February is Women’s Heart Health Month

National Go Red Day for Women is Friday, February 2, 2018. Heart disease and stroke cause 1 in 3 deaths among women each year, yet is 80% preventable! Here are some tips you can use to reduce your chances: don’t smoke or expose yourself to second-hand smoke; maintain healthy blood pressure; know your cholesterol levels; limit calorie intake; exercise often. Show your support all month by wearing red!

Easy Check-In

You may have noticed that we have kiosks placed at various locations throughout our facilities. These kiosks are designed to provide you and your family convenience, and security, by making it easier for you to check-in to your appointments. Beyond simply checking in, the kiosks also offer other distinct advantages.

Advantages of Using Our kiosks:

• Check in for your appointment faster.
• Spend less time waiting in line.
• Submit your beneficiary travel requests.
• Review and update your mailing address and phone number accurately and discretely.
• In many of our clinics, our providers also rely on the kiosks to see when you checked-in. This means less time spent in the waiting room.

We continue to update our systems, and plan to implement more kiosks and additional features soon.

Center for Spiritual Wellness

Come check out our renovated Chapel on the first floor. The newly rebranded “Center for Spiritual Wellness” is fully functional and offers space for religious serves along with activities such as yoga, mindfulness, 12-step faith-based groups, Tai Chi, deep breathing classes, grief-loss groups, interfaith meditations, memorial services, prayer services, mantram classes and more. Among the many changes: new carpet, refurbished pews, more chairs, new colors and designs.
Opioid Transparency

The VA just announced in January that they are publicly posting information on opioids dispensed from VA pharmacies along with VA’s strategies to prescribe these pain medications appropriately and safely.

“Many Veterans enrolled in VA the health care system suffer from high rates of chronic pain and the prescribing of opioids may be necessary medically,” VA Secretary Shulkin said. “And while VA offers other pain management options to reduce the need for opioids, it is important that we are transparent on how we prescribe opioids, so Veterans and the public can see what we are doing in our facilities and the progress we have made over time.”

San Diego reports a 44% decrease in opioids prescribed over the past five years, declining from 18% in 2012 to 10% in 2017*. VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) and the VA nationally have taken the lead in reducing opioid addition over the past five years. VASDHS has implemented many initiatives to reduce opioid use:

- Physicians make sure patients are on the lowest dose and doses are monitored to toxicity
- Patients are monitored every six months in face-to-face appointments
- Check State Prescription Drug monitoring Programs to check for outside VA prescriptions
- Offer alternate pain management programs (yoga, relaxation techniques, acupuncture)
- Provide assistance for patients with opioid addiction

A link to the interactive map on VA’s opioid use across the nation may be found [here](#).

I Love a Nurse Award

Nurse John Lallo from the Oceanside Clinic was recently recognized by Point Loma Nazarene University and radio station “Sunny 98.1” for their “I Love a Nurse” award honoring local nurses. The citation for his award for which he as nominated by a patient and some fellow nurses, read: “John has been a nurse for over 20 years. Everything he does is centered on the patient’s care. He listens to our Veterans and explains to them what is going on in layman’s terms. John is currently working on getting his masters in nursing.”

Appointment Scheduling
Did you know that we can schedule most of your follow up appointments prior to leaving the clinic? When you are finished seeing your provider, please be sure to check out with the scheduling staff and they can help you schedule your next appointment. This will save you from receiving multiple phone calls and letters from the VA pertaining to scheduling. We can now also schedule routine hearing exams, routine eye exams, nutrition appointments and some podiatry appointments directly, without having to go through your primary care provider. Be sure to stop at the desk and check out.

### Skin Check

Your skin, the largest organ in the body, is essential to your health. It protects us from microbes, helps regulate body temperature and more. Treat your body right by examining yourself regularly and scheduling appointments with your local dermatological provider. Here’s an easy method to look at moles and watch for signs of melanoma. If you observe two or more concerning criteria mentioned above, talk to your primary care physician.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Likely Benign</th>
<th>Possibly Malignant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assymetry</td>
<td>If you drew a line through the middle, the two sides would match</td>
<td>If you drew a line through the middle, the two sides would not match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border</td>
<td>Smooth, even borders</td>
<td>Irregular or jagged borders that are uneven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Typically one color, often brown</td>
<td>A number of different colors, even multiple shades of brown, tan, or black. May also appear red, white, or blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diameter</td>
<td>Smaller than ¼ inch, about the size of a pencil eraser tip</td>
<td>Larger than ¼ inch. Usually larger than benign moles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolving</td>
<td>Unchanging, looks the same over time</td>
<td>Changes in size, shape, color, or height, or the appearance of new symptoms like itching, crusting, or bleeding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alcohol and Drug Treatment Options

What options do we offer for Veterans seeking help in dealing with acute and chronic drug and alcohol issues?

- Outpatient - San Diego VA Medical Center and Outpatient Clinics
- Dual Diagnosis Substance/PTSD - La Jolla and Mission Valley only
- Intensive Outpatient- San Diego VA Medical Center
- Residential- San Diego VA Medical Center
- Pharmacotherapy options- San Diego VA Medical Center
- Contingency Management for Stimulant Use Disorder-San Diego VA Medical Center

For Veterans seeking drug and alcohol treatment services from the Alcohol Drug Treatment Program (ADTP), present to the program at our Medical Center in La Jolla, 2 North, Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. – 2 p.m. and say that they would like to be evaluated for treatment services with ADTP. The best time to present is earlier in the day.

Appointment Access

| Appt. wait times: (completed appts as of 11/30/17) | Primary Care: 1.84 days |
| Specialty Care: 6.35 days | Mental Health: 2.97 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

National Salute to Veteran Patients: Feb. 11 - 19
Ash Wednesday: Feb. 14
President’s Day: Feb. 19

Facebook Question

We’d like to hear from you on Facebook. Here’s this month’s question: How can we improve the quality of your care?

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 2017: .................................................. 83,014
*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

Important Phone Numbers:

VASDHS Main Line: ............................. (858) 552-8585
VASDHS Patient Call Center
(Appointments/Questions): ............... (858) 552-7475
Health Benefits & Enrollment: .......... (858) 552-7523
Billing (Copays, etc.): ........................ (866) 802-6381
Billing (Community Care): .............. (858) 657-1313
Billing (Choice Program): ................. (855) 722-2838
Suicide Prevention: ......................... (800) 273-8255, press 1

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