



SCI&D SPIRIT

Volume 1, issue 1

June 2011

CATCH the SPIRIT

U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs
VA Boston Healthcare System
Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders

“At the VA Everything Turned Around”

In June 2009, Kevin Hickey, a vocational teacher for 33 years, began to lose mobility and develop respiratory problems. This is the story he told us. He was admitted to one of Boston's teaching hospitals, where he spent seven weeks, five in the intensive care unit, before being diagnosed with acute disseminated encephalomyelitis - a viral infection of the brain and spinal cord causing paralysis. Kevin then spent two months at a private rehabilitation hospital. At discharge, his wife was told “This is as far as we can take him. We recommend you look into nursing homes for him.”

A friend recommended he look into care at the VA. When he was admitted to the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Unit at VA Boston Healthcare System, Kevin required help with his activities of daily living, had no specialized equipment and no idea how he could return to his home. At admission, VA SCI nurses told him “now you're here and we'll take care of you for the rest of your life”. Kevin states “They made me comfortable and treated me with respect and dignity from day one. Everything here was geared to making me stronger and more independent. The staff made sure I was taken care of physically, emotionally and spiritually.”

In addition to nursing care, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and kinesiotherapy, he received recreation therapy, pool therapy, speech therapy, and driver training. “The treatment plan was designed for me. The therapy was very intense - six days a week.

They really worked on my stamina. I was being measured for my wheelchair when I took my first steps. At my previous hospital if you missed a therapy session that was that. At the VA, the staff always made sure I had therapy. If I missed a session it was made up.”



Kevin Hickey, SCI/D Veteran

“The whole staff was fantastic. They explained everything and made sure I understood why and what they were doing. I attended weekly meetings with the whole team. My wife and family were welcome at every meeting.”

Before Kevin was discharged, a VA physical therapist and occupational therapist went to his house to evaluate and recommend adaptations for wheelchair mobility. Once home, a VA nurse and social worker came to his house and worked with his wife and him to ease their transition and adjustment to life at home. Kevin returns to the VA SCI Clinic for a “stem to stern” evaluation every spring. He states the clinic staff doesn't sugarcoat anything. “They tell me what I need to do and what I need to know - the good, the bad and the ugly.”

Kevin Hickey and his wife just returned from a trip to Aruba. He credits the VA SCI Program for addressing all his needs. “I was ready to give up at my previous hospital. It was here at the VA that everything turned around.”

SCI/D Launches Newsletter

Welcome to the first SCI/D Spirit Newsletter. We are proud of the services offered by the Spinal Cord Injury Services at VA Boston Healthcare System to our Veterans with spinal cord injury and disorders (SCI/D). This newsletter will provide information about our programs and will focus on our patients, our staff, and the outcomes they achieve. I hope you will find it useful. We welcome your feedback

- Sunil Sabharwal, MD, Chief of SCI/D Service, VA Boston Healthcare Service



Sunil Sabharwal, MD
Chief SCI/D Services

Boston SCI/D Participates in Miracles on a Mountainside

VA Boston Healthcare SCI/D was strongly represented at the 25th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic held at Snowmass Colorado, March 26-April 1 2011. Vidya Jayawardena MD (Dr. Jay), Maura Nee, NP and Beth Tammaro, RN spent the week attending to the medical needs of over 350 participants.

The Winter Sports Clinic offers a number of sporting events including: skiing, curling, snowmobiling, sled hockey, scuba diving, and archery. The pledge of the Clinic is to motivate Veterans with spinal cord injuries, orthopedic amputations, certain neurological problems and other disabilities to live life to the fullest by experiencing *Miracles on a Mountainside*.

Dr Jay shares her first Clinic experience...

"I was happy to be a medical provider for this revered sports clinic. Participants from across the United States came together united, happy, looking forward to each day and getting involved in activities that they like. Volunteer instructors, organizers, and others were marvelous, full of energy, vitality and strength working together to ensure a safe, fun and active event for everyone.

It was a pleasant surprise and honor when Vice President, Joe Biden came to the opening ceremony.



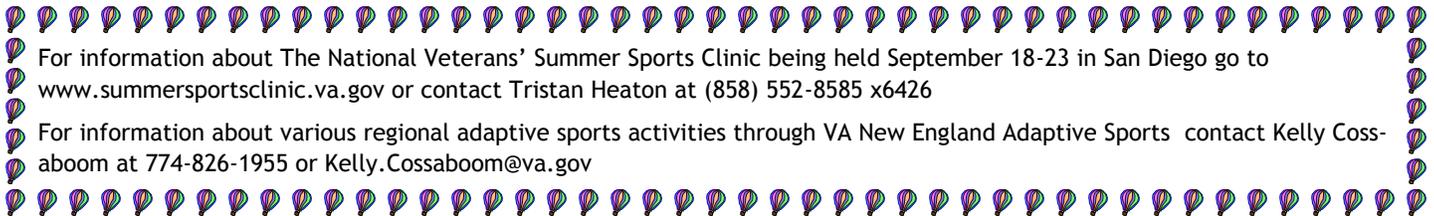
Vidya Jayawardena, MD, layered up for a day at the Clinic.
Background: Vice President Joe Biden

There were over 350 participants, and only very few accidents during the games. The temporary medical clinic was equipped to handle a majority of medical issues. The medics were on call on a rotating schedule with each activity, as well as regular clinic duties and night calls.

Monday, it was my day to be in the staging area. SCI vets were literally falling right and left when they got into the bucket seats of their sit-skis. They hit their heads (of course with their helmets on) and they hit their shoulders, but they got right up and went on with their schedule; no complaints, no hurting, alive with their military spirit.

To relax from the activities the participants had the opportunity to enjoy Glenwood Hot Springs, a true wonder of nature. There were 2 huge "hot tubs" one was 105 degrees and the other was in the 90's. The Veterans were so glad to be in the pools defying gravity while medics were constantly looking over their shoulders.

It was a well organized Veterans were well cared for at this event. It gave me so much appreciation for the abilities of our disabled veterans."



For information about The National Veterans' Summer Sports Clinic being held September 18-23 in San Diego go to www.summersportsclinic.va.gov or contact Tristan Heaton at (858) 552-8585 x6426

For information about various regional adaptive sports activities through VA New England Adaptive Sports contact Kelly Cossaboom at 774-826-1955 or Kelly.Cossaboom@va.gov



Left to Right: Roland Filion, Tony Lorick, Danielle Newman, RN, Bart Price, Joe Porter, and Lee Jones

A Garden Experience...

On February 4, 2011, patients who were working towards recovery at VA Boston SCI Center, were able to enjoy a night out at the Celtics vs. Dallas Mavericks game. Danielle Newman, RN, worked with Matt Meyerhson, of the Celtics, who donated tickets.

This was a great night out for all and for some a first time experience at an event of this magnitude. The Celtics provided excitement with a 97-96 lead, but Jason Kidd, with 2.5 seconds on the clock, put in a 3-point shot handing the win to Dallas.

Special thanks to Danielle Newman, RN, Amber Smith, RN, and Bruce Peirce, RT, who volunteered their time in order to make this event happen. They ensure that patients were well prepared and medically supervised during this outing.



The 10th Spinal Cord Injury Interdisciplinary Conference

The 10th Spinal Cord Injury Interdisciplinary Conference was held on April 5, 2011 at the VA Boston Healthcare System. This year's attendees consisted of 130 nursing students from a variety of nursing schools around the Boston area such as Simmons College, University of Massachusetts-Boston, University of Massachusetts-Lowell, Massasoit

Community College and Southeastern just to name a few.

The nursing students had the opportunity to learn the fundamentals related to spinal cord injury. Topics covered at the conference included introduction to spinal cord injury, autonomic dysreflexia, bowel and bladder management, skin care issues, nutritional requirements, therapy, suctioning and tracheotomies. Psychosocial aspects of spinal cord injury such as adjustment to a spinal cord injury and recreation were also discussed. The nursing students commented that they appreciated learning about caring for spinal cord injured persons. Several

even said that they will now consider working in spinal cord injury nursing after graduation. Overall, the conference was a huge success thanks to the team effort of the Spinal Cord Injury Staff.



Speakers at the conference from left to right: Christine Azevedo, RN, Mark Zacheis, RN, Karen Flaherty, RN, and Kelly Skinner, NP

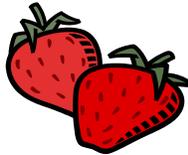
Peer Mentors Needed for Veterans with SCI/D. Please Contact Deanna Crowley 857-203-5371

Nutrition and SCI

It is important that people with SCI make healthy food choices to maintain a healthy weight and to prevent heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis.

Suggestions:

- Enjoy your food, but eat less
- Avoid oversized portions
- Increase physical activity
- Avoid inactivity



SCI increases the risk of obesity. People with SCI should look at behaviors and emotions that may lead to overeating. They should find ways to deal with these to make positive changes. Nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle changes can help reduce weight. Weight control is more than losing weight; it is making healthy food choices and maintaining a balance of calories.

Helpful tips:

- Increase vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat free or low fat dairy products and seafood
- Reduce food and beverages high in sugars, solid fats, sodium and refined grains
- Nutrients of concern are calcium, Vitamin D, fiber, & potassium

Fiber is needed for a successful bowel program. Fluids are important for bowel and bladder management and skin integrity. Calcium is needed for bone density. Beverage calories should be watched. Regular soda, alcohol and fruit drinks can add calories without providing nutritional value. Nutrition rich foods maintain healthy skin. People with SCI should consume less than 10% of their calories from saturated fat.

Caregiver Corner

Providing care for a loved one can be rewarding as well as exhausting, however caregivers often need to be reminded that self care is a must. Being the primary caregiver for an individual with spinal cord injury/disease is a demanding job that often leaves the provider feeling isolated. Most SCI caregivers do not have contact with others in a similar situation. Having contact with other caregivers can provide companionship, emotional support, and education as ideas are shared.

SCI Boston offers Telephone Caregiver Support groups that "meet" monthly using the VA's toll free conference calling system. Currently there are calls on the 2nd Friday of the month at 10AM and the 4th Tuesday of the month at 1PM. Call Groups at other times can be created as needed. If you would like more information, please contact social worker, Jeanine Penzo, LICSW at 857-203-6498.



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 West Roxbury, MA 02132
 800-865-3384

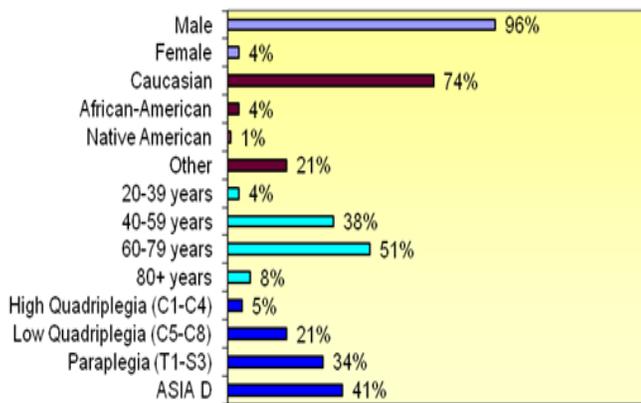
<http://www.boston.va.gov>
 Facebook: VA Boston Healthcare System

Veteran Veteran
 1 Veteran Way
 Boston, MA 02122

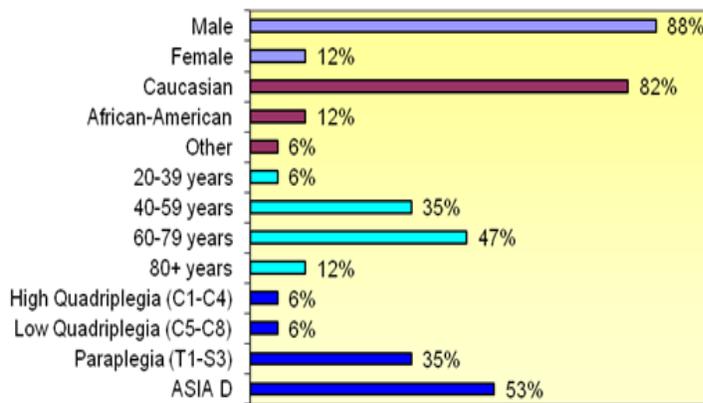
Who We Serve

VA Boston's SCI/D System of Care provides a full range of care for all enrolled Veterans, in the New England area, who have sustained a spinal cord injury or have a stable neurologic impairment of the spinal cord. During Fiscal year 2010 (10/1/09–9/30/10), we had 420 Veterans enrolled in the SCI/D program at VA Boston Healthcare System. There were 206 admissions to the SCI/D service for in-patient care. Seventeen of these admissions were Veterans who received comprehensive acute care rehabilitation services, with an average of six hours of treatment per day. Our outpatient clinic provided care to 449 Veterans, who averaged 2.5 visits for the year. Our Home Care Program had an enrollment of 104 Veterans, who averaged 5.5 visits for the year. The characteristics of our Veterans served are displayed in the charts below.

**FY2010 Patient Characteristics
 Total SCI System of Care**



**FY2010 Patient Characteristics
 Acute Rehabilitation Program**



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