

# Veterans' Health Today

WINTER 2009

The Future  
of VA Care

Staying Healthy  
this Winter

From Service  
Member to Veteran

Expanding  
Vision Services



**VA** DESERT PACIFIC  
HEALTHCARE NETWORK



Department of  
Veterans Affairs

# RETURN ADDRESS— THE SHIFT FROM SERVICE MEMBER *to* VETERAN

**E**very day dedicated men and women sign up to serve in our Armed Forces. Service members and veterans deserve a great deal of respect, care, and support. The VA is committed to these individuals as they transition from service member to veteran.

According to Dr. Susan Tate, Clinical Psychologist and Recovery Coordinator for VA San Diego Healthcare System, each veteran faces unique challenges as they reenter civilian life. “For some, it will be family issues,” said Dr. Tate. “Not only have their perceptions and roles changed, but quite often family members have changed as well. There may also be challenges related to pursuing educational goals or acquiring meaningful civilian work.”

Common medical issues arising during readjustment may include:

- Impatience
- Irritability
- Sleep problems or nightmares
- Lack of concentration or focus
- Restlessness

Common social challenges arising during readjustment may include issues with:

- Housing
- Income
- Education
- Employment
- Family concerns

Dr. Tate recommends that veterans seek assistance from the VA when they or a loved one notices stress related to the veteran’s military experience or re-entry to



civilian life. “It may not mean anything’s wrong,” she said, “but it is important to be aware and accepting of the fact that experiences in the military may have led to changes that make transitioning back to civilian life more difficult, and there is effective help available.”

The VA offers extensive medical and social services to help veterans. For example, each VA Healthcare System has established care management teams to address physical, emotional, spiritual, and social concerns that are associated with being a combat veteran adjusting to civilian life. Services may include:

- Post deployment screening
- Coordination with VA services and benefits
- Social service referrals
- Mental health support
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Chaplain services
- Family counseling
- Gender specific services
- Ongoing support during life transition

Vet Centers are also available in many communities to provide readjustment services.

It’s necessary for veterans to enroll in VA healthcare to access its many helpful services, and Dr. Tate encourages veterans not to wait. “Call your local VA and tell them you’re a returning veteran,” she said. Veterans can also call the VA benefit line at 1-800-827-1000, or visit [www.desertpacific.va.gov/iraqiFreedBenef.htm](http://www.desertpacific.va.gov/iraqiFreedBenef.htm).



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*Y*ou're in your room at the VA medical center visiting with your wife and son. The family dog is lying at your feet. Music is playing softly in the background, and the smell of freshly baked cookies drifts along the corridor. You and your wife are discussing the evening's dinner choices when your doctor stops in to review your patient record.

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## It's All About **YOU**

# The Future of VA Care

**O**ver the next few years, veterans will notice gradual and subtle changes at the five medical centers in the VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network. The changes are all about empowering *you*—the patient. While the scenario above may seem far-fetched, it's an example of the kind of atmosphere they hope to create at all the medical centers.

"The primary emphasis is to change the experience for the patient," says John Tryboski, Network Quality Manager. "Putting patients first and creating an environment that reduces stress will help patients focus on their wellness and recovery."

While the Network is in the early stages of making changes, some of the ideas being discussed include making the medical centers more homelike by changing the color schemes, displaying serene art, adding water fountains and garden areas, and replacing overhead paging systems with soothing musical selections.

But making your stay at the medical center more comfortable is only one of the ways they hope to address patient needs.

"The patient will be more involved in their care," says Deborah Dort, Chief of Radiology at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, and one of the people involved in planning the changes.

For instance, patients could be allowed access to their patient records to review and to make notes to their doctors. They might be allowed to have friends and family stay overnight. They could be given more flexibility in deciding when and what they eat or have family make their favorite homemade meals on the ward.

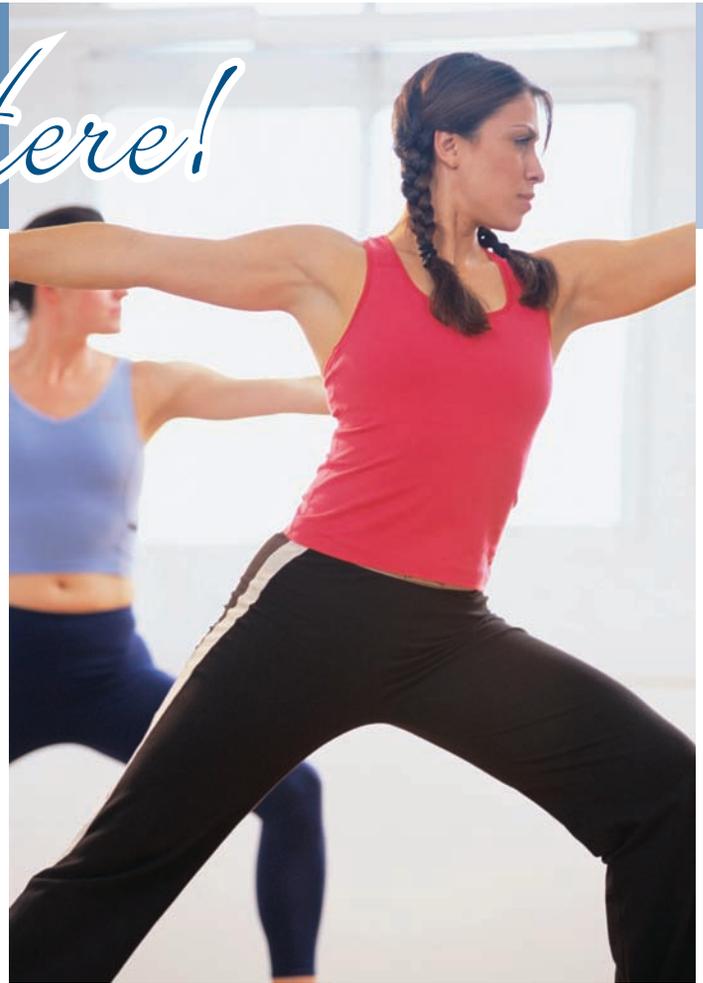
Alternative therapies could become treatment options. If a patient responds well to therapeutic massage, spiritual counseling, or music therapy, those things could be available.

According to Tryboski, medical centers in other parts of the country, referred to as Planetree facilities, have already adopted these practices and are seeing good results, including shorter hospital stays and higher patient satisfaction.

"We're focusing on meeting the patients' needs in a healing environment," says Tryboski. "It's an evolution in care—patient-centered care."

# Winter is Here!

## What You Can Do to Stay Healthy All Season



**E**ven in milder climates, the winter season brings with it shorter days, cooler temperatures, and plenty of ways your health can suffer. Maintaining your well-being during cool, wet months requires a little more vigilance than it does during summer's dry, hot days.

In the winter, when people spend more time indoors in close proximity, viruses tend to spread more easily. Getting plenty of rest and eating a well-balanced diet gives your body a good defense against illnesses.

The amount of sleep a person needs depends on age and other factors. In general, most people need seven to eight hours a night. As people age they are likely to sleep more lightly and for shorter stretches of time; however, they still need an average of eight hours of sleep. Getting the proper amount of sleep will help your body function at its best.

Your body needs the right vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients to stay healthy. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), a balanced diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. It also includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts. Saturated fats,

transfats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars should be kept to a minimum. For more information on how to structure your diet, including the USDA's food pyramid and healthy recipes, visit [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov).

Exercise can also play a key role in maintaining your health during the winter. Even though high winds, rain, and chilly temperatures can put you off getting regular exercise outdoors, it's important to get thirty minutes or more of physical activity most days of the week. Regular exercise can raise your energy level, help you shake the winter blues, and improve the quality of your sleep. If you're a man over 50 or a woman over 40 and you're just beginning an exercise program, be sure to consult your VA primary care provider before you start.

If you do brave the elements to exercise outside, be sure to dress properly. Layering is the most effective way to stay warm, and the layer closest to your skin should wick away moisture. Cold temperatures make your muscles tighter, so warming up properly is even more important in the winter. Be sure to take extra time to stretch before exercising to avoid cramping and pulled muscles. Finally, colder air increases the risk of dehydration, so drinking plenty of fluids when exercising is essential.

## Fighting the Flu: Who Should Be Vaccinated and Where to Get It

**I**n general, anyone who wants to increase his or her chances of avoiding the flu can be vaccinated. Contact the nearest VA medical center or community clinic for a schedule of flu vaccinations. Flu vaccines are free to all enrolled veterans.

Proper rest, exercise, and a balanced diet will help your body defend itself against colds and viruses, but there are other ways to protect yourself from illness. One of those is to wash your hands often. (See sidebar for tips on proper hand washing technique.) Another is to get a flu vaccine.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the single best way to protect against the flu is to be vaccinated each year. Influenza outbreaks can happen as early as October, but most of the outbreaks occur in January or later. It's good to be vaccinated early—in September or as soon as the vaccine is available—to avoid catching the flu. (See sidebar for information on who should get vaccinated and on vaccination availability in the VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network.)

Winter has its special holidays, activities, and special foods. Enjoy it to its fullest by staying healthy! To learn about additional ways to maintain your well-being until the arrival of spring, talk to your VA primary care provider.

## Wash Away the Germs

**D**uring the winter, when viruses are abundant and the chance of being around someone who is sick is higher than normal, regular and thorough hand washing is especially important. If you become sick, make an extra effort to wash often to avoid spreading your germs to others.



Follow these tips to be sure you wash your hands properly:

1. Wet your hands and apply soap.
2. Rub hands together vigorously to make lather and scrub your entire hand, back and front, for 20 seconds.
3. Rinse hands well under running water.
4. Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use the paper towel to turn off the faucet.
5. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based wipe or hand gel.

## 24 Hour Fitness for Veterans

**T**he VA Desert Pacific has recently contracted with 24 Hour Fitness Clubs to provide veterans and their families a special discounted membership rate starting at \$19.99.

Why exercise? Exercising regularly can help you manage your weight, improve your mood, combat chronic disease, and help you prevent — or manage — high blood pressure. Exercise can also help you prevent type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and certain types of cancer. There's no end to the benefits of exercise!

### Enrollment Made Easy:

to be connected to the nearest club please call 800.224.0240, OR enroll online at: <http://www.24hourfitness.com/corp/vadesertpac> (enter code: **100825**).

If you have questions, contact Rhonda Beard at [rbeard@24hourfit.com](mailto:rbeard@24hourfit.com), or contact your local club at 800.224.0240.



# BLIND REHABILITATION SERVICES EXPAND TO HELP THOSE WITH LOW VISION

**M**ore than one million veterans across the United States are visually impaired. The majority of these suffer from low vision, a significant, uncorrectable visual impairment that can make things such as reading, paying bills, or even going for a walk difficult. Low vision is most commonly caused by age-related conditions, such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy.

Last year, VA expanded its Blind Rehabilitation Service to include help for those with low vision, including intermediate and advanced low vision clinics as part of the services. The VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network has received funding for two intermediate clinics in Las Vegas and Loma Linda and two advanced clinics in Los Angeles and San Diego and a Blind Rehabilitation Center in Long Beach.

“With the addition of the four low vision clinics and a new blind rehabilitation center, the Network will be able to provide a full continuum of care beginning with people whose visual impairment is only affecting them moderately,” says Belinda Bruce Hawkins, the National Blind Rehabilitation Consultant.

Veterans experiencing vision problems start out in the basic vision care clinic, available at each of the VA medical centers in the Network. From there, if necessary, they will be referred to the intermediate or the advanced low vision clinics.

**VA** is expanding its Blind Rehabilitation Services nationwide, including the construction of three new Blind Rehabilitation Centers, one of which is under construction now in Long Beach, CA.

At the clinics, veterans are taught new ways to do the things that their low vision has prevented them from doing. They may also be shown how to use devices that supplement vision. “The training can be as simple as learning to do things in a different way, such as using a color-coded system, or learning to use a magnifier,” says Hawkins.

The most important thing for veterans to know, according to Hawkins, is that their optometrist or ophthalmologist is not the end of the road. “They don’t realize the options that are available. The clinics have a wealth of resources.”

Veterans and their families who want to learn more about low vision services can contact the vision clinic at their nearest VA Medical Center.

# Thank you!

**T**hanks to those of you who returned survey cards included in the last issue of *Veterans' Health Today*. Its purpose was to determine the computer skills of our veterans, and to determine their accessibility to VA on-line resources. There were 1,544 participants with an average age of 70.1 years. Fifty-four percent of all participants rated their computer skills as advanced; 28 percent were intermediate, and 18 percent rated themselves as beginners.

Some online functions frequently requested by our veterans were:

- ▶ Scheduling or changing an appointment
- ▶ Email communication with their provider
- ▶ Retrieving their lab results
- ▶ Accessing their medical record
- ▶ Information and FAQs on disease states and health management
- ▶ Upcoming health events (such as seasonal flu vaccination)

These surveys are used to improve communication between veterans and the VA. The more we hear from you, the better we can serve you!

Watch our websites for improvements:

[www.desertpacific.va.gov](http://www.desertpacific.va.gov)

[www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)

## Suicide Hotline for Veterans



**S**uicidal ideas and attempts to harm oneself are the result of problems that may seem like they can't be fixed. Together, Vet Centers and VA Medical Centers stand ready to reach out and help veterans at risk for suicide.

If you feel you are in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and indicate you are a veteran. You'll be immediately connected to VA suicide prevention and mental health professionals.

**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

## VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

### Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave., Suite 110  
Corona, CA 92879-3123  
951-734-0525

### East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard  
Suite 150  
Commerce, CA 90022-5147  
323-728-9966

### Las Vegas Vet Center

1919 S. Jones Blvd., Suite A  
Las Vegas, NV 89146-1299  
702-251-7873

### Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard  
Suite 150  
Gardena, CA 90247-4129  
310-767-1221

### Orange County Vet Center

12453 Lewis Street, Suite 101  
Garden Grove, CA 92840-4680  
714-776-0161

### San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140  
San Bernardino, CA 92408-3305  
909-890-0797

### San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92103-1003  
619-294-2040

### San Marcos Vet Center

1 Civic Center Drive, Suite 140  
San Marcos, CA 92069-2934  
760-744-6914

### Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue  
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618  
818-892-9227

### Ventura Vet Center

790 E. Santa Clara, Suite 100  
Ventura, CA 93001-2964  
805-585-1860

### West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100  
Culver City, CA 90230-6615  
310-641-0326

# REACHING US IS EASY



**Symbol Key**

- ★ VA Medical Centers
- ▲ Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

## ★ VA Medical Centers

- VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System**  
P.O. Box 360001  
Las Vegas, NV 89036  
702-636-3000
- Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital**  
4700 Las Vegas Blvd. North  
Las Vegas, NV 89191  
702-653-2215
- VA Loma Linda Healthcare System**  
11201 Benton Street  
Loma Linda, CA 92357  
909-825-7084
- VA Long Beach Healthcare System**  
5901 East 7th Street  
Long Beach, CA 90822  
562-826-8000
- VA San Diego Healthcare System**  
3350 La Jolla Village Drive  
San Diego, CA 92161  
858-552-8585
- VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System**  
11301 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90073  
310-478-3711

## ▲ Community Clinics

- Anaheim**  
1801 W. Romneya Drive  
3rd Floor, Suite 304  
Anaheim, CA 92801  
714-780-5400
- Antelope Valley**  
547 W. Lancaster Blvd.  
Lancaster, CA 93534  
661-729-8655
- Bakersfield**  
1801 Westwind Drive  
Bakersfield, CA 93301  
661-632-1800
- Cabrillo**  
2001 River Avenue, Bldg. 28  
Long Beach, CA 90810  
562-826-8414

- Chula Vista**  
835 3rd Avenue, Suite B  
Chula Vista, CA 91910  
619-409-1600
- Corona**  
800 Magnolia Avenue #101  
Corona, CA 92879  
951-817-8820
- East Los Angeles**  
5400 E. Olympic Blvd. #150  
City of Commerce, CA 90040  
323-725-7557
- Escondido**  
815 East Pennsylvania Ave.  
Escondido, CA 92025  
760-466-7020
- Gardena**  
1251 Redondo Beach Blvd.  
3rd Floor  
Gardena, CA 90247  
310-851-4705
- Henderson**  
2920 Green Valley Parkway,  
Suite 215  
Henderson, NV 89014  
702-456-3825
- Imperial Valley**  
1600 South Imperial Drive  
El Centro, CA 92243  
760-352-1506

- Laguna Hills**  
25292 McIntyre Street  
Laguna Hills, CA 92653  
949-269-0700
- Las Vegas Homeless Veterans**  
916 West Owens Avenue  
Las Vegas, NV 89106  
702-636-4077
- Laughlin Outreach Clinic**  
Coming Soon!
- Los Angeles**  
351 E. Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
213-253-2677
- Mission Valley**  
8810 Rio San Diego Drive  
San Diego, CA 92108  
619-400-5000
- Oxnard**  
250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue  
Suite 140  
Oxnard, CA 93030  
805-983-6384
- Palm Desert**  
41865 Boardwalk, Suite 103  
Palm Desert, CA 92211  
760-341-5570

- Pahrump**  
2100 E. Calvada Boulevard  
Pahrump, NV 89048  
775-727-7535
- San Gabriel**  
420 W. Las Tunas  
San Gabriel, CA 91776  
626-289-5973
- San Luis Obispo**  
1288 Morro St., #200  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
805-543-1233
- Santa Ana**  
Bristol Medical Center  
2740 S. Bristol Street  
1st Floor, Suite 110  
Santa Ana, CA 92704  
714-825-3500
- Santa Barbara**  
4440 Calle Real  
Santa Barbara, CA 93110  
805-683-1491
- Santa Maria**  
1550 East Main Street  
Santa Maria, CA 93454  
805-354-6000

- Sepulveda**  
16111 Plummer Street  
Sepulveda, CA 91343  
818-891-7711
- Sun City**  
28125 Bradley Rd., Ste. 130  
Sun City, CA 92586  
951-672-1931
- Upland**  
1238 E. Arrow Highway,  
No. 100  
Upland, CA 91786  
909-946-5348
- Victorville**  
12138 Industrial Blvd., Ste. 120  
Victorville, CA 92392  
760-951-2599
- Vista**  
1840 West Drive  
Vista, CA 92083  
760-643-2000
- Whittier/Santa Fe Springs**  
10210 Orr and Day Road  
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670  
562-864-5565

**Veterans' Health Today**  
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Long Beach, CA 90822

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Address changes should be sent to your local VA medical center.

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