

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

VA'S SUICIDE HOT LINE BEGINS OPERATIONS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – To ensure veterans with emotional crises have round-the-clock access to trained professionals, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun operation of a national suicide prevention hot line for veterans.

The toll-free hot line number is **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**. VA's hot line will be staffed by mental health professionals in Canandaigua, N.Y. They will take toll-free calls from across the country and work closely with local VA mental health providers to help callers. To operate the national hot line, VA is partnering with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

HERBICIDE EXPOSURE PRESUMPTION EXTENDED TO USS INGERSOLL CREW MEMBERS The USS Ingersoll (DD 652) operated as a Navy destroyer gunship providing fire support for military ground operations along the Vietnam coast during 1965. In addition to coastal duty, the USS Ingersoll traveled up the Saigon River on October 24th and 25th of 1965 to fire on enemy bases.

VA has reviewed the ship's deck logs, located at the National Archives and Records Administration, and confirmed this service in the "inland waterways" of Vietnam. As a result, the presumption of herbicide exposure is extended to any crewmember who served aboard ship during October of 1965. VA Regional offices will reevaluate any disability claim based on herbicide exposure from one of these veterans that has been denied.

SHINGLES VACCINE AVAILABLE TO VA PATIENTS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON—A vaccine for shingles, which Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) researchers helped develop, is available to veterans who are patients at VA medical facilities nationwide. VA physicians will offer the vaccine to patients with appropriate medical conditions, usually those who are 60 years of age or older and have healthy immune systems. A single dose of the vaccine offers protection against shingles, which is scientifically named Herpes Zoster.

VA researchers and patients from across the country participated in studies which led to the vaccine's approval by the Food and Drug Administration. The vaccine is available immediately to those who are recommended for the treatment.

FISHER HOUSE DEDICATED AT THE TAMPA VA MEDICAL CENTER (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is now better able to care for the families of injured military servicemen and women recuperating at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital. The newest Fisher House, dedicated August 6 at the Tampa facility, will provide families free lodging, making it easier to participate in the care and recovery of their loved ones.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson participated in a ceremony transferring ownership of the Fisher House to VA. The Department will operate and maintain the home at no cost to its residents.

This is the 38th Fisher House built by the Fisher House Foundation and the ninth operated by VA. At 16,000 square feet, the Tampa Fisher House is among the largest of these comfort homes which can accommodate up to 21 families.

Some families travel long distances to Tampa's Polytrauma Center – one of four unique VA polytrauma facilities in the United States where the most severely injured and disabled veterans are treated. In addition to polytrauma patients, those receiving care in the hospital's other specialized programs, such as spinal cord injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, will benefit from the Fisher House.

TAMPA VA MEDICAL CENTER PAIN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM HONORED (VA News Release) The Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Program at the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa was one of six facilities - and the only VA facility - earlier this year to receive the American Pain Society's first "Clinical Centers of Excellence in Pain Management Awards," honoring the nation's outstanding

pain care centers. The Society recognized programs that help pain patients enhance overall functionality and quality of life through integrated care across medical disciplines. Patients in the VA pain program have, on average, a 50 percent reduction in pain during treatment. More than half of polytrauma patients leave the facility free of prescribed pain medications, while others have substantially reduced dosages.

The Tampa VA Medical Center hosts one of VA's major polytrauma centers that receive the most severely wounded veterans of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Pain management for these patients is particularly challenging because many have cognitive impairment and multiple complex injuries.

During 17 years, Tampa's Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Program has developed national models for managing chronic pain. The facility has devised a pain assessment questionnaire that is used by more than 800 clinicians and researchers in 36 countries.

VA ANNOUNCES NEW NURSING ACADEMY SITES (VA News Release) WASHINGTON -- To provide compassionate, highly-trained nurses to look after the health care needs of the nation's veterans, VA is launching a new initiative that partners the Department's health care system with the country's finest nursing schools. The first four nursing schools selected to take part in the new program are: **University of Florida in Gainesville**; San Diego State University; University of Utah in Salt Lake City; and Fairfield University in Fairfield, Conn. Additional VA-nursing school partnerships will be selected in 2008 and 2009, for a total of 12 partnerships in the five-year pilot program.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing has reported that more than 42,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools in 2006 because of insufficient numbers of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space and clinical mentors. VA currently provides clinical education for approximately 100,000 health professional trainees annually, including students from more than 600 schools of nursing.

Further information about the pilot program can be obtained from VA's Office of Academic Affiliations web site at www.va.gov/oa.

IMPORTANT DATES IN SEPTEMBER

September 1 the 2007 clothing allowance payments will be issued for veterans who have been authorized recurring payments and for others whose awards are input on or before the last processing cycle of August

September 3 Federal holiday - Labor Day

September 6 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 10-01-2007 payments.

September 20 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 10-01-2007 payments

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 **561-649-6489**
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 **1-888-244-6711**

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **www.warms.vba.va.gov**

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): **www.ocwen.com**

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **www.floridavets.org**

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**