

Miami Veteran

Miami VA Healthcare System
Spring/Summer 2013

Your Choice, Your Health

Quick tips
to improve
your health
now and in
the future

A stylized tree with a brown trunk and branches, set against a dark blue background. The leaves are large and colorful, including shades of green, red, and blue. The tree is positioned on the right side of the page, with its branches extending towards the center and left.

CHECK IT OUT!

Healthy Living
poster on page 8



**YOU ARE NOT IN THE
MILITARY ANYMORE.**

**MAKE YOUR APPOINTMENTS
WHEN IT'S CONVENIENT FOR**

YOU

*Now scheduling primary care
appointments until 6 p.m.
and on Saturdays.*

You've earned the services we provide;
now get them when you want.

CONTACT

your primary care provider to learn more about our flexible appointment scheduling at our main campus and our Broward County Outpatient Clinic.

O UR LIVES

are filled with choices. What to eat, what to do, where to go; these choices add up. As a Registered Dietitian, I spent years helping Veterans learn how to eat better and teaching them how their food and nutrition choices affected their health. Now, as the Director of the Miami VA Healthcare System, I am proud to say that we offer a range of classes, programs and events that help teach Veterans a wide variety of healthy living options.

From exercise to nutrition, recreational therapies to basic life skills – the staff at the Miami VA can help Veterans tackle almost anything in the transition to civilian life. This edition shows how the partnership between patient and provider gives Veterans the tools they need to succeed. There are stories about Veterans overcoming devastating injuries, links to useful websites, innovative programs that give Veterans the chance to learn new skills, plus general health information that we can always use.

Healthy living means healthy choices and every month we hold classes promoting nine of the most effective ways you can improve your health. As you read this issue, we cover topics such as eating better, exercising more, drinking less and quitting smoking, along with information on how to connect with Miami VA and online resources to help you meet your goals. Just know that we will support you every step of the way!

This edition also has information on the Affordable Care Act, which gives every American the chance to enroll for healthcare. If you have questions about how the new healthcare law will impact you and your family, visit www.va.gov/aca or ask one of our staff for the ACA fact sheets we have available. Remember: As a Veteran who receives care at the Miami VA, you



Letter from the Director

won't have to do anything to meet the health insurance requirements.

It's never too late to come to VA for the programs and services that help Veterans make the civilian transition and we will be happy to help you anyway we can. It is our honor to serve you.

The Miami Healthcare System has excellent clinical programs though we are not without opportunities for improvement in parking and telephone access. These are focused areas for improvement going forward in our commitment

to provide exceptional healthcare to Veterans and your caregivers.

Being your first choice for healthcare is my primary goal for the Miami VA Healthcare System and I am proud that so many Veterans in South Florida come to us for primary, specialty and mental health care.

Paul M. Russo, MSHA, FACHE, RD
Director, Miami VA Healthcare System

Never Stop MOVING

Finding a new mission in life



While driving down a Connecticut road on a cold winter day in late 2012, Matt Kleemann swerved to miss a deer, hit a patch of ice and woke up in a hospital unsure of what happened to him.

"It opened my eyes to a lot of new things," he said.

Gesturing to around his diaphragm, "I'm a T-8 complete para," meaning he completely severed his spinal cord at his eighth thoracic vertebrae. He has no feeling from his bellybutton down.

After surviving the accident and undergoing several surgeries in Connecticut, Kleemann was transferred to the Miami VA to be closer to his family in South Florida and start his road to recovery. Little did he know that road would include sailing, waterskiing and horseback riding with the help of people like Brooke Westmorland, and the occupational therapy team at the Miami VA Healthcare System.

"Once I got here, Brooke came and said you want to go horseback riding, you want to try hand cycling,

you want to try sailing? When I was an inpatient here, I got really involved in everything they offered, sports-wise and really enjoyed it."

Enlisting at the age of 17, Kleemann always knew he wanted a job that would allow him as much time in the water as possible. He had spent his youth waterskiing and fishing in the warm waters off the South Florida coast, and developed a passion for diving that led him to the Navy. He was subsequently stationed at Naval Submarine Base New London, in Connecticut where he helped maintain and repair the ships docked at the New England naval base.

"I've grown up on boats and stuff, but never actually sailed. I had a lot of fun doing it," Kleemann said, recalling his first day outside of the hospital in months to Shake-A-Leg Marina in Miami.

"They let us actually sail and taught us to do everything. It felt really good to be back out on the water doing something fun."

That first outing opened up a world of possibilities for Kleemann, "Before I didn't realize how many adaptive sports there were. It really opened my eyes to a lot of different things. I wanted to do more."

Veterans at the Miami VA participate in a wide range of adaptive sports, recreational and occupational therapy programs designed specifically for them. These opportunities include sailing, swimming, bowling, horseback riding, scuba diving, cycling, rock climbing and archery.

"Besides the health related benefits and reduction of secondary medical conditions, adaptive sports have proven that the individual builds confidence while accepting one's disability," said Westmoreland, who also helps run the adaptive sports program. "Reduction in depression with an increase in vigor, self-esteem, relationships; as well as greater possibility for employment or returning to school," are also some of the benefits that come from participating in adaptive sports programs Westmoreland said.

Since that first outing Kleemann has participated in multiple adaptive

sports programs. These programs allow for a unique learning environment, allow him to meet others in a similar condition. "I was at a camp in Alabama. I met this one kid. He was a quad and he pushed a manual wheelchair and he really inspired me."

Kleemann trains nearly every day to participate in events like the Veteran's National Wheelchair games that took place this last July, participating in different activities and classes to help improve his skills and endurance. Some of these classes, like the advanced wheelchair training have real world applications in addition to preparing for events like the wheelchair slalom. In this class Veterans learn to negotiate the world in a wheelchair, going up and down stairs, curbs and escalators.

"I really had no idea people were so advanced with wheelchairs. They had no barriers. I never really thought about people going down stairs in wheelchairs," said Kleemann.

To see him now, Kleemann makes it look easy but it didn't start out that way. "I did fall," he said, remembering his first time attempting to go down stairs. "It was definitely hard, being right after surgery. I was in a lot of pain. It was pretty tough." Now he can go down escalators, several stairs, and roll up over curbs and through gravel.

Only six months after his initial injury, Kleemann participated in five events at the Wheelchair Games in Tampa, Fla., including hand cycling, swimming, archery, basketball and a water skiing clinic.

"My goals were to do good in the slalom, medal in the swimming; I'm not much of a basketball player, but it was fun," said Kleemann of his expectations for the games. "It's



Determined. Matt Kleemann and Occupational Therapist Brooke Westmoreland train for the 33rd Annual Wheelchair Games in Tampa (above). Kleemann also takes part in other activities such as riding horses (left).

"It hasn't been a hard transition, because I'm so lucky to be alive."

- Matt Kleemann

exciting to meet people from all over and to meet the other Veterans, [and to] meet people my age. You're around people who have to deal with the same stuff you have to deal with, which is good."

For most the transition to a completely new way of life would be difficult. But just months after his injury Kleemann has a positive outlook and is already making plans for the future.

"It hasn't been a hard transition, because I'm so lucky to be alive," said Kleemann.

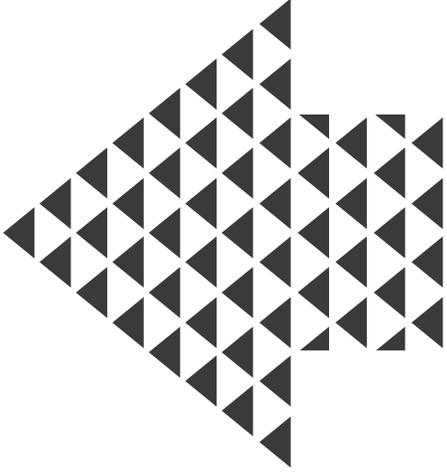
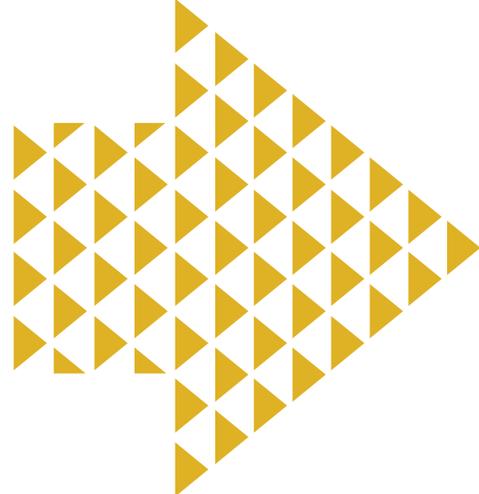
Once his recovery is complete, Kleemann will most likely be discharged from the Navy. Drawing

inspiration from others he met with spinal cord injuries, he then plans to go to college to study the same thing that helped him so much. "I want to start going to school to study recreation therapy. I want to be able to work in a spinal cord unit and show the newly injured the tricks they showed me.

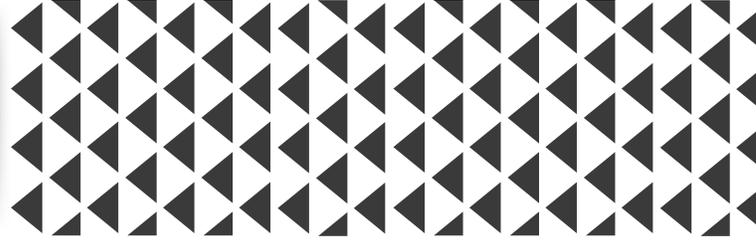
"They showed me that just because you're in a wheelchair doesn't mean you can't do what you used to."



HOPE



PURPOSE



Part of what make South Florida such a special place for Veterans are the community partners who work with the Miami VA Healthcare System to make sure every Veteran has the chance to heal and transition into civilian life. This is the story of Marine Corps Veteran Kathryn Hernandez and how two of these community partners have helped her find a purpose after serving.



I moved to Miami two years ago after serving six years in the United States Marine Corps in order to continue my education and graduate with

a bachelor's degree. When I entered the Marines, I left a small town where I knew everyone and could easily plug into the community. Now I found myself in a large city where I didn't know where to plug in. I also couldn't relate to any 18-year-old college students. The transition of leaving the military left me adrift. I changed my major three times; trying and discarding Psychology and Nutrition before settling on Recreational Therapy, and seriously contemplated dropping out. I had

lost interest in many activities that I had previously enjoyed immensely, including running and volunteering. All of that changed, however, when I learned about The Mission Continues.

The Mission Continues is a nonprofit organization that challenges Post 9-11 Veterans to become citizen leaders by answering the call to serve their local communities. During the six-month fellowship, Veterans serve at local nonprofits with the ultimate goal of identifying and renewing Veterans' sense of purpose, leading to employment or higher education and continued service to the community.

I served my fellowship at the local nonprofit Veterans Ocean Adventures (VOA). VOA brings the culture of water that is pervasive to the South Florida to Veterans who might not otherwise get the chance to experience the healing power of water. Through Couples Sunset Sails, kayaking, Learn to Sail classes and an introduction to SCUBA course, Veterans are able to relax, have fun, and find solace among the waves.

Through my fellowship with Veterans Ocean Adventures, I have seen first-hand the impact these

recreational activities have had on Veterans who participate. I have seen an apprehensive Veteran gain amazing self-confidence during rock-climbing sessions, and attack and conquer the rock wall as if he had been doing it for years. I have listened to multiple stories of the struggles individuals have gone through and how being out on the sailboat, listening to nothing but the waves calms them. One Veteran told me that if it weren't for the amazing VOA staff he and his wife wouldn't have taken a Couples Cruise.

My fellowship with The Mission Continues helped me define and set goals through its leadership training and monthly assignments. My service with Veterans Ocean Adventures helped me reintegrate by helping me reconnect with the community. I'm now dedicated to school, am enthusiastic about my Recreational Therapy major and am training to run the Marine Corps Marathon in the fall. Even after my fellowship, I plan to continue to serve my community and inspire other Veterans to become citizen leaders as well.

To learn more about recreational therapy options available at the Miami VA, ask your primary care provider to speak to the Recreational Therapy Service.

take CHARGE of your HEALTH

Every Veteran has a unique story. Serving in peace time or war time, on the front lines or in support – everyone’s life story has its own twists and turns. A person’s health history is no different. That’s why, with the help of the Miami VA Healthcare System’s team of healthcare staff we are working to ensure that every Veteran can take charge of their health and make the right choices when it comes to eating, exercising and living wisely.

To make this easier, VA has selected nine health-related topics that every Veteran can address to improve their health. Our goal at VA is to help each Veteran reach their optimum health and activity level and to give them the tools to stay healthy.

Our team approach is a great way to bring primary care, mental health, specialty care and social well being together, but the most important part of the equation is the Veteran. When Veterans take charge of their health, the results can be amazing.



Small
changes
can lead to
BIG RESULTS –
and the
Miami VA
can help.

HEALTHY LIVING

You Can Make it Happen

Eat Wisely-

Healthy eating can bring the rest of your health goals into reach! Giving your body what it needs to be healthy is the first step toward a healthy lifestyle

Be Physically Active-

Your body was meant to move! Just 30 minutes of walking a day can lead to huge health benefits. You will be amazed at what you are capable of!

Be Tobacco Free-

Quitting tobacco leads to immediate and lifelong health benefits, so talk to your primary care provider today about the wide range of

Limit Alcohol-

Know when to stop. Alcohol can lead to poor decisions, chronic illness and in some cases dependency. When you are ready to quit, we can help.

Be Involved With Your Healthcare-

Your doctors are only as good as the information you give them - and your

Be Safe-

tobacco cessation programs the Miami VA offers.

Prevention is the best medicine.

you give them, and your treatment is only as good as your participation. If you don't understand anything about your medical condition, never be afraid to ask!

Strive for a Healthy Weight

Get Recommended Screening Tests & Immunizations

Manage Stress

Everyday is a new chance for **A Better Life**

The decisions we all make everyday – what to eat, what to drink, if we exercise or smoke or get our vaccinations – these choices are the fastest way to a healthy life. VA can help you learn how to make these healthy choices while helping you kick some bad habits you may have picked up along the way.

Use this poster as a reminder to make the best choices for your health and your life. By eating a little better, exercising a little more and cutting out some high risk activities, you will be amazed at how much better you will feel and how much more you can enjoy your life.

Miami VA | Defining **EXCELLENCE**
Healthcare System | **VA HEALTH CARE** in the 21st Century
★★★★★

• www.miami.va.gov • www.facebook.com/vamiami •

Equal Service = Equal Healthcare



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION

2013

LEADER

IN

LGBT HEALTHCARE EQUALITY

HEALTHCARE EQUALITY INDEX™

The Miami VA Healthcare System has been recognized as a "Leader in LGBT Healthcare Equality" by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation for its commitment to equitable, inclusive care for LGBT patients and their families, who can face significant challenges in securing adequate healthcare.

"I'm proud to say that all Veterans are welcome at the Miami VA Healthcare System and that it is an honor to serve the men and women who have fought for our freedoms, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity," said Paul Russo, Director of the Miami VA Healthcare System.

For more information about the Healthcare Equality Index 2013, or to download a free copy of the report, visit www.hrc.org/hei.

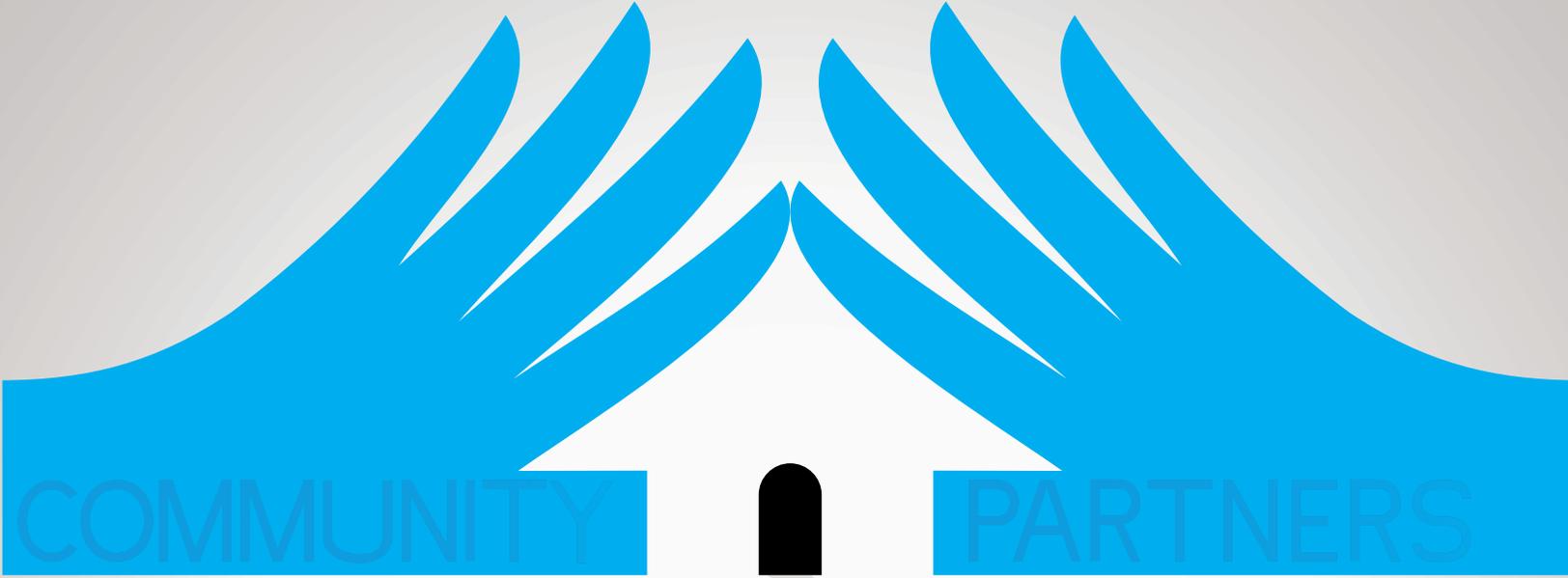


MEET YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND.

Flu Season can be more than miserable – it can be deadly.

200,000 thousand Americans are hospitalized every year because they don't take the simple (and safe) steps necessary to protect themselves from the flu.

Flu shots are **FAST, FREE** and available now.



Until they all have a place to call home



"If it weren't for the people in this room, I'd be dead. Simple as that."

For the homeless and those struggling with addictions, knowing that someone is ready to help can make all the difference. In South Florida, entire communities of support exist to help Veterans leave the streets and overcome whatever issues led to them living on the streets.

"On paper, I was successful. I had a Masters Degree, had a good job, had some money," said Brian Coleman during the annual Miami-Dade and Broward Counties Homeless Summit & CHALENG meeting. "But then my addictions, well, they got in the way of that. As a result of that kind of living, it brought me to my knees."

Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) for Veterans, brings VA and community homeless agencies together to enhance the continuum of care for homeless Veterans. The guiding principle behind Project CHALENG is that no single agency can provide the full spectrum of services required, but that together they can all play a part to help homeless Veterans become productive members of society.

Coleman soon found himself chasing his addictions and losing everything. It was then he found VA and all the local community partners that allowed him to heal and begin his journey toward success.



Motivated for Change. Eugene Cheatham, a social worker with the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans explains the VA Outreach program to community partners.

"With HUD/VASH, I didn't have to worry about where I was going to sleep. I could worry about the things I needed to work on, if it weren't for that I'm sure I'd be dead," he said.

During the last year, the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Program has helped more than 3,000 Veterans with various services. This includes housing more than 500 Veterans with HUD/VASH vouchers that combine housing choice vouchers from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and intensive case management from the Miami VA Healthcare System.

For more information about the Miami VA's Healthcare for Homeless Veterans programs, visit www.miami.va.gov/MIAMI/services/homeless.



VA Healthcare, the Affordable Care Act and You

Veterans receiving VA Healthcare don't need to take additional steps to meet the new healthcare law standards.

If you aren't enrolled for VA Healthcare, visit www.va.gov, call (877) 222-8387 or visit your local VA medical center to apply.

For more information about VA Healthcare eligibility, the Affordable Care Act and how the law will affect you – visit www.va.gov/aca.



State of the Art Technology. Navy Veteran and Miami VA Community Living Center resident Anne Margaret Parkhurst shows off her new touchscreen television and patient care system.

Bringing the (virtual) world to Veterans' bedsides

Being connected to friends and family has never been easier. Mobile phones, tablet computers, video chat and nearly ubiquitous internet access are, for many Veterans, a big part of their everyday lives. Now, Veterans staying at the Miami VA will have access to internet, TV, entertainment and patient education without having to leave their hospital bed.

Inpatients at the Bruce W. Carter VA Medical Center in Miami have had touchscreen access to television, movies, patient education and the Internet since the beginning of last summer when more than 230 monitors from the GetWellNetwork, Inc., were installed in inpatient rooms. For the patients staying at the

Miami VA for medical procedures, this system is a major step forward in terms of improving the patient experience.

"We are proud to be the first VA in Florida to be using this system," said Paul Russo, director of the Miami VA Healthcare System. "VA has always been very forward thinking in using technology to better serve our Veterans, but this system brings everything all into one place in a very easy to use way."

"The system is very easy to use," said Anne Margaret Parkhurst, a Navy Veteran and Community Living Center resident. "I'm glad they have this for the Veterans here."

By using GetWellNetwork, the Miami VA will also

be able to eventually connect to the patient monitoring system allowing for pain management, ordering meals, communication with medical staff and medical education sessions based upon each individual patient's need.

In addition to being the first VA in Florida to adopt this system, the Miami VA is also testing adaptive equipment for Veterans who don't have use of their arms. Using a "sip and puff" mechanism similar to what many Veterans use in their powered wheelchairs, paralyzed patients are able to scroll through menus, select channels, change the volume and have access to the interactive system on their own terms instead of having to call for assistance.

Envisioning a ^{Better} Life

Most of the time couples and families can work through the issues that come up in any relationship. Add the stress of returning from combat or leaving the military though, and sometimes it can become overwhelming.

Marriage and Family Therapists are highly trained mental health professionals who bring a family oriented perspective to therapy. They believe that to affect change, individuals and problems/issues must be seen within the context that is often the most complex: the family.

Research continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of marriage and family therapy in treating the full range of mental and emotional disorders and health problems and the Miami VA Healthcare System is pleased to announce the addition of Marriage and Family Counseling to the many services already being offered to our Veterans and their families.

Led by Grace Cleves, the Miami VA offers a "Solution-Focused" perspective, focusing on the present and future rather than dwelling on the past. Using this method, Grace helps Veterans in recognizing and using their gifts in order to address their interpersonal and/or family issues.

This approach allows clients and/or their families to use present moment attributes to help them envision what their preferred future will be like, thus providing a greater, more realistic method for enhancing their lives and resolving intrapersonal relationships.

Grace stated, "I really enjoy working with individuals and families in helping them identify what may be interfering with their success, rediscover and develop more skills to overcome their problems and achieve their stated goals," said Cleves, a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who is currently providing services to Veterans, couples, and families.

Regardless of whether the Veterans consider it an "individual" or "family" issue, involving families in solutions often benefits them. This involvement of families is commonly accomplished by their direct participation in the therapy session. The skills of the family therapist thus include the ability to influence conversations in a way that catalysis the strengths, wisdom, and support of the wider system.

It has been discovered that problems do not happen all the time. Even the most chronic problems have periods or times when the difficulties do not occur or are less intense. By studying these times when problems are less severe or even absent, we discovered that people do many positive things that they are not fully aware of. By bringing these small successes into their awareness and repeating the successful things they do when the problem is less severe, people improve their lives and become more confident about themselves.

And, of course, there is nothing like experiencing small successes to help a person become more hopeful about themselves and their life. When they are more hopeful, they become more interested in creating a better life for themselves and their families. They become more hopeful about their future and want to achieve more.

Everyone experiences stress, sadness and anxiety from time to time – it's part of life. But when changes in mood interfere with your ability to work, sleep, eat, and activities that were once enjoyed and pleasurable, it is time to ask for help.

Veterans requesting or interested in receiving this type of counseling can request a consult to Psychology for Marriage and Family Counseling from their primary care provider.



Agents for Change. Grace Cleves and social worker Michelle Cartagena work together to help Veterans achieve their goals.

Miami Veterans lead the way at National Wheelchair Games

In the United States there are approximately 100,000 paralyzed Veterans and countless others are mobility impaired either due to service-related injuries, disease or accidents. For those who receive care at the Miami VA Healthcare System, the message to wheelchair users is simple – we will help adapt and overcome.

There is no better example of the drive and determination Veterans possess than at the National Wheelchair Games. The 33rd annual games were held in Tampa, FL, this year and featured Veterans from around the country; including a large team from South Florida.

To get ready to compete, many of the Veterans participated in weekly training sessions to improve in both their individual sport and in general fitness. Led by Miami VA staff, this year the team had the chance to practice and train with Paralympian Scott Danberg, who competes on the U.S. Paralympic team in the discus event.

For the Miami VA team, the results could hardly have been better. 35 medals, including 15 gold medals in events like weightlifting, bowling, archery and hand-cycling.



In it to Win. Veterans from around South Florida use the annual wheelchair games for motivation as they recover from their injuries.

“We are so proud of our Veterans when they are able to participate in events like this”, said Alejandra Zuniga, Therapy Supervisor with Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders Service. “It’s a tribute to the hard work of our Veterans and the staff in Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service.”

The Miami VA Healthcare System Spinal Cord Injury Unit serves more than 400 Veterans recovering from and adapting to various degrees of paralyzation, and helps Veterans learn how to live healthy and full lives.

Photos and videos of the Miami VA Adaptive Sports team can be found at www.facebook.com/vamiami.

Miami VA AT THE 33rd Games

WINNINGS



Willie Green

won 3 gold medals alone

5 the highest number of medals won this year by one person - Thomas Donald



FUN FACT

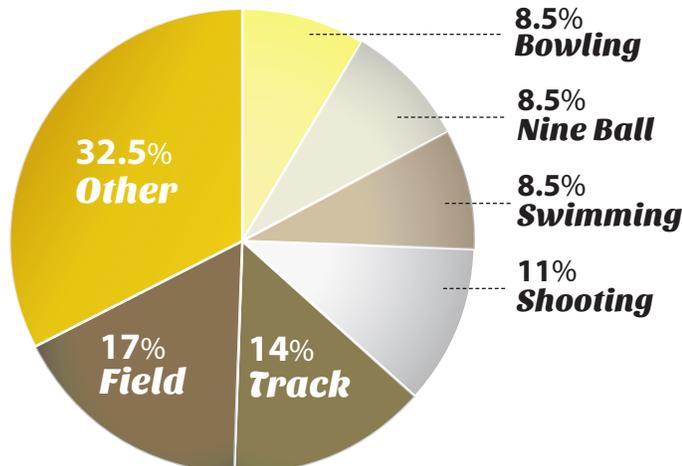
Modern wheelchair sports grew from World War II Veterans playing basketball while recovering in VA hospitals.

DID YOU KNOW?



The fastest wheelchair racers routinely achieve speeds over 20 mph!

Medal Winning Event Categories



There were almost

500

Veteran athletes participating in this year's games



“In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer.”

- Albert Camus

Miami VA
Healthcare System
★★★★★

VA
HEALTH
CARE

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

Our mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

Our vision is to continue to be the benchmark of excellence and value in health care and benefits by providing exemplary services that are both patient-centered and evidence-based.

This care will be delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery, and continuous improvement.

It will emphasize prevention, population, health, and contribute to the Nation's well-being through education, research, and service in national emergencies.

For more information about the Miami VA Healthcare System, visit www.miami.va.gov.

This publication is presented by the Miami VA Healthcare System.

For more information please contact Shane Suzuki, Public Affairs Officer, shane.suzuki@va.gov.