

# Salute Your Health

Affirming Our Commitment to America's Heroes

## Staying Healthy and Well-Informed

As part of a focus to put the Veteran at the center of care, the VA has developed the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT). Within PACT, Veterans work together with health professionals to plan for whole-person care and lifelong health and wellness.

A key part is the Health Promotion Disease Prevention (HPDP) program. It assists Veterans with making healthier lifestyle choices by helping them identify the need for change. For example, many common chronic diseases (including diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure) are affected by lifestyle choices. In fact, approximately eight percent of the U.S. population has diabetes, while 20 percent

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of Veterans receiving VA health care have diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association. HPDP gives Veterans the tools to make healthy choices as an active member of their health care team.

### Healthy Living Messages

Health promotion and disease prevention services are integrated into clinical care within the Medical Center and throughout affiliated Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). To do this, HPDP promotes these nine key Healthy Living Messages:

- Get involved in your health care.
- Be tobacco-free.
- Be physically active.
- Eat wisely.

### Comprehensive Services

The Health Promotion Disease Prevention program includes these additional programs:

- **HealthierUS Veterans** educates veterans and their families about the health risks of obesity and diabetes. It promotes healthy eating habits and being active.
- **My HealthVet** is a free, online personal health record that allows Veterans to track health information, re-order medications, interact with their health care team, and access reputable health resources.
- **MOVE!** is a national weight management program designed to help Veterans lose weight and keep it off to improve their health.
- **The Smoking and Tobacco Cessation Program** provides information on quitting, preventing, and treating smoking and tobacco use for Veterans, their families, and health professionals.
- **Primary Care – Mental Health Integration** seeks to integrate care for Veterans' physical and mental health conditions, and improve access and quality of care across the spectrum of illness severity, for Veterans with

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- Strive for a healthy weight.
- Limit alcohol.
- Get recommended screenings and immunizations.
- Manage stress.
- Be safe.

These messages may be communicated to the Veteran during individual,



## ERIE VA STAR POWER



**Satish Sharma, M.D.,**

urologic surgeon at Erie VA, was recently inducted into the American College of Surgeons (ACS) and conferred with its prestigious fellowship.

The fellowship is granted by ACS following rigorous evaluation of professional qualifications, surgical competence, and ethical conduct. The surgeon also must be found to be consistent with the high standards established and demanded by ACS.

The organization is focused on improving care and safeguarding standards of care to add to the health and well-being of patients.

group and telephone visits, virtual visits through secure messaging, through the use of self-management tools, and through community programs.

### Reaching Out to Veterans

HPDP uses proven patient-centered communication techniques to elicit the patient's values and goals and to help them prioritize and decide what health behavior they are ready to change. The evidence-based methods of communication are:

- **Health coaching:** Whole-person-centered approach to engage the patient in caring for themselves
- **Motivational interviewing:** Patient-centered approach to assisting patients in becoming actively involved in their health care
- **Shared decision making:** Between providers and patients

The program is staffed by two people who also co-chair the HPDP Committee.

**Program Manager Mari Johnson, RN, MSN,** handles strategic planning, program development and implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the overall program. **Health Behavior Coordinator Michelle Carpin, LSW,** provides health behavior change training and consultation, in addition to providing some direct clinical services.

For information on the Erie VA Medical Center Health Promotion Disease Prevention Program, please contact Mari at **814-860-2695** or Michelle at **814-860-2706**.

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mild mental health symptoms who do not need specialized care.

- **Veterans Health Education and Information (VHEI) program** is a coordinated approach to planning, delivering, and evaluating Veterans health education programs, services, and resource materials for Veterans and, as appropriate, for their family members.
- **Women's Veteran Program** recognizes the service and contributions of women Veterans and women in the military and raises awareness of the responsibility to treat these service members with dignity and respect.
- **The Flu Campaign** develops and distributes education and communication materials for the VA community that promote behaviors that prevent the spread of infection.
- **Wellness Is Now (WIN)** provides online health resources for VA employees, including a health risk assessment, lifestyle coaches, and an incentive program to promote employee health and wellness.

To get involved in any of these programs, or for more information, please ask your health care team.

# Women's Health Expands Staff and Services

The number of women Veterans enrolled at Erie VA has grown to more than 1,220. To meet the needs of this growing population, all primary care clinics and each Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) now have a designated women's health provider.

Additional staff joined the team to improve services and the quality of care for women Veterans. Carol Bliss, RN, Women's Health Case Manager, works closely with each primary care provider and team member to coordinate care for women patients. This includes follow-up with patients on screening tests, lab results and assisting in the scheduling of needed appointments. Julia Roussos, CRNP, as the Women's Health Clinical Champion, educates primary care providers and teams on women's health issues. Each of these women's health professionals works directly with Nadean Sitter, Women Veterans Program Manager, to bring the best care to women patients.

The New Baby Program supports pregnant Veterans by providing education and goodies to new mothers. With the help of community organizations, this program is able to reach out and support local Veterans and their new families.



Community outreach is also a strong focus. In September, the program hosted the Celebrate Women's Health luncheon, which had more than 110 attendees. This luncheon celebrated women Veterans and highlighted Erie VA services.

For more information, contact Nadean Sitter, Women Veterans Program Manager, at **814-860-2907**. You can also send secure messages to the Women's Health Care team on My HealtheVet. Go to [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) today!

## Primary Care Now Includes Mental Health

The VA continues to promote mental health awareness and mental health acceptance by our Veterans. The Erie VAMC has initiated a program that incorporates mental health treatment within the primary care setting, also referred to as Primary Care/Mental Health integration.

The overall purpose of the program is to integrate care for Veterans' physical and mental health conditions, improve access and quality of care, and allow treatment in mental health specialty settings to focus on people with more severe symptoms.

If you are experiencing mental health symptoms and/or have questions about the VA behavioral health services, you can address your concerns with your primary care provider. Your provider can then refer you to a behavioral health person within the primary care setting who is available to assist you during your appointment.

# CBOCs Debut Follow-Up Appointments

Erie VA is pleased to introduce the Recall Scheduling System, a new way of scheduling follow-up appointments for patients at the Ashtabula, Crawford, McKean, Warren, and Venango Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). Since this system began at the Erie facility, we've seen a 6 percent increase in the availability of appointments. This allows each clinic the opportunity to take care of more patients in a timely manner.

How does it work?

- At the end of the patient's appointment with his or her primary care provider, the provider will determine when he or she wants the patient to return. For example, in eight months.
- The VA staff will enter the return date into our Recall appointment tracking system.
- In seven months, the patient will receive a letter with instructions to call the VA to schedule the appointment. If the patient forgets to call, a second reminder letter will be sent.



- The patient will call and speak with an Erie VA Call Center staff member who will assist the patient in scheduling a convenient appointment time.
- Patients do not need to worry about their appointment being missed. The VA will track every patient in the Recall Scheduling System to assure that all required appointments are made.

We look forward to increasing appointment availability and serving more Veterans as this system rolls out to all clinics.

## More Pharmacy Options for CBOCs

Our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) recently contracted with local pharmacies to provide emergency medications (such as antibiotics) to patients. Each CBOC will work with two local pharmacies that are within three miles or less of their clinic.

Emergency medications will no longer be stocked and dispensed from the clinic. Your CBOC provider will write the prescription for your emergency medication and attach it to a certificate that you must present to the designated pharmacy. The pharmacy will not process your prescription without this certificate.

Prescriptions will not be charged at the local pharmacy.

For a list of participating pharmacies in your area, please contact your CBOC.



## Change in Clinic Hours

Starting February 16, clinics and labs will open at 9 a.m. on the first and third Wednesdays of each month.

No scheduled primary care provider or nurse clinic hours are offered after noon on Wednesdays.

# Spotlight on PTSD

Erie VA has seen a dramatic increase in the number of patients suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD can affect everyday activities, disrupt work, and strain relationships. Erie VA continues to work with Veterans to help them recover from emotional and mental health wounds.

## Treatment Options

Erie VA's PTSD specialists use evidence based practices—including cognitive processing therapy and prolonged exposure therapy—to treat and reduce PTSD symptoms.

- **Cognitive Processing Therapy** focuses on helping the patient understand their thought processes and change the way they view the traumatic event. This type of therapy helps

Veterans cope with feelings of guilt, anger, and fear.

- **Prolonged Exposure Therapy** helps patients face fears that are associated with traumatic memories by repeatedly talking with the PTSD specialist about the trauma. This type of therapy is often difficult at first but, over time, patients learn how to deal with the stressful memories.

Erie VA also offers medication management and individual, group, and family counseling for patients with PTSD.

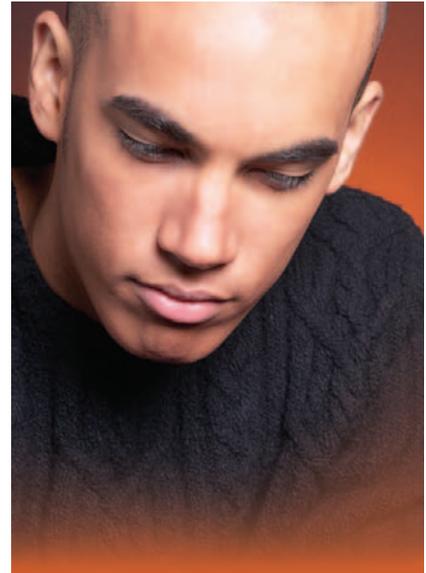
Counseling is also available at the Community Based Outpatient Clinics through on-site behavioral health staff or video-telephone (V-Tel) services.

## Coming Soon

New PTSD therapy groups are coming soon. These new therapy groups will focus on educating patients about what to expect with PTSD and what treatment options are available to help improve their health and well being. The Behavioral Health Clinic is also hiring a Peer Specialist. This position will provide Veteran-to-Veteran support with someone who is also in recovery.

## Getting Help

If you are experiencing symptoms of PTSD, please talk to your primary care provider and ask for a referral to speak with a PTSD specialist. For more information about PTSD, visit [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov).

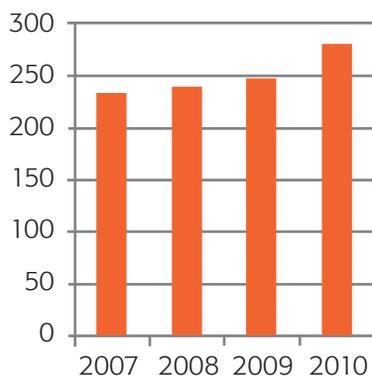


## Common Symptoms

PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not emerge until months or even years later. They include:

- Re-experiencing memories or nightmares
- Avoiding things that remind them of a traumatic event
- Emotionally disconnecting or feeling distant in order to protect themselves from feeling pain and fear
- Increased awareness, easily startled, or always feeling on edge
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Experiencing intense anger which may be difficult to control

**Number of Patients Treated for PTSD Only**



# Become a Healthier U.S. Veteran

[www.healthierusveterans.va.gov](http://www.healthierusveterans.va.gov) Winter 2011

## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

### Sleep Management

This one-session class is designed to help improve your sleep.

**CONTACT:** Edward Dabkowski, Ph.D., at 814-860-2038 to register or for more information, or ask your primary care provider for a referral.

### Pain Management

Find better ways to manage pain and live more effectively.

**CONTACT:** Edward Dabkowski, Ph.D., at 814-860-2038 for more information or ask your primary care provider.

## TOBACCO CESSATION

Quit the habit. Live longer. You may receive a prescription for one of several medications to aid in your attempt to quit.

**CONTACT:** Stephanie Dorich, LSW, at 814-860-2038 or ask your primary care provider for a referral to any of the following tobacco-cessation group programs:

### Support Group

Support therapy for any Veteran interested in quitting tobacco of any kind

**WHEN:** Every Friday at 9 a.m.

**WHERE:** Behavioral Health Clinic

### Educational Group

One-time tobacco-cessation educational group

**WHEN:** Dates vary

**WHERE:** The Erie VA and several of the community-based outpatient clinics

## WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Studies of those who have lost weight found that having support increases your chance for success. Join one of these MOVE! programs to get started on a healthier you.

**CONTACT:** 814-860-2554 for more information or to schedule an appointment for any of the weight-management programs listed below:

### MOVE! Support Groups

Support therapy for overweight or obese Veterans who want to lose weight, keep it off, and improve their health.

**WHEN:** Two times a month

### MOVE! Phone Clinic

This call-in telephone clinic

can answer your questions about losing weight and provide support when needed.

### MOVE! Education Series

This is a four-week educational series taught by a registered dietitian, a physical therapist, and a behavioral health clinician.

## EDUCATION

### Medical Words: A Tutorial from the National Library of Medicine

This tutorial teaches you about medical words and how to put them together. You'll also find quizzes to see what you've learned.

**VISIT:** [www.nihseniorhealth.gov](http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov). See Training Tools at the bottom of your screen.

## CANCER SURVIVORS SUPPORT GROUP

**New!** The Man to Man support group is led by Dr. Sharma, urological surgeon at Erie VA. Life after cancer... share, support, learn.

**WHEN:** January 20, March 24, May 19 from 1 to 2 p.m.

Look for more dates in the next issue.

**WHERE:** Conference room 1 on the second floor of the Erie VA Medical Center

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

**"If you or someone you know is in an emotional crisis... call 1-800-273-TALK Press 1 for Veterans"**

Department of Veterans Affairs



# My HealthVet

Access to VA health care is now at patient's fingertips. My HealthVet (MHV) offers 24/7 online access to personal health care resources. Erie VA patients can refill prescriptions online, send secure messages to their health care teams, track personal health information, view personal VA Wellness Reminders, access online medical libraries and more!

## Register at Home

1. Go to **www.myhealth.va.gov**.
2. On the right side of the screen, click the **Register Today** button and complete the registration page. Review and accept the **Terms & Conditions** and the **Privacy Policy**.

## Upgrade Account In-Person

Once registered, patients can upgrade their account through In-Person Authentication. This upgrade gives patients access to use secure messaging, view VA Wellness Reminders, and view the names of each prescription instead of seeing only the RX number. The In-Person Authentication process takes just 10 minutes to complete.



Erie VA MHV Users: **1,882**  
Erie VA Authenticated Users: **1,312**  
Online Refills Through My HealthVet Per Month: **2,409**  
Patients Using Secure Messaging: **70**

## To Upgrade an Account:

1. Log into **www.myhealth.va.gov** and watch the In-Person Authentication (IPA) video online.
2. Visit the Release of Information office located on the second floor of the Medical Center to sign the IPA Form and complete the authentication process.

For questions about My HealthVet, call the My HealthVet Coordinator at **814-860-2097**.

## What's Happening? Construction Updates

Erie VA is getting ready to open the brand-new front entrance and primary and specialty care clinics. The opening of the \$3.5 million expansion is tentatively planned for January.

### What to Expect?

- A new main entrance with additional kiosks serving as the main check-in area for primary care and specialty care appointments
- Additional space for the oncology clinic and compensation and pension offices
- A Women's Wellness Center wing
- A Returning Veterans Program wing

This expansion adds 8,000 square feet to the primary care and specialty care clinics. Another 4,000 square feet have been renovated.

Go to **www.erie.va.gov** for more construction updates and announcements about the grand opening!





Erie Veterans Affairs Medical Center  
135 East 38th Street  
Erie, PA 16504

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**INSIDE:**

- Expanded Women's Services
- Follow-Up Appointment Help
- Spotlight on Treating PTSD

Attention Postmaster: Time Dated Material Enclosed

*Salute Your Health* is published quarterly as a patient education service by the Erie VA Medical Center. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your health care, and learn more about the many services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your provider. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes. Our mission is to maintain and improve the health and well-being of Veterans by providing state-of-the-art comprehensive health care in a professional and pleasant environment. All models used for illustrative purposes only. (W111 6210M)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT US AT:**  
**Erie VA Medical Center**  
**135 East 38th St., Erie, PA 16504**  
**814-868-8661 or 800-274-8387**  
**Check out our Web site for**  
**hours, telephone numbers, and**  
**maps at [www.erie.va.gov](http://www.erie.va.gov).**

## Upcoming Events

**N**ational Salute to Veterans Week is coming up Feb 13-19. Each year, Erie VA invites local dignitaries, Veteran service organizations, local sports teams, Reserve Center staff and the general public to visit Veterans residing in Erie VA's Community Living Center and the hospice and palliative care unit.

We're extending our invitation to you! This event is dedicated to showing local Veterans that they are remembered. Individuals or groups wishing to participate in this year's National Salute to Veterans Week should call the Voluntary Service office at **814-860-2454**.

## Veterans Health Fair – Score One for Your Health!

**When:** February 2, 2011

**Where:** Erie VA Medical Center  
2nd floor conference rooms

**When:** 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**What:** Veterans are invited to find information and ideas on how to maximize their health. Represented departments include *MOVE!*, Smoking Cessation, MyHealthVet, OEF/OIF, Hospice, and the Health Promotion Disease Prevention program and exercise tips.

There will be a door prize and giveaways. Sponsored by the Health Promotion Disease Prevention program.

