

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

*James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center – Altoona*

# WHAT MATTERS

James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center — 2017 ANNUAL REPORT TO STAKEHOLDERS



# Dear Stakeholder —

# A

As the Director of the James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center, I am focused on what matters to Veterans, and on investing our resources to provide the kind of quality care and patient experience which makes Veterans continue to choose VA.



It matters that **26,457** Veterans chose us as their health care provider in FY17. It matters that **788** employees (221 who are Veterans) have committed their life's work to serving Veterans. It matters that **313** volunteers and **\$237,612** in local donations in FY17 were dedicated to making sure Veterans received what they deserve. It matters that we can offer quality, family-sustaining careers, and that much of our annual operating budget of **\$112,400,000** is invested in employees and businesses in this rural community.

In this FY17 annual report, you will read about how we have committed to making VA the right choice for Veteran health care, and how we have laid the groundwork to assure that Veterans have the services they need in FY18, and well into the future. I am grateful for the leadership offered to this VAMC in FY17 by both Charles Thilges, who served as Acting Director from January through September; and Dr. Ali Sonel, who served as our Acting Chief of Staff from August until the end of December. The guidance and leadership they provided to Altoona, during a time of transition, is invaluable and they both offered vision and action that allows us to bring new services to the Veterans in Altoona.

In FY18, Altoona and Pittsburgh VA leadership and clinical staff will continue working together to build on our strengths, and expand the services we offer closer to home. Some of the services that are expanding here in Altoona include:

- Increasing the use of Medical Unit 4 — Acute Care
- Wound Care
- Gastro-Intestinal services
- Allergy injections
- IV Infusion — Chemotherapy
- Cardiology — CHF
- Podiatry services in primary care
- Neurology
- Physical Therapy — Telehealth

Whether you are a Veteran, an employee, or a supporter of VA health care, please accept my sincerest gratitude for doing what matters for Veterans. It is because of you that we are growing stronger.

Kind Regards,  
Sigrid D. Andrew

JAMES E. VAN ZANDT VA MEDICAL CENTER - ALTOONA

TOTAL EMPLOYEES

**788**

Employees who are Veterans **221** / Nurses **172** / Physicians **22**

UNIQUE PATIENT TOTAL

**26,457**

Male **25,213** / Female **1,244**

OPERATING BEDS

**51**

OUTPATIENT VISITS

**236,550**

ADMISSIONS (including observation)

**222**

TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET

**\$112,400,000**

VIRTUAL CARE

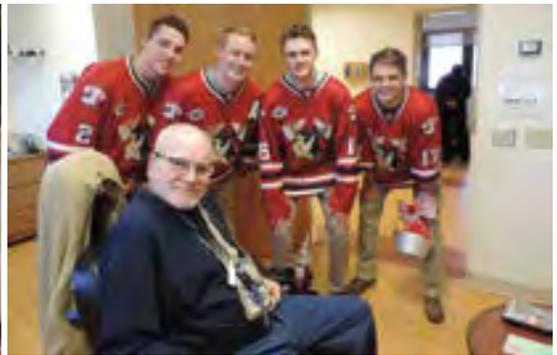
Encounters completed via Telehealth **4,793**  
(Home Telehealth, Store and Forward and Clinical Video Telehealth)

Telemental health care encounters **2,865** (742 unique patients)

Unique veterans used secure messaging **2,808**

VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Volunteers **313** / Volunteer Hours **39,182** / Youth Volunteers **24**



## HELPING PATIENTS MANAGE THEIR HEALTH

“Providers can help individuals stay healthy by preventing disease, and they can prevent complications of existing disease by helping patients live with their illnesses.”

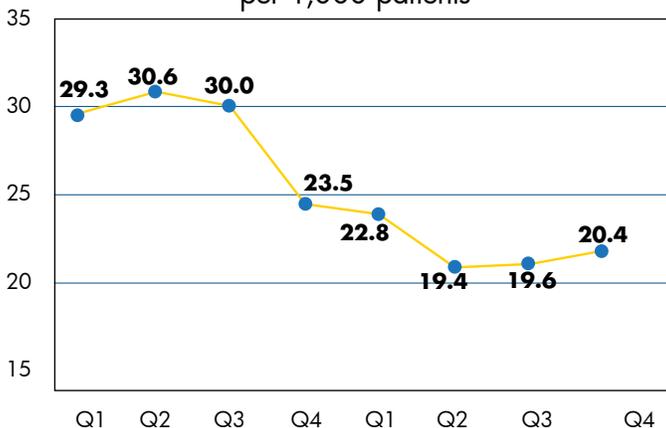
*From the Introduction to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality’s Guide to Prevention Quality Indicators.*



Certain conditions such as Congestive Heart Failure (CHF), Diabetes and pneumonia are defined as Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions (ACSC). Patients with these diseases are more prone to hospitalization episodes and health emergencies. For this reason, VA and other health care organizations committed to helping these patients to manage their disease and know the warning signs.

Based on our own data (see chart), the primary care nursing staff created a system of education and follow-up for patients with those four diseases, to help them manage symptoms and avoid hospitalizations. This FY17 project enabled us to decrease the number of hospitalizations for ACSCs from a high of 29.3 per thousand patients in FY16 to 20.4 per thousand in FY17.

ACSC Risk Standardized Admit rate per 1,000 patients



### Some of the methods utilized included:

- 1 Patients were provided evidence-based research and statistical information on the benefits of chronic disease management.
- 2 Staff were given direction and tools to identify patients with ACSCs.
- 3 Patients were added to a high risk registry, and nursing staff developed a process on the management and follow-up of those patients on high risk.
- 4 Nursing staff networked with Pittsburgh VAMC, our local acute care staff, inter-facility liaison, and non-VA care to assist RN Care manager staff to identify patients who have been admitted for these ACSC and who are discharged. We provided tools to identify patients who were recently discharged. Care managers follow up within 48 hours after discharge and follow up with patients seen in the Urgent Care Clinic.
- 5 Perform monitoring on 2-day discharge calls, quarterly monitoring on ACSC numbers.
- 6 Developed a magnet for each of the four ACSCs which the Veteran can place on the refrigerator titled, “Green Light to Go.” This helps the patient to determine his/her medical status on a daily basis.
- 7 Provided patient education tools such as a video designed for patients and family members.
- 8 Created access for patients through use of alternatives to practitioner visits such as RN Wave visits (see next page), telephone visits, group visits, secure messaging, etc.).
- 9 Expanded the roles of the RN care manager and other Patient Aligned Care Team members. The focus is on the most appropriate team member performing the most appropriate intervention, and working as a team for on shared goals of identifying problems and improving the patient experience.
- 10 Developed disease specific documentation templates in medical record for CHF, diabetes, pneumonia, and diabetes to provide education/information.



# Priority:

IMPROVE TIMELINESS OF SERVICES

## RN Wave Appointments

Excellent care starts with access. Our goal is to provide access to care at the time and place that is best suited to Veterans' health care needs, which has allowed us to achieve a high level of patient satisfaction related to care.

**91%**  
of Veterans surveyed in FY17 answered the following question with **Always** or **Usually**  
*In the last 6 months, when you contacted this provider's office to get an appointment for care you needed right away, how often did you get an appointment as soon as you needed?*

In FY17, the RN Wave clinic was created on all Primary Care teams to address patients' desire for a same day appointment. The patient sees the RN and communicates with the primary care practitioner to seek concurrence or additional recommendations prior to the patient leaving the clinic.

If the visit requires more assessment and involvement by the practitioner, the appointment is converted to a focus visit by the practitioner. In FY17, there were **2,011** RN Wave appointments completed on all primary care teams.

RN Wave appointments, Secure Message, Telehealth, Group Visits and other creative solutions are allowing VA to offer the right care at the right time and place.

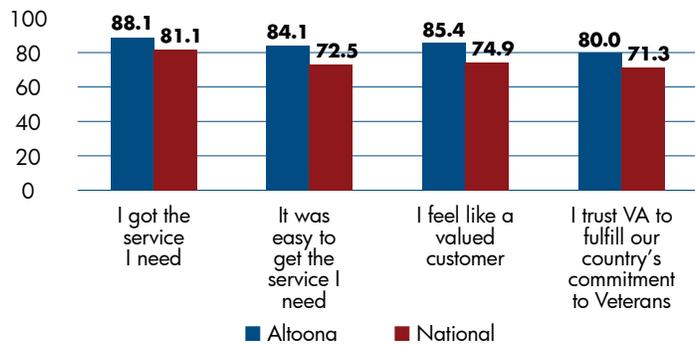
WHAT MATTERS IS YOUR SATISFACTION



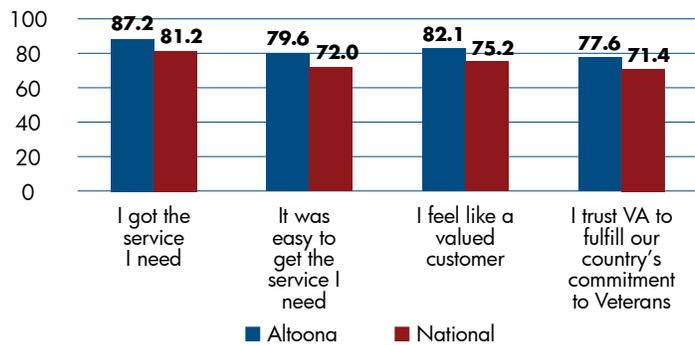
Veterans who receive care from our VA will receive a *Survey of Health Experiences of Patients (SHEP)* from VA. The "Trust in VA" questions listed below have been added to these surveys, so we know whether or not we are living up to our commitment to you. These charts indicate the number of Veterans who "agree" or "strongly agree" to the statements.

Will you please consider participating in these national surveys so that we can continue to improve?

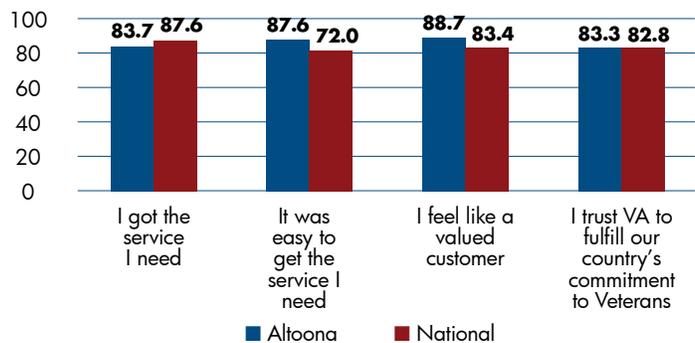
### Primary Care



### Specialty Care



### Inpatient





WHOLE HEALTH IN ACTION — **Roxanne Janisko, CRNP**, Johnstown VA Outpatient Clinic helps patients to think about What Matters to them.

As a member of the Cultural Transformation Committee since its inception, Roxanne Janisko, CRNP, has been committed to patient satisfaction and patient centered care for close to a decade. Roxanne is the primary care clinical champion for Whole Health, which supports Veterans' use of Personalized Health Planning tools. Utilizing the components of proactive health and well-being, which consist of prevention and treatment and conventional and complementary approaches to health, Whole Health puts the patient in the center and focuses on his or her goals for maintaining health.



*"In 2006 I had some bad health problems. I thought I was running out of time. When they assigned me to a Nurse Practitioner I was furious. As it turned out, Roxanne knew more about my problems than any doctor I had seen before. She postponed her vacation and got me on a true recovery path. She has taken care of all my problems through the years. Every Vet I talk to praises her. She still keeps me on the right path today. You're lucky to have her." Vic Foltz*

Roxanne received intensive training offered by the VA Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation which allows her to work with her patients to introduce these concepts.

*"Switching from 'what's the matter' to 'what matters' is a major shift in health care," she said. "At our VA, we have always been patient centered, but this allows us to become more 'patient driven' in our approach."*



*"I need to stay independent, that's what matters to me,"* said **Lynda Trout, U.S. Army Reserve Veteran and volunteer driver**. A back injury had affected Lynda so badly that she could not even lift her arms, but she chose to explore options other than pain medications. She has done physical therapy and rehabilitation, receives acupuncture, and participates in the wellness program in the PM&R gym.

*"Even with the medications and the working out, I was in agony, but after a 30 minute acupuncture session, I could get up and walk without pain,"* she said. *"I'm glad our VA offered this."*

Through her participation in the wellness program, Lynda became close with four or five other Veterans who work out together, including Milt Nickola, a fellow volunteer.

Lynda, who been her parents' caretaker, found herself looking for something to do after her father recently passed away. "I got to know Milt and I thought; if he can volunteer, then I can too. So one day I happened to get off the elevator on the second floor and the volunteer sign was practically bouncing off the wall in front of me, and I knew someone was trying to tell me something," she said.

Lynda is a volunteer driver, providing transportation for Veterans in Blair County one day a week. She believes her service to these men and women offers them more than just a ride. "I enjoy talking to them and I want them to know that I care about them," she said. Lynda shares her concern for their health and always tries to assure Veterans that there are people who look out for them. "One of the patients I drive lives by himself, so I always let him know that he's not really alone," she said.

*"I love what I am doing at the VA, and I won't let my injury keep me down. If I can move, I'll do it,"* she concluded.



**M**ilt Nickola is pretty sure about what matters to him. Staying active and involved in his community keeps this Navy Veteran young, even at the age of 90, with two new knees and a pacemaker.

“July 12, 2017 was my 90th birthday, and I had the VA doctor wish me a happy birthday at 5 in the morning and put a heart monitor on me,” he said. Shortly after that, Milt received a pacemaker at the Pittsburgh VA Healthcare System.

Tuesdays and Fridays Milt’s day starts early with a 7:30 a.m. workout in the Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R) gym. “I did 1.25 miles today on the elliptical,” he said, explaining that this is the best equipment for his new knees. “On the days I don’t come in here, I have my home workout,” he continued, which consists of stretching and movement to stay limber.

Milt credits the staff of PM&R and the wellness program with helping him to stay active and involved with people, which is something that keeps him young.

Since he moved from Florida back to his hometown, Altoona, PA in 2007, Milt has been a regularly scheduled volunteer, now working two days a week as a “Red Coat Ambassador” at the front entrance. He began as a volunteer in PM&R as a patient escort, assisting the staff by stocking towels and changing pillow cases and sheets in treatment areas, and making appointment reminder phone calls.

Milt, who grew up in Altoona’s railroad heyday, was drafted his senior year, and at 17 years old signed up for the U.S. Navy, serving on a ship off Okinawa, Japan. Following his discharge, 18 months later, Milt served 7 1/2 years in the Navy Reserve. During the Korean War, Milt spent time in Europe, even having seen Rita Hayworth on the French Riviera. “She waved to all of us guys,” he said with a gleam in his eye.

He retired from the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union 354 after a long career. “We replaced the boilers, here in the VA back in 1973,” he said. Those boilers were pretty good, but not quite as resilient as Milt, having just been replaced in 2017 after 44 years of service.



*Milt shares his memories of the 1973 boiler installation with VA boiler plant and engineering staff.*



**VA**



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

*James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center – Altoona*

2907 Pleasant Valley Boulevard  
Altoona, PA 16602

Phone: 814 . 943 . 8164

Toll-free: 1 . 877 . 626 . 2500

[altoona.va.gov](http://altoona.va.gov)

[facebook.com/VAAaltoona](https://facebook.com/VAAaltoona)

VA OUTPATIENT CLINICS

DuBois, Huntingdon, Indiana, Johnstown, State College

