Volume VII ISSUE I

INNOVATION

National Organization of Veterans Affairs, Chapter 129, VA Palo Alto Health Care System, P.O. Box V-39, , Palo Alto, CA 94304-0039

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!!

NOVA Chapter 129 Upcoming Events – Mark your calendar!

July 18, 2007
NOVA Educational Conference
Topic: *Behavioral Issues and Management Strategies for Patients with Brain Injury*
Location: Auditorium
VAPAHCS

October 4, 2007
NOVA Presents:
VA Nurses—Get to Know Yourselves
A poster/social highlighting achievements of VAPAHCS Nursing Staff
Location: Auditorium
VAPAHCS

October 24, 2007
APN Conference:
Focus on Addiction—
The Challenges We Face
Location: Auditorium
VAPAHCS

October 28, 2007
Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C.

November, 2007 Chapter 129 Board of Directors Elections
Consider running for a position on the board of directors. This is a great way to network with colleagues and promote educational opportunities for VAPHCS nurses!

January 26, 2008
Annual Education Conference
Topic: *Preventative Health: Living Young*
Location: Crowne Plaza Milpitas

April 2008
NOVA National Meeting
Boston, Massachusetts

The President's Message

May 2007

Welcome to all NOVA members visiting our web page for the first time. A special thanks to the efforts of Mary Montufar, Mary Lou Faustina for organizing all of the required materials to make this web site and newsletter a possibility. It is really exciting to see a vision that the board had many years ago finally begin to take shape. We hope that you will continue to check back for updates as we continue to expand. Please let us know if there is something you would like to see added to the web site. Stay tuned for future developments.

Our Palo Alto chapter started off 2007 with an excellent conference on Traumatic Brain Injury. Many thanks to Jill Thompson, Cherina Tinio and Sonia Olivar for coordinating a most informative and timely conference. Given the ongoing news events about DOD and VA medical care we should be proud that we have access to this continuum of care right here within own Health Care System.

Mary Montufar, Cherina Tinio and myself attended the Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. this month May. We attended a variety of sessions addressing the current status of VHA in preparation for our trip to Capitol Hill. Cathy Rick, Chief Nursing Officer and a panel of Office of Nursing Service staff presented a very informative session on the activities ongoing within central office affecting Nursing. Recruitment and retention being two big areas of concern. ONS is actively perusing passage of legislation which will allow the reinstatement of the Health Professional Scholarship program. This program will provide tuition reimbursement in return for service to individuals who are not currently VA employees. The formation of the VA traveling Nurse Corps is underway with a pilot to be starting in VISN 18 this fall. Details of these and other projects can be found on the ONS intranet web site:
vaww1.va.gov/nursing/

Interested in participating in the Marine Corp Marathon this year? Once again this year the NOVA Foundation will be a charity sponsor in the Marine Corp. Marathon in Washington, D.C. on October 28th. Detailed information can be found on the National NOVA web page. If you have ever thought about participating in a marathon, I would highly recommend this event. Last year as I ran through the streets of DC at every turn there were people cheering and providing support. If a marathon is not for you then consider participating in the 10K run held at the same time.

In the hit single "Unwritten" by Natasha Bedingfield the chorus sings out "Live your life with arms wide open - Today is where your book begins - The rest is still unwritten." What will go on the next page of your book? Is it taking time for yourself? Going back to school to further your education? Is it sharing with the community your years of expertise as a Registered Nurse? Running a marathon or 10K? Maybe it is answering yes when asked if you would serve on the NOVA board. Whatever may go on those pages remember that each day there is an entry that you should be very proud of - Today I provided Excellent nursing care. I hope each of you will stand proud and say "I am a VA nurse" and be proud of the wonderful care you provide to Americas Heroes each day.

NOVA Chapter 129 Palo Alto 2007 Annual Meeting: Installation of New Officers: Left to Right: Joni Drobick, Membership Chair, Ann Narciso, President, Gloria Kuhlman, Director; Mary Lou Faustina, Director; Wanda Tacey, Director; Sonia Olivar, Director, Mary Montufar, Vice President, Gigi Beckner, Secretary and Christine Camp, Director. Not pictured Denise Renfro, Treasurer, Leo Manglicmot, Leticia Sana and Emelda Kalkbrenner.

NOVA Chapter 129 Board Members

Ann Narciso, RN, MPH (President 2006-2008)
Started her VA career in 1983 at the Seattle VAMC Transferred to VA Palo Alto Health Care System in 1989 where she has worked in the Surgical ICU, as Nurse Manager of Outpatient Surgery Service and Nurse Manager San Jose Community Based Outpatient Clinic. Ann currently works as a Clinical Applications Coordinator.
Contact: Ann.Narciso@va.gov

Mary Montufar, RN (Vice President 2007-2009)
Has been a VA nurse since 1982 Her VA experience includes roles as staff nurse, manager and clinical specialist on the SCI service. She has been a Clinical Application Coordinator for 8 years.
Contact: Mary.Montufar@va.gov

Joni Drobick RN, BSN, MPA/HAS (Membership Chair 2006-2008)
Joni has been a VA nurse since 1989. She has been a Nurse Manager and QM Consultant . She began her current role as Patient Advocate in 2005.
Contact: Joanne.Drobick@va.gov

Gigi (Natividad) Beckner, RN (Secretary 2007-2009)
Began her VA career at the Bronx VA in 1987 and came to Palo Alto VA 1987. She has worked in MSICU and in the Ambulatory Infusion Center (AIC).

Denise Renfro, RN (Treasurer 2006-2008)
Denise Renfro RN is a veteran, United States Navy and began her VA career in 1984. She has been a staff nurse on GM&S, Intermediate ICU and ER.
Contact: Denise.Renfro@va.gov

Board of Directors

Christine Camp, RN (Director 2007-2009)
Chris is a new RN, (over 7 months now!), but has been in the VA for 12.5 years. As an LVN spent five years working with Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury and has spent an additional seven years in Ambulatory Care. As a NOVA Board Member she welcomes the opportunity to make a larger impact on the care of Veteran patients.
Contact: Christine.Camp@va.gov

Mary Lou Faustina, RN, MS (Director 2006-2008)
Has been a VA Nurse since 1986, first as a staff nurse and later as Nurse Manager on Psychiatry. She has been a Clinical Applications Coordinator since 2001.
Contact: Mary.Faustina@va.gov

Emelda Kalkbrenner, RN (Director 2007-2009)
Has worked at the VA Palo Alto for 25 years as an RN in GM&S. She has been an assistant NM for 6 years .

Gloria Kuhlman, RN (Director 2006-2008)
Gloria has been a nurse educator and now works as a neuroscience clinical nurse specialist at Palo Alto VA Health Care System.
Contact: Gloria.Kuhlman@va.gov

Leo Manglicmot, RN (Director 2007-2009)
Began his VA career as the off tour nursing supervisor at Livermore in 2000 and is now a staff nurse in the Ambulatory Care at the

Sonia Olivar, RN, MS (Director 2006-2008)
Joined the VA Jan 2003. She is the RN MDS Coordinator for building 324/Extended Care Service at the Menlo Park division.
Contact: Sonia.Olivar@va.gov

Leticia Sana, RN (Director 2007-2009)
Has been a VA staff nurse on GM&S ward 2A for 8 years and a NOVA member for 5 years.

Wanda E. Tacey, BSN, MSN (Director 2006-2008)
Joined the staff of VA Palo Alto HCS 3 years ago and as the Community Health Nurse Coordinator.
Contact: Wanda.Tacey@va.gov

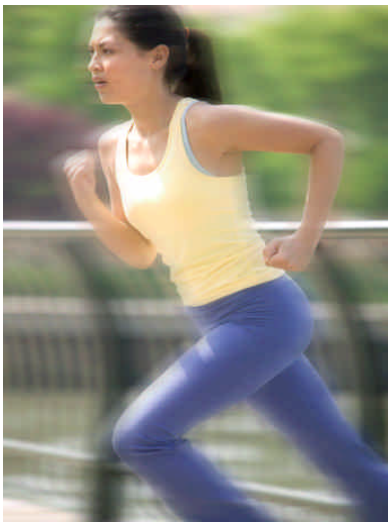
VA Nurses *MOVE* for American's Heroes

The NOVA Foundation has again been selected to participate in the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C. again in October 2007 as a charity organization. Marathon and 10K participants raised nearly $90,000 for scholarships and research grants for nurses in the VA during the 2006 event.

NOVA foundation runners will again participate in a 10K (6.2 miles) or a full marathon (26.2 miles) while raising funds for the foundation via sponsorships. The NOVA foundation provides scholarships and research grants to help VA nurses deliver outstanding care to our nation's veterans. The marathon, also know as the "The Marathon of the Monuments" will take place in the streets of Washington D.C. on Sunday October 28, 2007. Information on the actual course and event can be found at the www.marinemarathon.com

How can you help? – sponsor a runner, volunteer to help on race day in Washington D.C., or sign up or be a runner yourself.

The NOVA Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and depends entirely on donations for our funding. Donations are tax deductible to the extent the law permits.



NOVA CHAPTER 129
12TH ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE
January 27, 2007

Traumatic Brain Injury: Polytrauma in the VA

Jill Gandolfi, RN, MS, CRRN, Co-director, Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit

In response to the unprecedented increased numbers of survivors with mild to severe TBIs (believed to be over 60%), and multiple other injuries from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF, Afghanistan), in 2004, the "Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers" (PRC) were established at the TBI Centers of the VA to provide acute rehabilitation care for both returning Active Duty Service Members and Veterans needing these services.

Level I of the Polytrauma Rehabilitation System of Care (PRSC) is the PRC, four in the VA System who provide acute inpatient rehabilitation for TBI and multiple injuries. VAPAHCS is a Level I facility; the PRC is at PAD, Bldg. 7, Unit 7D.

Level II in the PRSC is the Polytrauma Network Site (PNS). The PNS is the receiving team for individuals discharged from the PRCs to their own VISNs. They also do outpatient screening and outreach; facilitating a plan and services as needed. PAVAHCS is the PNS for our VISN 21.

Level III facilities are called "Polytrauma Facility Teams" (PFT). They provide some polytrauma services if expertise is available. Other arrangements are made, usually with the PNS or PRC if appropriate services are not available.

Facilities such as the SF VA Medical Center are Level III facilities.

Level IV facilities have one point-of-contact who facilitate, but rarely provide needed services. VA Clinics, nursing homes, and some Veterans Centers fall into this category. The Stockton Clinic would be considered a Level IV facility.

All four PRC sites are now mandated to develop a Transitional Rehabilitation Program (TRP). The Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit (BIRU) at Palo Alto, a TRP, has been in existence for decades (unique in the VA) and has been experiencing much growth with much more coming soon. The TRPs are post-acute, comprehensive, rehabilitation for TBI and multiple injuries. TRPs at the other three sites will be up and running this coming summer.

Please contact Jill Gandolfi, at extension 62344 if you would like a more detailed in-service about our newest veterans and the PRSC.

Health Issues of OIF/OEF Women Veterans Presenting for Care

By
Ann Thrailkill MSN, ARNP, CNS, BC
Women Veterans Program Manager

Women Veterans are less healthy than the general female population and experience more stressful, traumatic events than male counterparts and the general female population. 29% of OIF/OEF women veterans are diagnosed with depression, substance use and adjustment disorders. 586 or 3.68% of these women veterans use VA healthcare services in VISN 21.

Musculoskeletal, mental health, and dental problems are the most common physical complaints among returning women veterans. When addressing mental health issues, we know that women experience trauma differently. There is more interpersonal trauma, precipitated by stressful events. They are desperate, want to change their lives, but coping strategies are often poor. They drink, use illegal substances, tattoo themselves, experience sexual dysfunction, often hypersensitivity, they have eating disorders, anxiety and panic disorders, somatization, and personality disorders and self-injury behaviors. Mental health providers have developed multiple strategies and have several therapeutic programs available for these women veterans.

Additionally, women veterans present physically with infections and parasitic diseases, disorders of the endocrine / nutritional / metabolic systems, diseases of the nervous system, respiratory system, digestive system, GU system, skin and poisonings and traumatic injuries.

Knowledge by primary care providers of these conditions,

and the fact that for the most part, these veterans are young and in denial, care will be a challenge. These veterans are apt to be in so much denial that they will not seek care at the VA, even if needed, and will avoid dealing with "mental health" issues because of fear of being "locked up".

We must outreach to these young veterans and their families to make their VA experience seamless, and also customize care for them so that they feel welcomed and safe in seeking their medical and psychological care within the VA healthcare system.

Additional Information on services and programs available the Women Veterans can be found on the VA web page at http://www1.va.gov/womenvet/

My HeltheVet

VA EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS
WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

My Health*e*Vet Mission

The mission of My Health*e*Vet (MHV) is to improve health care for ALL veterans, independent of where they receive care, by providing health information and health assessments via the web.

What is My Health*e*Vet?

Ø MHV is a web-based application designed for veterans and their families with the goal of optimizing veterans' healthcare.

Ø MHV is intended for all veterans and offers additional services to those receiving care at VA medical centers.

Ø MHV is a powerful tool to help you understand and manage your health. Knowledgeable patients are better able to make informed health care choices, stay healthy, and seek services when they need them.

MHV is the gateway to veteran health benefits and services. It provides access to:

- Online VA prescription refill
- Trusted health information
- Links to Federal and VA benefits and resources
- Personal Health Journals and Health **e**-Logs
- Soon, MHV registrants will be able to view appointments, co-pay balances, and copies of key portions of their VA medical records online, and much more!

MHV is available to veterans, their families, veteran advocates, and VA employees. We believe that if VA employees and volunteers use MHV themselves, they will be better equipped to teach others about it and use it to answer veterans' questions.

If you can access the Internet, logon and register for MHV at: **www.myhealth.va.gov**.

My Health*e*Vet is a web based application for patients, families and staff. Staff are encouraged to sign up for the program too. Staff can track their own activity, diet, and record personal health data.

Recent Chapter 129 Educational Events

"SOS" Mental Health Impact on Physical Health Conference a Huge Success!

On September 13th, 2006 an all day conference was coordinated at Palo Alto by the Advanced Practice Nurses Group, NOVA, and Women's Health. A total of 104 registrants including nursing, psychology, social work, and recreation therapy attended.

The objectives of the conference were as follows:
1. Incorporate current research findings concerning mental health issues into physical care.
2. Recognize the impact of depression across the life span on physical health.
3. Describe the impact of PTSD on physical health.
4. Identify the impact of anxiety on physical health.
5. Discuss the current psychoactive drugs used in treating mental illness and their impact.
6. Identify how insomnia can impact mental and physical health.
7. Appraise the impact of crystal methamphetamine addiction on mental and physical health.

Outstanding faculty for this conference were all experts in their areas of specialty. They were: Judith Chapman PhD, Mathew Cordova PhD, Gary Hartz PhD, Steven Lindley MD, Lawrence McGlynn MD, Priscilla Sarinas MD, Karyn Skultety PhD, and Robyn Walser PhD.

Comments from registrants after the event were all very positive and enthusiastic. One registrant stated: "This was a wonderful day. I learned so much that I can take back to my practice." Fortunately, the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System has experts that not only excel in their personal work but are willing to share it with others.

Best wishes to NOVA member Noreen Sommer who recently retired from the VA. Noreen has been an active member of the NOVA organization at both the national and local levels. In addition to her local leadership Noreen also served as the organization's National President beginning in 1990. Noreen has provided testimony to congress on a variety of topics including the impending nursing shortage.
Thank you Noreen for your outstanding leadership that helped set the foundation for the organization.

Highlights – NOVA National Meeting May 2007 Washington DC

NOVA held its 27th annual conference in Washington DC from 5/10-5/12 less than 6 months after elections that changed the leadership on congressional committees overseeing the DVA budget.

President Cecilia McVey RN MHA, ACOS for Nursing at, Boston VA Healthcare System, reported on NOVA's pre-conference strategic planning meeting held Wednesday May 9. Participants included NOVA national board members and representatives from various chapters including Ann Narciso, Chapter 129 President,

In addition to NOVA's legislative goals, the group identified the following priorities:

1. Increase involvement of nurse executives in local and national NOVA initiatives
2. Identify best practices of successful chapters for development and national distribution of effective recruiting tools .
3. Work with the Office of Nursing Service (ONS) to increase funding and development of nursing applications in the electronic medical record (development of flow sheets, kardexes, staffing and report applications in VISTA/CPRS), for priority funding from OI.
4. Increase access to NOVA national meetings economically and geographically. Regional rotation of the annual conference with a venue in Washington DC every 3-4 years rather than biannually might decrease costs and increase participation by members.

Legislative Panel Discussions:

Representatives from The Disabled Veterans of America (DVA), America's Veterans (AMVETS) and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Action Corps, an umbrella coalition of these service organizations, held a panel discussion on May 10, prior to capitol hill visits. Joan Ilem of DAV, discussed the partnership of 9 Veterans Service Organizations (VSO's) formed to promote mandatory funding for VHA. The goal is a baseline budget exempt from annual appropriation approval by Congress. See www.independentbudget.org for more information on this initiative. The consensus of the VSO representatives was that oversight of VA budget will increase and improve in the new congress.

Kathy Rick CNAA FACHE, VHA's Chief Nursing Officer, moderated a panel discussion Friday 5/11 on Nursing Workforce Initiatives underway in the Office of Nursing Service (ONS). Data collected by (ONS) in the recent Nursing Satisfaction survey contained good news on RN workforce recruitment and retention. Compared to the private sector, VA has decreased RN turnover and vacancies. The down side is the coming change as baby boomer nurses retire. Sixty percent of new hires come to the VHA because an employee tells them that it's a great place to work. ONS will look at RN satisfaction scores from 10 highest scoring facilities nationally and share the practices in place at those sites that have been identified as contributing to nurses' satisfaction. Another idea is a redesign of new employee orientation to make the experience more interactive. Research shows that decision to stay or leave a job is made within the first 2 weeks of employment.

Also in the pipeline are marketing initiatives promoting VA careers and educational opportunities. These include a new recruitment message, *"VA - The best care and the best career"*, possible scholarships to non-employees with a post graduate commitment and the reactivation of the Health Professional Scholarships Program for VA employees.

Efforts by ONS are underway to streamline the hiring process for RN's. Proposed regulatory changes would allow the hiring of nursing assistants under Title 38 and provide more local autonomy in hiring these employees.

Panel members from ONS were optimistic that a perfect storm (the nursing shortage, mass retirement of baby boomers and increased media attention to VA Healthcare) will jump start efforts to make VHA more competitive with the private sector.

Magnet Credentialing – 21 VA facilities have expressed interest in Magnet status. RN's want to work with colleagues who are expert clinicians. Credentialing is crucial. The ONS goal at this time is to promote a magnet working environment at all facilitates even if "magnet" status is not obtained.

Travel Nurse Corps: a pilot is underway in Phoenix where VA nurses will work in 13-26 week temporary assignments. Look for more information on the VA Travel Corps in the next NOVA national newsletter. Once policies are developed by ONS to address issues such as locality pay and duty assignments, the Travel Corps will be expanded to other facilities throughout the country.

Data indicates that graduate residency programs for RN's (such as the Versant Program started at Palo Alto in April), increase likelihood of keeping new RN's. Findings from VERSANT and other graduate residency programs will be used nationally to expand these initiatives.

The VA Commission on Nursing has recommended that RN education receive the same support and recognition that VHA has traditionally given to physician education. According to Ms. Rick, the VA Nursing Academy is a concept that would include academic affiliations between VA facilities and Schools of Nursing across the country. VA RN's would hold joint appointments (at their facility and at the affiliated academic institutions) with no loss of salary, benefits, or seniority. In addition, the DVA would pay nursing school faculty for time spent at VA facilities. The proposed VA Nursing Academy funding includes reauthorization of the Health Professional Scholarship Program. A five year pilot study for the VA Nursing Academy is budgeted through 2012 with 12 VA/Nursing school partnerships planned using 40 million dollars budgeted for this. An additional 45 million dollars are designated for the Health Professional Scholarships. At this time the proposal has VHA approval and waiting for Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) approval.

In summary these are the legislative proposals approved by VHA but waiting for OMB and DVA:

- Health Professional Scholarship Program
- Removal of Title 38 Nursing pay grade compression at Nurse Executive levels
- Increase OEF/OIF Care from 2 to 5 years after separation from service
- Changes federal regulations to permit RN retirees to return to employment without impact on pension.
- T38 Hybrid status for nursing assistants to allow for direct hire ability.
- Clinical Nursing Leadership (CNL) is a program designed to establish unit-based clinical leaders. Over 80 VA's have agreed to participate in the CNL initiative. The goal is to have CNL's in all facilities by 2016.

So, stayed tuned to NOVA hot news and Chapter 129's new web page. It's an exciting time to be a NOVA nurse!

Mary Montufar RN, Chapter 129

Stay informed on National NOVA activities register for email updates at: www.vanurse.org

NOVA NURSING'S BEST FOR AMERICA'S VETS

Nurses Organization of the Veteran Affairs-Chapter 129 - P.O. Box V-39, Palo Alto, CA 94304 - 0039

Palo Alto NOVA 129 Chapter
Board Members 2007

POSITION	NAME	WORK EXT.
President	Ann Narciso	61124/35425
Vice-President	Mary Montufar	67727
Secretary	Gigi Beckner	65983
Treasurer	Denise Renfro	65470
Membership	Joni Drobick	66718
Director	Mary Lou Faustina	66418
Director	Christine Camp	61316
Director	Gloria Kuhlman	22220
Director	Sonia Olivar	23331
Director	Wanda Tacey	65560
Director	Emelda Kalkbrenner	64565
Director	Leo Manglicmot	35431
Director	Leticia Sana	64565

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