



VA HEALTH CARE Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

Veteran Connection

VA Portland Health Care System Newsletter

Keeping the Promise - Advancing Excellence



March 2017

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VA Portland Health Care System

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Produced by the VAPORHCS Public Affairs Office

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS ??
Please email us at...
VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov
or call 503-402-2975

Lincoln's Promise (VA Mission Statement)

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

Inside this issue:

Director's Message	1
VA Volunteer Recognized	2
Toxic Exposure Town Hall	3
Compassionate Warrior Training	4
Mar 13 Blood Drive at PVAMC	5
Women's Health Fair	6
LGBT Health Awareness Mo.	7
Living Well with Chronic Conditions Class	8

For [VAPORHCS Events and Classes](#)—got to the VAPORHCS Web page...
www.portland.va.gov/calendar.asp

Message from the Director



Michael W. Fisher
Director, VA Portland Health Care System

I am delighted to announce that one of VAPORHCS' very own volunteers was recognized nationally last week for his volunteerism at the VA. Air Force Veteran Kent Erickson, of Tigard, received the [American Legion's 2016 VA Volunteer Services Worker of the Year award](#) during the organization's Washington Conference in Washington, D.C., Feb. 27. Thank you, Kent, for your tireless efforts in serving Veterans at VA Portland as well as for serving our country in the Air Force for 23 years. Of particular note, Kent joined the Oregon Army National Guard at age 15 serving in a field artillery unit for two years right here in Portland before joining the Air Force. I want to also thank the 800+ volunteers who serve our Veterans with more than 110,000 hours of recorded volunteer time each year. We could not be successful without you.

I would like to highlight our partners, Vietnam Veterans of America, and their efforts to provide helpful information to

all Veterans that could be life changing. We at VAPORHCS are proud to work with them to host a [Toxic Exposure Town Hall scheduled for March 11 at PVAMC](#). All the details are in the hyperlink above and in this newsletter. This is the fourth such event they have had at PVAMC and we are very appreciative of their steadfast support.

We need the support of our Volunteers and Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) to be successful in our mission of "serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans." With that said, I invite and encourage representatives of VSOs to be a part of the VA VSO Committee. The VBA Portland Regional Office Director and myself meet with this group each month to share information and gain feedback and ideas on VA services in order to continually improve the Veteran experience — be it in any capacity. If you are interested in being part of the conversation, please email or call my [Public Affairs Office](#) at 503-402-2975.

As always, thank you for your service and for letting us serve you.

Michael Fisher

VETERANS TOWN HALL

VAPORHCS & VBA Portland Regional Office Veterans Town Hall and Claims Clinic



FOR WHO? Veterans, family members and media representatives are invited

WHEN? March 20, 2017; Claims Clinic is 5–7:30 p.m.; Town Hall 6-7:30 p.m.

WHERE? [Vancouver Campus](#) Columbia Rm., 1601 E 4th Plain Blvd. & [Facebook Live](#)

WHAT? At the **Claims Clinic**, Veterans can

speaking to specialist about claims issues or to VAPORHCS Patient Advocates about your specific health-related issues or questions. At the **Veterans Town Hall**, get the latest updates from the Directors of VAPORHCS and VBA Portland Regional Office and ask questions and speak to staff.

If you would like to be added to the VAPORHCS Partner email list, please email us at VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov

[Oregon Legionnaire recognized for his volunteerism at VAPORHCS](#)

By Cameran Richardson

Feb 27, 2017 Feb 27, 2017

Kent Erickson has volunteered at the Portland VA Health Care System every Friday for the past eight years, delivering comfort items, smiles and personal time to the veterans he visits. Erickson's service to his fellow veterans was recognized by The American Legion on Feb. 27 during the organization's 57th annual Washington Conference – he was named the 2016 VA Volunteer Services Worker of the Year.

The award “makes me feel proud,” said Erickson, a U.S. Air Force veteran and member of Post 158 in Tigard, Ore. “I enjoy helping veterans.”

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt

presented the award to Erickson during the National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission meeting, honoring Erickson for his “service, dedication and commitment of giving back and continuing to serve America.”

As a volunteer at the Portland VA, Erickson meets the needs of veterans during their hospital stay by delivering requested comfort items such as blankets, clothing, books and toiletries. And during the holiday season he helps the American Legion Auxiliary with the hospital's Christmas shop by filling stockings with hats, scarves, hot cocoa mix, drawing utensils and more for the veterans.

“There's no question of what the mission of the VA is and the purpose of our volunteers are – every one of them want to give back in some way, and Kent is a classic example. He's giving back to his brothers and sisters who he served with or in memory of his brothers and sisters who he served with when he was in the Air Force,” said Shaun Benson, chief of voluntary services at the Portland VA. “We love having him, and it's always enjoyable to see him every Friday. He represents The American Legion very well.”

Department of Oregon Commander Jim Willis nominated Erickson for the award because “Kent has given thousands of hours of volunteer time to his fellow veterans and their families,” Willis said. “His service is an example to everyone who strives to serve his or her fellow veterans. He is just a nice guy.”

When Erickson walks the hospital's hallways to visit patients, he proudly wears his American Legion cap and an item that connects him to his service in the Air Force. As the Legion's VA volunteer of the year, he was given a new Legion cap that features his award title – which will serve as a conversation-starter with the patients he visits.

“Uniforms tell a story and you can certainly see part of Kent's story when he's walking down the hall – he's connected with the Legion, he's connected with the Air Force and the fact that he's a veteran,” Benson said. “And those are all conversation-starters when he walks into a patient's room. So the impact he's had at this VA hospital is knowing that he's going to make a difference in a veteran's life.”



VAPORHCS Volunteer Kent Erickson of Post 158 in Tigard, Ore., received The American Legion's 2016 VA Volunteer Services Worker of the Year award during the organization's Washington Conference in Washington, D.C., Feb. 27. Photo by Clay Lomneth/The American Legion



Toxic exposure educational event for Veterans and medical professionals

MAR
11

Toxic Exposure Town Hall

PVAMC Auditorium, Sat, Mar. 11, 1– 4 p.m.

This educational event, hosted by our partners, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), is intended to inform and educate Veterans and medical staff about the generational health effects of exposure to toxic substances to Veterans when they served in the military. This includes many toxic substances such as Agent Orange, burn pits, particulate matter, waste disposal pollution, asbestos, depleted uranium, and others. This event will begin with a brief history of Agent Orange followed by four guest speakers and discussion.

The speakers include:

- Just added! - Dr. Tom Berger. Executive Director of VVA Veterans Health Council; Vietnam Veteran, member of VVA's national Health Care, Government Affairs, PTSD & Substance Abuse, Toxic Substances, & Woman Veterans committees. Is a member of and former chair of the VA's Consumer Liaison Council for the Committee on Care of Veterans with Serious Mental Illness.

(Mokie Porter, National Communication Director, Vietnam Veterans of America, is now unable to attend.)

- A daughter of a Vietnam Veteran and former attorney will share her story and experience while facing four types of presumptive cancers related to her fathers' exposure.

- A founder of the VVA Faces of Agent Orange program, wife of a Vietnam Veteran, and registered nurse, will speak about her family's experience that includes children and grand children effected by her husband's exposure to Agent Orange.

- A decorated Navy Corpsman and recognized Veteran Service Officer who faces multiple exposure issues into the third generation of his family will share his expertise in filing VA claims for generational toxic exposure victims.

The event will be in the Portland VA Medical Center Auditorium located in building 101 on the 2nd floor from 1 to 4 p.m..

If you have questions about this event, please contact Tom Owens of VVA at towen6869@gmail.com or [VAPORHCS Public Affairs](#).

This is not a VA event. The VA is working with Vietnam Veterans of America, who is the host of this event, to help educate Veterans and medical professionals about this important topic.

Compassionate Warrior Training Supporting Veterans with PTSD and moral injury

By Phillip Myers

VAPORHCS Public Affairs Volunteer

Rebecca Morris is very familiar with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and moral injury. Moral injury is similar to PTSD but the life experience faced is considered extreme or unprecedented and transgresses deeply held moral beliefs and expectations. Rebecca encounters Veterans who suffer from these psycho-spiritual wounds in her VAPORHCS job as an ordained Buddhist minister and Interfaith Mental Health Chaplain, she also became very familiar with the disorders while growing up. Her father, a Navy Vietnam Veteran, and her step-father, an Army Vietnam Veteran, and her grandfather, an Army World War II Veteran, all experienced similar challenges. Exposure to PTSD and moral injury in the military has become a focal point in her Integrative Health & Wellness activities at VAPORHCS.

Rebecca's first exposure to the VA was in 2009 when she joined the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System in Denver as an intern after earning a Master's Degree in Divinity from Naropa University, in Boulder, Colo. She joined VAPORHCS in 2015 through a fellowship program centered on Clinical Pastoral Education leading to her outpatient mental health care related duties. As part of her goals to support Veterans through this fellowship, Rebecca developed a unique program titled, "Compassionate Warrior Training." This pilot program, the only one of its kind in the VA health care system, was birthed out of an identified need to help affected combat-exposed Veterans break the cycle of shame, violent communication, and hurtful actions that impact individuals and families. The program supports Veterans who may need help with reintegration back into their families, their communities and society.

"My ultimate goal is to create an experiential groundwork for Veterans enrolled in this training to feel more comfortable with their history and emotions, while making the transition back into civilian life and society," said Rebecca. "These are people who have suffered mental and spiritual trauma as a result of combat and complex trauma situations. We combine mental health exercises along with spiritual immersion. We support Veterans in this program by enabling them to look closely at their inner selves and mentor them in their process of giving back to the world."

Compassionate Warrior Training is a six-month program that helps Veterans realize that their "wounds can become a gift of wisdom that they have to give," and that one of the positive ways to re-enter civilian life is to engage with their community. There currently are 19 Veterans enrolled in the program. Participants, whose ages range from 28 to 80, meet once a week for two-hour sessions at the VAPORHCS Vancouver campus.

Rebecca said, "Many of these Veterans have been engaged in mental health services for years as a result of PTSD and moral injury due to combat situations. Nearly all of them have gone through trauma processing and are showing readiness to give back to others and want to pursue a holistic healing approach."



VAPORHCS Integrative Health & Wellness, Outpatient Mental Health Chaplain Fellow, Rebecca Morris, who developed the Compassionate Warrior Training pilot program at VAPORHCS to help Veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and moral injury transition into a meaningful civilian life, post-military service.

Continued on next page)

Compassionate Warrior Training (continued)

During the last 15 years, Rebecca has studied the traditions and spiritual beliefs evidenced by many spiritual traditions, including the Lakota Indian Tribe. “The Lakota are a very compassionate people,” said Rebecca. “They learn not to endure a sustained hate of their enemies.” One of the tenets of the Lakota is their sweat lodge ceremony in which members gather in community in a dome-shaped lodge, heated by hot stones with water poured on the stones. The lodge is a place of spiritual refuge and spiritual, mental and physical healing for purification, prayer and rejuvenation. A segment of Rebecca’s program includes participating in this ceremony, led by a Lakota elder, or leader. “I have witnessed a number of our Compassionate Warrior Program participants emerge from the sweat lodge with tears flowing after experiencing an opened heart,” Rebecca said.

Making room for new beginnings is one of the foundational pillars of the program. Other important aspects include learning various types of meditation, cultivating hope, and the willingness and confidence to engage in the spectrum of emotions from grief to joy, along with finding mission and purpose in life through development of self-confidence. Helping Veterans to rediscover their compassionate hearts and alleviate their fears and give back to society are goals that Rebecca is committed to. This is what she embodies in her spiritual and personal life, and as a VAPORHCS chaplain.

Have questions about Compassionate Warrior Training?

Contact Chaplain Rebecca Morris at Rebecca.Morris5@va.gov or 503-220-8262, ext. 56025

-VAPORHCS-

Blood Drive VA Medical Center Auditorium

3710 SW US Veterans Road
Portland, OR 97201

Monday, March 13th
8:30 AM to 2:00 PM



American Red Cross

March is Red Cross Month

Be part of an elite group of volunteers! Give blood.



Sign Up Today in the
Draw Station Waiting Room

or contact Eva at eva.viers@va.gov

You may also visit www.redcrossblood.org;
Sponsor Code: USVAPortland

-VAPORHCS-



Women's Health Fair

"Whole Health Starts with You!"



Friday, March 31
9 AM to 3 PM

VA Portland, Building 100, Auditorium

Celebrate women Veterans and learn more about the VA services available to support your whole health.

Hands-on Demos

Topics will cover Breast Health, Chaplain Services, Mental Health, Whole Health services, Healing Touch, Yoga, Mindfulness, Acupuncture and more.

Food and snacks provided!

All Veterans and Staff are Welcome!

For full schedule, visit: www.portland.va.gov

Free gifts, first 100 women Veterans

SPEAKERS EVERY HOUR

Community and VA services

Questions? Call Christine Krugh
503-220-8262, ext. 53098



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration



Details are available on the [VAPORHCS Facebook page](#) too!



March is designated **LGBT Health Awareness Month**

VA supports a month-long observance to bring awareness to the unique health needs and disparities of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

On average, LGBT-identified Americans experience higher rates of cancer, obesity, HIV/AIDS, and mental illness than their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts.

VA is working toward becoming a national leader in health care for LGBT Veterans, and strives to provide high-quality care in sensitive, respectful environments nationwide.

The following are links to LGBT Veteran Health fact sheets for gay and bisexual men, lesbian and bisexual women, transgender women and transgender men.



 [TRANSGENDER MEN HEALTH CARE](#)

 [TRANSGENDER WOMEN HEALTH CARE](#)

 [GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN HEALTH CARE](#)

VAPORHCS LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator:

Rebecca Casanova,
LCSW, MPH
(503) 220-8262,
ext. 56237

[Related VAPORHCS Web page](#)

LET'S TALK!

Sexual orientation and gender identity matter in health care.

LGBT Health Awareness Month

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Program
Office of Primary Care Services
LGBTProgram@va.gov



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Patient Care Services
Primary Care



**SICK AND TIRED OF BEING SICK AND TIRED?
TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH!**

Living Well with Chronic Conditions Class



Stories and Quotes from past participants:

"I have changed so many things in my life since I started the workshop 6 weeks ago, I am more positive and will continue with my goals I made for the rest of my life."

"This class helped me to realize the need of working personally with a counselor and having the courage to find one"

"Since going through the program I have been able to lower my blood sugar to below 140. I exercise 3 times a week and feel much better."

**Living Well with Chronic Conditions
2 1/2 hours for Six Weeks**

Classes are fun and interactive!

Classes starting April 2017

Classes will be held in West Linn

Learn practical skills!

Build confidence for staying active , managing your health, and enjoying life.

WORKSHOP FOR:

- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Heart Disease
- Arthritis
- Any other chronic health concerns

**Call to Register
West Linn:**

Please contact
Jamie Munsey at
503-210-4961

Next class starts Wednesday April 5th
12:30pm - 3:00pm at
The West Linn CBOC
1750 SW Blankenship Rd., Ste. 300
West Linn, OR 97068



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
VA Portland Health Care System

3/1/2017

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