



## Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center



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Today, almost one in ten Americans is an armed forces veteran. More than 3.6 million women and men have served during the period of time that we have been directly involved in the Middle East.

George Washington knew that, “The willingness with which our young people are

likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.”

The Philadelphia VA Medical Center (PVAMC) provides health care to 90,000 veterans living in America’s fifth largest metropolitan area. Our four-fold mission is to honor America’s veterans with world-class health care, advance medical knowledge through research, train health care professionals, and be prepared to serve in the event of a crisis.

We are a tertiary referral center with more than 135 acute care beds, 95 of which are medicine-surgery beds, and total yearly operating budget of more than \$380 million dollars. The PVAMC is an eight-minute walk from the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Our Orthopaedic residents and faculty are honored to help care for those who have served their country. Abraham Lincoln articulated the primary mission of the Veterans Administration Penn Orthopaedic Service more than a century ago: “To care for him who shall have borne the battle.”

Perhaps you are familiar with these words attributed to Father D.E. O’Brien:

*“It is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press.*

*It is the soldier, not the clergyman, who has given us freedom of religion.*

*It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech.*

*It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, who has given us freedom to demonstrate.*

*It is the soldier who follows the flag into battle, defends our flag, salutes our flag, and whose coffin is draped with our flag.*

*It is the soldier. It has always been the soldier, and it will always be the soldier.”*

The VA is the largest health care system (122 medical facilities) supporting graduate medical education in the United States and the second largest funding source for resident training (31,000 resident physicians) after the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. It is affiliated with 107 of the nation’s 129 medical schools. That network of facilities allows VA to deliver care to veterans from the greatest generation of World War II to the latest generation from Afghanistan and Iraq.

The University of Pennsylvania Orthopedic rotation at the Philadelphia VAMC allows our PGY-2 and PGY-5 residents to care for veterans in an intensive, general orthopedic practice setting under the direct supervision of Drs. Ahn, Bernstein, Ecker, Esterhai, Farber, Gentchos, Hume, Kelly, Kuntz, Sheth, Steinberg, and Zgonis. Dr. Harvey Smith, our spine surgeon, teaches and works with a PGY-3 resident. Dr. Levin volunteers his time without compensation. The veterans who require care at a level of sophistication that we cannot provide are referred to sub-specialists in the City or within the University of Pennsylvania Health System at Pennsylvania Hospital or Penn-Presbyterian Medical Center.

In addition to their dedication to direct patient care and resident education, Drs. Bernstein, Esterhai, Kuntz, Steinberg, and Zgonis have each applied for or been awarded research funding through the Veterans Administration competitive grant system. Under the direction of Drs. Mauck and Dodge our department’s Translational Musculoskeletal Research Center has five Merit Grants. Dr. Smith has begun his basic science spine studies under his Career Development Award. Our PVAMC clinical faculty members collaborate actively with intra and extra mural physicians and basic scientists including Drs. Jonathan Black, Jason Burdick, George Dodge, Paul Ducheyne, Dawn Elliott, Kurt Hankenson, Annamarie Horan, Russ Huffman, Robert Mauck, Samir Mehta, Lachlan Smith, and Lou Soslowsky.





Drs. Mauck and Dodge direct our Translational Orthopedic Research Facility, in 4500 square feet of superbly equipped research space. They have energized collaboration with Rheumatology and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation scientists. More about that in this volume of the UPOJ.

We have been able to improve our preoperative patient evaluation process to expedite surgery scheduling with the addition of preadmission testing offices immediately adjacent to our clinic, improved peri-operative pain management and post-operative floor care. We look forward to opening another operating room on Wednesdays and adding OR and PACU personnel to extend the operating room duty day.

Mitchell (Chip) Staska and John Wheeler, our superb Physician Assistants, provide seamless, exemplary, tender care from initial patient referral through appropriate triage, outpatient evaluation, scheduling of appropriate testing and consultations, surgery, and post hospitalization care. Chip and John provide immediate, timely interaction with referring physicians and outside consultants, coordination of pre-bed evaluations, surgery scheduling, interaction with the primary care providers, liaison with VA referral health centers, acute and chronic pain management, and assist in the operating room! John coordinates Dr. Smith's Orthopaedic spine care for our veterans.

We have the best electronic medical record system in the country. All records including consent forms and imaging studies are electronic. In-patient and out-patient progress notes, laboratory results, and imaging studies are available at the workstations on the in-patient units, offices, and outpatient care areas and individual examination rooms from local and satellite VA care facilities across the country.

We have patient office hours on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays allowing us to provide more than 5200 patient visits each year. New patients are scheduled

within thirty days of their primary physician's request for consultation. The Emergency Room is very busy. We perform scheduled surgery four days each week, averaging more than 450 major procedures yearly. Orthopedics performs more major surgeries than any other service. None of this would be possible without the professional expertise and wisdom of the Chief of Surgery, Lew Kaplan, and the nurses, administrative support personnel, and physician staff of the PVAMC.

Vince Lombardi said, "The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual." By God's providence and the hard work and daily diligence of everyone in anesthesia, instrument processing, nursing, and orthopaedics the infection rate for our total joints replacement patients has remained excellent. Several factors specifically contributed, including: improved pre-operative patient screening and preparation, rigorous instrument processing and packaging, heightened awareness of potentials for intraoperative contamination, perioperative antibiotic dosing, and patient retention for on site rehabilitation before discharge to the patient's home. In this time of increasing financial restraint and federal budget review we will likely be called upon to deliver more direct care and perform more research with fewer resources.

Today there are 26.5 million veterans of whom 1.7 million are women. Seventy-five percent served during at least one war time period with Vietnam era veterans accounting for 8.3 million; WW II, 4.8 million; Korea, 3.7 million; and the Gulf Wars 3.6 million.

Many of the veterans for whom we care commute a long distance from central and northeastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware. Many have significant co-morbidities such as HCV and difficult psychosocial environments. Many have had multiple operations making reconstructive surgical approaches and wound healing more difficult. Not infrequently they have had a difficult time reintegrating into society after their military service. It has been said that "a veteran is someone who wrote a blank check, payable to the United States of America, for an amount up to and including his own life." Providing Philadelphia-level, state of the art, complication free, compassionate care requires extra, special diligence. It is a worthy goal to which we are fully committed.