

Take This Issue Home!

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# Veterans HEALTH MATTERS

AWARD WINNING Wellness Magazine for Veterans in Florida, South Georgia & the Caribbean



**INSIDE:**  
*Hepatitis C:  
What You  
Need to  
Know*

## TO OUR READERS

A New Year is nearly upon us! With that comes new opportunities to make good health care choices!



One way to do that is by using VA mobile applications. Check them out at [mobile.va.gov](http://mobile.va.gov). Find great resources for managing your VA health care, keeping track of medication, managing your weight, quitting tobacco and more! Read more about this on page 3, and to the right.

Hepatitis C is a dangerous virus that affects thousands of people, especially Vietnam Veterans. Read more on pages 4 and 5 to see if you are at risk. And, learn about new treatments for Veterans.

The holiday season is always a joyous time! But we can easily forget to watch how much food we're consuming. On page 6, Simone S. Canty, a registered dietitian at the Orlando VA Medical Center, offers tips for enjoying the holidays without overdoing it.

Be well!

Miguel LaPuz, M.D., MPA  
Network Director, VISN 8

# Get Answers with Ask a Pharmacist



Ask a Pharmacist is a new mobile app at the VA App Store. It gives Veterans easy access to trusted VA sources for information on VA medications and pharmacies.

Ask a Pharmacist helps Veterans answer basic pharmacy and medication questions, such as "where is my nearest VA pharmacy located?" or "how can I identify my pills by sight?" Veterans can also access the app on any mobile device, making it easy to get answers quickly.

The app links directly to certain resources, including My HealthVet, VA's personal health record for Veterans with Advanced or Premium My HealthVet accounts.

Any Veteran receiving VA health care is eligible for a My HealthVet Advanced account that allows them to sign up to refill prescriptions online. Besides prescription refills, Veterans with a Premium Account can also use Secure Messaging to talk with their VA care teams. Visit My HealthVet at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) to learn how to obtain or upgrade a My HealthVet account.

More information and materials can be accessed on the VA App Store at [mobile.va.gov/app/ask-a-pharmacist](http://mobile.va.gov/app/ask-a-pharmacist). To learn more about available VA Mobile Apps, visit [mobile.va.gov/appstore](http://mobile.va.gov/appstore) or read the article on page 3.

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# VA's Mobile Apps Help Veterans Manage Their Health

Did you know? VA has launched a number of mobile apps to help Veterans live healthier lives. These apps make it possible for Veterans to receive medical information and stay in touch with their VA care team from wherever they are at any time.

Download these applications from the VA App Store:  
[mobile.va.gov/appstore](http://mobile.va.gov/appstore).

New to mobile devices and using applications?  
There's also app-specific training materials available at  
[mobile.va.gov/training/veterans](http://mobile.va.gov/training/veterans).



## Featured Apps:



### VA Launchpad for Veterans

[mobile.va.gov/app/va-launchpad-care-teams](http://mobile.va.gov/app/va-launchpad-care-teams)

Whether you are a Veteran or a VA Provider, the VA Launchpad houses apps designed to help you connect to VA's Electronic Health Record (EHR). By signing into the VA Launchpad once, you can access multiple VA Apps without logging in to each individually.



### Veteran Appointment Request App

[mobile.va.gov/app/veteran-appointment-request](http://mobile.va.gov/app/veteran-appointment-request)

The Veteran Appointment Request (VAR) App allows you to request primary care and mental health appointments at VA facilities where you already receive care. You can also schedule and cancel selected primary care appointments directly through the app.



### Stay Quit Coach

[mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach](http://mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach)

The Stay Quit Coach App was designed to help Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) quit smoking. Get tools for controlling cravings, reminder messages and support links.



### MOVE!® Coach App

[mobile.va.gov/app/move-coach](http://mobile.va.gov/app/move-coach)

MOVE!® Coach is a weight-management app that provides education, tools and guidance designed to help you meet your weight and health goals. You can monitor, track and receive feedback regarding your progress. It helps motivate you to successfully overcome challenges and meet your goals.



### Mindfulness Coach

[mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach](http://mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach)

Mindfulness Coach was designed to help Veterans, service members and others learn how to practice mindfulness. That means paying attention, on purpose, to whatever is going on in the present moment without passing judgment on it.



### Ask a Pharmacist

[mobile.va.gov/app/ask-a-pharmacist](http://mobile.va.gov/app/ask-a-pharmacist)

If you are a Veteran, the Ask a Pharmacist App allows you to access information about VA pharmacies and medication easily — with the comfort of knowing the information is valid and from trusted sources. Read more about this app on page 2.

**Apps Coming Soon:** My Goals App; Secure Messaging App; RX Refill App; Mission Health App; Pain Coach App

# New Treatments for Hepatitis C Offer Hope

*High cure rates with less side effects and shorter treatment time*

By Ed Drohan

## What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a viral disease. Those at risk often have received blood products, have homemade tattoos or piercings, or have used intravenous (IV) drugs. They may also have had unprotected sex with multiple partners. Hepatitis C causes cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease and liver cancer. Most people do not have any symptoms or show any immediate signs of infection, so it may go undetected for decades. Vietnam Veterans and those born between 1945 and 1965 are at a high risk.



*New treatment regimens for patients with chronic Hepatitis C have a very high success rate: 95 to 99 percent are cured of the disease. Treatment of the blood-borne virus is 12 weeks, down from a year, and at reduced risk. A blood test can detect the disease.*

## How do you know you have Hepatitis C?

Blood tests can determine a Hepatitis C infection. Tests can also detect the specific strain – or genome – of the virus. This is necessary to know so that doctors can determine which treatment to use. Jaela Dahl, VA infectious disease pharmacist, says one big problem is getting people in for treatment.

“If you have Hepatitis C, you don’t necessarily feel like you have Hepatitis C,” Dahl said. “You don’t really have symptoms and you won’t have symptoms until the disease progresses. So you can live 20, 30 years and not really know.”

## New treatments have higher cure rate

New drugs have been developed to target specific strains of the virus. These are more effective with fewer side effects than past treatments.

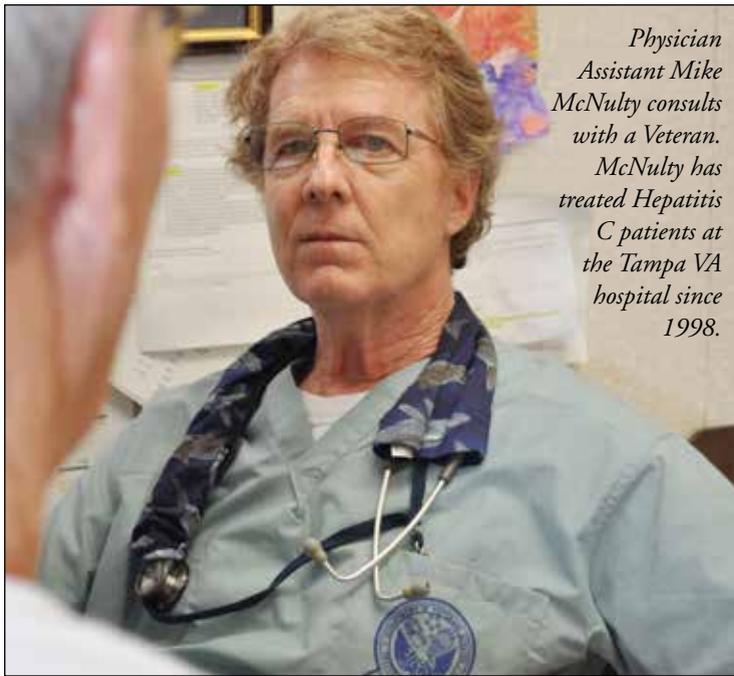
Past treatments often had severe side effects that were difficult for patients to handle. And, previous treatments only had about a 40 to 50 percent cure rate, says Mike McNulty, a physician assistant at the Tampa VA’s GI Clinic. The new treatments have a 95 to 99 percent cure rate with little to no side effects. Patients only need to take one or two pills a day for 12 weeks, rather than weekly injections for a year.

The new treatments can be expensive. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* estimates the cost between \$25,000 and \$68,000 for 12 weeks of treatment for one patient. Congress has approved funding for Hepatitis C treatment. The VA is trying to get every patient who has tested positive for Hepatitis C to be further evaluated for treatment.

## Get tested now

VA hospitals encourage every patient to be tested for Hepatitis C. You may not have any symptoms until the disease is very advanced. If you have tested positive for Hepatitis C, then seek treatment immediately. Veterans with questions on Hepatitis C testing or evaluation should contact their Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT).





*Physician Assistant Mike McNulty consults with a Veteran. McNulty has treated Hepatitis C patients at the Tampa VA hospital since 1998.*

## Should I get tested?

If you answer yes to any of the following questions, talk with your health care provider about being tested for Hepatitis C:

- Have not yet been tested and wish to be
- Was born between 1945 and 1965
- Have ever used a needle to inject drugs, even if once and long ago
- Had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992
- Are a health care worker who had blood exposure to mucous membranes or to non-intact skin, or a needle stick injury
- Was on long-term kidney dialysis
- Was born of a mother who had Hepatitis C at the time
- Are a Vietnam-era Veteran
- Had contact with Hepatitis C-positive blood to non-intact skin or to mucous membranes
- Received tattoos or body piercings in non-regulated settings
- Have ever snorted drugs or shared equipment
- Have liver disease or an abnormal liver function test
- Have a history of alcohol abuse
- Have hemophilia and received clotting factor before 1987
- Have had a sexual partner with Hepatitis C, now or in the past
- Have had 10 or more lifetime sexual partners
- Have HIV infection

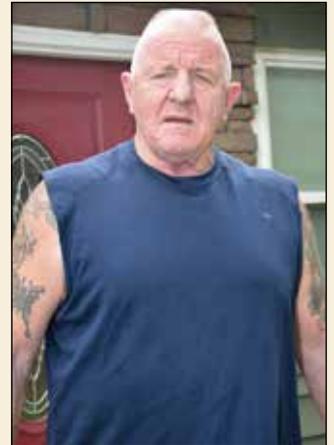
*You need blood tests to find out if you have Hepatitis C. If you are diagnosed, you can get the health care and support you need. You'll also need to learn how to avoid giving the virus to others.*

# Veteran Grateful for Cure

*By Ed Drohan*

Paul Munroe has been free of the Hepatitis C virus for more than a year now thanks to a new drug.

The 68-year-old Marine Corps Veteran was treated with Harvoni, one of the newer drugs for treating Hepatitis C. He's happy he only had to take one pill a day for 12 weeks.



*Paul Munroe, U.S. Marine Corps Veteran*

Munroe has no idea how or when he became infected with the virus, which can cause cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease and liver cancer if left untreated. But being a Veteran born between 1945 and 1965, he is in the group at highest risk for the disease. Munroe began treatment not long after being diagnosed, but struggled to find the right regimen at first.

Two previous attempts to beat the virus had been unsuccessful. They included different, much less effective medications and regimens that sometimes included painful injections. The new treatments have a cure rate of about 95 percent and few side effects.

When he was told about Harvoni, he was ready to try it. He said it's the best thing he's ever done.

"This saved my life," Munroe said.

# Making Healthier Holiday Choices



By Simone S. Canty, Registered Dietitian  
Orlando VA Medical Center

The holidays are my favorite time of the year. There's something about the music, the gathering of family and friends, the kindness of strangers, the decorations and the bustling of shoppers that's just delightful.

Even as a dietitian, I have struggled with the scale during the holidays. Like most people, I've gained weight during these joyous times. I often have the notion of making a promise to myself to take it off in the New Year.

What I've learned and science has told us is that if we make small changes during the holidays, we may not gain as much weight as we think.

A classic study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*<sup>1</sup> suggested that Americans gain, on average, about one pound during the winter holiday. This is contrary to the popular belief that we often gain five pounds or more.

No, it doesn't mean we can eat only vegetables or salads. Enjoy the holidays and incorporate small changes.

Here are five tips to help you manage your weight during the holidays from ChooseMyPlate.gov.



### 1. Choose lean protein

Turkey, roast beef, fresh ham, beans, and some types of fish, such as cod or flounder, are lean protein choices. Trim the fat before cooking meats. Go easy on the sauces and gravies. They can be high in saturated fat and sodium.



### 4. Bake healthier

Use recipes with unsweetened applesauce or mashed ripe bananas instead of butter. Try cutting the amount of sugar listed in recipes in half. Use spices to add flavor, such as cinnamon, allspice or nutmeg instead of salt.



### 2. Enjoy all the food groups

Prepare whole-grain crackers with hummus as an appetizer. Add unsalted nuts and black beans to a green-leaf salad. Include fresh fruit at the dessert table. Use low-fat milk instead of heavy cream in your casseroles.



### 5. Make exercise a part of the fun

Make being active part of your holiday tradition. Have fun walking and dancing with family and friends after a holiday meal. Researchers have found those that do regular physical activity had less holiday weight gain.



### 3. Cheers to good health

Quench your thirst with low-calorie options. Drink water with lemon or lime slices. Offer seltzer water with a splash of 100% fruit juice.



Other helpful tips and resources can be found at [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov).

<sup>1</sup>Yanovski JA, Yanovski SZ, Sovik KN, Nguyen TT, O'Neil PM, Sebring NG. A prospective study of holiday weight gain. *N Engl J Med*. 2000;342(23):861-867.



**FREE Wi-Fi**



## Guest Wi-Fi Coming to a VA Hospital Near You

All medical centers in the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network in Florida and Puerto Rico will soon offer free wireless internet or “Wi-Fi.” All Veterans and visitors will be able to access this service in the main hospital areas, including inpatient rooms.

Similar to what’s used in the commercial sector, the Wi-Fi network at VISN 8 hospitals will be high speed and secure. But be careful not to transmit sensitive data, such as health information, social security numbers, and credit card information.

### Wi-Fi Live Schedule

The Orlando VA Medical Center and the James A. Haley Veterans’ Hospital in Tampa are already operating their wireless networks in certain areas. The West Palm Beach VA has had free guest Wi-Fi in several select areas, like their library, for some time now. It will be expanded throughout the main hospital.

The VA hospitals at Bay Pines in St. Petersburg, Fla., and in San Juan, PR, should have their free Wi-Fi networks operational by the end of 2016. The medical centers in Gainesville, Fla., and Lake City, Fla., should be online by the end of March 2017. The Miami VA will follow in early spring and the West Palm Beach VA in summer 2017.

### How to Connect

To access the free Wi-Fi service at any VISN 8 medical center, follow these simple instructions:

- On your wireless device, view the available wireless networks. Select the following wireless network (a.k.a., SSID):  
**SSID: Public\_Wifi\_VISN8**
- Once connected, an authentication page should automatically launch. If it doesn’t, open any browser and go to any website.
- Read the “Acceptable Use Policy” and click Accept. You will be redirected to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov). Once you see that page, you are free to use the free Wi-Fi service.



## FEATURED Recipe!

# Spiced Sweet Potato Casserole

### Ingredients

- 12 oz. can evaporated milk (2%)
- 4 medium sweet potatoes
- 3 egg whites
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon (or nutmeg, if you like)

### Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Cut sweet potatoes into pieces and place in boiling water. Cook 15 to 20 minutes and drain. Remove skin from sweet potatoes and mash with hand beater or a fork. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix until smooth. Pour mixture into an 8x8 baking pan. Bake until casserole is firm in the center, about 40 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to stand for 5 minutes. Cut into 10 squares. Serve hot.



**Nutritional Information:** Serves 10. Per serving: 123 calories, 0.7 g total fat, 6 mg cholesterol, 25 g carbohydrates, 4 g dietary fiber, 75 mg sodium, and 2 g protein.

Recipe courtesy of What’s Cooking? USDA Mixing Bowl. To find more healthy recipes, visit [www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov](http://www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov).

## CORRECTION

from Fall Magazine 2016

### Smoking Quitline

Any Veteran receiving health care through VA is eligible to use the Quit VET quitline.

**Call 1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838)** to speak with a tobacco cessation counselor Monday-Friday.



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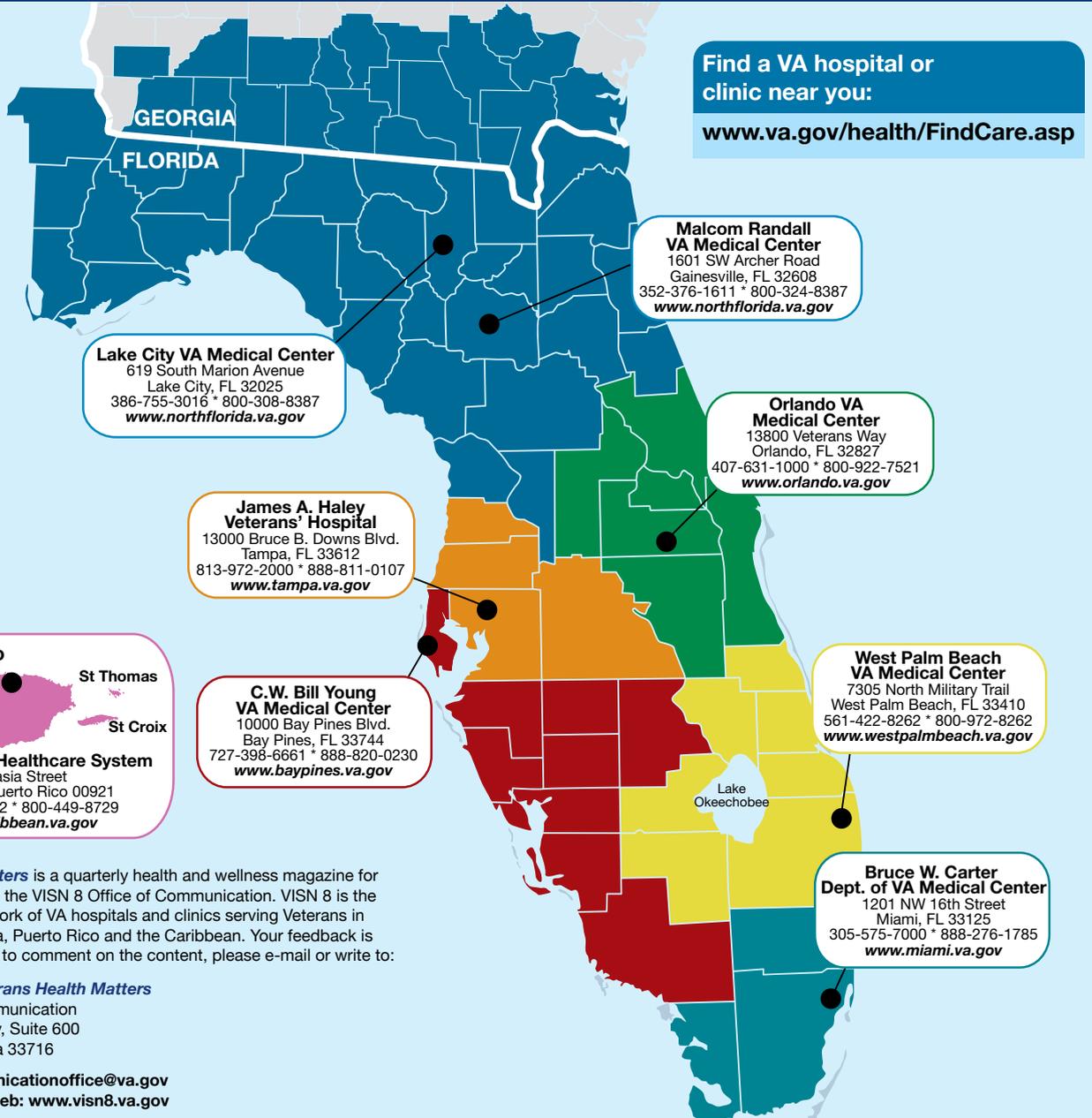
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## VA Sunshine Healthcare Network

[www.visn8.va.gov](http://www.visn8.va.gov)



at all  
Medical Centers



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