

# Horizons

A NEWSLETTER OF WILKES-BARRE VA MEDICAL CENTER // DECEMBER 2020



## PROJECT HAPPEN HELPING VETERANS STAY HEALTHY

One of the many goals of any healthcare organization is to make sure their patients do not acquire any infections during their hospital stay, such as pneumonia. To help ensure that doesn't happen at the Wilkes-Barre VA, the Nursing Evidence Based Practice Council launched a program called Project HAPPEN.

This national initiative created by VA Nurse researcher Dr. Shannon Munro of the Salem Virginia VA, aims to protect patients against non-ventilator associated, hospital acquired pneumonia by assisting patients with complete oral care twice a day. Simply providing help with tooth brushing and denture care can prevent this terrible disease.

Nurses from the council are collaborating with Dental Service, Infection Control, Speech Pathology, Supply Chain Management, and Systems Redesign to assemble a powerful alliance.

The group hosted two Nursing Oral Care Educational Open House events that brought information to over 60 acute care and long-term care nursing staff members to promote Project Happen to our Veterans. The project workgroup is active in linking Veterans to dental services, raising awareness about preventing aspiration, and acquiring supplies such as lip balm and mouthwash. An important message for Veterans is that oral care is not about grooming, it's about infection control. To date, the nursing staff has shown support to Veterans by observing or helping them to brush their teeth and care for their dentures.

The efforts of this type of proactive initiative have paid off since there have been no hospital acquired pneumonia cases since the program's implementation.

**Another side benefit of Project HAPPEN, has been the promotion of oral health as a path to better general health for all Veterans. Now that's something to smile about!**

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

## Focusing on the Positive Can Help Us Weather the Storm



Every day, we face new challenges to navigate. The pandemic has fundamentally changed the way we look at everything we do. If we try to live life as we once did, we get a quick reminder that COVID-19 may affect our actions. We wonder if the places we frequent will be open. When we shop, can we find the products we need? With all the negative

Coronavirus news out there, it's no wonder we question if it's safe to be around our own family and friends.

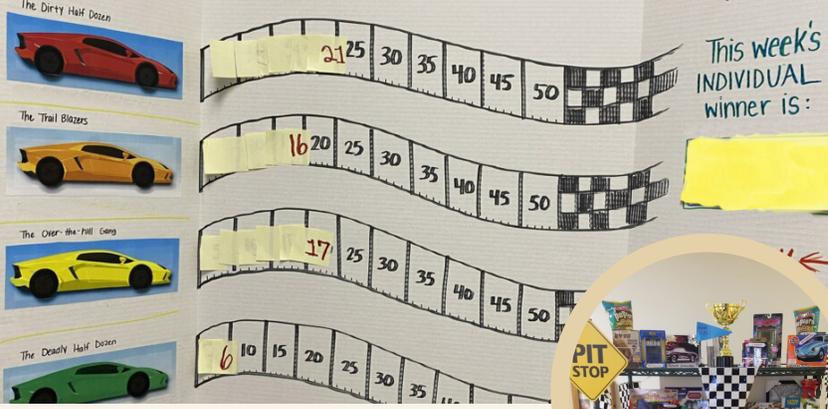
During these trying times, I encourage you to focus on the positive, so you can maintain the energy and resolve needed to weather this storm. Here are a few things we can all do:

- **Limit our intake of twenty-four-hour news.** Twenty-Four-hour news outlets were created so you can check in when you have time, then leave when you get updated. Continually watching can absolutely affect your mood in a negative way.
- **Look to the past, to a time when you had to endure other major life disruptions.** Remind yourself of the courage you had and that you are stronger today because of it.
- **Watch lighthearted videos or movies.** They can take your mind off current negative situations.
- **Look after your neighbors and family members,** as they may not be in as good a place as you are. The act of checking on them will not only make them feel good, but it will also make you feel better, too.
- **Support local businesses.** With the current restrictions, many local businesses are in survival mode and can use our help. One suggestion is to buy gift cards, it is a great way to help and you can postpone your visit until after the pandemic.

These times can be mentally challenging. In the short term, the pandemic has changed the way we live and work. We can all use a little release from the negative. There is hope in the future with Coronavirus vaccines. If we maintain a positive attitude, we can weather this storm and become stronger together.

Sincerely,

Russell E. Lloyd, Director



Leaderboard shows friendly competition between residents who engaged in health activities to earn prizes from the prize cart.

## Wellness Cup Activity Improved Overall Health During COVID-19 Pandemic

Let's face it, the current Coronavirus quarantine precautions have taken its toll on all of us, especially the residents at the Wilkes-Barre VA Community Living Center (CLC). To battle their increase in anxiety and depression, CLC staff had implemented a program that created a sense of connection between Veterans despite the need for physical distancing. The main goal of this program was to increase behavioral activation, which is a proven approach to decrease depressive symptoms, among quarantined long-term care residents. The program, called the Wellness Cup, used a race car theme game format to encourage residents to track and increase healthy, activating behaviors that improve overall health and well-being during this stressful time. Residents were divided into teams and competed individually and together with their teammates to build a sense of social connection. The goal was to see which individual residents and teams could engage in the healthiest behaviors over an 8-week period.

To encourage participation, our staff awarded "prizes" for engaging in a meaningful activity that promoted behavioral activation and wellness. Residents were able to redeem completed wellness cup game boards for craft activities, reading materials, puzzles, personal care items, clothing, relaxation CD's and stress balls, etc. Resident teams competed against each other and were given walkie-talkies to encourage their team members when they were falling behind. This interactive part of the game was fun and often involved the staff to "check-up" on teammates. As the game progressed, a notable improvement in overall wellness was witnessed by our staff.

The Wellness Cup culminated with a doorway party in which team and individual awards were given and put on display in their area of the CLC. The outcome was an overall success that positively impacted patient care, resident satisfaction, and quality.

This wellness program fits with the whole-health initiative and increased teamwork. CLC Recreation Therapy, Food and Nutritional Services, Behavioral Medicine, Restorative, Social Work, Medicine, and Nursing all assisted in helping this program be a success for our Veterans.

## MOVE! Program Helping Veterans Succeed During the Pandemic

We often hear that because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020 will be a year we want to forget. Through the dedicated work of our Wilkes-Barre VA Dietitians there are some Veterans that say that 2020 was a year of determination, prosperity, and success.

In March 2020 our dietitians had to transfer their in-person face-to-face MOVE! classes to a virtual telehealth format. Knowing that accountability and support provided at these MOVE! groups are critical to our Veterans' weight loss success; our dietitians have stepped out of their comfort zone to continue to provide excellent nutrition care through virtual telehealth classes.

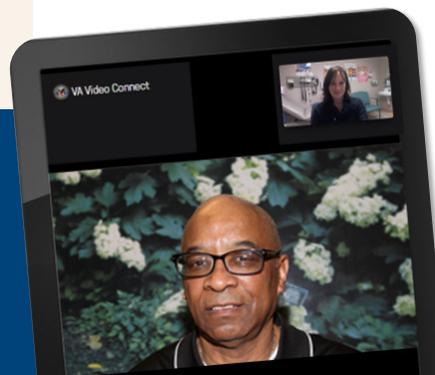
Some Veterans have made huge improvements in their health in 2020 because of these virtual classes. Here are two stories from Veterans who are successfully using our virtual services.

Mr. G, a 69 yr. old Veteran began the MOVE! program in March weighing 241 lbs. and was considered pre-diabetic. Over the past 8 months he has lost 45 lbs. and has seen a reduction in his Blood Pressure and Cholesterol levels and has decreased his Hemoglobin A1C levels from 6.5% to 5.6%. He continues to be a huge inspiration to others in the program.

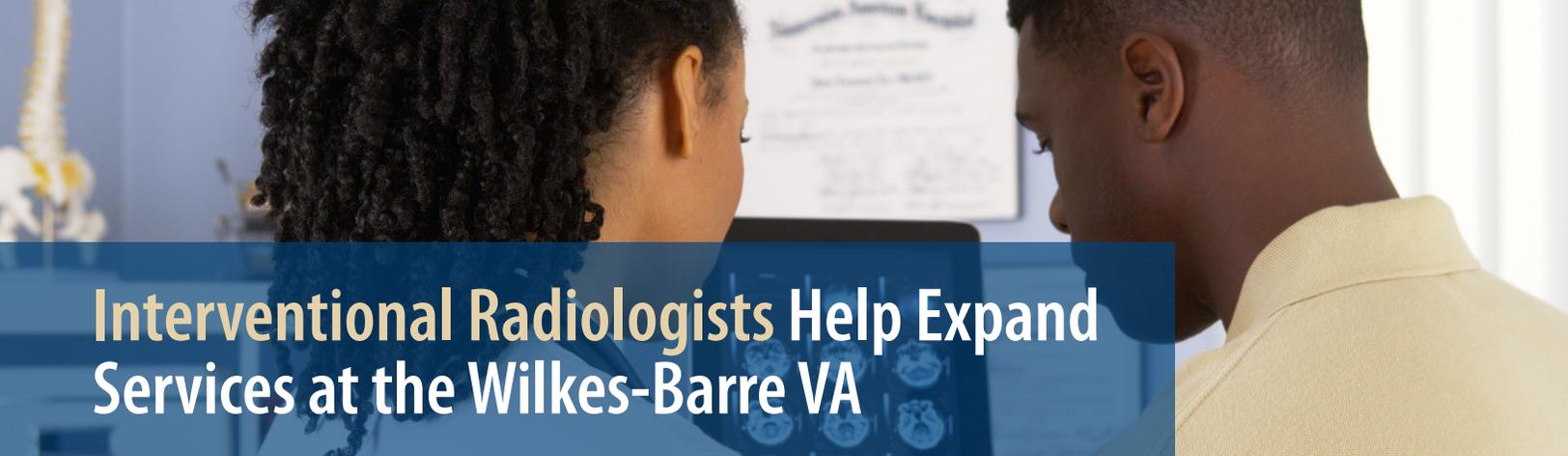
Mr. B, a 68 yr. old Veteran who has multiple medical problems and is wheelchair dependent, also began the MOVE! program in March weighing 466 lbs. Over the past 8 months he has lost 51 lbs. His weight loss success has given him motivation towards his ultimate goal of being able to walk again.

Our Dietitians continue to provide new, non-conventional education programs to our Veterans. Creating and implementing the VA Video Connect MOVE! group is just one example of what our dietitians have been doing. We know the positive outcomes that MOVE! Weight Management program has on our Veterans. By going this extra mile, our dietitians have positively changed the lives of our Veterans.

**MOVE! is a weight management program that teaches Veterans to manage several aspects of life that contribute to maintaining a healthy weight.**



Wilkes-Barre Dietitians using VA Video Connect to communicate virtually with Veterans during pandemic.



# Interventional Radiologists Help Expand Services at the Wilkes-Barre VA

By using imaging equipment, such as an Ultrasound Scanner, CAT Scanner or Fluoroscope, the Radiologists can see precise areas of interest when performing biopsies, drainage of abscesses, kidney procedures and Venous Angioplasty (which open narrowing or blocked blood vessels).



Putting the Veteran first is a phrase you will often hear when you spend any time at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. Over the last few years, Wilkes-Barre has continued their efforts to put Veterans first by expanding Interventional Radiology services. Interventional Radiology, by definition, is performing minimal invasive procedures using image guidance to visualize the organ or abnormality in question. That image guidance is made possible by utilizing Wilkes-Barre's state-of-the-art equipment for both our Interventional and CAT scan suites.

**“Over the past few years, we are fortunate to have Dr. Withrow and Dr. Lafond come aboard, and with their skills we were able to expand our Interventional service line. We are consistently adding new services. Recently, we have expanded our services to our Dialysis and Oncology patients. We now provide Interventional support for dialysis grafts in our dialysis patients. In addition, we now offer bone marrow biopsies to our Oncology patients utilizing a new device that makes these biopsies more accurate and less painful.”**

**—Dr Joseph Rienzi – Chief of Radiology**

The VA's expanded biopsy capabilities have benefitted our Veterans by significantly reducing the turnaround time from biopsy to diagnosis.

**“By working together with the primary care and specialty physicians, we can better manage our Veterans' care before and after a procedure. For that reason, there is a distinct advantage to have procedures performed in this facility.”**

**—Dr Ryan Withrow**

Having Interventional Radiological services performed here can save our Veterans time. There have been many occasions where our Physicians determined that a biopsy was needed, and under the right circumstances, we could perform that biopsy either immediately or the following day.

**“I do like to think we are Veteran friendly, and we put the Veteran first. Prior to obtaining consent for a biopsy or other procedures, I will show our patients the images of the area to be biopsied and discuss the procedure in detail with them. I think it's important for patients to be both informed and involved in their own care.”**

**—Dr Gisele Lafond**

Using Image guidance to improve our testing procedures to come to a quick, accurate diagnosis shows the commitment our Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center has made to our Veterans. The fact that our Veterans don't have to go out into the community to get these types of services can make a big difference in their overall health and wellness.

# The Importance of Mobility ASSESSMENTS

A patient's mobility is very important, when you lose it, you lose some freedom. When you gain it, it has a big influence on your life. That is why determining need for mobility devices such as Power Chairs, Scooters and Stair Glides is so important. At the Wilkes-Barre VA, that task is entrusted to Occupational Therapists Janine Bastis and Mark Vukovich.

The process starts with the Veterans Primary Care Physician. After an appointment and observation that the Veteran is not getting around like they used to, a request can be generated for them to be assessed for a power mobility aid.

When determining the need for mobility aids, the Therapist must evaluate how well the patient moves around and the physical environment where the device will operate. A misdiagnosis can cause the Veteran to become too dependent on the device, causing a loss in mobility or become a fall risk because their mobility needs were not fulfilled.

During the pandemic, our VA therapists have been using virtual assessment tools

more and more to help them determine patient need.

**"The ability to see visually both the mobility of the Veteran and the physical environment where the mobility device would be used, makes determining need a little easier."**

—Janine Bastis

The overall process in determining the need for mobility aids is very important. Along with Virtual assessment tools, one of the most important determining factors is a verbal interview with the Veteran. If need cannot be determined remotely, a live hospital visit or on-site assessment is done to help make an accurate determination on what's best for the Veteran.

**"At the end of the process we want to make sure the Veteran patient gets what they need to live a better life".**—Mark Vukovich

We need to make sure our assessments are as accurate as possible while keeping in mind that their mobility needs can change over time.



Top photo: Occupational Therapists Janine Bastis and Mark Vukovich help determine mobility needs of local Veterans.



## EIGHT CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

### 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

### Columbia County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

225 Columbia Mall Drive, Bloomsburg, PA 17815  
570-316-4116

### Northampton County Community Based Outpatient Clinic

701 Slate Belt Blvd., Bangor, PA 18013-9341  
610-599-0127

### Sayre Community Based Outpatient Clinic

1537 Elmira Street, Sayre, PA 18840  
570-888-6803

### Tobyhanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic

Tobyhanna Army Depot, Bldg. 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 Fl., Ste. 304  
Williamsport, PA 17701  
570-322-4791



We want to get mobility aids to the Veterans who need it, while keeping up the Veteran's walking strength and mobility for those who do not. Our goal is to always do what's best for our Veterans.

Call Center

1-877-928-2621

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