



Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
VA MIDWEST HEALTH CARE NETWORK
Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23
Network Update
October 2010
www.visn23.va.gov



Get Vaccinated against the Flu

Flu season is upon us. The 2010-2011 flu vaccine will protect against three different flu viruses: an H3N2 virus, an influenza B virus, and the H1N1 virus. The timing of flu is very unpredictable and can vary from season to season. Veterans can request the shot at regularly scheduled clinic appointments or by contacting their local VA medical facility to learn when flu shot clinics are scheduled.

Protect yourself, your family, and those around you:

- [Get vaccinated against flu.](#)
- Know the [symptoms of flu.](#)
- Cover your cough and sneezes.
- [Clean your hands.](#)
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect shared surfaces like faucets, light switches, and handles on doors and cabinets often.
- Don't enter the home of a sick person, if you are not needed for the person's care or support.
- Avoid getting too close to a sick person. When possible, remain at least three feet away.

For more information call the
VISN 23 toll free "Flu information
and Education Line" at
1-888-686-0479

Judith L. Johnson-Mekota Named Deputy Network Director

Judith L. Johnson-Mekota has been appointed Deputy Network Director (DND) for the VA Midwest Health Care Network (VISN 23) effective October 11, 2010. Ms. Johnson-Mekota was appointed Associate Director, VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System in December 2008. She began her career in the VA in 1992 as a nurse manager of a Coronary Care unit and held positions of increasing responsibility within the VA, including Administrative Officer/Chief of Staff at the Iowa City VAMC from 2001-2007. During her tenure as Administrative Officer, she served details as Acting Associate Director at the Iowa City and Fargo VAMC's. Ms. Johnson-Mekota holds a baccalaureate degree in Nursing from Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and a Masters degree in Nursing Administration/Informatics from the University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA. She has over 15 years of extensive nursing/management experience in private sector tertiary health care settings. If you would like to contact Ms. Johnson-Mekota she can be reached at 612-725-1968.

Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay (RSLSP)

The 2009 War Supplemental Appropriations Act established **Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay (RSLSP)**, providing \$500 for each month/partial month served in stop loss status. The Department of Defense (DoD) Web site (<http://www.defense.gov/stoploss>) links to service-specific sites, where you can get more information, or begin the RSLSP claim process. **The average benefit is \$3,700.**

Service members, veterans, and beneficiaries of service members whose service was involuntarily extended under Stop Loss between Sept. 11, 2001 and Sept. 30, 2009 are eligible for RSLSP. To receive this benefit, those who served under Stop Loss must submit a claim for the special pay (by Dec 3, 2010). Throughout the year, the services have been reaching out to service members, veterans, and their families through direct mail, veteran service organizations, and the media. But there is still money left to be claimed, and the deadline is approaching.

**Those eligible for RSLSP
must submit their claim by Dec. 3, 2010**

Network News

Vicki Edmonds named Chief Business Officer

Vicki Edmonds has been appointed as the Network's Chief Business Officer. Ms Edmonds started her career with the VA as a new nurse graduate in 1974 in Marlin, TX. She worked in a variety of clinical settings at the Marlin VA before transitioning to Utilization Management (UM) in 1987. In 1989 she transferred to VA in Perry Point, Maryland, serving as the UM Coordinator for four years. During her tenure at Perry Point, she became involved with the National Medical Care Cost Recovery (MCCR) Program which included a detail to VA Central Office to participate on many regional and national conferences. She was appointed Network Compliance Officer for VISN 16 in 2000 and was promoted to Business Manager in 2004. Ms. Edmonds helped design and implement the VISN 16 Consolidated Fee Unit (CFU). The CFU processes payments for 10 medical centers and is widely acknowledged as a center of excellence in fee claim processing. In 2007, she was awarded VA's first Chief Fiscal Officer Award for Financial Innovation in recognition of work on CFU. If you would like to contact Ms. Edmonds, she can be reached at 612-725-1968.

Sioux Falls VAMC Names Chief of Staff and Associate Director

Victor Waters, MD, JD was recently named Chief of Staff at the Sioux Falls VAMC. Dr. Waters began his VA career at the Sioux Falls VAMC on Sept. 27. He has over 25 years of clinical experience in internal medicine and emergency medicine and most recently served as the medical director of a Connecticut intermediate care facility for the Dept. of Developmental Services. **Barbara Teal** has been appointed Associate Director for Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive effective September 27. Ms. Teal has 25 years of health care experience. Prior to her appointment as Associate Director, she served Veterans at the Sioux Falls VAMC as an Administrative Officer to the Chief of Staff. Recruitment for a Medical Center Director continues.

Sioux Falls VAMC Community Based Outpatient Clinic Update –

- Wagner, South Dakota - Timothy O'Shea, MD has been appointed the new Medical Director and the Sioux Falls VAMC is planning several outreach events in the Wagner area this fall to raise Veterans awareness of services offered.
- Aberdeen, South Dakota - Luther Hegland, MD is the new psychiatrist serving Veterans at this clinic. A first-time stand down was recently held in Aberdeen for homeless Veterans. Attendance at the stand down was good.
- Sioux City, Iowa - David Sly, MD accepted the position as Service Line Director for the Primary & Special Medicine Service Line. He continues to see patients at the Sioux City clinic on a part-time basis while recruitment is in process for another provider.

St. Cloud VAMC To Introduce New Scheduling System

In the next few months, a new scheduling system is going to be phased in at the St. Cloud VA and its associated CBOCs. The new scheduling system will make it more convenient for Veterans to schedule an appointment. The new system only applies to appointments that are scheduled 90 days or more in advance. Here is a quick overview of how it will work: (1) The Veteran's provider determines how often the Veteran needs to be seen; (2) The Veteran receives a letter asking that s/he call the clinic to schedule a follow-up appointment. Contact information is included in the letter; (3) The Veteran calls the clinic to schedule an appointment(s) at a time that is convenient to the Veteran. Some clinics will begin this new process on October 4, 2010.

North West Metro CBOC Awarded Again After Protest

As a result of a protest, proposals for a NW Metro Community Based Outpatient Clinic were re-evaluated and the award was made (again) on September 29 to PSD LLC, 7533 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, MN 55303. There is a 10-day protest period for this award. The VA will not issue a notice to proceed until Oct 12.



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Serving Those Returning From Combat

The Network takes a proactive approach on outreach to returning service members. As of August 31, 2010, the Network enrolled a total of 41,714 returning service members. Of those, 24,298 received outpatient services; 994 were treated as inpatients; and 16,422 chose to enroll only. If you would like to discuss ideas on how we can better serve those returning from combat, please contact the OEF/OIF Coordinator at your local VA Medical Center. The following tables show the number of Combat Veterans enrolled in this Network and where they are receiving care.

Combat Veterans Enrolled in VISN 23 Cumulative thru August 31, 2010				
Location	National Guard	Reserve	Active Duty	Totals
Black Hills	1058	48	1445	2551
Central Iowa	1813	300	1034	3147
Fargo	2548	207	975	3730
Iowa City	2636	618	780	4034
Minneapolis	7246	4320	2553	14119
NE/W Iowa	2890	1266	1671	5827
St. Cloud	2521	350	1506	4377
Sioux Falls	1335	204	2390	3929
VISN Total	22047	7313	12354	41714

Combat Veterans Care in VISN 23 Cumulative thru August 31, 2010				
Location	Outpatient	Inpatient	Enrolled	Total
Black Hills	2131	281	139	2551
Central Iowa	1873	26	1248	3147
Fargo	1665	23	2042	3730
Iowa City	3060	50	924	4034
Minneapolis	4744	268	9107	14119
NE/W Iowa	3377	49	2401	5827
St. Cloud	4186	158	33	4377
Sioux Falls	3262	139	528	3929
VISN Totals	24298	994	16422	41714



Do you know a homeless Veteran?

Help spread the word - VA has founded a National Call Center for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, that provides free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. Call 1-877-4AID VET (1-877-424-3838) or Chat Live 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Calendar of Events - September and October 2010

October 7 Stand Down at Watertown, South Dakota

Sioux Falls VAMC will host a Stand Down at the Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Watertown.

October 15 Women's Veteran Conference to be Held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

The Sioux Falls VAMC invites women Veterans of all eras to a Women's Veterans Conference to celebrate their contributions and sacrifices. Conference objectives are to expand staff knowledge and understanding of the needs of women Veterans so we can better serve them, and provide women Veterans an opportunity to meet and socialize with other women Veterans. The event will be held at the Holiday Inn Sioux Falls-City Centre from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. For more information contact Charlotte McGrath, Women Veterans Program Manager, 605-336-3230, Ext. 7747.

Oct. 15-16 Veterans of Armed Forces Outreach Event in Red Cloud, Nebraska

Representatives from the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (NWIHCS) will host a Veterans Interagency Outreach Event Oct. 15-16 at the Red Cloud Community Center at 142 West Third Avenue, Red Cloud, NE. The outreach event includes information booths from the following Veteran agencies: NWIHCS Women's Health, Operation Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom Returning Veterans Outreach Team, Lincoln VA Regional Office, Nebraska Transition Assistance Office, Lincoln/Omaha Vets Centers with their mobile Vet Center, local county Veterans service officers, and private Veterans agencies. For more information, contact Cindy Niemack-Brown at 1-866-580-1810, Ext. 9-2287.

Oct. 18-22 VA Minneapolis Health Care System to Host Flu Clinics

Walk-in Flu Clinic will be held at the VA Medical Center October 18-22 in the flag atrium. It is now available for veterans and employees. It is just one shot this year and all are encouraged to get immunized. The Minnesota Visiting Nurses will be giving flu shots to non-veterans for \$26. They will also accept some insurances and Medicare. Letters will be mailed to all enrolled veterans with this information. In addition, the Influenza Hotline and Minneapolis web sites have been updated.

Oct. 19-20 St. Cloud VAMC to host Flu Clinics in St. Cloud and Alexandria, Minnesota

Walk-in Flu clinics will be held at the St. Cloud VAMC October 19-20 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. In Alexandria, the flu clinics will be held from 9-11 a.m. and 1-3 p.m. Oct. 19 and Oct. 29 at the Max J. Bielke Community Based Outpatient Clinic, 515-22nd Ave. E. Flu vaccinations will also be offered to veterans' spouses and partners, in the mornings only. Those shots are \$26, or health insurance can be billed if the patient brings an insurance card. Changes to the flu clinic schedule will be announced on a recorded message at 320-255-6444.

Oct. 19-20 Minnesota Hospice Veteran Partnership Conference in St. Cloud, Minnesota

All Minnesota CVSOs are invited to take part in a state-wide event bringing all community healthcare providers together, especially those serving rural areas. This is a "working conference" that will include education on various programs offered by VA and the community, as well as active participation by attendees to develop a plan for increased communication and collaboration. The purpose is to create a coalition of government and non-government organizations to ensure veterans and their families have access to appropriate high quality hospice and palliative care services. The conference is being held at the St. Cloud Civic Center, 10-4th Avenue South. For more information, contact Mike Jenkins at 701-239-3700 ext 9-4424.

For More information, call the Network Office at (612) 725-1968 or
Log on at www.visn23.va.gov or email sharyl.schaepe@va.gov