

# SPIRIT

ONLINE

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## VA Connecticut Welcomes New Associate Chief of Staff for Education

Linda Godleski, M.D., was appointed the associate chief of staff for education. Additionally, in her capacity as national VHA Lead for Telemental Health, she chairs the VHA Telemental Health Field Advisory Work Group which has been instrumental in implementing telemental health services throughout the VA.

Dr. Godleski brings to the VHA a variety of experiences from a wide array of healthcare settings. She came to VA Connecticut from her position as VA MidSouth Healthcare Network mental health services manager, VISN 9 (Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia). She returns to Connecticut where she previously served as the medical director of outpatient services at the Connecticut Mental Health Center. Her prior positions include director of the psychosocial rehabilitation unit at the University of Hawaii's State Hospital, director of the University of Virginia's psychiatric research unit at Staunton's Western State Hospital, and solo private practice.

Academically, Dr. Godleski was associate chair for academic affairs and associate professor at the University of Louisville's Department of Psychiatry and associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the Vanderbilt University's School of Medicine. Previously, she was an associate professor at Yale Medical School and at the University of Hawaii School of Medicine, in addition to prior faculty positions at the University of Virginia and the University of Central Florida.

Dr. Godleski has a bachelor of science degree from Yale University. She received her M.D. from the University of Virginia where she also completed her psychiatry residency.



Monica Lui

Summer Youth Volunteer Monica Lui continues her profiles of our youthful volunteers in VA Connecticut's Summer Youth Volunteer Program. This week's profile on page 2 features Sara Procopio and Meghan Makowski.



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### Events:

All Employee Picnics  
*Newington Campus*  
September 14  
11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

*West Haven Campus*  
September 15  
11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

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

## Disaster Drill Involves Smallpox Outbreak

The West Haven campus participated in a metro New Haven-area disaster drill involving a smallpox outbreak. The drill began July 16 with the first "virtual" patient reporting to the VA emergency room. By Friday, July 23, more than 1,100 virtual patients had reported to the medical center.

# Summer Youth Volunteers

by Monica Liu

## Sara Procopio

**A**sophomore at Laurelton Hall in Milford, Sara Procopio is volunteering in Nutrition and Food Services. Second-year volunteer Kimberly Gould convinced her to come to the VA. So far, Sara is enjoying herself.

“It’s fun,” she said, “and it’s a great learning experience.” With enthusiastic encouragement from her friends, she elaborated, “We make soup and load juice trays. We do office work. We mop floors. And we make other food like waffles, French toast, tuna, and egg salad.”

Sara likes meeting new people, and she and her companions smile when they recall a certain memorable experience. Each contributes their share of the story, filling in as the others burst into laughter. Finally, Kim summarized, “I dropped the juice trays, and everyone laughed. It was pretty funny.” Their energy and happiness is apparent.

Having recovered herself, Sara explained that she would be glad if she didn’t have to handle mayonnaise and fish. She also doesn’t like loading food; instead, she prefers doing office work. Nevertheless, Sara would recommend volunteering to other students. “It makes you have a life, and people need help [with their work]. Everybody’s nice and the food is good.” Hopefully, she said, she would be able to volunteer again next year.

Outside of the VA Sara spends her time using the computer, being with her friends and watching movies. She also enjoys taking walks and going to the beach. Sara is also obsessed with Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, and she can quote from it “for hours.” She needs little urging to begin: “Hence, I stand on sudden haste! Wisely and slow, they stumble that run fast...”



Sara Procopio

## Meghan Makowski

**S**eventeen-year-old Meghan Makowski is a senior at Jonathan Law High School in Milford. She participates in track and enjoys ballroom dancing. Having volunteered at the American Red Cross, Meghan heard about VA volunteer opportunities through Red Cross advertisements. With the VA close to home, she decided to spend her summer working in the rehabilitation service.

Meghan transports patients to and from physical therapy. She also lends her help where it is needed during the therapy session. She gestured toward a walkway where patients practice regaining their mobility. “Sometimes when patients are walking, I’ll stand behind them with a wheelchair in case they need support,” she explained. “I do little things, but I can still help out here.” Meghan enjoys volunteering and says that there is no other assignment that she would rather have. “I’m relaxed. No one really forces you to do anything. They know you’re a volunteer, and they go by that.” Also, she said, “I’m actually considering going into physical therapy [as a career]. This has given me an outlook on what the job is like.”



Meghan Makowski

Meghan has found volunteering a rewarding experience. She reflected, “Sometimes when I go to pick up patients, they don’t want to come, and I have to sit down and convince them. Then when I take them back, some of the patients will say, ‘That wasn’t so bad.’ I like being the one who convinced them.”

Finally, Meghan would like to recommend volunteering to other students. “It’s fun,” she said as she waited to transport a patient. “There’s no pressure, and it’s rewarding.”



## Changing Careers

### Attend nursing school full-time with pay and benefits

Changing careers is a big decision often influenced by financial considerations and time. Many people would go back to school for a career change if only they had the time, and others can be hindered by the rising costs associated with higher education. Often the two go hand-in-hand, requiring most adults to maintain some type of employment while going to school part-time.

VA Connecticut staff members interested in pursuing a career in nursing can take advantage of an educational program that allows nursing students to go to school full-time for up to 24 months while maintaining their current salary and benefits. This program benefits the employee by allowing him or her to pursue a nursing degree full-time and the VA by training future nurses – a field expected to have critical shortages in the future.



James Cyrus, LPN

**James Cyrus, LPN**, was recently accepted into the VA Nursing Education for Employees Program (VANEED). VANEED provides funds to cover the cost of tuition, books and certain fees for employees enrolled in approved nursing education programs.

An Army Reservist assigned to the 405<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Hospital based in West Hartford, James was not aware of the program until he saw an email from Cathy Grabowski, RN, nursing education coordinator.

“I was already pursuing a nursing degree from Southern Connecticut State University,” the 23-year-old said. “I applied and was accepted.” The VA will begin paying James’ tuition with the start of classes next month.

“This program is a good deal,” he said. With a course load he describes as “pretty challenging,” James commented that VANEED will give him a chance to focus more on his studies as a full-time student.

VANEED is limited to employees enrolled in Licensed Practical or Vocational Nursing Programs leading to an associates degree or diploma and employees enrolled in Registered Nurse associate or bachelor’s degree programs. The LPN program is limited to completion within 12 months and the RN program within 24 months.

As full time students, VANEED recipients are required to work at the VA during significant breaks in the academic calendar year. Recipients also incur a contractual service obligation following completion of the program.

To be considered, applicants must have been employed for one continuous year at the VA and demonstrate a high likelihood that they will be successful in completing the education and training and in the practice of the nursing degree attained.

James has worked nights at the VA for about 18 months on T3 West. He is trained as a combat medic in the Reserves and worked previously as a carpenter. Right now, he isn’t sure what type of nursing practice to pursue but feels his clinical experience obtained as a Reservist and working here will give him an advantage.

**Kimberlyn Boulware**, phlebotomist, is also a VANEED recipient.

For more information on VANEED and other nursing education programs, contact Cathy Grabowski, RN, at ext. 4674.



## EBRC Chief Testifies Before House Committee

**Penny Schuckers**, Chief, Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Service, testified before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs on the evolution of VA-DoD collaboration in research and amputee care for veterans of current and past conflicts, and needed reforms in VA blind rehabilitation services. The July 22 hearing was held in the Cannon House Office Building. Congressman Rob Simmons (R-2<sup>nd</sup>) chairs the HVAC Subcommittee on Health.



### Use of VA's Electronic Health Records Expanding

WASHINGTON -- One of the world's most sophisticated systems for keeping electronic health records will soon be easily available to doctors, hospitals and clinics around the country, courtesy of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. "VA is proud to lead the health care industry in the use of information technology. The expertise we have gained, however, belongs to the American public," said Dr. Jonathan Perlin, VA's Acting Under Secretary for Health. "With our federal partners, we're making it easier for the private-sector health care industry to make use of this electronic system for health care records." VA developed the system, called VistA-Office Electronic Health Record. A version of VistA is used at more than 1,300 VA facilities throughout the United States to maintain records on 5 million veterans who receive their health care from VA. Under the plan announced July 21, private-sector health care providers can obtain a version of VistA at nominal cost. Distribution of the software is expected to begin in late 2005. VistA offers health care providers a complete electronic record covering all aspects of patient care, including reminders for preventive health care, electronic entry of pharmaceutical orders, display of laboratory results, consultation requests, x-rays and pathology slides. Besides the VA system, VistA is currently used by the Department of Health for the District of Columbia, plus health care systems in Finland, Germany, Egypt and Nigeria.

### NCQA Accreditation

Research Service received its full three-year National Commission on Quality Assurance accreditation. The total score was 99.8 percent. Congratulations to **Dr. Fred Wright**, Associate Chief of Staff for Research, **Gerry Beccia**, Research Compliance Officer, **Rosemarie Emmett Palmieri**, Administrative Officer, **Cora Milewski**, IRB Program Manager and all of the Research Service staff for all of their hard work and effort in achieving this level of excellence.

### Researchers find stress harms ability to fight stress

Stress may boost levels of certain hormones that influence your ability to cope with negative effects of stress, according to a study led by researchers at the National Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Center in West Haven. Published in the August issue of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, researchers **Charles Morgan III, M.D.**, **Steven Southwick, M.D.**, and **Ann Rasmussen, M.D.** and **Zoran Zimolo, M.D.**, measured levels of the hormone DHEA-S and cortisol in 25 military personnel before and after they experience stressful scenarios in military survival school. The study found that DHEA-S-cortisol ratios during stress were significantly higher in subjects who reported fewer symptoms of dissociation and exhibited superior military performance. Researchers wrote that these data provide prospective, empirical evidence that the DHEA-S level is increased by acute stress in healthy humans and that the DHEA-S-cortisol ratio may indicate the degree to which an individual is buffered against the negative effects of stress. (HealthDayNews, Aug. 3, 2004)

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