

SPIRIT ONLINE

Volume 2, Issue 2

VA Connecticut Healthcare System

January 28, 2004

WINTER SPORTS CLINIC

The New England Winter Sports Clinic for Disabled Veterans was held Jan. 12-15, 2004, at Mount Sunapee, N.H. The VA Boston Healthcare System, in conjunction with the New England Handicapped Sports Association, sponsored this annual event.

The winter sports clinic promotes rehabilitation by instructing physically challenged veterans in adaptive alpine skiing and provides an introduction to other adaptive activities and sports. Participation is open to male and female military service veterans with spinal cord injuries, orthopedic amputation, visual impairments, certain neurological problems and other disabilities. Connecticut was represented by patients Keith Henneberry and Ed Dusick.

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VA Connecticut's Blind Rehab staff who volunteered for the visually impaired team (Foxes) were **Pamela Moran** and **Marty Snitkin**. Also attending were **Penny Schuckers**, Blind Rehab Chief and VA Connecticut director **Roger Johnson** who attended opening day.

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Events

National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans
Feb. 8-14

Supervisory Training
Feb. 11, 18
March 10, 24
Donaldson Education Center

Veterans Creative Arts Competition
Feb. 25 deadline

For more information on these and other events please see *Good Morning VA Connecticut*. Note: "Good Morning" is now available on Outlook. Look for new editions every Friday.



WINTER SPORTS CLINIC





25-Year recipients **Melinda Chasse, Ralph Varnado** and **Doris Houseman**.

SERVICE PIN AWARDS

25 YEARS:

Doris Houseman
 Stuart Green
 Barbara Cesanek
 Melinda Chasse
 Mark Cresman
 Joseph Branch
 Janet Healy
 Ralph Varnado
 Gary Iannitti
 Linda Farina
 Roberta Rosenberg
 Rene Concepcion

30 YEARS:

Dr. Fred Wright
 Dr. Gerald Gorecki
 Robert Lucas
 Natalee McGuire
 Beverly Howlett-Deshields

35 YEARS:

Harriet Edwards
 Hilda Moore
 Frederick Strickland



30-Year recipients **Bob Lucas** and **Beverly Howlett-Deshields**.



35-Year recipients **Fred Strickland, Harriet Edwards** and **Hilda Moore**.



REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance was as well attended as it was informative. Held in the staff dining room at the West Haven campus, the January 15 program on Dr. King's birthday was set up with attractive displays about Dr. King's life and the civil rights movement. The program was sponsored by the EEO Committee. The following employees were winners of a quiz: **Mabel Carroll** who won a 36th Anniversary mug; **Oscar Torres** who won the Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.; and **Billie Rudd** who won the "I Have a Dream" parchment.

Recent Advances in Health Care from Veterans Affairs Research

'Sunshine vitamin' shines in colon cancer study

In one of the most comprehensive studies to date on colon-cancer risk, a team led by Veterans Affairs (VA), National Cancer Institute and Harvard researchers confirmed that proper intake of cereal fiber and vitamin D are among the best ways to prevent the serious colon polyps that may lead to the disease. The study, which included more than 3,000 veterans at 13 VA medical centers, provides the most concrete evidence yet of the role of vitamin D—the “sunshine vitamin—in the prevention of colorectal cancer. Based on this and other findings, study leader David Lieberman, MD advised the following lifestyle measures to help prevent colon cancer: “Stop smoking, reduce alcohol and red meat consumption, take a multivitamin, exercise regularly, and consume vitamin D, calcium and cereal fiber in the diet.” (Dec. 2003)

VA, Department of Defense forge ties on prosthetics research

With an increasing number of military personnel suffering limb loss due to combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, prosthetics researchers and clinicians from VA and Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) met in Nov. 2003 to outline joint initiatives to further prosthetics research and improve care for military and veteran amputees. The conference, also attended by industry and university experts, fostered discussion on several proposed projects now under consideration by VA and WRAMC, such as the development of a shared database on military and veteran amputees and rigorous clinical trials comparing high-tech artificial limbs to less costly conventional devices. (Nov. 2003)

Study questions benefits of costly schizophrenia drug

A study at 17 VA hospitals comparing an older, pennies-a-day schizophrenia drug with a newer, far more expensive one found little advantage to the high-ticket drug. The researchers compared haloperidol, one of an older class of schizophrenia drugs called *typical* antipsychotics, to olanzapine, the most expensive among the newer *atypical* antipsychotics. Used alone, the older medications are more likely to cause troubling side effects such as tremors and twitches. But the study had doctors prescribe haloperidol as they would ideally in actual practice—accompanied from the outset by another drug, benzotropine, to minimize side effects. The randomized, double-blinded, one-year study showed little difference in the overall effectiveness of the drugs. However, there is a whopping difference in price: Olanzapine costs more than \$8 per day per patient, based on VA figures, compared to just about 10 cents per day for the haloperidol combination. And the higher-priced drug didn't lead to any significant reduction in hospital or outpatient costs. (Nov. 2003)

VA maintained quality in shift from hospital care in mid-'90s

Survival rates among chronically ill veterans remained constant in the mid-1990s despite a sharp reduction in hospital-based care provided by the Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system, reported researchers in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The study was the largest assessment to-date of the impact on veterans of VA's shift nearly 10 years ago from a hospital-based system to one emphasizing primary and outpatient care. Researchers in Houston studied the records of 342,300 chronically ill veterans to track their health care and survival between 1994 and 1998. The study showed VA hospital stays fell by 50 percent and outpatient care increased by about 10 percent. Patient survival rates remained steady. (Oct. 2003)

Lung cancer myth more common among African Americans

The false belief that lung cancer tumors spread when exposed to air during surgery is particularly common among African American patients, and may be keeping many of them from lifesaving operations, reported VA researchers and colleagues in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. In a survey of 626 lung patients at the Philadelphia and Los Angeles VA medical centers, University of Pennsylvania, and Medical University of South Carolina, 61 percent of African Americans and 29 percent of Caucasian Americans said they believe exposure to air during surgery causes a tumor to spread. Nearly 20 percent of African Americans said they would decline surgery because of this belief, compared to 5 percent of whites. Lung cancer is more prevalent and deadly among African Americans than whites. The researchers said education is needed concerning this myth and other issues to help improve outcomes for African American patients. (Oct. 2003)

Welcome to New England

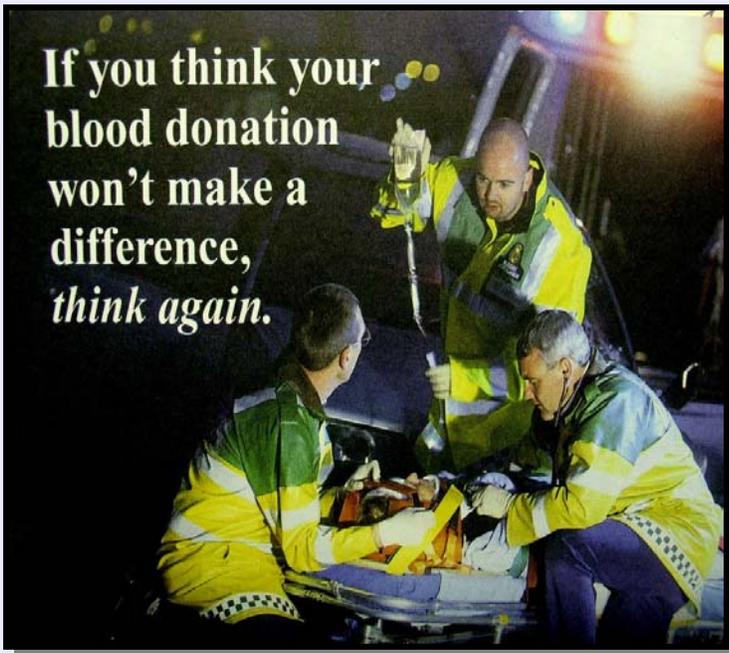
Nobody said slogging through New England winters was easy. The photos below show Building 2 at the West Haven campus in July and January and illustrate the extremes in weather New Englanders must endure. Smile, spring is just around the corner.



July 31, 2003



January 28, 2004



The American Red Cross in Connecticut is currently coping with a dangerously low blood supply. As of January 15, the Red Cross had only 151 units of blood at its Blood Center in Farmington. An adequate inventory is 2,000 units.

**If you would like to donate blood please call
1-800 GIVE LIFE. Thank you.**

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