

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

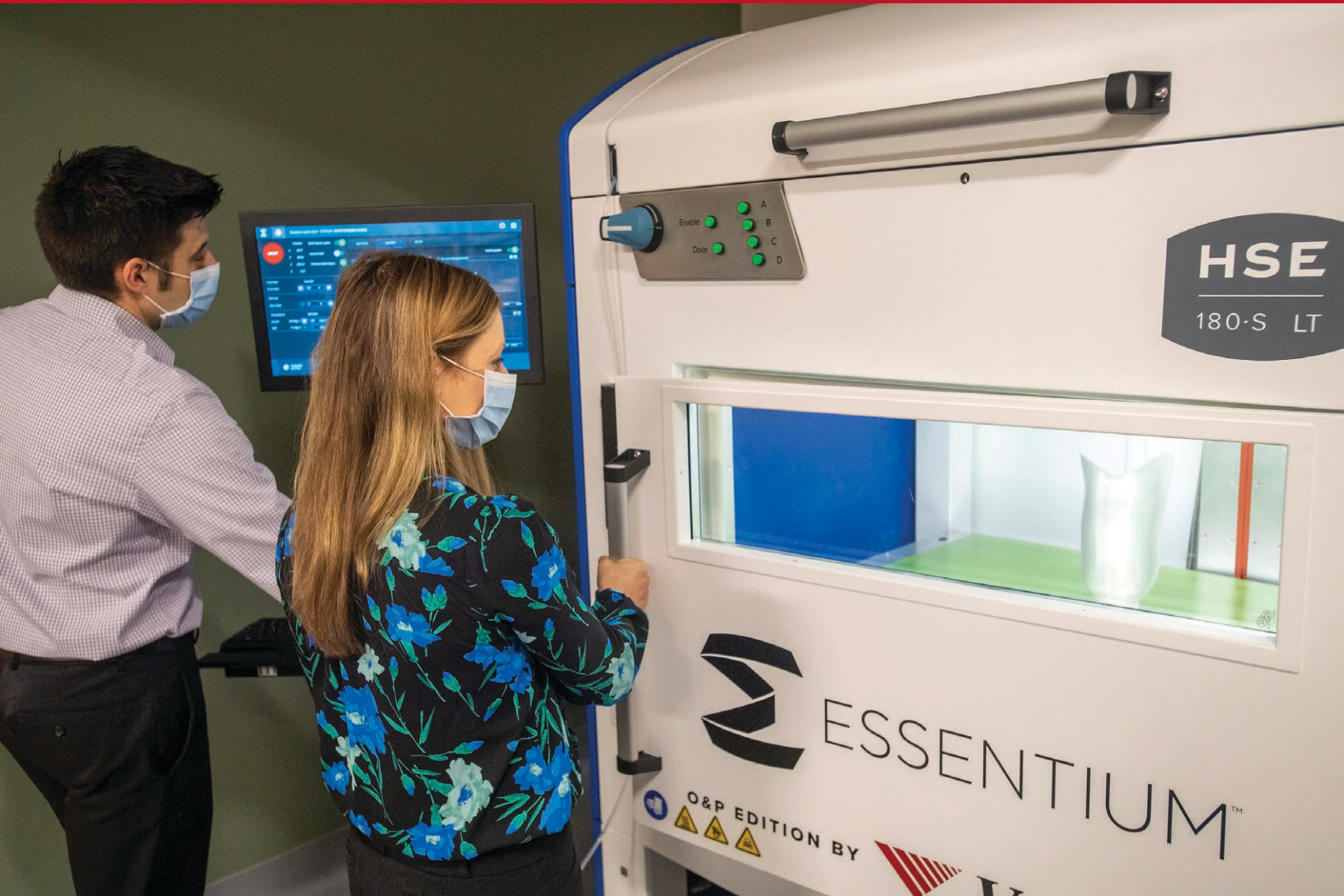
Veterans Health Administration
VA Healthcare-VISN 4

VISION

for Excellence

Newsletter for Veterans and Stakeholders in VISN 4

Issue 31



VISN 4's New Central Fabrication Prosthetics Lab

Delivering medical breakthroughs for Veterans

Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VISN 4:

I hope you are having an enjoyable and healthy spring.

Inside this issue of Vision for Excellence, we are pleased to highlight our VISN 4 Central Fabrication Prosthetics Lab, which officially opened in late March. Our new prosthetics lab uses cutting-edge, state-of-the-art technology to provide the latest in orthotic and prosthetic care to VISN 4 Veterans. Our lab is the only prosthetics lab in VA to have the highspeed extrusion 3D printer.

Our VISN also has a fully-equipped mobile prosthetics lab van that will be able to offer remote on-site services to locations within the western market. This van is one of only a few in the country and we are extremely proud to offer this service. Veterans in VISN 4 can now choose VA for their orthotic and prosthetic needs so their care can be coordinated within VA's and can easily include inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation.

We are also pleased to highlight enhancements to the network's Connected Care program including providing care through VA Video Connect and a heart failure initiative within Home Telehealth. You will also learn about significant changes to our Caregiver Support Program as well as receive an update on the VA Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) report. Released on March 14, the report includes recommendations by the VA Secretary to cement the department as the primary, world-class provider and coordinator of Veterans' health care for generations to come.

On behalf of all VISN 4 employees, I thank all Veterans and their families for entrusting us to provide your health care. I also want to thank our service and community partners and loyal volunteers for your continued support and guidance.

Please stay safe and make sure you get your COVID booster shots when recommended. It is our honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

Timothy W. Liezert
Network Director



VA Healthcare-VISN 4 Leadership Team

Timothy W. Liezert
Network Director

Charles R. Thilges
Deputy Network Director

Timothy Burke, M.D.
Chief Medical Officer

Denise Boehm, MSN, RN, NEA-BC
Chief Nursing Officer

Moira M. Hughes, FACHE
Quality Management Officer

Joseph Haverstick
Chief Financial Officer

Amber Mesoras
Chief Human Resources Officer

David E. Cowgill
Communications Manager

Jo Petro
Executive Assistant



Did you know?

The VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System Liver and Kidney Transplant Program is one of the nation's leading VA transplant centers and has some of the best one year survival rates in the country.

If you think you may benefit from a referral for an organ transplant, talk to your primary care provider. To learn more, visit <https://www.visn4.va.gov/VISN4/services/transplant.asp>.

AROUND the NETWORK

Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregiver (PCAFC)

The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) provides resources, education, support, a financial stipend, and health insurance (if eligible), beneficiary travel (if eligible), to caregivers of eligible Veterans.

You may be eligible for this clinical program if you sustained or aggravated a serious injury (now includes serious illness) in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975 or on or after September 11, 2001; and meet both of the following criteria to be eligible for PCAFC.

Among other applicable eligibility criteria, you must:

1. Have a single or combined service-connected disability rating by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) of 70% or more. This requirement is included in the definition of “serious injury;” and
2. Be in need of personal care services (requiring in-person personal care services) for a minimum of six continuous months based on any one of the following:
 - an inability to perform an activity of daily living (ADL)
 - a need for supervision, protection, or instruction.

VA is committed to the second phase of expansion in planned for October 2022 when Veterans of all eras will be eligible to apply for PCAFC.

The goal and intent of the VA Caregiver Support Program to give our best to caregivers and their Veterans. VA has heard and understands the concerns expressed by stakeholders about the experiences of legacy participants. As announced by VA Secretary Denis McDonough on March 22, 2022, VA will halt the discharge of any legacy applicant or legacy participant from the program which was slated for October 1, 2022. VA will initiate the rulemaking process to assure continued participation until eligibility requirements can be refined to meet congressional intent. VA will convene and collaborate with Veteran Service

Organizations, Congress, Caregivers, Veterans, and others to share plans and gain their insight and feedback.

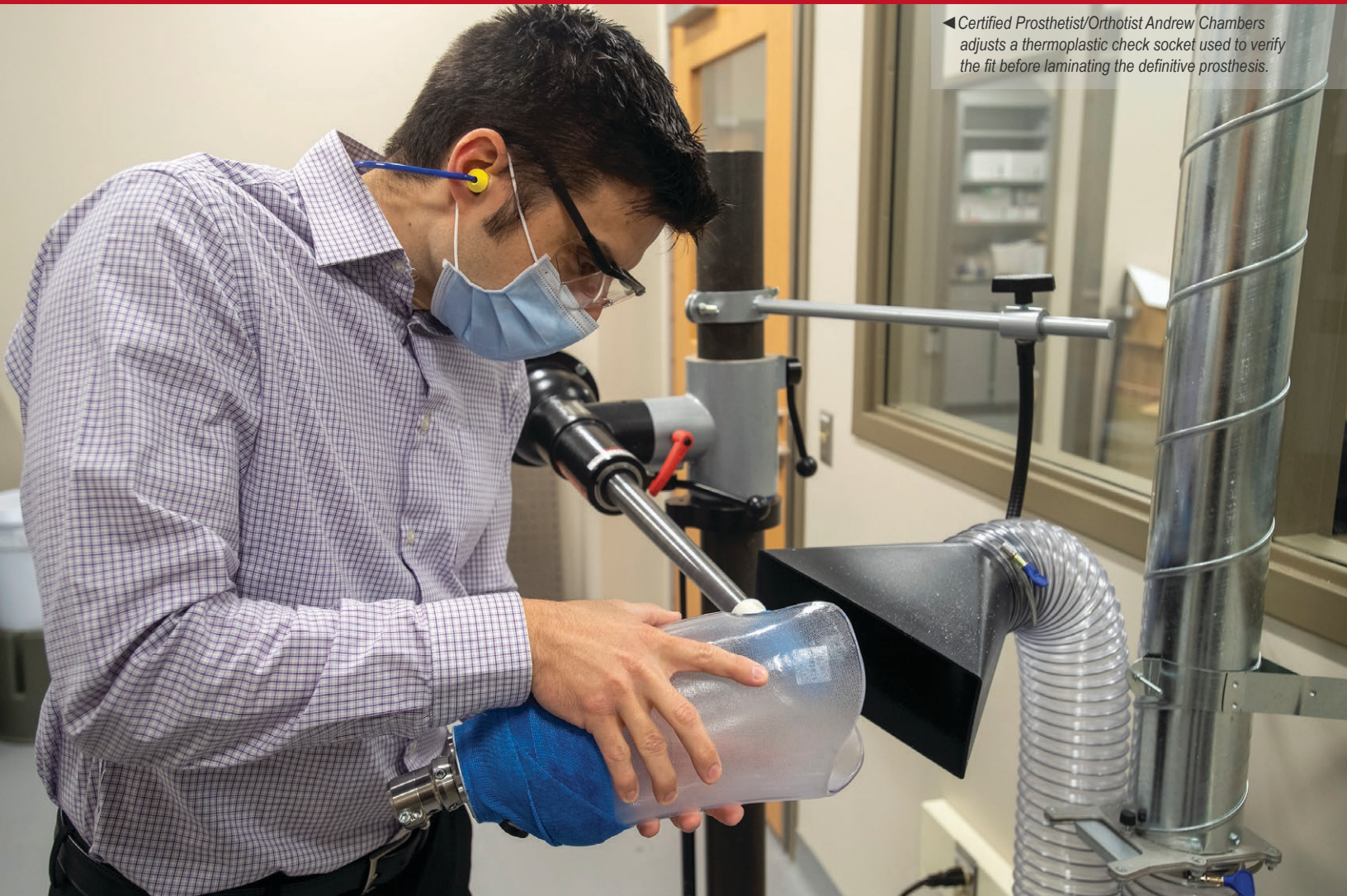
We continue to see a steady influx of new applications and continue to process them in a timely and thorough manner.

PCAFC decisions – options for further review and appeal

There are now several options for further review and appeal related to PCAFC decisions. If you disagree, in whole or in part, with a PCAFC decision, there are options for you to appeal or to request a Veterans Health Administration (VHA) review of the decision. Your options depend on the date we issued your PCAFC decision.

Previously you could only appeal PCAFC decisions through the VHA Clinical Review Process (also known as the VHA Clinical Appeals Process). Please see the [list of frequently asked questions](#) and [VA Form 10-305](#) for additional information.





◀ Certified Prosthetist/Orthotist Andrew Chambers adjusts a thermoplastic check socket used to verify the fit before laminating the definitive prosthesis.

VISN 4's 3D printing innovations are changing Veterans' lives

Our new orthotic and prosthetic lab is designed to manufacture artificial limbs and orthoses utilizing the latest 3D printing technology available in the field. An orthosis is an external device designed to improve biomechanical function, encourage proper joint alignment, or to protect an existing limb.

With the implementation of the lab, it is now possible for you to be connected with a VA provider to care for your limb loss and address any questions or concerns you may have. As the lab continues to develop, there is a potential for you to be seen at the bedside post-amputation for the fitting of a custom post-operative splint that will be custom manufactured using 3D printer technology. You can

choose VA for your orthotic and prosthetic needs, and your care will be coordinated within VA's health network from inpatient care through outpatient rehabilitation.

"The services are outstanding, and it's working! Everything was explained to me in a way I could understand it," says Bob B., a Navy Veteran.

"I am walking and I am not in a wheelchair. Everything I do is now effortless because I followed all their advice."

By choosing VA for your prosthetic care, you now have access to technology that's proven to be beneficial in overcoming fitting obstacles that were a barrier in the past.

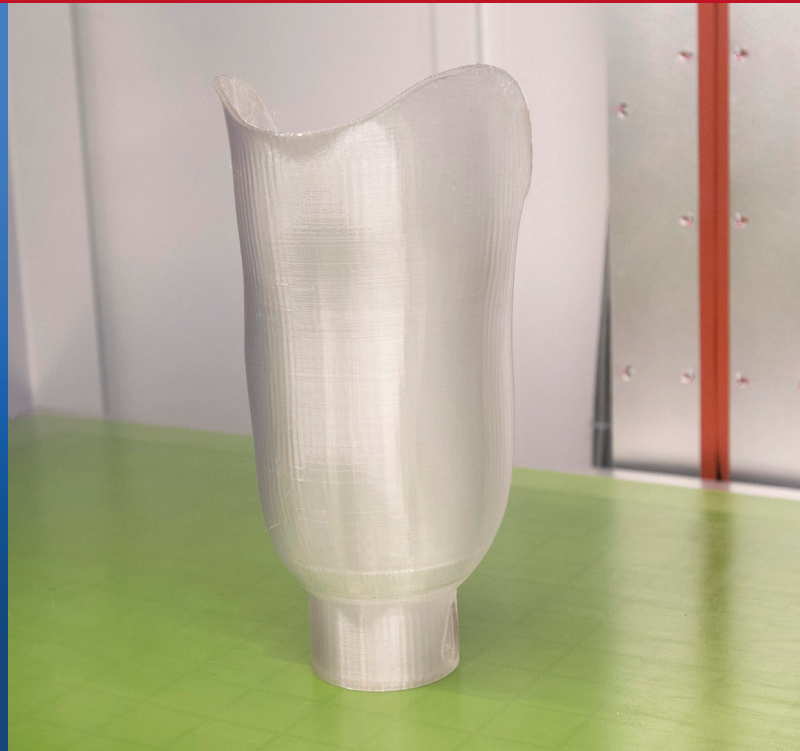
"With this new prosthetics lab, VISN 4 will now be on the cutting edge of providing the highest level of orthotic and prosthetics care for our Veterans.



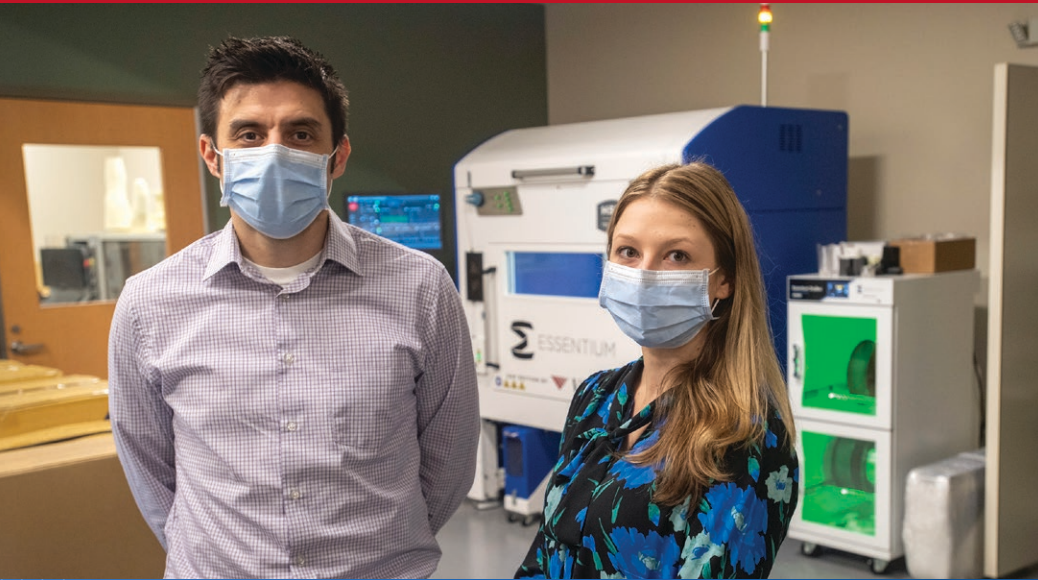
"Using the latest technology, we are able to not only provide exemplary limbs and braces, but also provide them in a time frame unparalleled by any community providers.

"We started this as an idea in 2017, and we've strived to make this the flagship VA prosthetics lab in the country."

– Doug Hilliard, VISN 4 Prosthetics Manager



- ▲ A check socket for a prosthetic diagnostic fitting is manufactured using a 3D printer.
- ▼ Certified Prosthetist/Orthotist Amanda Gilarski starts the 3 axis carver to create a dense foam model of the residual limb used to fabricate the prosthesis.



Central Fabrication Prosthetics Lab



► Certified Prosthetist/Orthotist Amanda Gilarski adjusts a thermoplastic check socket used to verify the fit before laminating the definitive prosthesis.

Quick Facts

Location and space

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System
H.J. Heinz campus:
Lab in building #49 is 1,288 square feet.
Patient area in building #71 is 1,012 square feet.

Date Opened

March 28, 2022

Staff

3 full-time staff: 1 supervisory prosthetist and 2 staff prosthetists

Goal and mission

To provide exemplary orthotic and prosthetic services to the VISN 4 Western Market

Why it is unique

We use cutting edge, state of the art technology to provide the latest in orthotic and prosthetic care to our Veterans in the most efficient and timely fashion. The new lab is the only prosthetics lab in VA to have the high-speed extrusion 3D printer.

Future Goals

Expand the reach of the central fabrication lab to provide coverage for the western market by utilizing technology and a mobile lab as well as giving Veterans the opportunity to choose VA for their orthotic and prosthetic care.

Current special projects that have VISN-wide impact

Potential to develop post-operative splinting for new amputees.



VA Mobile



Now available!

The VA Health Chat app provides easy, online access to chat with VA staff when you have minor health questions.

mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-chat

Asset Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission Health Market Assessments

VA has completed our Market Assessments and submitted the AIR Report as required by the VA Mission Act on March 14, 2022.

Our central vision throughout this process is ‘what’s best for Veterans?’ We will work to maintain and improve Veteran access to care through this process.

This is not a “BRAC for VA.” VA is staying in ALL Markets

For our Veterans, nothing is happening now, or in the near future; these are recommendations, only—all Veterans will continue to get their care tomorrow just as they are getting it today.

VA will continue to invest in our number 1 asset, our workforce...its they who provide care, not buildings.

The recommendations must go through the AIR Commission, through the President, Congress, and—if approved—implementation planning follows.

Potential changes to our health care infrastructure are years away.

In the longer run, AIR recommendations could impact VHA facilities and staff. But it’s way too early to know what those impacts might be.



VISN 4 RN Clinical Contact Center
1-833-TELE-URGENT
(1-833-835-3874)



Scan QR code with your smart phone to add this number to your contacts!



If you have an **urgent** medical or mental health question, call a VISN 4 Triage Nurse!

— Available 24/7/365 —



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Healthcare—VISN 4

Connected Care Update

Heart Failure Initiative Within Home Telehealth

Our Home Telehealth program assists Veterans with managing their chronic diseases while in the comfort of their home. Using an interactive voice response system, in-home monitoring system, and/or video technology, our home telehealth providers can offer more services to more Veterans, even in the most remote locations.

A recent collaboration between Home Telehealth and the Heart Failure Clinical Resource Hub now allows for intensive case management of Veterans with heart failure while still at home. Providers can identify an issue with the Veteran's health by reviewing biometric and dialogue responses submitted daily by the Veteran. The providers can then contact the Veteran by telephone or video for further assessment.

This information is then sent for review by a heart failure clinical resource hub provider to determine if a medication change or further intervention is needed. The result is increased access to needed medical interventions in an at-risk population, and builds trust between VA and Veterans.



Providing Care Through VA Video Connect

Our providers are constantly discovering new ways to use video to serve Veterans in a safe and convenient manner. In fact, many Veterans prefer a video appointment when clinically appropriate rather than travel to VA facilities. Last year, VISN 4 served more than 46,000 patients in their home through VA Video Connect (VVC).

Our Home-based Primary Care team from Wilmington used VVC to care for a 94 year-old Veteran with advanced dementia and other medical issues. One day the Veteran's daughter left a message reporting that her father had a swollen right leg. The provider, Dr. Shilpa Garg, connected with the Veteran using VVC and noted that the entire right leg was swollen compared to his left leg. Dr. Garg directed the daughter to take her father to the Wilmington VA Medical Center emergency room due to a possible diagnosis of deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

The emergency room physician confirmed the Veteran had DVT, which if left untreated could have led to a stroke or an amputation, and promptly started the Veteran on medication. As a result of the video visit, the Wilmington physicians were able to provide the correct care and guidance in a timely manner and potentially prevented further negative effects.

◀ Wilmington Home-based Primary Care Staff

Standing from the left: Evylina Chioma, Michele Kuhn, Rhonda Bumpers-Bland, Dr. Shilpa Garg, Jenna Hastings-Stasulli, Donna Hernandez, Patricia Colon, Cathy Smith, Olusade Banjo, Tara Cornish.

Kneeling in front from the left: Crystal McGee, Maybelline Gatto, Kathryn Sacharok



VA Healthcare-VISN 4

1010 Delafield Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15215
412-822-3316
www.visn4.va.gov

Vision for Excellence - Issue 31

Executive Editor David E. Cowgill
Layout & Design Louis Scavnicky

VA

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health
Administration
VA Healthcare-
VISN 4

We'd Like to Hear from You

Vision for Excellence is published for the employees, volunteers, patients and friends of VA Healthcare-VISN 4. For more information about this publication, contact David Cowgill at 412-822-3318 or david.cowgill@va.gov.