

Women Warriors Newsletter

Women Veterans Program
Providence VA Medical
Center

She Joined on a Dare

One ordinary day during a lunch break at her job at Providence City Hall in 1942, Charlotte Kwasha signed on the dotted line. Two weeks later—not knowing whether our country was really ready for women to serve—she found herself



heading to Iowa for Army basic training. "I couldn't get out of it, so off I went...My father gave me great advice as I boarded the train: 'No matter what you do, Charlotte,' he said, 'always keep your chin up and your head held high.'"

That she did. Ms. Kwasha vividly recalls her three years as a female women's auxiliary member. "As soon as I arrived (in Iowa), I began scrubbing the dorms, pulling K.P. (kitchen police) duty, and marching in the bitter cold. Food was not very good. Field meals consisted of mostly Spam, bully beef, and canned fruit. Most everything else was powdered." One time while performing K.P. duties, she received a visitor. "This very tall lady entered the mess hall with two female officers. She asked me what I was doing, and I told her I was watching the stove...When she asked me why I was watching the stove, I replied: so it doesn't run away!" The tall lady laughed and smiled and invited Ms. Kwasha—a young Private—to sit with them for a cup of coffee. She politely declined because it was not appropriate for a Private to sit and have coffee during K.P. duty—especially with two officers. "The tall lady insisted," Ms. Kwasha continues, "and introduced herself by saying: 'I'm the President's wife... I'm Eleanor Roosevelt!' She was so gracious; it was a wonderful honor to have coffee with the First Lady...one of my best memories." (Continued on page 4)



Summer/Fall 2010



Women's Health Care Team

Dr. Dawna Blake, Women's
Health Care Director

Pilar Capili, RN, Clinic
Coordinator

Beth Grady, LCSW, Women
Veterans Program Manager

Dr Jon Bas, Provider

Karen Chase, NP, Provider

Dr. Joan Karl, Provider

Dr. Neha Pathak, Provider

Joyce Simon, NP, Provider

Dr. Natalie Mariano, Hyan-
nis CBOC, Provider

Dr. Gregory Nye, New
Bedford CBOC, Provider

Dr. Terri Tamase, Middle-
town CBOC, Provider



DO YOU WORSHIP THE SUN?

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

**REMEMBER
YOUR
PROTECTIVE
GEAR**

**Prevent skin cancer.
Let VA help.**



★ You served, you deserve the best care anywhere. ★

Department of Veterans Affairs | www.va.gov/health | www.patients.va.gov/health | Women Veterans Health Strategy Health Care Group, WCG | 15-327-072010

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, skin cancer is the leading form of cancer in the United States. The two most common types are basal cell and squamous cell cancer. Less common, but more deadly, is melanoma, which forms in darker parts of the skin, such as moles. Nearly 24,000 women are diagnosed with melanoma each year, and 3,000 of those cases are fatal. The rate at which young women develop melanoma has more than doubled in the past 30 years.

Exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun is a risk factor for skin cancer. To reduce exposure, use sunscreen with an SPF 15 or higher, wear clothing to protect exposed skin, cover up with a wide-brimmed hat, wear sunglasses that block UVA and UVB rays, and seek shade, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are strongest. Tanning beds also emit UV radiation and are best avoided.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends clinicians be alert for skin abnormalities when conducting physical examinations for other purposes. Also, if skin changes are noticed, they should be evaluated by a clinician.

While anyone can develop skin cancer, fair-skinned people are at greater risk. Moles that have changed shape, size, or color are of particular concern, as this is often the first sign of melanoma.

References:



New awareness icon from the Skin Cancer Foundation

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/skin

www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/

U.S. Cancer Statistics Working Group. United States Cancer Statistics: 1999-2006 Incidence and Mortality Web-based Report. Atlanta (GA): Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), CDC, and National Cancer Institute (NCI); 2010. Available at: www.cdc.gov/uscs.

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/melanoma/youngwomen0908

www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstf09/skincancer/skincanrs.htm

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/melanoma

FUTURE HAPPENINGS



“Tents to Tea” is an opportunity for you to mingle and meet other women Veterans while in a *Bistro* atmosphere. Our first one was held in July and was a great success! Future dates include: **September 24, 2010 and January 14, 2011**. Our gathering is held at the Providence VAMC classroom 3, 5th floor, from 0900-11:30a.m. Call Beth at 401-273-7100, ext 6191, to tell her you are interested in attending.

TAIJI

Got **STRESS**? Come and have serious fun while learning this ancient art that builds strength, balance, and stamina. Call Peter Gauthier at 401-273-7100 ext 4276. It feels good, and it's **FREE** for Vets!

WARRIOR DRUMMING



The Veteran Resource and Recovery Center is starting up a **DRUMMING** circle for women Veterans. Learn how to make your own drum and feel the power of the beat! Call Denise Fragoza at 401-273-7100, ext 3413, for more info.



Houses for Hope

October 26th from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.



Come and join us for a one mile walk to promote breast cancer awareness. You'll have an opportunity to view creative bird houses made for this event and to make a bird house of your own to represent hope for breast cancer survivors. Call Beth at 401-273-7100, ext 6191.

THE WOMEN VETERAN COPING STUDY

Women Veterans face a unique set of physical and mental health challenges during and after military service. The Coping Study is an IRB approved study. The goal of this study is to gather information on the unique needs and experiences of women Veterans so that treatment approaches can be improved and tailored specifically to women's needs. If you'd like more information on the study, contact Suzannah Creech at 401-273-7100 ext 6245 or suzannah.creech@va.gov.

Numbers to Know; Numbers to Grow

Eligibility & Enrollments
401-457-3300

OEF/OIF Program Manager:
401-273-7100, ext. 6137

Mental Health hotline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Telephone Assistant Program
(TAP) Line
401-457-3336
1-866-590-2976

Homeless Resources
401-273-7100, ext. 3553

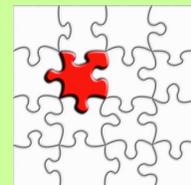
Hotline for Homeless Veterans
1-877-424-3838

State of Rhode Island
Department of Human
Services Division of Veterans
Affairs
401-254-8460

Veterans Benefits
Administration, Women
Veterans Coordinator
401-223-3651

Human services and helping
agencies
2-1-1

VET CENTERS:
Warwick: 401-739-0167
New Bedford: 508-999-6920
Hyannis: 508-778-0124



She Joined on a Dare (con't)

Providence VA Medical Center
830 Chalkstone Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island
02908

Hyannis CBOC
VA Primary Care Center
233 Stevens Street
Hyannis, MA 02601-3766
Phone: (508) 771-3190

Middletown CBOC
One Corporate Place
(West Main Road at
Northgate Road)
Middletown, RI 02842
Phone: (401) 847-6239

New Bedford CBOC
175 Elm Street
New Bedford, Mass 02740

Every path
has its puddle
-English proverb

After completing basic training, Ms. Kwasha's cohort relocated to Fort Sam Houston, Texas and was the first female group at Fort Sam. Although a milestone for women, she considers it at best bittersweet. She relates how she experienced discrimination for the first time—not as a female in the military but as a Jew. Her first assignment was to a service club on post; however, she was quickly informed by the manager that "no Jew was going to serve in my club." In those days, Ms. Kwasha explains, people actually believed that Jews had horns on their heads. One person even asked her why she didn't have horns. She told them that she had surgery to remove them, and the girls actually believed her! "I didn't want to be treated differently than anyone else, and it was important to be accepted." At times, she felt alienated and looked at discharge from the service as a viable option. Her sole reason for repeatedly turning down the opportunity to become an officer was related to being Jewish. "I finally felt safe in San Antonio, and re-training as an officer meant possibly being singled out again because I was Jewish. It wasn't a risk I was ready for." By the end of 1942, the war in the Pacific was heating up, and Ms. Kwasha was sent to New Guinea and the Philippines to support the war effort. During her time overseas, she worked under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. "I actually was present on the harbor when the Japanese formally surrendered. Can you believe it? It all worked out."

In 1946, Ms. Kwasha—now a civilian—became the first female service officer accredited to work here in Providence. She worked hundreds of claims cases until she officially retired at the age of 72. "That's just an age," she says. "I didn't get paid after that, but I continued to volunteer until I was 83." One case in which she worked on for over 8 years resulted in a Veteran receiving a lump sum of \$40,000 in 1990. "I received a gift of dried apricots as a thank you, and I was so proud because justice had been served."

Ms. Kwasha was one of the first Veterans treated when the Providence VAMC first opened its doors. She recalls being treated very well, with a private room and a private bathroom. "All the Veterans would come and visit me, and I believe I was the first female patient at this facility." She has fond memories of the VA and during the recent "Tents to Tea" event, everyone in attendance expressed gratitude to her for helping pave the way for all women Veterans. She has indeed held her head high—not bad for a woman who joined on a dare.

The Providence VA Medical Center is committed to meeting the unique needs of women Veterans by delivering the highest quality health care to each woman, while offering her the privacy, dignity, and sensitivity to gender-specific needs that she deserves. Our full time Women Veterans Program Manager is ready to assist you in getting timely access to the health care you need.

WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

You served, you deserve
★ the best care anywhere.



Beth Grady, LCSW, Women Veteran Program Manager, (401) 273-7100, ext 6191