

Central Blind Rehabilitation Center Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital 2011 Annual Report



“A Blind Center is where faith is strongest; that blind people deserve hope, respect and freedom. These are accorded first, followed by the means of achieving them. Our civilization permits wholesome living when blind, and here, one learns how.” Russell Williams



2011 Annual Report Highlights

- Decreased Wait Time for Admission
- Department Skill Area Progress
- Facility Updates and Improvements
- Dual Programs

Message from the Chief

Timely access to services is a priority for VA and VA Blind Rehabilitation. We are happy to report that we are ever closer to meeting the VA Mandate for the 120 day cap on the wait list for admission to our Blind Rehabilitation Program. This has been a long standing goal for our Center, and we are closer than ever. Also, speaking of access to services, VA Blind Rehabilitation Service has opened three new state of the art Blind Rehabilitation Centers located in Cleveland Ohio, Biloxi Mississippi, and Long Beach California. Referrals for blind rehabilitation services will now be distributed amongst a larger group of facilities to better serve our Veterans.

We have made great strides in keeping current with technology and incorporating the use of popular devices in blind rehabilitation. Some of those popular devices include the i-Pad™ and i-Phone™, along with appropriate applications to provide visually impaired individuals some of the same benefits afforded to others. Through cooperative efforts of our Living Skills and Computer Access staff, we assisted in evaluating these devices for compatibility with accessible software, developed lesson plans and incorporated them into our program curriculum. Lap-tops now replace PC's issued to veterans participating in the Computer Access Training program, allowing more flexibility in storage and usability. As a result of the increased need for computer accessible training, the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center will now be offering Dual Training Programs that offer a blended curriculum of the Regular Blind Rehab Program and basic computer training effective October 1st, 2011. Veterans who have advanced training needs in both the Regular and Computer Access training area would be considered good candidates for this new program. Veterans can be confident that we are staying current in the field of Blind Rehab and offering the latest in accessible training and prosthetics devices for the blind and visually impaired. However, we still maintain the basic blind rehabilitation skills that remain the critical foundation in remaining independent and active with a visual impairment that were established by our first Service Chief Russell Williams.

Our Recreation Program continues to thrive with a newly appointed Recreation Therapist, focusing on community based recreational activities both locally in Chicago, as well as local area organizations at the Veterans home base.

Thanks are extended to all the staff who help us provide the blind rehabilitation that we do every day of the year. We look forward to serving our Veterans in the coming year.



Jerry Schutter,
Chief, Blind Rehabilitation Center

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS 2011

INCREASED ACCESS 

DECREASED WAIT TIME 

At the start of FY11 (October 2010), Computer Access Training (CAT) wait times were significantly higher than the Regular and Other (Electronic Travel Aids and Electronic Reading Aids) training programs. Veterans had to wait approximately 9 months for admission to the Computer Training Program. Mandated by Veterans Health Administration in 2005, wait times for admission to any blind rehabilitation program were capped at 4 months. Blind Rehabilitation Centers have until the end of this fiscal year, (September 2012) to reach that goal.

Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center made significant progress towards this goal this year by modifying the Regular Core Blind Rehabilitation Program, by implementing the Guide™ computer training program to appropriate veterans within the Regular rehabilitation training curriculum. As a result, fewer veterans are submitting applications for CATs upon completion of their training programs. The addition of computer training as part of the regular program using the Guide™ computer system, as well as some Apple products (iPad, iPhone) which also helped meet many veterans' basic communications needs, has obviated the need for the CAT application for many veterans. As of October 2011, the CATs admission wait time now sits at 4 months, meeting the VHA Mandate. Over the course of the year, we have increased our ability to address the number of application received by 10%, which has aided us in keeping the wait time for the Regular program also within the 4 month timeframe.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER UPDATE

With the continued advancement of technology, the Blind Rehabilitation National Technology Evaluation Committee spent some significant time evaluating the latest Apple product applications used with the i-Phone™ and i-Pad™ this past year. With all the applications available for use on these devices, evaluations were required to determine the appropriateness of the application for blind and visually impaired users. Many were assessed for their compatibility with either Voice Over or Zoom. These efforts resulted in product evaluations being posted on a VA website established through this committee specifically to share this information on a national level. It is here where VIST coordinators, BROS, and Blind Rehab Instructors can find information about products that are currently issued to veterans during their blind rehab programs, as well as information regarding new products and whether or not they have been recommended for issuance. In addition to the Apple products, Hines blind center staff evaluated a total of 19 products over the course of FY 11. These include the following:

- **Low Vision Devices**
Besser™ EuroMag™, Eye Snap™, Mobilux LED™, Mobilux Digital™, Mini Max™, Optelec Reader™, Pebble™, Powerlux™, Speak Easy™, and Transformer™
- **Living Skills Devices**
i-Pad/i-Phone applications that address many of the functions previously addressed through note takers, bar code readers, digital recorders and even simple magnifications.
- **Computer Access Training**
I-Zoom™, Pearl™, and ZoomTwix™

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER UPDATE (CONT)

- **Orientation and Mobility Devices**

Trekker™ Breeze™ GPS Updates, I-Glasses™, Navigon™ GPS App, and the Talking Sign Post™

DEPARTMENT SKILL AREA PROGRESS

LIVING SKILLS

While the Living Skills department has undergone dramatic changes in the use of technology over the last two years with the implementation of the Guide™ computer training program and the



addition of the iPhone and iPad devices, we constantly strive to emphasize the importance of using basic blind rehabilitation skills to overcome deficits left by vision loss. These basic skills include; organization, tactual identification, tactual labels and sometimes simple common sense. Veterans are assessed in all areas of Living Skills when they first enter the program, goals are established and instruction begins. With many of the skills and devices that are presented in Living Skills there are always approaches that can be used in



place of a device. For example, many people are eager to receive a color indentifying device to assist them with identifying colors for

clothing, etc. While this is a good device, it is not always accurate. Sometimes, a simple approach to labeling clothing with buttons and or pins might work more consistently.

There are many great devices and advances for the visually impaired in meeting everyday needs but prior to all of the advances there were basic adaptive approaches to meet these needs which are the foundation to what we teach in Living Skills. We will continue to explore, evaluate, and issue new devices but the basic skills and techniques that we have taught for over 60 years remain the foundation for our program in Living Skills.

MANUAL SKILLS

We continue to assess and enhance skills in all aspects of sensory awareness, with an emphasis on organization, adaptive techniques, and basic safety in all areas. This is stressed in the various medias used that include, but are not limited to Leather-work, Copper tooling, Pottery, Weaving, Home Mechanics, basic Small Engine repair, Woodworking, and the Music Program.



This year, Manual Skills (MS) training focused on basic blind rehab skills including, organization, tactile awareness, spatial awareness, memory sequencing, problem solving, visualization, and confidence

building. A review of the skill area program was conducted for new applications to our mission to reinforce basic skills in new ways.

Among the accomplishments this year, clear issuance criteria & guidelines for all Manual Skills prosthetics were reviewed and updated to insure uniformity in assessing and issuance of adaptive devices used in the area.

In addition, a more collaborative effort with the facility Recreation Therapy department and their Craft Care Specialist resulted in increased utilization of donated kits for independence and continuum of care beyond the BRC in a Veterans home area.

VISUAL SKILLS

As with most years, we have tried to enhance the choices that will meet the ever expanding



needs of the veteran's we serve. We have added additional devices to our portable electronic magnifiers offerings and have added new lighting options for both task lighting and for lighting that assists our veterans with the proper lighting to travel through dimly lit environments. We continue to strive to meet the needs of our veteran's near distance, intermediate distance and far distance goals. This year, more than any previous year, the department has been able to meet these objectives with our extensive collection of standalone magnifiers, monoculars and CCTVs, but also the iPad and iPhone, which has given department greater flexibility in meeting those everyday goals of our visual impaired veterans.

However, as technology has altered and enhanced our program, the visual skills

department continued its commitment to laying a solid foundation. This foundation is rooted in educating our veterans on the functional implications of their impairment, the functional ramifications of proper lighting and contrast and the ability to know why each low vision device is issued and how it will play a role in their transition to greater and greater independence. This piece of the blind rehabilitation program is crucial. The visual skills staff continued this commitment by working closely with optometry, poly trauma, and staying current in the low vision field.

ORIENTATION & MOBILITY

The Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Department's foremost goal is to develop and implement an individualized



training program to teach safe, efficient and independent travel skills to each veteran. This is accomplished through an assessment of the veterans' needs and goals. Through a combination of teaching and providing positive support, the O&M Department, in conjunction with other program elements, contribute to the veteran's adjustment process and development of maximum potential.



The O&M specialists continually update lesson plans organized into 5 programs based on veterans needs. The programs include; Regular, Regular Low Vision, Modified, Accelerated and Super Accelerated Low Vision. Lessons, including

indoor travel, outdoor travel, on the hospital grounds, residential and business areas, all help facilitate the mission of this skill area. Special lessons continue to be developed and refined for rural travel experience in the neighboring forest preserves and advanced training to include Chicago downtown travel and night travel. The environments used for instruction is constantly reevaluated and updated to insure the areas are safe, similar to the veterans home environment, and that there is appropriate transfer of the skills learned to his or her home environment.

The O&M department has remained very active in providing instruction with the latest adaptive GPS devices, keeping current with the latest technology. However, while the Orientation and Mobility instructional program has incorporated some newer technology, meeting the individual needs and goals of each veteran for safe and independent travel is still the overarching goal of the department.

COMPUTER ACCESS TRAINING



As our culture changes to include computerized communication in many aspects of daily life, the Blind Rehabilitation program is changing toward implementation of access technology into the Regular Blind Rehabilitation Program. During FY'11, nearly

50% of patients admitted received instruction and issuance of some form of access technology. Veterans now have the option to meet their communication goals with various computers, and multifunction devices.

The trend has definitely moved toward smaller and more portable devices for many veterans. More veterans are receiving laptop computers (sometimes with external 22" monitors), and some veterans are meeting their goals with MacBooks, iPhones, and iPads. In some cases these new devices have made it possible to address multiple goals with a single device with the utilization of newly available applications to sense colors, read bar codes, scan text, and navigate.

As new options are becoming available for streamlined computing, e.g., CDesk and SAMNet, staff are comparing these options to Guide access software. This has been especially important, due to an increased number of referrals for veterans with limited learning ability and/or hand disabilities. Instruction of Guide Hands Free and Dragon Naturally Speaking continues to be a difficult challenge.



RECREATION PROGRAM



A new Recreation Therapist has been appointed to the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center (CBRC) at Hines VAH this year. Many of the activities that the veterans were participating in have been continued and are now available on a more consistent basis thanks to the continued efforts of our new full time Recreation Therapist.

The Blind enter is moving forward with more community based recreational organizations in the Chicago-land area. Some of the activities that the CBRC are more involved with include:

- Bi-monthly swimming
- Bi-monthly horseback riding
- Monthly Scuba Diving
- Kayaking
- Bowling
- Snow Skiing
- Golf
- Tandem Bike Riding

In an effort to improve our involvement with Veteran Organizations and Community regarding recreation activities with our Vets, the Recreational Therapist attended training with United Sports Association for Blind Athletes for a week in July to learn about

sports for the blind, as well as attended a conference at JBVAMC to learn about what is offered in the way of Art and Music therapy. These initiatives are supported to make a greater effort to engage veterans from the CBRC with the nationally sponsored clinics and games.



The Recreation Therapist has also been instrumental in the CBRC purchasing new fitness equipment (see photo below) that is safer and easier for veterans to use, and has implemented a structured fitness program for the exercise gym and is available to encourage and educate the veterans while they work out. Assisting veterans with finding recreation resources in their local area back home and informing them about the various National Veterans Clinics and Games that are offered has been a new focus for improved continuum of care.



**POLYTRAUMA BLIND REHAB
OUTPATIENT SPECIALIST (BROS)
TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI)**



As part of the Hines VAH Level II Polytrauma Team, The Blind Center continues to be a resource to much of the country and has established the baseline for comprehensive and timely intervention to meet the needs of the unique patient population generated by the current conflict.

The Polytrauma BROS covers two distinct areas in the field of Traumatic Brain Injury; vision screens and therapy for Polytrauma TBI patients, and, case management for full blind rehabilitation training programs prescribed for Polytrauma TBI patients.

TBI services typically address memory difficulties, vision problems (medical as well as functional), mental health issues and missing limbs. The Polytrauma Blind Rehabilitation Specialist conducts functional vision screens on Polytrauma/TBI patients to help identify vision issues and the best method of response to their vision needs. Last year, over 600 returning service members had vision screens completed by our Polytrauma BROS. Vision therapy is prescribed and provided as appropriate for patients who would benefit.

The Polytrauma BROS also case manages blind rehabilitation patients admitted for rehabilitation training under the Polytrauma/TBI diagnoses. In 2011, a total of 14 patients were case managed by this specialist at the Blind Rehabilitation Center.

Services do not end with the conclusion of blind rehabilitation training. The Polytrauma BROS completes comprehensive evaluations on all TBI inpatients of the Blind Center

program annually after the completion of initial service delivery of inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Training. This identifies the need for new equipment, repairs, changes in vision and appointments with Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators.

The Polytrauma BROS manages a comprehensive program to meet the unique needs of Polytrauma Traumatic Brain Injury patients, both inpatient and outpatient. Started in 2007, the program continues to grow each year generated by the current conflict. We are fortunate to have a specialist to provide these services to our veterans and will continue to meet the needs with each passing year.

NURSING



Nursing has been very busy with patient education this year. The staff has taught an increasing amount of blind veterans to self medicate with the Script Talk™ Machine. Blind veterans build confidence daily through the classes they attend and spend some time in the evening with the nurses on how to take medications independently. Veterans are taught how to use the glucometer to check their blood sugar and how to give themselves a shot with the insulin pen. Technology and medicine have come a long way to facilitate the independence of the visually impaired person.

We would like to say hello to the new Clinical Nurse Manager, Jenifer Bednar-Sinde RN CCRN, who came on board in May 2011. She has made a positive change in a short time by having the nurses become more involved in hospital wide committees and having a voice in nursing at Hines.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT SERVICES TEAM COORDINATORS (VIST)

As a regional program the Hines Central Blind Rehabilitation Center (CBRC) has launched an effort to maintain strong working relationships with referring VA's. Hines Blind Rehab center has regular phone and email contact with Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinators from each of the referring VA's. This collaboration promotes good communication, continuity of care, and better service delivery for veterans and active duty service members.

Recently a survey was sent to the VIST Coordinators in our 13 state region requesting feedback on their experience with the CBRC. The survey focused on the type and quality of information they are receiving from CBRC staff, timeliness in receiving the information, understanding of the CBRC's programs, and suggestions for improved communication between the CBRC and referring VA's. The CBRC will be using this feedback to make appropriate changes to insure the quality of care is maximized throughout the continuum of care and addresses the needs of all of our stakeholders both veteran and professionals.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The Blind Rehabilitation Center staff have taken many opportunities to educate and share their knowledge in the field of blind rehabilitation with providers in the private sector and the department of defense.



The Illinois Association for Education and Rehabilitation (IAER) annual conference last February 2011 found several Hines Blind Center staff presenting on topics such as,

'Assistive Mobility Devices for the Visually Impaired,' 'Traumatic Brain Injury,' and 'Organizational Strategies for Persons with memory and Vision Loss.'

With the advancements in technology, and the use of the iPad™ and iPhone™ the development of a training model and issuance criteria was presented to the National Prosthetics Office and was a focus of our postgraduate fellow this year. Presentations at National and VISN 12 Network Prosthetics Conferences occurred in Boston, MA and Appleton, WI, where Administrative and Supervisory staff for Living Skills and Visual Skills communicated on adaptive use of the most current technology and devices for the blind. The training program was well received by all of Blind Rehabilitation and quickly requested by the special education district of Chicago to be used as a training manual for all of their teachers.

Hines was also very well represented at the Annual Blinded Veterans Association Convention and Department of Defense Conference in Las Vegas, NV, in August. There staff served on a committee for the sharing of information with the DoD and the Vision Center of Excellence on all services available to returning soldiers who have functional or visual vision loss. These services ranged from the basic rehabilitation programs offered at each center, to the national recreational programs available. The department of defense does a tremendous job of addressing the stabilization of the physical organ of the eye and the stabilization of the physical body. They were not familiar with the broad range of services offered through Blind Rehabilitation and other national programs.

NATIONAL CONSULTANT

Among the noteworthy accomplishments in the VA Blind Rehabilitation Service within the past year, we wish to highlight the addition of new blind centers, and new VIST/BROS hires. Additionally, we are excited to share with you new staff education and development initiatives within BRS.

We are happy to announce the activation of three new state of the art Blind Rehabilitation Centers, located in Cleveland Ohio, Biloxi Mississippi, and Long Beach California. This means, the new facilities have begun accepting admissions. Predetermined catchment areas are being defined, and VIST Coordinators will be referring patients based on geographical locations designed to bring services closer to the patients and reduce patient wait-time for services. With modification in referral locations, these new Centers will help improve access for blind rehabilitation by sharing the patient population in need of these services. Veterans who reside near these new Centers won't have to travel as far to get the blind rehabilitation they need.

VACO established a workgroup to develop a training program for the National Consultants. National Consultant, Rita Hutton, represented the group on this initiative that is expected to be completed in the spring. Research indicates that employees are more likely to succeed if they have had a mentor. Although mentors are useful for everyone, they have typically been used to mentor TCF Interns and Academic Interns in the field of Blind Rehabilitation. This year we decided to extend the mentoring program to new VIST and BROS. These mentors will provide training and are partnered with the new employee for 6 months to 1 year.

Facility Updates and Improvements

SKILL AREA POSTERS

Our facility received some additions that spoke to our mission in educating the public to our



purpose. Skill area posters were developed, printed, and are now displayed in the hallways of our center. Predominantly on the 2nd floor training area, the posters provide a brief explanation of what each skill area teaches and how it aids in rehabilitation of a visually impaired individual.

These posters come in especially helpful when visitors tour our Center. We can give an enlightening explanation without interrupting classes. Last year, we hosted 100 visitors to our Center, including Ophthalmology Residents, Nursing students, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric Shinseki. We take our educational outreach seriously and are always open to sharing our purpose and mission with those who want to know.

We also increased our training space in Living Skills and Computer Access Training this year. Sound



absorbing panels have been installed to efficiently divide classroom space into several small training areas providing storage, privacy and a sense of personal work space for both Veterans and Staff. (See photo above)

WEBSITE UPDATE

Our facility updates reached beyond our building this year. The Center successfully updated the website to allow access and information sharing with the rest of the world. The site offers information on the blind rehabilitation program, skill areas, family program, as well as access to our patient centered TORCH publication that comes out 3 times a year, and this publication available electronically. Take some time to visit.

www.hines.va.gov/services/blind/index.asp

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

DUAL PROGRAMS

As of this new fiscal year, October 1st, 2011, the Hines Central Blind Rehabilitation Center has added Dual Programs to our list of rehabilitation training curriculum offered at our Center. Traditionally, the Blind Center only offered the *Regular Blind Rehabilitation Training Program*, consisting of four skill areas and still the standard starting point for a visually impaired veteran who has not had previous training. Veterans learn the skills to enhance their independence in everyday life, and are introduced to e-mail and internet access.



Over the years, as technology progressed, the *Computer Access Training Program* was introduced. In this program, Veterans return to the Center for a training program where each veteran learns to use accessible computer technology to meet his/her needs.

With the advancement of technology in everyday life, we recognized the need to offer a blended program, offering Regular and Computer Access Training, our **Dual Program**. Veterans who have advanced training needs in both the regular and computer access training area would be considered in this category. As this category is just now being offered, an admission waiting time based on all other applications and the veteran's specific needs will apply. We also still offer our subject-specific or *Special Programs* covering electronic aids for reading, Orientation & Mobility (GPS), visual functioning, and skills to address Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). These programs often include rapidly changing and improving technology specific to the latest electronic aids for the blind.

TELE-BLIND REHABILITATION

As technology continues to advance, we will soon be able to offer direct support to our Veterans at their local VIST coordinators office through video telecommunications. Remote diagnostic and treatment programs are being offered through the VA in many areas of medicine and soon Blind Rehabilitation.

Initially, video telecommunications services offered may be as simple as a video conference call between the veteran and their instructors for trouble shooting simple prosthetic devices. Other options for use of this technology include conference calls with the families to offer training and support. These services will in no way take the place of coming to a Blind Center for training.

The Initial operation of these systems is anticipated by the end of 2012, and will begin with video conferences between all of our referring stations.

2011 Statistics

Program

Number of Discharges	358
Number of OIF/OEF Patients Served	19
Average Daily Census	30
Occupancy	89%
Average length of Stay (day)	32

Type of Program

Program	#of Patients	Percent
Regular	181	50.4%
ETA/ERM	59	16.4%
CATs	113	31.5%
CCTV	6	1.7%
Dual Program	0	0

Patient Statistics

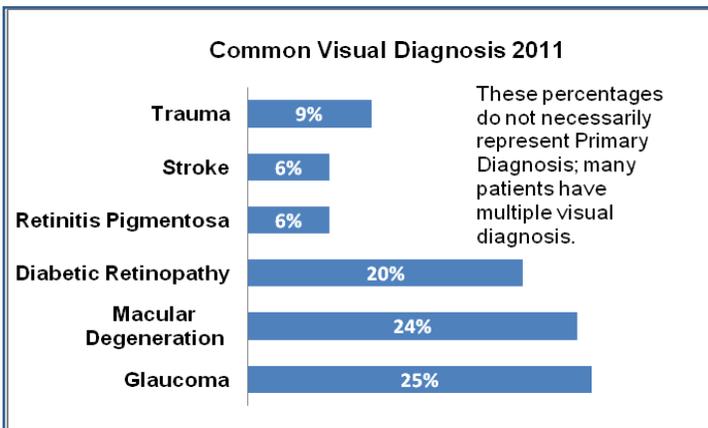
Age Group	# of Patients	Percent
18-39	10	2.8%
40-59	106	29.5%
60-69	106	29.5%
70-79	71	19.8%
80-89	57	15.9%
90-99	9	2.5%
Total	359	100%

Applications by State

Illinois	110
Michigan	26
Kentucky	10
Missouri	24
Indiana	59
Ohio	27
Minnesota	16
South Dakota	2
Iowa	27
Wisconsin	27
Kansas	6
Pennsylvania	6
Tennessee	2
New York	2
Arkansas	1
Texas	2
Mississippi	1
New Jersey	2
New Mexico	2
Oklahoma	1

VA Institution Referrals

VAMC Louisville, KY	11
VAH Hines, IL	58
VAMC Indianapolis, IN	40
VAMC Detroit, MI	12
VAMC St. Louis, MO	12
VAMC Minneapolis, MN	13
VAMC Sioux Falls, SD	15
VAMC North Chicago, IL	20
VAMC Jesse Brown, IL	27
VAHCS Des Moines, IA	15
VAMC Milwaukee, WI	15
VAMC Danville, IL	15



The 2011 Annual Report of the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center is published for VA blind rehabilitation stakeholders. Central Blind Rehabilitation Center, EDWARD HINES JR. VA HOSPITAL, P.O. Box 5000 (124) Hines, IL 60141 (708) 202-2273 *Hines VAH does not endorse the use or purchase of the specific prosthetic devices cited in this publication.*
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