Improving through Feedback

Completing VA satisfaction survey helps improve healthcare performance

Have you recently received a survey in the mail asking you to evaluate a recent VA outpatient visit or hospital stay? If so, the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System requests your assistance in completing the survey and providing feedback on the quality of care received.

Veterans accessing VA health care facilities around the nation are occasionally chosen at random to complete a survey to let facilities know how satisfied their customers are with the services and care they are receiving. The surveys are mailed to Veterans by an independent contractor, who also receives the responses, tallies the results and reports the information to VA headquarters and individual facilities.

“The survey covers multiple areas including access, care coordination, communication, comprehensiveness, and provider ratings,” said Jennifer Gerrib, Chief of VASNHS’ Veterans Experience Service.

“The data is shared with staff and used to pinpoint opportunities for improving the patient experience as well as share best practices with others in areas that receive high reviews.”

Overall, VASNHS has some of the highest inpatient satisfaction scores in the nation, while outpatient scores trail the national average.

“We need as many people as possible to participate, particularly when receiving outpatient surveys, to truly gauge our performance in the eyes of our Veterans,” said Peggy Kearns, VASNHS director.

“These surveys aren’t the only method we use to measure satisfaction, but they are what is used to compare the quality of the services we deliver against other facilities across the nation. If every person who receives a survey takes a few minutes to complete the assessment, it would be greatly appreciated.”
Breast Cancer Survivor:  
Air Force Veteran Battles Breast Cancer with the help of the VA and a Plant-Based Diet

Joan researched her condition endlessly. From books to websites; she read everything. Often, this raised more questions than it answered. “Thankfully, I could call my doctor at any time going through this,” she said. “Every step of the way, the doctors have been available to answer my questions.”

While Joan experienced the difficult side-effects associated with chemotherapy, like hair loss, she faced the dietary challenges with a unique perspective. Having consumed a plant-based diet since 2011, Joan looked at the normally debilitating chemotherapy-induced loss of appetite as an obstacle she wanted to overcome. Joan altered some of her normal staple foods based on the recommendations of the VA physicians. “The oncologists and dieticians here knew more about some of the active ingredients than I did based on their experience with other patients.” she said, “They’re aware of what interactions to look for with my medication.”

Throughout her journey, Joan has worked with Patricia Lobo, a VA clinical dietician, who lauded many of the food choices Joan had selected. “Cancer treatment can be very nutritionally demanding on your body. It is important to not only maintain a healthy weight, but also to fuel your body with nutrient- and calorically-dense foods that help you repair and recover,” Lobo said. “The best way to provide the body with phytochemicals (which work as antioxidants and protect the body’s cells from oxidative damage) is by consuming plenty of a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and plant protein sources (nuts, beans, lentils, tofu, and tempeh). If you choose to eat animal products, choose modest amounts of animal-based protein sources like fish, poultry, lean meats, and nonfat or low-fat dairy food.”

Joan’s experience with cancer and nutrition is inspiring her to help other women going through a similar struggle to eat healthy during treatment. In the future, Joan says she plans to create a blog which will feature interviews with professional dieticians, nutritionists, and oncologists to discuss cancer-fighting foods.

As Joan’s cancer treatment regimen enters the final stages, she reflects on the care she’s received from the VA; “They have just been wonderful here, and not just the doctors, but the people in the Oncology Clinic and dieticians. It takes a really special person to work in a job like that.”

For more information on VHA Nutrition programs:  
https://www.nutrition.va.gov/
Cervical Cancer: The Power of Early Detection

Screening
The first step of care is informing women of the critical test for cervical cancer: the Pap test. The test reveals abnormalities in cells in the cervix. It can detect cancer early, when treatment is most effective.

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidelines recommend a Pap test starting at age 21; from ages 21 to 65, the test should be at least every 3 years. For patients over 65 with normal Pap test results for several years, the doctor may say it’s OK to stop getting regular screenings. However, patients should speak with their health care provider — the frequency of screenings may vary based on past Pap tests, past surgeries, or age.

Dr. Laurie Zephyrin cautions that an abnormal Pap test does not mean a patient has cervical cancer. “Depending on the test result, sometimes it requires something as simple as repeating the Pap test or taking a closer look at the cervix with an electronic microscope called a colposcopy. With a closer view of the cervix, many abnormalities seen can be biopsied and sent to the lab for a more in-depth evaluation.”

Taking Care of Women Veterans
Cervical cancer screenings are one of the VA’s quality measures and it’s a quality measure VA takes seriously. In both 2008 and 2009, 92 percent of women ages 21 to 64 who were enrolled in a health plan had received at least one Pap test in the past 3 years. According to the 2010 VA Hospital Report Card, “Overall, provision of gender-specific care to women, e.g., screening for breast and cervical cancer, substantially exceeded that in other settings including commercial managed care systems, Medicare and Medicaid.”

“We definitely need to continue to ensure that our women Veterans are provided routine gynecological care and that women are receiving the best care in a timely fashion. It’s very important that women Veterans know that they can come to us to get their care.” Find out more by visiting our Women’s Health Center web site.

Talk to your VASNHS Primary Care Provider or for more information go to:
http://vaww.lasvegas.va.gov/women/Women_s_Health.asp

Cervical Cancer Facts
Know the Facts
Each year, approximately 12,000 women in the U.S. get cervical cancer. As the second most common cause of cancer deaths in women, cervical cancer has an impact on females around the world.

Dr. Laurie Zephyrin, the National Director of Reproductive Health at the Department of Veteran Affairs, says making screenings part of a woman’s regular physical can save lives. Thanks to cervical cancer screening with the Pap test, the number of women in the United States who develop cervical cancer has dropped a great deal.

With cervical cancer screening doctors can find cancer early or treat changes in the cervix before they develop into cancer. The VA provides gynecologic care, including routine pelvic exams and cervical cancer screening, to eligible women Veterans.

Your provider can schedule your Pap test at a VA facility or refer you to an outside provider for testing. Women Veterans are now the fastest growing subgroup of U.S. Veterans. VA health care is expected to be in high demand by the women Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.
Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

The Better Breathers’ Club (BBC)

The Better Breathers’ Club (BBC) is a support group that was started by the American Lung Association to provide education, resources and support to individuals with chronic and newly diagnosed lung disease. The support group meets monthly at different locations in the community and are facilitated by trained volunteers.

The majority of the attendees are people with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) which encompasses Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema; however, people with asthma, pulmonary fibrosis and lung cancer also attend. Caregivers and family members are always welcome to attend. People with COPD often feel ashamed because of forced lifestyle changes. Due to shortness of breath, they may not be able to perform activities of daily living as they had in the past; or continue to participate in hobbies or interact with family and friends. The BBC not only provides education, but gives people with COPD a venue to share their concerns and struggles with others who are truly able to empathize and give valuable feedback. Although COPD cannot be cured, it can be managed.

The BBC focuses heavily on disease management. COPD management topics include: medication management, breathing techniques, proper inhaler technique, indoor and outdoor air quality, nutrition (as it relates to COPD), depression (as it relates to COPD), vaccinations and avoiding infections, exercise (as it relates to COPD) and relaxation techniques to help with anxiety.

Per Yvonne Renee at the VASNHS “Health care professionals from the Las Vegas Medical Center and speakers from the community volunteer their time to give presentations and are a valuable resource for the attendees”.

Better Breathers Club Info:

The Better Breathers’ Club meets at the North Las Vegas Medical Center in classroom 1A139 (which is next to the Pulmonary Clinic on the first floor) from 1-2 p.m. the first Wednesday of the month.

For more information, contact Yvonne Renee
(702) 791-9000 at Ext. 13611

Look for our display board in the 1st floor hallway for the latest information for the BBC.
Be A Hero

The life saving actions of blood donation

Have you ever asked yourself, “What can I do that would truly make a difference?” Try being a Blood Donor. We have all heard about how important blood donations are but, did you know per the American Red Cross, one donation can save up to three lives? Donating blood is giving a gift of life.

Donating isn’t just good for the soul, it’s also good for the body. Research has demonstrated it could have positive health benefits for donors. Did you know that donating blood reduces the risk of heart attack and even cancer? per the Journal of the American Medical Association study in 2013. It is thought that the benefit comes from lowering high iron levels. The thickness of the blood is affected by iron levels in your body, raised iron levels also increases the oxidation process of cholesterol. Thinning the iron in the blood on a regular basis could have a protective benefit. According to a study from the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers found that those, ages 43 to 61, had fewer heart attacks and strokes when they donated blood every six months.

Leanne Beasley, VASNHS Blood Bank Supervisor and US Army Veteran, said that donating blood is, “…the most altruistic thing you can do in the shortest amount of time … basically you’re saving lives.” We get about 100 donations a year and we’re grateful… but we could use a lot more. Unfortunately, during the most festive times of the year (summer and holidays), there is always a shortage. It’s easy to do and most everyone can donate. One of the misconceptions is that you can’t donate after you’re 70; there is no maximum age. Leanne’s father, at the youthful age of 76, still donates regularly.

Leanne remembers Mr. Martin Lieblick, a Vietnam Era Air Force Veteran, who was one of the first recipients of a blood donation at the North Las Vegas VA Medical Center when the facility opened. Mr. Lieblick has been getting transfusions for almost 10 years. He said, “Although you don’t know me, I would like to say thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your blood donations saved my life, now, and will continue to do so.”

The VA is grateful for all of those who donate so selflessly. Those who would like to donate can do so at the VA. The next two blood drives are on January 19 and March 23 at the VA Medical Center, 6900 North Pecos Road, North Las Vegas, NV 89086. VA employees can donate during working hours, with their supervisor’s permission.

Blood Facts

Making a Difference

- Every day the U.S. uses approximately
  - 36,000 red blood cell units
  - 10,000 plasma units
  - 7,000 platelet units
- Maximum storage life of red blood cells – 42 days.
- Minimum time between whole blood donations – 56 days
- Time difference between storage life and donations – 2 weeks!
- O Negative is the universal red blood cell donor.
- AB (Positive or Negative) is the universal plasma donor.
- O Positive is the most common blood type, therefore is needed most often.
- Minimum age to donate – 16, with parental permission
- Maximum age to donate – No Limit!
- Maximum storage life for platelets – 5 days
- Maximum storage life for plasma (frozen) – 1 year
- Maximum storage life for plasma (thawed) – 5 days
- There are 29 systems of red cell antigens – ABO and Rh are 2 of them.

Donor red blood cells lacking certain antigens are identified as “rare”. Some patients who receive frequent and numerous blood transfusions develop antibodies and come to depend on rare blood, i.e. Sickle Cell Disease, many types of cancer. “Rare” blood can be frozen for up to 10 years.

Remember, blood cannot be replicated. This lifegiving gift can only come from a Super Hero ... like you. Make a difference ... Be a Donor!

If you have any questions, please contact Leanne at 702-791-9000, ext. 14543.

Be a Super Hero – donate today!
According to the American Diabetes Association, diabetic eye disease (also called diabetic retinopathy) is the leading cause of blindness in the United States. Diabetic retinopathy is a disorder in which the blood vessels of the eyes are damaged. Damage to the blood vessels results in leakage of blood and fluid in the retina—the structure responsible for vision. Vision changes and eye pain are common symptoms. However, symptoms of diabetic retinopathy may not happen until significant eye damage occurs.

Therefore, it is important that people with diabetes have routine eye exams. Routine eye exams can detect minor problems which can prevent worsening of diabetic eye disease. Preventing diabetic eye disease and worsening of this problem, if it already exists, is well within your control! Getting regular eye exams and maintaining normal blood sugar levels are great first steps to keeping your eyes healthy. You can also keep your eyes healthy by quitting smoking and controlling your blood pressure.

The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System offers diabetic eye exams for qualified patients through Telehealth. Telehealth is an enhancement to health care and is defined as the ability to use technology and telecommunications to deliver health care. Telehealth diabetic eye exams (also called Tele-Retinal Imaging) can be done at any of the Primary Care Clinics, including Pahrump and Laughlin. During the telehealth diabetic eye exam, a Telehealth Clinical Technician (TCT) will take multiple pictures of your eyes. After this visit, an eye care provider reviews the pictures to determine if diabetic eye disease is present. If diabetic eye disease is present, your primary care provider will speak with you about available treatment options.

Treatment options for diabetic eye disease may include close monitoring or laser eye surgery. If you are interested in having a telehealth diabetic eye exam, contact your primary care provider for details.

Facts on Eyesight Diseases:

- Diabetic Retinopathy is a leading cause of blindness in the U.S.
- Between 12,000 and 24,000 new cases of diabetic retinopathy are identified each year
- Diabetic retinopathy is the result of leakage from or abnormal growth of the blood vessels that supply the retina, the light-sensitive and vision-essential region at the back of the eye
- Regular eye exams, good diabetes care, blood pressure control, and not smoking helps to keep your eyes healthy
- Telehealth diabetic eye exams can be done closer to home at one of the VA primary care clinics
- Over 1,200 telehealth diabetic eye exams were done at the VA

For more information about diabetes, visit the American Diabetes Association website at [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org).
Project Homeless Connect in Las Vegas

The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System continues its efforts to support the local homeless community in Las Vegas. The VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System continues its efforts to support the local homeless community. According to a 2017 Southern Nevada Homeless Census and Survey, nearly 25,000 residents will experience homelessness this year. And while Southern Nevada has reached Functional Zero for Veterans, which means resources are available to provide shelter for Veterans experiencing homelessness, Las Vegas remains home to the third largest population of homeless Veterans in the nation. The VASNHS, along with the Reno Regional VA Benefits Office and Nevada Department of Veterans Services routinely send staff to enroll new Veterans, provide flu shots, social work counseling, dietary consultation, and assistance with housing, benefits and employment.

One of the most effective weapons in the fight against homelessness, is the VA Homeless Primary Aligned Care Team (HPACT). This is a community-based outreach clinic that specializes in homeless Veteran health care. The Northeast Primary Care Clinic is the operating base for this team, and it’s collocated with the VASNHS’ Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) as most of the homeless population reside nearby. Egoshia Odobo, Nurse Practitioner for the HPACT, as well as the only Primary Care Provider for the team, says that they are able to offer a one-stop-shop for the specific care required for homeless Veterans. “What we provide, it’s not just medical alone; we give them shelter,” said Odobo. “We give them three square meals a day. And then they have a place to shower, and a place to wash their clothes, while their medical needs are covered.”

In addition to the normal challenges involved with medical care, there are several unique aspects of dealing with homeless Veterans. Substance abuse is often a concern, says Odobo, but the biggest issue is usually logistical. “They have no way of being contacted. They have no phones, so getting them back is not easy. We have to involve a lot of people within the community to get them back for urgent care or follow-ups for lab results.”

Because most homeless Veterans lack access to phones or internet, the HPACT has had to be flexible with their scheduling. “Every Veteran that comes in for medical care are seen that same day,” explained Odobo. “In between the scheduled Veterans, if we have someone who walks in, they will be seen. Nobody is being turned away.”

The unique mission of the HPACT requires certain personality traits, according to Joseph Yip, a registered nurse at the Northeast Clinic. “It’s just about having that openness to work with them where they are at, and not judge them. It’s easy start with a lot biases; a lot of preconceptions about working with homeless Veterans. I know I did when I started, but the reality is that they are just everyday regular people, some of them just went through difficult situations in life.”

Upcoming Events Jan-March 2018 (Go to www.lasvegas.va.gov for current dates & times)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 Jan</td>
<td>SVCEB Veterans Resource Fair &amp; Quarterly Town Hall - VAMC</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Jan</td>
<td>Federal Holiday: Birthday of Martin Luther King Jr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 Jan</td>
<td>Blood Drive at VA Medical Center (VAMC)- North Las Vegas</td>
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<td>26-27 Jan</td>
<td>UNLV Veterans Career Fair w/Sen. Cortez Masto</td>
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<td>28-31 Jan</td>
<td>Project Hero Las Vegas Mountain Bike Ride</td>
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<td>14 Feb</td>
<td>National Salute at VA Medical Center - Voluntary Service</td>
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<td>19 Feb</td>
<td>Federal Holiday: Washington’s Birthday</td>
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<tr>
<td>23-24 Feb</td>
<td>At Ease Event: Free Legal Assistance for Veterans - VAMC</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 March</td>
<td>Women’s History Month Event - VAMC</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 March</td>
<td>SVCEB Veterans Education Fair at Vegas PBS, 4-7 p.m.</td>
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If you are a Veteran enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system, the Veteran Appointment Request mobile application (app) allows you to self-schedule or request primary care appointments and request mental health appointments. You can also view appointment details, track the status of requests, send messages about the requested appointments and get notifications about appointments and cancel appointments.

For directions go to: https://mobile.va.gov/appstore/veterans
Special Events

SNVCEB Resource Fair and VA Quarterly Hall

The VA information Fair will include information tables, as well as other displays and information for Veterans, their families and caregivers.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will hold its quarterly Veterans Town Hall Jan 13, 2018, which includes the moderated Town Hall from 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. and Resource Fair from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

The Town Hall will include updates from Veterans Health Care and Veterans Benefits leaders on national and local activities and initiatives, followed by a question and answer session where leaders will answer pre-submitted questions or questions of general interest submitted on a comment card during the session.

Veterans can submit questions in advance to: vhalaspao@va.gov

Questions of a personal nature or those unable to be addressed during the town hall will be sent to the appropriate representative for a direct response back to the submitter.

(Note: Listing of participating non-government organizations is for informational purposes only and does not infer or imply endorsement by the Department of Veterans Affairs)

FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION IN THE VA SOUTHERN NEVADA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING WEB LINKS:

VASNHS Website
Free Email Alerts

Scan Here to Sign-up!

VASNHS YouTube

Scan Here for videos!