Personalized Health Care for LIFE!

WILKES-BARRE.VA.GOV
FACILITY OVERVIEW AND STATUS

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 healthcare 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.

SERVICE AREA

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center primarily serves Veterans from 18 counties in Pennsylvania:


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

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

Northampton Community Based Outpatient Clinic
701 Slate Belt Blvd
Bangor, PA 18013
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 Floor • Suite 304
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-322-4791
TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET
$255,080,000

MEDICAL SERVICE $197,555,000
FACILITIES $19,178,000
ADMINISTRATIVE $17,217,000
NRM $21,130,000

TOTAL EMPLOYEES 1,360

EMPLOYEES BY THE NUMBERS
VETERANS 248
NURSES 228
PHYSICIANS 101

WILKES-BARRE
33,746 UNIQUE VETERANS 292,568 VISITS
COLUMBIA
1,591 UNIQUE VETERANS 4,042 VISITS
SAYRE
2,635 UNIQUE VETERANS 17,149 VISITS
WAYNE
1,062 UNIQUE VETERANS 4,687 VISITS

ALLENTOWN
10,359 UNIQUE VETERANS 71,596 VISITS
NORTHAMPTON
1,411 UNIQUE VETERANS 5,105 VISITS
TOBYHANNA
653 UNIQUE VETERANS 2,234 VISITS
WILLIAMSPORT
3,962 UNIQUE VETERANS 17,172 VISITS

TOTAL VISITS 414,544
TOTAL UNIQUE VETERANS 38,562

OPERATING BEDS 173

10 SUBSTANCE ABUSE
30 INPATIENT CARE
105 INPATIENT MENTAL HEALTH
10 RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION
4 SURGICAL
24 COMMUNITY LIVING CENTER
A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR...

As early as the mid-1600s, our Nation’s leaders identified the burdens borne by the men and women who served in our armed forces, ultimately resulting in the establishment of today’s Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to serve those who so proudly served the nation.

As the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, I’m honored to be a part of the mission to support our Veterans on a daily basis.

Although many of the organizations medical centers were established during the Civil War, Wilkes-Barre’s history is unique.

In 1944, the Wyoming Valley Chamber of Commerce petitioned the VHA consider Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania as a site for the establishment of a VA Medical Center, assuring the government that the community would raise funds necessary to acquire the land for the construction of a medical center.

In 1945, authorization was received to proceed with plans for a hospital in Wilkes-Barre, and a site was selected. A coalition of Veterans organizations, community groups, and individuals established a campaign to raise the funds necessary to purchase the land. As a result of the collective community support, more than enough money was raised to purchase the land on which the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center was to be constructed.

In 1946, the Board of Trustees of the Wilkes-Barre and Wyoming Valley Veterans Hospital Fund was established to manage the excess funds raised by the community. These funds were invested and designated to be used for entertainment, education, recreation, and supplies to promote the morale and physical welfare and rehabilitation of Veterans served at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. Although the membership of the Board of Trustees has changed over the years, they have remained dedicated to enriching the lives of Veterans served at the Medical Center.

Over the last 73 years, the Board of Trustees have provided the Veterans served at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center with hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of amenities which cannot be purchased with the medical center’s appropriated funds.

As the Medical Center Director, I recognize and appreciate the role of our community partners, Veteran Service Organizations and stakeholders in increasing the services available to our Veterans. Together, we’re assuring that our Veterans are receiving personalize, proactive, patient driven health care necessary for the best possible outcomes.

For all the daily freedoms that we enjoy, I say thank you to our Veterans.

For helping to assure that we are able to provide our Veterans with the best possible resources, I thank our community partners.

Russell E. Lloyd
WILKES-BARRE PILOTS
SINGLE VISIT DENTURE FABRICATION

In FY18, the Wilkes Barre Dental Clinic began a pilot of a new denture fabrication technique which allowed for the delivery of a full set of dentures from one office visit. The appointment, which last approximately 2 hours, begins with an exam to screen for any pathology and confirm the patient as a good candidate for the technique. Basic criteria for fabrication includes adequate bone structure for stability and the ability to follow simple instructions during fabrication. Once identified as a candidate, a prefabricated denture is custom molded to the patient’s mouth with the prosthesis fully functional at the conclusion of the visit. With over 25 units installed to date, the results have been outstanding.

A Vietnam Veteran presented to the dental clinic post esophageal cancer surgery. Due to his condition, the Veteran was very susceptible to gagging, which generated increased health concerns for conventional denture fabrication. A one-day denture was fabricated to replace his lower teeth without taking impressions. He left the clinic with a new lower denture and very pleased with his new smile.

Another Vietnam Veteran presented to the dental clinic from a private nursing facility approximately 70 miles from the hospital. He came in via ambulance and was able to be treated on the transport litter in the reclined position for patient safety. The onsite oral surgeon removed his teeth and fabricated a denture during same visit! The patient/his family were spared the inconvenience of several trips to the medical center. Both Mr. Filo and his wife, Amelia, were very pleased with overall experience.

1. Mr. Anthony Filo, a Vietnam War Veteran, presented to the dental clinic from a nursing facility 70 miles from the hospital. He came in via ambulance and was able to be treated on the transport litter in the reclined position for patient safety. The onsite oral surgeon removed his teeth and fabricated a denture during same visit! The patient/his family were spared the inconvenience of several trips to the medical center. Both Mr. Filo and his family were very pleased with overall experience.

2. Mr. John Vandervell, a Vietnam Veteran, presented to the dental clinic post esophageal cancer surgery. Although John required dentures, he was susceptible to gagging and had concerns about conventional denture fabrication. A one-day denture was fabricated and he left the clinic with a new lower denture and is pleased with his new smile.

3. Ms. Lynda Tillman, an Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran, presented to the clinic after receiving an ill-fitting set of dentures several months prior. Lynda stated she was not able to eat and was ashamed to be seen in public. A one-day denture was fabricated with excellent results. The patient states she can eat properly and is very happy to have her smile back.

The Wilkes Barre Dental Clinic is continuing to explore areas where this technique can be most beneficial for our Veterans. Preliminary use has shown very promising results and will continue to be part of our available treatment options in the future.
VETERANS ARE LOSING TO WIN AT WILKES-BARRE

Wilkes-Barre VAMC MOVE! Weight Management program hosted their first annual MOVE! Reunion in December 2018. Attendees participated in holiday activities and shared their weight loss success while relaying stories of increased physical activities, which many attribute directly to their involvement with the MOVE Program! It was a great event with all treated to some healthy food items prepared by Wilkes-Barre’s Dietitians.

The reunion was held to recognize the successes of program participants over the past year and provided the continued support critical for long term sustainment. All expressed a deep appreciation for the continued support of the MOVE! Program, crediting the supportive friendships developed through the program as a key factor in their success.

Wilkes-Barre’s Bariatric Surgery Program, which kicked off in 2017, is also supported by the MOVE! Program Weight Management Team. The team assists Veterans, pre- and post-surgery, with establishing and maintaining the life-long behavioral changes required for safe and successful outcomes associated with dramatic weight loss, including a commitment to sound nutritional choices.

Wilkes-Barre enters 2019 with 28 Veterans having received surgery for a combined weight loss of over 1,750 pounds!

Whether through independent lifestyle changes or a surgically assisted program, the evidence supporting the benefits of weight loss are well documented. Wilkes-Barre is committed to helping Veterans improve their quality of life through a variety of weight loss programs, coupled with proper diet and exercise.

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.

If you are ready to commit to a lifestyle change to improve your overall health and quality of life, speak with your Primary Care Provider about the many weight loss services available through the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center.

Around the table clockwise from Lower Left: Rebecca Marsh, Al Kircher, Walter Szpakowicz, Delmar Anthony, Charlie Zaremba, Charles Pond, Steve Orzel, Debra Waite, RD Facility MOVE! Coordinator, Richard Manta, Tracy Mundhenk, Savanna Mojtabadi, Emily Richters, MS RDN LDN Outpatient Dietitian, Gerry Tranguch, John and Nancy Wettstein, Sam Orlando
WEIGHT LOSS SPOTLIGHT

JEFFREY DERR
A Marine Corp Veteran who served in multiple theaters of operations including the Gulf War, Bosnia and Kosovo, Jeffery Derr struggled with his weight post deployment. Jeff was at 325 lbs when he began his journey with Wilkes-Barre’s Bariatric Surgery Program and has since lost over 100 lbs while gaining control of his diabetes and cholesterol.

CHARLES POND
A US Army & Air Force Veteran, Charles Pond was 401 lbs when he underwent Bariatric Surgery at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center in February of 2018. Today, he’s down to 251 lbs with increased energy levels, a new zest for life, and only pounds away from his military weight.
FROM THE VETERAN: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM BEYOND THE TEXTBOOK

As told by Fred Searles
US Army Veteran. Former Prisoner of War

I was born in 1931, the eldest of four brothers and 2 sisters. We lived in a house by the tracks on the East End of Wilkes Barre. Things were different then, people gained enjoyment from the simple things and were satisfied with very little. We would often pack into my father’s 1937 Buick and drive around. We would take a frying pan, some lard and meat and cook up hamburgers on the side of the road!

As a kid, I loved to play baseball and football. I also liked gymnastics, I could do a flip in those days! We used to gather around the radio and listen to Jack Benny and Fred Allen. Some of the mystery serials, like Inner Sanctum, had great sound effects such as a door creaking open or a ball bouncing down stairs. You were brave if you could stay home alone after listening! After going to the movies, we kids would pretend to act out all the action scenes. One of the kids that I hung out with was Nick Adams, who later became a big Hollywood movies star.

We never locked our door. People would always stop by and chat on the porch. One of our neighbors was a bartender at local bar (a former speakeasy) - sometimes when he’d had a little too much to drink he would end up sleeping on our porch (if it was warm) or end up on our couch (if it was chilly). I lived with my grandmother and cousin when I was growing up. My grandmother was very generous, even though we didn’t have much ourselves. Anytime I came home from school for lunch, she would be feeding hobos. One of my favorite memories is watching my grandmother making fresh donuts. She would ask me and my cousin to dust the warm donut with powdered sugar—we ended up fighting over who would eat the hot donut first instead.

When I was 12, I worked as a shoe shine boy. My grandfather had built me a shoe shine box, which I set up at the square in Wilkes Barre. This was during WWII, and lots of GIs would be in town. I would charge 10 cents a shine and bring the money back to my family.

I graduated from Coughlin High School in Wilkes Barre. I ran the relay on the track team. I especially enjoyed learning about history and geography in school. When I was 18, a cousin of mine who was an Army recruiter came to visit. He tried to convince me and my brother Henry to join. I joked and said “I’ll join if Henry joins!” Henry surprised me by saying he would join, and that’s how I joined the Army.

I completed my basic training as an infantryman at Fort Knox. Later, I was sent to Korea. It was quite a journey! I took a bus from Scranton to Chicago, then a train from Chicago to California. From California, we flew to Washington State, then through Canada and Alaska to Japan. The airplane was a rickety old prop plane. When I looked out the window, there would be oil dripping down the wing.

We spent 2 days in Tokyo, and then were sent to Busan, Korea to support troops holding back against the sea. I ended up being a part of 1st Calvary. We joined up with General MacArthur’s troops after the invasion of Inchon and took Seoul. We waited for 3 days before we were given permission to cross the 38th parallel. We later took Pyeongchang. We were part of a diverse fighting team as we were fighting under the UN flag. However, after 2 months of being on the front, on November 2, 1950, I was captured as a prisoner of war by the North Koreans.

They separated us by nationality and rank (I was a corporal at this time). The Koreans attempted to create tension between the different soldiers and crush our spirits by reading propaganda over loudspeakers. But we gave them hell. We knew the more trouble we created, the more guards they would send, meaning there were fewer soldiers fighting out there.

The prison was a small village the Koreans had kicked their own people out of. There were about 200-300 Americans.
We were taken on detail in the countryside to conduct labor. We would chop down trees using a dull splitter. They were so dull we were beating down the trees as opposed to actually chopping them down. During the winter, we would have to march across the border to China to collect supplies. It was so cold that our breath would condense and form icicles over our mustaches and beards.

When your body starves, your mind starves. We were given tasteless sorghum gruel every 2 to 3 days. To flavor it, we would collect rotting peppers from farmers while on detail. We would soak the peppers in water to make the flavor last longer. Sometimes we got dense, steamed purple bread. It was so heavy— if piece fell on your toe, you might break it. Other times we received a seaweed soup—which was beneficial, as we later learned it contained a lot of iron. I was down to about 90lbs. Every morning, they would bang on the door and ask “Anyone die in the night?” We would try to not tell them until they fed us. That way, we could give the extra portion to weakest among us. They wouldn’t let us bury our dead. We would try to cover up the dead with stones by the Yellow River—the bodies would get swept away by the tides.

Once the armistice seemed more likely, they began feeding us more regularly. Eventually the Red Cross came in. In all, I was a POW for 33 months. I was able to cope with my capture through meditating. I was able to survive because of my sheer stubbornness and pigheadedness.

For many years after I returned to the United States, I struggled with PTSD. I self-medicated with alcohol from 1953 to the mid-1960s. Eventually it was my wife who inspired me to quit drinking by asking me, “Who do you love? Booze or your children?” I was lucky enough to be involved with many service organizations who invited me to speak at different events. The more I spoke about my experiences, the more it took the edge off and the less bothered I was by it.

My wife and I had 5 children— 4 boys and a girl. I worked in construction, roofing and eventually owned two trucking businesses right here in Wilkes Barre. I value my family the most. My father and grandmother taught me to be polite and honest. A decent person respects everyone. I don’t lie— that way I don’t dig myself into a hole. Be gentle and kind to everyone.
WILKES-BARRE ADDS PERCUTANEOUS CORONARY INTERVENTION (PCI) SERVICES

The Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center’s Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory received approval from the Office of the Under Secretary for Health, Washington D.C. to begin a Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI) Program in 2018.

The PCI Program, which performed its first case at Wilkes-Barre in April of 2018, is a new service offering at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. The PCI Program, which includes stenting, expands the comprehensive cardiac care available for Veterans receiving care in Wilkes-Barre, as well as across VISN 4.

The stenting process, or coronary angioplasty, involves the utilization of a balloon catheter to expand a blocked artery and implant a small mesh-like tube (stent) in the artery to increase blood flow and reduce the risk of heart attack or muscle damage due to blockage.

Recovery from coronary angioplasty is much quicker than recovery from bypass surgery (open heart surgery), with a vast majority of Veterans able to be discharged to home the morning after the procedure.

At Wilkes-Barre, many of our procedures can be performed radially (via the wrist), as opposed to the traditional distal (via the groin) catheter insertion, which also significantly reduces recovery time while allowing Veterans to ambulate freely post procedure without the need for hours of restrictive bed rest.

The ability to offer these services in Wilkes-Barre’s state of the art Catheterization Suite is affording Veterans comprehensive cardiac services in an environment which is familiar and close to home, with their loved ones by their side to offer support.

The team of cardiologists, registered nurses, and technologists at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center are skilled in all elements of catheterization care. We take pride in providing holistic, Veteran-centric care that is second to none. We’re proud to be able to offer these expanded services to the men and woman we serve.

“By continuing to expand the services offered at the Wilkes Barre VA Medical Center, we’re assuring that Veterans receive safe, reliable and highly effective care in the most convenient manner possible for the Veteran and their family members.”

Dr. Nabeela Mian
Associate Chief of Staff, Medical Service
EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGIES

Amazon, Alexa, Uber, 3-D printers and the Cloud are just a few examples of how technological advancements have resulted in the development of applications that impact our daily lives. Healthcare is not exempt from the impacts of technology.

It is the goal of Wilkes-Barre’s Connected Care Program to continually increase a Veteran’s access to healthcare by extending services beyond the traditional office visit through the utilization of the latest virtual care delivery technologies.

In 2018, Wilkes-Barre performed in excess of 9500 virtual care encounters and demand continues to increase as Veterans become more comfortable with virtual care modalities.

To offset a regional shortage of Mental Health Providers, Wilkes-Barre has been able to effectively utilize telehealth modalities to maximize provider efficiency for increased access to care. Virtual care offerings have also increased the convenience of care, increasing patient satisfaction while reducing no-show rates due to factors such as inclement weather, transportation, work and family schedules.

It’s an exciting and busy time for Wilkes-Barre’s Virtual Care Department. We’ve expanded telehealth modalities to all our sites of care. We’re utilizing the technology to enhance all the services available to the Veterans we serve.

We’re expanding the availability of existing services, such as Mental Health and Tele-ICU, while developing new care delivery models. We’ve hired two dedicated Tele-Primary Care providers to help reduce cancellation rates due to provider call offs and departures. We’ve implemented a Tele-Stroke Program, to immediately bring an increased level of expertise to the bedside when the timeliness of care is most essential. We’ve worked with our community partners, such as the Gino Merli State Veterans Home, to offer virtual care delivery services from the Medical Center to remote locations that also service our nations Veterans.

By providing convenient and timely access to safe, reliable, high quality healthcare, Wilkes-Barre is working to assure that all the Veterans we serve enjoy the highest quality of life through readily available access to health care.

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MILITARY MASTERPIECES BY MILITARY HEROES

All too often, we take for granted the little things in life. Taking a vacation, a long weekend, a last-minute drive or running out to dinner on a moment’s notice, we’ve all done it. It’s an escape from work for a few days or just a reason to get out of the house.

For the Veterans residing in Wilkes-Barre’s Community Living Center, disengaging from the daily routine can be a challenge. Wilkes-Barre recognizes the importance of social and emotional well-being as a determining factor in quality of life.

In 2018, Wilkes-Barre established a Military Masterpieces display in the lobby of the Community Living Center. The original artwork, displayed proudly on the wall, is all generated by the Residents of Wilkes-Barre’s Community Living Center.

The program, which engages Veterans through creative therapy, has proven to effectively increase creativity, while engaging the Veterans in a social activity. The program is improving the overall health of the Residents by decreasing depressive symptoms while encouraging them to explore their feelings independent of artistic abilities, and physical or cognitive disability.

“The Veterans residing in our Community Living Center are such a diverse group of people. It’s amazing to see their personalities come out as they paint a picture for the Military Masterpieces, practice a routine for the Creative Art Competition, or just sit and talk at the Coffee Klatch. It’s a real experience to sit and listen to their stories.”

Amie O’Malia
Recreation Therapist

Masterpieces 1 (Seated Left to Right): Terry Neil, William Hastie, Lou D’Angelo, Frank Fertally

Masterpieces 2 (Seated Left to Right): James Woodruff, Charles Anistranski, Jake Mashunas, John Wolczyk

Colonel Charlie Anistranski (Right): shows off one his original works displayed on Wilkes-Barre’s Wall of Military Masterpieces.
The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre and all its Community Based Outpatient Clinics, began sending out electronic surveys in April of 2018. Survey responses are reviewed weekly. If you complete a survey, you may receive a follow-up call to address your comments, but you can opt out of the return call when completing the survey if you so desire.

We need to know what we’re doing well and what requires additional attention. We’d appreciate if you would take the time to tell us about your visit if you are selected to receive a survey.

The survey is for outpatient service experiences only, such as scheduling, pharmacy, lab, imaging and primary/specialty care appointments. If you are randomly chosen to participate in the survey, you’ll receive an email or text. Again, your response is optional, but we’d really appreciate the feedback.

**THE SURVEY FOCUSES ON:**
Before the visit - “I got an appointment when I needed it”
Arriving at the facility - “It was easy to find where to go for my appointment”
During the appointment - “I felt heard and cared for”
Departing from the facility - “It was easy to get my prescriptions filled”
After the visit - “I understood what I needed to do next to manage my whole health”

**HELP US SERVE YOU BETTER**
**PARTICIPATE IN OUR SURVEY!**

Health Care That Matters Most To **YOU!**

The Wilkes Barre Veterans Affairs Medical Center is bringing Whole Health Care to Veterans. Whole Health Care is a personalized health approach to health care delivery that starts by addressing the goals of your care that are most important to you. Whole Health Care starts by putting the person, not the disease, at the center of service delivery. Wilkes-Barre VAMC is offering a full range of conventional, complementary and integrative health care offerings to assist you with taking charge of your health and well-being to live your life to the fullest.

These approaches include:

- YOGA/TAI CHI
- MINDFULNESS
- ACUPUNCTURE
- BATTLEFIELD ACUPUNCTURE
- PAIN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
- DIABETES MANAGEMENT
- HEALTHY COOKING
- COPD MANAGEMENT
- TOBACCO CESSATION
- MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
- STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS
  and MUCH more!

To learn more about the Whole Health Program at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center:

1. Speak with your Primary Care Provider
2. Contact one of our Whole Health Professionals at 570-824-3521 Ext. 4671 or 4892
3. Look for the Integrative Health and Wellness Program calendar at facebook.com/VAWilkesBarre or posted within the facility.
In May 2018, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), including the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center, renewed its commitment to addressing health care disparities among our transgender and intersex Veterans.

Since her appointment as Wilkes-Barre’s Lesbian Gay Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT) Veteran Care Coordinator (VCC), Sandy A Rowlands, LCSW has fostered notable strides in the implementation and improvement of the services offered to Wilkes-Barre’s LGBT Community.

By working with Wilkes-Barre’s specifically trained Primary Care Physicians and Psychologists, Ms. Rowlands has been able to coordinate the expansion of resources for the provision of clinically appropriate and comprehensive Veteran-centric care for our LGBT Veterans.

She has been instrumental in the development of an LGBT Psychoeducational and Empowerment Group, known as “Spectrum”. The group, which meets monthly, is designed to foster peer support, self-advocacy, and a connection with resources and community partners to raise awareness of disparities related to sexual orientation and their impacts on one’s self and interpersonal relationships. Spectrum has been such a success with Veterans that it is nearing capacity and consideration is being given to the establishment of additional groups.

In her role, Ms. Rowlands has strengthened Wilkes-Barre’s presence in the coalition of Eastern Market VA Medical Centers to further the provision of services related to health screenings based on birth sex and gender identity, psychological assessments, supportive services, provision of prosthetic devices, Hormone Replacement Therapies and Voice Coaching.

Under her guidance, Wilkes-Barre has implemented the ‘Allies’ Program, which utilizes a group of specially trained and readily identifiable individuals, to assist LGBT Veterans with managing their health care needs, navigating the system, and locating internal and external resources.

By establishing progressive policies, practices, and services which focus on the provision of evidence based, Veteran-centric health care for our LGBT Veterans, Ms. Rowlands is helping to assure that at Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center we are providing the highest level of care to “All Who Served.”
THE CHALLENGES OF REDEFINING ONE’S SELF

Working in Social Work Services at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center, my initial interaction with clients is often under challenging circumstances. It's the nature of the job. Those who seek my assistance are often battling medical, social, psychological or legal issues. It's my job to help. The job can be challenging, stressful and emotional, but the successes stories can also be phenomenal. My experience with "Jim" not only defines a success story, but is one which I will remember throughout my career.

Jim is a United States Army Veteran. When I met him in May 2015, he was unemployed and homeless. He had recently been released from prison and had a record which included multiple arrests and felonies convictions. I wondered how I could help.

He had enlisted in the US Army at 17, just as the Vietnam War was ending, and after serving in Germany, he began using illicit substances which ultimately resulted in Jim's discharge from the military. Following his discharge, he returned home to Mississippi, where he “went off balance.” He was arrested multiple times, including charges related to armed robbery, escape, and a murder-for-hire plot.

As an African-American born in Mississippi, he was no stranger to severe racial prejudice. Jim always remained confident in himself. “My past is what made me…my negative turned out to be my positive!” Jim will tell you that he was a racist while in prison. “I used to wake up every day so angry. I used to program my ‘T.V. to wake up to hate. I was so racist!”

Jim has shared with me and others that the turning point in his life also came while he was in prison. “While in jail, I came to a realization that it never was my ‘brothers’ who helped me. Rather, most of the people who helped me were Caucasian…so how can I be racist?”

When you look at him today, one would not imagine his dramatic story. He exudes a serenity, a sense of purpose and a sense of being at peace with himself. Once he freed himself of the hatred and rage which he had harbored for so long, his life began a positive swing. Through Justice Department Programming, he went on to obtain a GED, an Associate Degree and a barber’s license.

Wilkes-Barre’s Social Work Service was able to coordinate a coalition of local social service agencies to assist Jim in regaining control of his life, resulting in the establishment of stable housing and the ability to maintain modest employment. “It’s always been the VA in the background to save me. You guys have always helped,” says Jim.

Jim is a success story. His dedication to recovery, and our dedication to walk with him through the difficult times has left an impression on both of us that will last a lifetime.

Social Work Service at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center provides a diverse offering of comprehensive programs for Veterans and their families, including supportive services for housing, nursing home placement, caregiver education, mental health treatment, and other recovery interventions. If you or a fellow Veteran are struggling with life’s stressors, talk to your Primary Care Provider about meeting with one of our Licensed Clinical Social Workers.

CUSTOMER SERVICE CORNER

Did you know the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center has a Customer Service Committee, comprised of Veterans, managers, front line staff, and volunteers, that are passionate about providing all we serve with the care and services that they deserve?

The Customer Service Committee reviews, tracks and trends the feedback received from a variety of sources (i.e. surveys, letters, phone calls, stakeholder meetings) to improve the services provided at the Medical Center and our Community Based Outpatient Clinics.

We are listening! We are responding! Your comments are making a difference!

AS A RESULT OF YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We have altered interdisciplinary review processes to improve care transitions from hospital to home
- We have increased outreach efforts to identify eligible Veterans that may not be utilizing the services
- We have strengthened the “No Wrong Door” approach to care
- We have empowered and encouraged all our employees to act as Patients Advocates
Personalized Health Care for LIFE!

VA

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center

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