

SPIRIT ONLINE

Volume 1, Issue 24

VA Connecticut Healthcare System

December 17, 2003

HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



This is the time of year when we look forward to spending time with family and friends.

This holiday season has special meaning for us. Recently, staff at the Newington campus bid farewell to the men and women of the Connecticut National Guard who were mobilized to serve in the Persian Gulf. The National Guard based at the Newington campus has become

a part of our VA Connecticut family and their presence will be missed. At formation the morning the guard mobilized for their 18-month deployment, the commanding officer expressed his thanks for your support of the troops. I ask that as you celebrate with your family and friends this holiday season, that you remember these men and women, and the thousands of others like them, who will be spending this season away from loved ones.

I would also like you to remember the men and women we serve here daily. It was not so long ago that they also left family and friends behind in defense of this great nation. As we said goodbye and will miss those deploying now, someone felt those same emotions for the veterans we now serve. It is our privilege to care for those who gave so much and I ask that you keep this in mind when you pass our patients in the halls, canteen, retail store, parking lots and waiting rooms. They, too, left behind everything, uncertain of whether they would return. They are the reason we are here. Happy Holidays!



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Events

**- Newington -
Holiday Get-Together
with the Director
Dec. 19**

10-11:30 a.m.
(5th floor of Building 1)

**Federal Agencies
to Close Dec. 26**

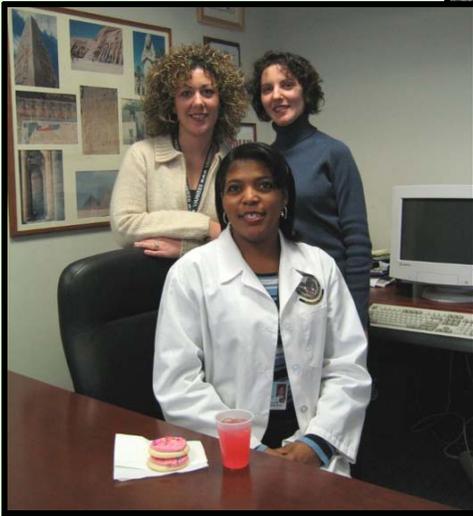
Happy Holidays!



For more information on these and other events please see *Good Morning VA Connecticut*.

DIRECTOR'S HOLIDAY PARTY

VA Connecticut Director Roger Johnson hosted a holiday get-together Dec. 15 for employees and volunteers at the West Haven campus. Several rooms in the director's suite were decorated and filled with holiday goodies that were enjoyed by the many employees who stopped by between 2 and 4 p.m. Another party is scheduled at the Newington campus on Dec. 19 from 10 to 11:30 on the fifth floor.



Researchers Pinpoint Source of Chronic Pain Resulting from Spinal Cord Injury

(Yale News Release, Nov. 6, 2003)

New Haven, Conn. -- The burning, vise-like pain experienced by most people with spinal cord injuries results from overly sensitized nerve cells; this activity can be blocked by administering specially designed molecules, according to Yale researchers.

These results for the first time implicate sodium channels-molecular batteries necessary for conduction of nerve signals-in severe pain following spinal cord injury. The findings also suggest a way to treat this pain by blocking the production of the specific sodium channels, the authors stated in the Journal of Neuroscience October issue.

Spinal cord injury can result in hypersensitivity of pain-signaling nerve cells within the spinal cord. In his study with rats, **Bryan Hains, M.D.**, a postdoctoral fellow in neurology and the Veterans Administration Rehabilitation Research and Development Center in West Haven, found a particular type of sodium channel, Nav 1.3, to be present in abnormally high levels within the pain-signaling nerve cells following spinal cord injury. These channels cause the nerve cells to become hypersensitive, allowing them to fire signals at higher-than-normal rates. Normal stimuli then become extremely painful.

Next, Hains and **Stephen Waxman, M.D.**, professor and chair of neurology and senior author of the study, injected the rats with specially designed molecules, "antisense oligonucleotides," targeting the problem sodium channel. The injection resulted in decreased production of the Nav 1.3 sodium channels, less hypersensitivity of the pain-signaling nerve cells within the spinal cord, and reduced pain-related behaviors. The pain returned when the treatment was stopped.

"These results demonstrate for the first time that an easily targeted molecule can have dramatic effect on pain after spinal cord injury, which is very exciting," Hains said. However, despite their potential, the results must be replicated and tested in higher-order animals before testing in humans, he said.

The research was supported by the Medical Research Service and Rehabilitation Research and Development Service, Department of Veterans Affairs; the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association; the Paralyzed Veterans of America; The Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation and the National Institutes of Health-National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

Citation: The Journal of Neuroscience, Vol. 23(26): pp 8881-8892 (10/2003)



CALL CENTER DEDICATION



The VISN 1 Centralized Patient Accounts Customer Service Call Center hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony on Nov. 19, 2003. The center, located at the Newington campus of the VA Connecticut Health-care System, handles all patient billing inquiries for the Network.

"We believe that the call center will improve customer satisfaction and overall billing and collection processes at each medical center," said Dr. Jeannette Chirico-Post, network director. "By providing veterans a toll free number, they can have their billing questions resolved quickly."

Approximately 350 billing inquiries per day are received from veterans throughout New England.



Pictured left: Dr. Jeannette Chirico-Post, VISN 1 Director, Rolane Talleos, Call Center Supervisor, Roger Johnson, VA Connecticut Director, Beth Brown, VISN 1 Business Office Service Line Manager and Karen Meffert, VA Connecticut Chief Financial Officer.



Photo: Joe Serafin, Jim Deschenes, and Gary Grant, FMS employees at the Newington campus, wish the troops well as they leave the campus for training at Fort Drum as part of 18-month deployment to the Middle East.

Newington staff and volunteers braved the elements and bid farewell to members of the Connecticut National Guard on Dec. 11 as the guard mobilized for an 18-month deployment to the Middle East. As the guard stood in formation inside the Red, White and Blue rooms, families and media watched as guardsmen received their orders to travel to Fort Drum, New York for one month of training leading to their overseas deployment. Lt. Gen. William A. Cugno, Connecticut National Guard Adjutant General, addressed the formation and encouraged the soldiers to keep in touch with their families. Newington staff and volunteers plan to write to the guardsmen during the deployment to maintain the bond established between the two organizations since the National Guard moved into the Newington campus in 2001.

Pulmonary Rehabilitation



Pictured are members of the Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program Team. They are (l. to r.) John Mazzacane, Chief Respiratory Care, Mary Dallas, PT, Physical Medicine & Rehab. Carolyn Rochester, M.D., Pulmonary Service and Edward Bowerman, KT, Physical Medicine & Rehab.

The Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program recently celebrated its first anniversary. This multidisciplinary program comprised of Pulmonary, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Respiratory, Hospital Education and Patient/Family Education, held a reunion Oct. 31 at the West Haven campus for all veterans who graduated from the program.

The Connecticut HCS Outpatient Rehabilitation program is designed to meet the needs of veterans with chronic respiratory disease who remain limited by their symptoms despite optimized medical therapy. General goals of this program are to improve exercise tolerance, reduce symptoms and improve the quality of life. In the past year, 30 veterans attended the program.

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Is published bi-monthly by the VA Connecticut Healthcare System Public Affairs Office. Please submit comments and ideas to Pamela Redmond or Richard Thompson, Public Affairs, 00/PR.

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