

# IMPROVING THE VETERAN EXPERIENCE

WILKES-BARRE.VA.GOV



2015  
ANNUAL REPORT

# FACILITY OVERVIEW AND STATUS

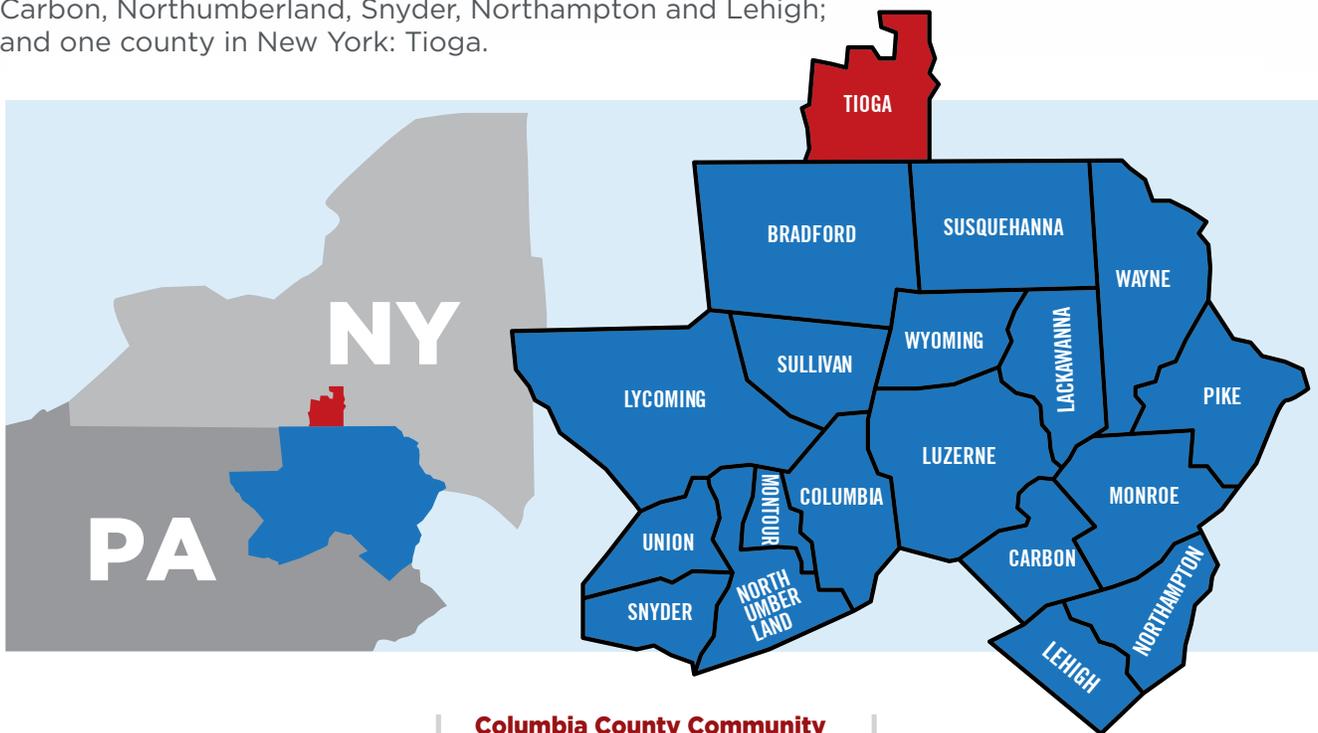
**The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center**, located in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, is a complexity level 2 teaching hospital which provides a full range of patient care services. The facility and outpatient clinics served 39,054 Veterans in FY 2015 with over 403,000 outpatient visits.

Late in FY2014, Wilkes-Barre activated the Wayne Community Outpatient Clinic in Honesdale Pennsylvania.

The clinic provides a variety of services, including Primary Care, Women's Health, and Tele-health services to the Veterans in the northeast region of the catchment area. In Fy15, 1,173 Veterans received care at the clinic and these numbers continue to grow. Wilkes-Barre is excited about the convenience this new clinic is affording our Veterans.

## SERVICE AREA

The facility serves Veterans in 18 counties in Pennsylvania: Bradford, Susquehanna, Lycoming, Sullivan, Wyoming, Lackawanna, Wayne, Pike, Union, Montour, Columbia, Luzerne, Monroe, Carbon, Northumberland, Snyder, Northampton and Lehigh; and one county in New York: Tioga.



**Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center**  
1111 East End Blvd.  
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711  
570-824-3521 | 877-928-2621

**Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic**  
3110 Hamilton Boulevard  
Allentown, PA 18103  
610-776-4304

**Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic**  
701 Slate Belt Boulevard  
Bangor, PA 18013-9341  
610-599-0127

**Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic**  
301 West Third Street  
Berwick, PA 18603  
570-759-0351

**Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic**  
1537 Elmira Street  
Sayre, PA 18840  
570-888-6803

**Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic**  
Tobyhanna Army Deport Building 220  
Tobyhanna, PA 18466  
570-615-8341

**Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic**  
1705 Warren Avenue  
3rd Floor • Suite 304  
Williamsport, PA 17701  
570-322-4791

**Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic**  
600 Maple Avenue • Suite 2  
Honesdale, PA 18431  
570-251-6543



# TOTAL UNIQUE VETERANS SERVED

## 39,054

# TOTAL OUTPATIENT VISITS

## 403,352

\*\*As Veterans are often seen at more than one facility, site specific unique data contains redundancies. As a result, the sum of the site specific data exceeds the actual number of Total Unique Veterans Served.

<b>WILKES-BARRE</b> <b>35,284</b> UNIQUE VETERANS <b>285,667</b> VISITS	<b>COLUMBIA</b> <b>1,485</b> UNIQUE VETERANS <b>4,243</b> VISITS	<b>WILLIAMSPORT</b> <b>3,852</b> UNIQUE VETERANS <b>13,937</b> VISITS
<b>TOBYHANNA</b> <b>622</b> UNIQUE VETERANS <b>1,187</b> VISITS	<b>SAYRE</b> <b>3,060</b> UNIQUE VETERANS <b>18,236</b> VISITS	<b>WAYNE</b> <b>1,173</b> UNIQUE VETERANS <b>12,727</b> VISITS
<b>ALLENTOWN</b> <b>9,699</b> UNIQUE VETERANS <b>72,236</b> VISITS	<b>NORTHAMPTON</b> <b>1,520</b> UNIQUE VETERANS <b>4,747</b> VISITS	



# TOTAL EMPLOYEES

## 1320



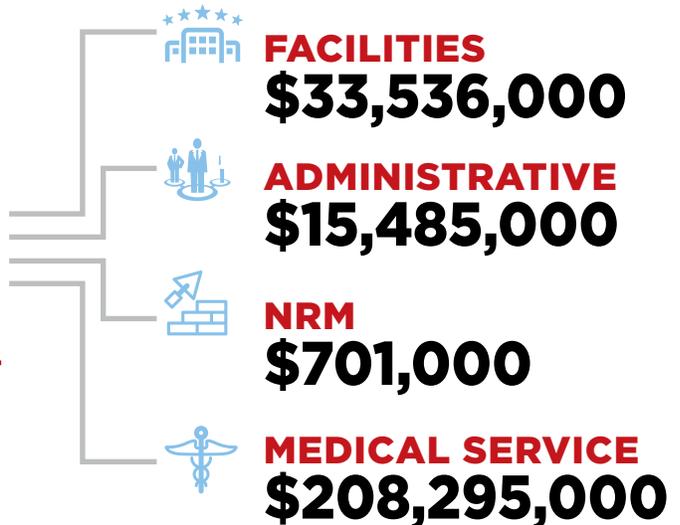
# OPERATING BEDS

## 166

- COMMUNITY LIVING CENTER **105**
- INPATIENT CARE **29**
- INTENSIVE CARE UNIT **12**
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION **10**
- INPATIENT MENTAL HEALTH **10**

# TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET

## \$258,017,000



# VETERAN FOCUSED

## Wilkes-Barre invites Veterans and their families to take part in guiding the facility's future

In 2015, the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center significantly increased Veterans' involvement in the day-to-day operations of the medical center. To learn more about Veterans' experiences with the facility, Wilkes-Barre expanded its quarterly Veterans Council Meetings in the areas of Mental Health, Primary Care, Medicine, Women's Health, and Surgery.

Veterans provided input into ways parking issues at the facility should be handled, how construction projects should be built, and how appointment letters could be revised and simplified.

Wilkes-Barre also expanded its Service Level Patient Advocate Program (SLPA). Now, Veterans have advocates within the facility at the location at which they receive service. Every service area now has photos of and

contact information for patient advocates who work within the area. Veterans no longer have to visit to the Patient Advocate Office if they have an issue they'd like addressed.

The new patient advocates are all supervisors within their respective areas, with sufficient knowledge and authority to appropriately address Veterans' issues.

Many Veterans have questions relating to VA's new Choice Program. To answer those questions, Wilkes-Barre has established a Customer Service Center for Choice and Fee for Service questions. The service center is located next to a hospital entrance for easy access. Center staff welcomes walk-in guests, and the center is staffed during all administrative hours to help visiting Veterans.

Finally, Wilkes-Barre has begun to use single question survey cards to get immediate feedback from Veterans about their hospital visits. These easy-to-complete surveys allow Veterans to either respond anonymously or provide their name and contact information, so they can receive a return call on the issue they have raised.

Wilkes-Barre's Customer Service Committee reviews each of these comments and uses them to make service improvements.

*Clockwise from upper right: Sample Advocate photo/contact sign as part of SLPA; Badge Buddies used to readily identify employee roles at the medical center; Directions Kiosk located in the atrium; Sample single question survey card used to give Veterans an opportunity to provide immediate feedback on their visit; Full time Customer Service Center specializing in resolving Veterans Choice and NVCC billing issues.*



### Meet Our Team



**Nicole Gillen**  
Patient Advocate  
(570) 824-3521 ext. 7604  
Fax: (570) 819-5172



### How are we doing?

Rate your service today on a scale of 1-10 with one being not satisfied at all and 10 being very satisfied

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If you can't rate us a 10, please let us know why

May we contact you? Please provide your name and phone number.

# IMPROVING SERVICES FOR VETERANS

## Lean strategies improve service, performance and create a culture of continuous process and outcome improvement

In 2015, Wilkes-Barre's Lean Steering Committee implemented a lean management system throughout the facility. These efforts are improving Veterans' experience with their care and helping to create an organizational culture of continual improvement.

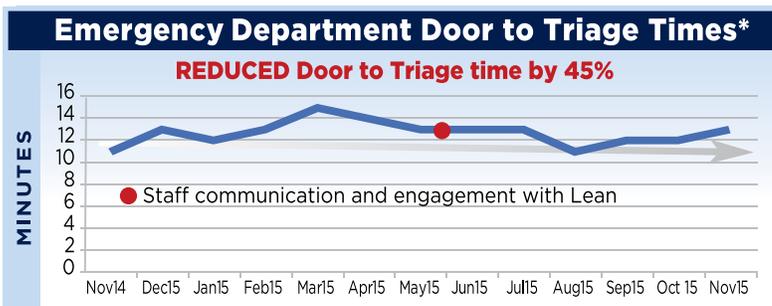
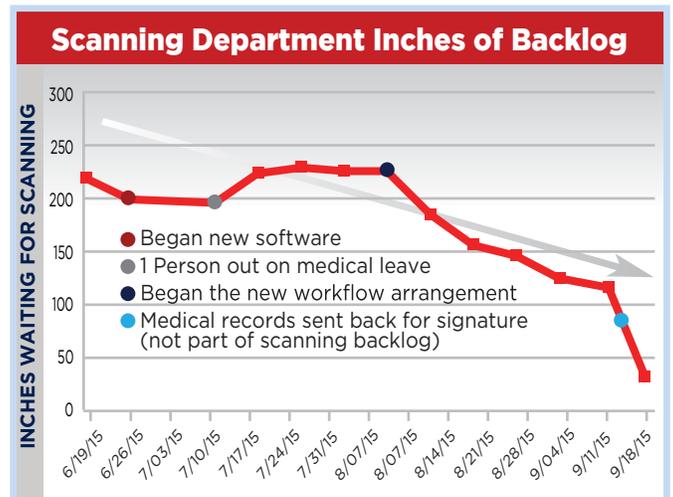
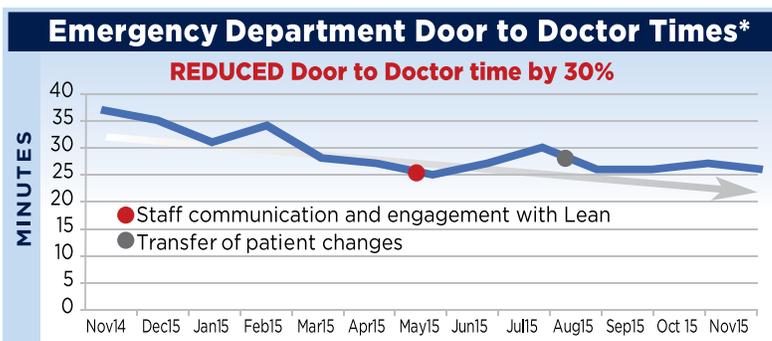
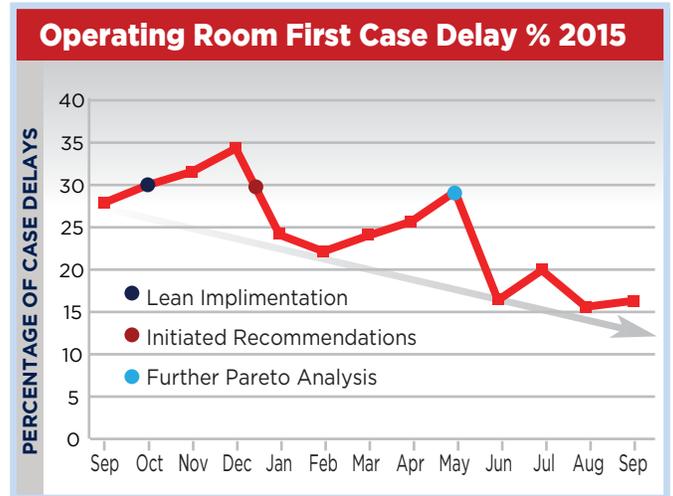
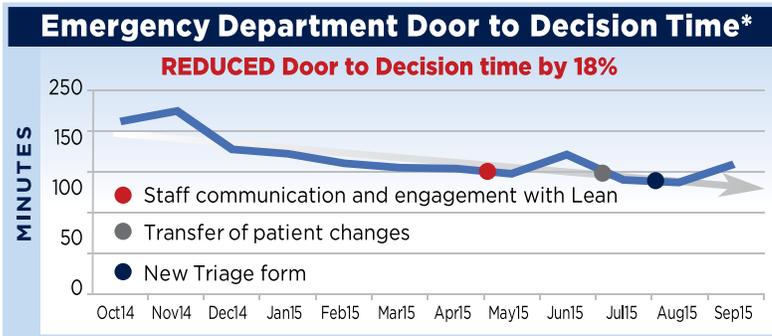
In the operating room, strategies increased the percent of time the room is in use by 25% (from 35% to 60%). Delays in new cases have been reduced by 12%, and the time it takes to clean and prepare the room for the next patient has decreased as well.

In the emergency room, strategies resulted in a 45% decrease in the time it takes for a Veteran to be triaged once through the door; a 50% decrease in the time it takes to see a physician; and an 18% decrease in the time

it takes to determine whether a Veteran should be admitted.

Lean strategies were used to eliminate the backlog of records that need to be scanned into VA's Electronic Health Record. Currently, records are scanned into the system the same day they are received by the scanning department.

In 2016, the committee will continue to oversee the implementation of the lean management system to additional areas of the Medical Center. The goal is to empower employees to streamline daily processes and remove barriers to improve customer service to Veterans and their families.



\*BY MONTHLY AVERAGE



# EXPANDING THE AVAILABILITY OF TELEHEALTH FOR VETERANS

## New telehealth modalities bring added expertise to ICU patients and clinicians

Telehealth uses information and telecommunications technologies to provide Veterans with better health care services. The Wilkes-Barre VA uses telehealth technologies in many areas.

In 2015 alone, Wilkes-Barre had 14,668 telehealth encounters, which is the third highest in VHA's VISN 4. Forty-four percent of these Veterans received care virtually, using videoconferencing or other home telehealth devices for their consultations with their health care providers.

The facility's new Tele-ICU program, started in July 2015. Veterans in the Intensive Care Unit now have access to specialists in caring for critically ill patients 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

Each Wilkes-Barre ICU room has had video conferencing and remote monitoring equipment

installed. The equipment is monitored at all times by on-site health care providers and by intensive care specialists at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center.

The Cincinnati VAMC specialists regularly assess patients' conditions, and provide advice and support to Wilkes-Barre staff and Veterans through a video connection. Veterans can decline participation in the program if they wish, and are always notified before the Tele-ICU staff "enters" their room, in order to ensure their dignity and privacy.

*Wilkes Barre's Tele-ICU exemplifies the VA's commitment to leveraging advanced technologies for the provision of the highest quality care and services to Veterans.*



# CARING FOR VETERANS AT HOME

## Home-based primary care comes to Allentown Outpatient Clinic

Chronically ill Veterans with complex medical conditions in the Wilkes-Barre area are eligible to participate in VA's Home Based Primary Care (HBPC) Program. The program provides Veterans with primary care services in their homes.

Veterans are referred to HBPC when they are at high risk of being hospitalized on a recurring basis, need frequent visits to emergency rooms, or may otherwise require placement in a nursing home. Some Veterans whose illnesses are at advanced stages receive palliative care in their homes.

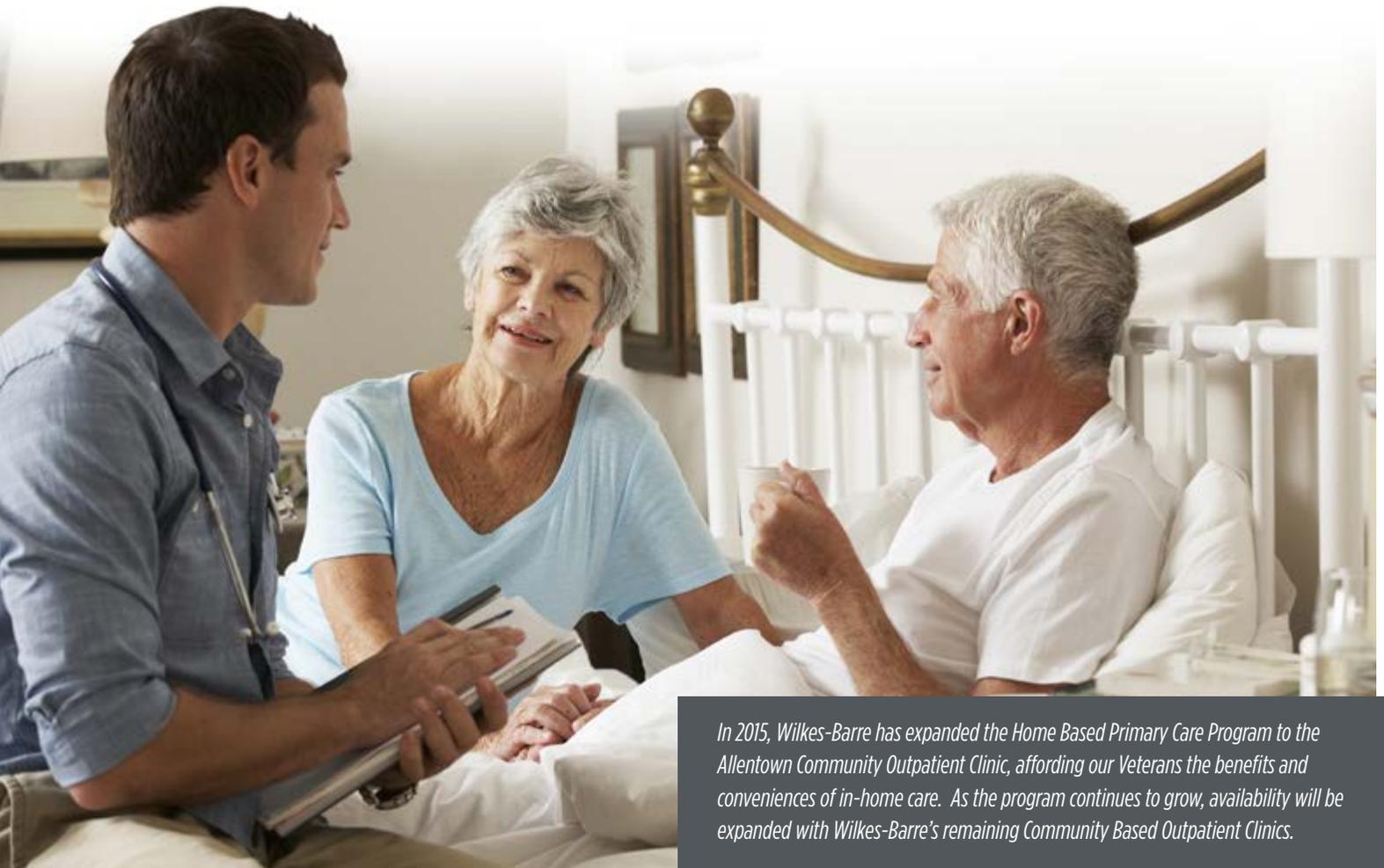
In March 2015, Wilkes-Barre expanded HBPC services to the Allentown Outpatient Clinic.

Every HBPC team includes two registered nurse care managers, an occupational therapist, a social worker, a clinical pharmacist, and a registered dietitian.

Team members visit Veterans at home to assess their needs, and develop a patient-centered treatment plan that incorporates the Veteran's medical needs, safety requirements, and caregiver support. The team also works closely with each patient's primary care patient aligned care (PACT) team.

HBPC team members also advocate for their patients, and help them navigate the VA system. They link patients to VA and other community resources that support the Veteran and help him or her to live as independently as possible.

From March to December, 35 Veterans were enrolled to receive HBPC through the Allentown clinic. The clinic's goal is to enroll a total of 52 Veterans. The in home services will be enhanced in the coming year by incorporating telehealth technologies into the home visits.



*In 2015, Wilkes-Barre has expanded the Home Based Primary Care Program to the Allentown Community Outpatient Clinic, affording our Veterans the benefits and conveniences of in-home care. As the program continues to grow, availability will be expanded with Wilkes-Barre's remaining Community Based Outpatient Clinics.*

# VETERAN CENTERED CARE

## Personalized health plans offers goals, strategies for a healthier life

Personalized Health Plans are plans of care that incorporate Veterans' life goals, values, and interests. They are at the heart of VA's practice of personalized health care.

In July 2015, Wilkes-Barre's Primary Care Service began to provide area Veterans with these plans. Taking a personalized approach to health includes: identifying the Veteran's mission for life and health, developing shared goals for patients and providers, preparing a personalized health plan, and providing support to enable Veterans to succeed in reaching their goals.

Personalized approaches to health change the question providers ask from "What's the matter with you," to "what matters to you?"

At Wilkes-Barre, social workers begin the personalized health process by asking Veterans questions that give providers a better picture of the Veterans' life, core values, emotional health, and personal health goals. Primary Care providers then work with the Veteran to develop shared goals.

During these discussions, the Veteran is the expert on his or her health goals and life values, and the provider serves as the clinical expert.

Once shared goals are established, the personalized health plan is built. Skills and support mechanisms, such as referrals to services to programs, are also addressed. The end goal of helping patients improve the management of their diseases is to regain and maintain their highest possible levels of health and well-being.

Fourteen Wilkes-Barre Patient Aligned Care (PACT) teams are participating in this new initiative. In the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2015, 79 Veterans received personalized health plans. Their goals range from improving their diabetic status to medication reduction.

In a follow-up survey, 91 percent of respondents reported that the process addressed what mattered in their life and health status, and that their plan had helped them achieve their shared goals.

*Wilkes-Barre is working with Veterans to develop Personal Proactive Healthcare Plans which address the Veterans clinical needs in mindful consideration of their life priorities and goals.*



# WOMEN VETERANS

## New advances in gynecological care, pre- and post-natal care, and genomic counseling expand Wilkes-Barre's ability to serve female Veterans

In 2015, the Wilkes-Barre VA continued to expand its general gynecological and surgical services for women. Last year, 8 percent of the Veterans Wilkes-Barre served were women, an increase of 3 percent from 2014.

According to Dr. Sumit Ghosh, the facility's medical director for women's health, "Gynecological surgical services previously referred to community providers are now being performed at the medical center."

Among those are minor gynecological procedures, many of which can now be performed at either the Wilkes-Barre or the Allentown outpatient clinic at the same time as a consultation visit takes place.

Wilkes-Barre was also chosen in 2015 as a VISN 4

pilot site to implement a new telehealth consultation program. The program allows women Veterans to remotely receive consultations with Dr. Ghosh on subjects including hormone reception therapy, contraception, infertility, and post-operative follow up.

In addition, women Veterans can now receive genomic counseling via telehealth from VA's Salt Lake City Healthcare System. Veterans can receive genetic BRCA evaluations for possible breast and ovarian cancer through this program.

We are taking an active role in care coordination for our female Veterans.

Marianne Ferretti, LPN, is Wilkes-Barre's new maternity care coordinator. Ms. Ferretti has more than 30 years of OB/GYN experience. Thirty-seven women who use the Wilkes-Barre VA for care became pregnant in 2015, and 40 new births were recorded—a 40 percent increase over 2014. Many new mothers and mothers-to-be are actively participating in pre- and post-natal primary care, improving both their own care and that of their babies.

*Standing (L-R): Sumit B. Ghosh MD, MBA, Section Chief, Gynecology, Surgical Service, MDWH; Patricia Conroy, LCSW, WVPM; Lori Manfre-Conahan, PA-C, Designated WH PCP; Marie Judge, MSA, WH PACT*

*Seated (L-R): Barbara Menzel, RN, WH PACT; Jill O'Donnell, Pharm D, Clinical Pharmacy Specialist; Marianne Ferretti, LPN, WH PACT, MCC*



# VETERANS SEEING AN IMPROVEMENT

## New services, outreach programs serve blinded and low vision Veterans

Wilkes-Barre's Visual Impairment Services (VIS) Program's mission is to restore and maintain the independence and quality of life of blind and visually impaired Veterans.

In January 2015, Ms. Jennifer Throop, M.S CVRT joined the team at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center as the facility's Blind Rehabilitation Specialist/Visual Impairment Services Coordinator. Ms. Throop holds a Master of Science degree in Vision Rehabilitation from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry and is a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT). The facility is excited about the enhanced opportunities available to Veterans with Ms. Throop on the team.

Only about one-third of Wilkes-Barre's eligible Veterans who might benefit from the Visual Impairment Services Program are currently taking advantage of the services offered. *"I believe it is a strong program which can do so much to help our visually impaired Veterans regain their independence."* says Throop.

Among the programs VIS offers are assessments of vision loss needs; the development of comprehensive treatment plans; comprehensive eye exams; access

to both inpatient and outpatient blind rehabilitation centers; computer access training programs; adaptive aids such as mobility canes, talking watches, and talking prescription readers; orientation and mobility training; help in adjusting to blindness; and information on available benefits and services, both at Wilkes-Barre and in the community.

Veterans are eligible for the program if they are eligible for VA health care. They must also be legally blind or have low vision, including central or peripheral field loss; or have visual dysfunctions that impair their ability to perform everyday tasks related to their vision loss.

*"Newly blind Veterans often come into my clinic feeling hopeless and afraid,"* says Throop. *"But when they learn how much we can do for them, they leave with tears of joy and gratitude. We're helping to give Veterans their lives back!"*

According to blinded Vietnam Veteran Ron Biglin, *"the training I received (from the VIS) made me a better person and rebuilt my self-confidence...I still enjoy fishing and kayaking on lakes and rivers, and am learning how to use an application on my iPhone to kayak all by myself!"*

Jim Pius, who lost his sight in Vietnam, said, *"I have a reason to live—and so much more to learn. The Visual Impairment Service Program and its professionals are a blessing. They make me proud to be a Veteran!"*

*"Newly blind Veterans often come into my clinic feeling hopeless and afraid, but when they learn how much we can do for them, they leave with tears of joy and gratitude in their eyes. We're helping to give Veterans their lives back and I'm proud of the role I play in that process."*

(Left) Throop with Jim Pius  
(Below) Throop with Ron Biglin  
(Right) VIS Holiday Party



## IMPROVING THE VETERAN EXPERIENCE



### **WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER**

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1111 EAST END BOULEVARD  
WILKES-BARRE, PA 18711  
1 (877) 928-2621



[www.wilkes-barre.va.gov](http://www.wilkes-barre.va.gov)



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