

AFFIRMING THE COMMITMENT

**Thomas J. Fitzgerald III, BBA, CHESP
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VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

VA MOTTO

*To care for him
who shall have borne the battle
and for his widow, and his
orphan*

DEFINING STATEMENT

“The character of a nation can be measured by the way that nation treats its Veterans.”

Author unknown

MILITARY OATH

- ▣ I, (*NAME*), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God

VETERAN SACRIFICES

FAMILY

EDUCATION

PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL

NORMALITY

LIFE

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM



ONE VA

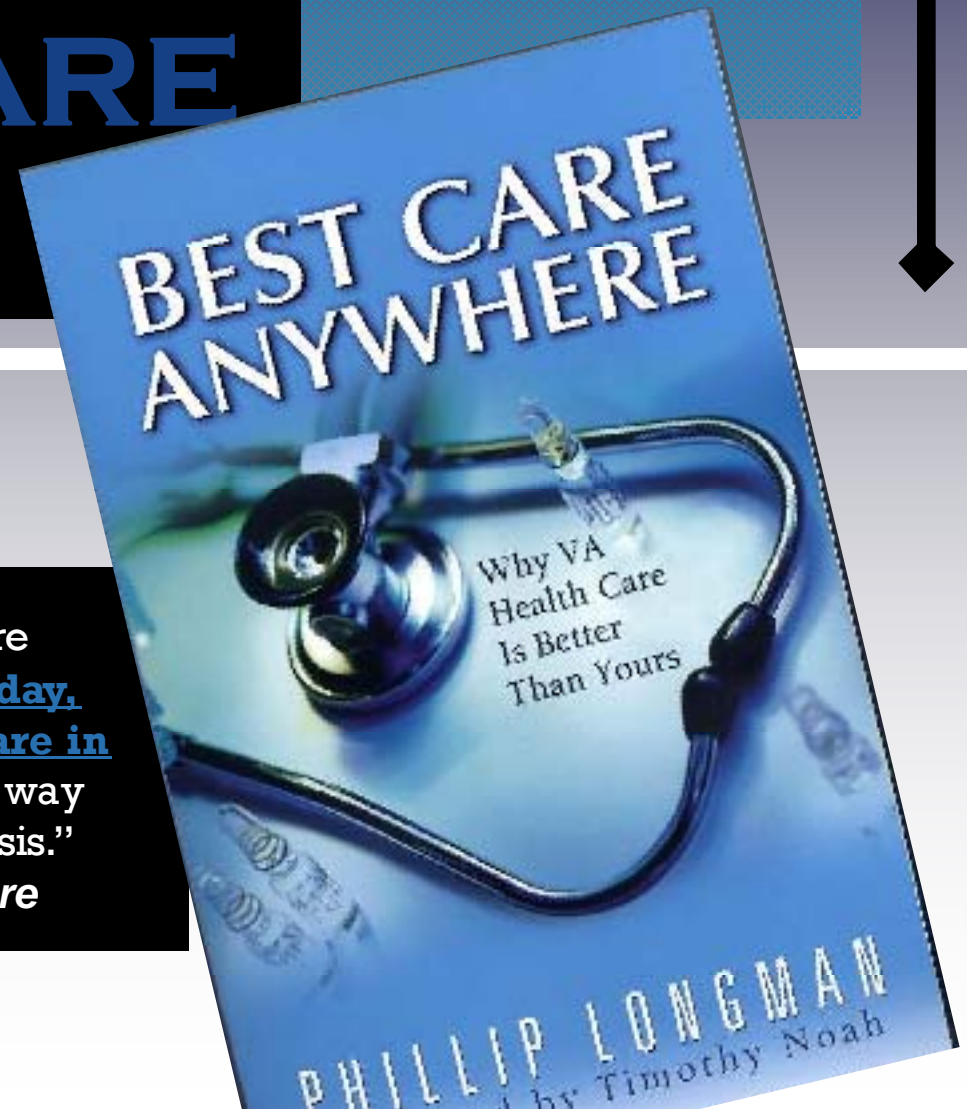
- VBA
- VHA
- NCA

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

THE BEST CARE ANYWHERE

“Ten years ago, veterans hospitals were dangerous, dirty, and scandal-ridden. Today, they're producing the highest quality care in the country. Their turnaround points the way toward solving America's health-care crisis.”

-Phillip Longman, *Best Care Anywhere*



VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

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HOW VA HOSPITALS BECAME THE BEST

No longer a nation's shame, veteran care is aging competitors

By DOUGLAS WALLER

Most private hospitals can only dream of the futuristic medicine Dr. Droya Sheriff practices today. Outside an elderly patient's room, the attending physician gathers her residents around a wireless laptop propped on a mobile cart. Sheriff accesses the patient's entire medical history—a stack of paper in most private hospitals. And instead of looking to the radiology lab to view the latest X-ray, she brings it up on her computer screen. While Sheriff is visiting the patient, a resident types in a request for

private health plans or more, according to a study published in the April edition of *Medical Care*. Harvard University just gave the VA its Innovations in American Government Award for the agency's work in computerizing patient records.

And all that was achieved at a relatively low cost. In the past 10 years, the number of veterans receiving treatment from the VA has more than doubled, from 2.5 million to 5.3 million, but the agency has cared for them with 10,000 fewer employees. The VA's cost per patient has remained steady during the past 10 years. The cost of private care has jumped about 40% in that same period.

Now still grips about wading through red tape for treatment. Some 11,000 have been waiting 30 days or more for their first appointment. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars could stress the system, although the agency module the VA's That's back to the vet, reports from the VA and Korean war cases at the VA, whereas the have so far at 550,000 are he in body arm added added of that in war re of the new p gish

laptop. In the private sector, 20% of all lab tests are needlessly repeated because the doctor's test performs better than the VA's, according to a report by the VA's information advisory commission. Another at the VA was system, as in market, for tests—a system lower than 5% hospitals. VA hold laser may scans the bar patient's wrist the one on the pills. If the match the p the doctor type computer, it alerts the VA Institute of VA times that patients can be year by medic but compute and have not have virtually these problem hospitals.

Private which make it treating, per come to them profit from he reems to pers which keep. A, which is fa patients for in his post an need spending c sense to V (the hospital) half the syste placed the n new comm e more accen. He act

At the reforms produced results, veterans' performance standards that graded physicians on health promotion.



Special Report • Best Hospitals

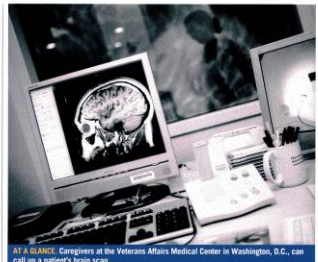
Military Might

Today's VA HOSPITALS ARE MODELS OF TOP-NOTCH CARE

By Christopher J. Gearon

Three summers ago, Augustin Martinez's skin was yellow. He was in pain. And physicians at Kaiser Permanente, his usual source of care, were baffled. The frustrated Martinez, a retired Lockheed Martin engineer in San Jose, Calif., asked his brother, a New York physician, for advice. After consulting colleagues, his brother advised him to go to the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in nearby Palo Alto. Martinez, a former Navy petty officer 2nd class, was entitled to VA care (eligibility depends on several factors, including date and length of military service, injury, and income). But his brother's recommendation took him by surprise. Better care at a VA hospital? But he went—and was quickly diagnosed with pancreatic cancer by Sherry Wynn, chief of general surgery, who operated on him within days. He has relied on VA hospitals and clinics ever since. "They ran a good ship," says Martinez, now age 72.

That they do, say healthcare experts. Routinely criticized for decades for indifferent care, attacked by Oliver Stone in *Born on the Fourth of July*, the VA health system has performed major surgery on itself. The care provided to 5.2 million veterans by the nation's largest healthcare system has improved so much that often it is the best around. And in the new VA, patient safety is a particular priority. Before making the first incision, for example, surgeons conduct a five-step audit to be sure they don't cut into the wrong body part or person. Doctors and nurses are unusually conscientious about hand hygiene, to reduce infections caused by carrying germs from one patient to another. Technology helps, as would be expected. Martinez is particularly impressed by the computerization of patient records. When he visits his doctors



and nurses instantly call up his medical records, including test results (his cholesterol is high and he suffers from asthma), CT scans, and medications via laptop, which has become a ubiquitous tool at VA facilities as a stethoscope. Paper delay. But computerized records are more than a convenience. If all patient information could be reviewed on a computer screen and updated with each new test and observation, studies suggest that many of the medical errors that kill hospital patients would be preventable. Keeping everything on paper has been shown to delay care, force 1 in every 3 lab tests to be repeated, and cause unnecessary hospitalizations. But switching to computerized records can cost millions of dollars at a single hospital, or relatively few medical centers outside

the VA have changed over. "The information is right at your fingertips, right at the bedside, right when you're making decisions," Wynn says. Besides giving her a quick snapshot of a patient's progress, the system automatically displays the latest and best studies and guidelines for that patient's condition. The screen also prompts her about preventive measures. If she calls up the record of a diabetic patient, for example, she is reminded to perform or schedule foot and eye exams, which diabetics must have regularly to prevent amputation or blindness.

Such prompting is largely why the VA vaccinates 92 percent of patients ages 65 and older against pneumonia versus 29 percent 10 years ago, says Jonathan B. Perlin, the top doctor in the Department of

Photography by Jim Lo Scalzo for US&W

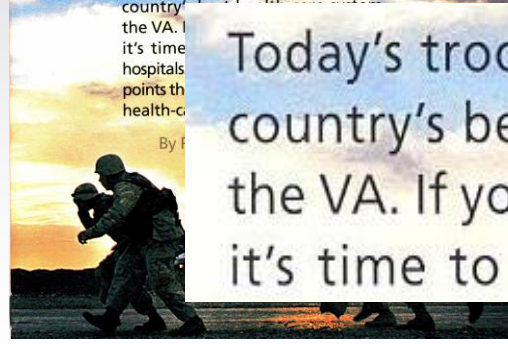
Washington

MONTHLY

BEST CARE ANYWHERE

Today's troops are headed into the country the VA. | it's time hospitals points health-c

By I



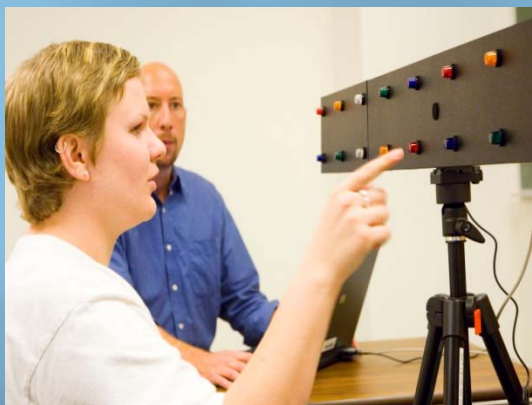
BusinessWeek

The Best Medical Care In the U.S.

Reprinted from the July 17, 2006 issue of *BusinessWeek* magazine.

Today's troops are headed into the country's best health-care system—the VA. If you just did a double-take, it's time to look again at veterans

KEEPERS OF THE PROMISE



JASON POOLE IN IRAQ



ROAD TO RECOVERY



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY



AFFIRMING THE COMMITMENT



“The character of a nation can be measured by the way that nation treats its veterans.” - Author unknown