

Veterans *In-Touch!*

The Newsletter of the Veterans Consumer Advocacy Council

Volume 6 Issue 2

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Pathogen and Bio-marker Discovery in Gulf War Illness

The Sierra Nevada Health Care System and Whittemore Peterson Institute are conducting a 2 year research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the potential causes of GWI (Gulf War Illness). Researchers will be looking at the differences in the immune system composition between veterans who have symptoms of GWI and subjects that do not have those symptoms, which in turn will afford physicians the necessary tools to make more accurate diagnoses.

Each participant will be involved in one visit only.

Who is eligible?

Veterans who were on active duty during the Gulf War (1990-

1991) who have been seen in the VA Health Care System.

What will you be asked to do?

- Complete a brief questionnaire (5-10 minutes).

Provide 30 ml (about 2 tablespoons) of blood (20-30 minutes).

Cost and Compensation

You will receive \$25.00 for travel and time associated with study participation.

This study will be performed at Ioannis A. Lougaris VA Medical Center in Reno and the VA Sierra Health Care System Com-

Veterans *In-Touch!* Newsletters

can be found On Line at the *Operation Keep the Faith* website:

<http://www.oktf.org/Veterans-In-Touch-Newsletter.html>

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Hotline for Homeless Veterans

The VA has founded a National Call Center for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, that provides free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. Call:

1-877-4AID VET
(1-877-424-3838)

Veterans Crisis Hotline

For information about the suicide prevention program, please call **1-775-326-2920** and ask for Marlyn Scholl, LCSW, Suicide Behavior Specialist or Stacy Gillham, LSW, Suicide Behavior Specialist.

In case of an emergency, please use the Veterans Crisis Hotline.

1-800-273-TALK (8255)
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Plumas Street Mental Health Offices

6110 Plumas, Reno, NV 89519
775-328-1490

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munity Based Outpatient Clinics*

For more information or to volunteer for this study, please contact Study Coordinator, Rory Berk, 775-328-1750.

*Processing and analysis of blood samples will be conducted at the Whittemore Peterson Institute (1664 N. Virginia St., University of Nevada, Reno) under the supervision of the Principle Investigator, Dr. Vincent Lombardi, 775-682-8278.

***Why does
Veterans In-Touch!
address
Suicide Intervention
in the first page of
each newsletter?
(Part 2)***

by Cynthia Ransom, M.P.H.

Edited from an internet article written by: Susan Blumenthal, MD current Public Health Editor at Huff Post and Former U.S. Assistant Surgeon General in Collaboration with George Maliha and Anita Mathews.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-blumenthal/military-suicide_b_1884083.html

Special Issues for Women Veterans

While civilian men have a four times higher suicide rate than women and **95 percent of military suicides are male**, female veterans appear to be more than **three times more likely** to commit suicide than their civil-

ian counterparts. The elevated suicide rate among service women as compared to females in the general population reflects some of the **particular stresses** of being a woman in the military, especially when deployed away from family members, including spouses and children as well as friends. Without the social support and connection to family (a protective factor against suicide among women in the general population), deployed women are disconnected from these protective connections. At the same time, women may be more isolated from their colleagues in the armed forces, increasing their vulnerability by their smaller numbers, lower ranks, and weaker support networks for gender-specific issues.

And, while enhanced efforts are being made to prevent **sexual harassment and assault** in the armed services, a risk factor for PTSD and suicide, female service members are still targets. In 2010, an estimated **19,000 rapes and sexual assaults** took place in the military. Indeed, **47 percent of female officers and 60 percent of enlisted women** report being sexually harassed, and **29 percent of women** reported that they were victims of sexual assault while in the service. Despite these alarming statistics, it is estimated that only **10 percent of these incidents** are reported to military authorities, so many women

suffer this invisible wound of military service alone. Women are often penalized for alleging sexual assault and, in the past, were required to report such attacks to their supervisors, who in some cases are the perpetrators of the rape or attack. These reports are alarming, especially considering that the armed services have had a "zero-tolerance" policy for such attacks for years. A number of female service members who were abused are now **unemployed and continue to suffer** from their physical and mental injuries, and a significant number of them do not receive adequate treatment. Some of these tragic cases have been chronicled in a recent film documentary, *The Invisible War*.

(To be continued in the next issue of Veterans In-Touch!)

Bereavement Group

LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

The VA has a Bereavement Support group available for those who have **lost a loved one** and/or are anticipating the loss of a loved one. It is available for veterans as well as their spouses, adult children, siblings, parents, and friends, as well as VA staff. The group is held on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month from 11am

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to 12pm. Each meeting takes place in the Chapel, on the 1st floor near the Gold elevators.

For further information, please contact Cindy Barber, PhD, at (775) 786-7200 x5015, or Ruth Simonis, LCSW, at x5055.

LOSS OF A PET

If you have experienced the **loss of a pet**, support is available in the community. You can **contact** Hearts Companion at (775) 323-7387, or the Shakespeare Animal Fund at (775) 342-7040.

Cindy Barber, Ph.D.
Psychologist
Community Living Center
Sierra Nevada VAMC
975 Kirman Street #116
Reno, NV 89502
Office: (775) 786-7200 ext. 5015
Fax: (775) 337-2287

KATE'S CORNER

by Kate Roman (US Army Retired 1970-1992), Investigative Reporter

(This is Kate Roman's last regular article in the Veterans In-Touch Newsletter. Kate is moving out of state on the first of February so that she can be closer to her family.

Kate is not only an original member of the Consumer Council but a great friend to all Veterans. We will miss her greatly!

February is Black History Month, so I wanted to let you know about some of the special

people in the National Museum of African-American History and Culture.

Orator: I am Frederick Douglas (1818-1895). In the 1840's I rose to prominence on the abolitionist circuit as I presented my story of slave life in Maryland and my escape to freedom.

I started my newspaper, **The Northern Star**, which was a mouthpiece for the anti-slavery movement and carried addresses from the leading abolitionists of the day.

I encouraged President Lincoln to allow African-Americans to engage in the fight.

In the years after the war, I continued to fight tirelessly for equality including suffrage for both African-Americans and women.

My home is now a landmark monument to my struggle for equality.

Activist: I am Ida B. Wells-Barnet (1862-1931). I am best known for my work at the age of 22, with the anti-lynching campaign.

In 1884 I successfully sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company after being forced from my first-class seat, in favor of a white man, and moved to the "Jim Crow" car.

The verdict was later overturned on appeal by the Tennessee Supreme Court.

Scientist: Hi, I am George Washington Carver (1864-1943), a poet and painter. I am associated with the humble peanut.

In 1896, at Booker T. Washington's invitation, I became head of the Agriculture Department at Tuskegee Institute, where I taught and researched for 47 years.

I studied ways to improve the depleted soil in the South by crop rotation and planting a variety of foods such as peanuts, soybeans or sweet potatoes.

I am the first African-American to be honored for my work and to be honored with a national monument.

Entrepreneur: My name is Madam C.J. Walker (1867-1891).

As a daughter of former slaves, I experienced a chilling childhood. I suffered hair loss in my twenties. I set about creating a line of hair products for African-American women.

The success of my hair care products allowed me to open a factory and school where I trained hundreds of black women to become self sufficient. Because of my knowledge, I became one of the first female millionaires in U.S. history.

I was an active participant in the social and political organizations to bring reform in the African-American community.

One Goal, One Passion,SPOUSES

Written by Susan Jones, CLSC - spouse of a Retired Navy Veteran and Certified Life Strategies Coach specializing in Nutrition, Stress Management and Wellness

Balance Life Strategies Coaching
www.balancelifestrategies.com

Stress, Stress, Stress!

If you are feeling stressed, you are not alone. Everyone gets stressed from time to time.

Some people cope with stress more effectively. It is important that you know your stress limits in order to manage the stress in your life. Tense muscles, racing thoughts, sweaty palms, stomach aches and no concentration may be some of the symptoms of what stress could be doing to your body.

What is stress anyway?

Stress can be defined as the brain's response to demands. Many things can trigger this response, including change.

Changes can be positive or negative, short-term or ongoing, as well as real or perceived. They may include things like commuting to and from school or work every day, preparing for a vacation, wedding or other major event, taking care of a loved one, or even moving to a new home. Some changes can be mild and relatively harmless, but some changes are major, such as di-

orce, serious illness, or a car accident. Other changes are even more extreme, such as exposure to violence, and can lead to traumatic stress reactions.

Stress is caused by a complex interaction of internal and external processes. It is basically our "survival instinct." Our body recognizes the alarm and starts dumping stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol into the bloodstream. The adrenaline causes what we know as the "fight or flight" response. This response is wonderful if we are in an extreme or dangerous situation, but if we experience the constant release of these hormones every day, we would eventually feel tired, worn out, have physical pain, irritability, insomnia and perhaps even become violent.

How do we cope with stress?

There are different ways to manage and cope with our stress.

- Seek help from a qualified mental health care provider if the stress is overwhelming you, you can't cope, have suicidal thoughts or are using excessive drugs and alcohol.
- Be sure to receive proper health care. Preventing future health problems can reduce stress.
- Stay connected to people who can provide emotional support. Friends, family, religious organizations and

groups can all be beneficial. Keep positive people in your life.

- Set your priorities.
- Always focus on what you have accomplished at the end of the day instead of what you were not able to do.
- Exercise regularly. Just 30 minutes of light exercise per day can help boost your mood and reduce stress.
- Explore stress relief activities such as Yoga and Meditation.

Do not wait until tomorrow to start your stress management. Tomorrow becomes today and today will become yesterday and the stress will continue to build in your life. Start to de-stress today by taking small steps. Commit to going to bed 30 minutes earlier. Take a short walk on your lunch break. Allow yourself time to journal, read a book or take a hot bath; do something just for you.

Establishing new habits require that we make change. It doesn't matter if that change is small. Anything you are able to do to help relax yourself is contributing to better health, a calmer spirit and a clear mind. Remember these four steps:

1. Something good for your body
2. Something to calm your mind
3. Something to feed your spirit
4. Something to simplify your environment

If you can do one thing in each of these categories every day,

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you are taking a major step in incorporating stress management into your life.

You can manage and even eliminate much of the negative stress in your life. Find stress management techniques that work best for you; techniques that accommodate your lifestyle. Learn these techniques, practice them and **RELEASE THAT STRESS!**



Be Involved in Your Health Care

Jana Patterson, RN, MPH
Health Promotion Disease Prevention
Program Manager
VASNHCS
975 Kirman Avenue
MS 11AC
Reno, NV 89502-2597
775-328-1872

Infection: Don't Pass It On

Flu activity continues to surge across most of the United States—and February and March are recognized as the peak flu season. The Nation is experiencing an early flu season and high levels of activity are being seen across the ma-

jority of the country. Most of the influenza viruses circulating in the United States to date this season are influenza A (H3N2) viruses. However, patients with influenza B and a few persons with pH1N1 09 have been also identified. In some regions, influenza B is predominant. Most of the influenza strains are very similar to the influenza strains in this season's influenza vaccine. To date, the CDC has not identified any influenza virus isolates from this season resistant to neuraminidase inhibitors (i.e., Oseltamivir [Tamiflu]).

It is not too late to get your flu shot! The VA has ample flu vaccine available—you can obtain your flu shot on a walk-in basis Monday-Friday 8am-3pm, as well as during your regular medical appointment.

February is...



AMERICAN HEART MONTH!

American Heart Month is a time to battle cardiovascular disease and educate Americans on what we can do to live heart-healthy lives. Heart disease, including stroke, is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. In

America, every 25 seconds someone will have a coronary event and every minute someone will die from heart disease. Heart disease still kills more women than all cancers combined so it is time to get educated and join in the fight against heart disease.

We are asking you to wear red on February 1st, 2013. By wearing red you will be showing your support of American Heart Month and joining in building the awareness of the fight against heart disease and helping build healthier lives.

WAR TEST

A Poem by Allen Bell

(Allen Bell is a veteran receiving services from the Sierra Nevada Medical Center, Reno, NV.)

WAR TEST

We go where there's unrest

We send in our fighting best

When done the enemy is useless

We keep it clean, no mess

We are highly trained

With superior trained brain

We are sharp when we take aim

We are the best at this game

Allen Bell

IMPORTANCE OF DD214

By Valerie Nenzel, GWOT Writer

Your DD214 is used to verify your record of service in the military. You will be asked to provide your DD214 in order to access veterans' benefits and services.

A DD214 contains information on when you entered the military and when you were discharged. All military training and education, medals awarded, dates, locations and units of deployment are contained in your DD214.

Always keep your DD214 in a safe place. Ensure that all information on your DD214 is complete and correct.

Be sure to file a copy of your DD214 with your County Clerk's Office. This will make life easier if you happen to lose or misplace your copy. If you have not filed your DD214 with your County Clerk's Office, you may obtain a copy by contacting your branch of service.



**DEAF & HARD
OF HEARING
ADVOCACY
RESOURCE
CENTER**

DHHARC is a 501.c3 (Non-Profit) organization with the vision of empowering Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals by

providing services and community education about the right guaranteed to all Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nevadans and enhancing the quality of life of all Nevadans.

The mission of the organization is three pronged:

1. Support Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to attain independent living.
2. Strive for equal communication access in all aspects of daily life.
3. Provide educational outreach, community building events and civil rights advocacy programs.

Services:

- Direct one-to-one assistance.
- Cultural sensitivity outreach and training for local entities, private and public business.
- Information and referral
- Employment classes
- Getting a Nevada Drivers License.
- Educational support Services.
- Document translation.
- Resource Library.

For a list of registered interpreters in Nevada visit:

www.dhharc.org, http://dhhs.nv.gov/Wry_Registered_Community.asp, or contact our local DHHARC office.

Northern Nevada Office

1150 Corporate Blvd Suite 1

Reno, NV 89502
V/TTY: 775-355-8994
FAX: 775-355-8996
VP: 775-434-0290

Southern Nevada Office

2575 Westwind Rd. Suite C
Las Vegas, NV 89146
V/TTY: 702-363-3323
FAX: 702-685-0324
VP: 702-475-4751

Poisoned Patriots: Agent Orange and the Fort McClellan Connection

From: Veterans Today Military and Foreign Affairs Journal

Fort McClellan was officially closed in 1999 and is now operated by the Alabama National Guard. For much of its history, Fort McClellan was one of the principal chemical and biological training centers for the Defense Department.

For more information contact:

www.veteranstoday.com/2011/03/14/agent-orange-and-the-fort-mcclellan-connection



BE

TOBACCO

FREE!

FLU SHOTS

No walk-in clinics are scheduled, however:

Veterans can still “walk-in” to the Clinic, check in with the MSA, and ask for a flu shot.

Veterans can also receive the shot during their regular appointment.



Encourage Veterans to Seek Medical Care

www.myhealth.va.gov

Theresa Thurman
Sierra Nevada VAMC Coordinator
1-775-786-7200, Ext 1588

To help Veterans address problems and support Veterans in making decisions about getting care call the **Coaching Into Care Program** [1-888-823-7458](tel:1-888-823-7458).

The Coaching Into Care program offers unlimited, free coaching with family members or friends over a series of telephone calls.



VA
HEALTH CARE
Defining EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

Combat Call Center

1-877-WAR-VETS

24 Hours

1-877-927-8387

<http://www.vetcenter.va.gov>

1-877-WAR-VETS is an around the clock confidential call center where combat Veterans and their families can call to talk about their military experience or any other issue they are facing in their readjustment to civilian life. The staff is comprised of combat Veterans from several eras as well as family members of combat Veterans.



VA
HEALTH CARE
Defining EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

RENO VET CENTER

1-775-323-1294

5580 Mill St. Suite 600
Reno, NV 89502

The Vet Center can help you:

Find Family Support

If you have served in ANY combat zone, or experienced sexual trauma while serving, Local Vet Centers can help you and your family with readjustment counseling and outreach services — for free!.

Reno Vet Center
5580 Mill St. Suite 600
Reno, NV 89502
Tel: (775) 323-1294
Fax: (775) 322- 8123

<http://www.vetcenter.va.gov>

The VETERANS Advocacy Council

- Become a nucleus of information for all veterans through a central location.
- Assist the patient advocate and work to improve patient satisfaction scores.
- Inform the community and veterans of the many resources available through the VA.
- Provide information on a regular basis on local veteran functions.

To find out more about the Council, please feel free to call any of the members.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Bob Sperry	(775) 721-0557
Ron Coleman	(775) 787-1065
Cindy Ransom	(775) 626-5709
Kate Roman	(775) 322-4989
Valorie Nenzel	vnenzel@yahoo.com
Walter Jones	(775) 336-8671
Susan Jones	(775) 336-8671

If you wish to contact the VA Advocacy Council, please call any of the above phone numbers, e-mail the editor, Cynthia Ransom, M.P.H. at:

veteransintouch@aol.com

or send a letter to:

Lynn Boutilier, Ph.D. (116)
Veterans Administration
Medical Center
975 Kirman Ave.
Reno, NV 89502

Newsletter Staff**Editor:**

Cynthia Ransom, M.P.H.

U.S. Army 1968-1971

veteransintouch@aol.com

775-626-5709 Home

775-846-1291 Cell

Chair:

Bob Sperry

U.S. Marines 1952-1975

Mentor & Distribution:

Ron Coleman

U.S. Marines 1966-1969

1978-1979

Reporter:

Kate Roman

U.S. Army 1970-1979

Air Guard 1987-1988

National Guard 1988-1988

U.S. Army 1988-1992

Reporter:

Valorie Nenzel

U.S. Navy 1988-1992

Writer:

Susan Jones, CLSC

Walter Jones

U.S. Navy 1996-2010

Staff Support:

Lynn Boutilier, Ph.D.

Staff Support:

Valerie Williams, Ph.D.

Spotlight On Health

Jana Patterson, R.N. M.P.H.

Technical Support:

Ray Ransom

U.S. Army 1969-1971

VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System Volunteer Transportation Network

CALL AREA COORDINATORS FOR A RIDE**NEVADA****Reservations**

RENO (Mon thru Fri) 775-328-1230

Sparks, Spanish Springs, North Valleys, Verdi

FALLON (Tues, Thurs, Fri) 775-426-0010

Fernley

CARSON CITY (Mon, Wed, Fri) 775-887-3679

Minden, Gardnerville, Dayton, Topaz, Washoe Valley

HAWTHORNE (Tues, Thurs, Fri) 775-945-9001

Yerington, Silver Springs, Walker Lake

WINNEMUCCA (Tues and Thurs) 775-625-4258

Lovelock, Imlay, Mills City, Battle Mountain

CALIFORNIA**Reservations**

ALTURAS (Thurs) 530-233-3741

AUBURN (Mon-thru-Friday) 530-889-0872

GRASS VALLEY (Tues, Wed) 530-273-3396

QUINCY (Tues and Thurs) 530-283-0461

S. LAKE TAHOE (Thurs) 775-328-1230

SUSANVILLE (Tues and Thurs) 530-251-8193

WHO MAY RIDE?

- **Veterans** eligible for VA Transportation under Title 38 USC
- **Veterans** must be enrolled in the VA Medical Care System with a scheduled appointment unless otherwise authorized by VA and/or Area Coordinator
- **Veteran** must be **ambulatory** or travel with an **AUTHORIZED** caregiver.
- **Space on Vans** is on a first come - first served basis with priority given to medical appointments

Trips may be canceled due to low ridership, driver availability or weather conditions.

For more information about the Veterans Transportation Program call 775-328-1230

The Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) is a courtesy service provided through a partnership with DAV, AM-VETS, VA, and many dedicated volunteers representing veterans, civic, and fraternal organizations and individuals. The only "fee" required is your gratitude! The VTN is not part of the VA benefits entitlement package.