Ribbon cut on Hematology, Oncology

Patients tell stories of compassionate care received from Lovell FHCC Hematology/Oncology clinic staff

By Jayna Legg
Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

Not by choice, Hematology/Oncology at Lovell FHCC is a second home to many patients – some who have returned to the clinic weekly for many months and even years for life-saving medical treatment.

It was with gratitude that several veteran and military patients not only attended but participated in a recent ribbon-cutting on the newly remodeled Hematology/Oncology and Wound Care clinics at the FHCC in North Chicago, Ill.

“It’s a home to me because I have these great people here to support me,” said veteran Bradford Evans, who spoke during the ceremony and helped cut the ribbon. “I’m literally thankful to be here … I wouldn’t be here without the people here.”

Evans, who received chemotherapy for two years, said he was referred to the clinic by his primary care doctor, and he remembers Hematology/Oncology Chief Dr. Bharat Agarwal reassuring him at his first appointment that “things will be okay.

“Everyone here makes me feel comfortable,” said the 32-year Navy retiree. “No one wants to be here, but they make it okay. That’s what it’s all about.”

Patients and their caregivers were joined by FHCC leaders, staff and volunteers, all who crowded into the bright new waiting room for the event. After remarks and the ribbon-cutting, clinic staff led tours of the new spaces, frequently stopping to take selfies for social media postings.

Improvements include double the number of infusion chairs – from four to eight – and a new chemotherapy mixing room in the clinic, which helps significantly decrease patient wait times, Agarwal said in his remarks.

“Patients who need chemo right away don’t have to wait, and that was untrue before,” said Agarwal, who thanked the patients for supporting the clinic throughout construction. “I want to especially thank our patients,” he said. “I’m honored to care for you.”

Veteran Lou Ness, said during her remarks she came “kicking and screaming” to the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2010.

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Charlie the Today Show “Puppy with a Purpose” visits FHCC

Charlie visits patients, staff and one famous human

By Julie Ewart
Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

It’s not uncommon for patients at Lovell Federal Health Care Center to be visited by therapy dogs or accompanied by service animals.

But on June 19, FHCC visitors, staff members, and even the facility’s namesake retired Navy Capt. James A. Lovell himself, got to meet a celebrity canine – Charlie, the Today Show’s “Puppy with a Purpose.” Charlie’s training to become a service dog for a military veteran was regularly featured on the NBC-TV morning show earlier this year.

The year-old Labrador retriever’s stop at Lovell FHCC in North Chicago was part of his daylong trip to the Chicago area that ended with his participation at a Chicago Cubs baseball game and was part of a weeklong national tour to promote the vital partnerships between service dogs and military veterans.

The visit also gave Charlie an opportunity to meet a very famous human – Captain Lovell.

Continued on page 5
Stories are what connect the health care providers – every Sailor, Department of Veterans Affairs civilian, contractor and volunteer who gives of their time and talents here – to our patients.

I was reminded of the sheer emotional impact of candidly shared stories recently when we cut the ribbon on our new Hematology/Oncology and Wound Care clinics. Patients who have been cared for in these clinics were eager to approach the podium and share the very personal details of their medical care and ongoing recovery in those clinics. They lavished praise on the doctors, nurses, other clinicians and staff members who have been there for years in some cases, caring for these people facing most likely the biggest challenges of their lives.

One patient, Lou, has been coming to Hematology/Oncology every month for seven years for treatment of a rare medical condition. So, she has witnessed many changes in that clinic and our facility over those years since we integrated as the nation’s only federal health care center.

You’ll read in the ribbon-cutting story in this issue of “The Apollo” that she originally had no desire to “go to the VA” for health care but today she doesn’t want to go anywhere else. What an outstanding testimonial that is to the dedicated people who work in that clinic, who heard first-hand that what they do day-in, day-out is making a difference.

Another way we are honoring the role of storytelling in providing the best patient care possible is our participation in “My Life, My Story,” also featured in this newsletter.

We need our volunteers to help us implement this worthy initiative. They will conduct in-person interviews with our patients to hear and record their stories. The idea is that health care providers who understand and appreciate where their patients are “coming from” will better be able to care for them. It’s a simple idea, and makes perfect sense to me.

We already have a group of volunteers, all outpatients of the FHCC, who are using storytelling to affect the future of veteran health care right next store at our academic partner Rosalind Franklin University. You’ll read on page 6 about this diverse group of veterans giving their time to interact with their patients.

Dear reader, this is why we ask you to volunteer your time to record patient stories for new initiative ‘My Life, My Story’.

Volunteers are needed at Lovell FHCC to record patient interviews for new initiative ‘My Life, My Story’.

Editor’s Note: “Healing is a series written in the first-person by veterans who have experienced significant recovery in their lives.”

Name: Michael Quinn
Branch of Service: U.S. Army
Dates of Service: 1988-92

I was raised on the south side of Chicago, in the Robert Taylor Homes, the projects. Being the oldest of five boys, I was the only son that joined the U.S. Armed Forces. In 1988, at the age of 30, I enlisted in the Army. I did my boot camp at Fort Knox, Kentucky, as a tank and truck driver.

My first duty station was at Camp Casey, Korea, for a year. After that, I was deployed during Desert Shield, Desert Storm for seven months in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq.

After the war was over in 1991, my military career ended at Fort Stewart, Georgia. In 1992, I ended up back in Chicago after being honorably discharged. After being out for 60 days, my mother passed away of a massive stroke. Thirty days later, my father passed away. With the loss of my Mom and Dad, and me getting combat PTSD, I started using drugs to deal with all the pain in my life, which landed me in jail several times and caused me to have legal problems.

It took 20 years and the VA to get my life back on track. I’m also grateful the VA’s (Lovell FHCC) been there for me since my heart attack in Feb. 2016. I’m now doing well and still living because of the FHCC and the staff members here. I also work in food service at the FHCC. I’m now able to live a normal life. I just took a vacation to India to visit my Goddaughter, and I’m enrolling in DBSA-VA (Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance) Peer Specialist Training so I can help other veterans who are going through the same challenges I did.

The courts mandated me to the North Chicago VA Hospital in 1997 (today Lovell FHCC). I went to ATP (Addiction Treatment Program) for coping with my drug and alcohol problem, the Building 46 program to deal with my hard-core behaviors, Building 7 for my PTSD problems, the PREP (now Compensated Work Therapy/Transitional Residence) Program for independent living skills, and, finally, Building 66 (homeless domiciliary) for cognitive therapy.

It was in Bldg. 66 that I first met Mrs. Sonya Turner, who has played a major role in my recovery and life for the past 20 years. She was my counselor when I first got here, and she’s still helping and supporting me today as my primary care coordinator. I can’t thank her enough for helping me as well as all the other veterans she’s helped.

You’re invited:
Community Town Hall Meeting in McHenry
Oct. 11
Reception 5-7 p.m.  Meeting 7-9 p.m.

- Learn about services
- Ask questions
- Meet FHCC leadership
FHCC celebrates opening of remodeled Fisher Clinic on East campus

By Jayna Legg
Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

After an approximately $7 million overhaul of the entire building, Lovell FHCC celebrated a ribbon-cutting in July on the newly renovated Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher Medical and Dental Clinic at Naval Station Great Lakes.

Retired Navy Captain and former NASA (Apollo 13) astronaut James A. Lovell, the facility’s namesake, helped cut the ribbon, along with the youngest medical and dental hospital corpsmen and FHCC leaders.

“Dedicated people are even more critical to meeting the mission here of ‘readying warriors, caring for heroes,’ than brick-and-mortar facilities,” Lovell said during his remarks. “Today, I salute the integrated Navy and VA (Department of Veterans Affairs) staff of Fisher Clinic. Collectively, you are a major reason why I am proud to have my name on this Federal Health Care Center.”

Fisher Clinic is one of four Naval Station Great Lakes branch medical clinics that are part of Lovell FHCC. Originally named Naval Hospital Great Lakes Branch Medical and Dental Clinic, Bldg. 237 was renamed Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher Medical and Dental Clinic (Fisher Clinic) in tribute to the philanthropic family that gives generously to all branches of the armed forces.

“This newly renovated space symbolizes to me what our continuing efforts to improve patient care are all about,” said Dr. Stephen Holt, Lovell FHCC director during his remarks. “With more exam rooms, a new treatment room, a space dedicated to women’s health, Fisher Clinic providers will be able to see more patients while at the same time provide patients more privacy, comfort and natural lighting.”

The clinic provides medical and dental care primarily to the approximately 18,000 Corps School students who pass through the Naval Station Great Lakes Training Support Center annually. At any one time, up to 5,000 sailors are eligible to receive care at Fisher Clinic. The clinic also cares for about 2,500 local active duty patients, as well as additional active duty personnel stationed in a 16-state Midwest region.

The two-year construction project by general contractor Industra modernizes the clinic and greatly improves patient flow in a building originally known for being a maze of crowded hallways and dark spaces. For example, dental examination rooms that were designed in the 1970s didn’t allow space for computer work stations and advanced dental technology. And some patient areas weren’t conducive to protecting patient privacy.

“As you know, exam rooms, equipment and expansions are the smaller part of what makes a difference in our patients’ lives,” Holt said. “It is our dedicated, compassionate staff that delivers the best patient-centered care to every patient, every time, everywhere.”

Lovell FHCC places in top 25 percent of VA hospitals for quality of care

Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

Returning FHCC patients wait just two days, on average, for primary care appointments at Lovell FHCC. That is one of several positive factors placing FHCC among the top 25 percent of all 129 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers in the United States, according to a third quarter, fiscal year 2017 report released for the VA’s Strategic Analytics for Improving Vision and Learning system (SAIL).

“That reflects a lot of hard work from our staff and commitment to continuously improve our processes,” said Dr. Stephen Holt, director of the FHCC. “It’s all about providing world class care for our patients.”

The SAIL system was designed to compare VA hospitals so they can share improvement strategies. The data is significant for the FHCC and other medical centers with a VA mission because it prioritizes the need to improve patient care practices in specific areas, and to continue to strengthen others.

Under SAIL, if one VA hospital improves in performance, then another will drop in performance. SAIL was not designed to compare VA hospitals to non-VA or private sector hospitals, and the FHCC’s rating does not consider data specific to Lovell’s care of active duty military and dependents.
Volunteers needed for “My Life, My Story”

D o you enjoy listening to the stories people tell, especially Lovell FHCC patients? Volunteers are needed for a new project to learn the life stories of Lovell FHCC patients and include the narratives in their medical records to improve patient-centered care.

Volunteers will attend a short training session to learn active listening and how to compile the stories. Patients will get copies of their stories to give to caregivers and other loved ones. Staff and existing volunteers at Lovell FHCC may participate. Contact Kenny List at 224-610-3139 for more information.

FHCC LEAD ‘Class of 2017’ graduates

FHCC LEAD ‘Class of 2017’ graduates

FHCC instructors pose with the first graduates of the new leadership transition course. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jacob Waldrop)

By Jayna Legg

Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

C omments include, “The course could have easily lasted longer.” “It was one of the best educational experiences of my professional life.” “It was very helpful to have navy members there as well as the director; it was an excellent course, and I would highly encourage all individuals transferring from DoD to VA to attend.” “Absolutely outstanding course!”

Early reviews for the new “Leadership Transition: Department of Defense to Veterans Affairs” course piloted at Lovell Federal Health Care Center this year were all positive. The FHCC had run two iterations of the three-day course, which is taught in partnership with the Healthcare Leadership Talent Institute. It is designed to assist retired and former Department of Defense (DoD) leaders as they transition into leadership roles in the Department of Veterans Affairs, (VA) such as director, associate director, assistant director and chief of staff positions.

“It creates an open dialogue between these new leaders and seasoned executives at the FHCC to enhance the speed of transition to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) culture,” said Rachel Fleming, who oversees administration of the course at the FHCC and is planning for the third class meeting in October.

FHCC subject matter experts cover topics as far-ranging as media and congressional relations and “Management Style – VA Employees vs. DoD” to “Independent Practitioner and Affiliate Issues” and “VA and VHA Hot Topics and Career-Enders.”

“As the only integrated DoD and VA health care facility, the FHCC is the logical place to teach this course,” said FHCC Director Dr. Stephen Holt. “With our integrated staff of Navy and VA civilians, all the way up to top leaders, it makes sense that we (FHCC) know what the challenges are and how best transitioning leaders can traverse the obstacles to be successful. We want to share that knowledge.”

Congratulating graduates:

- LT Amber Egbert, MSC, DCSS, Department of Optometry was named FHCC Junior Officer of the Quarter, 1st Quarter.
- LT Nathan Aranas, NC, Emergency Department, was named FHCC Junior Officer of the Quarter, 2nd Quarter.
- HM1 (FMF/SW) Jeremiah Spasojevich, GEC/MH, was named Senior Sailor of the Quarter, 3rd Quarter.
- HM2 (AW) Rosana Iribar, Specialty Care, was named Sailor of the Quarter, 3rd Quarter.
- HM3 Bradley Hamilton, Clinical Support Services, was named Junior Sailor of the Quarter, 3rd Quarter.
- HH Samuel Cohoon, Fleet Medicine, was named Blue Jacket of the Quarter, 3rd Quarter.
- LT Christopher Boyer, LT Mark Derocher, LT Dustin Haupt, LT Diane Vo, LT David Satterwaite and LT Talitha Moton were selected for promotion to Lieutenant Commander.
- Dr. Raul Gazmuri, MD, PhD, FCCM, and research team received a VA Merit Review Grant titled “Cyclophilin D: A Regulator of Mitochondrial Oxidative Phosphorylation.” The FHCC has also been selected to participate in a new clinical trial assessing the potential effects of Nivolumab in patients with sepsis/septic shock.
- FHCC Emergency Management Communications Department were recognized by the VA Office of Emergency Management - Area Emergency Manager Region V Chicago - for best practices in integrated public messaging during the FHCC’s response to Lake County flooding in July.
- LCDR Suzanne Gudeman, LCDR David Liu, LCDR Evan Whitebook were selected for promotion to Commander.
- Gail Evans was named Junior Civilian of the Quarter, 3rd Quarter, fiscal year 2016.
- Lyuba Dragilev was named Senior Civilian of the Quarter, 3rd Quarter, fiscal year 2016.
- Michael Wintniker was named Junior Civilian of the Quarter, 4th Quarter, fiscal year 2016.
- Jerome Campbell was named Senior Civilian of the Quarter, 4th Quarter, fiscal year 2016.

Congratulations!

• Military retirees appreciation day Oct. 7
• Flu Shot Clinic Oct. 14
• Military retirees appreciation day Oct. 7
• FHCC marks POW/MIA Recognition Day

... and many more stories and photos!

Find More Online @ facebook.com/ LovellFHCC

or Visit Our Website @lovell fhcc va.gov

FHCC pilots Dept. of Defense-to-VA leaders’ class

By Jayna Legg

Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

Volunteers are needed for a short training session to learn active listening and how to compile the stories. Patients will get copies of their stories to give to caregivers and other loved ones. Staff and existing volunteers at Lovell FHCC may participate. Contact Kenny List at 224-610-3139 for more information.

FHCC LEAD ‘Class of 2017’ graduates

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Update about the future of FHCC

Update about the future of FHCC

Update about the future of FHCC

Department of Defense-to-Veterans Affairs Leadership Transition Program

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Department of Defense-to-Veterans Affairs Leadership Transition Program

Leadership transitions between the two agencies, Holt said, lead to better patient care all around and eventually may play a role in the creation of future FHCCs. “I wanted the FHCC to be the lead on this,” Holt said. “This is an investment in the future of federal health care.”

The course is structured around interactive seminar discussions that allow for as many questions as needed, Fleming said. “This was a huge undertaking and an ancillary assignment for everyone involved spanning over nearly a year for myself,” Fleming said. “It was remarkable to see it go from an idea to a Word document and spreadsheet and result in high quality product with potential to impact not only leaders at this level but those they serve – staff and veterans.”

Fleming also developed a VA Pulse site “DoD to VA Leadership Transition” to assist incoming leaders new to the VA and give them access to valuable resources, allow them to engage with colleagues and view relevant content with the intent to ease and expedite the transition. “The group is meant to be a place of collaboration and a repository of information intended as a tool to assist in the development of an informed, engaged and capable VA leader delivering outstanding service to VA’s stakeholders,” Fleming said.

Three new Navy Chiefs are from Lovell FHCC

Green House home resident’s veggie garden prospers

• Flu Shot Clinic Oct. 14
• Military retirees appreciation day Oct. 7
• FHCC marks POW/MIA Recognition Day

... and many more stories and photos!
FHCC Veteran patients meet Today Show service dog (cont.)

Continued from page 1

The retired Navy officer and Apollo 13 commander’s name has graced the FHCC since 2010, when the former North Chicago VA Medical Center and Naval Clinic Great Lakes were joined to become the nation’s first federal health care facility, fully integrating Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense resources.

Lovell FHCC in North Chicago - with clinics at Naval Station Great Lakes, Recruit Training Command, and in Evanston, McHenry Ill. and Kenosha, Wis. - cares for veterans alongside active duty military members and military family members.

“I’m really proud to have Charlie and The Today Show here,” said Lovell during an interview with Comcast Sports Network Chicago, an NBC affiliate. The interview took place in front of the mural that inspired the seal design for NASA’s Apollo program.

“I love to see this facility get recognized for what it can do, and how it can help with Navy personnel working alongside VA people to run this efficient organization,” Lovell said.

In one of the center’s Green House long-term care homes, Lovell and dog-loving veterans and staff observed Charlie’s ability to “work a room,” winning over all with fetching demonstrations, paw shakes and unabashed requests for tummy rubs in front of the television cameras.

Residents were also thrilled to sit side-by-side with Lovell, with at least one calling a family member immediately afterwards to recount his conversation with the renowned space explorer.

Charlie won over patients of all shapes and sizes in the main hospital, from gleeful toddlers holding hands with active-duty military parents to veterans being escorted to appointments by their own service dogs, who glanced over and sniffed at the young canine-in-training.

After completing his training in December, Charlie will be paired with a veteran applicant who needs a service dog to maintain an independent lifestyle. Charlie will be matched with a veteran already on a waiting list with the non-profit organization America’s VetDogs.

The match will be made based on “the dog’s strengths and personality and the client’s lifestyle and needs,” said Charlie’s trainer Katie Ruiz, who accompanied him to the FHCC.

“We’ll bring the veteran into our facility for two weeks to learn how to better use the dog, and then we offer support for as long as the two continue to work together.”

Katie Ruiz, Charlie’s trainer America’s VetDogs.

“We’ll bring the veteran into our facility for two weeks to learn how to better use the dog, and then we offer support for as long as the two continue to work together,” Ruiz said, who noted that while Charlie is famous, he’s one of many America’s VetDogs service animals learning the same skills.
Veterans role-play for Rosalind Franklin medical students

Lovell FHCC volunteers help train future doctors

By Jayna Legg

Lovell FHCC Public Affairs

Face-to-face for the first time with veterans as patients – albeit in mock medical appointments – some of the young medical students weren’t sure how to proceed.

To get accurate medical histories, how much should they probe the veterans about their military experiences and the quality of their health care since their service? How much time should the doctors-in-training spend with each patient? How do veterans’ personal stories of battles won and lost, both figuratively and literally, figure into the success of their medical treatment?

The Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, Chicago Medical School students’ assignment was to exercise their interview skills and learn how to guide conversations with veteran patients – role-played by about two-dozen real outpatients of the Lovell Federal Health Care Center.

Thanks to the veteran volunteers, all 300 first-year medical and podiatry students had the opportunity to engage with a FHCC veteran in a clinical setting by the end of the class.

Most of the veterans who volunteered to participate also are members of the FHCC Friday Expressive Arts Therapy group, and some are members of the FHCC Patient Stakeholder Committee. They hailed from all eras, from a World War II veteran who told students a harrowing story of surviving the bombing of the U.S.S. Enterprise, to combat veterans of Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq struggling with PTSD and traumatic brain injury.

“We’re thrilled you are here,” Dr. Ariel Katz, course director, told the veteran volunteers at a pre-brief before students arrived. “These are first-years; they are ready to dive in … This is your chance to make a good impression on the next generation of doctors.”

Class professors handed the veterans a list of sample questions students might ask and advised them to just “be themselves,” and try to avoid doing students’ work for them.

“The students’ goal is to make their patients feel comfortable to open up,” Clinical Assistant Professor Dr. Ligaya Marasigan explained. “And the ultimate goal is for them to arrive where they should go – diagnosis. It’s paving a well-guided path to diagnosis.”

Aqeel and Arif listened attentively and took turns interviewing Probst and critiquing each other.

“This is a very good experience for me,” Aqeel said. “As a doctor, you will have a lot of people who are angry, upset and emotional.”

Arif echoed his fellow student’s sentiments. “We are learning to be welcoming, to empathize and try we actually care, and be there for them,” Arif said. “If they are comfortable, this helps us do our job better, in diagnosing.”

December 1969. Probst was an infantryman and contracted malaria during his service. He told the students he thinks about war at night because of the noise from O’Hare International Airport near his home. At one point in Vietnam, he had to step up to lead his unit when his lieutenant got shot. He said his regular doctors know his appointments might take 45 minutes or more, “because they know what happens if a button gets pushed,” he said.

“Veterans deserve respect and the honesty of not just the government and family but of all the people around them, including their doctors,” Probst said.

Probst said he volunteered to help with the class to benefit future military service members. “It’s helping our young people who fight wars,” he said. “We need doctors that understand how to talk to them and maybe find a way for them to find an exit.”

The interviewing class was not the first time Lovell FHCC outpatients have worked with Rosalind Franklin students. Many of the same volunteers routinely participate in panel discussions with medical students and already are looking forward to volunteering for the first-year interview class again next school year.

“This really is a win-win situation on both sides,” said FHCC Patient Stakeholder Committee Co-chair Col. Chris O’Donnell, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.), who coordinates the Rosalind Franklin veteran volunteer efforts.

“This has a terrific impact on our veterans and affords them an opportunity to ‘give back’ and positively help shape the future of health care for veterans,” he said. “And it allows them to talk with confidence as they are talking about their lives and experiences. What a great morale booster.”

New Lovell FHCC All Hazards Team forms and trains for emergencies

The FHCC All Hazards Team recently conducted a decontamination exercise to certify the team to respond in the event of such an emergency. The team conducted initial assignment training, including Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) level certification, for all newly assigned and recertifying Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) mass casualty patient decontamination team members. As a multi-discipline team, members also will help in the evacuation of patients and assist with other Emergency Management functions like Mass Casualty drills and exercises.

The veterans spread out in the mock exam rooms in the basement of the university, which borders the Lovell FHCC West campus in North Chicago, Ill. Students filed in for class and paired off at each “bed.”

In one exam room, students Fadi Aqeel and Amir Arif talked to Marine Vietnam veteran Bob Probst, who served from October 1967 to

In the above photo, a Sailor goes through decontamination during the recent Lovell FHCC All Hazards team exercise. On the right, team members use a simulation manikin to practice decontamination procedures while a trainer watches. The decontamination tent can be seen in the background. (Photos by Willie Ramsey, FHCC Emergency Management Officer)