



VA Black Hills Health Care System Update South Dakota Veterans Commission Meeting

The VA BHHCS leadership team has identified key priorities of focus that closely align with Secretary Shulkin's plan to offer greater choices for Veterans, modernize our systems, efficiently focus resources, and improve timeliness of services. Suicide Prevention has been identified as the top clinical priority. Our expanded efforts include; increasing our Suicide Prevention staffing, ensuring all employees take SAVE training, and providing community outreach and education. Family and friends are important in all aspects of care, including suicide prevention. Everyone has a role to play and we are encouraging our communities to engage in simple acts of support and making a commitment to stay with a Veteran in crisis until they are safe. The Veterans Crisis Line is an excellent resource for Veterans in crisis and is available by calling 1-800-273-8255 Press 1.

In March, Donna Schnider, RN, MS, CPHQ returned to the Black Hills team as our Associate Director for Patient Care Services/ Nurse Executive. We have filled several key leadership roles with outstanding candidates. New to our staff are Dr. Vicki Callahan, Chief of Surgery and Specialty Care; Tim Minihan, Chief of Prosthetics, Hector Avila, Chief of Logistics, Robert Cagle, Chief of Human Resources, and Steve Binegar, Chief of Police. Dr. Neil Goodloe has transitioned to his new role as our Chief of Extended Care and Rehabilitation. Dr. Alvaro Sanchez, Chief Medical Officer for VISN 23, is serving as our Acting Chief of Staff while we are recruiting to fill our vacancy.

We are closely monitoring the Veterans Choice Program and the future structure of the care in the community programs being debated in Congress. VA Black Hills transitioned our Care in the Community staff into a formal Service Line. This new designation provides a leadership team consisting of an Associate Chief of Staff for Care in the Community and a Associate Chief Nurse. Our program staff will continue to assist any Veteran with questions or concerns related to the Choice Program by contacting one of our Choice Champions at 605-347-2511 ext 6846 or 605-745-2000 ext 2253.

A recent telehealth initiative introduced by President Trump is rolling out at VA Black Hills. VA Video Connect is a new software solution for conducting real time video visits, primarily when the Veteran is at a non-VA location. It is available for scheduled visits or on-demand in Primary Care, Mental Health Clinics and other specialties. The technology will expand access, reduce barriers like excessive travel time or inclement weather, and improve the Veterans experience. Patients will be able to securely connect with their providers through smart phones, tablets, or computers for routine appointments or follow up care.

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Our contracted Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Winner, SD and Scottsbluff, NE moved into new buildings and expanded their clinic space. The new locations offer larger waiting and exam rooms for patients and their caregivers.

VA Black Hills is a proud commemorative partner in the 50th Anniversary Vietnam War remembrance. Director Sandra Horsman presented commemorative lapel pins at the Honoring our Patriots Night in Rapid City, TREA, Pine Ridge Veteran Pow Wow, Scottsbluff Veteran Town Hall, and at a special event honoring Vietnam Veteran employees.

On November 9th, over 200 Veterans and their family members were provided information, resources, and on the spot services at our largest Homeless Veteran Stand Down at the Rapid City Civic Center. Stand Downs were held throughout our catchment area reaching at risk or homeless Veterans in Scottsbluff, Standing Rock, and Rosebud. Our next Veteran Stand Down will be held on January 10th in Chadron, NE.

Veteran Town Halls are scheduled for the upcoming year. A Town Hall was held on December 12th in the Scottsbluff/Gering, NE area. Future locations are set for Sundance and Newcastle, WY and Rapid City and Pierre, SD. Before the public meetings, our staff will be available to meet with Veterans one-on-one to discuss a wide range of health care questions. Please stay tuned for details about these events.

VA Black Hills completed another round of survey's and oversight visits including the Long-Term Care Institute and the Office of Inspector General. The reports have all commented on the friendliness and cleanliness of our facilities. Meeting the rigorous standards of each survey team means safe, quality healthcare and excellent service remains our top priorities. We were recently notified of our Gold Standard Designation for Patient Safety from the Cornerstone Recognition Program in both 2016 and 2017.

Each year our employees are given the opportunity to share feedback through the All Employee Survey (AES). The survey is valuable for several reasons including how it is factored into our star rating on SAIL. Recently, VA BHHCS was commended by VA's National Center for Organization Development as one of the most improved facilities in scores from the previous year. The survey comments and data drive employee engagement initiatives across all our Service Lines, ultimately improving employee and Veteran satisfaction.

In January 2017, a Record of Decision was delivered on the Reconfiguration of our healthcare system. In May, Secretary Shulkin asked that the implementation of that decision be put on hold and considered as part of a broader look at modernization efforts throughout VA. As a result, the implementation of the reconfiguration remains on hold until further notice. VA

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Black Hills received great news. We have been given authority to move forward with an expanded Multi-Specialty Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Rapid City. The project is in the design phase and no site selection has been made. The time frame to complete this new 40,000 sq. ft. facility is anywhere from three to five years. We are in the process of making some immediate improvements in our current location to help ease space issues for our Veterans and staff.

We are constantly engaged in improvement planning for construction projects across our Health Care System. Our imaging services area at Fort Meade was renovated. Veterans may also experience but likely won't see the upgrades we've made to our HVAC and water systems at the Hot Springs campus. Hot Springs is also baring witness to remodeling efforts in the Dental Clinic and the former operating rooms at Fort Meade are being remodeled to accommodate endoscopy and small procedures. Our extraordinary Facilities staff are always working to ensure the highest standards of safety and comfort in patient areas. Fort Meade's building 113, Acute care inpatient area, will be updated in the future to include moving to single occupancy rooms.