Message from the Director

I am pleased to introduce our inaugural VA San Diego Healthcare System Veteran Health newsletter. You asked for information and updates from VASDHS, and we listened. We will be sending this out monthly using our web-based email distribution system. If you would like to be added to the distribution system, just go to our home page at www.sandiego.va.gov, and enroll where it says “Subscribe to Receive Email Updates.” We want the content to be valuable to you, so please feel free to contact us and make suggestions for topics.

We strive every day to provide quality health care with respect and compassion. Our staff training focuses on customer service and developing a culture of excellence because we want you to have a positive experience with every encounter.

As Veterans Day approaches, I want to thank you all for your service to our nation. It is this month that we take time to pause and think about the prosperity and freedom we enjoy thanks to the contributions and sacrifices of Veterans. I wish you and your family a wonderful Veterans Day.

Sincerely,
Robert M. Smith, MD
Director, VASDHS

Veterans Day Parade

Come see us at the 2017 Veterans Day Parade in downtown San Diego! The parade route begins at the County Administration Building on N. Harbor Drive and goes down the Embarcadero route to Pacific Highway. The fun begins at 11 a.m. and concludes at 1 p.m. We’ll see you there!

Flu Shots

Flu season is upon us again and our priority is ensuring the safety of patients, staff and those that visit the medical center. We’re offering free flu shots to all enrolled Veterans from Oct. 2 to Dec. 29. Patients with scheduled appointments will be given flu vaccine during their clinic appointment. Otherwise, click here to see walk-in locations: https://www.sandiego.va.gov/SANDIEGO/features/flushots_2017.asp
Our goal is to provide Veterans with the level of care they feel they need and expect, and we have done a lot of work to help streamline our processes. The following information is designed to help you navigate the medical services we offer.

- **Health Benefits & Enrollment, (858) 552-7523, toll-free (877) 222-8387**
  
  To receive care at any of our facilities, you must enroll as a patient in our health care system, which you can do at the medical center and all of our clinic locations except for Sorrento Valley. It’s helpful if you have the following information available when completing your Application for Health Benefits ([VA Form 10-10EZ](#)) and when coming in to enroll:
  
  - DD 214
  - Two forms of valid, government-issued identification (at least one must contain a photo)
  - Employment data
  - Any private health insurance coverage you have
  - Financial information from previous calendar year
  - Information relating to your dependents and spouse such as social security number, date of birth and date of marriage

- **My HealtheVet ([www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov))**:
  
  - Email members of your health care teams who usually respond within one business day
  - View appointments, lab results, vitals, readings and doctor’s notes as well as view, refill and track the delivery of prescriptions

- **VASDHS Patient Care Call Center, (858) 552-7475**:
  
  - General health care questions and questions related to past or future visits are relayed to your health care providers who respond within 1-2 government business days
  - Check upcoming appointments, cancel existing appointments and schedule new appointments
  - Cannot schedule same-day appointments

- **24-Hour Nurse Advice Line, (877) 252-4866**:
  
  - For professional medical advice the same day
  - Depending on symptoms, patients may speak to a nurse immediately or receive a call back
  - Based on medical need, nurses can schedule appointments for the same day or shortly thereafter

- **Primary Care Clinic Walk-In**:
  
  - Only a limited number of same-day appointment slots are available each day
  - Depending on medical need and availability of appointment slots, patients
    - May not be seen the same day
    - May not be seen by their assigned providers
    - May wait much longer than they anticipate
  - Instead of walking in without a scheduled appointment, we highly recommend patients call the 24-Hour Nurse Advice Line at (877) 252-4866 beforehand to attempt to schedule an appointment

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**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

VA San Diego Healthcare System
• **Emergency Department, 24/7:**
  - For actual medical or mental health emergencies only
  - Use one of the other listed options to resolve non-emergency issues
  - Patients are seen based upon the urgency of their medical needs
  - Wait times for non-emergency issues can be much longer than patients anticipate

• **Psychiatric Emergency Clinic:**
  - For mental health emergencies
  - Open Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
  - Emergency after-hours mental health care is available at our Emergency Department and at the Veterans Crisis Line, (800) 273-8255 option 1

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**Great American Smokeout**

If you’ve tried and failed to quit tobacco, don’t give up! Nov. 16 is the Great American Smokeout, a day for taking action to change bad habits. Here are some tips and suggestions to help you become tobacco-free:

1. Make yourself a quit plan
2. Ask your family, friends and co-workers for support and encouragement
3. Pick a quit date
4. Identify and eliminate things that trigger you to smoke or develop ways to deal with them
5. Get rid of smoking reminders like ashtrays and if you smoked in your car, clean it out to get rid of the smoke smell
6. Hang out with people who don’t smoke
7. Start activities that don’t involve tobacco use such as biking, swimming, walking, etc.

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**Suicide Prevention for Veterans: Be There**

Supporting the Veteran or service member in your life who’s going through a difficult time doesn’t have to be complicated. We can all play a role in preventing suicide.

If you notice warning signs in yourself or a Veteran loved one, call the **Veterans Crisis Line** at (800) 273-8255 and press 1, chat online at **VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat**, or text **838255** to get confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
Appointment Access

Appt. wait times: (completed appts as of 9/30/17)
- Primary Care: 1.86 days
- Specialty Care: 6.48 days
- Mental Health: 2.85 days

Choice referrals: In fiscal year 2017, VASDHS referred 35,891 Veteran episodes of care to the community for a total cost of $69,891,170.

Calendar

- Standard Time Begins: Nov. 5
- Transgender Awareness Month Open House: Nov. 8, 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
- Marine Corps Birthday and Cake Cutting Ceremony: Nov. 9
- Veterans Day and the Veterans Day Parade: Nov. 11
- Great American Smokeout: Nov. 16
- Thanksgiving: Nov. 23
- Aspire Center Open House: Nov. 30, 9 – 11 a.m.

Facebook Question

We’d like to hear from you on Facebook. Here’s this month’s question: If there was one thing we could improve related to your health care visit that would make your experience better, what would it be?

Other Newsletter Comments/Suggestions? Christopher.menzie@va.gov

About VA San Diego Healthcare System

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 located in Chula Vista, Escondido, Imperial Valley, Mission Valley, Oceanside, Sorrento Valley and at the Rio Clinic. 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 1,440 medical interns, residents and fellows as well as 751 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 budget of $41.3 million, 210 principal investigators and 698 projects.

Number of Veterans who received care from VASDHS in FY 2016: 82,940
*Number of Veterans in San Diego County: 243,369
*Number of Veterans in Imperial Valley: 6,225
Total Veterans living in SD & Imperial Valley Counties: 249,594

*from VetPop, 9/30/2017

VA’s Top 5 Priorities

1. Greater Choice for Veterans
2. Modernize Our Systems
3. Focus Resources More Efficiently
4. Improve Timeliness of Services
5. Suicide Prevention