



SCI&D SPIRIT

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CATCH the SPIRIT

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Boston Healthcare System
Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders

Veteran Achieves Personal Goal

Mr. George Debarge, age 69, served as a Crew Chief in the United States Marine Corps from 1961-1965. In 1977, he re-enlisted in the Army National Guard, where he served an additional 18 years and retired as a 1st Sergeant.

In June 2011, George sustained a spinal cord injury at the T4 neurological level, following surgery, at a community hospital, to remove a spinal tumor. After surgery, he states: "I was getting out of bed and walking short distances with a walker. Then I developed a blood infection which caused paralysis, making walking impossible. I was now faced with the inability to return home with my family or take care of myself."

When George transitioned to a community rehab center, he was unable to care for himself. Close to discharge, he was faced with considering transfer to a nursing home.

His daughter suggested he consider going to the VA Hospital for further rehabilitation.

He contacted the SCI Case Manager at the Central Western Mass VA in Northampton, MA. The Case Manager referred George to the VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS) SCI Center and within days he was transferred.

With hopes of recovery, George came to VABHS where he spent his time learning how to be independent with his care, becoming involved in the community by participating in recreational programs and making lasting friendships with his fellow Veterans.

At age 68, being faced with a nursing home was not only a motivating factor to work diligently in rehab, but also

to become an active participant in his own health care.

While at VABHS, he was encouraged to enroll in 'My *HealtheVet*', a protected website that gave him access to parts of his own medical record including medications, appointments, and lab results. He could also securely email his providers. At the time, George had very basic computer knowledge. Initially, he was reluctant to consider using this tool, but once he had access he felt connected with his providers.

"I have access to my own health information. I especially like secure messaging which allows me to email my doctors about questions I have. 'My HealtheVet' has allowed me to easily track my health care and remain in regular contact with my providers." - George Debarge



George Debarge prepares Thanksgiving dessert in the VHABHS SCI apartment

After three months of hard work, George went home where he participated in outpatient therapy at a VA Outpatient Clinic. There he gained more function and

strength which led an opportunity to return to the SCI Center with new goals for more intensive rehabilitation.

In August 2012, George returned to the VABHS SCI Center for additional inpatient rehab. His personal goal was to stand on his feet and walk again. In this admission, he is standing and walking short distances with a walker. He has also participated in VABHS' drivers rehab program to further regain his independence. George's story reflects the experience of many Veterans, with improved outcomes and significant benefits after coming to the VA SCI Center even after rehabilitation at a private facility.

Connecting in Additional Ways

An important advance in health care has been the increased recognition of the benefits of patients becoming truly active partners with their health care team. My *HealtheVet*, the VA's Personal Health Record, provides tools and opportunities to further this partnership. As illustrated by the story above, this is not just for young, computer-savvy Veterans. In fact, older patients may benefit the most, e.g. by being able to renew prescriptions from home when they want or having simple non-urgent questions answered through Secure Messaging, instead of "telephone tag" or having to make a special trip to the VA. To learn more, go to www.myhealth.va.gov and ask about this exciting program at your next visit, so you can get greater control of how you manage your health and communications with your SCI team to make informed choices, stay healthy, and seek services when needed.



Sunil Sabharwal, MD
Chief SCI/D Services

It Takes a Village

An old proverb states “It Takes a Village to Raise a Child”. Our SCI/D village works together to ensure that our Veterans receive the best care for mind, body and soul. We are not only comprised of Veterans, families, caregivers, friends and professional providers but also a diverse group of volunteers.

Veteran Larry Berry volunteered to present his poster “Everyone benefits, especially me!”: The Social and Psychological Benefits of a Respite Program, at The 21st SCI Symposium which took place at VABHS on October 12, 2012.

Larry Berry received multiple personal benefits during his first respite stay at the Brockton SCI Unit in Building 8. While the program is designed to be a respite for his caregiver, this Veteran believes he benefited more than anyone. Specific benefits included enlarging his world view about how he can better integrate into the community, participating in recreational sports using adaptive equipment, developing quality social interactions with other Veterans with similar disabilities – all in an environment he felt was “stress free” and accepting.

“I was a little nervous about what I was getting myself into by going into respite, but my misgivings were quickly replaced within minutes of getting dropped off.”

-Larry Berry



SCI Symposium
Pictured Left to Right: Ellen Zhan, MD, Sunil Sabharwal, MD, Maggi Budd, PhD, Veteran Larry Berry, and Charlie Patten, Boston University Psychology Intern



Pictured Left to Right: Genevieve Brintnall, Veteran Wayne Post, Justice Stallworth, Veteran George Debarge, and Jonathan Brintnall

On Wednesday evenings, Recreational Therapist, Bruce Peirce, accompanies rehab patients on outings designed around community reintegration. They have gone kayaking, to the movies, to sporting events, and to museums. Bruce is assisted by SCI/D staff who volunteer their time and also by three special volunteers: Genevieve Brintnall age 8, Jonathan Brintnall age 11 children of PT Assistant Barbara Brintnall, and their friend Justice Stallworth age 11. These young volunteers help by loading and unloading the van, pushing wheelchairs, and carrying things. When asked what they like about volunteering with the Veterans they stated:

“I like the good feeling I get from doing it.” - Jonathan, age 11

“The experience is fun and great. These people saved our country. They are not regular people; they are special.” - Genevieve, age 8

“Two years ago, I started pushing a family member in a wheelchair. I like to help

Every Thursday, patients and staff look forward to a visit from Phoebe. Phoebe, a three year old Golden Retriever, owned by Judith Server, is registered with Therapy Dogs International (TDI).

To be a registered therapy pet, Phoebe had to pass a TDI temperament evaluation which includes the 15 item American Kennel Club’s Good Citizen Test. She also got tested on behavior around people who use equipment (wheelchairs, crutches, etc).

Phoebe is not a service dog but rather a therapeutic dog. Her goal is to provide comfort and companionship to our patients during their hospital stay.



Pictured Above: Phoebe, therapy pet



On November 7, 2012 two former Patriot players, Joe Andruzzi and John Smith paid a visit to Veterans at VA BHS.

Joe Andruzzi was an offensive lineman for the Patriots from 2000 until his retirement in 2007, helping the team to 3 Super Bowl championships.

John Smith was a kicker with the Patriots from 1974 until his retirement in 1983. He led the NFL in scoring in 1979 and 1980.

The visit from the two players included taking pictures and signing autographs with staff and Veterans.

Pictured Left, from Left to Right: Joe Andruzzi, Veteran James Snyder, and John Smith



Professional Advancement



The SCI/D Service promotes a culture of certification as an indication of professional growth and development. Therefore, we are proud to announce that Darlene Hanley, A2 Staff Nurse; Bonnie Russell, SCI Nurse Manager; and Nancy Brooks, SCI Case Manager, recently became certified in rehabilitation nursing. Congratulations on this outstanding professional achievement!

Pictured Left to Right: Darlene Hanley, CRRN, Bonnie Russell, CRRN, & Nancy Brooks, CRRN

Awards



Michaela Tinory, RN



Wamsutta Lauture, NA

Each year, two SCI nursing staff members at the VABHS receive the Pierik Award in recognition of the outstanding care they provide to Veterans with SCI/D. This year's award recipients are Michaela Tinory, RN, of the acute SCI Unit in West Roxbury and Wamsutta "Faith" Lauture, Nursing Assistant, of the long-term care SCI Unit in Brockton. They were publicly recognized at the New England Paralyzed Veterans of America (NEPVA) Banquet.

Retirements



Sharrie Finn, RN



Howard Dillon, RN

After 32 years of service, Sharrie Finn, RN, SCI Home Care Staff Nurse, has retired. Howard Dillon, RN, SCI Staff Nurse, who had 41 years of service including military service, also retired. They have started the next chapter of their lives. Sharrie and Howard truly made a difference in the lives of our SCI veterans and will be sorely missed!

Stay Safe During the Winter Months Ahead

SCI brings more risks when it comes to winter weather, preparation is key in keeping yourself safe. Some tips include:

- Get your flu shot!
- Wear multiple layers of clothing. Loose, lightweight, warm clothing keeps air trapped between the layers and provides insulation. Wool is best, but moisture-wicking fabric like polypropylene is also a good choice. Avoid cotton as it traps moisture. Layers can be removed as needed.
- Always wear a hat since half of the body's heat can be lost through an uncovered head. Waterproof gloves or mittens keep hands warm, dry and free from salt and sand. Keep an extra pair handy.
- Know the signs of frostbite and protect exposed skin. Frostbitten skin feels cold and numb to the touch. The area may look white or grayish. Never rub an area that may be frostbitten!
- Stay hydrated. The body needs more hydration in the winter because it uses more energy to stay warm. When you are dehydrated, cold sets in more easily.
- Keep your wheelchair in a warm area when not in use as cold temperatures can drain the battery more quickly.
- Notify your local Police and Fire Departments of your SCI/D in order to be added to their vulnerable persons list.



November was National Family Caregivers Month.

Thank You to the dedicated caregivers of our Veterans with SCI/D!

When Veterans have an inpatient hospital stay, family members/primary caregivers interact with one another either on Ward A-2 or in the Fisher House, providing mutual emotional support. Once the veteran is discharged home, these caregivers often become isolated in their communities with little or no support. There are currently 2 monthly Telephone Caregiver Support Groups that use the VA's toll free conference call system (2nd Friday and 4th Tuesday of each month) and are facilitated by the Outpatient SCI Social Worker. Coming soon is an additional evening Support Call. If you are interested in any of the Support Calls, please contact Jeanine Penzo, LICSW @ 857-203-6498.



VA Boston Healthcare System
1400 VFW Parkway
West Roxbury, MA 02132
800-865-3384
<http://www.boston.va.gov>
Facebook: VA Boston Healthcare System

Veteran Veteran
1 Veteran Way
Boston, MA 02122

VA Boston SCI/D Center Accreditation



CARF is the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities - an independent, nonprofit organization focused on advancing the quality of services provided to patients and ensuring they get the best possible outcomes. The SCI/D Center at VA BHS first received its accreditation in 2000 and has had four successful surveys since then, most recently in July of 2012. Each one is for a three year period. We have always received the highest accreditation possible.

Patients in need of rehabilitation services, their families, and the public look for CARF accreditation as assurance that rehabilitation facilities strive to offer the highest quality services and focus on the unique needs of each person served. This is done by applying CARF's comprehensive set of standards for quality to our business and service delivery practices. CARF's leading-edge standards are developed collaboratively with involvement of interdisciplinary professionals and healthcare consumers.

Accreditation means that we have demonstrated conformance to these proven standards and are committed to continuous quality improvement. Our dedication to excellence is evaluated every three years by a team of on-site CARF surveyors and reconfirmed annually. We are proud to be one of the select SCI Programs who are accredited by this international agency as a confirmation of our pledge to provide the highest quality of services to our Veterans.



The Staff of the VA Boston HCS Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders Program

Wish all of our Veterans and their loved ones

A Happy and Healthy 2013

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