

Caring for America's **HEROES**

OKLAHOMA CITY
VA MEDICAL CENTER

SPRING 2009 VOL. 9 NO. 1

A 
*New
Leaf*



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David P. Wood

Director's Corner

This issue of *Caring for America's Heroes* is dedicated to helping you make positive changes in your life! Just like springtime itself, many people use this time of year for change, renewal, and growth. Likewise, 2009 will be an exciting year of change for the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center and our Veterans.

This year we will be reaching out to you, our Veterans, by opening three new Community-Based Outpatient Clinics in Altus, Enid, and Stillwater. These new clinics will aid in bringing the "world-class health care of the Department of Veterans Affairs [VA] closer to home for Oklahoma Veterans." As former VA Secretary James B. Peake said, the "VA continues to make access to care easier through an expanding outpatient system focused not only on primary treatment but also on prevention of disease, early detection, and health promotion."

In anticipation of turning over a new leaf for 2009, on October 15, 2008, we held our annual leadership retreat, where senior leaders got together and laid the foundation for this year's priorities. We agreed that access to care, patient satisfaction, performance measures, and employee satisfaction were our top priorities. For each of these focus areas, we have identified several things we will be working on. They include improving processes like the telephone system, patient discharges, and surgical joint replacement, and providing patient information to our Veterans. These key areas will help us continue to provide the best health care and support the Veterans Health Administration's vision of "support, innovation, empowerment, productivity, accountability, and continuous improvement."

Sincerely,

David P. Wood, MHA, FACHE
Medical Center Director

Have You Visited Our Web Site Lately?

If not, you're in for a surprise! The site is chock full of important and helpful information for our Veterans and their families. You can:

- Find information, driving directions, and parking facilities for our main campus, our five community-based outpatient clinics, and our other clinics
- Schedule, change, or cancel an appointment
- Learn how to refill a VA prescription
- Learn about available educational resources for our Veterans
- Create a personal health record
- Send a card or gift to a hospitalized patient
- Access My Health₂Vet, the gateway to Veteran health benefits and services

All this and more is just a mouse click away at www.oklahoma.va.gov.

Log on today and start clicking. You'll be amazed by what you find.



Suicide Prevention Is Everyone's Business

By Tony Kirksey, Suicide Prevention Coordinator

Did you know that male Veterans are twice as likely to commit suicide as Non-Veterans of either gender?

Did you know that most suicides are preventable?

Did you also know that the vast majority of suicides are caused by underlying conditions such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic pain, and substance abuse, all of which are highly treatable?

Every year in the U.S., approximately 30,000 people take their own lives. Suicide ranks as the second leading cause of death among 25- to 34-year-olds and the third leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds. Older Americans also are disproportionately likely to die by suicide. Of the top 50 metropolitan areas in the U.S., Oklahoma City ranks fifth in the number of suicides per capita.

In an effort to reduce the prevalence of suicide among Veterans, VA has implemented such initiatives as placing a suicide-prevention coordinator at each facility, providing suicide-prevention education to employees at every level, and establishing a VA national suicide hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

You Can Help Yourself

Be aware of the warning signs of suicide:

- Threatening to hurt or kill yourself
- Looking for ways to kill yourself
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide

Additional warning signs include:

- Hopelessness, feeling like there's no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, mood swings

- Feeling like there's no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking first
- Increasing alcohol or drug abuse
- Withdrawing from friends or family
- Giving away possessions

Know What to Do

If you experience any of the warning signs, do not hesitate to get help.

During normal business hours, just walk into the Ambulatory Mental Health Clinic on the ground floor of the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center or call 456-5183. After hours, go to the nearest emergency room. If you are actively suicidal and have no way to get to a hospital, call 911.

Anytime, day or night, that you are experiencing an emotional crisis, you can call VA's National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (Veterans, press 1).

If you are not experiencing the suicidal warning signs yourself, but you know someone who is, ask the person if he or she is thinking of suicide. Don't worry—doing this will not plant the idea in the person's head. If the answer is yes, assist him or her in getting the help outlined above.

It takes the courage and strength of a soldier to ask for help...



If you are in an emotional crisis call 1-800-273-TALK

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-TALK www.suicidepreventionline.org

Our Veterans are important to us, and to keep them safe, we need your help. Remember this mantra: Suicide prevention is everyone's business.

Suicide Prevention Resources

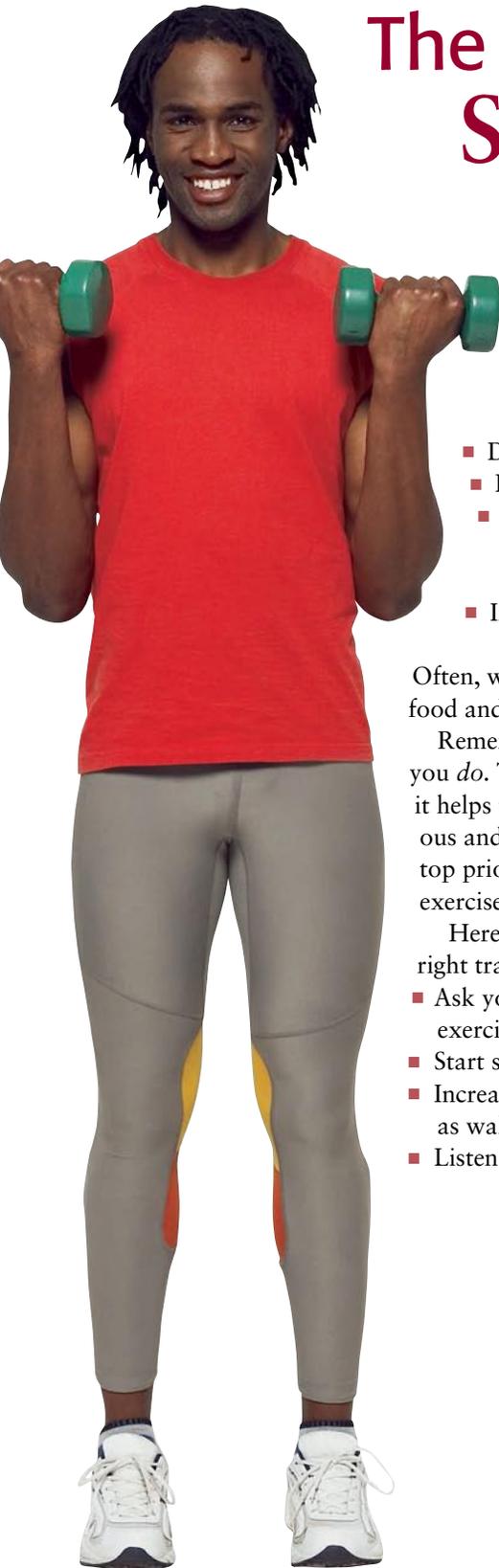
-  Hotlines
- VA hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
 - HeartLine: 405-848-CARE (2273)

-  Websites
- www.psychalive.org
 - www.suicidology.org
 - www.afsp.org
 - www.glendon.org



The Benefits of Shaping Up!

By Kristy Doyle,
Recreation Therapist



There are many benefits of participating in regular physical activity, including the following:

- Helps manage weight
- Reduces the risk for coronary heart disease and stroke
- Decreases blood pressure
- Helps prevent and control diabetes
- Increases muscular strength and bone strength and helps prevent injury
- Improves mood

Often, we must change our thinking about food and exercise to be able to shape up.

Remember, what you *think* drives what you *do*. To get started with an exercise plan, it helps to make a firm decision to get serious and make physical activity one of your top priorities. You must set aside time for exercise to be part of your life.

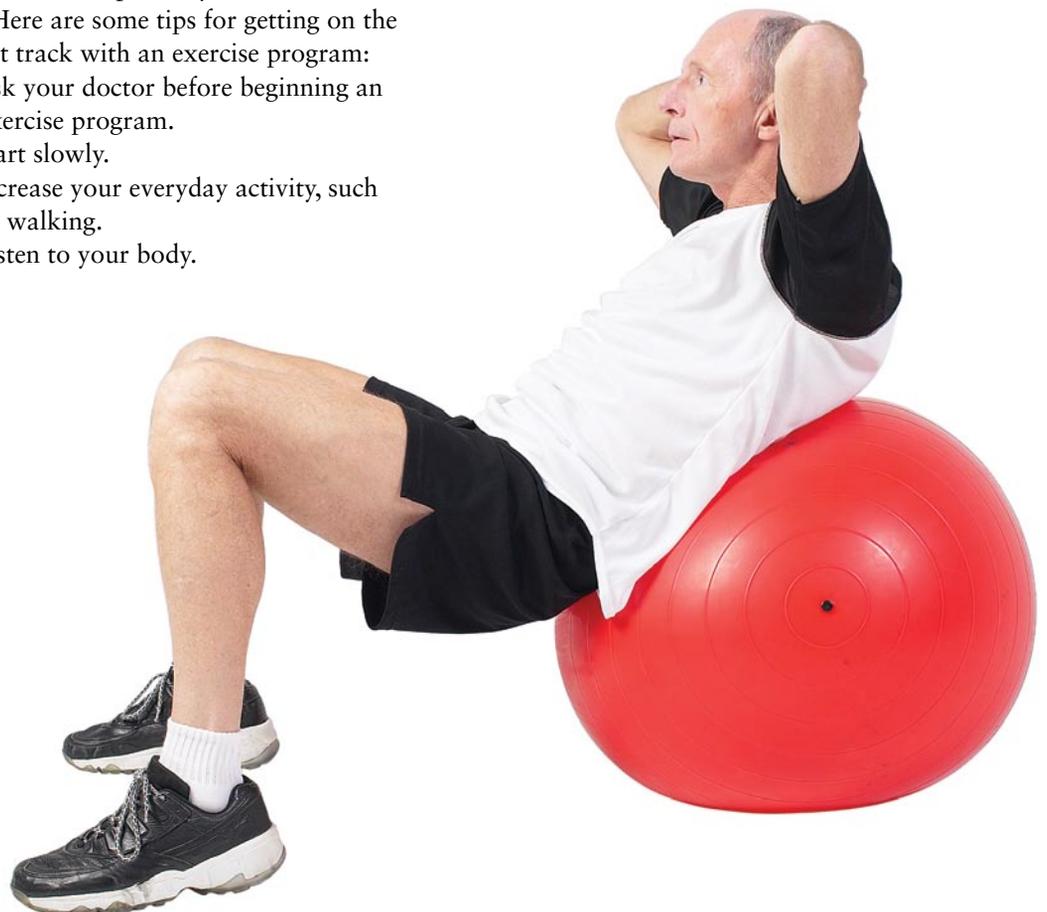
Here are some tips for getting on the right track with an exercise program:

- Ask your doctor before beginning an exercise program.
- Start slowly.
- Increase your everyday activity, such as walking.
- Listen to your body.

- Recruit an activity buddy.
- Warm up before exercising and cool down afterward.

There are several programs at VA to assist you with your efforts to shape up. The majority of the information in this article is from a program called MOVE! It is an educational program available to assist you in learning how to make healthier choices regarding diet and exercise. Ask your primary care physician about this program if you are interested. Another available program is Therapeutic Exercise in Therapeutic Recreation. In this program, you will meet with a therapist to develop an exercise program that will help you achieve your physical activity goals. Ask your primary care physician for a referral if you are interested in this program, as well.

And join us to shape up!



Spring CALENDAR

Plan to attend one or more of the following therapeutic recreation and creative arts therapy sessions.

Arts/Crafts

Monday through Friday, 8–10 a.m.

Art Therapy

Individual sessions are scheduled with the Art Therapist

Creative Writing

Mondays, 10:30 a.m.–noon

Drumming

Mondays, 2:30–3:30 p.m.
and Wednesdays, 1–2 p.m.

Field Trips

Second Saturday of every month, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (unless otherwise scheduled) to the Oklahoma City Elks Lodge #417

Jewelry Making

Mondays, 10 a.m.–noon

Leisure Education

By appointment only

Literacy (learn to read or improve reading ability)

By appointment only

Open Studio to Develop Leisure Skills

Thursdays, 1–3 p.m.

Photography

Fridays, 10 a.m.–noon

Pottery

Tuesdays, 1–3 p.m.

T'ai Chi

Fridays, 11 a.m.–noon

Therapeutic Exercise

Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

Walking Stick-Making Class

Tuesdays, 8–10 a.m. and 1–3 p.m.,
and Fridays, 8–10 a.m.

Women Veterans Group

Thursdays, 10 a.m.–noon

If you are interested or want further information about creative art and/or therapeutic recreation classes, call 405-456-3488, ext. 3487 or 3488, or contact your primary care physician for a referral.

Get Help to Quit Smoking

For more information, contact the Stop Smoking Program
VA Medical Center, Oklahoma City
405-456-3369

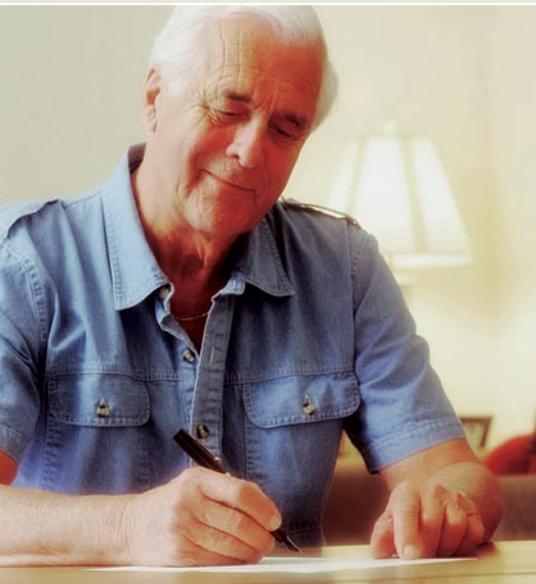


Free Educational Services for Veterans

For more information about these services and to see if you qualify, call Nyree Cunningham or Jennifer Carnes at 405-869-2200.

Family Education Programs

Available at the Oklahoma City VAMC. For more information, please call Dr. Michelle Sherman, Director of the Family Mental Health Program, at 405-456-5171.



Asparagus, Harbinger of Spring

By Cheryl Smith, MS, RD/LD, Clinical Dietitian

What better time than spring to renew your effort to follow a healthy diet. This spring, turn your focus toward foods you *can* eat, rather than those you *cannot*. If you're not eating the recommended 2½ cups of vegetables per day, try doing so, and see how little room you have left for high-calorie snack foods.

A good vegetable to start with is asparagus, the first major vegetable crop of the year.

The health benefits of asparagus include:

- Very low in calories (less than four calories per spear)
- Fat-free, cholesterol-free, and very low in sodium
- Leading vegetable source of folic acid
- Significant source of thiamin and vitamin B6
- Good source of potassium
- Source of fiber

Source: Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board

Stop by the nearest farmers market today for some Oklahoma-grown asparagus. Hurry! Asparagus is only in season through June.

To prepare this simple recipe, all you need is some olive oil and lemon juice. If you don't have a pan with a steamer basket, try a steamer bag. Or, if you're using a microwavable baking dish, place the spears with tips facing the center, cover with plastic wrap with one corner peeled back, and cook at 100 percent power for four to seven minutes.

Asparagus with Lemon

Recipe Summary:

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Number of Servings: 4

Cups of Fruits and Vegetables per Person: 1

Ingredients:

2 lbs. asparagus, tough ends trimmed

2 tsp. olive oil

2 tbsp. lemon juice

Directions:

Place asparagus in a steamer basket over boiling water. Cover saucepan and steam five minutes or until bright green and tender. Rinse asparagus under cold water and drain thoroughly. Combine oil and lemon juice in a bowl. Pour over asparagus. Season with pepper to taste. Serve at room temperature if desired.

Nutrient Facts per Serving (¼ recipe): Calories, 70; Total fat, 3 g; Saturated fat, 0 g; Trans fat, 0 g; Cholesterol, 0 mg; Sodium, 0 mg; Total Carbohydrate, 9 g; Dietary Fiber, 5 g; Sugars, 4 g; Protein, 5 g; Vitamin A, 35% DV; Vitamin C, 25% DV; Calcium, 6% DV; Iron, 25% DV

Source: FruitsandVeggiesMatter.gov

Websites to explore:

www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov

www.asparagus.org

www.osuokc.edu/farmersmarket



Relaxation of Priority Group 8 Enrollment Restrictions

Description

Public Law 110-329 provides VA additional funding to allow expanded enrollment opportunity for certain Priority 8 Veterans who may have been previously denied enrollment in VA's health care system because their income exceeded VA's means test thresholds (MTT).

The new provision allows Veterans whose incomes do not exceed these thresholds by more than 10 percent to enroll in VA's health care system. The new provision is expected to take effect in June and will be applied retroactively to all enrollment applications received on or after January 1, 2009. These changes do not open enrollment to all Priority 8 Veterans.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q If Public Law 110-329 provided VA with additional funding, why isn't enrollment open to all Veterans?

A The law allows VA to provide care to the extent that resources are available. PL 104-262 requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to determine annually whether VA has sufficient resources to enroll Veterans. The additional funding is to allow expanding enrollment opportunity for certain Veterans who may have been previously denied enrollment in VA's health care system because their income exceeded VA's MTT. The new provision allows Veterans whose incomes do not exceed these thresholds by more than 10 percent to enroll in VA's health care system. It is anticipated that this rule will take effect in June 2009.

Q Is VA amending its regulations regarding enrollment in the VA health care system?

A Yes. In particular, it is proposed that VA establish additional subpriorities within enrollment priority category 8 and provide that beginning on the effective date of the regulation, VA would enroll priority category 8 Veterans whose income exceeds the current MTT and geographic means test income thresholds (GMTT) by 10 percent or less. These Veterans will be placed in priority group 8b or 8d. These changes do not open enrollment to all Priority 8 Veterans.

Q Which Veterans make up the new priority groups 8b and 8d?

A On the effective date of the regulation, a Veteran who applies for enrollment, who does not qualify

for a higher priority group, and whose income exceeds the MTT or GMTT by 10 percent or less will be placed in priority group 8b (if the Veteran is 0 percent service-connected, non-compensable) or 8d (if the Veteran is non-service-connected).

Q What happens to these Veterans prior to the new regulation effective date?

A Prior to the effective date of the rule, a Veteran who applies for enrollment, who does not qualify for a higher priority group, and whose income exceeds the MTT or GMTT by 10 percent or less will continue to be placed in priority group 8e (if the Veteran is 0 percent service-connected, non-compensable) or 8g (if the Veteran is non-service-connected). For those Veterans who apply on or after January 1, 2009 and are placed into a rejected priority group due to income, VA enrollment correspondence will indicate that VA will redetermine enrollment after the effective date of the new rule.

Q Which Veterans make up priority groups 8e and 8g?

A Veterans in priority groups 8e (0 percent service-connected, non-compensable) and 8g (non-service-connected) have incomes that exceed \$29,402 in 2009 for a single Veteran or \$35,284 for a Veteran with a single dependent and that also exceed a geographically based income threshold set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for public housing benefits. Information about the geographic income thresholds is available at <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/Library/pubs/GMTIncomeThresholds>. Information about the VA national income thresholds is available at <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/Library/pubs/VAINcomeThresholds>.

Veterans in priority group 8e or 8g remain restricted from VA health care enrollment.

Q Who should a Veteran contact with questions concerning enrollment priority or eligibility for VA health care?

A For more information about enrollment and eligibility for VA health care, Veterans are encouraged to contact VA's Health Benefits Service Center toll-free at 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or via the Internet at <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility>.



IMPORTANT Telephone Numbers

Main OKC VAMC Number: 405-456-1000 Primary Care

To schedule or cancel an appointment with your Primary Care Provider, call **405-456-1890** or toll-free **1-866-835-5273** Monday–Friday (except holidays), 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

All Other Clinics, Including Specialty Clinics

To schedule or cancel an appointment in one of the specialty clinics, call the numbers below, Monday–Friday (except holidays), 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

Alzheimer's.....	405-456-5797
Arthritis Scheduling.....	405-456-3944
Audiology.....	405-456-5490
Cardiology.....	405-456-3268
Chaplain Service.....	405-456-5138
Chest Medicine.....	405-456-3347
Dental Clinic.....	405-456-5139
Dental Clinic Lawton.....	580-585-5607
Dermatology.....	405-456-2110
Diabetes Clinic/Education.....	405-456-3284
Ear, Nose, Throat (ENT).....	405-456-2368
Endocrinology.....	405-456-3285
Eye.....	405-456-3909
Geriatrics/Home-Based Care.....	405-456-4327
GI Clinic/Lab.....	405-456-5312
Hematology.....	405-456-3325
Home Oxygen/CPAP.....	405-456-3344
Infectious Diseases.....	405-456-2250
Infusion Clinic.....	405-456-5498
Lawton Outpatient Clinic.....	580-585-5600
Liver Clinic.....	405-456-2220
Mental Health AMHC.....	405-456-5183
Mental Health PTSD/ Neuropsych/HlthPsy.....	405-456-5367
Mental Health PRRC.....	405-456-3626
Mental Health REACH.....	405-456-2392
Mental Health Sub. Abuse.....	405-456-3278
Neurology/Rehab.....	405-456-3365
N. May Ave. Clinic.....	405-456-1890, Opt.3
Nuclear Medicine.....	405-456-4284
OEF/OIF (Mental Health).....	405-456-3295
OEF/OIF (Program Office).....	405-456-3214
Oncology.....	405-456-3325
Outpatient Surgery.....	405-456-5855
PFT Lab.....	405-456-3350
Prosthetics/Orthotics.....	405-456-4212
Pulmonary Oncology.....	405-456-3279
Radiology Scheduling.....	405-456-4135
Renal (Nephrology).....	405-456-2525
Sleep Medicine.....	405-456-1573
Smoking/Tobacco Cessation.....	405-456-3969
Social Work.....	405-456-5574
Specialty Clinics.....	405-456-3942
Speech Pathology.....	405-456-5490
Surgery Clinics.....	405-456-3379
Urology.....	405-456-3018
Women's Clinic.....	405-456-3379

Automated Prescription Refill System

To request a prescription refill, check on your prescription status, or get your account balance 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call **405-456-1610** or toll-free **1-800-694-8387**. Please have your Social Security and prescription numbers ready when calling.

Check Upcoming Appointments (Telecare)

To check upcoming appointments, call **1-866-914-7348**. If you believe you have an appointment that is not listed, call the clinic directly.

After-Hours Care and Emergencies

After normal business hours, holidays, and/or weekends, staff is available to assess your symptoms and medical concerns. Call **405-456-5430** or toll-free at **1-866-835-5273**. Please note that staff is unable to schedule or cancel appointments.

Compensation and Pension Claims

Veterans who have questions about compensation and pension claims may contact:

VA Regional Office

125 S. Main Street
Muskogee, OK 74401
1-800-827-1000

National Cemetery Administration

Veterans and their spouses can get the latest information on VA burial benefits, including detailed eligibility criteria, by calling Fort Sill National Cemetery at **580-492-3200**.

Editor: **Barbara L. Curry**,
Education Coordinator

Editorial Board
Patient Health Education
Committee

Special Thanks
Pictures—**Tony Caballero**

Vet Center

The Oklahoma City Vet Center provides core services of outreach, readjustment counseling for combat stress and military sexual trauma/harassment, and follow-up, which are supplemented by numerous ancillary services such as individual, marital, family, group counseling, and employment and Veterans' benefits counseling. The Vet Center is located at 1024 N.W. 47th Street, Suite B, Oklahoma City, OK 73118, or call **405-456-5184**.

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Ardmore VA Outpatient Clinic
2002 12th NW, Suite E
Ardmore, OK 73401
580-226-4580

Lawton Outpatient Clinic
Building 4303, Pitman & Thomas
Fort Sill, OK 73503
580-353-1131

Konawa Outpatient Clinic
(Veterans Clinic of South Central OK)
527 W. Third Street
Konawa, OK 74849
580-925-3286

Ponca City Outpatient Clinic
(Blackwell Family Medicine)
1009 W. Ferguson Avenue
Ponca City, OK 74631
580-762-1777

Wichita Falls Outpatient Clinic
(Veterans Clinic of North Texas)
1800 Seventh Street
Wichita Falls, TX 76301-4388
940-723-2373

Satellite Clinic

North May Avenue Outpatient Clinic
2915 Pine Ridge Road
Oklahoma City, OK 73120
405-752-6500

The Oklahoma City VAMC staff strives to provide you with exceptional health care. It is our goal to help you improve your overall health and well-being. If you have a concern about your care and/or safety in the hospital and you feel it has not been addressed, please contact the Customer Service Department (room 1B-107) at **1-866-519-2003** or the Director's Office (room 1A-105).

If your concern is not resolved by the Customer Service Department or the Director's Office, you may contact The Joint Commission by either calling **1-800-994-6610** or e-mailing **complaint@jointcommission.org**.

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