



South Dakota Department of the Military
 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



STATE VETERANS HOME STAFF RECEIVE GOLD MILESTONE RECOGNITION

Staff at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home were recently recognized for their training achievements and were presented the “Gold Milestone.” Previously staff had received Copper, Bronze and Silver recognitions.

“The Gold Milestone through the QAPI in Action Milestones program is a culmination of all departments at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home coming together as a team striving for excellence,” said Superintendent Brad Richardson.

The recognition is awarded by the Great Plains Quality Innovation Network for participation in the South Dakota/Great Plains Nursing Home Quality Care Collaborative program. The team was recognized for their efforts to improve the quality of care and quality of life for our residents.

Great Plains QIN works with healthcare providers and communities to implement data-driven quality initiatives to improve healthcare. They offer technical assistance, tailored education, best practices, tools and resources. Through these efforts, they work with our staff to improve patient safety, reduce harm and improve clinical care.

The QIO Program, one of the largest federal programs dedicated to improving health quality for Medicare beneficiaries, is an integral part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) National Quality Strategy for providing better care and better health at lower cost. By law, the mission of the QIO Program is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, economy, and quality of services delivered to Medicare beneficiaries.

“The state home has built a team,” said Secretary Zimmerman. “This team has panned some “gold” by coming together and being an outstanding team that dug their way to the top.”



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VETERAN CRISIS LINE IMPROVES SERVICE WITH NEW CALL CENTER OPENING IN ATLANTA

The United States Department of Veteran Affairs cut the ribbon for its new Veteran Crisis Line (VCL) satellite office in Atlanta allowing the life-saving hotline to expand capacity by nearly 600 veterans each day essentially doubling the VA's ability to help veterans in need. As a part of the MyVA initiative, the largest restructuring in the Department's history, improvements of the VCL are a key priority, with the goal of providing 24/7, world-class suicide prevention and crisis intervention services to veterans, service members and their family members across the globe.

The VCL is critical to connecting veterans with facility-based Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPCs). SPC teams within each Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) work to engage veterans and communities to raise awareness about the VA's suicide prevention and behavioral health resources.

The VCL interfaces with various stakeholders, including the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Suicide Prevention Program Office and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), to provide critical services that ultimately provide a safe haven for veterans and service members.

Since VCL was launched in 2007, the crisis line counselors have:

- Answered nearly 2.6 million calls
- Dispatched emergency services to callers in imminent crisis more than 67,000 times
- Engaged nearly 314,000 veterans or concerned family members through the chat option launched in 2009
- Responded to nearly 62,000 requests since the launch of text services in November 2011
- Forwarded more than 416,000 referrals to local VA suicide prevention coordinators on behalf of veterans to ensure continuity of care with veterans' local VA providers

The VCL staff has grown over the years. Initially housed at Canandaigua VAMC in N.Y., it began with 14 responders and two health care technicians answering four phone lines. Today, the combined facilities employ more than 500 professionals, and the VA is hiring more to handle the growing volume of calls. Atlanta offers 200 call responders and 25 social service assistants and support staff, while Canandaigua houses 310 and 43, respectively.

Callers dial the National Suicide Prevention Hotline number 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and veterans choose option 1 to reach a VHA VCL Responder. The text number is 838255 or veterans may chat with trained professionals online at VeteransCrisisLine.net. Calls, texts, and chats are immediately directed to a VA professional who is specially trained to handle emotional and mental health crises for veterans and service members. The VA is also streamlining and standardizing how crisis calls from other locations, such as VAMCs, reach the VCL, including full implementation of the automatic transfer function that directly connects veterans who call their local VAMC to the VCL by pressing a single digit during the initial automated phone greeting.



MEMBERS OF TRI-STATE DELEGATION ASK VA FOR ANSWERS ABOUT REDUCTION OF HOT SPRINGS SERVICES DESPITE SUPERIOR RATING

U.S. Sens. Mike Rounds (SD), John Thune (SD), John Barrasso (WY) and Reps. Kristi Noem (SD) and Adrian Smith (NE) wrote U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert McDonald to ask about the VA's preferred alternative to drastically cut services at the Hot Springs VA facility despite it being rated by the VA as one of only 14 "five star" facilities across the country.

"As you continue to overhaul the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) through the MyVA plan, we believe that it is essential to use VA's top performing facilities as models for others to follow as opposed to targeting them for closure," wrote the delegation. "Now more than ever, the VA needs to leverage its top medical centers for best practices and lessons learned to replicate their performance throughout VHA. This is critical as the VA continues to rebuild trust with veterans following the high profile scandals of recent years. As one of only 14 rated five-star facilities, we feel that significantly reducing services at Hot Springs would be a grave mistake and a disservice to the veterans it serves." Full text of the letter is below:

Dear Secretary McDonald:

We write to you regarding the recent press publication of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) internal quality "star ranking" metrics for its medical facilities. It is with great pride that we note the Hot Springs campus of the Black Hills Health Care System (BHHCS) is one of only 14 "five-star" facilities out of a total of 146 medical centers. As you are aware, the Hot Springs campus takes great pride in the care and services it provides to veterans, a mission that it has admirably accomplished since the U.S. Civil War. It is therefore no surprise for us to learn that Hot Springs is one of the VA's top performing facilities.

This revelation makes the VA's proposed BHHCS realignment and corresponding reduction in services at Hot Springs all the more concerning. Since the start of the realignment process over five years ago, we have expressed concern about the VA using this process to accomplish a pre-determined outcome, as opposed to conducting an honest and fair assessment to determine the best way to serve veterans in the Black Hills and surrounding areas. The VA's release of a preferred alternative that drastically cuts veterans services at Hot Springs at the same time that we learn it is one of the VA's premier medical facilities casts significant doubt upon the integrity of the entire realignment process.

We therefore ask that you provide our offices with specifics as to the role that these previously unreleased quality metrics play in the VA's realignment decisions. As you continue to overhaul the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) through the MyVA plan, we believe that it is essential to use VA's top performing facilities as models for others to follow as opposed to targeting them for closure. Now more than ever, the VA needs to leverage its top medical centers for best practices and lessons learned to replicate their performance throughout VHA. This is critical as the VA continues to rebuild trust with veterans following the high profile scandals of recent years. As one of only 14 rated five-star facilities, we feel that significantly reducing services at Hot Springs would be a grave mistake and a disservice to the veterans it serves.

As you consider the final outcome for the Hot Springs campus and the BHHCS, we hope that you keep these considerations in mind. We look forward to working with you to serve our nation's veterans and we thank you for your timely consideration of this urgent and important matter.

PIERRE ELKS LODGE 1953 DELIVERS HOLIDAY GIFTS TO SOUTH DAKOTA HEROES

The Pierre Elks Lodge 1953, with the help of their partners, donated \$36,572 of inventory to the veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home and the VABHHCS facilities in Hot Springs.

The staff and heroes and MJFSVH truly appreciate the Pierre Elks Lodge for their dedication and devotion to South Dakota's heroes and more importantly for the partnerships they built over the years in their communities to ensure a successful holiday for our heroes.

This is the 33rd year that the Pierre Elks Lodge has spearheaded this project.



VA STUDY FINDS EEG CAN HELP TELL APART PTSD AND MILD TBI

A recent VA study points to a possible breakthrough in differentiating between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), otherwise known as a concussion. The two disorders often carry similar symptoms, such as irritability, restlessness, hypersensitivity to stimulation, memory loss, fatigue and dizziness. Scientists have tried to distinguish between mTBI and PTSD in hopes of improving treatment options for veterans, but many symptom-based studies have been inconclusive because the chronic effects of the two conditions are so similar. If someone is rating high on an mTBI scale, for example, that person may also rate high for PTSD symptoms.

The researchers used electroencephalogram, or EEG, a test that measures electrical activity in the brain. The size and direction of the brain waves can signal abnormalities.

Analyzing a large set of EEGs given to military personnel from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the researchers saw patterns of activity at different locations on the scalp for mTBI and PTSD. They saw brain waves moving slowly in opposite directions, likely coming from separate places in the brain.

The researchers emphasize that these effects don't pinpoint a region in the brain where the disorders differ. Rather, they show a pattern that distinguishes the disorders when the EEG results are averaged among a large group.

The study included 147 active-duty service members or veterans who had been exposed to blasts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of those, 115 had mTBI, which accounts for nearly 80 percent of all traumatic brain injuries. Forty of the participants had PTSD, and 35 had both conditions.

More information can be found at: <http://www.research.va.gov/topics/tbi.cfm>

92ND SOUTH DAKOTA LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The 92nd Session of the South Dakota Legislature will convene at approximately 1:00 pm on Tuesday, January 10, 2017, with Governor Daugaard's State of the State Address. This year's session is scheduled for 38 legislative days, with the main run concluding March 10. March 27 is reserved for considering gubernatorial vetoes.

Legislative actions can be viewed at:

http://sdlegislature.gov/Legislative_Session/Default.aspx?Session=Ninety-Second

Legislative bills can be tracked or monitored at:

http://sdlegislature.gov/Legislative_Session/Bills/default.aspx?Session=2017

The schedule for standing committees can be found at:

<http://sdlegislature.gov/docs/legsession/2017/LRCStaff.pdf>.



	PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE Senator Brock L. Greenfield (Republican)	SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE Representative G. Mark Mickelson (Republican)
LEADERSHIP POSITION	SENATE	HOUSE
SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE		Don Haggar (Republican)
MAJORITY LEADER	R. Blake Curd (Republican)	Lee Qualm (Republican)
ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER	Ryan Maher (Republican)	Kent Peterson (Republican)
MAJORITY WHIPS	Bob Ewing Kris Langer Al Novstrup (Republicans)	Arch Beal Lynne A. DiSanto Leslie J. Heinemann Isaac Latterell Larry Rhoden (Republicans)
MINORITY LEADER	Billie H. Sutton (Democrat)	Spencer Hawley (Democrat)
ASSISTANT MINORITY LEADER	Troy Heinert (Democrat)	Julie Bartling (Democrat)
MINORITY WHIPS	Jason E. Frerichs (Democrat)	Karen Soli Susan Wismer (Democrats)

Upcoming Events

2017

- Jan. 10 - Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan. 11—SDDVA/Veterans Council Legislative Reception—5:00 pm—8:00 pm (CT)
 Jan. 12—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—American Legion Post 8—Pierre—9:00 am (CT)
 Jan. 30—VFW Legislative Reception—AmericInn—Fort Pierre
 Feb. 1—American Legion Legislative Reception—American Legion Post 8 Cabin—Pierre (520 S. Pierre Street) - 5:30 pm (CT)
 Feb. 4—Valentines for Veterans Concert—Sioux Falls Washington Pavilion—3:00 pm (CT)
 Feb 10-12—SD American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma
 April 19—SD Veterans Council Meeting—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
 Jun 15-18—SD American Legion State Conference—Watertown



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