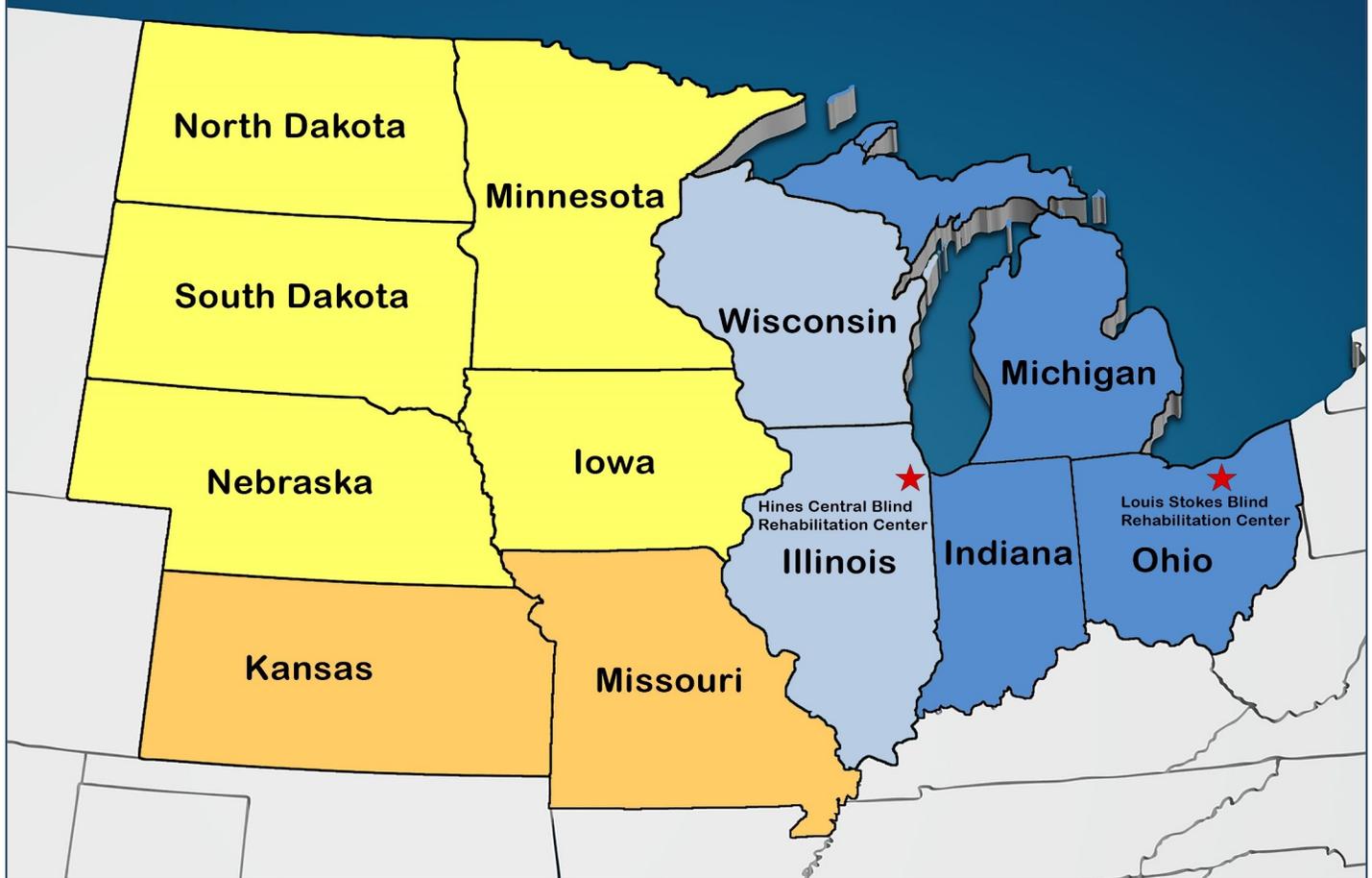


Central Blind Rehabilitation Center Annual Report 2015

Proudly Serving the Central Area Region



CENTRAL AREA REGION



ICARE

*To fulfill President Lincoln's promise:
"To CARE for him who shall have borne the battle,
and for his widow, and his orphan."*

Denise Van Koevering, COMS, CLVT, Chief
Chuck Brancheau, CVRT, Assistant Chief
Central Blind Rehabilitation Center
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital
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Hines, IL 60141
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Message from the Chief

To Our Stakeholders:

In 2015, the Hines Central Blind Rehabilitation Center has embraced the **ICARE (Integrity Commitment Advocacy Respect Excellence)** core values that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, along with Secretary McDonald, have advocated over the past year, to reaffirm our VA Mission and commitment to our Nation's heroes. I am pleased to say that we followed these core values through the provision of services in our program all year.

We have maintained **Integrity** with whom we have engaged; Veterans, Staff and Visitors. We have remained **Committed** to our mission and goals. We have **Advocated** for our Veterans and their families within the community. We have **Respected** all with whom we serve and work each day; Veterans, their family members, staff, and visitors. We have strived for **Excellence** in our program and continue to improve as we move forward each year. Our annual report communicates how we accomplished ICARE all year long.

Excellence was evident in the Joint Commission Triennial Review that occurred at Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital in February 2015. Hospital Leadership reported that we had a very successful review. JOINT Commission is an independent, not-for-profit organization, who accredits and certifies nearly 21,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States. Joint Commission accreditation and certification is recognized nationwide as a symbol of quality that reflects an organization's **commitment** to meeting certain performance standards.

In addition to the Joint Commission Triennial Review, we also underwent a Commission on the Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditation review. We **excelled** during that review as well. A number of programs at Hines VA were reviewed, (7 in all), and all were successful. This will mark the sixth time the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center participated in a CARF Review. Finally, the Blinded Veterans Association made several site visits to Blind Rehabilitation Centers across the U.S., including Hines Blind Center. This Site Visit, known as a "Veteran's Care Review," was equally successful. While they were very complimentary, they left us with some suggestions for consideration with more opportunities for growth and improvement.

Among the highlights for 2015, we would be remiss if we did not mention the visit by the VA Undersecretary for Health in September. Dr. Shulkin visited a number of programs at Hines VA, including the Blind Rehabilitation Center. Showcasing our National program provided a wonderful opportunity to educate VA leadership about what we do for our Nation's Veterans.

The year 2015 has been a busy year at the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center at Hines VA. So, flip the pages and read about all we have accomplished in just 12 months.

Sincerely,



Denise Van Koevering, COMS, CLVT
Chief, Central Blind Rehabilitation Center
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital

Integrity
Commitment
Advocacy
Respect
Excellence

Act with high moral principle.

Adhere to the highest professional standards.

**Maintain the trust and confidence of all
with whom I engage.**

Integrity Commitment Advocacy Respect Excellence

Leadership Reflections; the best of 2015

Monica Steiner, M.D.

Chief, Rehabilitation Service, Hines VA Hospital



Warm greetings from Rehabilitation Service! This year, Hines completed another successful site visit with the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). The Central Blind Rehabilitation Center (CBRC) received numerous accolades on our patient-centered care and compassionate staff. Also, in an effort to provide the highest quality patient care and outreach services, CBRC is now providing services via telehealth, as well as direct patient care in our rural communities. These initiatives have allowed us to improve our access to care for Veterans with vision rehabilitation needs. On the medical front, we are happy to welcome our new full time nurse practitioner, Michelle Paetow, who served in the United States Army and completed her nurse practitioner training at Loyola University in 2011. Our low vision Optometrist, Dr. Stelmack, is active in research and is mentoring other VA investigators on a national level. Under the leadership of Denise Van Koevering and Charles Brancheau, our staff remain committed to providing the highest quality, state-of-the-art services.

Denise Van Koevering, COMS, CLVT

Chief, Central Blind Rehabilitation Center



The year 2015 has been an exciting year! I am especially proud of our outreach efforts in the area of rural health. We have been able to reach and serve 149 blind and vision impaired Veterans in the rural areas of Illinois. Our continued improvement on our Veteran Satisfaction Surveys and our All Employee Survey speak well of our on-going efforts toward quality and excellent service. Of all our accomplishments, it is the staff that makes me proudest! They have worked continuously at providing the best Blind Rehabilitation to our Veterans, often times doing things that go unnoticed. They adapt to change and always put the Veteran first. Without the staff, our program would not be where it is today.

Charles Brancheau, CVRT

Assistant Chief, Central Blind Rehabilitation Center



As I continue to learn the position of Assistant Chief, one of the things I am proudest of in the past year is the ability of the staff to overcome adversity. This past year has brought many challenges and changes, not only to the Blind Center, but also to the hospital and the VA in general. The staff has successfully prepared for CARF accreditation, managed changes to the daily class schedule, and met many staffing changes and shortages, to name a few. One of the constants that I always hear from our Veterans is that the staff here at Hines are "the best." When working with the Veterans, our staff is able to remain focused and dedicated to provide the best individualized care. Working with this staff and our Veterans is the one thing that makes me proudest and makes me want to continue to strive to be the best!

**Integrity
Commitment
Advocacy
Respect
Excellence**

Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries.

Be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission.

**Fulfill my individual responsibilities and
organizational responsibilities.**

Integrity Commitment Advocacy Respect Excellence

Polytrauma/Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Hines VA Hospital continues to be identified as the primary Polytrauma Network site for Northern Illinois and Wisconsin. Polytrauma is the term used to describe the multiple life-threatening injuries that soldiers have sustained as a result of war and combat. The scope of these injuries greatly affects the traditional health care model, therefore, a new system of care was developed to address the needs of these Service Members and Veterans.

The Polytrauma/TBI team at Hines VA is made up of multiple disciplines including a Physiatrist, Nurse Educator, Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Neuropsychologist, Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Recreational Therapist, Blind Rehabilitation Therapist, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, and Social Worker. This multidisciplinary team creates an individualized plan of care to meet the needs and goals of each patient served.

The Polytrauma TBI Program continues to provide unique services to our Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn) OEF/OIF/OND Service Members and Veterans. These services do not take away from our already existing blind rehabilitation inpatient program, but enhance it, as well as provide additional services to those with functional vision issues. Approximately 300 functional vision screens have been completed in 2015. As a result, many patients have received additional services including, ophthalmological evaluations, glare control lenses to address light sensitivity issues, vision therapy to address functional vision concerns, and referrals to inpatient blind rehabilitation services.

The Polytrauma BROS along with the Polytrauma Team, are committed to this initiative and continue to participate in educational training on the newest technologies and advancements to remain at the cutting edge of this unique model of care.

OEF/OIF/OND Week 2015

Another example of commitment to this unique Veteran population includes OEF/OIF/OND Week. This group participated in a one-week specialized program emphasizing updating and refining skills, new technology, and building relationships with one another. The group consisted of Veterans that have graduated from the Hines BRC regular program, as well as Veterans who were just experiencing Blind Rehabilitation training for the first time. This was a great opportunity for these individuals to develop relationships and network with other visually impaired Veterans.

Along with individualized one-on-one training time, the Veterans participated in daily group discussions including new technology, advanced computer security, and sharing tips and tricks they have learned as everyday access technology users.

The Veterans also participated in numerous recreational activities including kayaking 6 miles down the Chicago river, golfing, and paddle boarding.



OEF/OIF/OND week 2015 participants

Integrity Commitment Advocacy Respect Excellence

Recreation Therapy

Part of the Blind Rehabilitation Center's Commitment to a well-rounded rehabilitation experience includes a robust Recreation Program. Recreation provides an opportunity for Veterans to practice new skills and renew interest in activities that have been enjoyed in the past as well as develop new interests and foster adjustment to a new lifestyle. The Central Blind Rehabilitation Center has been especially busy with adaptive recreation activities, both individual and team based. Some of the activities the veterans participated in this year included:

- Outings to the Chicago Symphony
- Lyric Opera
- Boat Tours down the Chicago River
- Golf
- Archery
- Snow skiing
- Paddle sports

Opportunities to try kayaking in a pool setting, learning paddle skills and rescues were also part of the many adaptive recreational choices offered in 2015. They also had the chance to kayak in a lagoon, river, and in the local forest preserve woods. A new challenge this past year included paddle boarding on Lake Michigan.

The newest adaptive activity this year included Dragon Boating (a team paddling sport on water in colorfully painted boats.)

The Central Blind Rehabilitation Center at Hines VA remains committed to offering the widest range of adaptive recreation activities to enable our Veterans to be as active as possible with their vision impairment.



Rural Health Initiative

In alignment with the Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) 12 Strategic Plan 2013-2018, *'Provide Veterans Personalized, Proactive, Patient-Driven Health Care, by increasing equitable care delivery to special Veteran populations,'* VA launched a Rural Health program through the VA Office of Rural Health (ORH) whose purpose was to do exactly that.

The Blind Rehabilitation Center is committed to both the strategic plan and to serve special Veteran populations which includes blinded and visually impaired individuals. Additionally, Veterans living in rural areas have traditionally been underserved due to their proximity to care and services offered by the VA. In response to this VA initiative, the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center piloted a staff position to specifically support rural blinded Veterans. In late 2014, a Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS) position was deployed as part of this national initiative. Under this ORH initiative, this position targeted rural geography patient populations. The funding was provided by the VA Office of Rural Health (ORH) for both 2014 and 2015. The BROS offered pre and post Blind Rehab Center training, and was able to instruct those who may not be able to travel to a Blind Rehabilitation Center for a full inpatient program. Finally, this initiative was also thought to help shorten the Inpatient Program treatment time and/or obviate the need for inpatient services.

This pilot has proven successful in 2015 in reaching and serving 149 Veterans in geographies beyond Cook and DuPage counties within the Northern Illinois area.

Integrity
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Advocacy
Respect
Excellence

**Be truly Veteran-Centric by identifying,
fully considering, and appropriately advancing
the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.**

Integrity Commitment Advocacy Respect Excellence

Advocacy is ongoing at the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center. The Hines BRC staff maintains a strong commitment to professional education, outreach, and advocacy. We are happy to report in 2015 we logged **99 visitors** and **720 hours of educational orientation** on vision impairment, blindness and blind rehabilitation.

Our **Visitors Program** is an opportunity to educate and increase awareness on the subject of vision impairment and how one can overcome many of the limitations once thought to be barriers to a quality life. Our visitors include students in health care and associated allied health care positions such as Nursing students, Optometry Residents and Rehabilitation Physicians. Visitors also include guests from the community, including Service Organizations and Volunteers. Visitor orientations typically include a tour of the Center and an orientation to the different skill areas within the Blind Rehabilitation curriculum.

Additionally, our Rehabilitation Staff reach out into the community and within professional organizations to present on blind rehabilitation related topics and participate on professional committees to further advance progress in this specialized field.

Professional Organizations and Committees

Blind Center Staff maintain membership on a number of professional organizations and committees, some of them include:

- International Association for the Education and Rehabilitation (IAER) Board Membership/ Conference Planning Committee
- Association for Education and Rehabilitation (AER) Orientation & Mobility Professional Standards Committee, University Review and Professional Development Committee

Professional Development and Education Awareness

Education and awareness is one of the best forms of advocacy. The following are some examples of education and awareness opportunities the Blind Center staff facilitated in 2015:

- **Annual Ophthalmology Immersion Program** coordinated by blind center staff for Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine Ophthalmology Residents and Rehabilitation Physicians, where participants experience a real-life simulation of all areas of the blind rehabilitation program.
- Hines VAH Social Work Service hosted a presentation for education on Blindness, our Blind Rehabilitation program, and services available to blinded and visually impaired Veterans.



Annual Ophthalmology Immersion Program

Community presentations in 2015

- Adaptive Rock Climbing at the **Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago**; volunteers were taught 'human guide techniques' for guiding visually impaired participants through their climbing adventure.
- **Cook County Sheriff's Cadets** received education on blind rehab services .
- *Adaptive Mobility For the Older Population*, presented at **Northern Illinois University** O&M Master's Program.

Integrity
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Respect
Excellence

Treat all those I serve and with whom I work

with dignity and respect.

Show respect to earn it.

Integrity Commitment Advocacy **Respect** Excellence

Voice of the Employee

The 2014 **All Employee Survey** revealed some opportunities for improvement in strengthening our working relationships with each other. Blind Rehabilitation Center Staff collaborated to develop an action plan to improve outcomes in three areas. **Respecting** the needs of our employees focused on addressing the three areas:

◆ Praise

Ensuring the positive feedback we receive from our Veterans is now shared with the staff on a more regular basis. Peer Recognition through **Above and Beyond Certificates** and **On-the Spot Awards** increased in frequency due to greater awareness of these opportunities for positive communications.



◆ Workgroup Communication

The 2015 CARF Survey results encouraged improved documentation of measurable Veteran progress. We are assessing our practices and will develop strategies for improving outcomes in department communication as well as documentation. This will be a carry-over goal in 2016.



◆ Alleviating Exhaustion

A six month pilot of a new patient schedule was implemented in June 2015. This new schedule converted a six class hour day to a seven class hour day with shorter classes. Realigning the class hours allowed for more time between classes for documentation for the staff and breaks for the Veterans.



Voice of the Patient

We maintained a 'High Performing Service' status in **Consumer Satisfaction** with an average of **99.3% overall satisfaction** rate for the Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Program.

Universal Stakeholder Participation Questionnaire (uSPEQ) (pronounced "you speak") is a neutral, third-party resource to anonymously capture consumer feedback. Reports are monitored quarterly with particular focus on the "Potential Areas for Improvements" section to identify trends that can be addressed through improvements within the BRC programs. This feedback survey is endorsed by CARF and utilized throughout Blind Rehabilitation within the VA System of care.



Integrity
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Excellence

Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement.

Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership,

accountable for my actions,

willing to admit mistakes,

and rigorous in correcting them.

Integrity Commitment Advocacy Respect Excellence

Excellence is evident in professional development programs and performance improvement initiatives that we have implemented over the past year in our efforts to bring the best quality program to our Veterans.

Performance Improvement

Performance improvement initiatives this year focused on **Excellence** in providing quality care, in a timely fashion.

- ◆ For 2015, there was a slight increase in the number of Veterans receiving training (304). Access to care barriers continue to challenge the program. Emphasis on establishing discharge dates for Veterans in the program has enhanced our ability to plan for admissions more efficiently. Continuous communication with our VIST Coordinators is helping identify more specific needs of Veterans before they are admitted for training.
- ◆ We met and exceeded the goal of 10 encounters for Virtual Care through Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) totaling 33 CVT appointments for the fiscal year 2015. Currently, many of the Program Reviews are conducted using CVT. We continue to explore other opportunities to incorporate the use of CVT for admission assessments, family program conferences, and participation in support groups sponsored by local area VIST Coordinators.

Excellence in Education and Development

Our University Student Internship Program continues to excel here at the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center. The 2015 academic year included 20 students from a number of university affiliates who offer graduate programs in the field of blind rehabilitation. The majority of our students come from Western Michigan University and Northern Illinois University. This past year, new affiliations with the University of Massachusetts and Hunter College Public University New York City, New York, participated in our internship program.

We take great pride in our internship experiences and continue to have very good working relationships with the universities. Regular visits to the local campuses are scheduled where we speak with students about VA Blind Rehabilitation, the internship program, and employment opportunities within the VA for blind rehabilitation. Many of our interns have been hired into various disciplines within VA Blind Rehabilitation. The VA experience offers students excellent opportunities to teach and train in the other areas of the blind rehabilitation program including Manual Skills, Visual Skills, and Computer Access Training. The experience gained from the VA student internship program is not easily matched with experiences found outside of the VA.



Integrity Commitment Advocacy Respect Excellence

Skill Area Progress

All of the skill areas within Blind Rehabilitation continue to refine processes and programs to meet the demands of a program of excellence. One consistent for all skill areas this past year was the development of measurable goals to better document Veteran progress in their rehabilitation program.

Living Skills continues to evolve to meet the increased technology needs of the Veterans we serve. As a result, Veterans in our Regular Blind Rehabilitation Program are assessed for technology needs within the first week of admission. We have combined Activities of Daily Living (ADL), Adaptive Kitchen Skills (AKS), and Communications (COM) to be taught by one instructor in an effort to streamline instructor efforts. Living Skills has also completed a new **Blind Rehabilitation Center Cookbook** for Veterans participating in Adaptive Kitchen Skills (AKS) area. This new book features healthy recipes for the stovetop, oven, microwave, and crockpot. The cookbook is in large print and laminated for durability and encourages our Veterans to continue the skills they acquired during training. Teaming up with dietetics, we continue to increase our efforts to provide education about the benefits of healthy eating. Additionally, we are currently researching new emerging accessible phone options to address low technology needs.

The **Manual Skills** department continued its focus on how the **5S Workplace Organization Methodology** could improve efficiency within the skill area. 5S stands for *Sort, Set in Order for Flow, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain*. This methodology was applied to the Home Mechanics, Small Engines, and Leatherwork areas. The audible iTunes Apps that were trialed last year were regularly exposed to Veterans in Home Mechanics and those participating in the Music Program. Those Apps included the *Clinometer* app (an audible level for around the house) and the *Talking Tuner* app (an audible instrument tuner). 'Pandora' (an iTunes app that generates music stations) was also more regularly incorporated into the group Manual Skills class to create a more relaxing atmosphere and also have Veterans practice using their iOS technology in different settings.

Visual Skills continues to focus program development. The areas being addressed include assessments of remaining vision and the addition of simulator kits that enhance our ability to educate family members and visitors on various vision loss conditions.

Computer Access Training placed new emphasis on a special class to expose Veterans to **Identity Protection and Internet Security** concepts and strategies. The concepts covered in these classes include, identity protection, resistance to social engineering phone calls, phishing e-mails, and internet pop ups. Reports from the field indicate an increase in fraudulent attempts to gain access to Veterans' private information. The trends for access technology needs remains consistent. However, there appears to be a trend for higher customized programs and complex technology to overcome severe disabilities.

Orientation & Mobility has evaluated a number of **public transit GPS** applications for use on the iPhone and iPad devices. These applications are designed to provide accessible information for the visually impaired. The **Trekker Breeze** (a stand-alone global positioning system (PGS) has been updated to the new **Trekker Breeze Plus**. This new device is to be more accurate with faster response time. It also works much better in downtown environments with large buildings.

Outreach

Central Area Region VIST Coordinators

The Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators (VIST) case-manage visually impaired and legally blind Veterans, helping them navigate the Vision Rehab Continuum of Care model established by the VA. They are responsible for referring Veterans to the appropriate model of care for their vision impairment needs. The following is a current list for the Central Area Region.

Indiana

Indianapolis, Deanna Austin; 317-988-2576
Fort Wayne, Novalea Welch; 260-426-5431 x72650

Illinois

Hines, Patrick Zeinstra; 708-202-2351
North Chicago, Eric Strong; 224-610-5429
Chicago, Melinda Dunlap; 312-569-7531
Marion, Betty Howerton; 618-997-5311 x54815
Danville, Jeff Stroud; 317-554-5406

Iowa

Des Moines, Margaret E. Parker; 515-699-5410
Iowa City, Herbert Queen; 319-338-0581 x6128

Kansas

Leavenworth, Dawn Clouse; 913-682-2000 x52657
Wichita, Bob Hamilton; 316-685-2221 x 53682

Michigan

Detroit, Jennifer Troyer; 313-576-4888
Battle Creek, Bill Bernhard; 269-223-6607
Ann Arbor, Richard Alden; 734-845-3064
Iron Mountain, Patricia Staller; 906-774-3300 x34515

Minnesota

Minneapolis, Jennifer Points; 612-725-2000x1814

Missouri

St. Louis, Kevin Jacques; 314-652-4100 x54121
Kansas City, Paul Clary-Archuleta; 816-861-4700 x56924
Columbia, Lauren Swift; 573-814-6458
Popular Bluff, Erin Hullinger; 573-686-4151 x52151
Sioux Falls, Anna Perry; 605-336-3230 x7860
Black Hills, Galen Britain; 605-745-2000x92558

Nebraska

Omaha, Jean Butler; 402-346-8800 x3188

North Dakota

Fargo, Jody Schommer; 701-232-3241 x33056

Ohio

Cincinnati, Brian Joos; 513-559-3567
Columbus, Matthew Page; 614-257-5470
Youngstown, Beth Levine; 330-740-9200 X1580
Cleveland, Marianne Ryan; 216-791-3800 x4240

South Dakota

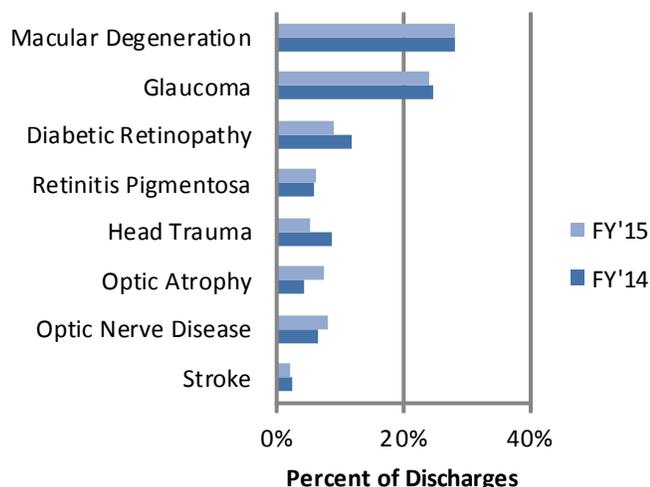
Sioux Falls, Anna Perry; 605-333-6891
Black Hills, Galen Britain; 605-745-2000x92558

Wisconsin

Milwaukee, Leon Haith; 414-384-2000 x41832
Madison, Kurt Brunner; 608-256-1901 x 11960
Tomah, Gina Chmelka; 608-372-3971 x66440

Operating Statistics for 2015

Common Visual Diagnoses Fiscal Years '14 & '15



Number of Discharges	304
Occupancy	86%
Average Length of Stay	36 days

Age Group # of Patients Percent

Age Group	# of Patients	Percent
20's	3	1.0
30's	10	3.3
40's	10	3.3
50's	54	17.8
60's	85	28.0
70's	67	22.0
80's	54	17.8
90's	21	6.9

Discharged Veterans by State

Central Area Region

Illinois	82
Indiana	34
Missouri	34
Minnesota	29
Wisconsin	26
Michigan	21
Iowa	14
South Dakota	11
Kansas	8
Ohio	7
Nebraska	5

Type of Program

Program	# of Patients	Percent
Regular/Dual	190	62.8%
Computer Access Technology Section (CATS)	71	23.4%
*Single Area	42	13.8%

*Low Vision, Electronic Travel Aid (ETA), GPS, Electronic Reading Machine (ERA), iPhone, iPad

The 2015 Annual Report of the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center is published for VA Blind Rehabilitation stakeholders. Hines VAH does not endorse the use or purchase of any specific prosthetic devices cited in this publication.

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