

# THE northern

The Official Voice of VA Northern California Health Care System

SPRING 2014

## IN THIS EDITION...

MANAGING  
YOUR PAIN

USING A SMARTPHONE TO  
MONITOR CHRONIC PAIN

CONSTRUCTION  
TIMELINE

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# A Welcome Letter from the Editor



Welcome to *The Northern*, a quarterly magazine focused on fostering the connection between our Veterans and their health care.

VA Northern California Health Care System (VANCHCS) is introducing this magazine during a time of exciting changes to our system. We have a new director, David Stockwell, who is dedicated to fostering the connection between the best health care and the best people—our Veterans. Shortly after Mr. Stockwell became director, I was appointed as the new public affairs officer. I am also dedicated to our Veterans, as I am an Operation Iraqi Freedom Army Veteran myself.

The communications team created this magazine in order to connect with you and provide meaningful information about what is happening around the health care system, as well as to announce new and innovative programs available for our Veterans.

Our goal is to be people-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking. We want to encourage you to take an active role in your health management and to read about some of the innovative research projects underway.

Thank you for trusting us to serve you!

Tara Ricks  
*Public Affairs Officer*

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### About the Publication

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## Join us for the Sacramento VA Medical Center's 8th Annual Memorial Day Ceremony

**Monday, May 26, 2014**

9:30 a.m. Pre-Program Entertainment  
10:00 a.m. Commemoration Program

**Memorial Plaza**  
Sacramento VA Medical Center  
10535 Hospital Way  
Mather, CA 95655

# Important Changes in Pain Management

**Y**our safety is our top priority. Because of increasing numbers of overdoses from opioid pain medications, the guidelines for prescribing pain medicine are changing across the country.



Your VA health care provider will be informing you of any changes that affect you.

## What changes will occur at VA Northern California Health Care System?

- For your safety we will require two provider visits per year to assess the safety and effectiveness of your pain regimen.
- Together we will need to discuss your pain regimen, after which you will be asked to sign an opioid agreement reflecting that discussion.
- Together we will need to make sure that it is safe to continue your pain regimen, which will require various evaluations including urine drug screens.
- Should we need to change your pain regimen, you will be offered alternative therapies.

## What do these changes mean for me?

- Your medications and treatments may change to be safer and more effective.
- You may be offered alternative treatments for your pain.

## What can I do?

- Start to take control of your health.
- Talk with your provider about the risks and benefits of your pain therapy.
- Discuss alternative options for pain treatment with your provider.

## Did you know?

- Rates of overdose deaths from opioids are five times higher now than in 1990.
- Accidental deaths can occur when people mix opioids with other drugs.
- Some side effects can occur with any dose, large or small.
- Often higher doses do not bring better pain relief.
- Even patients who have been on opioids for some time may be at risk for harm.
- Please let your provider know if you are under co-managed care and/or use medical marijuana.

## Some examples of opioids

- Hydrocodone (Norco®, Vicodin®)
- Morphine (MS Contin®)
- Oxycodone (Oxycontin®)
- Fentanyl (Duragesic®)
- Methadone (Methadose®)

Our goal is to help you and your family reach your greatest health potential.

To learn more about pain medicine safety, visit [www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/rxbrief/](http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/rxbrief/)

## Research Highlight

### Using a Smartphone to Monitor Chronic Pain

The Personalized Research for Monitoring Pain Treatment (PREEMPT) study, sponsored by the National Institute of Nursing Research, will test the use of technology in improving chronic pain management for Veterans across the VA Northern California Health Care System. Scientists from UC Davis, UC San Francisco, Brown University, and the VA have teamed up with computer programmers at Open mHealth and Cornell Tech to find ways for patients and health care providers to treat pain more effectively.

The research uses a smartphone application called the Trialist, which allows patients dealing with chronic pain and their providers to compare treatments by conducting a personalized experiment. Patients switch back and forth between two pain treatments, using the app to keep careful track of how they are doing.



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# MEET THE DIRECTOR



**A**fter getting some time to settle into his new role as Director of VA Northern California Health Care System, David Stockwell stopped by the Public Affairs Office to introduce himself and talk about his vision for our health care system, staff, and Veterans.

# CTOR

## Q&A with the Director, VA Northern California Health Care System



the first barcode system for logistics in the VA. I said that I could do it, and that project ended up saving the VA \$400,000 in one year and continues to save the VA money. It was a great accomplishment for me and made me realize I could make a difference. From there, I believed in VA's mission and vision to serve Veterans and help improve their lives. I went on to get a master's in health administration and, as they say, the rest is history.

**Everyone who works at the VA has a moment that really solidifies the reason our mission to help Veterans is important. What's your memorable moment?**

While I was working at the Alaska VA, I attended a fundraiser for the American Legion to help raise funds for their mobile gift shop for inpatient Veterans. Like at most fundraisers, there were auction items, and one of the items was this really old teddy bear that showed signs of years and years of love. No one had placed a bid on it yet, so I said, why not offer 20 bucks, and I won. As I went up to get the teddy bear, this woman started getting emotional. It was the bear her husband, a World War II Veteran, had given her 50 years ago, before he was killed in action. She had slept next to the teddy bear every night for 50 years, and now she wanted to pay it forward to other Veterans who needed help. Of course I gave it back to her, but it just amazes me what people are willing to sacrifice to help Veterans.

**What is one main vision you have for our Veterans in Northern California?**

A lot of people don't know this, but I am a type 1 diabetic. [Type 1 diabetes] is a disease in which the pancreas stops producing insulin. When I think of health care for my personal life, I think about all the people who took the time to educate me on how I could manage my own health. That is one of my primary goals for our Veterans; I absolutely want to ensure we are giving them all the tools they need to manage their health and well-being. The VA is not just about treating symptoms. It's about caring for our Veterans and their long-term health, and empowering them to be active participants in their health care.

**How did you get started with the VA?**

When I was a sophomore in college, I signed on for 90 days to work for the brand new VA medical center in Portland, OR, moving furniture for \$9.64 an hour. At that time, I was going to school for business, so I didn't really know what I wanted to do.

**What made you stay and pursue a career with the VA?**

I remember working at the supply warehouse with a little desk in the back corner. I overheard a conversation that my supply supervisor had about his vision to create



# VANCHCS Construction Timeline

Sacramento VA Medical Center — Consolidated Outpatient Surgical Specialty (COSS)



## Consolidated Outpatient Surgical Specialty (Sacramento)

Status: Open

Expected Milestone\*

Open

## Parking Structure (Sacramento)

Status: 225 new spaces

Open

## Behavioral Health Unit (Sacramento)

Status: Under construction

Spring 2014

## ED Expansion (Sacramento)

Status: Under construction

## Consolidate and Expand Medical Procedures (Sacramento)

Status: Construction drawings being finalized

Planned Start Spring 2014

## Medical Specialties Building (Sacramento)

Status: Construction drawings being finalized

September 2014 Award for Construction

## Consolidate and Expand Outpatient Mental Health (Martinez)

Status: Under construction

September 2014 Award for Construction

## Alameda Point (Oakland)

Status: Schedule is dependent on Congressional Appropriations and the VA's future construction budgets

Planned Activation Fall 2014

Property Expected to Be Conveyed from Navy to VA in 2014

## Neurocognitive Research Building (Martinez)

Status: Under design

Planned Design Complete FY 14 / Construction FY 15

## Single Consolidated Lease at Redding and Chico

Status: Team being assembled

Spring 2017

\* Dates are projected and subject to change. Look for more updates at <http://www.northern-california.med.va.gov/services/engineering/> and <https://www.facebook.com/VANCHCS>

# Healthy Recipes!

**S**pring is here, and warmer weather is on its way. Eating healthy and staying active are important ways that Veterans (and everyone else) can manage their health. Enjoy creating and devouring this great recipe from our dietitians!

## Spice Crusted Chicken Breast with Mango Salsa

(Yield: 6 servings)

### Ingredients

*For chicken:*

- 1 ½ lbs boneless, skinless chicken breasts (6 breasts, 4 oz each)
- 2 Tbsp ground coriander
- 2 Tbsp ground cumin
- 1 Tbsp fresh ground pepper
- 1 ½ tsp salt
- 2 Tbsp olive oil

*For mango salsa:*

- 3 cups ripe mango, cubed and peeled (about 2 large mangos)
- 1 cup green onions, finely chopped
- ½ cup fresh cilantro, minced
- 1 cup red bell pepper, diced
- ⅓ cup fresh lime juice
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 tsp sugar
- ½ tsp salt

### Preparation

*For chicken:*

1. Toast coriander, cumin, and pepper in a large, dry non-stick skillet over medium heat, stirring until aromatic, about 4–5 seconds. Transfer to a small bowl, add salt, and set aside.
2. Dredge both sides of each chicken breast with the spice mixture.
3. Heat olive oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium-high flame. Once hot, sauté chicken breasts 4–5 minutes each side or until no longer pink in the middle. The internal temperature of the chicken should read 165 degrees on a meat thermometer. Do not overcook or chicken will be tough.

*For mango salsa:*

1. Combine all ingredients in a bowl.
2. Toss well.
3. Cover and chill until ready to eat.
4. Place ½ cup of Mango Salsa over each chicken breast.



Nutrition information (per serving)

Calories: 235 kcals; Carbohydrates: 18g; Sodium: 865mg; Total fat: 6g

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Every day, patients use the app to answer questions about their pain and side effects. After the trial has ended, the patient and provider will review results based on answers that were entered into the app.

Around 250 patients will participate in the study, half using the app and half continuing with their regular care without the app. These two groups will be compared to see whether the patients using the app report better pain management.

Using this smartphone app allows patients to keep better track of their pain and allows for more personalized and patient-centered care.

If you would like more information about this current research study, please call Maria T. Stoecklin-Marois at 916-703-5643.

## Our Service Area

