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VETERANS Health MATTERS

SPRING 2023

Award Winning Wellness Magazine for VISN 8 Veterans
in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico & the U.S. Virgin Islands



Revolutionizing VA Through
Immersive Technology

New Toxic Exposure Screening

“The MOVE! Program
Saved My Life”



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Veterans Health Matters is a quarterly health and wellness magazine for Veterans produced by the VISN 8 Office of Communication. VISN 8 is the country's largest network of VA hospitals and clinics serving Veterans in Florida, South Georgia, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Your feedback is welcome. If you'd like to comment on the content, please e-mail to:

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To Our Readers



With Spring finally here, we can enjoy more daylight hours and the mental boost from more natural light. In this issue, we continue to shine a light on VA's new toxic exposure screening for Veterans as part of the PACT Act. These screenings, which take just 10 minutes, can be done at any VISN 8 hospital or clinic and may connect you to ongoing support and resources. See page three for more details.

Virtual reality experiences are now being offered to Veterans as part of VA's creative arts therapy programs. This immersive technology provides yet another tool in the treatment of a variety of physical and emotional health concerns. Learn more on pages four and five about the many ways this innovative technology is advancing and improving VA health care services and programs.

We all enjoy an inspiring story from a fellow Veteran. Read on page six how one Veteran credits VA's MOVE! Weight Management Program with saving his life. If you are looking for healthy recipes to support your healthy weight goal, check out the recipe on page seven. While you are there, you can also exercise your brain muscles with a word search puzzle.

Be well and stay safe!

David B. Isaacks, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 8

VA App Highlight – MOVE! Coach

MOVE!® Coach is a weight management app for Veterans and others who want to lose weight. This 16-week program guides participants to achieve weight loss and management through education and the use of tools in an easy and convenient way. Participants can monitor and receive feedback on their progress with their weight, diet, and exercise goals.

The app is available to download and use at no cost on the Apple App Store and Google Play. To learn more, please visit **mobile.va.gov/app/move-coach**.



New Toxic Exposure Screening for Veterans

If you're enrolled in VA health care, you can now receive a toxic exposure screening at any VISN 8 hospital or clinic. If you're not enrolled but meet eligibility requirements, you can receive the screening after you enroll for care. During your screening, you will be asked if you believe you experienced toxic exposures during your military service. If you answer 'yes,' you may be connected to support and resources, including a review by your primary care provider.



Fast Facts About the Screening

- It's quick. The screening takes about 5-10 minutes and can occur during a regular health care appointment.
- It documents a variety of exposures. This includes open burn pits and airborne hazards, Gulf War-related exposures, Agent Orange, Camp Lejeune contaminated water exposure, radiation, and others.
- It helps support your long-term care plan. This allows for your ongoing care that ensures early diagnosis and treatment of any future health concerns related to your toxic exposure(s).
- You will receive additional information about benefits, registry exams, and clinical resources to address any concerns you have.
- You can ask about the screening at your next VA health care appointment. If you want to be screened sooner, contact your local VA facility.
- You will be screened at least once every 5 years. Even if you don't have concerns today, you may in the future.
- If you choose not to be screened, you have the option to decline until the following year.

Keep These Things in Mind:


- It doesn't diagnose. The screening identifies and documents potential exposures. If there is a need, it will support you in connecting with your health care team. You can also always contact your local VA health care team through Secure Message or call 1-800-MyVA411 and press 8.
- It's not part of the VA benefits claims process. To file a claim visit www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim.
- Being screened is separate from joining a VA environmental health registry. You will receive information about registry participation after your screening.



To learn more about toxic exposure screenings and the PACT Act, visit www.va.gov/pact. For more information and to apply for VA health care benefits, visit www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply.

Revolutionizing VA Through Immersive Technology

By Melanie L. Thomas, MBA,
Public Affairs Officer,
Orlando VA Healthcare System

A close-up photograph of a middle-aged man with a grey mustache and goatee, wearing a blue t-shirt and a white and black VR headset. He is smiling slightly and pointing his right hand towards the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Employees at the Orlando VA Healthcare System are working with Veterans to provide a variety of virtual reality experiences like meditation, gardening, music therapy, sculpting, mindfulness, and more to help ease stress, and overcome mental health challenges and memory loss.

Recreation Therapist Michael Weaver explains that virtual reality helps patients engage in treatment. It also provides Veterans an outlet for emotional support and expression. "Virtual reality offers Veterans the ability to experience immersive technology that helps them address their pain, empower them to pursue rehabilitation, and engage in their health care in powerful ways," he said.

As one of 56 VA hospitals across the nation using virtual reality, the Orlando VA has incorporated its use into their creative arts therapy program. "Veterans are enjoying art, dance, drama, and music," said Innovation Specialist Kim Bielicki. "The individualized and personalized opportunities for Veterans are endless with this modality. We are excited about the potential to make a positive impact in Veterans' lives."

According to Recreation Therapist Roger Tabatt, the COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in limiting opportunities for Veterans to socialize with their peers. "Before COVID, we were able to take Veterans on outings like fishing, barbecues, and social events in the community, but everything was brought to a halt," he said. "With virtual reality, we are able to work through boredom, pain, anxiety management, and many other behavioral concerns."



According to Bielicki, Veterans are not the only ones who benefit from virtual reality. "Virtual reality is also being used to support employee wellness and to mitigate burnout," she said. "Overall, our employees are loving the perk of being able to take a break from their work area, destress, and recharge."

To date, 27 virtual reality headsets have been deployed for Veteran and employee use in Orlando with plans to expand the program in the future. "This is just the tip of the iceberg," said Bielicki. "We are currently working to pilot new training for our discharge process and are working with our onsite simulation center to help teach staff new skills."



Research supports the effectiveness of creative arts therapy interventions in many areas, including the facilitation of movement and overall physical rehabilitation. Therapies further increase patients' engagement in treatment, provide emotional support for Veterans and their families, and create an outlet for emotional expression.

Virtual reality applications offer the latest advancements to Veterans while improving engagement, adherence, and self-management. With technology being such an intimate part of many Veterans' lives, virtual reality can bring more capabilities to already effective programs like creative arts therapy offered at the Orlando VA and facilities across the country.

To learn more about creative arts therapies available to you, please speak with your primary care team. For more information about the Orlando VA Healthcare System, visit www.va.gov/orlando-health-care.

The MOVE! Program Saved My Life

By **George Velez, DHA, MBA, CFAAMA, FACHE,**
Director, Veterans Health System of the Ozarks

(Note: Mr. Velez previously served as the Deputy Director, VA Caribbean Healthcare System, San Juan, Puerto Rico)

“There is no better time to begin than today.”

Sometimes, the hardest part of the journey to achieve any goal is staying motivated. VA’s MOVE! Weight Management Program assisted me in achieving my wellness and lifestyle goals and in keeping me motivated.

After I retired from the U.S. Air Force, I steadily gained weight over the years to the point where I weighed over 275 pounds. This obesity factor was affecting my entire body, requiring extensive medical interventions and prescription medications. I always felt tired and fearful of declining health as I aged. I joined the MOVE! Program in January 2022.



This program uses a team approach. My primary care team and nutritionists supported me on my journey and helped me to stay focused on my wellness and lifestyle goals.

Today, I am very active in the MOVE! Program, relearning healthy eating habits and exercising routinely. In just one year, I lost nearly 60 pounds. More importantly, I have regained my health and I am medication free. I feel this program truly saved my life.



For my fellow Veterans, if you find yourself in a similar situation with your weight, there is no better time to begin than today. Ask your primary care provider about the MOVE! Program and take control of your health.

Lastly, I want to thank my PACT Team and my nutritionists Rosemarie Acevedo and Mayra Roman in San Juan for all their support. They have forever made a positive difference in my life.

To learn more about the MOVE! Program please visit www.move.va.gov.



Watch the Video!

View the video, “MOVE! A Weight Management Program That’s So Much More” at visn8.va.gov/visn8/news/publications.asp.

Word Search

Find these words from the stories in this issue of **Veterans Health Matters**. Remember to also look up, down, and backward. Have fun!

CREATIVE	B	M	D	A	F	J	O	H	R	W	A	C
EXPOSURE	M	O	T	I	V	A	T	E	D	S	D	F
GOALS	G	V	O	V	I	R	T	U	A	L	I	O
IMMERSIVE	A	E	X	P	O	S	U	R	E	A	R	W
MOTIVATED	Y	C	I	E	G	J	L	P	O	O	N	A
MOVE	E	S	C	R	E	E	N	I	N	G	M	T
PACT	Y	B	H	O	J	I	L	S	V	T	P	Y
SCREENING	G	E	V	I	S	R	E	M	M	I	A	L
TEAM	N	Q	U	W	A	D	H	O	A	N	C	R
THERAPY	R	W	D	A	Y	P	A	R	E	H	T	N
TOXIC	U	F	J	O	C	R	E	A	T	I	V	E
VIRTUAL												



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Sweet & Sour Cabbage

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups thinly sliced red cabbage, (about 1/2 medium head of cabbage)
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon packed brown sugar (or other sweetener)
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 pinch salt



DIRECTIONS

1. Heat a large skillet or sauté pan over medium heat. Add the butter and oil. Heat until the butter is melted and the oil is shimmering.
2. Add the cabbage and toss to coat. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring often.
3. Add the sugar, vinegar, black pepper, and salt. Stir to combine. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat, then reduce heat to maintain a low simmer.
4. Cook until the cabbage is wilted and tender, about 25-30 minutes, stirring often. Serve warm.

Nutritional information:

(4 servings). Per serving: 90 calories, 6 g total fat, 2 g saturated fat, 8 g carbohydrates, 2 g dietary fiber, 1 g protein, and 80 mg sodium.





U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
 Veterans Health Administration
 VA Sunshine Healthcare Network (VISN 8)

VISN 8 Office of Communication
 13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.
 Tampa, FL 33612



History of VA in 100 Objects

Visit this virtual exhibit to explore VA's history.

VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

www.visn8.va.gov



at all Medical Centers

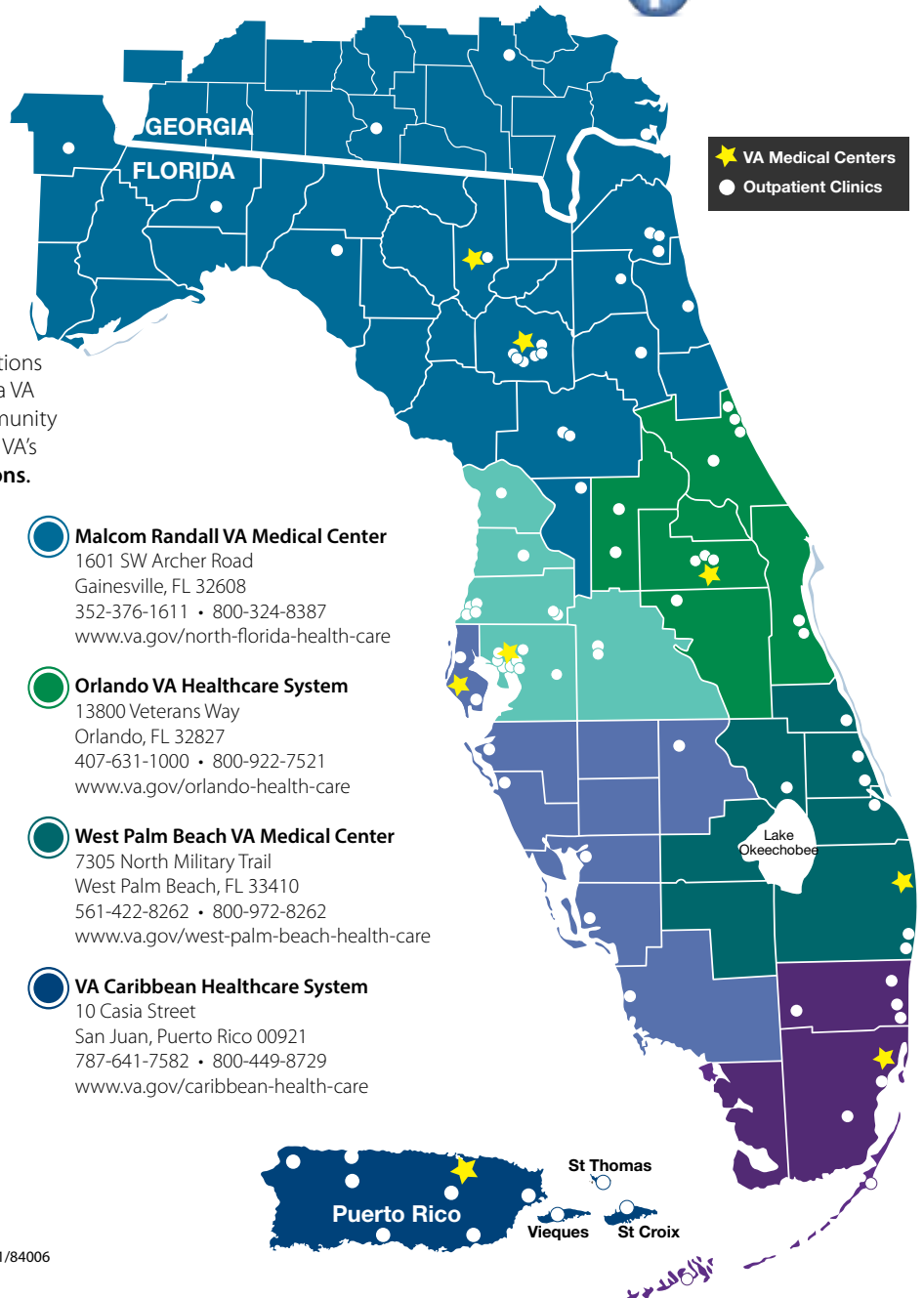


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NOTE: This map shows medical center locations only and associated service areas. To locate a VA healthcare center, outpatient clinic, or community based outpatient clinic near you, please use VA's facility locator at: www.va.gov/find-locations.



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 1201 NW 16th Street
 Miami, FL 33125
 305-575-7000 • 888-276-1785
www.va.gov/miami-health-care

C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center
 10000 Bay Pines Blvd.
 Bay Pines, FL 33744
 727-398-6661 • 888-820-0230
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 Tampa, FL 33612
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www.va.gov/tampa-health-care

Lake City VA Medical Center
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