



VAMC Anchor

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The Secrets That We Keep

by Judith Berger, LICSW; and Tom Antonaccio

Imagine you're alone in a common shower area in the barracks...all of a sudden the lights go out; there's an eerie silence for a fleeting second before a towel is wrapped over your head. You're overpowered, helpless. When it finally ends...there's no one to tell, no one who'll listen...shame and guilt present themselves...you learn to keep it secret...that's just the way it is. That is what's expected.

This may sound like something out of a horror show, but it's not. It's something that some male Veterans painfully recall on a regular basis; they are victims of Military Sexual Trauma, or MST.

MST is a term that the VA uses to refer to sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that occurred while a Vet was in the military. Although usually thought of as a women's issue, MST affects men and women. Given the disproportionate ratio of men to women in the military, the number of men being treated for MST in the VA system is nearly equal to the number of women being treated for MST. Nevertheless, only 1% of males report MST compared to 20% of females. More shockingly, perhaps, is that men who have experienced MST have a 65% probability of developing PTSD in contrast to 38.8% probability for those having experienced combat trauma (Kessler et al., 1995)!

MST is—for men as for women—a silent trauma. From disturbing memories, to feelings of depression and numbness, to panic disorders, to suicide ideation, to somatic complaints—MST manifests itself in many ways. What may not be as obvious, is that MST often manifests itself in a reluctance to take certain exams, such as a colonoscopy or a dental exam. This reluctance may easily be misinterpreted as non-compliance.

While there are no easy answers, one thing we all can do is be aware of the signs—more importantly—to keep an open mind. Counseling for mental health conditions related to MST is provided at the VA free of charge, regardless of the Veteran's military discharge. Each VA facility has an MST Coordinator to ensure that all Veterans reporting MST have access to treatment as well as to provide education to staff and Veterans about MST and MST-related issues. If you have any questions, please contact me, Judith Berger, LICSW, PVAMC's Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator, at ext. 2731.



March 2010

Allison Calderon (Fiscal)
Prudence Venner (Human Resources)
Edward Broderick (OI & T)
Cheryl Adams (Medical Service)
Louis Cerbo (MHBSS)
Scott Rogers (Nursing)
Tracy Bardsley (Nursing)
Susan Rochford (Nursing)
Donna Berube (Nursing)
Cheryl Rinaldi (Nursing)
Joseph Medeiros (Nutrition/Food Svc)
Wesley Archambault (Pathology & Lab)
Marion Beaudoin (Pathology & Lab)
Ronald Eldridge (Pathology & Lab)
Marilyn Marrero (Pathology & Lab)
Mark Nickels (Primary Care)
Dawn Mello (Research)



Giving Back to the Community

by Tony D'Eramo

Student Nurse Deborah McKenna with Veteran Roger Tortolani at the "Y"

Outreach comes in all shapes and sizes—a booth at a community college, a visit to a senior citizens center...But sometimes outreach can take on a life of its own. A few months ago, while I was working out at the Cranston YMCA, I noticed virtually no regularly-occurring health screening events being offered. I approached the manager and was gladly invited to initiate a hypertension screening program. Since screening is an easy and important part of hypertension management, we set up a bi-monthly

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Director's Spotlight

"How We Work Together and the Importance of Understanding One Another"

Sometimes we become so busy in what we do that we don't have a chance to stop, look, and see the big picture. We tend to get too wrapped up in the day-to-day affairs of our Service, our department, our clinic. That's what I like about our annual All Services Fair—it helps everyone gain a better perspective on how each of us contributes to our mission of taking care of Veterans.

As I looked at the exhibits, studied the various posters, and even tried my hand at some of the games, I was energized by the level of enthusiasm with which each representative explained his or her area's mission and responsibilities. It was obvious that quite a bit of thought and attention went into preparing for the fair. There was a lot of sharing and learning, and I overheard several people comment about how much they didn't know about a particular department or service. I call that success.

Many of you may not be aware of the role our LEAD program candidates played in orchestrating this fun-filled event. They came up with the theme for this year's fair ("How We Work Together and the Importance of Understanding One Another") and collaborated with representatives from each of the services. This combined effort no doubt gave us all a better appreciation of the contributions each service, each department, each person make toward the cause of patient care.

I think you'll agree that whether you're a VA doctor, nurse, administrator, or housekeeper, we all have the same goal. Healthcare doesn't occur in a vacuum. It takes a village to raise a child; similarly, it takes the combined effort of an entire hospital staff to provide the best care anywhere to our nation's Veterans.

Thank you again for all that you do and for making this event such a huge success!

WILLIAM BURNEY
Acting Medical Center Director

Brown Students Skills Fair



"Use the alcohol wipe...Let it dry because you don't want it to burn... Now, inject the needle into the muscle...carefully," so said Nancy Lancaster, holding an alcohol pad in one hand and an orange in the other. This past Friday, about 100 third-year Brown University medical students gathered around providers here at PVAMC, holding oranges, syringes, and other instruments. The event was part of their medical simulation training prior to being on the inpatient wards beginning this week. According to Dr. Amos Charles, PVAMC's Residency Program and Medicine Clerkship Site Director, "this skills fair for third-year students is pretty unique--something we like to do before the students go out on to the inpatient wards..." For many of the students present, it was their first exposure to key skills such as a lumbar puncture, an injection, a blood draw, suturing, and an IV insertion.

About 35% of these students will rotate through the VA for an elective or core rotation as part of their training. This annual fair has been on-going for the past 20+ years, said Dr. Charles. A Residents Skills Fair is scheduled for June.



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SCC Infectious Disease

Specialty Clinic Corner

1. Overview: Infectious Disease is a branch of medicine devoted to a multiplicity of communicable diseases, which are caused by microorganisms and transmitted through people, animals, surfaces, foods or air. Communicable diseases rely on fluid exchange, contaminated substances, or close contact to travel from an infected carrier to a healthy individual.

The Outpatient Infectious Disease Clinic provides our Veterans with care for their diseases such as HIV/AIDS, other STD's (sexually transmitted diseases); viral infections such as influenza; lyme and parasites; and bacterial infections. The Clinic physicians also provide expertise in investigating whether a condition is caused by an infectious agent. There are currently 2 physicians and support from both Health Technicians and Medical Support Assistants within the clinic. The Chief of Infectious Disease chairs the Hospital Infection Control Committee.

2. Treatment Services:

a. The initial consultation to initiate the ordering of appropriate diagnostic tests to determine the disease process manifested by the patient.

b. The prescribing of the correct treatment modality which will provide support and relieve the symptoms as exhibited.

3. Workload: The Infectious Disease Clinic had 472 visits during FY 09.

4. Patient Education: The Physicians provide education and guidance to patients and families, not only for the disease processes for which they are being treated, but also for preventive measures that may help prevent the transmission to other family members or contacts. We can all reduce exposure with preventive measures such as avoiding risky behaviors, getting vaccinated, frequent hand washing, proper disposal of waste, etc.

5. Did you know? The study of a communicable disease may intersect with issues of sewage systems, weather systems vaccinations, available medical care, public education, travel restrictions, water purity, and social interactions.

Prepared by Jackie Horner, RN, MA, BC; reviewed/edited by Melissa Gaitanis, MD

"YMCA" (continued from page 1)

date and time during peak senior-member activities. Since March, over 80 members have participated, including some local Veterans.

I never expected this tiny outreach effort to continue to pay forward as it has—it's now an opportunity to mentor our students from the Rhode Island College School of Nursing and to team-up with them in doing something positive for the community. This fall, we hope to expand the number of students who participate. The "Y" is hoping for further volunteer commitments from VA providers for wellness education on topics such as nutrition, exercise, and stress management.

I know that many of us here at PVAMC volunteer time for a variety of great causes. In doing so, we demonstrate community stewardship, which is an important strategic goal within the VHA. But more than that, volunteering lends itself to reflection and lessons to be learned—one being that in the end, it's not the "stuff" or our savings account but kindness, compassion, and gratitude that truly matters.

(Tony D'eramo is part of the VA Nursing Academy faculty here at the Medical Center)



The Case of the Haunted House

Due to the large number of correct submissions, winners of April's **Intrepid Detective** were selected via a drawing. April's winners were John Tweedley, Dawn Pedchenko, Ann-Marie Tripodi, Colleen Sionni, Cara Gregory, and Steve Boucher. Each will receive 2 free movie passes.



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Staff in the News

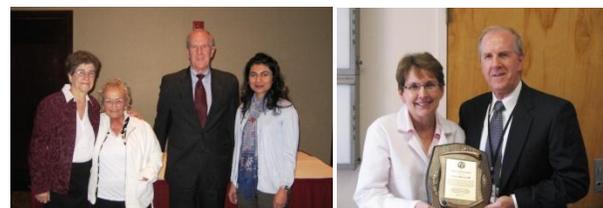
Woman Physician of the Year

Congratulations to **Sharon Rounds, MD**, Chief, Medical Service, for her selection as 2010 Woman Physician of the Year by RI Women's Medical Association. Back row: Dr. Michael Goldstein; Laura Mercer, NP; Dr. Hank Wu; John Lyman, Paula Termine, NP; Dr. Al Erickson; Middle Row: Dr. Amos Charles; Janet Burnell, Borin Pond; Dr. Soneath Pond; **Dr. Sharon Rounds**; Dr. Wilfredo Curioso; Sue Ryan, NP; Dr. Patricia Cristofaro; Anne Baxter, NP; Dr. Martin Weinstock; Front Row: Dr. Stephen Mernoff; Dr. Gaurav Choudhary; Dr. Tanya Ali; Dr. Melissa Gaitanis; Irene Watson, NP; Heather Oberg, and Dr. Nancy Burnside.



Also in the news: (Clockwise from top left) Congratulations to Disabled American Veterans 2009 Award Recipients **Cheryl Klein** (Support); **Dora Scione** (Volunteer); **Afreen Siddiqui, MD** (Physician); and **Laura Mercer, NP** (Nurse); **Tony Montecalvo, RN**; **Susan Zaykowski, RN**; **Denise Tynell, RN**; **Maribel Arguinzi, RN**; **Maria Trice, RN**; and **Deborah Clickner, NE-BC**—posing in front of their winning exhibit for Nurses Week; “Men in Khakis”—Sensory Rehab’s **Wilfred Pelland**; **Tom Wheeler, MMSC, PT**; **James Navilliat, PT**; and **Jerome Rao, DPT**. Also, congratulations to **Christine Fitzgerald**, Research Compliance Officer, for recently passing the Certification Examination for Institutional Review Board (IRB) Professionals, and to **Martin Weinstock, MD, PhD**, Chief of Dermatology, for his selection as the 2010 recipient of an American Skin Association Achievement Award for his important contributions to the understanding of Skin Cancer/Melanoma.

Correction from last month: **Leslie Gagnon, RN**, recently completed 30 years of service and not 25 years, as was original reported.



Got Story Ideas?

Please submit your ideas to
Thomas.Antonaccio@va.gov.

Director's Blog



Need Enrollment Info?

Please call (401) 273-7100, ext. 3300