Youth volunteers have landed at Dorn

Story by Jessica Bailey
Dorn VA Student Volunteer

Since 2008, the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center has opened its doors to individuals who want nothing more than to give back to their Veterans, and offer help and assistants to the facility without the thought of monetary compensation. These individuals range from the ages of 13 to 18 years old who volunteer in the nationwide Summer Student Volunteer Program. In this program, students will explore different career options, gain experience in the work force, and learn and talk to Veterans.

Fourteen-year-old Student Volunteer Jeremiah Buting who works in restorative therapy said when he first saw this program he thought it would be a great opportunity to help improve the of health patients.

Students get to talk to Veterans, or what Tammy Finney, chief of voluntary services, likes to call “living history.” Finney explained how student can learn history from the Veterans that you can’t get from a history book. She said, “We have had Veterans in the past pro-vide a Lunch and Learn, and let them share their experiences.”

She explained “We had one Veteran who was a Prisoner of War (POW). The students told me that they have read about (POWs), and that they have learned about them in school. They were intrigued to meet someone, and talk to and converse with someone; where you can ask question that you could not have asked a history book…”

Finney went on to explain that with the world we live in today, most people take things for granted and with this opportunity, and how when students come to the VA to volunteer, they start to understand the sacrifices these Veterans and their families have made, both mentally and physically, and start to appreciate those sacrifices that they’ve made.

This program gives the students an experience of possible career choices that they are interested in, such as pharmaceuticals, technology and nursing. It gives the students a better understanding of what kind of work they have to do, and what it take to make it in that line of work. This gives them opportunities to experience what that career and specialty has to offer.

First-year Student Volunteer at Dorn VA, Zaria Thomas says she is hoping to one day work as a radiologist or an anesthesiologist, and is looking forward to seeing what a working hospital floor looks like. She said this program also help you make informed decisions on their career choice, especially if a student wants to go to college; it helps clarify what they want their major to be.

Even if you are not yet at the age where you can get a job, this program gives you the experience of what it’s like to be in the work force. Tammy Finney said, “Even through some students are not at the age where they can go out and get a job, this program makes you understand what it’s like to wake up in the morning, and know that you are part of a team, and that there are individuals and Veterans who depend on you.”

Jarian Jackson, a 15-year-old Student Volunteer working in restorative therapy hopes for the same thing in summer experience at the Dorn VA, said “I’m looking to develop better
June is PTSD Awareness Month
New VA online tool helps Veterans learn about, compare effective PTSD treatments

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs Launched a new online tool to will help Veterans compare various treatment options for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
The PTSD Treatment Decision Aid is a free, interactive online tool that helps educate patients about effective treatment options for PTSD and encourages them to participate actively in decisions about their care.

“The health and well-being of the courageous men and women who have served their country in uniform is the VA’s highest priority,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “The PTSD Treatment Decision Aid is an important step in putting Veterans in control of their health care. By helping to bridge understanding and communication between Veterans and providers about the most effective treatment options available, we are ensuring Veterans receive the treatments that best promote their healing and recovery.”

The tool includes information about evidence-based PTSD treatments, such as talk therapy and prescription medication options. It also includes useful information designed for people who have served in the military.

Users can watch videos of providers explaining different treatment options and what to expect with those treatments, and hear from Veterans who have benefited from them.

Veterans can also build a chart to compare the treatments they prefer and print a personalized summary to share with their providers. All personal information is erased once the tool is closed to protect users’ privacy.

According to VA findings, approximately eight of every 100 people will experience PTSD at some point in their lifetimes, and almost 620,000 of the Veterans treated by VA have a diagnosis of PTSD.

PTSD. - Why people avoid treatment

By Air Force Maj Jeremy Pallas
2nd Medical Group
Mental Health Flight

BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La. — The stigma of seeking help for mental health conditions exists in our general population and within the military community. Stigma can cause a person to deny symptoms, delay seeking care or stop them altogether from beginning treatment.

During the month of June (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month) we are encouraging you to be part of the solution. Having a greater understanding and awareness of PTSD can help service members and others recognize symptoms, and seek help and save lives.

Perceived Stigma: If you had a cold, sore throat or an infected cut, you might consider taking some medication to alleviate the symptoms. Most people would not interpret your actions as a weakness. Sadly, there is a stigma that suggests if you are weak if you need mental health help.

A 2007 survey of the U.S. population noted the most adults with mental health symptoms (78 percent) and without mental health symptoms (89 percent) agreed that treatment can help persons with mental illness lead normal lives. It discovered that 57 percent of all adults believed that people are caring and sympathetic to persons with mental illness, yet only 25 percent of adults with mental health symptoms believed that people are caring and sympathetic to persons with mental illness.

For those with PTSD symptoms, the internal belief that others will judge them for seeking help can be a barrier to receiving proper care.

Time: Some people delay seeking medical care, thinking their problems will improve over time. Unfortunately, symptoms do not always resolve on their own.

A barrier for some is the time it takes to attend medical appointments. Concerns may exist that the time away from work will delay completion of job duties or the time away is looked at with a negative perception from their peers.

Most medical providers agree that the earlier you seek care for a medical condition the more likely the condition can be resolved or mitigated. What may surprise you is that many temporary mental health conditions can be treated within four to twelve sessions. For instance, one Evidence-Based Treatment (EBT) for PTSD, Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), is a 12-session,
Dorn director highlights progress, future plans

By Dr. David Omura
Medical Center Director

As many of you may have heard, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David Shulkin hosted a press briefing on May 31 to discuss the “State of the Veterans Administration.”

During this national briefing, he provided a candid assessment of the challenges facing the Department of Veterans Affairs, and what he believes can be done to rectify some, if not all, of these issues with the support of each and every Veterans Affairs facility.

In his briefing, Dr. Shulkin highlighted 13 areas of risk which he believes are significant areas of focus that need to be addressed in order to drive performance, quality of care, and maintain world class services. These areas include:

• Accountability of all staff
• Hire and retain the most talented workforce available
• Continue to improve access for Veterans
• Ensuring the appropriate payment of community providers
• Streamline community care services and partnering with Department of Defense medical facilities
• Make quality metrics on VA health care transparent
• Increase the speed in addressing disability and appeals claims
• Improve information technology services
• Ensuring appropriate capital asset needs are maintained
• Obtain department funding for needed construction
• Reducing the bureaucracy in the VA: Improve communication
• Further reduce waste, fraud and abuse
• Eliminate Veteran suicide

The staff of the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center stand fully behind the secretary’s vision, and are focused on continuing to improve the care provided to our Veterans each and every day. A 90-day plan was developed for our Medical Center which provides a focused approach on overall operations and is being used in conjunction with facility’s annual performance plan and strategic plan in driving progress.

The following are just a few of the measures that highlight the success of the Dorn VA:

Continue to Improve Access to Care

Here at Dorn VA, as the secretary said, “We’ve done a significant job in improving access to care for clinically urgent Veterans, so people with clinically urgent needs are now being addressed in a much more efficient way.”

The average wait time at Dorn for a primary care appointment is only seven days, and at our seven community-based outpatient clinics across the state, the average wait is between five and 10 days compared to 2015, when the average was more than 12 days.

Regarding access to mental health care, the average wait time at Dorn is now two days, compared to nearly five days only a year ago. We are also pleased to report that as our access continues to improve our quality remains very high and we meet or exceed the quality of care of our community facilities and are in the top 10 percent in the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) and Oryx inpatient measures across the VA.

Ensuring the Appropriate Payment of Community Providers

Another category Dr. Shulkin covered was paying providers when Veterans go out into the community. He expressed his understanding that providers are increasingly frustrated with the VA’s inability to make payments in a timely manner; to the point that some of them are actually leaving our network.

The Dorn VA is actively engaged in developing, maintaining, and improving our relationships with community providers. Facility leadership meets regularly with our community partners and others involved in the process to evaluate and quickly address any concerns. This regular communication, along with improved staffing and improved processes, has led to improvements in outstanding payments, leading to enhanced community relations and Veteran satisfaction.

Make Quality Metrics on VA Health Care Transparent

According to recent data of what Veterans themselves said about their own experience accessing care and the quality of that care, more than 80 percent of them said they were completely satisfied. This is a significant improvement over the last few years in which...
Summer Youth

Students who volunteer at the VA have many benefits and opportunities. Sixteen-year-old Zaria Thomas, who is a first-year Student Volunteer at Dorn VA, in voluntary services is definitely excited about all of the opportunities she is getting from this voluntary experience.

Thomas said, “I definitely want to do this for the scholarships; running errands to different departments, and I’m also excited about the Lunch and Learns.” She went on to explain that she is looking forward to getting to know how a hospital works and getting hands on experience in the work force.

Finney expressed the many opportunities the students here are given, “I think that’s the beauty of this program - there is such a wide array of opportunities, such as job opportunities; being a productive citizens, potential scholarship opportunity, and to learn about history through the Veterans they work with.

Finney also added that this program will help a “Succession Plan” in which hopefully, by giving young students the opportunity to work at this facility and get to understand the mission of the VA service, that they will have the same passion the employees who work here have today. This generation is setting the ground work, in hope of the next generation can build a high standard for VA service.

Another highlight of the program is the Lunch and Learn sessions. Students get a unique experience at Lunch and Learns where they get to experience different career opportunities the VA, the military and other outside organizations have to offer such as:

• Backpack Journalist: where students get to capture Veterans stories through different journaling styles
• Team bonding/building activities
• Practicing lifesaving skills by learning and practicing CPR/AED/First Aid training

Though students have much to gain from this program, they still have some responsibility. Finney said her expectations are clear. She stated, “I expect my volunteers to be mature; to be respectful; to absorb and learn as much as possible from this program; and to have open communication.” She elaborated on her meaning of open communication, saying that with open communication, students get to make suggestions about the programs to make the program better in future whether it’s the graduation ceremony or the lunch and learns. Finney added that with open communication, she hopes to be able the students reach their goals.

There is much diversity in the student summer volunteer program, as students have come from Fort Jackson, different school districts, and even out of state. This gives the students the chance to learn about different experiences and opportunities from someone in a similar age group.

Student Volunteer Jarian Jackson says that one of the things he is most looking forward to is meeting new people, which he will hopefully get to do. Veterans enjoy sharing their experiences with the volunteers, and it gives the Veterans a chance to take pride in what they have done for their county. They also love to hear about what the students want to do and what plans you have for your future.

Finney said, “Veterans want to invest in your future and your life experiences. They also appreciate to see young people giving back to their community, to their county, to their Veterans, and it warms their hearts to know that youth is taking care of them and want to help give back.”

(EDITOR’S NOTE: Jessica Bailey is a 13-year-old Summer Student Volunteer in the public affairs office at the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center. She is a rising eighth grader from E.L. Wright Middle School in Columbia, S.C.)
Dorn
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barely more than 50 percent of the Veterans receiving care here were satisfied with their experiences here.

We expect this number to climb even higher in the weeks, months, and years to come, due in part, to the efforts being made to expand our ability to provide care to Veterans by developing new facilities, repurposing and redeveloping some of the old facilities on this campus, and maintaining a focus on hiring staff who are committed to providing the care our Veterans deserve.

In terms of transparency to the community, the VA recently deployed a publicly accessible website that shares quality data from community providers and VA facilities, satisfaction scores, and how quickly Veterans are able to be seen. www.accessstocare.va.gov

Ensuring appropriate Capital Asset Needs are Maintained

Plans are in place for many expansions and new buildings on the Columbia campus and at the Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). Some of these projects include new CBOC facilities in Rock Hill, Orangeburg, Sumter, and Florence, which are currently approved and in the design phase, and will be increasing in size by nearly 100 percent in the next three years or so.

In addition to these enhancements in the CBOCs, at our main campus in Columbia we will have a new parking garage under construction in the next six months. We will also have new buildings including: a mental health center, a Fisher House for patients’ families to stay at for no charge, a prosthetics center, a new perimeter fence, a police headquarters building, and the renovation and restoration of the historic building 10 as a primary care annex. In our current main facility, projects underway include a mental health inpatient unit and the OR suite renovation.

With these exciting improvements, the face of the Columbia campus will change significantly in the near future and will allow us to continue to improve services while also providing a better experience to our Veterans.

Further Reduce Waste, Fraud and Abuse

The efficient use of taxpayer funds is a main focus of the medical center, and is taken into consideration with all facility operations. Other areas of focus include productivity reviews, strategic planning with our Department of Defense partners, and prescription diversion prevention measures.

As part of the facility’s 90-day plan, along with a national focus on prescription drug diversion, a goal was developed to design and implement an enhanced tracking system to address and prevent drug diversion. Our overall focus is to maintain our operational efficiency and at the Dorn VA all expenditures are closely monitored for the most efficient use possible. We are proud to be in the top 10 percent of efficiency measures for all VA facilities.

Eliminate Veterans Suicide

The Dorn VA has a dynamic suicide prevention team that continues to identify ways to address this widespread and tragic problem. Several facility goals to address suicide prevention include developing stronger partnerships with the South Carolina National Guard and the South Carolina Department of Mental Health, hosting suicide awareness summits, and the integration of suicide prevention into the homeless Veteran program.

Additionally, the facility has partnered with other VA medical centers to implement a VA Diffusion of Excellence practice called the Home-Based Mental Health Evaluation (HOME) program, which will empower employees to promote continuous improvements in the transition from inpatient mental health care to a Veteran’s home, reducing post-treatment suicide rates.

The Dorn VA is also a member of the Midlands Veteran Engagement Council (MVEC) which is made up of community leaders who provide feedback to the Medical Center and are a barometer of how we are performing. We appreciate their input, collaboration, and partnership in our relentless focus on providing the best care possible for our Veterans.

As our president has expressed several times, he is committed to fixing the issues Veterans face, and Dr. Shulkin is right in line with this message – wanting to fix the problems and lag times within the VA.

As for Dorn VA, I am just as committed to taking care of our Veterans as the president and the secretary – and so is my staff. And though there may be some who feel otherwise, I would say to them to consider that nearly 40 percent of our staff are Veterans themselves and many others have close family members who were or still are in the military and they are committed to our mission. Secondly, I ask those Veterans we serve, their families, and their friends, that if you see something at the Dorn VA or one of seven CBOCs that needs to be addressed, to let us know so we can resolve those issues immediately. Together we can all be part of the solution.
June is Men’s Health Month

Be a man: go to the doctor.

A 2009 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found U.S. men were 80 percent less likely than women to have a usual source of health care.

Dr. Linda Kinsinger, chief consultant for Preventive Medicine in VHA’s National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention, explained that men often don’t go to doctors unless they have a medical emergency.

“The message to men is encouraging them to pay attention to their bodies,” she said. “There are a lot of things they can do to stay healthy and take care of themselves.”

A health checklist for men will vary by age group, but tracking basic health measures like blood pressure and body mass index (BMI) are important at any age. Getting an annual flu shot, keeping up-to-date on tetanus shots and getting an HIV test are also important preventive health practices for men.

As men reach age 35 and older, screening for cholesterol is added to the recommended health checklist. As age increases, preventive measures for heart attacks, a herpes zoster (shingles) immunization and screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm are also on the list of topics to be discussed with a health care provider.

There is a higher prevalence of mental health issues, like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), among Veterans. Kinsinger explained a patient’s physical and mental health are related.

“Generally, taking care of yourself physically is a really key point in taking care of your mental health,” she said. “Getting enough sleep, eating well, not over-indulging in alcohol — all things that are critically important in maintaining your mental health as well as your physical health.”

“Having men feel OK about reporting any disturbing feelings that they’re having that could possibly be symptoms of depression or PTSD is something that we really want” said Terri Murphy, RN, MSN, NCP National Program Manager for Prevention Policy.

VA offers a wide range of services to help Veterans readjust to civilian life and cope with the mental and emotional impact of their military experiences.

The importance of communicating with your doctor can prevent unnecessary medical procedures as well.

“The most common misconception is that more screening is always better,” said Murphy. “It’s a little more complicated than that; not everyone needs to be screened for everything every year.”

PTSD

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focused intervention that has shown to effectively reduce problematic symptoms. CPT, and many other EBTs are available on an outpatient basis at most mental health clinics.

The healthier your team is the more efficient and productive they are.

Imagine someone coming to work with a headache every day and how that might impact their performance. Social, emotional and psychological stressors can be like a headache that distracts, with the potential to lead to job errors or mission failure.

Be aware that some medical conditions may require frequent follow-ups, like physical therapy and mental health appointments. The medical staff works to provide timely treatment with the ultimate goal and intent to return patients to work centers without restrictions.

The investment in treatment can have huge payoffs in productivity and quality of life enhancements.

PTSD symptoms such as intrusive and unwanted memories of the traumatic event, avoidance of reminders of the event, negative thoughts/mood, high physical tension/awareness don’t have to interfere with everyday activities, work or relationships. Treatment can help you get better.

Untreated, severe PTSD can degrade your quality of life and relationships.

For some patients, the risks of a screening procedure may outweigh the benefits. Prostate cancer, for example, is usually a very slow-growing cancer and a biopsy to confirm the screening results is not without risks.

The NCP has outlined nine key health messages to encourage Veterans to choose healthy behaviors and communicate with their health care team. These include nutrition, physical activity, weight management, smoking, alcohol use, stress management, preventive immunizations and screenings, safety, and good communication.

This message of healthy living is being promoted at VA medical facilities nationwide to raise awareness among providers and patients alike. But it will come down to the Veteran to put these health tips into practice.

“You can’t just take a pill instead of watching your weight, stopping smoking or limiting your alcohol use,” said Murphy. “Behavior change in those areas is hard work! We’re here to introduce the topics, to support Veterans, to give them the information they need, and to give them the latest evidence-based care, but the Veteran is the one who needs to decide he/she is ready to improve their health.

“Healthy living takes commitment, but the payoff is huge.”

There are countless success stories of those who have utilized mental health services to enhance their resilience.

Be there for your family, friends, peers and coworkers and be part of the solution to encourage seeking help when needed. You can help by connecting them with a Chaplain, a Family Life Counselor, their PCM/Behavioral Health Optimization Program, a mental health counselor or sharing the Veterans Crisis Hotline (800-273-8255 press 1) as a resource that is available 24/7 and is confidential.

Be the solution to change the culture and help reduce barriers for those seeking or receiving treatment for mental health issues.
### Frequently Called Numbers

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<td>Admissions</td>
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<td>Appointment Line</td>
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<td>Telephone Advice Line</td>
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<td>Outside Columbia</td>
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<td>In Columbia</td>
<td>(803) 647-5829</td>
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<td>Travel Office</td>
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### Community-Base Outpatient Clinics

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<td>3030 N. Hwy 81, Anderson, SC 29621</td>
<td>(864) 224-5450</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sumter CBOC</td>
<td>407 N. Salem Ave, Sumter, SC 29150</td>
<td>(803) 938-9901</td>
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<td>Greenville OPC</td>
<td>41 Park Creek Drive, Greenville, SC 29605</td>
<td>(864) 299-1600</td>
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<td>Orangeburg CBOC</td>
<td>1767 Village Park Drive, Orangeburg, SC 29118</td>
<td>(803) 533-1335</td>
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<td>Spartanburg CBOC</td>
<td>279 North Grove Medical Plaza, Spartanburg, SC 29303</td>
<td>(864) 582-7025</td>
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<td>Rock Hill CBOC</td>
<td>2670 Mills Park Drive, Rock Hill, SC 29732</td>
<td>(803) 366-4848</td>
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<tr>
<td>Florence CBOC</td>
<td>1822 Sally Hill Farms Blvd, Florence, SC 29501</td>
<td>(843) 292-8383</td>
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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 you comments or suggestions to vhacmsdornpa@va.gov.