KEEPING VETERANS SAFE 2020
VASDHS Annual Report
VHA MISSION
Honor America’s Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

VHA VISION
• VHA will continue to be the benchmark of excellence and value in health care and benefits by providing exemplary services that are both patient-centered and evidence-based.
• This care will be delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery and continuous improvement.
• It will emphasize prevention and population health and contribute to the Nation’s well-being through education, research and service in national emergencies.

ACCREDITATION & CERTIFICATION
• The Joint Commission
• Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF): Aspire Center, Spinal Cord Injury, Medical Rehabilitation, Wellness and Vocational Rehabilitation Enhancement, Homeless Veterans Programs, and Substance Abuse Recovery and Rehabilitation Treatment Program
• College of American Pathologists
• American College of Radiology (ACR): Mammography, CT and MRI
• American Association for Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC)
• Nuclear Regulatory Commission
• American Association of Blood Banks (AABB)
• U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA): Registered Blood Bank and Mammography Program
• Clinical Laboratory Improvement Act (CLIA)
• Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)

2020 Director’s Message
VASDHS Annual Report

As part of the front-line response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have faced many challenges over the past year. Our focus continues to be Keeping Veterans Safe and providing excellent care. In early spring, we set up our Hospital Incident Command System and worked to assure we had adequate amounts of personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID-19 testing capacity and additional COVID-19 surge beds. We also implemented screening and testing areas, both at the hospital and community clinics, and we developed COVID-19 communications for Veterans and staff.

During fiscal year 2020, we provided care to more than 90 inpatient and more than 600 outpatient COVID-19-positive Veterans; and those care needs are still increasing. As part of the VA’s Fourth Mission to provide medical support in the time of national emergencies, we sent clinical staff to nursing homes and health care facilities in the southwest to support civilian facilities overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases. We are already preparing to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine to Veterans and our staff as soon as it is available.

For our Moving Forward efforts, we are providing a combination of virtual and in-person care. As we begin fiscal year 2021, our workload is approximately 85% of pre-COVID-19 levels. We are actively reaching out to Veterans to encourage them to catch up on the routine care they may have missed during the pandemic and to make them aware of the breadth of services that we can provide virtually.

I want to assure all Veterans that we are here to serve you and we continue to focus on providing the highest quality health care and services every day. We look forward to serving you in 2021.

Robert M. Smith, MD
Director/Chief Executive Officer
VA San Diego Healthcare System
VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP (L–R)
Sarah E. Guerard, MHA
Assistant Director
Cynthia E. Abair, MHA
Associate Director
Robert M. Smith, MD
Director/Chief Executive Officer
Kathleen Kim, MD, MPH
Chief of Staff/Medical Director
Carmen Concepcion, MSN, MHA, RN
Associate Director, Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive
FY 2020 (10/1/19 – 9/30/20)

Operating Expenses $723,473,794
- Salaries, Wages & Benefits $461,171,657
- Services $78,518,475
- Supplies $112,739,650
- Other Expenses $71,044,012

COMMUNITY CARE
Total $124,843,016
In FY 2020, the VA transitioned from the Patient Centered Community Care (PC3) Network of community providers to the Community Care Network (CCN) of community providers.

STAFFING STATISTICS
(FTE = Full Time Equivalent)
- Employees (FTE) 3,378
  - Physicians (FTE) 288
  - RNs (FTE) 709
  - Other (FTE) 2,381

EDUCATION STATISTICS
Total 1,782
- Medical Residents and Students 1,256
- Other Clinical Trainees 526

VOLUNTEER STATISTICS
Volunteers 511
Volunteer Hours 39,376
Donations including
- Summer Sports Clinic $789,662
COVID-19 Donations $223,661
Total Volunteer Impact, Value of Hours Worked $1,860,689

RESEARCH STATISTICS
Total Research Funding $44,300,000
Principal Investigators >250 active
Research Projects 677

WORKLOAD STATISTICS
Medical Center Beds Total (authorized) 296
- Acute 134
- Community Living Center 43
- Spinal Cord Injury 50
- Domiciliary 69
Admissions Total 6,169
- Acute 5,807
- Community Living Center 180
- Domiciliary/Aspire 79
- SARRTP* 103
Patient Days Total 59,868
- Acute 41,601
- Community Living Center 6,849
- Domiciliary/Aspire 8,720
- SARRTP* 2,698
Average Length of Stay
- Acute 7 days
- Community Living Center 24 days
- Domiciliary/Aspire 27 days
- SARRTP* 41 days
Surgeries Total 3,899
- Inpatient surgery 1,487
- Outpatient surgery 2,412

Outpatient Visits Total 885,076
- Chula Vista Clinic 29,321
- Escondido Clinic 16,043
- Imperial Valley Clinic 6,335
- La Jolla Medical Center 589,279
- Mission Valley Clinic 144,151
- Oceanside Clinic 94,258
- Rio Clinic 5,689
Telehealth Medicine** Visits 71,978
Enrolled Patients 84,572
Number of Veterans in San Diego and Imperial Counties Total (estimate) 261,009
- San Diego 255,315
- Imperial Valley 5,694

* SARRTP: Substance Abuse Recovery and Rehabilitation Treatment Program
**Telehealth Technologies include: Home Telehealth, TeleRetinal and TeleDerm Imaging and Telehealth appointments with VA community clinics or the Veteran’s home or mobile device using VA Video Connect.

ALTERNATIVE REVENUE VASDHS collected $29.35 million, composed of $27.75 million in Medical Care Cost Funds (MCCF), plus external sharing revenue of $1.6 million. These funds stay at our local facility to enhance services for San Diego Veterans.
COVID-19 RESPONSE
Starting in late February 2020, as the nation became aware of the pandemic’s magnitude, VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) staff quickly established an incident command post and started developing plans to adjust care for a possible surge of COVID-19 patients.

- VASDHS has taken all precautions to keep Veterans and our staff safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. That included following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and VA guidance and screening at all of our facilities. Precautions included taking temperatures, requiring face covering in our facilities and referring to secondary screening if the Veteran or staff member had symptoms.

- Converted 15 rooms to negative pressure for a total of 27 rooms to accommodate a surge of COVID patients if needed.

- Established two-day COVID-19 testing turnaround, a COVID-19 drive-up testing tent and provided testing for all admissions.

- Dramatically increased our telehealth care with more than 71,978 VA Video Connect telehealth appointments for primary care, mental health and specialty care since October 2019.

- Established regular communications on COVID-19 precautions to staff and Veterans including emails, posted information on the intranet and internet, digital information boards and social media.

- To help fulfill VA’s Fourth Mission of supporting the nation’s healthcare system during national emergencies, 13 VA San Diego Healthcare System nurses were deployed to Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County nursing homes and Tuba City, AZ to provide medical support for a surge of non-Veteran patients at risk of contracting COVID-19.

- VASDHS held an Honoring Our Health Care Heroes campaign to recognize staff.
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2020

NEW VA CHULA VISTA CLINIC OPENS
VASDHS opened the new VA Chula Vista Clinic on October 16, 2020 with a virtual grand opening ceremony. The new $277 million clinic, located at 353 H Street in Chula Vista, replaces the former Chula Vista Clinic. The spacious new facility is three times larger than the old clinic and offers expanded capacity for appointments with the ability to serve up to 25,000 Veterans. Primary care will expand to 28 exam rooms as compared to 11 at the old clinic and mental health will have 12 consultation rooms. New services now available are gynecology and women’s health and audiology testing booths.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION TREATMENT PROGRAM OPENS
On Monday, June 29, 2020, VASDHS celebrated the re-opening of its Substance Abuse Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (SARRTP) unit on the second floor of the San Diego VA Medical Center. The new 29-bed unit offers comprehensive treatment for addiction recovery and includes 16 private counseling rooms, three group session rooms, a dining room, and a recreation room.

SPECIALTY CLINIC AREA OPENS
On June 16, VASDHS opened a newly remodeled clinic on the medical center fourth floor offering pain management/anaesthesia, wound care, cardiology, plastic surgery, Hepatitis C Virus, liver fibro scan, podiatry and sleep services.

THERAPEUTIC NEUROMODULATION PROGRAM SUITE OPENS
VA San Diego Healthcare System welcomed the grand opening of the Therapeutic Neuromodulation Program Suite on August 31, 2020 at the 2 South Wing of the Medical Center. The suite provides state-of-the-art equipment and space to consolidate and expand the range of neurostimulation and neuromodulation interventions offered by the Mental Health Care Line at VASDHS. Cutting-edge interventions such as repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulations (rTMS), intranasal esketamine (SPRAVATO®) and intravenous ketamine infusions for Veterans with Treatment Resistant Mental Health Conditions including Major Depressive and Bipolar Disorders and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are among the program treatments. The suite offers dedicated private rooms for rTMS, SPRAVATO and ketamine infusions as well as for treatment recovery, education, and relaxation.

ENERGY STAR AWARD
San Diego VA Medical Center earned the highly sought-after ENERGY STAR award for the 10th year. To be certified as ENERGY STAR, a building must meet strict energy performance standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). “ENERGY STAR certified buildings save energy, save money, and help protect the environment by generating fewer greenhouse gas emissions than typical buildings,” according to the U.S. EPA.

THE JOINT COMMISSION ACCREDITATION
VASDHS achieved a three-year accreditation in November 2019.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS
Projects and Design Section completed projects for FY20:
• Specialty Clinic on 4W – Created 9 exam rooms
• Substance Abuse Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program which created 29 beds – 11 double and 7 single beds
• Psychiatric expansion
• New blood draw area
• Chula Vista Outpatient Clinic
• Facility infrastructure upgrades
PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Here is a list of the 2020 accomplishments:

VASDHS outperforms the local community and National VHA in the CMS 30-day mortality rate.

- Performed better than the top 10% in Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) Inpatient Performance Measures
- Outpatient Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) measures sustained top 10% performance
- SAIL “Patient Experience Stress Discussed” improved from 3rd to 1st quintile between FY19Q3 and FY20Q2
- Successful completion of The Joint Commission triennial survey
- Journey toward a High Reliability Organization: completed Clinical Team Training for approximately 50 employees
- Hospital Incident Command System (HICS): Organized the COVID-19 testing of approximately 300 CBOC employees at four locations in four days
- HICS: California Veterans Home – coordinated the COVID-19 testing of approximately 200 employees

TELEHEALTH

VA San Diego Healthcare System dramatically increased our telehealth care with more than 71,978 VA Video Connect telehealth appointments for primary care, mental health and specialty care since October 2019. Veterans increasingly chose virtual care through VA Video Connect during the COVID-19 pandemic. VA Video Connect allows Veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA care teams on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with an internet connection. As in-person interactions decreased in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, VA Video Connect supported Veterans’ ability to continue care and remain safely at home.

TOP RESEARCH AWARD

The VA Office of Research and Development announced in August that Dr. Kirk Hammond was the recipient of the VA Biomedical Research & Development Senior Clinician Scientist Investigator Award for his work on gene transfer to treat heart failure and insulin resistance.

Dr. Hammond is participating in gene transfer of beneficial peptides and proteins in animal model studies as a therapy for treating heart disease and insulin resistance.

Dr. Hammond has made remarkable contributions to VHA through his continuous service as a staff physician and researcher at the VA San Diego Healthcare System since 1987 and as a professor of Medicine in Residence at the University of California San Diego.

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS GERIATRIC EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION

The VASDHS Emergency Department received the American College of Emergency Physicians Geriatric Emergency Department Accreditation. This represents our Emergency Department’s commitment to providing the highest standards of care for older adults.

2020 VHA ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS SERVICE EMS MANAGER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Ethan Woods, Acting Chief of EMS, received the VHA EMS Manager of the Year Award.

ROBERT L. JESSE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION

Dr. Leonie Heyworth, VA Director of Synchronous Telehealth, received the 2020 Robert L. Jesse Award for Excellence in Innovation. Since taking on a leadership role in the Office of Connected Care, Dr. Heyworth has led the development, implementation and clinical adoption of real-time telehealth solutions, including VA Video Connect and Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations (ATLAS). Additionally, she has overseen the delivery of real-time virtual care during national emergencies as the driving force behind VAs growing telehealth-based emergency response capabilities. Her efforts have enhanced the VA’s ability to meet critical needs during Hurricanes Harvey, Maria, Florence and Michael, multiple wildfres in California and Oregon, west coast mudslides, numerous severe storms and most recently, COVID-19.

Telehealth has enabled us to continue to provide care to Veterans in a safe environment.
JOURNEY TOWARD A HIGH RELIABILITY ORGANIZATION (HRO)

VASDHS is one of 18 lead sites across each Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) selected to lead the implementation of HRO principles, focusing on eliminating patient harm from medical error. As part of the 18 lead sites, VASDHS participated in diagnostic assessments to establish a baseline understanding of the HRO culture, Clinical Team Training (CTT) Champions Courses to initiate team-based error prevention techniques at the unit-level, Just Culture Training to instill a culture of transparency and just accountability, and an HRO Collaborative to apply group learning to process improvements projects. As an HRO, VASDHS strives to be an organization that attracts and develops highly engaged and empowered employees. The three pillars of HROs are leadership commitment, culture of safety, and continuous process improvement.

SYSTEMS REDESIGN (SR) AND INNOVATION

VASDHS is committed to using Systems Redesign and Innovation to improve the way we deliver health care. Over 1,300 staff members completed SR/Lean process improvement training.

Improvement project outcomes include:

- Improved Home Telehealth Program Workflows
- Standardized Orientation Processes for the Aspire Center
- Streamlined Emergency Department Patient Flow
- Improved Management and Tracking of Implant Items
- Optimized Use of Extended Recover Unit (ERU)
- Improved Environment of Care Using Lean 5S Projects

Innovation projects chosen by the VA Center for Innovation as “Innovation Investments” include:

- Teleglaucoma, Expanding Teleophthalmology to Monitor Stable Glaucoma Patients
- VEST (Virtual Emotional Support for Teams)
- The Equine-imity Project, Equine-Assisted Therapy for Prevention of Recurrent Homelessness Among Veterans
- Listen Act Develop Model, A Strategy to Reduce Burnout and Promote Engagement Among Clinicians

All of our services are committed to keeping Veterans and staff safe.
The VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) provides a wide range of inpatient and outpatient services at the medical center in La Jolla and at six community clinics in Chula Vista, Escondido, Imperial Valley, Mission Valley, Oceanside and Sorrento Valley. We provide medical, surgical, mental health, geriatric, spinal cord injury and advanced rehabilitation services. VASDHS has 296 authorized hospital beds including skilled nursing beds and operates several regional referral programs including cardiovascular surgery and spinal cord injury care.

We are affiliated with the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, and provide training for 1,256 medical interns, residents and fellows, as well as 526 other health profession trainees in areas such as nursing, pharmacy, dental and dietetics.

VASDHS has one of the largest research programs in the VA nationally with a $44.3 million budget, more than 250 principal investigators and 677 projects.