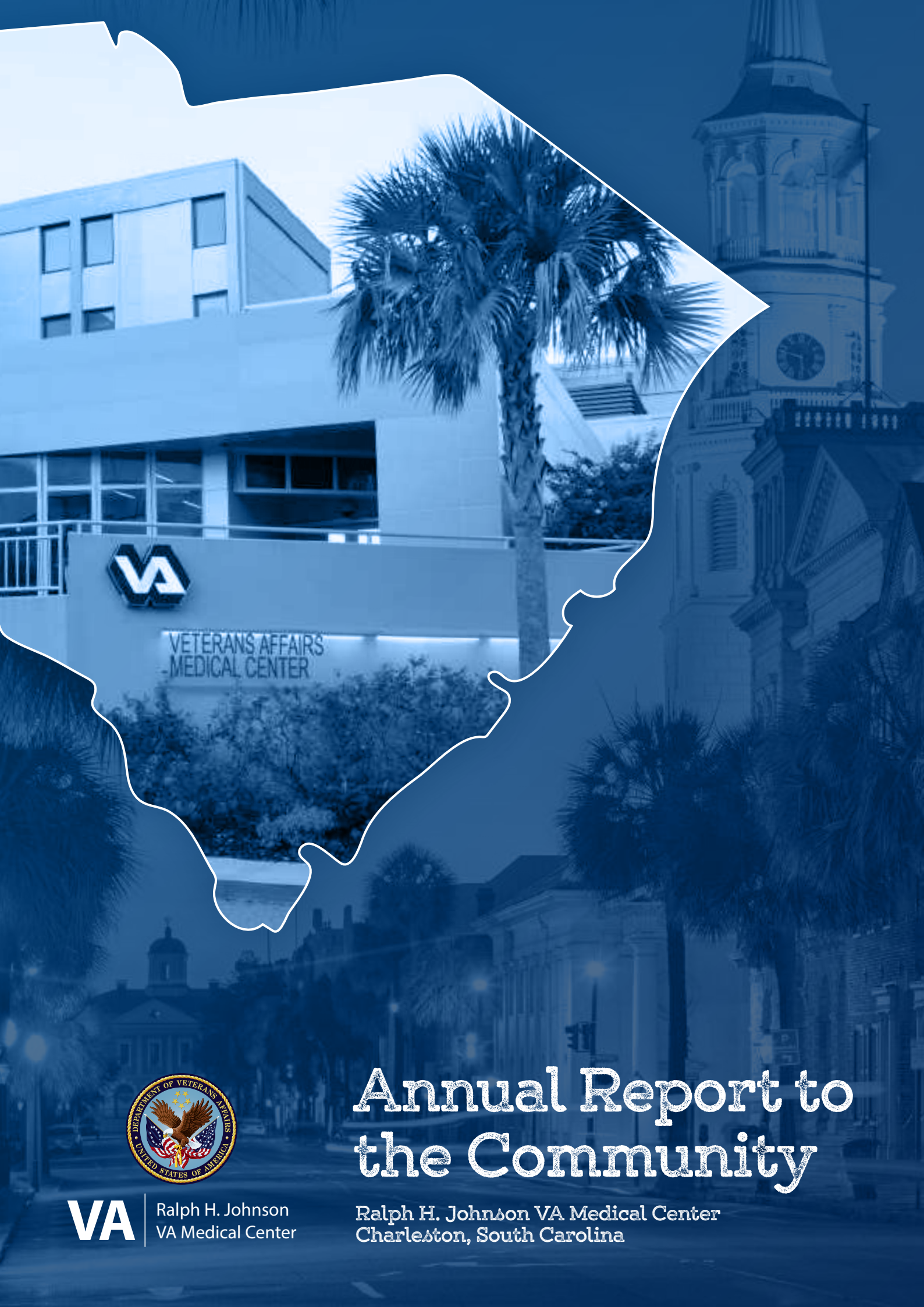




VETERANS AFFAIRS
MEDICAL CENTER



VA

Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center

Annual Report to the Community

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center
Charleston, South Carolina



myVA
Putting Veterans

LAST YEAR, THE RALPH H. JOHNSON VA Medical Center, in alignment with Secretary McDonald's vision, encouraged Veterans and employees to embrace ownership of their local VA facility by launching the *myVA* campaign and rebranding our quarterly magazine. Today, VA centers across the country have caught the Secretary's vision and *myVA* has been adopted throughout the country as a constant reminder of the personal care VA provides our nation's heroes. The national *myVA* initiative is built on a number of foundational elements:

Veteran Experience

Our mission is to examine our Veteran-facing organizations and processes from the Veteran's perspective. Provide every Veteran with seamless, integrated and responsive customer service in every VA experience.

Employee Experience

Our mission is to focus on people and culture so employees are empowered to better serve Veterans. Build a collaborative, inclusive and results-oriented environment that inspires trust.

Support Services Excellence

Our mission is to optimize the organization, functions and activities of VA's core support services.

Performance Improvement

Our mission is to establish a VA-wide infrastructure that supports a culture of continuous performance improvement. Identify successful solutions developed at the local level and replicate them across multiple facilities to improve service to Veterans.

Strategic Partnerships

Our mission is to enhance existing partnerships and build new ones between VA facilities and nonprofits, the private sector, and local governments to integrate service to Veterans.

terans First



Look for this symbol throughout our 2015 Annual Report to find out more about a topic in our online and interactive versions available at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15.

from left to right: Pamela Crowell, Mary Fraggos, Scott Isaacks, Dr. Florence Hutchinson, Felissa Koernig.

The 2015 Annual Report

outlines the amazing ways in which our medical center has grown and excelled in the past year—from adding new facilities like our Community Resource and Referral Center, a one-stop shop for VA and community services dedicated to eradicating Veteran homelessness in our community, to our ever-expanding patient population, which this year has exceeded 67,000 Veterans. Our VA is on the rise. It is my sincere hope that every Veteran who needs health care will walk through our doors and experience the high-quality care we provide. We exist to serve the Veterans in our communities who have selflessly sacrificed in the defense of our nation and the freedoms we all enjoy. The new construction, innovative medical techniques, research and staff additions you'll see featured in this report are just a small sampling of the ways we are pushing forward and striving to hold up our end of the bargain by honoring our Veterans with the best medical care available anywhere.

For Charleston VA and our clinics, 2015 was a year of unprecedented growth—yet we have been able to consistently provide timely access to care by planning ahead. Thanks to expanded clinic hours, increased staffing, tele-medicine and many other strategies, we are able to complete 99 percent of our appointments within 30 days, which is much lower than the national average.

This year, we expanded our Beaufort VA Clinic and open a shared

VA-DOD Dermatology Clinic there thanks to our partnership with Naval Hospital Beaufort. We also opened the doors to a joint VA-DOD Physical Therapy Clinic at Naval Health Clinic Charleston, thereby expanding our relationship with our military partners and Servicemembers across our service area. We realized new parking solutions in 2015 as well by adding a well-received offsite parking lease and shuttle service, and breaking ground on a brand new parking deck at our Charleston campus.

Additionally, Charleston VAMC improved from a 3-Star rating in FY14 to achieve a 5-Star rating in FY15 under VA's Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) evaluation system—an accomplishment that places us in the top 10 percent of all VA medical centers in the nation. We also improved our SAIL efficiency score from 39th in FY13 to 3rd most efficient rating in FY15. We have also continued our solid track record of quality care, ranking in the 90th percentile of all public and private sector hospitals according to the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) measures.

I hope that you will flip through these pages and celebrate with us the advancements that this transformative year has brought. It is my greatest honor to work alongside thousands of dedicated staff members here at Charleston VA who make it their daily business to improve the lives of our Veterans. We all look forward to shaping a better and brighter future for our VA in the year to come.

Sincerely,


Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Director

executive leadership

DIRECTOR

Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Pamela S. Crowell, MPA

CHIEF OF STAFF

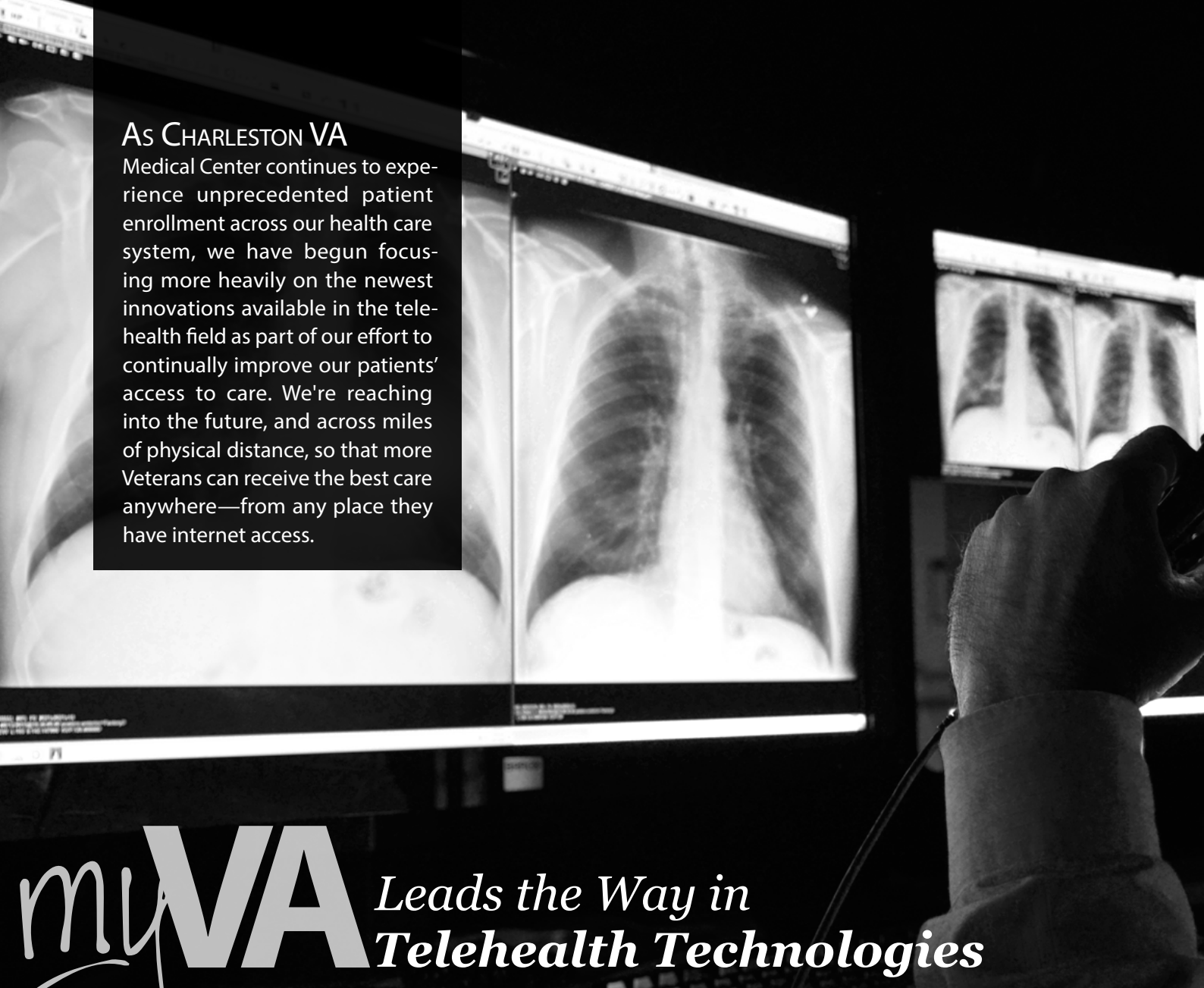
Florence Hutchison, M.D.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR PATIENT CARE/NURSING SERVICE

Mary C. Fraggos, RN, M.S.,
CNAAC, BC

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Felissa Koernig, J.D., MBA



AS CHARLESTON VA

Medical Center continues to experience unprecedented patient enrollment across our health care system, we have begun focusing more heavily on the newest innovations available in the telehealth field as part of our effort to continually improve our patients' access to care. We're reaching into the future, and across miles of physical distance, so that more Veterans can receive the best care anywhere—from any place they have internet access.

myVA *Leads the Way in Telehealth Technologies*

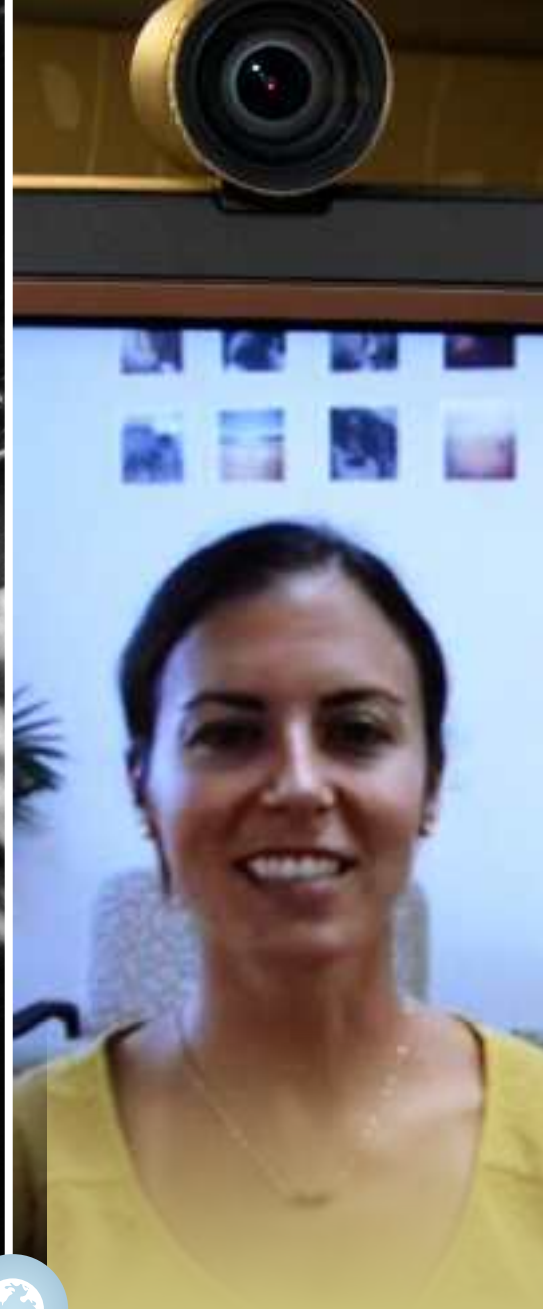
Teleradiology program improves service, cuts costs

Swing by the Radiology Department here at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center after hours, long after the hallways have cleared and most of the staff have gone home for the evening, and you will find a couple of dedicated radiologists sitting in a darkened room and analyzing scans for patients located not only in Charleston, but across the Southeast.

The VISN 7 Southeast Network Teleradiology Program was created in October of 2014 and housed within the Radiology Service at Charleston VAMC. The program had two simple goals—save money by reducing the number of radiological studies sent to providers outside of the VA system to be evaluated and improve patient care by reading scans more quickly.

"I initially conceived this project when reviewing the bills that were being generated across the VISN for teleradiology services," said Chief of Radiology Service Alexander Dibona. "At that time we were using a third party vendor and the costs were astronomical. It occurred to me that we should be able to provide at least a part of that service for the VISN at much lower cost. We already had a great deal of the needed infrastructure in place in the form of workstations and related hardware components. We just weren't using that equipment at night and if we could get some radiologists in house overnight we should be able to make very cost effective use of existing equipment."

Upon the program's creation, radiologists in Charleston began reading local studies as



well as some routine cases for Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System in Alabama, which was experiencing a radiology backlog at that time due to low staffing.

Now, the program has evolved and the teleradiologists read routine studies for the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center in Dublin, Georgia, the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia, ensuring Veterans across the region receive top notch medical care in a fraction of the time. ▀

>125 SCANS
per evening

\$841,000
saved for VISN7

21,000
studies in FY15

The nation's top-performing Telemental Health Program

Last year, Charleston VAMC's Telemental Health Program had more visits than any other VA facility in the country—bringing telehealth services to patients at all of the medical center's outlying outpatient clinics. These services include psychiatric medication management, psychotherapy and assistance through the Homeless Program. See how Telemental Health Section Chief Anna Birks and her team bring health care to the most remote areas at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/telehealth

myVA

REDUCES CANCER RISK

AT HER ANNUAL ROUTINE MAMMOGRAM in September 2013, U.S. Army Veteran Edith White got the news that many women dread—there was a lump. Within a month the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center coordinated her biopsy appointment at the Medical University of South Carolina Hollings Cancer Center.

“The process happened quickly,” said White. “It was such a short amount of time between my mammogram and the biopsy. The VA set up my appointment and then called me with the date, time, and location. Elizabeth took care of all that for me.”

Physician Assistant Elizabeth Spitz serves in an essential role for breast cancer treatment at Charleston VAMC by closely coordinating with community partners to treat Veterans. She is the point person on-site at the VA who patients can contact

directly, making her very accessible for breast cancer patients as they go through treatment.

White has a significant family history of breast cancer, so following a lumpectomy and radiation, she was recommended by her VA oncology team for genetic testing through a telegenetics partnership with the Salt Lake City VA Medical Center. The testing took place right at her local VA outpatient clinic in Myrtle Beach making the appointment very convenient for her. She tested positive for the genetic

mutation that can increase a woman’s risk of breast and ovarian cancer. In June 2015, White opted for a double mastectomy and hysterectomy at Charleston VAMC.

“I am thankful to the people in my community that recommended I go enroll in VA health care,” said White. “The VA has helped guide me through these surgeries and treatments. I am now encouraging others in my town to ask about their eligibility.”



The Loris, South Carolina native cannot wait to heal from her surgeries and get back to gardening.

"I love to see the flowers when they start to bloom and watch the goldfish in my pond," said White.

You can bet White is not letting cancer get the best of her—she remains ambitious and ready to move forward in life. She has her eyes set on completing a bachelor's degree in social work to help others in her community. ■

7,233
female Veterans in FY15
More than 1/10
of all patients



Charleston VA provides top-notch cancer care

Chief of Surgery Dr. Mark Lockett and his team work hand in hand with community partners to coordinate the care for Veterans before, during and after a cancer diagnosis. Learn more about their care coordination, patient navigation and breast cancer treatments at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/cancer



I did it!

Thanks to my VA

THREE YEARS AGO, Army Veteran Jerry Nelson lost his left leg to complications of diabetes. The amputation left the 63-year-old Veteran in a wheelchair, but also ignited his competitive spirit. Early in 2015, after much determination and incredible fortitude, Nelson realized a long-time goal of walking the Cooper River Bridge Run.

"At first I was depressed," Nelson remembers. "I thought it was the end of me. But I was determined to get out of that chair and walk again and be as normal as possible. And that's what I'm doing."

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center gave Nelson the support he needed to not only get himself out of the wheelchair, but to gain enough confidence to walk with

a prosthetic limb over the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge during the 10-kilometer race. Physical therapists were instrumental in helping Nelson adjust to his new leg. They taught him how to put it on and led him in exercises to help regain his balance. Home nurses supplemented the care he received in the facility and furthered his recovery.

"My therapy here helped me stay motivated," Nelson said. "I couldn't have done any of this without their help—they made this all possible."

Nelson built up to walking four miles a day, four days each week in preparation for the Bridge Run. On race day, the Veteran completed the course with a smile despite the struggle of making it over the bridge's daunting incline.

"The closer I got to the top of the bridge, the further away it seemed to get," said Nelson. "But once you get over it, it's all downhill from there. I came to conquer that bridge and there was no way I wasn't going to finish strong."

And he did. Nelson hopes his story will inspire his fellow Veterans to make the effort to reach their goals.

"I wanted to show others that they could do this," said Nelson. "If you want to get out of that wheelchair, you can. You just have to have the self-pride and the motivation. The VA helped me get there. You just have to take it one small step at a time." ■



Physical therapists get Veterans back on their feet

Recovering from an injury or adjusting to a new prosthetic limb is no easy task for most patients. Fortunately, Veterans served by Charleston VAMC have a team of well-trained physical therapists to turn to when the going gets tough.

See how medical professionals like Janine Tumminia help get Veterans back on the road to recovery at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/pt



5 DAYS

CHARLESTON IS A NATIONAL LEADER IN turnaround times for procurement of much-needed prosthetic limbs. On average, it only takes **five days** from the time a Veteran is seen in the Amputee Clinic for the purchase of the limb to be authorized. The Veteran will typically have the limb from the vendor—ready for use—within **30 days** of being seen in the clinic.

30 DAYS



myVA gave us a stable home

WHILE LIVING IN COLUMBIA, South Carolina, Monique Eazel found herself in a difficult situation—in an abusive relationship with three young children and in need of help. Eager to change her life, she reached out to the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center Homeless Team and has now been successfully engaged in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development–Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD–VASH) program for four years.

The HUD–VASH program combines Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA.

“Since the beginning, the VA has understood my story, taken me under their wing and helped me get to where I am today,” said Eazel. “They have given my family a safe and stable home where we can build our future.”

The homeless program at Charleston VAMC helps Veterans build a foundation of health care, job training, education, emotional support and financial resources to begin again. The team of employees works to turn each Veteran’s tale into a success story and make sure they find their way home.

“I want my kids to see me doing something good,” said Eazel. “I want them to want to finish school and have a bright future. The VA has helped me set a good example for them and I’m grateful for the support.”

Encouraged by her VA social worker, Eazel fulfilled her lifelong dream of completing her degree in cosmetology and is excited about future employment! ■

498 Veterans
permanently housed in
FY15 through HUD-VASH

60 Employees
dedicated to VAMC
homeless program

Charleston offers targeted health care for the homeless

Dr. Elizabeth Call is dual board certified in internal medicine and psychiatry. She leads Charleston VAMC Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team. Her team’s focus is to deliver just-in-time primary care for Veterans, allowing for daily walk-in appointments and referrals for housing or other needs. Learn more about the health care services Dr. Call provides at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/homeless





my VA

SPEND ANY AMOUNT OF TIME at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and you'll get to know Navy Veteran Percy Jones. Jones, now employed as a housekeeper at the hospital, goes about his daily duties sporting an infectious, bright, wide smile and interacts joyfully with staff and patients while making his rounds. But his disposition wasn't always so sunny.

"At one time, I was having an awful lot of problems isolating myself," Jones remembers. "I got angry easily and I was always very nervous. I couldn't sleep. I started drinking too much. It got to the point where I was suicidal. I just didn't want to live."

Fortunately, Jones heard about a national research study being conducted at Charleston VA, which utilized a non-invasive technique called transcranial magnetic stimulation to treat depression among Veterans. Jones signed up straightaway and soon after began receiving treatments—one 30-minute session, five days per week, for six straight weeks. Jones would come in during his lunch break and relax in a chair while researchers used a magnet to stimulate his prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for emotions and mood regulation. The results were almost immediate.

"In the first week and a half I could feel a difference," Jones said. "I started realizing that I was myself again."

And many Veterans in the study have had similar experiences. According to Dr. Mark George, principle investigator of the study, so far about 60 percent of the patients in the trial have reached a state of remission with their depression. This is big news for Veterans like Jones. Through the TMS treatment George hopes to help Veterans struggling with crippling depression and suicidal thoughts once again lead happy and productive lives.

"It was just like a door opening," Jones said, beaming. "I started smiling more and sleeping again. I would say the treatment suppressed my depression and anxiety enough for me to be me." ■





\$21 million

FY15 research budget

100

principle
investigators

>200

ongoing research
studies

DISCOVERS NEW THERAPIES

Rooting out depression with breakthrough technologies

Dr. Mark George conceived the idea of using transcranial magnetic stimulation in the treatment of depression in 1990. Since then, he has been instrumental in getting the technique approved by the Food and Drug Administration and researching TMS through the VA and the Medical University of South Carolina. Find out more about how TMS is changing how clinicians may treat mental disorders in the future at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/research



Veterans Choice offers flexibility, improved access to care

The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, which was implemented a year ago, is fully supported by our VA. As the Choice Program expands, more Veterans may be eligible for community care. Based upon comments from our patients, our Veterans have clearly stated their desire to continue receiving their care at our VA—see why at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/choice



THIS YEAR CHARLESTON VA

Medical Center was designated as a participant in the South Carolina Hospital Association pilot project to guide health systems in the state towards high reliability. The project combines the collaborative platform for quality and patient safety improvement with the knowledge and expertise of the Joint Commission. Charleston is the only VAMC to participate in a pilot of this type.

The input of Charleston VAMC is valued, and with good reason, they put their Veterans needs and safety first. Patients like Jim Strickland recognize the quality of care they receive.

“As a retired health care professional, I am very picky about where I receive my care,” said Strickland.

Strickland, a former resident of Savannah, Georgia, now resides in Fernandian Beach, Florida. The move to Florida didn’t prompt him to look for another health care facility—he kept his care at the Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic, right where he’s been receiving care for the last 15 years.

“I don’t mind the 90-minute drive to Savannah to see Dr. Christopher Ludlow and the rest of the team at the Savannah clinic,” said Strickland. “I have been to other clinics, and the Savannah facility is stellar. I’ve never had a gripe or complaint there; it’s just good quality health care.”

The personal care and concern from the VA employees in Savannah is what keeps Strickland coming back. Dr. Ludlow—Strickland’s primary care physician—calls his home with test results, follows up with direct and clear information, and can even quickly recall Strickland’s wife’s name. Strickland feels comfortable navigating the clinic because Dr. Ludlow himself often walks him to the next area in the clinic where Strickland is receiving care—escorting him straight to the lab or physical therapy.

“Even my father was a Savannah VA clinic patient for over 10 years,” said Strickland. “He is a retired Marine with high expectations, just like mine. Everyone is upbeat and professional at the clinic and I don’t plan to go anywhere else for my health care. I know good care when I see it.” ■

5th Fastest
growing VAMC in U.S.

Top 10%
of all VAMCs in
quality & efficiency

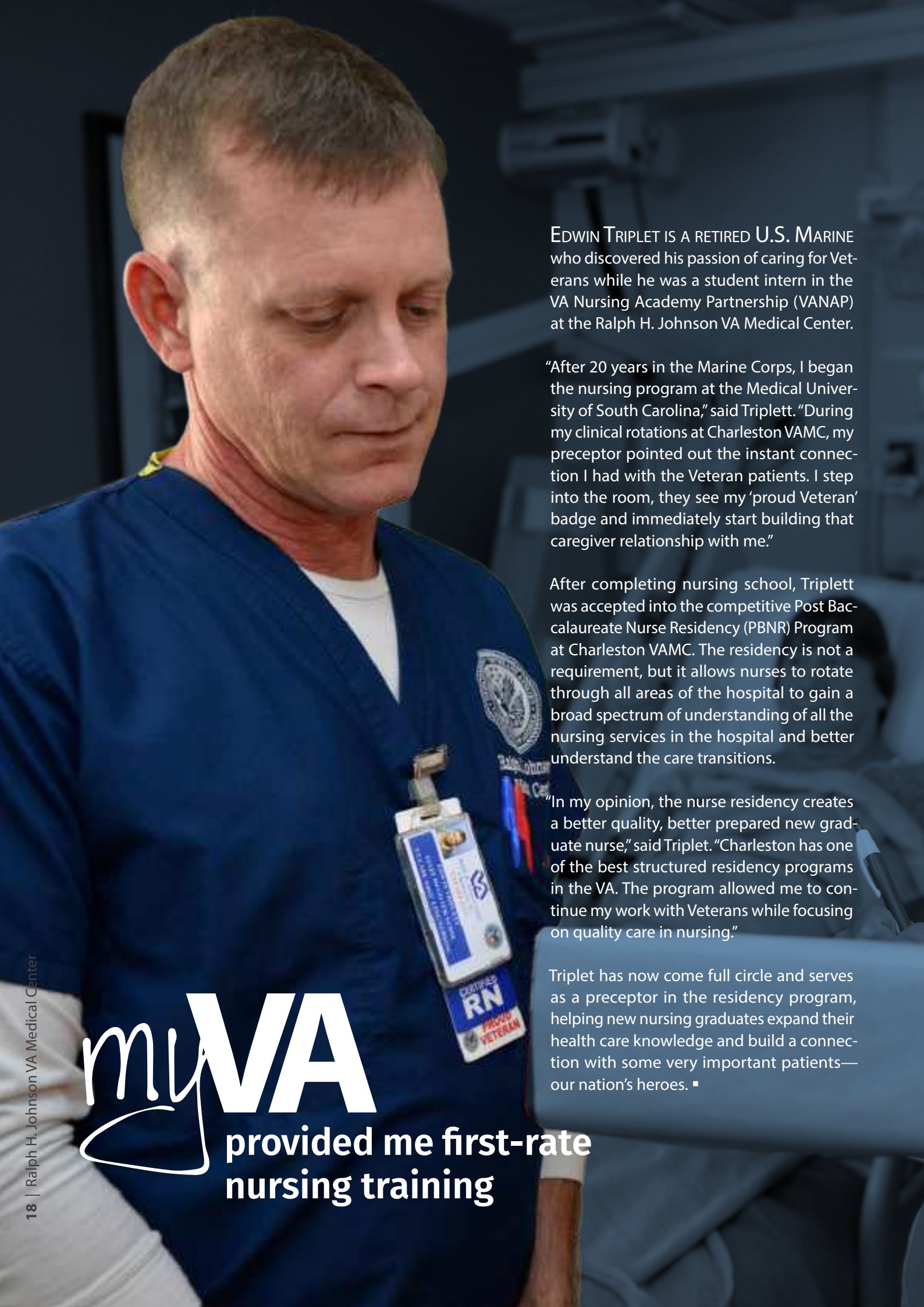
**Top 10th
Percentile**
Healthcare Effectiveness Data
and Information Set ranking



5-Star Quality Care

Charleston VAMC improved from a 3-Star rating in FY14 to achieve a 5-Star rating in FY15 under VA's Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) evaluation system—an accomplishment that places us in the top 10 percent of all VA medical centers in the nation. We also improved our SAIL efficiency score from 39th in FY13 to 3rd most efficient rating in FY15. SAIL is a comprehensive tool that assesses 25 quality measures in such areas as complications, patient safety, access to care, and customer satisfaction. SAIL also includes efficiency measures such as telephone abandonment rate.

myVA
provides the
highest quality
care



EDWIN TRIPLET IS A RETIRED U.S. MARINE who discovered his passion of caring for Veterans while he was a student intern in the VA Nursing Academy Partnership (VANAP) at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center.

"After 20 years in the Marine Corps, I began the nursing program at the Medical University of South Carolina," said Triplett. "During my clinical rotations at Charleston VAMC, my preceptor pointed out the instant connection I had with the Veteran patients. I step into the room, they see my 'proud Veteran' badge and immediately start building that caregiver relationship with me."

After completing nursing school, Triplett was accepted into the competitive Post Baccalaureate Nurse Residency (PBNR) Program at Charleston VAMC. The residency is not a requirement, but it allows nurses to rotate through all areas of the hospital to gain a broad spectrum of understanding of all the nursing services in the hospital and better understand the care transitions.

"In my opinion, the nurse residency creates a better quality, better prepared new graduate nurse," said Triplett. "Charleston has one of the best structured residency programs in the VA. The program allowed me to continue my work with Veterans while focusing on quality care in nursing."

Triplett has now come full circle and serves as a preceptor in the residency program, helping new nursing graduates expand their health care knowledge and build a connection with some very important patients—our nation's heroes. ■

myVA
provided me first-rate
nursing training



Nursing education:

Training tomorrow's healers

Nicole Coxe, MSN, RN, started at Charleston VAMC as a student nurse in the VALOR Program. Today, she is the chief of nursing education and helps other nurses get the training they need to provide high quality health care services to Veterans. Find out more about nursing education at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/nursing

Students in our Nursing Trainee Programs Annually

180/year
VANAP

VA Nursing
Academic
Partnership

4/year
VALOR

VA Learning
Opportunity
Residency

6/year
PBNR

Post-
Baccalaureate
Nurse
Residency

3/year
PMHNP

Post Mental
Health Nurse
Practitioner
Residency

Charleston VAMC is the only VA in the country to offer all three nurse residency programs. In May 2015, Charleston VAMC received accreditation of its nurse residency program through the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).





my **VA** gave me a family

At 81 years old, U.S. Army Veteran Lawrence Moore was living alone in an unsafe neighborhood with poor nutrition and inadequate medical care. Fortunately, a VA program connected Moore with a woman in the community who was motivated to care for Veterans in her own home—a woman dedicated to bringing Veterans in and making them part of her family.

“They served their country, now it’s our time to serve them—and I’ll never give up on them,” said Rose Doctor, caregiver with the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center’s Medical Foster Home Program.



Medical Foster Home Coordinator brings Veterans together with caregivers

As the Medical Foster Home Coordinator, Natasha Simeon-Major, MSW, LISW-CP, is passionate about connecting Veterans and caregivers in the community. She has helped build the program since 2013 when it received its initial funding. Read more about the MFH program and Simeon-Major’s commitment to expanding the service at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/mfh



A Medical Foster Home is an alternative to a nursing home for Veterans who are no longer able to safely live independently. The program helps connect Veterans with caregivers who are willing to open up their home and serve in the role of a strong family member, providing Veterans with a safe environment for aging.

"The care provided in a MFH is a better level of care than typically provided in a nursing home and it's at a lower cost to the Veteran," said MFH Coordinator Natasha Simeon-Major. "Veterans are receiving one-on-one care by someone solely dedicated to their needs."

Moore made the move to Doctor's home located in St. Stephens, South Carolina, in February 2015 at a frail 121 pounds. His previous diet consisted mainly of lunch meat and snack foods and even that was not always available. Just six months after daily meals provided by Doctor, Moore had gained a healthy 18 pounds, reaching his medical team's short term goal for weight gain.

"She provides good home cooked meals," said Moore. "I like her lima beans, fish, cabbage and greens."

MFH works in conjunction with the Home-Based Care Team to provide the in-home medical care needed by aging Veterans. A part of healthy aging is companionship, and the MFH provides that piece to the puzzle too.

"We play board games together, go to church and I love to be around her grandkids," said Moore. "She even threw me a surprise 82nd birthday and invited my grandsons—that made me feel good."

"People are what really matter," said Doctor. "To be there for someone in their time of need is more important than anything." ■

MARINE CORPS VETERAN CHARLOTTE STEVENS'

pain management journey began decades ago in the early '80s with a back injury she sustained while at boot camp. Since then, the Veteran has undergone three back surgeries, the most recent of which was in 2010, and two knee replacements to correct a multitude of ailments. The procedures helped improve Stevens' mobility but she still found herself struggling with persistent, and sometimes excruciating, pain.

"You start hurting and you just want relief," Stevens explained. "You don't really care at the time how that relief comes; you just need to feel better."

For Stevens, that relief came in the form of strong prescription pain medication—pills that helped dull the pain but left her feeling numb and disconnected.

"I was on methadone for quite a while," Stevens said. "I really didn't like the way it made me feel. I felt sluggish, like I was in a fog. Plus, there's a stigma attached to those medications. I was in the military and I'm a retired police officer. I just knew there had to be a better way."

The former Marine found just the help she needed when she was referred to the interdisciplinary Pain Clinic at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. Under the watchful eye of pharmacist Anthony Abramczyk, Stevens began slowly tapering off of the opioids and replacing the pills with holistic pain management solutions. The treatment began with acupuncture administered at the clinic and evolved to include remedies the Veteran could accomplish at home. Stevens now takes supplements such as fish oil and vitamin D. She also practices controlled yoga breathing daily and is dabbling in tai chi—techniques proven to help chronic pain sufferers master mindfulness and improve their flexibility.

"I feel better than I have in years," said Stevens. "I'm enjoying my gardening and needlework and I'm so thankful that I have learned these natural ways to handle my pain. I know I won't always be pain free, but the excellent care I've gotten at Charleston VA has given me the tools I need to cope with it and live my life to the fullest." ■



Opioid Management: The right treatment at the right time

Charleston VA Medical Center is committed to the safe and effective management of all opioid prescriptions. The facility's Pain Management Committee brings together key staff to evaluate dosing and monitor patients currently taking these medications. Learn more about how Clinical Pharmacy Specialist and Pain Management founder Anthony Abramczyk and other integral clinicians helped Charleston become a national leader in safe prescribing of opioids at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/painmanagement

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES OFFERED

- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Nutraceuticals (Natural Supplements)
- Trigger Point Massage using a TheraCane
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Aquatherapy
- Yoga Classes
- Tai Chi Classes
- Qigong Classes



naturally pain
free thanks to **myVA**



LFHA expands health clinics in the Lowcountry

Access to health care just became a bit more convenient for Veterans, Servicemembers and other Department of Defense beneficiaries with this year's addition of the new Dermatology Clinic at Naval Hospital Beaufort and the expansion of physical therapy services at Naval Health Clinic Charleston.

Through the Lowcountry Federal Healthcare Alliance, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense work together to offer a broad range of health care services, including specialty care, to our nation's heroes and their families. LFHA also introduces new opportunities for care.



When the new Dermatology Clinic opened at Naval Hospital Beaufort, it was the first time dermatology services had been offered there. Since its opening in February 2015, there have been 828 visits to the clinic by Veterans and DOD beneficiaries. And the expansion of the existing Physical Therapy Clinic at Naval Health Clinic Charleston, which put resources in place to provide physical therapy for Veterans, has resulted in more than 19,000 visits to the clinic in FY15.



"The convenience of not having to drive downtown for a PT appointment, or in the case of Beaufort, not being referred to non-VA care. With clinics being closer to where Veterans and Servicemembers live and work, they've now been empowered to seek treatment for medical issues that they may have been aware of, but were reluctant to seek care for because of logistical challenges," explains LFHA VA-DOD Liaison Ray Seegers.

LFHA includes Naval Health Clinic Charleston, Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, 628th Medical Group and Naval Hospital Beaufort. One of only 12 VA-DOD joint venture sites in the country, this partnership significantly reduces the government's overall health care expenditures, improves access to care, and promotes continuity of care among active duty military members transitioning to Veteran status.

LFHA has saved VA and DOD more than \$12.7M since it was established in 2006. And while the cost savings are notable, Seegers also notes the less quantifiable rewards that come out of the partnership:

"Veteran patients really enjoy spending time with active duty Servicemembers and forming new friendships. The same has been said by the Servicemembers receiving treatment alongside their Veteran brethren. They enjoy sharing stories, and in some cases, asking for guidance."

LFHA members plan to continue the alliance for years to come, adding and expanding medical specialties throughout joint venture sites to provide the quality health care our Veterans, Airmen, Sailors, Soldiers, Marines and their families deserve. ■



Lowcountry Federal Healthcare Alliance

LFHA is an award-winning collaboration between VA and DOD. Through resource sharing agreements, LFHA provides joint health care services to Veterans and DOD beneficiaries throughout the Lowcountry. Learn more about LFHA's two newest clinics at www.charleston.va.gov/AR15/LFHA

Our VA is growing...

As the number of Veterans in and around the Charleston area continues to grow, more and more of our nation's heroes are choosing the quality health care provided at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. Averaging 150 to 200 new patients each week, it's no wonder that our VA is the fifth fastest growing VA medical center in the nation. Charleston VA has a growth rate of 6.6 percent for FY15. To date, our VA serves more than 67,000 unique Veteran patients, of whom more than 10 percent are women. With more than 1 million patient encounters per year, including approximately 772,000 outpatient visits and 3,890 admissions during FY15, our aim is to reach every Veteran who comes to us for care and deliver an excellent patient experience. This year our VA ranked in the top 30 percent nationwide for Veteran satisfaction.

...and expanding to
meet patient need

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is expanding to accommodate the growing patient demand. Charleston VA has shown record growth in the services we offer and the expansions occurring across remote outpatient clinics. Several new specialty care clinics opened during FY15, including:

- Radiology, MRI, dermatology, podiatry at the Beaufort VA Outpatient Clinic
- Physical therapy at the Goose Creek VA Outpatient Clinic
- Dietary at the Hinesville VA Outpatient Clinic
- Podiatry, physical therapy, and dermatology at the Myrtle Beach VA Outpatient Clinic
- Dietary services, telehealth dermatology, and teleretinal imaging at the Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic

Through the Veterans Choice Act, Charleston VAMC was also awarded with two of the 27 major medical facility leases awarded nationwide. These leases provide the flexibility needed to meet shifts in patient demographics and the changing service needs of our Veterans. In the years to come, a new primary care and dental clinic annex will be added at the Charleston site, and the Myrtle Beach VA Outpatient Clinic will be replaced.



ACC Expansion

The Ambulatory Care Center expansion opened in May to meet the growing need for additional access to surgery and gastrointestinal procedures. The ACC is located on the third floor of the medical center and has increased the unit from 13 to 21 beds. In 2016, Charleston VAMC will open a sixth operating room and four new GI procedure rooms.



CRRC Grand Opening

Charleston VAMC, in partnership with Palmetto Goodwill, opened a Community Resource and Referral Center in North Charleston during FY15. The center provides a one-stop resource center for Veterans experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless in the greater Charleston area. Services at the CRRC are provided by Veterans Benefits Administration, Social Security, Legal Aid, Charleston Adult Education, South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation and several other organizations.



Additionally, a number of construction projects and improvements are also underway:



Charleston VAMC Parking Deck

During FY15 Charleston VA broke ground on a new parking deck at the medical center. The parking deck is a two-phase project with Phase 1 building the first two stories and setting the foundation for Phase 2's future expansion. Phase 2, scheduled to begin in 2017, will add four additional levels for a total deck capacity of 900 parking spaces once complete.

Transition & Care

Management Welcome Area

The VA is working to ensure that Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn are making use of the benefits they have earned through their service. In Charleston, our medical center is creating a space where these Veterans can go to learn more about these services. The Transition & Care Management welcome area is expected to open during FY16.



Savannah VA Outpatient Clinic

Veterans in the Savannah area are looking forward to a new and improved 69,000 square foot leased facility that will replace the existing Savannah clinic. The new clinic will feature primary care, mental health, women's health, telehealth, telemental health, radiology, physical therapy and optometry.





The difference is you...

Our Staff

Staff at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center arrive at work with one purpose in mind—"to care for him who shall have borne the battle." In FY15, Charleston VA increased the number of people who bear this mission by more than 14 percent, bringing the total number of employees to 2,395 for FY15. Two hundred of the 270 new positions are clinical staff, allowing Charleston VA to continue to grow its world-class team of physicians, nurses, therapists and allied health professionals. We improved on 90 percent of measures in the All Employee Survey, scoring above the national average on more than 80 percent of AES measures. Employee satisfaction is evidenced by a low employee turnover rate of less than 7 percent, which is lower than the VHA turnover rate of 9 percent and the private sector health care rate of 18 percent.

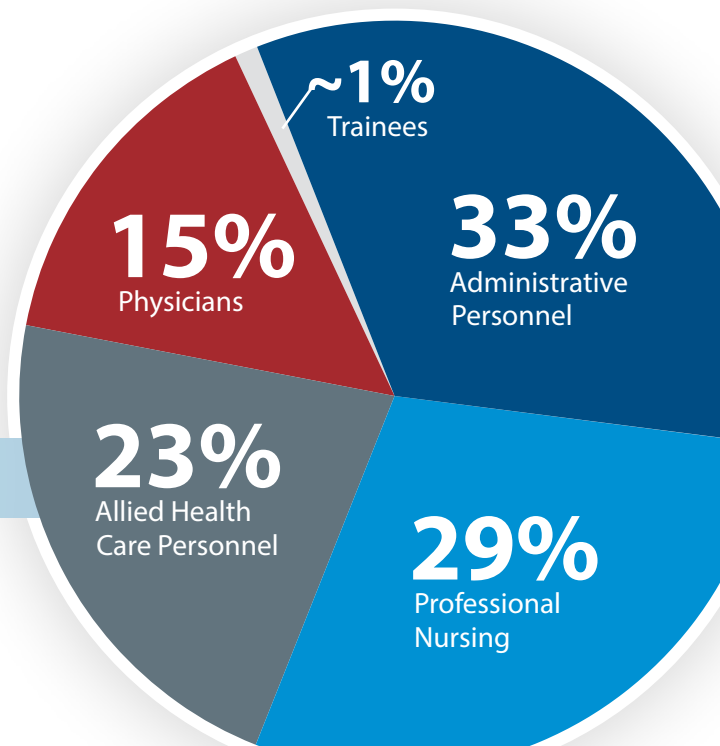
<7% Turnover **270** New Positions **14%** Workforce Increase

2,395 EMPLOYEES

30% Veterans **64%** Female **36%** Male

Our Volunteers

Our mission to serve America's Veterans would not be possible without the commitment and dedication of the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service and the volunteers who devote their time and talents everyday. Volunteers cover a myriad of tasks from visiting with hospitalized patients, to escorting distinguished guests, to driving Veterans to and from the medical center. Our dedicated volunteers have a keen sense of duty and understand the importance that each act of service brings to these Veterans. Approximately half of the people who volunteer their time are Veterans themselves.





\$2.2M

Total Resource
Impact of Voluntary
Services & Donations

85,420

Hours of Voluntary
Service

by

1,088

Volunteers

58%	Personnel Services
20%	Miscellaneous Contracts
17%	Supplies & Materials
3%	Grants & Contributions
2%	Equipment

\$397,677,451

FY15 FACILITY BUDGET

Customer Care

Charleston VA has implemented several customer service initiatives in FY15 such as training for customer service staff, new survey tools, secret shoppers, and including Veterans in customer service councils, focus groups and advisory boards. Additionally, Charleston VA has established a non-VA care coordination (NVCC) customer service line to help manage patients who elect to receive care outside the VA system. NVCC has also established teams to help coordinate care between VA health care providers and external health professionals.

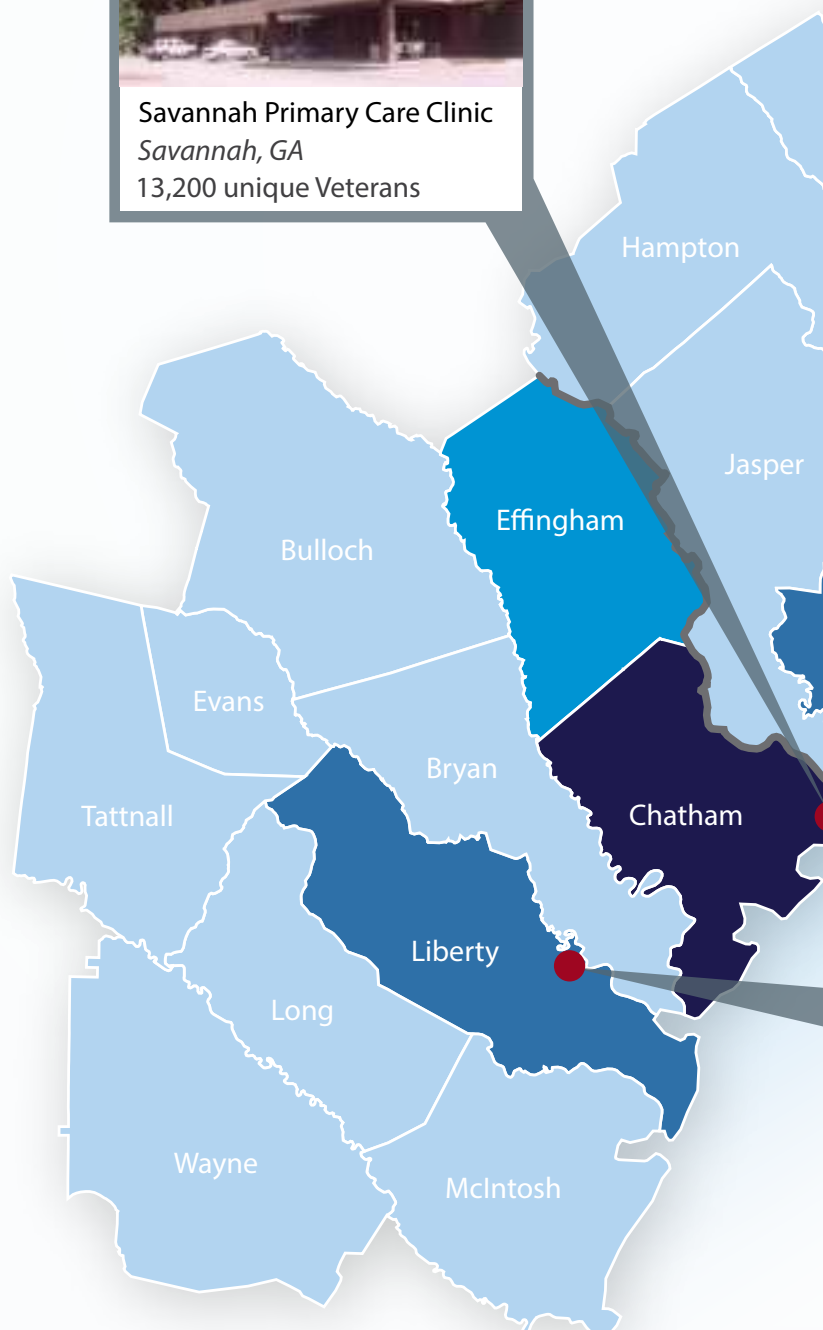


Areas Served

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center is a 149-bed Level 1 tertiary care medical center that includes six community outpatient clinics, a 20-bed nursing home, women's health and the full range of inpatient and outpatient care including Medical and Surgical Intensive Care. The VAMC provides more than 772,000 outpatient visits and approximately 3,890 inpatient stays annually—that's more than one million clinical encounters per year!

LEGEND

FY15 Eligible Veteran Population, by County







VA

Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center
109 Bee Street
Charleston, SC 29401

www.charleston.va.gov
1-888-878-6884
(843) 577-5011

Director
Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE

Executive Editor
Tonya Lobbestael

Writers
Erin Curran, MHA
Meredith A. Hagen
Lanelle W. Strawder, M.A.

Photographer
James Arrowood
Designer
David L. Jones, MSOL