



THE KEYS TO EXCEPTIONAL CARE

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VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System
2009 Annual Report



INNOVATION
MOMENTUM
CONNECTION
COMMITMENT

To all our partners

As you flip through this publication, you will see that we have divided our annual report into four distinct categories this year.

Innovation, Momentum, Connection, Commitment.

These four simple words might not take up a lot of space on this page, but they speak volumes about how our health care system excelled in 2009.

I like to call them our “keys to exceptional care,” and I am happy to report that they add up to one very extraordinary year.

For starters, in 2009 we embraced **innovation** (page 4), which drove us to ask questions and seek answers.

We also gained **momentum** (page 8), which helped to energize us and prepare us for tomorrow’s challenges and triumphs.

Then there’s **connection** (page 10); we spent the last year reaching out, expanding, and building stronger, smarter relationships along the way.

And finally, we honored an important **commitment** to others (page 13).

Here at VA Pittsburgh, our grandest goals always boil down to one, noble function: to serve Veterans. I am pleased to say that we performed this service in 2009 with great warmth, responsibility and reverence.

So—please—take a big breath, flip the page and read away. I am certain that you will share in my awe at what we’ve accomplished in just 12 short months...and we are just warming up! I have said it before and I will say it again—I am very proud to be the director of this health care system.

Thank you all for another wonderful year, and here’s to an equally successful and satisfying 2010.

Sincerely,

Terry Gerigk Wolf, FACHE
Director and Chief Executive Officer
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System





INNOVATION

“If everybody is thinking alike, then somebody isn’t thinking.” GEN. GEORGES PATTON JR.

In this past year, VAPHS led a drive to revolutionize the health care industry—and boy did we succeed. Our staff thought outside the box. We developed avant-garde technologies. We reinvented the wheel with old-fashioned, unfussy elbow grease. All in all, we changed the way that people practice medicine. Read on to learn some of the many ways that VA Pittsburgh pushed the creative clinical envelope in 2009.

INNOVATION
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COMMITMENT



OUR TEAM SET OUT TO EMPOWER NURSES TO TAKE CHARGE OF GLYCEMIC MANAGEMENT WITHOUT DIRECT PHYSICIAN INPUT...AND WE SUCCEEDED.
NURSE CANDACE CUNNINGHAM



A 2009 INNOVATION HIGHLIGHT

Pittsburgh: The New Silicon Valley?

In 2009, a small team of employees at VA Pittsburgh developed and piloted a new type of medical software called Glycemic Expert for Nurse Implemented Euglycemia (GENIE). This software—which the Veterans Health Administration is working to patent—“allows nurses to reliably and easily monitor and control a patient’s post-operative glucose levels with minimal physician supervision,” says patient care services nurse Candace Cunningham, who developed GENIE alongside Dr. Harsha Rao, a VAPHS endocrinologist, and industrial engineer Peter Perreiah. Stabilizing an individual’s glucose levels is very important, especially after surgery, adds Cunningham, who notes that the risk of adverse effects—such as infection and multisystem organ failure—can greatly increase for a patient whose glucose levels spiral out of control. To date, the software is unique to VAPHS, but other hospitals plan to adopt the program in 2010.

2009 INNOVATION STATS

Research Funding **\$27 million** | Research Investigators **111** | Research Projects **492**
Kidney Transplants **40** | Liver Transplants **43** | Surgeries Performed **4,934**



Giving Veterans a Space to Relax

Patients of Highland Drive's 1-3 east, an extended care psychiatric ward, will soon be able to unwind and de-stress in the unit's new, cutting-edge relaxation room. Visitors to the room will be able to listen to soft music or watch soothing images—such as stars or an aquarium scene—on the walls. The room will also have massage tools, a writing desk and crayons, a rocking chair and thick, weighted blankets. “The concept of a relaxation room is relatively new to the world of behavioral health,” says Joni Parise, the unit's assistant nurse manager, who points out that these types of rooms are frequently used in dementia units and to calm children with autism. “The goal is that our patients will sense when they are getting agitated or anxious and then they will use the room's tools to calm themselves,” says Parise. The staff of the 26-patient unit created this room, which will open in early 2010, after receiving a \$10,000 national patient safety award.



One Stop Shop for Research Help

In September 2009, VA Pittsburgh's research office introduced the research concierge service, a customer-service driven program that mirrors a hotel's concierge service. The program's goal is “to provide frontline support to investigators, coordinators and research staff as they navigate the VA research process,” according to Associate Chief of Staff of Research and Development, Dr. Ali Sonel. In order to reach this goal, the research office has installed a point person to work the concierge service full-time and help answer any researcher's questions.



Honoring Nursing Pioneers

VA Pittsburgh nurses scored an unprecedented three of 10 national Nursing Innovation Awards in 2009. The awards, which recognize nursing leadership in quality improvement, will enable VA Pittsburgh's nurses to develop programs to reach out to homeless Veterans, offer in-home anticoagulation management and deliver high-quality preventive care to rural areas.



Engineering Health Care Solutions

In June 2009, the Veterans Health Administration honored VA Pittsburgh with a three-year, \$3.6 million grant to establish a Veterans Engineering Resource Center (VERC). This award will enable VAPHS to collaborate with the University of Pittsburgh to apply engineering principles to common health care hurdles. “The multidisciplinary VERC will empower health care teams to work more efficiently and effectively—and in turn give Veterans the best care and services possible,” says the VERC's newly-appointed director, Robert Monte. VA Pittsburgh was the only stand-alone facility and one of only four VA organizations nationwide to receive this award.



Veteran Ron Haney of Lemont Furnace, Pa. rolls down the halls of 4-west with his “VA dog.”

A 2009 MOMENTUM HIGHLIGHT

Helping Veterans Heal Faster

Real animals are not allowed on 4-west, a post-surgery ward at University Drive. Yet, thanks to a unique program called “Operation Walk the Dog,” a rotating cast of some 25 dogs—and even a few cats—play a crucial role in patients' recovery. The program, which launched in early 2009 and is the first of its kind in the VA, utilizes a gallery of laminated 8x10” photos of furry friends to get patients moving after surgery. “Research shows that there are a lot of benefits to getting up and moving around after an operation,” says Darlene Dietrich, the nurse manager of 4-west. “The whole inspiration behind this program was, ‘You have to walk your dog today, too, so why don't you get up?’” Patients can choose not to participate in the program, but those who do are free to name their adopted dog (the most popular moniker? Butch, according to Dietrich) and keep the pet's picture in their hospital room throughout their stay. When Veterans do take man's best friend for a stroll, they often hang the pet's photo from their IV pole or around their neck. The end result is that “there are always dogs on the floor,” says Dietrich, laughing. “It's a pretty fun—and effective—program.”



MOMENTUM

“Success doesn’t come to you...you go to it.” MARVA COLLINS

Here at VA Pittsburgh, we move. Fast. The future—and securing out success in it—is a challenge that we take seriously. To stay ahead of the game, we invest in people, in projects and in dreams. This year was no exception. In fact, we worked harder than ever to lay the groundwork for an amazing tomorrow and affirm our position as a leader in the health care industry for years to come. So, keep reading to learn more about some of the long-term projects we set into motion in 2009.

INNOVATION
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VA PITTSBURGH IS BUILDING FOR TOMORROW. THAT’S A GREAT FEELING. AS A YOUNG VETERAN, I LIKE HOW BRIGHT MY FUTURE LOOKS IN THE VA’S HANDS.”

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM VETERAN
JESUS RODRIGUEZ JR.



A 2009 MOMENTUM HIGHLIGHT

Expanding Facilities to Enhance Care

As part of the VA Pittsburgh Expansion Project, VAPHS broke ground on two monumental new facilities in 2009.

Both buildings—which are slated for completion in 2011—will utilize cutting-edge technologies and the latest innovations in health care design.

The largest building, a six-floor, \$75.8 million Consolidation Building at University Drive, will integrate primary care and behavioral health and serve as a one-stop center for many Veterans’ health care needs. As a result, Veterans will be able to access a wider array of services more quickly and smoothly while experiencing less stress.

The second building, a three-floor, \$38.2 million Ambulatory Care Center at the Heinz Division, will house primary care offices as well as a variety of specialty services, such as audiology, prosthetics and physical rehabilitation. Patients will also benefit from an array of quality-of-life enhancing perks, such as therapeutic healing gardens and an extended network of sidewalks for outdoor exercise.

VA Pittsburgh’s Expansion Project also includes plans for a \$30 million research building outfitted with a heliport at the University Drive Division. This three-story construction—while still in the blueprint stages—will span 65,000 square feet and is scheduled for completion in 2012.

These three new facilities will help VAPHS remain firmly implanted at the forefront of the health care industry—both in the public and private sector.

2009 MOMENTUM STATS

Operating Budget **\$450,418,388** | Operating Beds **583**

2009 MOMENTUM ROUNDUP



Leading the Way in Wheelchair Research

The Department of Veterans Affairs selected VAPHS's Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL) as a national center of excellence in 2009. As part of the award, HERL will receive \$5 million in funding over the next five years. "Our work touches the lives of many of our Veterans with severe disabilities. We help them avoid pain and participate in life," says research scientist Rory Cooper, who is also the founding director of HERL. "This third award as a center of excellence is both a testament to our work over the past decade and a commitment to continue to be at the vanguard for wheelchairs and related technologies." said Rory Cooper, the founding director and a research scientist at HERL. "Our work touches the lives of many of our Veterans with severe disabilities. We help them avoid pain and participate in life."



Stimulus Funds Fast Track Construction

VA Pittsburgh received nearly \$11 million in funds allocated under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The money is earmarked for three construction projects at VA Pittsburgh's University Drive division. Two projects—upgrading the facility's emergency power distribution system and replacing its plumbing system—are slated for completion in March 2011. The third project, revamping the site's surgical intensive care unit, is projected to wrap up in the summer of 2010.



Upgrades at University Drive

In 2009, VAPHS allocated more than \$23 million in funds to complete two dozen maintenance projects at all three sites. Some areas of the health care system to benefit from these projects include: the Healthy Women's clinic, the canteen, radiation therapy, same day surgery and the soon-to-be relocated Heroes Hall at University Drive.



Outreach Program Takes Off

In 2009, VA Pittsburgh laid the foundations for renewed outreach efforts by participating in approximately 60 community health and benefit events. In all, the burgeoning program connected with more than 3,000 Veterans and eligible service members.

Some of the locations VAPHS's outreach team visited include:

Veterans Job Expo at Soldiers and Sailors Museum / Toby Keith Concert / Kennywood / Community Based Outpatient Clinic Open Houses / UFC Cage Fight at Mellon Arena / County Fairs

"This was a great start, and we are aiming to expand our outreach efforts in 2010," says VAPHS Outreach Coordinator Heather Frantz. "Our goal, now and in the future, is to remind our local heroes that we will come anywhere—even to a UFC cage fight—to ensure that they are getting the benefits and health care help that they have earned and deserve."

A 2009 MOMENTUM HIGHLIGHT



Veteran Baylor (No. 8) breaks a sweat playing wheelchair rugby.

Gearing up For the Big Game

Have you heard? Pittsburgh is hosting the National Veterans Wheelchair Games—the largest wheelchair sporting event in the world! VAPHS and the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) will co-present the event, which will unfold during the first week in August 2011 and showcase the athletic talents of more than 500 wheelchair-bound Veterans from across the country. The Pittsburgh Games "are a great chance for my family and friends and the local area to get a better view of what sports can do for the rehabilitation of disabled persons," says wheelchair athlete and Veteran Jerry Baylor, 65, of Allegheny Township, Pa. With the help of the Pittsburgh-based Keystone PVA, VAPHS has spent the last year confirming event venues, kicking off fundraising efforts and recruiting volunteers. The pace of preparations will surely quicken in 2010, with everyone working toward the same goal: giving Veterans the best Games ever!