA provider. Although the percentage among women is much higher, given the far greater number of men in military service, there are significant numbers of both men and women who have experienced MST. In fact, more than 40 percent of the Veterans seen in VA who disclose MST are men.

Because of this, MST coordinators and other VA staff make special efforts during SAAM to show support for Veterans who experienced MST by hosting awareness-raising and educational events. Also, VA’s Make the Connection website has video clips of Veterans sharing their stories of recovery, as a reminder that survivors are not alone in having experienced MST or in having the strength to recover.

For more information, contact the MST coordinator at the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center at (803) 776-4000, ext. 7329.

April SAAM Events

April 19: White Ribbon Campaign Day – Come to the outside terrace in front of Building 100 between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to sign the pledge to not commit or condone violence against women.

April 25: SAAM Resource Fair – This event will be hosted in Patriot’s Park from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and will feature The Clothesline Project, awareness activities, games, food and resource information.
April is Alcohol Awareness Month

If you choose to drink alcohol, drink in moderation. Avoid “binge drinking.” If you are concerned about your drinking, talk to your VA health care team.

**Facts**

One drink is:
- 12 oz. regular beer, which is usually about 5% alcohol OR
- 8-9 oz. malt liquor OR
- 5 oz. table wine (12%) OR
- 1.5 oz. 80-proof hard liquor

Binge drinking is having:
- 4 or more drinks in about 2 hours for women.
- 5 or more drinks in about 2 hours for men.

On average, women should have no more than one drink a day (and no more than seven drinks per week) and men should have no more than two drinks a day (and no more than 14 drinks per week).

For many adults, drinking small amounts of alcohol does not cause serious health problems.

Too much alcohol use or binge drinking can lead to higher risk of health problems, such as liver damage or other injuries.

The following people should not drink alcohol at all:
- People of any age who cannot limit their drinking to the recommended levels
- Women who are pregnant or who plan to become pregnant
- People who plan to drive, operate machines, or take part in other activities that require attention, skill, or coordination
- People taking certain medications that interact with alcohol
- People with certain medical conditions
- People recovering from alcohol dependence (alcoholism)

Alcohol dependence can be treated. Effective treatments include individual counseling, group treatments, medications to reduce craving or prevent relapse, and inpatient or residential treatment. Talk to your VA health care team about the resources VA has that can help.

If you have questions or interest in making a healthy living change, please see your primary care team at the VA facility in which you receive health care.

**Veterans Crisis Line gets needed update**

WASHINGTON – In response to the recently released VA Office of Inspector General report that reviewed processes from June 6 through Dec. 15, 2016, of the Veterans Crisis Line, the Department of Veterans Affairs released the following statement: “The Department of Veterans Affairs is proud to announce that the challenges with the Veterans Crisis Line have been resolved.

“Prior to the opening of our new Atlanta call center, our call rollover rate often exceeded 30 percent. Our current call rollover rate is less than 1 percent, with over 99 percent of all calls being answered by the VCL.”

“Suicide prevention is one of our highest priorities,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin. “Fixing the Veterans Crisis Line was a critical step in keeping our commitment to Veterans.”

To reach a VA professional, who is specially trained to attend to emotional crises for Veterans and service members:

- Dial the National Suicide Prevention Hotline number, 800-273-TALK (8255). Veterans should choose option 1 to reach a VCL responder;
- Text 838255 – A VCL responder will text back.
- Chat online at https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/
Colvin joins the ranks of Dorn VAMC employees who are passionate about their work. As service chief, she endeavors to ensure the employees are up to date in their skills. There is a lot of one-on-one training with staff by teaching and educating them on new marks in the social work field and Veteran services.

LaVetta Jones, administrative officer in Social Work Service, said of Colvin, “she is even-keeled and listens to our input. I value being an employee with her.”

Colvin always wanted to be in a profession to help others, initially thinking it would lead her to that of being a school counselor. But attending Georgia Southern College in Statesboro, Ga., for a degree in sociology and the University of South Carolina, where she got her masters in social work, led her to where she is today.

In her rarely found spare time, Colvin can be seen enjoying a spin class or rotating back and forth between cheerleading competitions and football for her 11-year-old daughter, Sydney and 16-year-old son, Kade.

“Our leadership and staff here at Dorn care and work extremely hard for the benefit of all the Veterans. Everyone is here for the right reason…to take care of the Veteran,” Colvin concludes.

PTSD

their experiences in service.

“The data that MCS researchers have been collecting since 2001 is incredibly valuable for both the DOD and VA,” said Dr. Dennis Faix, director of the Millennium Cohort Study and preventive medicine physician. “Going forward, working with VA will allow both agencies to make sure we are getting the best information to develop a comprehensive understanding of the continuum of health in current and former service members.”

The results of the joint VA DOD study will appear in the Journal of Psychiatric Research’s June 2017 issue. It is the first of many joint future publications expected to result from the collaboration between VA and MCS.

You can learn more about the study here: http://millenniumcohort.org/.
April is National Volunteer Month

Volunteerism leaves legacy at National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic

by Karen Fort

The ability to connect with a disabled Veteran at the fly-fishing event through the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic came naturally for high school junior Austin Hawkins, a member of the Air Force JROTC from Glenwood Springs High School.

“My sister has a visual impairment and so I know how to approach and talk to people with visual difficulties,” he said.

Hawkins and visually impaired Army Veteran Hardy Alexander of Hampton, Virginia fly-fished for the first time in Basalt, Colorado. “We wanted to learn, so we tried together. I cast the rod out and he reels it in,” Hawkins said. “No bites, but we’ve gotten some nibbles.”

Hawkins partnered with Hardy Alexander of Hampton, Virginia, to fly-fish for the first time during National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

The joy of volunteering is felt by the entire Air Force JROTC group, led by retired Chief Master Sgt. Paul Nunemann, a former KC-135 boom operator. “The ROTC came to greet the Veterans at the airport, and many of the Veterans were brought to tears. It was great to see.”

His local JROTC group of 80 cadets performs community service about once a month. “It opens their eyes,” he said.

Thirteen Glenwood Springs Air Force JROTC cadets were part of more than 600 volunteers who participated in various capacities during Winter Sports Clinic, helping register people, aiding Veterans in and out of equipment, fulfilling transportation needs and guiding participants to their sports activities. The Aspen Elks Lodge was also on hand hosting the fly-fishing activity and helping provide and serve lunch at various locations throughout the week.

“We’re a group with a benevolence problem,” jokes Bob Cook, a member of the Aspen Elks Lodge #224. The Elks fraternity’s 200 lodge and community members donated more than 2,000 volunteer hours this week, also providing more than 300 access ramps distributed, collected and stored each year.

Additionally, the Elks coordinated four professional fishing guides who donated their time, rods and reels for the week-long clinic. Cook said his group has played a large role in what he believes is one of the largest disabled Veteran events in the country.

During a week when all eyes are focused on the rehabilitation and joy of serving disabled Veterans, one San Diego Veteran revealed the act of volunteering is what makes her feel worthwhile.

Navy Veteran Gileen Paschal says while the Winter Sports Clinic was the first inflection point to transform her life, it’s the VA and their ongoing care that she uses to be successful in her everyday life.

“I know what the VA has done for me,” Paschal says, “and they are the reason I am who I am and what I know today. They’ve changed my life—no other healthcare would do that. The VA has changed my life, period. And so, I volunteer as a way to give back and say ‘thank you.’”

“Before I was tripping over people, and this schooling the VA sent me to taught me how to navigate my new world.” Paschal says whether it’s trying new activities during the Winter Sports Clinic or helping in the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Department at the VA San Diego Healthcare System, she believes it’s important helping people with any impairments understand it’s not the end of their life.

“I want people to see all we are capable of; we shouldn’t be overlooked.”
Frequently Called Numbers

Admissions ..................................................(803) 776-4000 x4983/7190
Appointment Line .........................................(803) 647-5829
.............................................................................(800) 293-8262

Billing and Insurance
Collections – pay a bill ......................................(888) 827-4817
General questions ...........................................(866) 258-2772
Medical claims ................................................(803) 776-4000 x6763

Chaplain Services
8 a.m. to 4 p.m. .............................................(803) 776-4000 x6332
After hours ...................................................(803) 776-4000

Compensation and Pension ..................................(803) 776-4000 x6183
Enrollment Eligibility ........................................(803) 776-4000 x7010
Information Desk (Dorn VAMC).....................(803) 776-4000 x4179/5580

Medical Records ............................................(803) 776-4000 x6283
MyHealthEvet .............................................(803) 695-6783
Patient Advocate .........................................(803) 776-4000 x7998/6937
Prosthetics ....................................................(803) 776-4000 x6323
Optometry (Eye Clinic) .....................................(803) 776-4000 x5122
Release of Information ...................................(803) 776-4000 x6290
Shuttle Service .............................................(803) 776-4000 x6780

Telephone Advice Line
Outside Columbia ...........................................(888) 651-2683
In Columbia ..................................................(803) 647-5829

Travel Office ...................................................(803) 776-4000 x4483/4525/4484
Veteran’s Transportation Service ..................(803) 776-4000 x7998/6937

Veteran Service Organizations
American Legion ...........................................(803) 776-4000 x7539
AmVets .......................................................(803) 776-4000 x2421
Disabled American Veterans .........................(803) 776-4000 x2422
Military Order of the Purple Heart ...............(803) 776-4000 x2430
Paralyzed Veterans Association .....................(803) 776-4000 x2432
Veteran’s of Foreign Wars .........................(803) 776-4000 x2443

Voluntary Services .......................................(803) 776-4000 x6780/7081

Community-Base Outpatient Clinics

Anderson CBOC
3030 N. Hwy 81
Anderson, SC 29621
Tele (864) 224-5450

Greenville OPC
41 Park Creek Drive
Greenville, SC 29605
Tele (864) 299-1600

Spartanburg CBOC
279 North Grove Medical Plaza
Spartanburg, SC 29303
Tele (864) 582-7025

Florence CBOC
1822 Sally Hill Farms Blvd
Florence, SC 29501
Tele (843) 292-8383

Sumter CBOC
407 N. Salem Ave
Sumter, SC 29150
Tele (803) 938-9901

Orangeburg CBOC
1767 Village Park Drive
Orangeburg, SC 29118
(803) 533-1335

Rock Hill CBOC
2670 Mills Park Drive
Rock Hill, SC 29732
Tele (803) 366-4848

Stay connected to with Dorn VAMC
Dorn VAMC official Web site:
www.columbiasc.va.gov/

Dorn Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/VAColumbiaSC

Dorn Twitter handle:
@VAMCColumbiaSC

Dorn Flickr account:
www.flickr.com/photos/dornvamc

Comments / Suggestions for the Palmetto Post

The Palmetto Post is designed to help keep South Carolina’s Veterans informed about the health care and services provided by the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center and its seven community-based outpatient clinics.

This is your newsletter. So suggestions on the information you’d like to see in this newsletter are most welcome. Keep in mind, space is limited as this is only a monthly newsletter, so not all suggestions will be granted.

Submit your comments or suggestions to vhacmsdornpa@va.gov.