CHECKING OUT THE BAKERSFIELD CLINIC

-INTRODUCING-
THE NEW BAKERSFIELD PATIENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
WHAT’S INSIDE!

03
Is your Information Correct?
Current contact information helps us keep you informed.

06
Dave’s the man at Bakersfield
A fellow Veteran making positive changes every day.

07
Vendors at Bakersfield
You asked for it, we delivered.

04
Health Coaches are here to help!
Your secret weapon, revealed.

08
Your Dentist is on Active Duty
Fellow Reservist Dr. Sze shares his compelling story.

10
Sharing Joy
Veteran Joe Grassman wants YOU to be happy!

11
Veterans step up at Bakersfield
VA Bakersfield staff and Veterans get together to make it happen.

12
VA Health Registries
What are they and are you eligible?

14
Advice from a Trout
Welcome Gayle Ocheltree, our new columnist, as she shares her advice.

16
GLA updates
Other interesting stories about Veterans and GLA.

GLA Patient Advisory Committees point out and help solve problems.
Make the VA better!
IS YOUR INFORMATION CORRECT?

This, as it turns out, is a serious question. When you come to GLA for health care, it’s important to make sure that the contact information we have on file for you is correct. We understand that life these days is pretty fast-forward, and many of us change addresses and phone numbers. But when we aren’t updated about these things, it gets difficult to get you the health care you want. Or, perhaps the records on file aren’t correct for you. Here’s an example:

Ray Arellano, U.S. Army Veteran, works in the Office of the Patient Experience at West LA. He is also a Veteran, and gets his health care at GLA, and he’s working on a claim to file at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). Recently Ray was wondering why he couldn’t get a hearing test, as it was important to get the ringing in his ears diagnosed. He also was interested in getting an appointment in Pain Clinic, as he has some lingering shoulder pain he associated with carrying heavy guns in Iraq. He asked his primary care provider to put in a consult for these clinics, but nothing happened. His doctor tried again. A month went by, still nothing happened.

Finally Ray went to the Business Office at West LA to check out just what was on his record, since he wasn’t getting notified about any consults. He found out that his information was totally wrong, and that his correct phone number wasn’t listed. He got it corrected. Then, when he called the Call Center later on (to double-check), there still was a problem with his phone number – and it got corrected. Finally! Now his need for specialty care is being taken care of, he’s getting the appointments he needs, and things are back on track.

So, when you come to GLA for care, ask about your contact information when you check in. Clinic clerks should be able to tell you what contact information we have listed for you—including current phone numbers, home address, and emergency contact information—and be able to update that if needed. You can also call the GLA Call Center at (800) 251-7295 and ask a representative to check and update your contact information. We know people get new numbers all the time or move, and want to be able to reach you when trying to schedule you or give you other information. We want to serve you, but we need that phone number and current address!

MAKE SURE THIS INFORMATION IS CORRECT AND CURRENT:
* Phone number (cell and home)
* Mailing address
* Emergency contact name and phone
  - You can also specify who is your next of kin, in case someone needs to be contacted
Health Coaches are here to help!

At GLA, we are big on helping you stay healthy and practice wellness. There’s a new expert on our team that will do just that for you: the Health Coach. These folks are great at listening to you, helping you learn how to care for yourself, and explaining how to take advantage of great VA services to preserve your health. They are especially good at helping folks with:

• Weight problems
• Smoking
• High blood pressure
• High cholesterol
• Diabetes
• And other long term health issues

They are your secret weapon!

Veteran Bill Shelby chats with Krystin Buckley about his health

Health Coaches are now at West LA, Downtown, Sepulveda, and our Community Clinics. You can get a face to face appointment, talk with them on the phone, email them, or use our video system to connect with them. They also offer group sessions, which are very popular.

Our newest Health Coach is Krystin Buckley, who comes to our Bakersfield Clinic regularly. She has individual or telephone appointments available. At Bakersfield there is also a monthly Healthy Living Group to discuss your health and well-being; they use the Wheel of Health (see next page) to work out how your health can be improved in different ways. The Healthy Living Group talks about things like nutrition, exercise, sleep, and how to control stress. If you would like to work with a Health Coach, please ask your primary care provider. For Bakersfield or West LA patients, you can also call Krystin at (310) 478-3711 ext. 42648.
All of this affects your health
Talk with your primary care provider now!
Dave Berumen, U.S. Army Veteran who served in Vietnam, is also a volunteer at the Bakersfield Clinic and has been working there for about three years. “My friend told me to get in to the VA and use the place,” Dave said, and “then I started helping Frank Lomas out.” Frank is the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Service Officer that has an office in the Bakersfield Clinic. Pretty soon staff started noticing how helpful Dave was, and approached him about doing more in the Clinic. Dave starting helping with the Truthpoint assessments (asking customer satisfaction questions using a handheld tablet device), and enjoyed working with fellow Veterans. “I kinda became the enforcer,” he chuckles, as he was quick to help other Veterans who were having a tough time or were acting out. Then he was asked to join the Quality Culture Seminars, where staff form teams to solve problems. “It helps me to see the problem from both ends,” he said, and he had good suggestions to offer. He has continued to work with staff on teams, on special events, and is a fixture in the Clinic. “I feel calm in the Clinic,” Dave stated. “It helps me with my PTSD to be helping others.”

Keep up the good work, Dave.
In the fall, GLA held a Patient Townhall at the Bakersfield Clinic. One of the suggestions was to have vendors exhibit their wares, like at the Sepulveda Clinic or West LA. We heard you! The Bakersfield Clinic Manager, Anne Seydel, and Canteen Service got busy and arranged for several vendors to display their merchandise during several days a week. Sales have been brisk; so far it’s a success. Keep talking to us, we’re listening!
“It’s cool to have Dr. Sze on staff! First off, he’s a great dentist and a really kind person. And then we can talk about things we have in common about our military time, and compare notes about serving overseas.”

Dr. Donald Sze, in Dental Service, has been a Navy Reservist for almost 17 years. He recently returned after being deployed for almost a year, and we caught up with him during his busy practice at GLA. We asked him what made him decide to join the Reserves, and his story is long and interesting!

Dr. Sze had been working at GLA’s West LA Medical Center for three years, when he became restless. He needed something more in life than just working his entire career at one place, and he hit on the idea of serving his country. His father said, “Go for it!”, and so he signed up. Less than five years later, in 2003, he was mobilized to active duty in support of Noble Eagle and Enduring Freedom operations, and then several positions providing critically needed Oral and Maxillofacial care to our service members.

He continued moving up in rank and responsibilities. When the Navy merged both the Dental and Medical Departments into one unit, he became XO for the Naval Reserve Hospital at Camp Pendleton and San Diego. He was then selected as the Commanding Officer of the 4th Dental Company, 4th Marine Logistics Group. In 2014, Dr. Sze was again recalled to active duty in support of Enduring Freedom Operations. As Commanding Officer of the Navy Expeditionary Medical Unit 15 and the Deputy Director for Navy Personnel, Dr. Sze led a multidisciplinary team at the Landstuhl Regional (Army) Medical Center in Germany.
“The job was pretty complicated,” Dr. Sze reported. “We had to find out who was coming in for care, where they were coming from, what their needs were, and set up their care from receiving to inpatient. We provided everything the soldiers needed. They were either returned to duty, or went home for rehabilitation, and we had to arrange all of it, including transport. It was huge.”

When he came home, it took time for the whole family to adjust, particularly in the kitchen. “It’s MY kitchen,” he stated proudly. “I do all the cooking!” When we asked about that, we got another interesting story.

Dr. Sze was born in Beijing, China, but his family fled to Hong Kong when he was three years old to escape the Communist government that was taking control there. They fortunately had family in Hong Kong who sponsored their stay. When things got unstable there, the family immigrated again to Washington, D.C. His father was an accomplished accountant, but the only work he could get at the time was as a cook, so he worked 16-hour days in a restaurant. Eventually the family moved to Los Angeles with their three kids, and they started a Chinese restaurant on Santa Monica Blvd., next to what is now known as “Ye Old Kings Head” restaurant. Dr. Sze worked at the family restaurant in his teens while going to University High. Every day after school, he went back to work at the restaurant, finally going home at 9pm to do his homework. He went to the University of Southern California, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, got his Doctor of Dental Medicine degree, and started his dental practice. After a few years of private practice, he joined GLA over 19 years ago.

“My family believes in repaying this country for its generosity,” Dr. Sze commented. He also spoke of how he now has extended family in the military all over the country, and recommends reserve duty to anyone considering it. “You get the best of both worlds, and you get to wear the cloth of your country.” If you look in Dr. Sze’s office, you’ll see his pride in military service all over it.

There’s a patriot in Dental Service!
Over the past few years we’ve been encouraging both employees and patients to “practice joy” as part of our Health Promotion and Mindfulness initiative. We all want to be happy, and studies show that by practicing joy you can be happier. It’s like practicing any skill or craft: the more you do it, the better you get at it. So if you want more joy, happiness, or peace, find time and ways throughout your day to practice those things.

Here’s how Joe Grassman, Veteran and GLA patient, shares his joy:

I love sharing joy, but it took a long time for me to realize that I had to be joyful to share joy. The thing that I do to keep myself joyful is dance. I dance five or six times a week (2-2 ½ hours each), but it doesn’t dominate my life because if friends want to get together then I don’t dance, period! Also, laugh; read something funny. Talk to someone funny. Watch a funny video. Amuse yourself.

Now don’t get me wrong, I’m not telling all of you that you’ll feel better if you dance. Whatever you love doing (hiking, golfing, walking the dog, biking, yoga, skiing, gardening, cooking, etc.), do it, and do it often. But make sure you have time for your friends and do the thing you love to do with others; they are the ones that will add joyfulness.

Joe adds joy to his life by dancing. Dancing is a social activity and a form of exercise, so Joe is benefitting twice – adding to his emotional and physical health. Social support and relationships add to people’s happiness. So find out what makes you happy, grab a friend or find others who are doing it, and share your joy!

Joe Grassman is a member of the Sepulveda Patient Advisory Council, and a volunteer driver for DAV.
When it comes to an event, Bakersfield goes all out! And the Veterans who use the Bakersfield Clinic don’t just sit back and relax, they pitch in. It’s not unusual to find Veterans busy at work during all major events. This includes working the BBQ, providing a warm welcome during the Open House, working and walking the VA2K walk, and helping with stand downs. They also make sure everybody gets goodies during Valentines’ week, and work the soda and ice cream during the root beer so-cials. Of course, everybody joins in on the VA entry for the Veterans Day Parade. Veterans help set up, decorate the float, march in the Parade, and get it packed up again. Go Team Bakersfield!
Some of the dangers faced during service are not so obvious. For example, some Veterans may have been exposed to a range of chemical, physical, and environmental hazards during military service. VA has created several health registries to provide you with information about exposure to hazardous substances during service.

Signing up with a VA health registry is voluntary. Health registries are basically a way to sign up to receive information on health issues related to military exposure. You may also choose to have an optional free medical evaluation. This evaluation includes a physical exam and a medical history questionnaire that can be used to identify health concerns, guide discussions with your health care providers, and document deployment-related exposures. This data helps VA track and monitor the health of specific groups of Veterans, and respond to these health problems more effectively.

There are several VA health registries you may be eligible for:

- Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry
- Gulf War Registry (includes Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn)
- Agent Orange Registry
- Ionizing Radiation Registry
- Depleted Uranium Follow-Up Program
- Toxic Embedded Fragment Surveillance Center

If you’ve been exposed, sign up. You have a right to important updates on your issue.
Eligible Veterans who want a health registry medical evaluation must remember that it is not a disability compensation exam and does not give you a service-connection disability rating. A health registry evaluation does not start a claim for compensation and is not required for any VA benefits. Compensations claims are filed with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and is a very different process. It is also important to remember that a health registry evaluation does not affect the quality of your medical care and treatment at the VA, and it is not necessary when you file a claim with the VBA. GLA will always appropriately treat your medical conditions regardless of whether they may be related to military exposures.

VA will use deployment data provided by the Department of Defense to determine health registry eligibility. If you are already enrolled at GLA, contact your primary care provider to schedule a health registry evaluation, or Jody Conn, GLA Environmental Health Coordinator, at (310) 478-0172. Veterans not enrolled with the VA should call (818) 895-9528 or (877) 222-8387.

For information on health concerns that may be related to military exposures, you can visit: http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/index.asp.
For information on the health registry medical evaluation, you can visit: http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/benefits/registry-exam.asp.

You can find more information on the types of VA health registries and enroll at the following resources:
http://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/exposures/registry-evaluation-brochure.pdf#
Advice from a Trout

By Gayle S. Ocheltree
Army Airborne, service-connected, Southern CA Coordinator - Vet’s First Fly Fishing

In the military, you always know who’s who because of the rank indicators and badges on their uniforms. But when you come to a VA hospital, there are people with different badges and different roles in your medical care, so sometimes it’s difficult to know who’s “in charge.”

Personally, I’ve had six successful surgeries at the VA. The VA doctors are “in charge” of our medical care at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). But don’t expect them to be the expert regarding your military benefits. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) will be your best bet for any questions regarding service-connection disability eligibility and ratings. Veterans Service Organizations such as the Disabled American Veterans can help direct you through the benefits process.

The VA can be overwhelming and confusing to know which part processes your compensation and pension claim and other benefits (VBA) and which part takes care of your health issues (VHA).

Understanding how different parts of the whole work together helps you manage your health and well-being. That’s why I joined up with a trout fishing group, the Vet’s First Fly Fishing (VFFF). VFFF has an engineer who designs original adaptive equipment so Veterans can experience the peace and thrill of fly fishing. The parent organization is International Federation of Fly Fishers (IFFF) and they have special memberships for Veterans. If interested, call (406) 222-9369.
My experience is that the trout always have something for me to learn. A large Bull Trout in Montana taught me not to give up without a fight and to show my true colors. A small Brookie Trout advised me to scale back and know when to keep my mouth shut. The Rainbow Trout always teach me to appreciate clean water and to not be lured by shiny objects.

Your first trip to the VA might be a fishing trip to simply get signed up and put into the system. The DOD and VA do not share computer information. Hook a smart contact and reel them in. Take notes, collect direct phone numbers, and ask how to locate the "Release of Information" office for copies of your VHA hospital records. Ask how to get signed up for the New Patient Orientation meeting where you can ask questions from various experts.

The VA is a powerful benefit for all Veterans. See you there.

Gayle Ocheltree is one of our thoughtful and active members of the West LA Patient Advisory Council. She will be featured this year in the Voice of the Veteran magazine.
NEW PATIENT ORIENTATION

All Veterans and family members are welcome to attend New Patient Orientation, which helps you understand all of the services available at the VA. The sessions last about two hours, and have presenters from our Preventive Medicine group, the Business Office, MyHealthEVet online service, and many other services. We also include staff faculty from the Veterans Benefits Administration, so that you can learn more about how to file claims and what the VBA offers Veterans. You don’t have to be new to the system to benefit from this program! You can look up the dates for each of our major sites on the GLA Internet (www.losangeles.va.gov); all sessions begin at 10am. If you have questions you can call Marianne Davis (310) 268-3534.

Find out all you can about VA services…it’s worth it!

REMEMBER JAMES HOGAN? HERE’S AN UPDATE!

Congratulations James Hogan!

James Hogan was selected as male Volunteer of the Year by VA National Voluntary Services. He accepted his award in April; he will also accept the General Maas Award from Blinded Veterans of America for his work to help his fellow blind and needy veterans.

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