

Caring for America's **HEROES**

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OKLAHOMA CITY
VA MEDICAL CENTER



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Readjustment Help

FOR RETURNING OEF/OIF VETERANS

Steve Scruggs, Psy.D.

In America, many men and women choose to serve our country in the various branches of the military. Service members who do tours of duty in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom — OEF) and Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom — OIF) face especially difficult and dangerous missions. Although their service is appreciated, it sometimes comes at a high price to them personally.

“Returning” problems

Recent studies on returning veterans indicate that three to six months after they return to the United States, about 19 percent of OEF/OIF veterans are still struggling with problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Indications that a veteran is having difficulty with readjustment include sleep problems, difficulty in crowds, irritability, feeling tense or depressed, and lack of energy or motivation. Spouses and children may tell a veteran that he or she is easily angered, and they worry about the veteran “blowing up.” The risk for stress-related problems is greatest among veterans who have repeatedly faced dangerous situations.

Some veterans have serious problems, but most deal with everyday readjustment issues. Readjustment expert James Munroe, Ed.D., psychologist at the Boston VA Outpatient Clinic, categorizes this as going from using “war zone skills” to using “home skills.” To survive and function in a war zone, veterans may have acquired a number of very powerful skills and have become adept at using them. They have lived in a different world and established

many routines and behaviors that served them well there. These skills can become firmly established due to the life-and-death intensity of a war zone. However, some of these same skills may get in the way of good relationships and communication at home.

These skills may not be easy to identify and do not just go away upon leaving the war zone. Conflicts with spouses or children are common as veterans move back into civilian life, and learning new skills to ease this transition can make all the difference.

Help is available

That’s where the OEF/OIF Program comes in. Working out these readjustment problems requires learning specific things, such as identifying what war zone skills are and how they may be influencing a veteran personally and in relationships with others. OEF/OIF staff members meet with veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and help

them build on their strengths and overcome obstacles to readjustment.

The new OEF/OIF Program

opened recently on the sixth floor of the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. OEF/OIF veterans may be referred by their primary care providers, or they can call and make appointments themselves. Walk-in

appointments are available from 1:30 to 2 p.m. daily. Individual counseling and readjustment classes also are available. In addition, referrals can be made for everyday problems such as improving communication with family members, or services where veterans can get help finding a job. The staff includes Dr. Steve Scruggs, OEF/OIF Team Leader/Psychologist; Susan Shead, OEF/OIF Social Worker; and Dr. Ashley Benjamin, OEF/OIF Psychiatrist.



For more information or to make an appointment, call 405-270-1544.

HOW WE HELPED OTHERS HAVE A *Blessed Christmas*



In December, the Patient Accounts Service (PAS) decided to “adopt a family” and try to make their Christmas a little brighter. A few of the staff members went to the main post office and read many letters, trying to find just the right family. They finally found one letter that particularly touched them.

A young, single father had recently received custody of his three children, all ages 6 and under. It appeared they had few material possessions and many emotional wounds to overcome. This family definitely needed help.

The outpouring of love was immediate. The PAS group started collecting things right away. After a few weeks, we knew there would be too many items to fit in one or two cars, so someone with a pickup truck volunteered to help deliver the gifts. The Decision Support System (DSS) soon noticed the items accumulating and asked if they might also assist with the project.

The staff gathered one day and had a “snack and wrap” party. Once again, everyone came through with donations of wrapping paper and ribbons, Christmas sacks and tissue paper, not to mention a feast of goodies they snacked on most of the day as they wrapped in shifts.

“Our” family was presented with toys, clothes, shoes, books, TVs, VCRs and enough food to last quite a while. They also had a Christmas tree with lots of lights and decorations, as well as stockings with their names on them that were full of goodies.

This family received a truck full of blessings, but PAS and DSS received an even greater blessing — they learned it is truly better to give than to receive. What a wonderful time!



WHAT IS My Health_Vet?



It is a Web site just for you — veterans, your families and VA staff members.

At www.myhealth.va.gov, you can see a video overview of My Health_Vet, where you'll find one-stop shopping for VA benefits, health information and services, as well as health assessment tools.

When you register on www.myhealth.va.gov, you will be able to refill your prescriptions online and build your own health profile. Building your own health journal means you can keep track of your blood pressure, monitor your heart rate, chart your blood sugar, keep track of your food intake, chart your exercise activity and much, much more. And, you can print out this information and take it with you when you have an appointment with a member of your health care team.

In the future, you will be able to view key portions of your medical record, schedule your own appointments and communicate directly with your health care provider. Stay tuned for information about future releases.

Family Education Programs Available at Oklahoma City VAMC

Do you have a family member or friend who struggles with mental illness? You are not alone.

In the United States, one in four families has a loved one who struggles with mental illness. Caregiving can be very demanding and stressful. The Family Mental Health Program has created the S.A.F.E. Program: Support And Family Education, Mental Health Facts for Families. Family members and friends are invited to a 90-minute, confidential, free workshop on the second Monday of each month. Refreshments are provided, and reservations are not needed.

Attending the S.A.F.E. Program provides opportunities to:

- Talk with other family members in similar situations
- Learn more about causes, treatments and medications for mental illness
- Receive emotional support and encouragement
- Ask doctors questions about mental illness

■ Improve your ability to take care of yourself as a caregiver

Each session has a specific topic (such as “What Causes Mental Illness?” “Depression and Its Impact on the Family” and “P.T.S.D. and Its Impact on the Family”). Past participants have appreciated the handouts and support provided in the sessions, both from professionals and other families.

For more information, please contact Dr. Michelle Sherman, Director of the Family Mental Health Program, at 405-270-5183.



Spring

CALENDAR

THERAPEUTIC RECREATION AND CREATIVE ARTS THERAPY

Arts/Crafts

Monday through Friday, 8–10 a.m.
This class offers a variety of crafts for persons wishing to develop new skills and hobbies. Crafts include ceramics, leather, model building, painting kits, wood kits, etc.

Art Therapy

Sometimes it is difficult to express yourself verbally. Art therapy offers the opportunity to work through psychological issues using various arts media. Individual sessions are scheduled with the Art Therapist.

Creative Writing

Mondays, 1–2:30 p.m. Whether it be prose or poetry, writing often can open avenues for self-expression. Students can look forward to venues for being published.

Drumming

Wednesdays, 1–2 p.m. If you have a heartbeat, you have rhythm. Join this class and learn various techniques of hand drumming using African drums. Drums are provided.

Field Trips

Second Saturday of every month, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (unless otherwise scheduled). Trips are to the Oklahoma City Elks Lodge #417 for a billiard tournament and bingo. Lunch is provided. To participate, veterans must be enrolled in an Art Therapy or Therapeutic Recreation class.

Leisure Education

By appointment only. Therapy sessions deal with leisure planning, identification of community resources, barriers to participation, attitudes about leisure and other issues related to leisure and recreation participation.

Open Studio

Thursdays, 1–3 p.m. If you have an interest in developing your leisure skills through art, this class is for you. Materials provided.

Photography

Fridays, 10 a.m.–noon. Introductory classes teach the use of the 35-mm camera. Learn about f-stops, lighting, film speed and more. Field trips are included and cameras are provided.

Pottery

Tuesdays, 1–3 p.m. Working with clay — either molding it or throwing it on a wheel — can be a satisfying and self-fulfilling experience.

T'ai Chi

Fridays, 11 a.m.–noon. This ancient art of meditation and exercise is a sure way to promote relaxation and stress management.

Therapeutic Exercise

Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m. Whether or not you have physical limitations, exercise is healthy for you. The therapist will provide individual instruction on the proper exercise for you.

Walking Stick-Making Class

Tuesdays, 8–10 a.m. and 1–3 p.m., and Fridays, 8–10 a.m. Design, paint and craft your own walking stick. Materials are provided for \$10/stick.

Women Veterans Group

Thursdays, 10 a.m.–noon. Learn a new game, craft or leisure skill and be with other women veterans. Field trips are included once a month.

For More Information

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



FREE Educational Services for Veterans

Are you interested in continuing your education? The Veterans Upward Bound Program may be able to help.

Services are available free to all veterans with 180 days or more of active duty or separated medically with a discharge other than dishonorable and who have less than a bachelor's degree.

The only other qualification is that the veteran plans to attend college or vocational school or prepare for a GED.

Services include, but are not limited to:

- Access to tutors, computer lab and ongoing advisory
- Upgrading skills in the areas of writing, math and/or reading
- Evaluation and testing for school readiness
- Basic computer skills (classes held each month)
- Degree/career guidance
- Information about colleges and technical schools
- Financial aid guidance
- Study skills — speed-reading, test and note taking, stress and time management
- Essay writing
- Conversational Spanish

To qualify, veterans should bring copies of their DD214 and tax forms to the Upward Bound Office located on the 3rd floor (3A-140), Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. If you qualify, you may be entitled to a \$40-per-month stipend allowance as you work on your skills. Testing is normally scheduled on Wednesdays at 1 p.m. Stop by or call Erica Seyfert or Jennifer Carnes at 405-270-0501, Ext. 1130.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF Quitting Smoking

When you kick the cigarette habit, you don't have to wait weeks or months to reap the health benefits of your new lifestyle. Here, according to the American Cancer Society, are the changes that take place in your body when you give up smoking.

Within 20 minutes

- Blood pressure and pulse return to normal.
- Body temperature of hands and feet increases to normal.

After 8 hours

- Carbon monoxide level in blood drops to normal.
- Oxygen level in blood increases to normal.

After 48 hours

- Chance of heart attack decreases.
- Nerve endings start to regrow.
- Ability to smell and taste things is enhanced.

After 72 hours

- Bronchial tubes relax, making breathing easier.
- Lung capacity increases.

After 2 weeks to 3 months

- Circulation improves. Walking becomes easier.
- Lung function increases up to 30 percent.

After 1 to 9 months

- Coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue and shortness of breath decrease.
- Cilia regrow in lungs, increasing ability to handle mucus, clean lungs and reduce infection.
- Body's overall energy level increases.

After 5 to 10 years

- Lung cancer death rate decreases to nearly that of a non-smoker.
- Precancerous cells are replaced. Risk for other cancers — such as those in the mouth, larynx, esophagus, bladder, kidney and pancreas — decreases.

For more information:

Stop Smoking Program
VA Medical Center, Oklahoma City
405-270-0501, Ext. 3219



David P. Wood

HELP US HELP YOU: *New Customer Service Initiatives*

You may soon notice several new customer-oriented programs throughout the medical center. Customer service programs and activities are among my top priorities and will be at the center of awareness this year. Several exciting programs have already begun, and many more activities will begin over the next few months.

A large focus will be placed on our inpatient services. Beginning with admission, we want our veterans to know we are committed to providing quality service throughout the continuum of care. During the admission process, each patient will be given a Patient Education/Discharge Tool Kit that will identify his or her team of providers and explain some of the steps involved in the discharge process.

Another new program involves approximately 100 employees who have been recognized for providing exceptional customer service participating in the Inpatient Ambassador program. Inpatient Ambassadors will visit each inpatient shortly after admission to ensure that we are meeting our veterans' expectations and to address any

questions or concerns. In addition, all inpatients discharged from our facility will receive a Press Ganey satisfaction survey approximately one week after discharge. By completing this survey, our veterans will allow us to gauge the services we provide.

We also are continuing to use the OpinionMeters to survey patient care in the outpatient clinics. OpinionMeters are electronic devices that allow you to answer survey questions about patient satisfaction and service delivery with the push of a button. These OpinionMeters are located outside the waiting areas of Modules B, C and D and the Medicine and Surgery Specialty Clinics. If one of these units is set up in an area where you have received care, please take a few minutes to complete the brief survey regarding your visit. Your opinion matters to us.

The progress and outcome of these new customer service programs will be highlighted in future editions of this magazine. If you would like additional information regarding any of these new customer service programs, contact Stacy Rine, Acting Customer Service Representative, at 405-270-0501, Ext. 3649.

We hope these customer service programs will serve as a catalyst for change in the services we provide to our veterans and strengthen the OKC VAMC's commitment to honoring America's veterans by providing exceptional care that improves their health and well-being.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Wood".

David P. Wood, MHA, FACHE
Medical Center Director
Oklahoma City

Under **Pressure:** THE FACTS ABOUT HYPERTENSION

The dangers of high blood pressure are not fiction. Knowing the facts regarding this life-threatening condition can help you detect and control it.

A healthy blood pressure level can reduce your risk for many serious diseases and increase your longevity.

If you have high blood pressure, your heart has to work harder to pump blood through the arteries to your organs. This increased pressure poses the potential for serious health risks.

Familiarizing yourself with the following fictions and facts about this dangerous and common condition can help you detect and control it.

Fiction and fact

Fiction: High blood pressure is my only problem, so there's nothing serious for me to worry about.

Fact: High blood pressure increases the risk for heart disease and stroke. It also can lead to other conditions, such as congestive heart failure (a type of heart condition), kidney damage, dementia and blindness. On average, one American dies every

two minutes from complications due to high blood pressure.

Fiction: My blood pressure is pretty good — a few points over don't matter.

Fact: Health guidelines state even slight elevations in blood pressure significantly increase the risk for stroke or heart attack. It doesn't take much of an increase in blood pressure to raise your chance of developing problems with your heart, blood vessels, brain or kidneys. Normal blood pressure for most adults is less than 120/80 mm Hg.

Fiction: If I had high blood pressure, I would feel it.

Fact: Most people with high blood pressure have no symptoms, so they don't know they have it. That's why it's important to have your blood pressure checked once a year by a health care professional.

Fiction: High blood pressure can't be controlled.

Fact: Hypertension is easily detected and usually controllable. Making healthful lifestyle changes and taking medication as prescribed are the keys to controlling it.

Healthful lifestyle changes include:

- **REDUCING SATURATED FAT AND CHOLESTEROL IN YOUR DIET.** A diet full of fat and cholesterol can lead to diabetes and obesity, which are

independent risk factors for high blood pressure.

- **EXERCISING REGULARLY.** Increasing your physical activity strengthens your heart, reduces resting blood pressure and helps you lose extra pounds.
- **REDUCING SALT INTAKE.** Sodium, a component of salt, can make the body retain fluid that increases your overall blood volume, which increases the pressure.
- **QUIT SMOKING.** Smoking increases blood pressure, damages arteries and puts you at greater risk for cancer, heart attack and stroke.
- **LIMIT ALCOHOL INTAKE.** Excessive alcohol intake can raise blood pressure and make it more difficult to control with medications.

Fiction: Because my high blood pressure is under control, I can finally stop taking my medication, eating a healthful diet and exercising.

Fact: High blood pressure is a lifelong condition. Chances are it's at a healthy level because you've been taking your medication and making healthful choices. If your doctor prescribed a medication for high blood pressure, you should continue to take the medication as directed.

Sticking to the facts about high blood pressure can help you keep it under control and live a long and healthy life.



For More Information

Visit MedlinePlus at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus and enter "high blood pressure" in the search function.

IMPORTANT Telephone Numbers

Primary Care

To schedule or cancel an appointment with your Primary Care Provider, call **405-290-1890** 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 **405-270-0501** and enter the extension (see list below) or toll free **1-866-835-5273**, Monday–Friday (except holidays), 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

Alzheimer's	Ext. 5797
Arthritis	Ext. 3944
Audiology	Ext. 5490
Bone Density	Ext. 5159
Cardiology	Ext. 3268
CAT Scan	Ext. 4135
Dean McGee Eye Institute	Ext. 5831
Dental Clinic	405-270-5139
Dental Clinic Lawton	580-357-6981
Dermatology	Ext. 3944
Diabetes Education	Ext. 3284
Ear, Nose, Throat (ENT)	Ext. 2368
Eye	Ext. 5280
Geriatrics & Home-Based Care	Ext. 5198
GI Clinic	Ext. 3944
Hematology	Ext. 3944
Infectious Disease	Ext. 3284
Infusion Clinic	Ext. 5497
Mental Health	Ext. 5183
MRI	Ext. 5706
Nephrology (Renal)	Ext. 3284
Neurology/Rehab	Ext. 3365
North May Avenue Eye Clinic	Ext. 4716
Nuclear Medicine	Ext. 4284
Oncology	Ext. 3944
Outpatient Surgery	Ext. 5855
Prosthetics/Orthotics	Ext. 5612
Radiology	Ext. 4135
Speech Pathology	Ext. 3887
Social Work	Ext. 5574
Surgery Clinics	Ext. 3379
Ultrasound	Ext. 4135
Urology	Ext. 3018
Vascular Interventional	Ext. 3979
Women's Clinic	Ext. 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 **405-290-1610** or toll free **1-800-694-8387**. Please have your Social Security and prescription numbers ready when calling.

Check Upcoming Appointments

To check upcoming appointments, call **1-800-694-8387**. If you believe you have an appointment that is not listed, call the clinic directly. Call **405-270-0501** and the appropriate extension.

After-Hours Care and Emergencies

After normal business hours, holidays and/or weekends, staff is available to assess your symptoms and medical concerns. Call **405-290-1890** 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: **Kenneth Wrighter, M.Ed.**

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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 3033 N. Walnut, Suite 101W, Oklahoma City, OK 73105, **405-270-5185**.

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

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

Veteran's Clinic of South Central OK
527 W. Third Street
Konawa, OK 74849
580-925-3286

Internal Medicine Associates
215 N. Third
Ponca City, OK 74601
580-762-1777

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
405-290-1890, option 8

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 concerns about your care and/or safety in the hospital and you feel they have not been addressed, please contact the Patient Advocate (room GF-216) or the Director's Office (room 1A-105).

If your concern is not resolved by the Patient Advocate or Director's Office, you may contact the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Facilities' Office of Quality Monitoring by either calling **1-800-994-6610** or e-mailing complaint@jcaho.org.