

VA Black Hills Health Care System is actively engaged in a VA-wide training program called Leaders Developing Leaders (LDL). VA understands that training and leader development is essential to reach our goal of improving customer service. A cascade training approach is continuing throughout our entire organization to give employees the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their roles.

In December, VA Black Hills completed six public meetings to hear comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding the proposal to reconfigure healthcare services. There is an ongoing consultation process taking place with consulting parties scheduled to meet on January 21. The public comment period on the DEIS was extended to February 5, 2016 to allow Veterans and stakeholders more time to read and prepare meaningful comments on the draft.

A robust flu vaccine outreach campaign began early to get a head of flu season and prevent the illness. To date over 1.48 million influenza vaccinations were recorded as delivered to Veterans within VA system. VA Black Hills employee vaccination rates have been calculated at 69% and are aligned with Minneapolis, MN with employee vaccination compliance rates. Hand hygiene and respiratory stations have been set up throughout all facilities with signage and pamphlets to aide in flu prevention.

In July 2015, a MyVA Map Initiative was launched for all VA medical centers. In December, VA BHHCS completed several maps of our facilities and parking and posted them to our public website. The objective is to enhance wayfinding in our facilities for Veterans and their families. The maps are expected to assist patients better navigate the buildings, increase visitor familiarity, decrease the number of missed appointments, and reduce overall frustration. Additional maps of buildings and parking areas will be added to the website as they are completed.

Among our top priorities is timely access to quality healthcare. A number of factors impact access such as efficient clinic utilization, reducing the number of missed opportunities/appointments, and recruitment of providers. In November, our staff participated in a VHA-wide Access Stand Down. Staff came in on a Saturday to make calls and reach out to Veterans on a "stat/urgent" consult list. It was a great opportunity to connect with Veterans about their care and ensure there were no needless delays in treatment. Providers gladly stepped forward to offer increased clinic hours to address internal appointments. Several lessons were learned about internal processes and we are looking forward to the next national access stand down scheduled in February. It is our goal to maintain focus on the stat consults so that future Saturday Stand Down calls are minimal.

There have been several new updates to the Veterans Choice Program legislation. Staff members are being trained on the changes to better educate Veterans on their eligibility and next steps. Our Choice Champions and Patient Advocates continue to advocate for Veterans with Health Net, our third party administrator, to work issues as they arise. Comments and feedback from Veterans is important as we up channel those concerns for consideration. Several important program improvements have occurred as a direct result of Veteran feedback.

VA Black Hills Choice Champions

- Cynthia Heaton at 605-720-7181
- Valerie Anderson at 605-347-2511 ext 7632
- Barb Wilde at 605-745-2000 ext 2253

Veterans can expect to see the rollout of **Veteran Preferential Treatment or VPT**. This process will give Veterans greater control over and a better understanding of their medical plan and future appointments. A Veteran's VPT team will ensure they fully understand the next steps in their care before they leave their appointment. The Veteran's team will consist of both business office and clinical staff to better coordinate future care. The rollout is occurring at Fort Meade now with Rapid City CBOC and Hot Springs to follow, in that order.

Upcoming Events:

- **Veterans Creative Arts Competition:** All enrolled VA Black Hills Veterans are eligible to compete. The deadline to submit entries is February 19, 2016 for the Fort Meade competition and March 2, 2016 for Hot Springs. Art shows will take place in March, 2016. The points of contact at each facility are the Recreational Therapists.
- **National Salute to Veteran Patients Week February 14-20, 2016:** Several events are scheduled throughout our health care system to recognize and pay tribute to hospitalized Veterans. The events are supported by several community partners.
- **Homeless Veteran Stand Downs:** The Healthcare for Homeless Veteran Program hosted a successful Stand Down in November in Rapid City. The event was an opportunity for over 30 community partners and 12 VA departments to provide on-the-spot services to 187 Veterans. Upcoming Stand Downs are scheduled on March 1 in Kyle and March 2 in Mission.

VA Black Hills has several key vacancies to include the Director of Organization Improvement, Human Resources Officer, ACOS for Mental Health, Chief of Education, Chief of Sterile Processing Services, and Chief of Dental. Recruitment of providers is an ongoing priority, made urgent by several openings in primary care. Our stakeholders are vital partners in recruitment and promoting the value and honor in working for VHA.

We are pleased to welcome Dr. Ruth Olmer, RRTP Psychologist, Katie Darrow, Canteen Chief HS, Dr. Angel Overvold, Hospitalist Section Chief, Patti Hacker, PhD LCSW, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, and Tammy Crazy Bull, Health Information Manager/Alternative Privacy Officer.

There are several important minor construction projects occurring throughout our health care system. These ongoing projects maintain the structural integrity and safety of our facilities for Veterans and their caregivers. The expected completion of the Surgical Operating Suite addition is April with an open house tentatively scheduled for April 25, 2016. This is a 36,000 square foot addition to the Hospital, Building 113. The project includes three Operating Rooms, post anesthesia observation, ten Pre/Op Post/Op Patient Spaces, and supporting functions.

VA Black Hills is in the window for the Joint Commission triannual survey. The visit is expected to be completed by September 2016.

The Business office completed a transition to a cashless beneficiary travel pay process. Veterans were informed and encouraged to sign up for direct deposit over a year long period before the change took place. The Travel Pay office continues to work with Veterans who present with emergency needs.

Voluntary Services is actively recruiting for volunteer van drivers for several routes. Recent changes to physical requirements have disqualified some current and prospective drivers. Interested individuals should contact Cheryl Rieniets or Don Sealock at 605-347-2511.