



# Health Beat



Fall 2008

News from the South Central VA Health Care Network

www.visn16.med.va.gov

## VISN 16 Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Program Ensures Veterans Receive Quality Care

The Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 16, known as the South Central VA Health Care Network, is dedicated to ensuring veterans receive quality care, and the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans are no different. Every VA Medical Center has a team standing ready to welcome OEF/OIF service members and help coordinate their care.

Marilyn Crosby, RN, MSN, MBA is the VISN 16 OEF/OIF program manager, and supports the medical centers with their program. Ms. Crosby is committed to assisting the VA in meeting the needs of OEF/OIF veterans. "I consult with the OEF/OIF program managers within the

facilities to assist them in facilitating efficient and appropriate delivery of care to OEF/OIF veterans within the Network's ten Medical Centers and multiple Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC)," says Ms. Crosby. "Providing exceptional health care to veterans is our top priority."

For more information about the OEF/OIF program, you may visit the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) OEF/OIF web site for returning Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom at [www.oefoif.va.gov/](http://www.oefoif.va.gov/). This web site also contains links to information about:

- Enhanced VA Health Care Benefits
- Primary Care Health Services
- National Guard / Reserves Information
- Transition Services
- Housing Transition
- Military Transition Programs
- Employment Information
- Family services



Pictured right is Marilyn Crosby, VISN 16 OEF/OIF Coordinator.

Inside this issue:

My HealtheVet Receives Awards	2-4
More Than 1,000 VHA Leaders To Gather In Washington, DC	3
VA Raising Home Loan Ceilings in Many Areas	4



## VA Provides State-of-the-Art Psychotherapies to Treat PTSD

WASHINGTON—The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is providing national training in state-of-the-art psychotherapies to enable its mental health clinicians to provide the most effective and proven treatments available to help veterans overcome Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

By expanding its

training programs, VA will enable more veterans than ever to receive the newest evidence-based psychological treatments, such as Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Prolonged Exposure (PE) Therapy, two psychotherapies developed specifically for PTSD.

Evidence-based psychotherapies are those that have been scientifically

evaluated and shown in randomized clinical trials to be more effective than other treatments or no treatment. VA is the first national health care system to undertake a broad national initiative to use evidence-based psychotherapies for PTSD.

In 2007, VA began a national initiative to train VA mental health clinicians on how to use Cognitive

Processing Therapy through an intensive interactive training program involving attendance at a workshop, incorporating role playing and ongoing follow-up in which a consultant works directly with the therapist in applying the therapy with their patients. More than 1,100 mental health professionals have received this training to date.

(Story continued to page 2)

South Central VA Health Care Network, also known as VISN 16, is one of 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) of the Department of Veterans Affairs. VISN 16 is comprised of 10 medical centers and 37 community-based outpatient clinics that serve veterans in all or parts of the following eight states—Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Missouri, Alabama and Florida.

## PTSD *(story continued from page 1)*

VA also began similar training earlier this year to enable clinicians to utilize Prolonged Exposure Therapy. About 150 clinicians have been trained so far, and training will continue over the next few years.

“VA is strongly committed to making evidence-based psychological treatments available to all veterans,” said Dr. Bradley Karlin, VA’s Director of Psychotherapy Program. “This intensive training will enable VA to become even more effective in treating patients with PTSD and other mental illnesses.”

According to Dr. Karlin, recent reviews and reports, including a report by the Institute of Medicine, have confirmed that psychotherapies such as Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure Therapy are effective for PTSD and at least, if not more, effective than medication in treating PTSD.

CPT is a form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) developed for PTSD. This type of therapy links a person’s psychological well being with his or her thoughts and beliefs. Individuals with PTSD, depression, or other mental health problems often engage in extreme, negative ways of

thinking or interpreting situations that affects their mood and behaviors.

“In Cognitive Processing Therapy, the therapist helps the patient confront the symptoms of PTSD and the thoughts and behaviors that contribute to and maintain them,” Dr. Karlin said. “During the therapy, the patient comes to develop more realistic and balanced evaluations of the trauma and of oneself following the trauma.”

For example, a veteran who may suffer from PTSD after firing on a fast approaching car at a checkpoint may harbor the belief that killing that person was their fault and, as a result, they may experience significant guilt. During therapy, the patient may learn to come to a more realistic evaluation of the situation and replace the original thought with the idea that firing their weapon was done as a last resort, thus leading to reduced guilt.

Exposure therapy is based on the idea that people learn to fear the thoughts, feelings and situations that remind them of a traumatic event. This avoidance usually strengthens the patient’s fear. By talking repeatedly with the therapist and overcoming avoidance

of such reminders and their internal emotional experiences, patients can change the feelings they have related to the trauma.

In Prolonged Exposure Therapy, the patient learns relaxation techniques to help them through imagined exposure exercises in which he or she recalls memories of the traumatic experience that were previously avoided. Following repeated imagined exposure, the patient exposes himself or herself to situations that remind them of the traumatic event, such as crowded places or particular locations or surroundings that maintain and exacerbate the trauma-related symptoms.

“We are fortunate today to have treatments for PTSD that are proven to work, and VA is actively working to bring these state-of-the-art treatments from the laboratory to the therapy room,” Dr. Karlin said. “The intensive training VA is providing to clinicians nationwide is revolutionary and will transform the way mental health care is delivered to veterans. The end result will be better treatment for our nation’s heroes who have PTSD.”

## My HealtheVet Receives Awards from Two Major Information Technology Groups *by Stacie Rivera, Program Specialist, VA Office of Information Communications*

WASHINGTON—My HealtheVet -- the web-based portal that enables veterans to create and maintain a personal health record -- has received two major awards from organizations that focus on effective use of Internet Technology.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA)’s Office of Information has been selected to receive one of the prestigious 2008 “CIO 100 Awards” in recognition of its innovative use of information technology at its My HealtheVet web site ([www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)). The CIO 100 award program recognizes organizations

around the world that exemplify the highest level of operational and strategic excellence in Information Technology.

VA developed My HealtheVet ([www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)) to be a one-stop location for veterans of all eras to receive critical medical and benefits information and to provide ways for veterans to input and view some of their own medical records online.

Earlier this year, My HealtheVet was selected as the Gold Award winner for Best Practices in Consumer Empowerment and Protection Awards in the Category of Patient/Consumer Safety

by the Utilization Review Accreditation Committee (URAC). URAC is an independent nonprofit group known as a leader in promoting health care quality through its accreditation and education programs.

“These awards demonstrate how VA and its leaders continue to provide innovative Information Technology solutions to enhance veteran and employee health, and improve the quality of care VA’s health care system provides,” said Dr. Michael J. Kussman, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. “I encourage America’s veterans and others

*(Story continued to page 4)*

# More Than 1,000 VHA Leaders To Gather in Washington, DC For 2008 Senior Management Conference

**WASHINGTON**—More than 1,000 Veterans Health Administration' (VHA) leaders from throughout the nation will meet in Washington, DC, Aug. 26-28 for the 2008 VHA Senior Management Conference. The conference will feature a keynote address by VA Secretary Dr. James B. Peake and a special presentation from renowned presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.

The theme for this year's bi-annual conference of VHA leaders nationwide will be: "Power of the Promise: Orchestrating a New Tomorrow." The three-day event also will feature a major address by Under Secretary for Health Dr. Michael J. Kussman.

"The 2008 VHA Senior Management conference provides an educational opportunity for leaders to address current and emerging challenges the Department of Veterans Affairs faces," said Dr. Kussman, underscoring the conference's purpose.

The conference is designed for VISN Directors; VHA Chief Officers; VA Medical Center Directors; Associate, Assistant, and Deputy Directors; Chiefs of Staff; Nurse Executives; Clinical Managers; Quality Management Officers and other emerging or current senior leaders.

The conference will highlight examples of Dr. Kussman's four areas of concentration: Practicing Progressive Leadership; Putting Patient Care First; Improving the Quality of VHA's Business Processes; and Maintaining Meaningful Measures of Performance.

"We'll talk about how each of these areas are important to VHA's success, and how they work together to provide us with a path to continually improve our service to veterans," said Dr. Kussman in his letter about the conference to VHA Colleagues.

The objectives of the Conference are to: identify and describe examples of VHA "Excellence" related to each of the VHA Under Secretary for Health's four focus areas; understand the role and importance of Diversity in VHA Leadership; recognize interdependencies between various components of VHA and the impact on teamwork and communication; and articulate the priority focus areas as defined by VA and VA's top leaders.

The key breakout sessions include:

- Facility and Culture: I'm a Little Bit Country; They're a Little Bit Rock and Roll;
- Turn the Beat Around: PR Matters
- Achieving Perfect Pitch: Fine Tuning Care Management
- Suicide Prevention: Composing the Approach for the Future
- Managing Academic Affiliations: Finding Harmony
- IT Reboot: developments, Innovations and Impact on VHA
- Healthcare System Redesign: Composing a New Score

- Taking Care of Business: Don't Let Risks Slip You Up
- Striking a Bad Note – Peer Review and Disclosure
- Getting a Standing Ovation: Meeting Consumers' Expectations
- Everyone Plays Their Part in the NASCAR Symphony
- Upping the Tempo: Attracting and Keeping the Talent
- Learning Changes: Striking Up the Band
- Suicide Prevention: Composing the Approach for the Future
- Avoiding Dissonant Chords: Leader's Responsibilities for Research
- Managing Academic Affiliations: Finding Harmony
- IT Reboot: Developments, Innovations and Impact on VHA
- System Redesign: Bringing Zen to Inpatient Flow
- Staying in Tune: VHA's Challenge in Managing Clinical Quality and Patient Safety

Mrs. Goodwin's presentation will center around her acclaimed book, "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln." She previously authored best-selling books about Lyndon Johnson, the Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys, and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.

Nationally renowned conductor Roger Nierenberg will give a presentation demonstrating how leading a symphony orchestra is similar to leading a large organization. Nierenberg formerly led two major symphonies and has recorded with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He now leads MUSIC PARADIGM sessions before major companies, financial institutions and global consulting firms throughout the world in which an orchestra is used as a metaphor for any dynamic organization.

Also appearing will be Elliott Masie, an internationally recognized futurist, analysis researcher and organizer on the critical topics of learning, technology business and workplace productivity. He is the editor of Learning TRENDS, an Internet newsletter read by more than 50,000 business executive worldwide, and has authored several dozen books.

The session on diversity will be presented by Luke Visconti, a partner and cofounder of DiversityInc Media LLC magazine and an accompanying web site. He is a recognized leader in this field and has appeared on major network television programs. He is often quoted on diversity issues in major newspapers including *The New York Times*.



1600 Woodrow Wilson Drive  
Third Floor, Suite A  
Jackson, MS 39216



We're on the web!  
Visit us at  
<http://www.visn16.va.gov/>

Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 16, known as the South Central VA Health Care Network, is an integrated health care delivery system of medical centers with the primary purpose of providing care and treatment to eligible veterans. VISN 16 is one of 21 networks within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and includes ten medical centers, 37 associated community based outpatient clinics, six nursing homes, and one domiciliary.

VISN 16 spans 170,000 square miles and includes nearly two million veterans in all or parts of Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. The network office is located in Jackson, MS.

**The South Central VA Health Care Network's Mission:**  
*To honor America's veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.*

### VA Raising Home Loan Ceilings In Many Areas: Improved Benefits Aid Disabled Veterans in Adapting Homes

WASHINGTON—The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will use a locality-based approach in raising ceilings on its no-downpayment home loans from the current \$417,000 to as much as \$729,000.

The increases are effective immediately under legislation recently enacted with President Bush signing the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008.

That law also improved VA's Specially Adapted Housing Program. It raises primary grants from \$50,000 to \$60,000 toward constructing a new home or modifying an existing home to meet adaptive needs of veterans or active duty servicemembers with certain service-connected disabilities.

One new feature is a provision in the law that will assist burn victims. It will allow veterans with certain service-connected disabilities resulting from severe burns to receive the adaptive housing grants. The new law also makes future increases in ceilings on the Specially Adapted Housing Program automatic.

The increased limits in the general home loan program for all veterans' home purchases or construction will be based on local housing costs, tied to the similar locality adjustments of the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp., Freddie Mac.

VA home loans are available for veterans to purchase or construct single-family homes, and to purchase condominiums or cooperative apartments. There are about 2.3 million existing VA home loans, more than 90 percent made with no down payment.

More information about VA home loans and adaptive grants is available from VA at 877-827-3702 or [www.homeloans.va.gov](http://www.homeloans.va.gov).

## My HealthVet *(story continued from page 2)*

to log on to My HealthVet and forge a new partnership with us to make their health care decisions."

Recent upgrades to the web-based portal include an Active Duty Center for newly discharged veterans, a new calendar option, and Military Health System (MHS) learning modules which feature three online courses developed in concert with the Department of Defense. Another upgrade will be added soon enabling veterans to view their lab results for certain tests and view appointments.

Craig B. Luigart, VHA's Chief Information Officer, will receive VA's award on Aug. 26, 2008 at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual CIO Symposium and Awards Ceremony in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Complete coverage of the 2008 CIO 100 awards will be in the August 15 issue of *CIO* magazine and available online at [www.cio.com](http://www.cio.com) on June 1.

URAC announced 22 winners for excellence among entries from health

care management, health information technology, health plan and pharmacy benefit management organizations. Gold Award winners were selected for their ability to measurably demonstrate an impact on consumer empowerment or protection, as well as for their potential for wide-spread implementation of the program by other organizations. A complete list of award winners may be found at [www.urac.org](http://www.urac.org).

My HealthVet also was selected earlier this year as winner of the 2007 "Top 5" Excellence.Gov Awards for innovative technology from the American Council for Technology's Industry Advisory Council, a nonprofit education organization established to assist government in acquiring and effectively using information technology resources.

*Health Beat* is a patient newsletter published quarterly by VISN 16. *Health Beat* gives veterans and their families insightful information about managing and accessing health care from VA medical centers within VISN 16.