

Improving Access and T I M E L I N E S S of Care

JAMES E. VAN ZANDT



2015 Annual Report to Stakeholders



William Mills, Director, congratulates Altoona City Mayor, Matthew Pacifico for accepting the VA Mayor's Challenge to End Homelessness Among Veterans.

Dear Stakeholder:

In Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15), I had the pleasure of speaking with many of you personally through Town Hall meetings, listening sessions, Summer of Service Open House, and many other events designed to bring your views into focus. Timely access to health care was perhaps the most important thing on all of our minds – with good reason. No person who has defended our Nation and fought for freedom in our world should have to wait to receive the health care that he or she deserves.

In this annual report for FY15, you will learn how we are improving access to health care for nearly 25,000 Veterans in our 14 county service area. Some of these include: how telehealth and virtual care are improving access, saving money and bringing care closer to Veterans; new specialists hired to improve access to specialty services; and outreach and enrollment efforts which continue to reach new Veterans.

I am confident that you will continue to see VA health care evolving to meet the needs of America's Heroes. I am grateful to staff, volunteers, Veteran Service Organizations, and other community stakeholders who support the efforts of VA to provide the best quality health care to these Heroes.

Thank you for all that you do to serve Veterans.

William Mills
Director

Virtual Care reached
41.53%
of our enrolled Veterans

99.09%
of appointments were completed
within 30 days
in September 2015

Average wait time for appointments:
2.67 days Primary Care
4.88 days Specialty Care
1.7 days Mental Health

2,663
new patients enrolled for health care

65
enrollment outreaches, yielding
472
new patient applications

VOICES OF VETERANS

JAMES E. VAN ZANDT



“Kristen Williams is an incredible medical professional. During my life, I have been in the care of many outstanding physicians. Kristen is the best.”

“We love the new State College facility. It exceeded all expectations.”

“The treatment and attention by every single person interacted with has been simply great. Every person in every department, even those you pass in the hallway have been upbeat, kind and positive. Every appointment I have had has been achieved on time and with minimum of wasted time once in a specific department. What a refreshing experience it is going to the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center in Altoona, PA.”

“Checked in with Hollie Boyles, she gave me a warm welcome with a friendly smile.”

“I always look forward to my sessions with Dr. Cash because of his awareness to my needs, his genuine empathy, and his knowledge of his job.”



Our partnership with the Department of Defense offers Post Deployment Health Reassessment Events designed to enroll returning service members immediately for VA health care.

The VA Outpatient Clinic in State College moved to a new location at 2581 Clyde Avenue opening at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, March 3. The new location near the Nittany Mall doubled



the space of the former clinic. The clinic serves about 4,000 Veterans from State College and surrounding counties. The clinic offers primary care and some specialty care services. The move allowed additional specialty care services such as audiology, to be provided in the clinic. There will also be space available for specialty services such as mental health, nutrition and dermatology to be offered through telehealth.

IMPROVING ACCESS WITH A NEW VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC, NEW SPECIALTY CARE STAFF...

Specialty Care Access Improved

In FY15 we hired five new specialists to provide additional access to health care for Veterans. Access to specialty care services has improved greatly as a result of the additional staff. In September 2015, the average wait time for completed appointments for specialty care was **only 4.88 days**, compared to 5.63 days in that same period in 2014.



Dr. Samuel Magee
Surgeon

Joined August 2015
Procedure Clinic
"It is an honor to care for the Veterans to whom we owe such a large debt. Veterans are the most appreciative and friendly patients that I have ever treated. We all are striving to improve the quality and accessibility of their healthcare."

Crystal Causer
Audiologist

Joined September 2015
Audiologist for DuBois and State College Outpatient Clinics
"Providing audiology services to Veterans is a way that I know I can help improve the quality of everyday life for someone who risked everything to improve the quality of my life."

Dr. Hiba Beshir
Gastroenterologist

Joined July 2015
Additional staff for colonoscopy, EGD and GI clinic
"Being able to work with Veterans is very rewarding because I know they have all sacrificed part of their lives for our Nation and it is an honor to serve them in return."

Dr. Raj Kansal
Urologist

Joined June 2015
Replaced previous staff in Urology
"I see a Veteran with a smiling face and strive to see the same smiling face before they leave the exam room."

Dr. Veronica Wolf
Optometrist

Dr. Veronica Wolf started as a full time staff Optometrist in June 2015. She holds clinics in both State College and DuBois VA Outpatient Clinics. She holds a Doctor of Optometry from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in Philadelphia and completed a Primary Care and Low Vision Rehabilitation Residency at the VA Connecticut Health-care System in 1999.

Dr. Wolf says, "Providing eye care to our Veterans has been the most rewarding and fulfilling experience of my career. Each Veteran has given all during their service and that fuels my energy and passion to help them see better, and to help them take an active role in improving their general health."

“I will take this in a heartbeat over traveling all day for a one hour appointment.”

...AND INCREASED USE OF TELEHEALTH

Expansion of Telehealth

Miles Dunklebarger is a Vietnam Veteran from Altoona. He has been a patient at the Altoona VAMC for 20 years and just started seeing one of his doctors through telehealth two months ago.

“I used to have to take the bus to Pittsburgh for this treatment, and it would take all day for one appointment. Now, I just come here and get to talk to my doctor on telehealth. It’s a win-win situation,” he says.

Dunklebarger sees Dr. Depp-Hutchinson, a primary care physician in DuBois who specializes in the kind of treatment he needs to maintain his health.

Altoona VAMC added seven new Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) programs in 2015 including: Heart healthy group, Veterans Justice Outreach, Hepatitis C, Primary Care-Mental

Health Integration, Primary Care, Rheumatology and Stem Cell. These were added to other services such as physical therapy, behavioral health, nutrition and *MOVE!*

CVT is improving access to many services that were previously unavailable in rural areas and Veterans are taking advantage of this opportunity to receive care within their own communities.

“This saves us Vets a lot of travel time and it’s got to be saving VA a lot of bucks,” says Dunklebarger.

The percentage of our patients who are utilizing Virtual Care rose from 31.8% in FY14 to

41.53% in FY15

Virtual care includes Telehealth, Home Telehealth, Clinical Video Telehealth, Store and Forward Telehealth, eConsults, and Secure Messaging

Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy provided more than 60% of their care to patients at VA Outpatient clinics through Clinical Video Telehealth, seeing

over **800 patients**

and saving over **71,000 miles** of travel for staff and Veterans

Tele-retinal and Tele-dermatology clinics are offered at **all** sites



Vietnam Veteran, Miles Dunklebarger talks with Dr. Depp-Hutchinson via Clinical Video Telehealth.

THE VETERAN'S EXPERIENCE OF QUALITY HEALTH CARE IS OUR MEASURE

Since 2004, the American Customer Satisfaction Index has shown that Veterans give VA health care higher ratings than patients at most private hospitals.

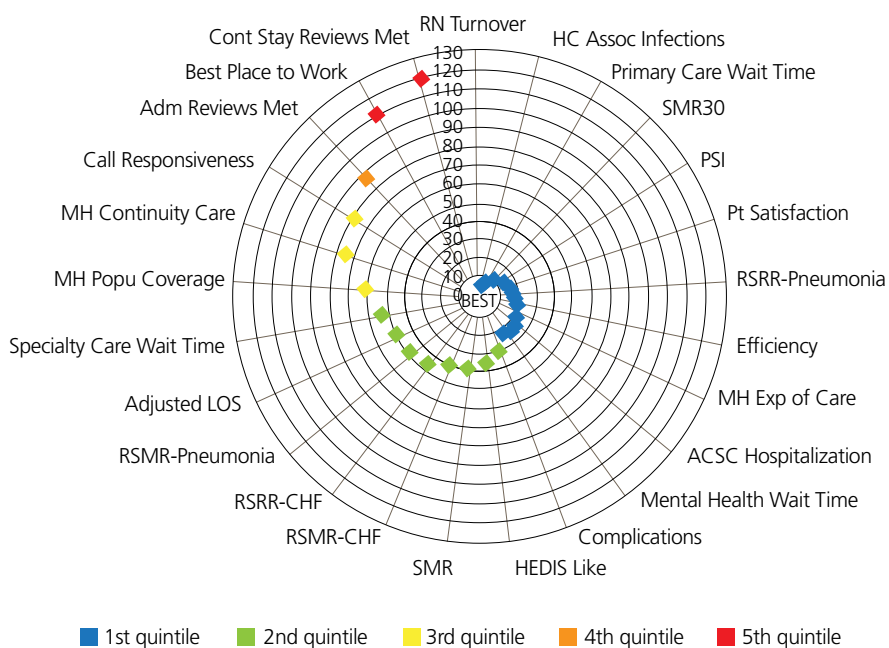
“The key to improving the Veterans’ experience of VA is a customer-service approach. I call it the Platinum Rule. You’ve heard the Golden Rule – Treat others as you want to be treated. The Platinum Rule is – Treat others as THEY want to be treated. Their perspective is what counts.”

Secretary Robert McDonald, Remarks to the American Legion’s 97th Annual Convention, Baltimore, MD September 1, 2015

“The prescription services via Altoona Hotline = Home Run Hitters.”

Altoona VAMC - 5-Star in Quality

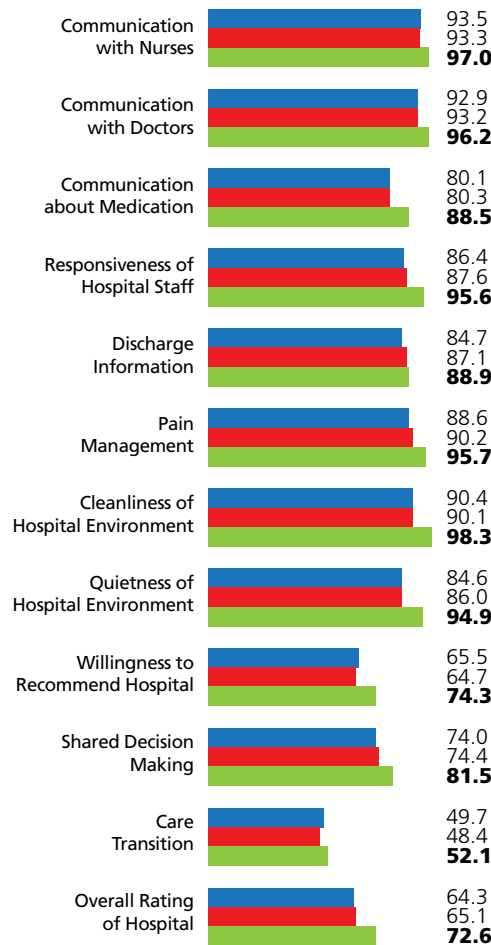
FY 2015Q3 (Metric)



“I want to thank the Women Veterans program so much for being here for me. Thank you also to Amy Benson in prosthetics. I got the help I needed.”

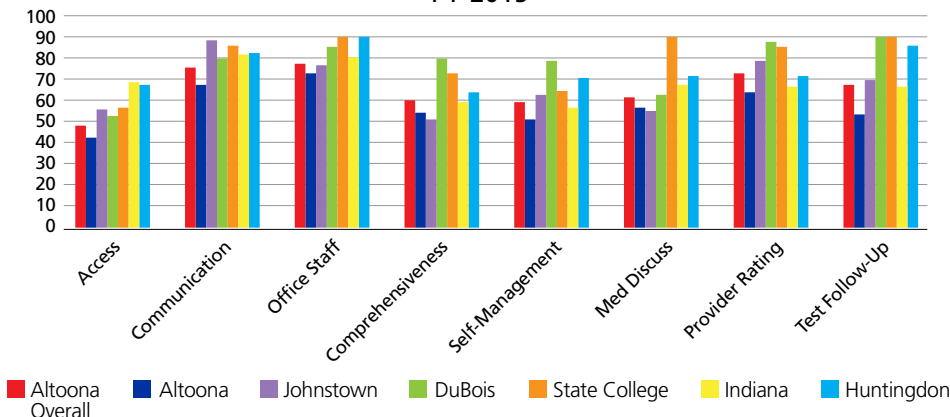
Inpatient Satisfaction

FY 2015



Outpatient Satisfaction

FY 2015



AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

Altoona VAMC Receives Blair County Business Hall of Fame Award

The James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center was inducted in the Blair County Business Hall of Fame on October 20, 2014. The Blair County Chamber of Commerce has hosted a Business Hall of Fame dinner every year for 25 years, and typically three to four local organizations are inducted. In 2014, the VAMC was inducted, along with a nursing home, a hotel and a general contractor. As part of the application package, this information was submitted:

When the VA Hospital opened in 1950 there were 250 employees who were charged with the care and treatment of 200 Veterans in inpatient beds. Now, just two and half times that number of employees provide a vast array of advanced medical care to almost 25,000 Veterans in multiple settings ranging from primary care to behavioral health, radiology, physical therapy, acute and long term care residential units and much more. The changes that have taken place in health care in the last 64 years, coupled with the complex needs of Veterans (who statistically have more chronic and severe physical and mental health needs) have allowed the evolution of the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center from a hospital to a complex system of medical care for Veterans. While our annual budget allocations from Congress have fluctuated over the past 64 years, we have never had a layoff of employees. Several generations of employees have retired with generous pensions and benefits. With the support of elected officials, the community, the American Federation of Government Employees

(AFGE) union, and all the staff, the medical center has become one of Blair County's most significant employers and community resources.

The VAMC is a source for above-average salaries, union supported jobs, and significant local tax revenues. Our annual payroll for the employees who work in the Altoona (Blair County) medical center is \$38.5 million, excluding benefits. Employees are offered a full benefits package including health insurance, pension and thrift savings plans, flexible spending accounts, ample vacation and sick leave, tuition reimbursement, an employee association, child care center and child care subsidies, student loan repayment program, wellness initiatives, and much more. The AFGE offers union support to all eligible employees. The benefits of union membership include representation in individual or group grievances, oversight of working conditions for all employees, life insurance programs, vision coverage and more. The union is an active partner with management on all issues that affect employees.

Mr. Richard Hoffman, Senior Industrial Hygienist, Veterans Health Administration (second from right) presents the Top 25 in Environmental Excellence Award to Director William Mills. Glen Holsinger (left) and Timothy Blackburn (second from left) represent the VAMC's Green Environmental Management Service.



Director William Mills and AFGE Local 1862 President, Andrew Scherzinger, share the Blair County Chamber of Commerce Hall of Fame Award

Altoona VAMC Achieves Excellence in Environmental Stewardship

The James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center, the first VA medical center ever to win the Top 25 Award, has for the second year in a row, won a TOP 25 Award from Practice Greenhealth as well as a Top Ten Circle of Excellence for water conservation. Practice Greenhealth is the nation's leading health care community that empowers its members to increase their efficiencies and environmental stewardship while improving patient safety and care through tools, best practices and knowledge. The TOP 25 Award is the highest Environmental Excellence Award given by Practice Greenhealth each year to honor environmental achievements in the health care sector.

The award recognizes the 25 health care facilities across the nation that exemplify the best of the best in environmental excellence and are setting the highest standards for environmental practices in health care.

VA EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS ARE COMMITTED TO

In 2015 we continued to offer the employee Star of the Month Award program for employees who performed above and beyond in serving Veterans. Awards were given to employees who offered exemplary customer service which had a direct impact on the patient; performed special or heroic acts; initiated improved work processes which resulted in excellence in the way we serve Veterans; or who performed volunteer work linked to VA which represented VA in an exemplary way.

October – CAROL RILEY, Housekeeping

November – WENDY LAFFERTY, RN, Yellow Team

December – JANET MILLS, Medical Support Assistant/State College VA Outpatient Clinic

January – YVONNE LUCIANO, Medical Support Assistant, Acute Care

February – BETH COLEMAN, RT(R), CT, Radiology Technologist

March – ANITA WRAY, LPN, Community Living Center

April – AMY DETTERLINE, Voluntary Services Program Assistant

May – LAURIE WAITE, MSW, LSW, PACT Red Team, Social Worker, VIST Coordinator (Blind Rehab Specialist)

June – KATHLEEN MILLER, LCSW, Suicide Prevention Coordinator

July – BONNIE CLARK, LCSW, Veterans Justice Outreach

August – DANIEL MOYER, Clerk, Home Based Primary Care

September – JENNIFER HARKINS MT, (ASCP) Medical Technologist, Pathology/Laboratory



Volunteer, Don Burchalewski, is given an award for over 21,000 volunteer hours at the annual Volunteer Appreciation event. Don has been at the VAMC for 22 years and volunteers four to five days a week in the pharmacy.



William Mills, Director, and Joan Perove, Associate Director of Patient Care Services (third from right), celebrate National Nurses' Day with the Secretary's Award for Nurse recipients Evonne DeBernardis, RN, Vicki McMonigal, RN and Brenda Seymore, LPN.



Dr. Asif Ali, Chief, Geriatrics and Extended Care, gives a presentation on India, his home country, in honor of Asian and Pacific Islander History month.

VETERANS AND VALUES

IntegratedEthics

VA has recognized the need to establish a national, standardized, comprehensive, systematic, integrated approach to ethics in health care –and IntegratedEthics was designed to meet that need.

A central tenet of the IntegratedEthics model is that ethics is integral to quality. Thus, health care ethics and health care quality cannot be separated.

All staff participated in conversations about ethics and values during FY15 through the Value of the Quarter initiative, which seeks to incorporate IntegratedEthics into the everyday work of all employees. Values discussed included Commitment, Excellence, Advocacy and Trust. Employees were encouraged to examine how these values were applied in their own work unit.



Veteran and resident of the Community Living Center, William Koontz, receives a rose as part of the annual POW/MIA ceremony with assistance from Jean Marie Walter, Recreation Therapist.



A group of VA employees, families and pets walked in the Veterans Day Parade in Altoona.



Voluntary Services

401
volunteers

32,994
volunteer hours

\$299,526.52
donations

IMPROVING TO SERVE VETERANS



710
total employees

40 CLC; 11 Medical
operating beds

224,651
total outpatient visits

25,814
Veterans served (uniques)

1,175
Women Veterans served

3,876
OEF/OIF/OND Veterans served

\$140,776,000
total operating budget

**Compensation and Pension
(C&P) Exam Program**
through September 2015

within 29
the average number of days
to process C&P exams

Transition and Care Management

FY 2015

Staff managed
203 OEF/OIF Veterans of which
55 were seriously injured Veterans

Staff managed
145 OEF/OIF Polytrauma Veterans

Staff completed over **90%** of all
case management screenings for new Veterans
requesting care in Altoona, **surpassing**
the 85% benchmark.

Average Wait Time

■ SEPTEMBER 2014
■ SEPTEMBER 2015

Completed Appointments



30 Days or Less



Average Wait Time in Days

■ SEPTEMBER 2014
■ SEPTEMBER 2015

Primary Care
Average Wait Time



Specialty Care
Average Wait Time



Mental Health
Average Wait Time



Homeless Veterans Program

FY 2015

- **261** homeless Veterans were assessed during **961** encounters
12 females are in the HCHV Program
- HOMELESS HOTLINE:
49 calls for homeless/near homeless Veterans
1 of the 49 calls was a female Veteran
- HOMELESS CLINICAL SCREEN
47 homeless/near homeless Veterans were referred to the program by clinical providers
5 of the 47 calls were female Veterans
- RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT
12 Veterans were transferred from transitional housing to non-VA independent housing
25 Veterans were transferred from transitional housing to HUD VASH housing
- Housing Specialist traveled **15,283 miles** in FY 15 assisting and transporting Veterans to housing appointments

The new behavioral health building provides an open and welcoming environment for Veterans



Congressman Bill Shuster (seventh from left), Blair County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, Joe Hurd, (second from left) and Dr. Angela Keen, VISN 4 Behavioral Health Executive (sixth from left), joined VAMC leadership, Veterans and staff in breaking ground on the Behavioral Health Building in 2014.



New Behavioral Health Building and Staff Poised to Serve Veterans for the Next Two Decades

Project cost: \$7,805,702.10
Construction start date: 7/7/2014
Move in date: 11/19/2015
Square footage: 23,463 SF
Architect: Harrell Design Group, PC
Contractor: Altamar Enterprises Inc.



Psychiatrists, psychologists, and therapists treated over 4,579 patients with 29,961 appointments in FY15. Veterans received care for issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders. There are more than 40 employees in the service and several more being recruited. Demand for behavioral health services is expected to grow by 40% over the next twenty years.

“We have been working on this project for several years,” said William Mills, Director of the VAMC. “Bringing our behavioral health service right next to the main entrance is a step toward a major initiative in VA, which is Primary Care/Mental Health integration. A Veteran’s mental health treatment is equally as important as his or her physical health care needs. We believe that integrating all health care is key to a patient’s overall health and well-being.”

2015 ANNUAL REPORT TO STAKEHOLDERS

JAMES E. VAN ZANDT



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VA OUTPATIENT CLINICS

DuBois, Huntingdon, Indiana, Johnstown, State College



CARLA ACRE SIVEK, MSW
Interim Network
Director



WILLIAM H. MILLS, SES
Director



CHARLES T. BECKER,
MBA, CPA, CGFM
Associate Director



SANTHA KURIAN, MD
Chief of Staff



JOAN M. PEROVE, RN
Associate Director for
Patient/Nursing Services