

VOICE OF THE VETERAN

VA GREATER LOS ANGELES HEALTHCARE SYSTEM
BY VETERANS, FOR VETERANS

THE LABYRINTH

AN ANCIENT TREATMENT



The Flu Vaccine
are you battle ready?

Man's Best Friend
a veteran's journey

Tell Us All About It
your feedback is important

Winter 2013

The Official Veterans
Newsletter of the VA
Greater Los Angeles
Healthcare System

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**VA GLA Patient Advisory
Council Members**
Assistant Editors

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This quarterly newsletter is an
authorized publication for GLA
patients and their families,
dedicated to supporting the holistic
wellness and health promotion
hallmarks of Patient Centered Care.

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Cover Photo: Sepulveda
Patient Advisory Council
checks out The Labyrinth!

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NEW TO THE VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM? WELCOME!

So you have enrolled to receive your health care at the VA...but do you know of all the benefits available to you as a Veteran? The Veterans Health Administration offers a range of benefits to manage your health care.

You've already taken the first step and enrolled. If you haven't yet, our Business Office will assist you with enrolling. Once enrolled, we invite you to attend the New Patient Orientation, where we explain the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (VA GLA) model of patient centered care. You will learn how your Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) can help you coordinate your health care plan and personalize it for your needs and health goals. PACT is a partnership between you and your primary care team.

We will explain administrative processes, some of the benefits you may be eligible for, and all the great resources to help manage your care. You will also be able to speak with representatives from different offices who are eager to answer your questions.

The VA also has two helpful publications: the "Veterans Health Benefits Guide," which provides general information about the VA Medical Benefits Package, and the "Health Care Benefits Overview," which provides information on frequently asked questions about eligibility and benefits. They are available online at <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/resources/epublications.asp>.

New Patient Orientations are scheduled regularly at the West Los Angeles, Sepulveda, and downtown Los Angeles Clinics: West LA: Marianne Davis (310) 268-3534 or Sepulveda/LAACC Kenneth Cobb (213) 253-2677 ext. 4564. Additional assistance is available at:

- VHA Health Benefits Website: <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/>
- VA toll-free 1-877-222-VETS (8387), between 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM EST, Monday-Friday

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND AT GLA?

VA GLA has asked our patients for their feedback for several years

For the last four years, we've traveled out to five GLA sites and asked our Veterans what they thought about our healthcare system and about programs and services we were thinking of offering. Every time we've gotten a very enthusiastic response, and this year was no different. Here are some of the main themes we heard about this year:

Most of our patients are not worried about the Affordable Care Act. Some of you plan on taking advantage of other insurance plans in addition to your VA benefits. Many of you said you would rather that we just improve things at VA.

Veterans are very interested in what services are being offered at the GLA sites. Everyone is very interested in taking advantage of our Integrative Medicine programs, such as Tai Chi, yoga, acupuncture, and meditation. Everyone likes having preventive screening and services to keep them healthy and to be given choices when it comes to their care, for example, trying biofeedback to control pain and doing yoga or meditation to relieve anxiety. Patients also want to be connected to MyHealthVet if they haven't done so already. MyHealthVet lets you track your own personal health, do research on healthcare topics, renew prescriptions, check appointments and send secure e-mail messages to your primary care provider. Kevin Ligon is

the Coordinator, and his phone number is (818) 891-7711 ext. 9155.

Most Veterans don't know about the TeleCare Nurse Advice Line service, where you can reach a VA nurse 24/7 and ask about a health problem. The number is (877) 252-4866.

The telephone system needs work, and fortunately our VA Network is working on a new contract, so we should see changes in the upcoming year.

Many Veterans reported that they love their health care, but needed help getting to it. We agree, and have launched New Patient Orientations to help, and The Voice of the Veteran Magazine to get the word out. We also run Patient Advisory Councils at West LA, Sepulveda, and soon at LAACC/Downtown and our other Clinics. We invite you to join the Councils, and help make things better for all Veterans at the VA GLA.

Question? Please call Marianne Davis at (310) 268-3534 or email marianne.davis@va.gov. Tai Chi: Carol Stein at (310) 478-3711 ext. 43281. Yoga: Nang Mohla at (818) 891-7711 ext. 5336. Meditation: Dr. Greg Serpa (310) 478-3711 ext. 49563. Acupuncture: Ask your provider.



Santa Maria Veterans tell us like it is!

BEATING THE ADDICTION DEVILS: FRANK WINS

Navy Veteran Frank Martinez started out in Los Angeles, and had a challenging childhood. He was constantly shifted from relative to relative, which is hard on a kid. He sought protection and stability from the low-rider culture that flourished all around him, and found it in a local “car club” of older guys. He was very focused on making money, so he always had some kind of job and money in his pocket, which he used to buy favor with the leaders of the club. They in turn protected him from bullies at school, but they also introduced him to smoking and drinking.

At 16, Frank got a relative to sign him up for the military, and the bad habits got worse. While overseas, “I tried weed, Thai sticks, Columbian gold, all the fancy stuff,” Frank said. Fortunately, cocaine had no effect on him, so he escaped that dreaded addiction. When he came back from the Vietnam conflict, he met up with his old crowd and continued using. He actually had so much alcohol in his system at his Welcome Party that he was poisoned by it and was sick for a week. But that didn’t stop him, and he continued to go down the addiction path, losing money, jobs, and relationships.

Frank eventually wound up in jail after a series of blackouts, and a visiting VA representative got him into a residential treatment center at GLA. He had a lot of time to dry up in isolation, and decided to turn everything around. He took classes, passed with flying colors, went into the Compensated Work Therapy Program, and eventually got into VA Housekeeping. Frank is now an EMS Supervisor at the Sepulveda Clinic, and his life is now dedicated to his wife and daughter. His last challenge was kicking the smoking habit, for their sakes. He was up to two and half packs a day, and decided to just start eliminating a cigarette a day...until he was down to just three a day, two a day...slow and steady elimination did the trick.

Frank’s words of advice to others: “If you want to kick a habit, don’t hang around the same place and the same people. Set your mind to getting ahead, finding new opportunities, and new friends. It’s all gotta change.”

“When you change a habit, do it in small steps.”

Frank Martinez
U.S Army
Sepulveda EMS Supervisor





Joe Grassman, GLA patient and volunteer on the Patient Advisory Council, shares more of his top tips for the best experience at GLA—stay tuned for more tips in future editions!

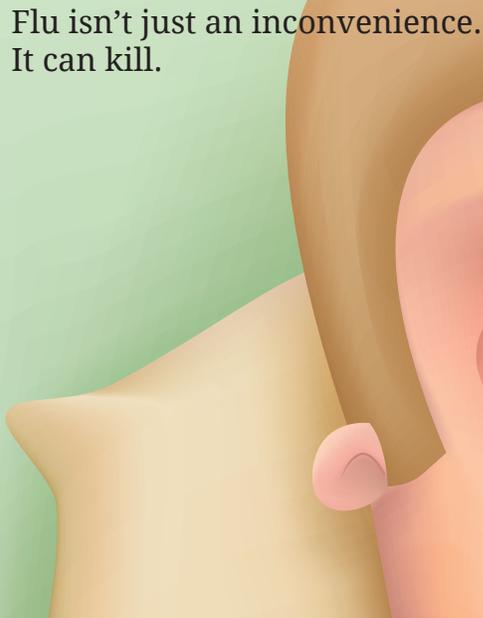
- Get the extension number for your Team or Clinic. This will help you reach your providers faster and save you frustration from waiting on the phone.
- Arrive early to check out the parking situation – parking reconnaissance works!
- Cancel or reschedule your appointment if you can't make it. Another Vet who is waiting for that appointment time will appreciate it.
- Try to be patient when you come in for your appointment. Your doctor or therapist is probably working with another Vet and sometimes an appointment before yours may be running late.

If you have questions, you can contact:

The Patient Advisory Council at Sepulveda by calling Voluntary Service at (818) 895-9325, or ask Voluntary Services for the numbers for Veterans Service Organizations or how to get started with MyHealtheVet.



Joe Grassman not only uses VA GLA, but wants to make it better for you.



Flu isn't just an inconvenience.
It can kill.

FALL BRINGS VIRUSES & COLDS

Fall brings us wonderful crisp cool weather, football, the beginning of holiday celebrations... and viruses. Also known as: colds and flu.

We need to protect ourselves from these viruses so we can enjoy the holiday season in our best health. The most important way to protect against viruses is to wash your hands, wash your hands, wash your hands. With soap. **Seriously.**

And get the flu vaccine. It will protect you and your loved ones. The flu virus changes every season, so it is important to get a flu shot now for the current virus making the rounds. GLA offers free flu vaccine to all Veterans, so it's simple to stay healthy. You can get it from your provider at each GLA site.

If you do get the flu, don't go to work, visit patients, or volunteer. Even if you feel just a

little bit sick, you may be carrying a virus that could really hurt someone who has a chronic disease and is frail.

Urge children to wash their hands too, and take extra care with their nutrition and sleep. Children may not even know they are a carrier as they may not get sick, or they may pass along the virus before they show symptoms.

Use the hand sanitizer at all entrances to VA buildings and before you enter a patient's room. Use it again when you finish your visit. Wash your hands with soap every chance you get, and especially after using the restroom and before you eat. Get the flu vaccine, eat right, get lots of rest, and get enough fluids.

Don't let a virus ruin your fun. Fight back with the flu vaccine!

Mission success depends on so much. Training. Trust. Teamwork. And when Travis Miller returned from serving his mission in the USMC (2000-2004), he found his new mission was learning how to successfully live with his PTSD and TBI. He needed a new team.

Travis found himself acting out of character and spiraling out of control, and realized he needed help. “I tried cognitive therapy, meditation, relaxation, pretty much everything that the VA was offering [for PTSD],” he said. “But it wasn’t working. I couldn’t relate to them, and they couldn’t understand the daily things I go through to keeps things together.”

Then Travis read about how service dogs were being trained to help Veterans with PTSD. He decided to look into getting the dog he had rescued about a year earlier trained and certified as a service dog.

Travis and Sadie, his rescue dog, trained for a year and a half. To become a certified service dog, Sadie went through an intensive training program to learn tasks that would decrease the impulsive or destructive behaviors of people with psychiatric and neurological disabilities. She also had to learn verbal commands, hand gestures, and appropriate social behavior, such as not being aggressive toward or barking at people or other dogs, not responding to food or petting from others, and not to toilet in public.

Sadie has had a significant impact on Travis’s PTSD treatment. “She can pick up on my rising stress and anger levels, and she’ll rub against my leg.” This is the physical cue Sadie learned to remind Travis to calm himself. Their relationship goes beyond the companionship between a man and his dog; they work as a team to manage Travis’s PTSD. And the benefits to both of them are considerable.

SERVICE ANIMALS: TRAINED WARRIORS WITH A MISSION

“She helps me through my issues. Sadie has been a huge help in where I’m at now.”



“Sadie gets me out of funk by going out for a walk or playing. Just seeing her happy brings me back to a centered environment,” Travis said. “She helps me through my issues. Sadie has been a huge help in where I’m at now.” In Sadie, Travis has found his teammate.

As we continue to gain a better understanding of PTSD symptoms and explore treatment options, partnerships with PTSD-trained service dogs may complement conventional therapy.

For more information on the American Disabilities Act and the criteria for a service dog, please go to http://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm.



THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT AND YOU

With the Affordable Care Act (ACA) taking effect soon, you may be wondering whether your VA benefits may be affected.

The ACA was created to expand access to affordable health care coverage, improve care quality and coordination, and control costs. In 2014, everyone will have to have insurance that meets the ACA's minimum essential coverage standards.

As a Veteran, you are already eligible for health care coverage with the VA. So rest assured—the ACA will not change your VA health coverage or out-of-pocket costs, and you do not need to do anything else to meet the new ACA requirements.

Veterans not yet enrolled in VA GLA health care can apply at any time. You can call us at (310) 268-4559 or visit us at a VA GLA site to complete an application (the 1010EZ form), or apply by phone at (877) 222-8387, online at www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll, or by mailing the 1010EZ form to the Health Eligibility Center: 2957 Clairmont Road, Suite 200, Atlanta, GA 30329-1647.

You may also use other plans in addition to your VA health care, such as Medicare, Medicaid, TRICARE, or private insurance. If you choose to purchase additional insurance, however, the VA cannot assist with lowering your premiums with those other insurers. We encourage you to

keep your VA provider informed of any non-VA care you receive so we can ensure coordination of your health care.

The VA recognizes that family members are important to Veterans' well-being and support networks. On the ACA marketplace, your family will be able to choose insurance plans that offer free Wellness visits and preventive services, and child-only options through the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). You may find more information on ACA insurance coverage options in California at www.healthcare.gov or www.coveredca.com.

In some cases, VA coverage may be available for family members of certain Veterans who are permanently and totally disabled, died serving our country, or with children who have Spina Bifida. You may find more information on VA eligibility for family members in these cases at <http://www.va.gov/hac/forbeneficiaries/champva/champva.asp> or (800) 733-8387, and <http://www.va.gov/hac/forbeneficiaries/spina/spina.asp> or call (888) 820-1756.

With over 151 facilities nationwide, VA health care covers you even when you travel or move. You can get your medical records on a CD—ask for this at the Medical Records Release of Information Office at your GLA site.

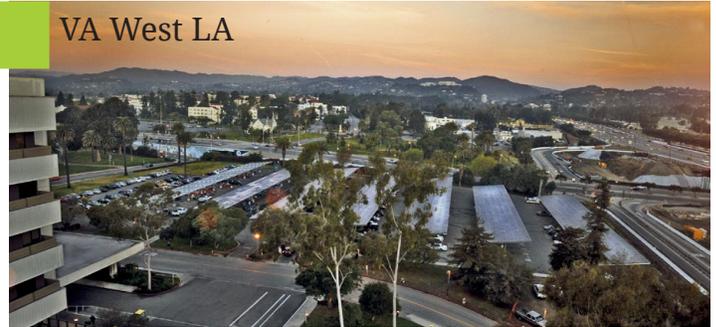
You've earned your VA health care—now make it work for you.

HERE COMES THE SUN

Solar power keeps it green and low-cost at VA GLA

GLA's Sepulveda campus recently completed the installation of the largest solar energy system within the City of Los Angeles. The VA worked closely with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and Sunpower Corporation to ensure proper interconnection of this large system. The solar panel system will generate an estimated 7,300,000 KWHr of clean energy per year—this is the equivalent of saving 2,750 metric tons of carbon dioxide from polluting the atmosphere, or saving over 308,000 gallons of gasoline from being consumed, or recycling 1,030 tons of waste. That means we're generating a lot of energy that won't be a strain on our environment! VA West LA and the Downtown Clinic also have installations.

VA West LA



Sepulveda's solar panel field on Plummer and Haskell Blvds.



Frances Landin with her Gold and Silver Medals for 2013



“We supported each other, and then went straight into a support group afterwards.”

FRANCES SHOOTS FOR THE MEDAL!

Frances Landin knew she had to change; her weight was up, her diabetes was getting her down, and she needed to get things under control. Her provider told her to get herself into a MOVE! Weight Management Program for Veterans class, so she went.

Her first reaction to MOVE was mixed. “It was geared to guys, and I felt like a tag-along.” But it covered diet and weight loss, which Frances found beneficial, and so she stayed with it.

Then a MOVE class for women Veterans started up—and that was a totally different experience. “For 12 weeks, they had different speakers on all kinds of topics, and videos, and you had to weigh-in every week.” Then there was eight weeks of maintenance coursework, which helped Frances with staying on target. “You didn’t get dropped like a hot potato, you were still involved,” Frances said. The staff went on walks with them, and Mira Doshi, the

Dietician, brought handouts on how to prevent heart attacks and other preventive topics. Most importantly, there was lots of personal sharing and problem solving between friends.

“We supported each other, and then went straight into a support group afterwards.” Frances has remembered her MOVE experience, and carried on with the help of her caregiver, Michelle Mack. Her diabetes values slipped, and Michelle quietly said, “You’re not making me look good.” Frances said, “I disappointed her, and that was the worst. My caregiver is like my sister or my aunt, and she doesn’t take any prisoners! I had to fix it.” She also had to clean up her act before she could go to the Golden Age Games... and she did. “I got the weight off, got my diabetes back under control, and I kicked ass at the Games!” Frances won two gold and two silver medals. Now the challenge is to maintain her momentum for the next six months. Attagirl, Frances! Ask your provider about getting referred to MOVE.

HOW WAS YOUR VA EXPERIENCE? TELL US!

Whether it's your first time or your 101st time visiting GLA, we want it to be the best health care experience possible. We know that coming to a medical center can sometimes be stressful and understanding the systems can be confusing. We want to welcome you warmly every time you come to any GLA Clinic and assist you throughout your visit. Your feedback about how we are doing helps us better help you manage your health care. To do this, we are using a new assessment tool called **TruthPoint**.

You may have been asked about your GLA experience by a VA employee holding a miniature laptop. The laptop is a TruthPoint assessment tool designed to collect information on patients' experiences at GLA. This is an opportunity to rate your satisfaction with how you were treated by GLA employees. We also ask for your suggestions about how we can improve our services. At the Sepulveda Clinic, you may find a TruthPoint clerk with a laptop near one of the primary care clinics, such as the Red, Green, or Gold clinics.

All responses are anonymous, so we encourage you to tell us what you really think about GLA, whether you have specific concerns or want to praise employees that provided exceptional service to you and your family. It only takes a few minutes, and you can share as much or as little as you wish.

Your feedback helps us identify specific issues with all aspects of Veterans' health care experiences. Some of the issues you raise can be fixed immediately, and some we take to leadership. Your feedback has already helped in pointing out troubles with the phone system at the Sepulveda Clinic, which can be hard to navigate. We are developing a plan to fix this issue, thanks to your feedback!

Many of the GLA and TruthPoint clerks are also Veterans and share a similar feeling of pride and commitment to country. The TruthPoint clerks are willing to listen to more than TruthPoint assessment responses and are there to assist you in ensuring that you have the best health care experience possible at GLA. Tell us about your GLA experience—we're listening!



Stan Moroncini uses Truthpoint to get a Veteran's feedback

For more information on the TruthPoint assessment, please contact :

Stan Moroncini
(818) 891-7711
ext. 2176.





“WHAT THE HECK IS A HEALTH COACH?”

That’s what John Blackman asked when his physician suggested he try a Health Coach. John had been trying to deal with high blood pressure through use of medications, but he seemed to need more help. He was also struggling with chronic neck and back pain, and depression. He was referred to Lindsay Weinstein, and as John describes it, “Lindsay helped me set my own personal goals, helped me see things in a different way, and connected me to so many things that the VA offers. It really opened my eyes to what they can do for you, and I’m keeping them open all the time now!” They met once a week, and it led to many changes in how John was taking care of himself, thought about his own goals, and set to work on reaching them.

First, he became aware of salt in his diet. “There’s so much in everything we eat,” he said as he looked at his shopping habits. He had always been a label reader, but salt wasn’t his main concern. “Something as simple as a can of beans can easily have 25% of your day’s total of salt in it!” But then he found he had choices by choosing other brands and low-salt varieties. And he had to stop a life-long habit of adding salt to food. “You just don’t need it.” His blood pressure started going down as he watched what he was eating; medications helped, but cutting down his salt intake really did the trick. He now cooks at home without ever adding salt.

John also took a good look at alcohol. Lindsay helped him set up weekly goals, and rather than two or three glasses of wine with dinner, he got

down to one. Exercise was another focus, and he increased his running from three days a week to five or six days a week. “Exercise helps me on so many levels,” John said. “It relaxes me and improves my mood. Even when I really don’t feel like doing it, I just know that I am going to feel better afterwards, and it does work, every single time.”

Pain management was also an area that John worked on with his Health Coach. He learned about “mindfulness” for pain management, and biofeedback. “Biofeedback is so interesting and helpful. And now I know how to calm myself through breathing techniques. It’s not like you’re just sitting there and breathing; there is a way to actually bring yourself down to a calm state through it.”

John is now part of the “Booster Group,” which keeps him in contact every month with the Health Coaches and other patients after completing the classes. “Meeting the other Health Coaches is so helpful, and it continues to be helpful as I work on my goals.” John’s advice to other Veterans: “Take advantage of everything! Go for it!”

Ask your provider to be referred:

Downtown - Johana Vega
Sepulveda - Tim Penix & Rachel Rosen
Santa Barbara - Rachel Rosen
Santa Maria/San Luis Obispo – Tim Penix
West LA – Lindsay Weinstein, Vanessa Soto, Laura Gunn
Bakersfield – Lindsay Weinstein

CLICK HERE TO MANAGE YOUR HEALTH CARE

You can stay informed on the latest news online. You can manage your finances online. You can track the status of your package delivery time online. Did you know that you can also manage your health care at GLA online? Yes! With My HealtheVet you can access your personal health record through a secure online system, and find health care information, resources, and tools.

Having immediate access to your health care records and appointments means you can store your medical history and information, track your illness, manage your medications, and send your health care providers private messages about appointments, medication, or any concerns about health-related issues.

Your confidentiality is always protected with My HealtheVet. With Secure Messaging, your email messages can only be read by you and your providers. They can answer your questions and save you from having to wait for returned calls or coming in to a clinic for routine questions. To protect your information, you need to come into your local VA to complete an In Person Authentication Form (IPA) after you create your My HealtheVet account. This only takes a few minutes, but is an important security measure to verify your identity in person.

Convenient. Immediate. Anytime. Anywhere. My HealtheVet. Sign up today! GLA has one computer for My HealtheVet at the West LA, Sepulveda, and Downtown LA Patient Education Resource Centers. We also have My HealtheVet computers in the Santa Maria Clinic lobby and in the Cyber Café area in the Bakersfield Clinic.

For more information about My HealtheVet, please contact Kevin Ligon at (818) 891-7711 ext. 9155.

Register Today for My HealtheVet!

1. Go to www.myhealth.va.gov
2. Click on the Register Today button (on right-hand side)
3. Complete the registration page
4. Review and accept the Terms & Conditions and the Privacy Policy
5. Log into your my HealtheVet account and create your Personal Health Record
6. Come into your local VA to get an In Person Authentication account to protect your confidentiality and access all the My HealtheVet services





THE LABYRINTH: AN ANCIENT TREATMENT

Sometimes a circular path is the most direct way to health and healing. The simplicity of a single, spiraling path is soothing and centering, and for some, valuable in their treatment and recovery.

The VA is now approaching healing with a different attitude: Patient Centered Care (PCC). So we are trying to address your needs in a more holistic way, and putting you at the center of any discussion about your health care. We are also going beyond medical procedures and prescriptions to design a healing environment that helps to calm and comfort patients. When one is relaxed, healing speeds up.

GLA's labyrinth has gone a step further. Built in 2003, the labyrinth is an informal, self-paced therapeutic tool.

People report that walking the labyrinth is an intensely personal journey that

literally leads them to their center and to a state of balance, acceptance, and optimism. There are no distressing decisions to make: Should I turn left? Right? Did I choose well? You simply walk along the one path that winds its way to the center, and walk the same path back out.

Labyrinths do not represent any specific religion or culture, and have been used for centuries to reduce stress. Walking the labyrinth has definite physical benefits in lowering blood pressure and heart and metabolic rates. Being more in control of and involved in your treatment could be as simple as taking a walk.

For more information on the labyrinth at GLA, please contact Ms. Martha Waite, Associate Chief of Social Work, at (818) 895-9596.



VOICE OF THE VETERAN

VA GREATER LOS ANGELES HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

It's your voice, so let us hear it!

What do you want more Information about?

We welcome all suggestions and comments. Please us an additional sheet of paper if needed. Submit to:

Marianne Davis, MPH MLS
Voice of the Veteran Program
Office of the Patient Experience

**VA Greater Los Angeles
Healthcare System**
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Los Angeles, CA 90073

marianne.davis@va.gov



Visit us at:

www.losangeles.va.gov

And don't forget to join us on:



Facebook.com/LosAngelesVA



Twitter.com/LosAngelesVA

The Warrior's Way

Some Rules for Staying Alive



- At the VA **you** are the most important one on your health care team.
- Make sure that the time that you have with your provider covers what you are interested in.
- Ask lots of questions. If you're not sure of something, ask.
- Know what's going to happen before any test or procedure. Know the name of the test, the benefits and risks, and when you should expect to receive results.
- Make sure you bring your medical history and documents to your VA provider.
- Keep a list of all the medicines you take, and bring it with you to all of your appointments.
- Your medication list should include: names and dosages of the medicines, when you typically take them, and include any over-the-counter and herbal medicines you take.
- Please tell your healthcare provider about any allergies or reactions you have had to any medicines in the past.
- Check your medicines when you pick them up. Make sure you understand the instructions. If you don't, ask your pharmacist for clarification.
- If things don't happen when you expect, don't sit around. Call your team, your provider, and ask. Or email them on MyHealtheVet.