

# CAVHS COMPASS

Summer 2014

VETERAN FOCUSED NEWS

## VA/Clergy Partnership: Forging New Bonds

The wounds of war can go far beyond physical and mental scars. The emotional turmoil experienced by some Veterans not only keeps them from living a healthy and balanced life, it can also keep them from seeking help from VA. This situation can be even more difficult for Veterans living in rural areas.

Realizing that some Veterans may only start the healing process with support and encouragement from a pastor, preacher, rabbi or other local spiritual leader, Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS) embarked on an ambitious partnership with rural clergy.

According to CAVHS Chaplain Steve Sullivan, the initial goal was simple – educate rural clergy about the many VA services available to assist Veterans with their emotional and mental struggles.

Thus, the local churches would then be better equipped to act as “First-line Responders” for Veterans in crisis. Sullivan was originally contacted by the VA South Central Mental Illness, Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC) about the possibility of combining chaplain and mental health forces to reach rural Veterans in communities across Central Arkansas.

“We have found that many of the rural Veterans in Arkansas feel more comfortable talking about their struggles with a pastor or someone in a local church,” said Sullivan. “With that in mind, we looked for an opportunity to partner with the local faith communities. And with the award of a federal grant, we started the VA/Clergy Partnership for Rural Veterans program in 2009.”

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Rev. Alfred Carroll (right) of Pine Bluff, Ark., and Chaplain Steve Sullivan participate in a “Pew and Couch” working lunch attended by local clergy and mental health professionals as part of the VA/Clergy Partnership in Pine Bluff. (Photo by Jeff Bowen, CAVHS medical photographer)



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## A Message from the Director

### Save every life!

Not possible you say, well how can we know unless we make every effort toward that goal. That is the concept behind our Network Director's goal of eliminating Veteran suicide. It is a very high goal, but without setting your sights on the highest of targets, you may never reach your maximum level of performance.

Even one suicide among the 250,000 Veterans in Arkansas is one too many. We are pushing ourselves every day and reaching out to Veterans across Central Arkansas with a helping hand for those grasping at straws. Sometimes the help comes in the form of a VA Chaplain's visit, other times it can be found through your provider during a routine medical appointment. And sometimes it can take the right person asking the right question before a Veteran is ready to talk and ask for help. It could be as simple as a VA employee asking, "Are you doing okay today?"

Everyone at our Medical Center facilities stands ready to help you with the challenges to your overall health and well-being. There are many services available if you feel like you are in crisis. The national Veterans Crisis Line, <http://veteranscrisisline.net>, is always available at 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1 to talk to someone now) or send a text to 828255. You can call your Primary Care Team to speak with a nurse or use secure messaging via the My HealthVet website. And as always, if it is a life-threatening emergency, please call 911.

The most important step is often the first step. If you find it difficult to handle life's challenges and you are not sure where to turn for help – turn to us. From everyday health care needs to robust mental health care therapies, our dedicated professionals are here to see you through the rough patches and provide you with the tools to meet any challenges you may face in the future. Together we can eliminate Veteran suicides – just take that first step with us.



**Michael R. Winn**  
Medical Center Director

## The Goal: Eliminate Veteran Suicides

Lofty goals come with lofty expectations. During a recent employee town hall meeting, the Veteran Integrated Service Network (VISN) 16 Director, Mrs. Rica Lewis-Payton, challenged the men and women of CAVHS with the goal of eliminating Veteran suicides by 2016.

Across the 10 Medical Centers in the South Central VA Health Care Network, 68 Veterans took their lives in Fiscal Year 2013. Almost half of these Veterans suffered from depression and 45 percent also dealt with PTSD, substance abuse or bipolar disorders. Most of the Veterans, more than 90 percent, were enrolled in the VA, but less than half received mental health care at their local VA medical facility.

Working as a team, Veterans and VA health care providers can meet the challenges facing today's Veterans and plot a course toward better health and well-being. Sometimes it takes the strength and courage of a Warrior to ask for help. Be that Warrior and talk with your provider if you feel that life is pushing you to the breaking point.



## Staff Bring Home UALR Awards

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) Graduate School of Social Work recently selected CAVHS staff for two of their annual awards.

Honored as the social work “Professional of the Year” was Vikki Dahmen-Jones. Jones is the CAVHS internship coordinator for Social Work Service. She has worked as the coordinator for the past 7 years and each fall 14 new social work interns arrive to complete the work experience portion of their Masters programs.



Vikki Dahmen-Jones (left), CAVHS Internship Coordinator for Social Work Service, discusses patient treatment options with Dewayne Sora, a UALR student intern. (Photo by Jeff Bowen, CAVHS medical photographer)

Also recognized during the May awards program was the entire Social Work Service as the “Organization of the Year.” The award was accepted by Sidney Badeaux, Chief of Social Work Service, on behalf of more than 130 CAVHS social workers.

Social workers provide Veteran services ranging from assessment and crisis intervention to discharge planning and case management. If Veterans or their family members have questions or problems, social workers are on-call 24/7 and can often provide the answer or make a referral to the right person for help.

## Sign of the Changing Times

New signs are being installed across CAVHS facilities both inside and out. This is all part of a multi-year program to improve the health care experience for Veterans and visitors to our Little Rock and North Little Rock campuses.

The new way-finding signage being installed in John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital and Eugene J. Towbin Healthcare Center will greatly improve Veteran’s ability to find departments and rooms during visits. The new outside parking and directional signs will be larger, easier to read, and easier to follow as you enter to either campus. As always, we are working to make your visit to any CAVHS facility as easy and stress-free as possible.



(Photo by Jeff Bowen, CAVHS medical photographer)

## New Role – Same Goal

### Helping Veterans Find (and Keep) a Home

By Hans Petersen, VHA Communications

“I’ve been too busy lately to sit around and think about how depressed I am.”

When Sarah Scalia heard that, she knew she had helped a Veteran change his life.

She also realized he had defined her job, that of an occupational therapist, “better than I ever could have dreamed.”

Occupational therapy is a discipline that aims to promote health by enabling people to perform meaningful and purposeful activities. As the largest health care system in the nation, VA is the single largest employer of occupational therapists.

Scalia works within HUD-VASH, a partnership between the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and VA Supported Housing (VASH).

HUD supplies a number of Section 8 housing vouchers designated for Veterans and VASH supplies ongoing case management services to help the Veteran obtain and maintain affordable housing with the voucher.

“As the first Occupational Therapist hired into a VA homeless program, I have had the privilege of a blank canvas on which to paint our services for our Comprehensive Homeless Program here at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System.”

Scalia was asked to help a Veteran who had accumulated so much clutter in his apartment that he was at risk of eviction. He had a long history of depression and alcohol dependence and only had a two-foot wide path from his bed to his chair in the living room.

Her assessment confirmed that his living space was a direct reflection of his depression: decreased self-worth and motivation. He did not want to become homeless again but he felt overwhelmed.

“I assured him his goal was attainable, rolled up my sleeves, put some gloves on and spent three days a week for a month and a half with him.”

Scalia’s assignment includes assessing Veterans going into housing to ensure they are functionally able to reach the goal of maintaining housing long term. So far, she has conducted evaluations on more than 100 Veterans.

She also assists on cases for Veterans who are already in housing, assessing functional knowledge and skills associated with many basic activities of daily living, but mainly budgeting and home management.

**Continued, see “Occupational Therapy” page 6**



VA occupational therapist Sarah Scalia (right) assists Veteran Arthur Carter with life skills like making change or planning weekly medications. VA occupational therapists work with Veterans who suffer from disabling conditions by utilizing treatments that develop, recover, or maintain the Veteran’s activities of daily living. (Photo by Jeff Bowen, CAVHS medical photographer)

# “100” Women Veteran Rally



Above: Lee Quimby (left), a 92-year-old WWII Veteran, poses proudly with Helen McKee, a CAVHS social worker. Sergeant Quimby served in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) from Feb. 15, 1943, until May 1, 1945.



Left: Women Veterans admire the story boards on display at the event. More than 130 people attended this year’s CAVHS Women History Month celebration in Little Rock, Ark.

Lower Left: Members of the Little Rock Air Force Base Honor Guard present the Colors during the opening ceremony.

Below: Iris Pickett, CAVHS social worker, wows rally attendees with a powerful rendition of the National Anthem.



(Photos by Jeff Bowen, CAVHS Medical Photographer)

## Occupational Therapy (continued from page 4)

As she explains, “It’s the nature of the job when developing a new program that the format of services must change and shift according to the needs of the population being served.”

Occupational Therapists use a holistic approach and address activities of daily living, such as dressing, bathing and grooming, as well as more advanced activities such as cooking, shopping, driving, parenting, and returning to work.

They are skilled at assessing performance, analyzing the components of tasks, and helping to improve performance through adapting the way a person is performing the task, the use of equipment, or by adapting the environment.

VA occupational therapists work with individuals who suffer from a mentally, physically, developmentally or emotionally disabling condition by utilizing treatments that develop, recover, or maintain clients’ activities of daily living. They work with thousands of Veterans of all ages.

Remembering the Veteran with the clutter, Scalia noted that, “Once we got his apartment cleaned out, I began teaching him how to maintain the cleanliness we had achieved. His HUD-VASH social worker reported that his depression symptoms significantly decreased.

“When he was able to sit on his couch for the first time in over a year he said, ‘Now I could have a friend over. And, I could cook them dinner now that I can use my stove and oven.’

“He continues to live in a safe, clutter-free apartment. He has re-gained employment and his Mental Health Clinic team says our Occupational Therapy assistance helped to make a great difference in the symptoms they had been struggling to address for this Veteran for a long time.”

“I facilitated his engagement in occupation, meaning that I helped him with his problem solving skills, therapeutically challenging his thought processes associated with throwing things away, and teaching him to recognize how and why certain items triggered an increase in his depression symptoms.”

Sarah Scalia is also designing a series of group protocols to improve HUD-VASH Veterans’ skill set associated with maintaining recovery: a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) enhanced with education and experiential activities provided to promote mindfulness of our senses and how sensory processing affects our responses to everyday life.

The other will be a community re-integration group to promote social interaction, independence, and a sense of community among Veterans who are obtaining permanent housing. She will be co-facilitating this group with a HUD-VASH Social Worker.

About her job? “Quite frankly, it’s a beautiful thing! Multiple clinical services working towards the same goals, the goals of the Veteran.”

Since Sarah Scalia’s initiation of this new service, two additional VA Occupational Therapists have joined her in the unique assignment – the second in Boston and the third in Portland, Ore.

April is Occupational Therapy Month, a perfect time to reflect on the work VA does to help Veterans live a full and productive life. To learn more about CAVHS programs and services, visit [www.LittleRock.va.gov](http://www.LittleRock.va.gov) or visit your nearest CAVHS facility.



Sarah Scalia, Occupational Therapist at the Veterans Day Treatment Center. She is the first Occupational Therapist hired specifically to support a VA homeless program. (Photo by Jeff Bowen, CAVHS Medical Photographer)

## Partnership (continued from page 1)

“We started with the local faith community in just one rural area. At first we struggled to get local clergy and mental health providers to come together for the training. We hit on the idea of ‘Pew and Couch’ lunches. Bring together like-minded professionals over a meal to get to know each other and share some stories and ideas on how to help Veterans through their difficulties,” said Sullivan.

And the hard work and long hours on the road are now paying-off for Veterans across Arkansas.

“We have spent the last five years growing the program and we now have relationships built in six rural areas across Arkansas,” said Sullivan. “Our monthly partnership meetings have evolved into ‘hubs’ for a host of Veteran resources to come together, share information, and facilitate help to Veterans.”

Other organizations participating in the partnership now include Department of Defense (DoD) family providers, community mental health providers, workforce partners, non-profits, local Veteran Service Officers, Veterans Service Organizations, and other community groups.

One of the first churches to enter into a partnership with CAVHS was Grace Chapel Pentecostal Church in Russellville, Ark. Senior Pastor William Flynn has been working with Sullivan and participating in the program for more than three years. He sees the program as an excellent tool to help reach some of the Veterans in his area who are struggling with personal issues.

“It gave me a catalyst to work through. That was one of the draws in the beginning. The program brought together all of the key players working together to help Veterans through rough patches,” said Flynn.

“This has helped open my eyes to what mental health brings to the table. I had a negative view of mental health prior to participating in this program. I listened to the mental health professionals because now they are listening to me.”

The program is now expanding to other rural areas in Oklahoma and four other states thanks to the success of this pilot program.

“I’m excited about this program and its expansion throughout the country,” said Sullivan. “What I love about the partnership is that it is not a ‘top-down’ approach. Each community develops a partnership that is unique to its own resources and needs.

“Local communities are often the most important and most neglected resources for reintegration of our returning service members. The VA/Clergy Partnership for Rural Veterans builds community partnerships to help our Veterans and their families come ‘all the way home’ from war,” added Sullivan.

## VA National Salute

**Denver Ezell, a U.S. Army Veteran, receives a visit from two pageant queens during the National Salute to Veteran Patients week at CAVHS.**

Each February during the week of Valentine’s Day, VA Medical Centers across the country hold a week long National Salute for Veteran patients with special activities. Local celebrities, Veteran Service Organizations, Elected Officials, other community groups and individuals visit patients throughout this special week as an expression of recognition and thanks for their service to our Nation.

In 2013, hundreds of Volunteers donated their time and contributed more than 32,000 volunteer hours in support to Veterans at CAVHS Medical facilities across Arkansas.

If you would like to volunteer, contact Voluntary Service at 501-257-3288.



(Photo by Jeff Bowen, CAVHS Medical Photographer)

# Events to Keep You in the Know

## July

- July is UV Safety and Eye Injury Prevention Month
- July 4 is Independence Day
- July 26 is Americans with Disabilities Act Day

## August

- August is National Immunization Awareness and Cataract Awareness Month
- Aug. 1-7 is National Minority Donor Awareness Week
- Aug. 3-9 is International Assistance Dog Week
- Aug. 10-16 is National Health Center Week

## September

- September is Ovarian and Prostate Cancer Awareness Month
- Sept. 1 is Labor Day
- Sept. 8-14 is National Suicide Prevention Week
- Sept. 28 is Gold Star Mother's Day



## CAVHS & Local Events

- Aug. 26: Women's Equality Day event (NLR)
- Sept. 26: Former POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony (NLR)
- Nov. 5-7: Homeless Veteran "Stand Down" (NLR)

# CAVHS Contact Information

### CAVHS and VA Contact Numbers

John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital, Little Rock	501-257-1000
Eugene J. Towbin VA Medical Center, North Little Rock	501-257-1000
Conway Community-Based Outpatient Clinic	501-548-0500
El Dorado Community-Based Outpatient Clinic	870-881-4488
Hot Springs Community-Based Outpatient Clinic	501-520-6250
Mena Community-Based Outpatient Clinic	479-394-4800
Mountain Home Community-Based Outpatient Clinic	870-424-4109
Pine Bluff Community-Based Outpatient Clinic	870-541-9300
Russellville Community-Based Outpatient Clinic	479-880-5100
Searcy Community-Based Outpatient Clinic	501-207-4700
Pharmacy Refills/Helpline	1-888-492-7845
VA Eligibility & Enrollment	1-800-224-8387
Assistance for Returning Troops from Iraq/Afghanistan	501-257-6706
For an Appointment in the OEF/OIF Post-Deployment Clinic	501-257-3984
Little Rock VA Regional Office	1-800-827-1000
Little Rock VA National Cemetery	501-324-6401
Veterans Day Treatment Center, Downtown Little Rock	501-244-1900

### National Hotline Numbers

Veterans Crisis Line	1-800-273-8255
Caregiver Support Hotline	1-855-260-3274
Hotline for Homeless Veterans	1-877-4AID-VET