2019 ANNUAL REPORT

Quality of Life through Health Care

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER

FACILITY OVERVIEW

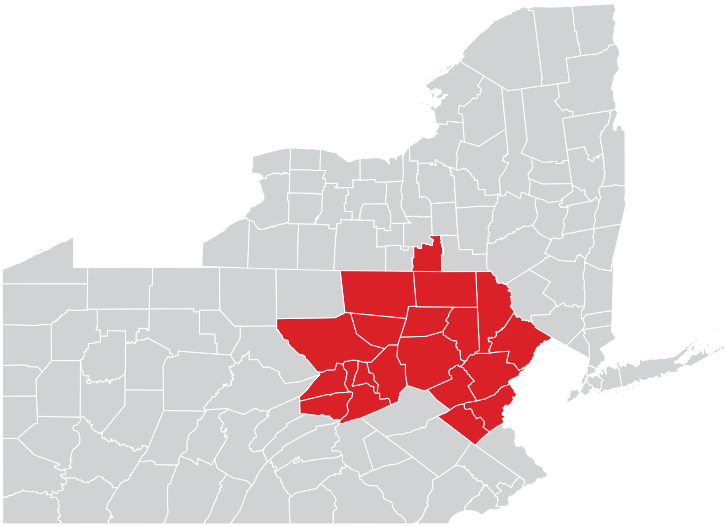
The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, is a complexity level 2 teaching hospital which provides a full range of patient care services. The medical center operates 58 hospital beds, 10 domiciliary beds, and 105 Community Living Center (CLC) beds.

Comprehensive health care is provided through Primary Care, Medical and Surgical Specialty Care, and Mental Health Programming. Geriatrics and Extended Care services are also offered, including long term care, respite, rehabilitation, dementia care, hospice and palliative care, transitional care and a variety of home care services.

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center is part of the VA Healthcare - VISN 4 Network along with eight other medical centers in Altoona, Butler, Coatesville, Erie, Lebanon, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Wilmington.

2019 Operating Budget

Total Operating Budget:	$251,852,702
Medical Services	$205,923,537
Facilities:	$19,979,569
Administrative:	$17,959,596
NRM Projects	$7,990,000



Service Area

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center primarily serves Veterans from 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.

58 Hospital Bed

10 Domiciliary Beds

105 CLC Beds

Unique Veterans/Visits

**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.

Facility	Unique Veterans	Visits
Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center	33,650	296,064
Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic	9,360	62,106
Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic	1,465	3,594
Northampton	1,439	4,491
Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic	2,564	15,854
Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic	605	1,960
Wayne County Community Based Outpatient Clinic	1,021	4,057
Williamsport Community Based Outpatient Clinic	3,938	17,126

405,252
Total Visits

Total Unique Veterans **38,255**

1,515 Employees

343 Veterans

129 Physicians

259 Nurses

173 Operating Beds

10 Substance Abuse Residential Rehabilitation

4 Surgical

30 Inpatient Care

105 Community Living Center

24 Inpatient Mental Health

LOCATIONS

Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center
1111 East End Blvd.
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
507-824-3521 / 877-928-2621

Allentown Community Based Outpatient Clinic
3110 Hamilton Blvd.
Allentown, PA 18103
610-599-0127

Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
701 Slate Belt Blvd.
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 Depot
Building 220
Tobyhanna, PA 18466
570-615-8341

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

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

wilkes-barre.va.gov/

facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre/

A MESSAGE FROM
FROM THE DIRECTOR

"As the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, I'm proud to be part of the VA's continued commitment in meeting the health care needs of our Women Veterans."

For generations, women have honorably served in our nation's military. During World War I, approximately 35,000 women served as nurses and support staff, with that number quadrupling to an estimated 140,000 women serving in World War II. Today, women make up approximately 14% of the active duty military, serving across all occupations including leadership roles and combat duties.

In 1948, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, granting women permanent status in the military which entitled them to Veterans benefits. Today, over 700,000 women have served our armed forces post-9/11 and Women Veterans have become the fastest-growing segment of VA Health Care.

As the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, I'm proud to be part of the VA's continued commitment in meeting the health care needs of our Women Veterans.

Wilkes-Barre maintains Women's Health Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs) at the Medical Center and all our Community Based Outpatient Clinics. Our Women's Health PACT Providers are trained in treatment modalities aimed at meeting the specialized needs of our Women Veterans.

To further enhance the services offered to Women Veterans at the VA Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, I'm pleased to announce that Wilkes-Barre has been approved to begin offering Mammography Services at the Medical Center.

We're anxiously looking forward to establishing the program. Staff are on-board, the equipment has been ordered and we're currently working to design the Mammography Suite, which is expected to be fully operational in 2021.

For more information on the services available to Women Veterans through the VA, please don't hesitate to contact Mrs. Patricia Conroy, Women Veterans Program Manager at 570-824-3521 Ext 27517. Mrs. Conroy is a great resource and can assist with coordinating a variety of services, including primary care, specialty care and reproductive health.

Russell E Lloyd, Director

VA Video Connect can use one of these 5 devices to gather patient health information remotely in real time.

VA MAKING CARE BETTER
THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Improve Response Time through Remote Monitoring

Over the past few years, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, has utilized a remote communication technology, called VA Video Connect, as a virtual solution that allows Veteran patients to connect with VA Medical Staff from the convenience of their homes.

Utilizing VA Video Connect, patients are able to utilize their personal devices, such as smart phones, I-pads, and computers, to connect with their provider via WiFi or cellular service. In some cases, it may be possible for the VA to provide a pre-loaded I-Pad for Veterans to utilize for the receipt of care through the VA Video Connect Program.

With the appropriate applications installed on the chosen device, the medical team can conduct remote appointments with the Veteran and receive up to the minute patient information.

Often, it is possible for the provider to receive the following information in real time:

- blood pressure
- pulse rate
- body temperature
- weight
- heart electrocardiogram
- lung function

The VA Video Connect Program provides caregivers an efficient and convenient manner of care delivery while minimizing the need for the Veteran to travel.

If you think you'd be interested in establishing yourself as a VA Video Connect Patient, please speak with your Primary Care Provider or visit **https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect** for more information on VA Video Connect or to download the app to your device.

VA Video Connect is part of the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center's Broader Telehealth Program. It offers our Veterans an opportunity to receive specialized care from the comfort of their own home via the latest in health care technology.

STRIVING FOR A "HEALTHY ME"

"The process has not been easy, but the results have been amazing! I feel so much better, I'm living life again, I'm more active and I can't wait to see what the future holds."

Teresa Travis

"There are many people like Teresa who have benefited from the bariatric surgery program. The post-surgery commitment our Veterans make through the VA MOVE! Program also helps them to attain their weight loss goals. Patients show significant improvement in their comorbid conditions as well."

Dr. Ghazali Chaudry, Chief of Surgery

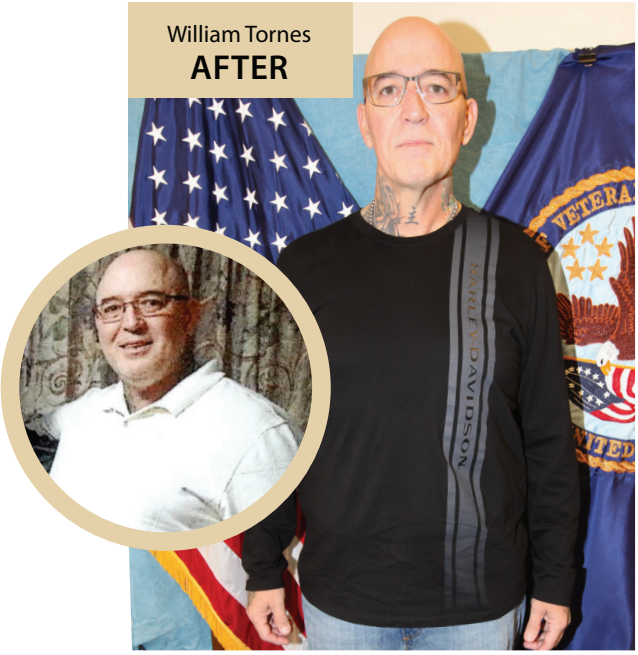
How Bariatric Sleeve Surgery is Changing Veterans Lives

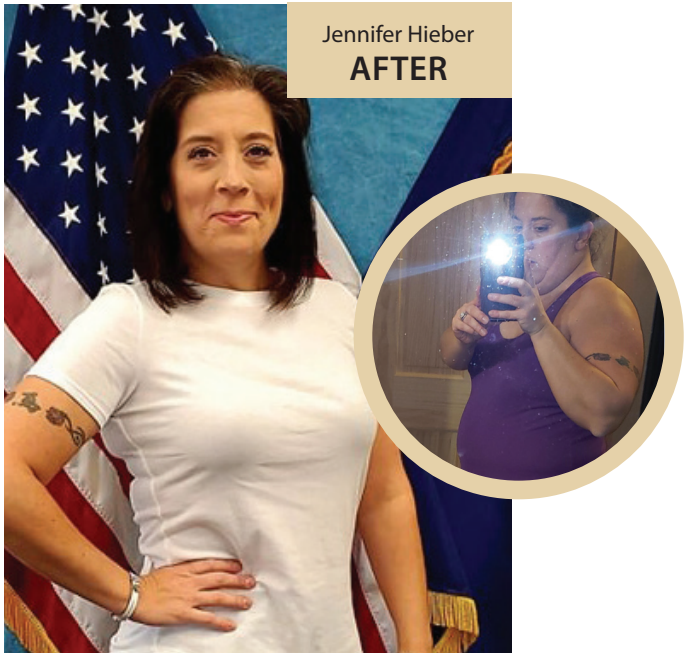
US Navy Veteran Teresa Travis always claimed that she was a "Poster Child" for weight fluctuation. As she grew older, she was taking medication for high blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol, while also suffering the effects of Sleep Apnea. Her back and knees were in constant pain, and the slightest amount of physical activity left her short of breath. Faced with a diminished quality of life, Teresa knew it was time for a change and began exploring her options.

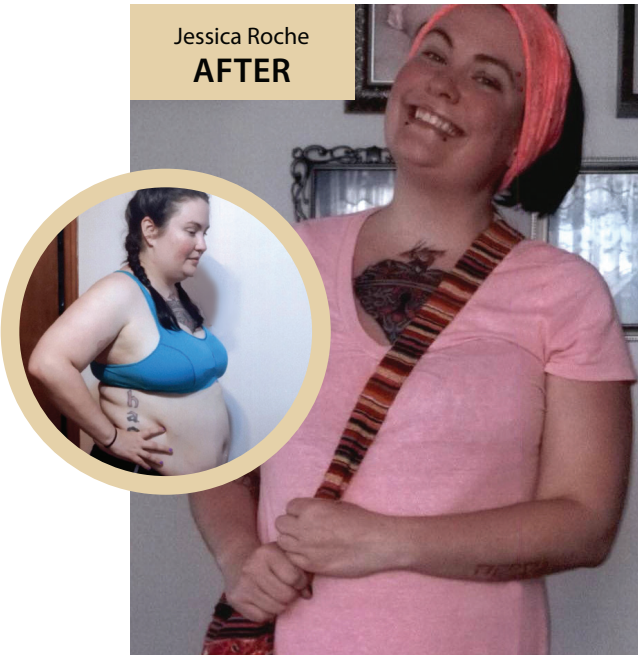
MOVE!® Weight Management Program for Veterans

She enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) MOVE! Weight Management Program to begin her weight loss journey. Through the VA MOVE! Program, she became more active and improved her nutritional health, which lead her to become a candidate for bariatric sleeve surgery, which was ultimately performed at the VA Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Wilkes-Barre VA's Bariatric Surgery Program, which started in 2017, has helped many Veterans change their lives. The VA's MOVE! Weight Management Program assists Veterans pre- and post-surgery, helping them establish and maintain lifelong behavioral changes required for safe and successful







outcomes associated with dramatic weight loss, including a commitment to sound nutritional choices.

The benefits of sustained weight loss include the long-term remission of Type 2 diabetes, improved cardiovascular health, relief of depression, elimination of obstructive sleep apnea, joint pain relief, improved fertility, and the alleviation of a variety of other medical conditions.

Over the past year the VA MOVE! And Bariatric Surgery Programs have helped many Veterans with significant weight loss, improved nutritional health, and reduced comorbidities. The photos speak for themselves.

CONQUERING PAIN
FOR **IMPROVED** QUALITY OF LIFE

Dr. Amanda Schramp, a member of the Interdisciplinary Pain Management Team, works daily to minimize the impacts of a Veteran's pain on their quality of life.

Dr. Amanda Schramp is no stranger to Veterans, or their struggles with pain. Prior to joining the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania as a Physical Therapist, she was commissioned with the United States Army Reserve as a Physical Therapist and member of the Medical Specialty Corps. She joined the 865th Combat Support Hospital in Niagara Falls, New York, in July 2016, and has experience working in critical care, skilled nursing and rehabilitation, home care, and outpatient orthopedics.

As a member of the Interdisciplinary Pain Management Team, she works daily to minimize the impacts of a Veteran's pain on their quality of life.

By educating Veterans on the impacts and effects of chronic pain, she is helping them understand the connection and relationship between their pain experiences and their brain. She develops individualized treatment plans, based on each Veteran's examination and evaluation, to select the best interventions to address their pain. Pain intervention techniques such as exercise, stretching, manual therapy, and physical agent modalities (heat, cold, sound wave, electricity, mechanical forces) are just a few of the medication-free options offered.

The overarching goal of the Interdisciplinary Pain Management Team is to restore the quality of life for our Veterans by enhancing their ability to perform the functions of daily living and leisure activities through appropriate pain management.

Our team of dedicated professionals is committed to working with you to determine the best possible solution for managing your pain. If you're experiencing chronic pain, pain that lasts for more than three months, speak with your Primary Care Provider about a referral to Interdisciplinary Pain Management Team. What can it hurt?

HISTORY
ON DISPLAY AT WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER

US Army Veteran Ronald Skamanich volunteer curator at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

An ashtray and a drinking cup were skillfully made from sea ration cans by creatively bending the metal can lids.

26-Year Veteran Curator's Passion for History

When 26-year US Army Veteran Ronald Skamanich volunteered to become curator of memorabilia at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, it came with many challenges. His first order of business was to organize the ever-growing array of military items according to era.

Ron, who in the past worked as the Director of Education at the Everhart Museum in Scranton, felt strongly that it was important to have our military history preserved and respectfully displayed. A big history buff, Ron knows that Veterans will be fascinated to see the items currently on display in our 1st Floor Exhibit Area.

The Medical Center is exploring more creative ways to utilize the space. We're working to install shadow boxes on the wall to display military uniforms and may even get a few additional manikins to display full dress uniforms throughout the Medical Center.

One of the most interesting items we have on display, is a piece of a propeller from a Japanese Zero airplane that was shot down during the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The Propeller sits next to a small-scale model of the Japanese Zero Aircraft. We also prominently display an ever-growing Veteran Women section.

Our Veterans have donated quite a bit of WWI and WWII era items, but Ron admits that it's harder to find a lot of memorabilia post WWII because of the militaries policy on soldiers returning home with items.

Ron is currently working on acquiring and building models from the Vietnam era, like the Osprey and Apache Helicopters. He also plans on adding a model Humvee to represent the more recent engagements.

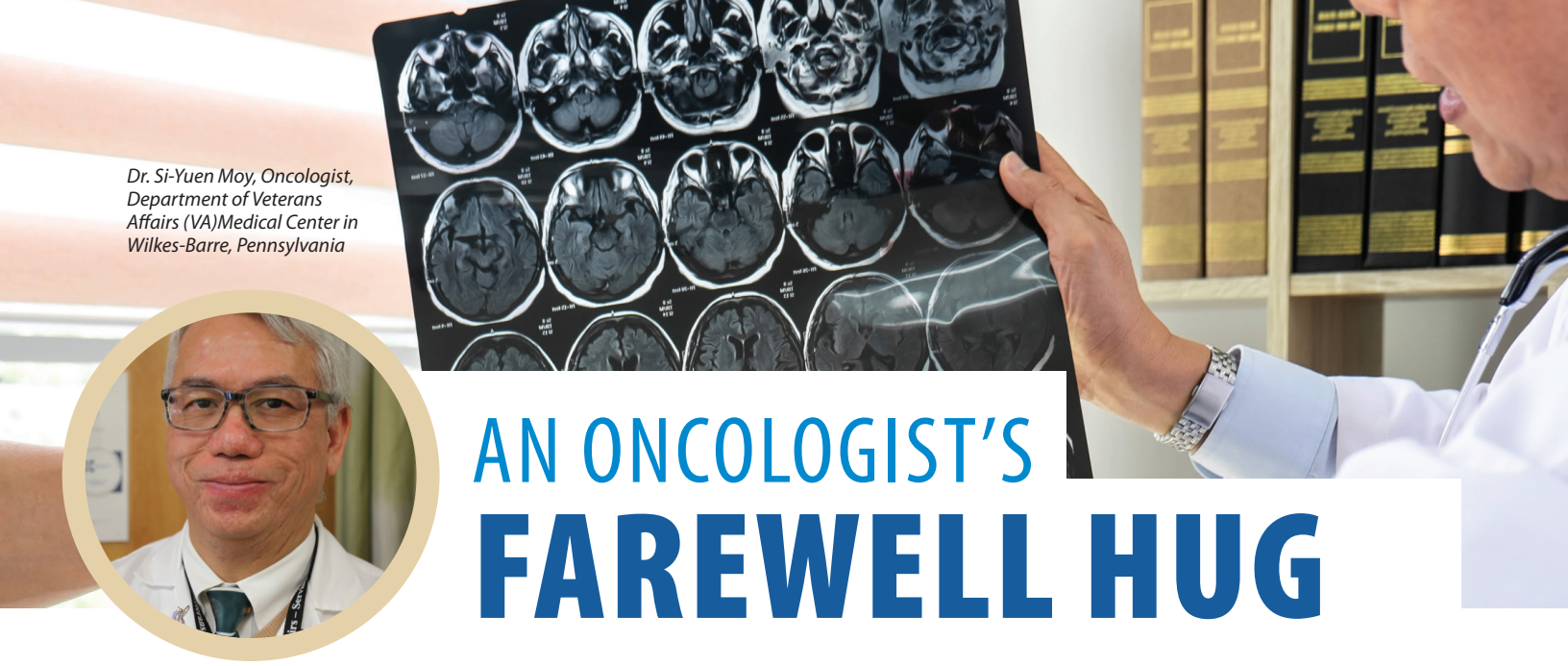
Moving forward, Ron would like to see groups, like scout troops and school clubs, utilize the display as an educational tool for teaching future generations about our military history and our Veterans.

"Veterans come up to me all the time and say they have never seen this or haven't seen it in over 50 years. It's unfortunate that three quarters of the memorabilia we have, as is the case in most museums, is in storage, we just don't have the space to display it all at once."

Ron Skamanich

VISIT OR DONATE

The VA's memorabilia collection is on display in our 1st Floor Atrium. If you or your family are looking to donate to our memorabilia collection, please contact Voluntary Services at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center at (570) 821-7237.



Dr. Si-Yuen Moy, Oncologist, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

AN ONCOLOGIST'S FAREWELL HUG

A Provider's Perspective by Dr. Moy

The name (Ray) was changed to protect patient privacy.

I walked down one wing of the medical ward looking for Room 28. This led me to the last room on the left. It was a double-occupancy room with only one bed. This made sense to me, as this gave a patient who was on the verge of entering hospice care more privacy.

The patient, Ray, was lying in bed facing the window. I knocked before entering. Ray turned around as I was walking towards his bed. I was specifically looking for signs of grimacing on his face as he turned and was relieved that he did not show any.

This was the second time in 3 weeks Ray has been admitted for uncontrolled hip pain due to his metastatic lung cancer, except this time even Dilaudid did not provide any relief.

As I was reviewing his chart before coming to see him, I learned that he came to the ER and was admitted on Friday. Palliative Care was consulted Saturday to discuss the goal of care because of the worsening pain caused by his bone metastases. Hospice care was discussed, and Ray has decided the time has finally come for that.

After the initial greetings, I turned to the business at hand.

"I read from the chart that you have decided to enter hospice at the Community Living Center," I led the conversation to this important decision.

"Home hospice," he corrected me.

"Most people do prefer to stay at home," I provided support for his decision.

Frequently, patients who have been receiving chemotherapy would like to discuss the decision of entering hospice care with their oncologist, making sure the clinical picture is ripe for this transition. In his case, he has made this decision in my absence over the weekend. Nonetheless, I wanted to offer what I could retroactively related to this important decision.

"Are you comfortable deciding to enter hospice care?"

"Yes."

"No regrets?"

"No regrets. I knew someday I would reach this point."

There was a pause. I waited patiently to let his mind roam where it may, giving him time to contemplate the current situation.

After a moment, he revealed what went through his mind, "I can't imagine you having to deal with situations like this day in and day out."

"Well, in situations like this, I just try to make things better, or less bad. I hope I have made it known along the way that someday we would reach a point of stopping treatment. Well, we have reached that point."

Ray has always had a nonchalant demeanor. He would change the subject every time I would attempt to drop hints of his inevitable fate. I was not sure if he had a realistic understanding of his clinical situation.

"I knew, even though we didn't really talk about it."

I was very relieved to learn of his acceptance of the situation.

"The main focus now is to adjust your pain medications to take care of the pain. The hospitalist asked me if palliative radiation to the right hip is feasible. I told them 'yes'." Recently, Ray and I have already talked about palliative radiation. Since he thought his hip pain was still bearable, we have decided to "save it for the future". Well, the future is now.

"Hey! You will be in good hands with the home hospice people. I don't have to see you in the clinic regularly anymore."

"You mean, I don't get to harass you anymore?"

"I am always available if you need anything, or if you just want to drop by to say 'Hi!' I love to find out how my patients are doing."

I extended both hands to bid him farewell.

"This call for more than a hand shake," he said as he reached around my neck with both hands. His arms were stronger than I expected, lifting his body up for a close embrace. I bent down to hug him. His hard whiskers brushed against my cheek, yet it was a welcome closeness and not at all an annoyance. For those few seconds, I felt like I was being comforted by my patient, a role reversal of sorts. No tears. Yet this is one of the most deeply touching farewell hugs I have had.

"Take care of yourself, Doc," he said as I was leaving the room.

As I was walking back to the clinic, the mental image of that farewell hug refused to leave my mind. I have had numerous farewell hugs in my career, with the patients, with their wives, with their families. Most were spontaneous like this one, some with tears held back, some with run-away emotions (one patient called his wife's show of emotion "Niagara Falls"). The tightness of a wife's hug tells me how overwhelming such moment is; the duration of a patient's embrace tells me how strong of a bond we have developed.

But why is this one so special?

Is it because for all his casual manners, he showed me he valued our relationship more than I expected?

But this time, it was clear to me that it is not only the belief that I have accomplished something meaningful with my work that keeps me going strong, it is also the positive response, sometimes too subtle, occasionally more memorable, that restores my emotional well-being in my demanding daily work.

Dr. Si-Yuen Moy

Is it because for the limited therapeutic options I could offer him and the limited quality of life I could salvage for him, he showed more appreciation than I expected?

Whatever it was, I had the rare experience of taking as much as giving in this doctor-patient relationship.

I always tell people, "if I don't believe in what I do, I would have been burned out a long time ago. "Yes, I have said that to Ray during the aforementioned visit. This assumes I am the giving party.

But this time, it was clear to me that it is not only the belief that I have accomplished something meaningful with my work that keeps me going strong, it is also the positive response, sometimes too subtle, occasionally more memorable, that restores my emotional well-being in my demanding daily work. In short, being appreciated is strong medicine to cure stress, fatigue, and emotional burn out.

And so at the end of today when I arrived home, I told my wife that I had "another one of those hugs" with a patient. After all these years, she knew what the circumstances were.

But in order to explain to her why this one is so special, I have to elaborate my thoughts on paper because this time it made me realize how much my patients are giving me as much as how much I am attempting to give them.

OFFERING RENEWED HOPE

FOR VETERANS WITH VISION LOSS

Each year, hundreds of blind and visually impaired Veterans benefit from services and equipment provided through Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania's Visual Impairment Services (VIS) Program. The program goal is to restore independence and quality of life to Veterans experiencing vision loss.

Marine Leon Vieira, a 61 year old Vietnam Veteran, completely lost sight in one eye and became legally blind in the other due to glaucoma. Although painting had always been his passion, he feared his ability to paint would fade with his eyesight. He thought his painting days were over, but while being treated at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center, Leon became aware of the vision enhancing technologies available through the VIS Program.

Through the VIS Program, each Veteran's visual impairment is assessed, an individual care plan is developed based on their visual needs and the activities they enjoy. In addition to providing rehabilitation therapies to teach the skills needed to perform daily living activities and safety in/around their homes and communities, the care plan also aims to incorporate adaptive equipment to allow Veterans, like Leon, to best utilize their remaining vision.

The loss of one's sight is a significant event which impacts so many daily life activities. Many Veterans don't know where to turn for help when they experience vision loss, but once they discover all that the VIS Program has to offer, they have a renewed hope that they can once again enjoy independent, productive and fulfilling lives.

Vietnam Veteran Leon Vieira uses vison enhancing technology obtained through the VA to continue his passion for painting.

Vision enhancing device that can zoom up to

80 TIMES

THE ACTUAL SIZE

"The Annual Vision Expo highlights the latest in vision enhancing technologies available to Veterans through the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. By coupling rehabilitative training with the latest equipment and technology, we are able to assist our Veterans with continuing their passions despite their visual challenges."

Jennifer Throop
Visual Impairment Services Coordinator, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

VETERANS SERVING VETERANS

"Being a Nurse Recruiter and Veteran myself, I try to hire as many Veterans as possible. They have made a tremendous sacrifice serving in our military prior to their employment here, and some continue their military service in the Reserves on a part-time basis."

Sandra Dompkosky, RN

(Top) Veteran Sandy Dompkosky, RN was instrumental in developing the Veterans Serving Veterans Wall to honor our Veterans working here at the VA. (Bottom) Sandy posing in front of the Employee Recognition Wall.

A Tribute to Their Service

From time to time employees who work at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, travel to other VA facilities for training. The attendance at one of these training sessions became the inspiration for Navy Veteran, Sandra Dompkosky, RN to develop a display at the Wilkes-Barre VA to honor our Veteran employees who serve other Veterans.

The goal was to create a space to display photos of all the Veterans who work here at the VA, so they can be recognized for their military service and the services they provide to other Veterans.

Sandy, working with her group, coordinated the best location for the display, researched the identity of our Wilkes-Barre VA Veteran workforce, then took all the photos to help create an extraordinary photo display.

In conjunction with the Veterans Serving Veterans Photo Wall, an Employee Recognition Photo Wall, opposite the Veterans display, was created to honor exemplary employees on a monthly basis.

The Veterans Serving Veterans Wall along with the Employee Recognition Wall are located on the bottom floor in the hallway leading to the silver elevators. The displays act as a reminder to each VA employee of the core values that define "who we are," and how we care for our Veterans.

WELCOME HOME!

Now It's Our Turn to Serve

After days, weeks, months or even years of anticipation, you're going home. It can be a busy time for a returning Veteran, so many family and friends to see, places to go and things to do. Young and in-shape, the last thing they're concerned about is their health care, but unfortunately, we'll all get old someday.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania offers our returning Veterans transition assistance to ensure continuity and coordination of health care services post deployment. Although it may not seem a post-deployment priority for the Veteran, taking a proactive approach to health care has proven to have long term benefits.

If you have a friend or family member that has recently served, help us connect. We want to be sure that their health care needs are being met.

For more information about the various programs available for recently returned Servicemembers, log on to the Returning Servicemembers website at www.oefoif.va.gov, or contact the Post-9/11 Transition and Care Management (TCM) Program Monday thru Friday between the hours of 8 am and 4:30 pm at (570) 824-3521 Ext. 24558.

If you know a Veteran that's been home awhile and is interested in information regarding services available from the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center or one of our Community Based Outpatient Clinics, eligibility information is available through several sources.

To apply for VA health care benefits, including enrollment you must fill out an Application for Health Benefits, VA Form 10-10EZ. Obtain this form by one of the following means:

Apply online
https://www.va.gov/ website

Call toll-free:
877-222-VETS (8387)

In Person
Complete the "Application for Health Benefits" at the Wilkes-Barre Medical Center's Enrollment & Eligibility Group located in Room AG 64, Monday through Friday between the hours of 8 am and 4:30 pm or call (570) 824-3521 ext. 27877

Visit us on the web, stop by, or give us a call. There is no harm is seeing what we have to offer.

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