



# Federal Health Matters

## Peake Sworn in as New VA Secretary

On December 20, James B. Peake, MD was sworn in as the sixth secretary of the VA. A combat veteran of the Vietnam War and former U.S. Army surgeon general, Peake was nominated by President Bush on October 30 and unanimously confirmed by the Senate on December 14. Peake follows R. James Nicholson, who resigned the post on October 1, and VA Deputy Secretary Gordon Mansfield, who served as acting secretary after Nicholson's resignation. During the swearing in ceremony, the President praised Peake's long standing military and medical career, asserting that Peake "has the skills and experience to carry out [the VAs] mission."

Peake takes office during a time when the VA faces many challenges, including an influx of veterans who have served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, a large backlog of benefits claims, and long wait times for VA health care appointments. In response, a number of special task forces and independent review panels, including the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors, have made recommendations to the VA for improving its benefits and services. Peake called the commission's report a "powerful blueprint to move forward" and said he would continue to implement its recommendations and to work with Congress to pass legislation as needed.

Peake graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (West Point, NY) in 1966 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the army. For his service in the Vietnam

War he was awarded the Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart. In 1972, Peake received his MD degree from Cornell University (Ithaca, NY). Following a general surgery residency at Brooke Army Medical Center (Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX), Peake went on to serve as a cardiac surgeon and commander in several military medical posts, commanding general of the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School (Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX), and the 40th U.S. Army surgeon general. In 2004, Peake retired from the army as a lieutenant general and became the executive vice president and chief operating officer (COO) of the nonprofit public benefit organization Operation HOPE (Los Angeles, CA) and the chief medical director and COO of QTC Management, Inc. (Diamond Bar, CA). Peake is a fellow of the American College of Surgeons, Society of Thoracic Surgeons, and American College of Cardiology.

## VA Announces Caregiver Assistance Program

The VA announced on December 6 that it will provide nearly \$4.7 million for a series of eight pilot programs to expand and improve health care education, training, and resources for at-home caregivers of disabled and aging veterans. These programs add to current VA services that provide support to caregivers through case management, social work, care coordination, geriatrics and extended care, and nationwide volunteer programs.

The pilot programs span the country geographically, and many plan to utilize innovative technologies to accommodate caregivers' needs. For instance,

one project at the VA Desert Pacific Network (Los Angeles, CA) and the VA Sierra Nevada Healthcare System (Reno, NV) will work with a community coalition to provide resources and training to caregivers of veterans with traumatic brain injury using web-based, telephone, and video conferencing. Another program, at the Atlanta VA Medical Center (VAMC) (Decatur, GA), will use computer-based technology to support caregivers who live in remote areas or cannot leave their homes due to their caregiving responsibilities. And the Transition Assistance Program at the VAMC in Gainesville, FL will provide support and education to caregivers using videophone technology.

Other programs include: a Memphis, TN and Palo Alto, CA initiative to provide caregivers in 14 home-based primary care (HBPC) programs—and in non-HBPC settings at Palo Alto—with education, support, and skill building for managing stress and patient care; a project at the Albany VAMC (Albany, NY) to convert a three-hour workshop, entitled "Communicating Effectively with Health Care Professionals," into a multimedia format; a round-the-clock caregiver advocate program at the VA Healthcare System of Ohio (Cincinnati, OH); a joint program between the VAMC at Tampa, FL and the Miami VA Healthcare System (Miami, FL) that focuses on providing in-home respite care, home companions, adult day care, and an emergency response system for caregivers; and a "medical foster home" model of care for veterans in the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (Honolulu, HI), which involves caregivers in communities across the Hawaiian islands taking veterans into their homes and providing 24-hour supervision. ●