



Summer 2013

HORIZONS

Introducing
Nurse Sheila Keezer

Employee
of the **Year**

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in conversation with Physician Assistant Tom Patts.

issue
one

From the Director's Desk

Welcome to the first edition of *Horizons*, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center's quarterly news magazine. *Horizons* will be an integral communication tool that will document our patient centered care journey. Within the pages of this magazine you'll learn about improvements we've made, and are making, to our service to Veterans at the hospital and at our outpatient clinics.

Our special focus will be on keeping you informed about innovations that empower Veterans and their families to take an active role in their health care. This will improve the ability of our staff to fully partner with our Veterans - which is the definition of a patient centered care organization. At Wilkes-Barre, we are transforming our approach to care from one that finds problems and fixes them to a personalized, proactive approach driven by the individual needs of Veterans.

We'll also discuss the accomplishments of our outstanding staff and volunteers; present the current and future agenda of our leadership team; and, on occasion, remind eligible Veterans not currently enrolled for VA health care of the benefits of joining up with us. Most importantly, we hope this magazine will enable everyone to understand what we mean by patient centered care and share in our vision of what a medical center fully engaged in providing such care will look like.

This issue of *Horizons* is largely devoted to a recent milestone in our efforts to provide patient centered care: the completion of an organizational assessment by the FIT (field-based implementation) team of VA's Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, along with a representative of the Planetree Group.

The assessment identifies what we have done so far to implement patient

centered care in Wilkes-Barre, and helps us establish priorities for our future work. You'll learn what members of our staff, our volunteers, and our patients told the team about what we're doing well—and areas in which we can improve. Keri Frank, our Patient Centered Care Coordinator, explains our way forward, and the implementation cycle we are using to ensure that we stay on the path we've begun.

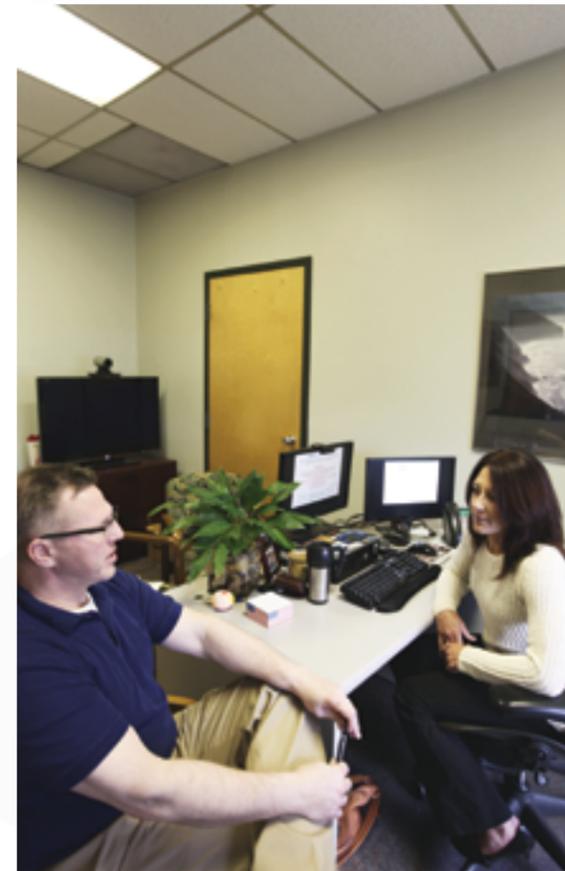
As Medical Center Director, it's one of my most important priorities to improve communication throughout our facility—a subject that was discussed in the team's report. In recent months, we've begun providing weekly newsletter updates; prepared an annual report filled with information about our facility and its accomplishments; and now, we've begun this news magazine.

We will continue to improve our communication efforts, just as we will continue to improve all aspects of our care to Veterans. As Keri says, "Providing patient centered care is not a new initiative—it's a cultural transformation." I'm very excited about our journey to provide proactive, personalized, and patient-driven care, and I'm glad to have you aboard!

Sincerely,
Margaret B. Caplan
Director



Below: Wilkes-Barre Director Margaret B. Caplan (right) presents employee of the year award to Sheila Keezer.



Nurse Sheila Keezer named Employee of the Year

For Sheila Keezer, RN, practicing patient centered care has had dramatic results. Sheila, Wilkes-Barre's 2012 Employee of the Year, totally changed the life of a Marine Corps Veteran in her care. The Veteran would not eat, talk, walk or go outside before starting treatment. His journey of recovery began when he joined a group therapy session that Sheila facilitated in the Mental Health Intensive Case Management (MHICM) program.

For eighteen months, Sheila and other Wilkes-Barre employees tended to the Veteran, who first began to walk; then to eat and enjoy food; then to whisper; then finally to speak again. When he finally spoke, he credited his relationship with Sheila—and even went so far as to nominate Sheila for an employee of the month award. In his nomination, he wrote that he "would not have spoken or eaten (again) if it was not for her coaching during her weekly groups."

Today, the Veteran reports that the food is "great" at Wilkes-Barre, and he is making up for lost time. He speaks to his sister on a regular basis, smiles frequently, and tells jokes. His life has changed dramatically—thanks to our Employee of the Year and her colleagues in the MHICM program.

Wilkes-Barre Organizational Assessment Completed

Blueprint for the Medical Center's Transformation

The number-one goal of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is to provide every Veteran it serves with proactive, personalized, and patient-driven health care. The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center has taken a huge step towards providing that kind of exceptional care through the completion of its first-ever Organizational Assessment.

A team from VHA's Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, and the Planetree Alliance, a nonprofit organization of hospitals and other healthcare providers, prepared the Organizational Assessment.

At the invitation of Margaret Caplan, Wilkes-Barre's Medical Center Director, the team visited the hospital and its Allentown Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in November 2012, and again in January 2013. Their report was issued in March.

"The assessment is a valuable tool that will help us along our journey to patient centered care," says Keri Frank, RN, Wilkes-Barre's Systems Redesign and Patient Centered Care Coordinator. Wilkes-Barre employees reacted enthusiastically

to the presence of the team, which held several information sessions nearly 60 percent of the staff attended. "They told us this was the best attendance record they had ever had," Frank says.

Besides the information sessions with all employees, the team held "listening sessions" with more than 20 focus groups. At these focus groups, which included Veterans, Veterans' family members, facility employees, and others, participants responded to questions focused on perceptions of various aspects of care.

Among the areas in which Wilkes-Barre performed best, according to its patients, are patient safety; communications between physicians and patients; and patient privacy. Areas in which there was potential for improvement, again according to patients, included noise in the hospital; the time it takes for staff to respond to call buttons; and the ease of getting treatment at our outpatient facilities.

The team will return in twelve to eighteen months to conduct a new assessment and to review the progress the hospital has made since the last assessment.

What the Staff Likes:

Facility leadership: "We go above and beyond for our boss, because she goes above and beyond for us. When she says 'Good job,' she really means it."

The caring and dedicated staff they work with: "We don't have a job, we have a purpose."

The level of teamwork: "We are a family here. My relationship with my coworkers is what keeps me here and makes me happy to come to work each day."

Wilkes-Barre VA HAVING THEIR SAY
Messages from Veterans & Staff



What's Happening Now?

Patient Centered Care Projects Underway

New furniture: Now that the Patriot Brew Café is open, we've ordered new, more homelike furniture for the lobby area as part of the overall redesign of the entrance to the hospital. In addition, hospital rooms will be repainted in natural tones; skylights will be added where possible, and we will do all we can to make the hospital more homelike.

PACT cards: VA's Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) allow patients to take a more active role in their health care, and are an essential part of our health care redesign. Every Wilkes-Barre primary care patient is a member of a PACT, and we will be providing cards for our patients to tell them who is on their team.

Additional PACTs: Besides our primary care PACT, we will be looking at forming additional teams in our specialty care areas, including mental health and surgical services.

Telesolv: In our Intensive Care Unit and on 4 East, we are conducting a pilot project. Two hospital consultants are looking at all of hospital staff's interactions with Veterans to look at ways in which we can improve our customer service. A customer service committee, under the direction of Joseph Sharon, Interim Associate Director, has already been formed.

Patient Advocates: Besides Joyce Nardoizzi, our hospital's current patient advocate, we are training service-level patient advocates in many of our patient care areas to provide more immediate help for Veterans who require support in their interactions with medical center staff.

The WILKES-BARRE FIVE-STEP CYCLE to Patient Centered Care



EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP READINESS

What: A day long session for senior Wilkes-Barre Leadership.
Why: To help attendees create a vision of patient centered care and to make a commitment to bring that vision to reality.
When: December 2012



ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

What: Conducted focus groups with Veterans, staff and volunteers, then developed a written report of the themes that emerged.
Why: To understand the facility's current status when it comes to providing Veterans with patient centered care, and the level of a "culture of caring" for visitors, volunteers, staff and providers.
When: Interviews completed January 2013; report completed March 2013.



STAFF INFORMATION SESSIONS

What: Hour-long information sessions for staff, volunteers, and Veterans.
Why: To teach attendees about patient centered care and to inspire them to get involved in the effort to bring it to Wilkes-Barre.
When: December 2012



LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

What: A one-day immersion session for managers, supervisors, and leaders throughout Wilkes-Barre.
Why: To prepare service chiefs and supervisors to lead the initiative and be champions of patient centered care.
When: March 2013



STAFF ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS AND FACILITATOR WORKSHOP

What: A three-day retreat for selected staff members.
Why: To create an awareness of patient centered care among staff members, and to inspire them to be part of the journey by serving as facilitators.
When: April 2013 and on-going



Wilkes-Barre VA HAVING THEIR SAY
Messages from Veterans & Staff

What Veterans Would Change:

- Increased access to care:** "Access to my primary care provider is hard. It can take up to a month to get a routine appointment, and god forbid if you need to see a specialist."
- Improved communication:** "There is a lack of communication between staff and patients. They send letters and automatically assume we get them, and are available on that day for an appointment."
- Better nutritional choices at meal time:** "Better meals at lunch and dinner—I am sick of pizza!"



Caption: Our new, fully stocked Patriot Brew opened for business in February.

Transforming our Physical Plant

Signs of Wilkes-Barre’s transformation to patient centered care are everywhere, if you know where to look. Here are a few of our recent improvements:

Patriot Brew Café: In mid February, VISN 4 Network Director Michael Moreland cut a ribbon to dedicate the Patriot Brew Café, a shop located near the main entrance to sell Starbucks coffee and other products to Veterans, employees, and other visitors. The new café, operated by the Veterans Canteen Service, will not only enhance our ability to serve visitors, but will also create a more homelike atmosphere in our lobby waiting area, so Veterans waiting for rides home can be more comfortable.

PET Scanner murals: Wilkes-Barre’s Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scanner offers a unique type of imaging test that helps doctors see how the organs and tissues inside the body are actually functioning. During the test, patients are asked to lie down on a flat examination table that is moved into the center of the scanner for up to an hour or so. To help calm patients while physicians are looking at images from the scanner, they can now see pictures of the sky and trees while in the scanner—just by looking up!

Wayfinding: One of the most common issues the assessment team heard was the difficulty patients, employees and visitors were having in finding their way around the hospital, especially with all the construction currently taking place. Wilkes-Barre has made a commitment to fixing this. At press time, flat screens were already up for new hospital signage and will be kept up to date as work continues.

CAM therapies: Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM) therapies are alternative medical treatments such as acupuncture, chiropractic, and yoga, used together with conventional medical treatment. Many of our patients are interested in such treatments. Wilkes-Barre now offers yoga, tai chi, and acupuncture—and recreational therapist Marian Skomsky is a certified rhythm therapist, teaching Veterans how to make and play percussion instruments together in “drum circles.”

What Veterans Like:

The level of cleanliness at the facility and its clinics: “I have been to a lot of VA’s and this is a 5 star hotel. It may not be the newest, but this is one of the cleanest.”

Wilkes-Barre’s caring and committed staff: “It’s almost unbelievable how good they take care of us.”

The quality of care Veterans receive: “I come here for the quality of care, and it has improved 10 fold. It’s better than the outside hospitals now.”

Help in the parking lots: For several years we have been using a “golf cart” to transport patients from their cars to the main entrance. Now, we’ve acquired an electric car, driven by volunteers, which will offer lifts for patients to and from their vehicles. Need a lift?



Shown: Rich Silva, volunteer driver, alongside the hospital’s new shuttle bus.

CONSTRUCTION Updates

Here are the construction projects that are currently underway, due to be started, or just completed around the Wilkes-Barre campus. All completion dates are approximate.

STARTING THIS QUARTER:

Building 5 renovations: Building 5 will be totally renovated to provide additional administrative space for the Medical Center. The building is now empty. The project will take six months to complete.

Roofing work above Liberty Hall and the Employee Lounge: A new roof will be placed above the two areas. The work will take six months to complete, and there may be sporadic closures of the two areas while it is taking place.

Steam Traps Replacement: Steam traps (which discharge condensation without letting steam for heating escape) will be replaced throughout the main building. The project will begin once it is warm enough that steam can be turned off in the building.

CURRENTLY UNDERWAY:

Upgrading Patient Rooms in the Community Living Center (CLC): We are in the process of upgrading patient rooms and flooring throughout the CLC’s second and third floors. The project includes painting and installation of the Get Well Network which provides internet and cable for each Veteran. The work will close three or four rooms at a time and should be completed in July.

Renovating the 6 West Area: Following the completion of this construction work in May, Logistics will return to this area. This is phase 4 of the overall renovation project.

Boiler Plant System Upgrade: Wilkes-Barre’s Boiler Plant is being upgraded. There may be sporadic impacts throughout the Medical Center. The work is scheduled to be completed in October.

Renovation of the 8th floor Sleep Lab: We are in the process of upgrading the sleep lab suites and audiology laboratory and will be adding an additional audiology testing booth for Veterans with disabilities. Social Work staff will also move into the hallway when it is ready in June.

Renovation of the 2nd floor Wound Care Clinic: This project will provide an Ultrasound Suite, offices for Prosthetics, orthotics, and rehab—and the wound care clinic itself. The Ultrasound Suite will be completed in May, and the remainder of the project will be completed in September.

Upgrading Plumbing: Phase 1 of this recently started project involves installing new vertical risers for domestic water throughout the main building by next January. Phase 2, not yet begun, will involve installing horizontal risers.

Renovate Building 2: We are in the process of renovating Building 2 to provide additional administrative space for the medical center’s business office. This project will be completed in June.

COMPLETED IN THE LAST QUARTER:

6 West Renovation Project: The Contracting Office has returned to the 6 West area following the renovation of their offices.

Coffee Shop: The new Patriot Brew Café recently opened and is serving Starbucks products and fresh pastries for staff, patients, and visitors to enjoy.

Caption: Mr. Moreland, VISN 4 Network Director, Mrs. Caplan and Engineering Technician Mike Somoga, discussing the anticipated new area for the Sleep Lab and Audiology services.



Patient Centered Care in Action

VIST Coordinator Repeatedly Cited for Her Commitment

HORIZONS

An important part of Wilkes-Barre's Organizational Assessment process was "listening sessions," allowing participants to answer questions about their perceptions of the health care we provide. Eleven of those sessions were conducted with patients and their family members, and the assessment team received many comments that helped form their recommendations for future activities.

According to Keri Frank, one of the areas in the hospital most frequently cited by patients for providing exceptional patient centered care was the Visually Impaired Service Team (VIST) program, which helps legally blind and severely visually impaired Veterans and their families adjust to vision loss. Maria Grimes, MS, CLVT, COMS, shared some of her "secrets" for providing patient centered care.

"I try to treat each patient as if he or she was my only patient," she explains. "Also, I make sure the patient has gained something from that visit. Because 98 percent or more of my patients have to be driven to their appointments, I get to know them personally, and their families as well!"

In addition to helping blind and low vision patients to improve their ability to perform

activities of daily living, Maria is also a "problem solver" for many of the 370 legally blind and more than 100 visually impaired patients she supports.

"Some of them have problems using the pharmacy; others have transportation problems; still others have issues unrelated to health care. Where I can, I use my contacts to help patients resolve those problems. I try to be accessible," she tells us.

Maria, who manages the VIST program herself with the help of a volunteer, recently began using VA's MyHealthVet secure messaging system so that Veterans and their family members can communicate with her via e-mail. Asked to cite a particular success story, she mentioned that of Alan Morrison, MD, an oncologist and Veteran whose son works at the Allentown Outpatient Clinic. The elder Dr. Morrison had his ability to practice medicine severely restricted by vision problems.

Maria arranged for him to be seen at the Lebanon VA Medical Center's Visually Impaired Services Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISOR) program, an intense rehabilitation program for the visually impaired. Once Dr. Morrison finished the program, Allentown provided him with a magnified computer adapted for his use.

Another patient Maria cited was Barry Haupt, a recently blinded Veteran now living in the Wilkes-Barre VA Community Living Center. Barry would prefer to live at home, so Maria is training him to use a Scriptalk device, to read medication labels.

Below: VIST coordinator Maria Grimes demonstrating the ScriptTalk device to Veteran and Community Living Center resident Barry Haupt.



"I look at all my patients holistically. I work with them and their families to find out what they want—and then I help facilitate whatever that is!"

Maria Grimes, MS
Visual Impairment Services Coordinator



Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

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or Toll Free at 1-877-928-2621

www.wilkes-barre.va.gov

Photography by **Edward T. Shudak**.

Visit any one of our Veteran Outpatient Clinics:

Allentown Outpatient Clinic

3110 Hamilton Blvd.
Allentown, PA 18103
(610) 776-4304
Toll Free: 1-866-249-6472

Sayre Outpatient Clinic

1537 Elmira St.
Sayre, PA 18840
(570) 888-6803
Toll Free: 1-877-470-0920

Northampton Outpatient Clinic

Phoebe Slate Belt Nursing Home
& Rehabilitation Center
701 Slate Belt Blvd.
Bangor, PA 18013-9341
(610) 599-0127

Williamsport Outpatient Clinic

Campus of Divine Providence
Hospital
Werner Bldg. 3rd Floor, Suite 304
1705 Warren Ave.
Williamsport, PA 17701
(570) 322-4791

Tobyhanna Outpatient Clinic

Tobyhanna Army Depot
Bldg. 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
(570) 615-8341

Columbia County Outpatient Clinic

Alley Medical Center
301 West Third St.
Berwick, PA 18603
(570) 759-0351