
The United States Navy on the World Wide Web
A service of the Navy Office of Information, Washington DC
send feedback/questions to comments@chinfo.navy.mil
The United States Navy web site is found on the Internet at
<http://www.navy.mil>

Navy and Marine Corps Medical News
MN-00-48
December 1, 2000

Navy and Marine Corps Medical News (MEDNEWS) is a weekly compendium of news and information contributed by commands throughout the Navy medical department. Information contained in MEDNEWS stories is not necessarily endorsed by Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED), nor should it be considered official Navy policy.

BUMED distributes MEDNEWS to Sailors and Marines, their families, civilian employees and retired Navy and Marine Corps families. Further distribution is highly encouraged.

Stories in MEDNEWS use these abbreviations after a Navy medical professional's name to show affiliation: MC - Medical Corps (physician); DC - Dental Corps; NC - Nurse Corps; MSC - Medical Service Corps (clinicians, researchers and administrative managers). Hospital Corpsmen (HM) and Dental Technician (DT) designators are placed in front of their names.

Contents for this week's MEDNEWS:

- Budget adds major TRICARE benefits for active duty
- New laser vision center opens at NNMC
- New saliva test detects Tuberculosis
- Hospital awarded for community service
- Atsugi clinic becomes unexpected delivery room
- TRICARE question and answer
- Healthwatch: It's cold and flu season again

Stories

Headline: Budget adds major TRICARE benefits for active duty
By Staff Sgt. Kathleen T. Rhem, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - Active duty members and their families should look for major new benefits coming soon in DoD's TRICARE managed healthcare plan, a senior program official said.

Air Force Col. Frank Cumberland, TRICARE Management Activity director of communications and customer service, said the most publicized TRICARE change in the defense budget signed Oct. 30 has been the opening up of benefits to Medicare-eligible retirees age 65 and older. The coming wave of change, however, won't overlook active duty members and families, he added.

Some of the benefits being added to TRICARE within the next year include:

- Active duty family members will no longer have to make co-payments for care from a civilian provider after April 30,

2001.

- Family members of active duty troops in remote locations become eligible for the TRICARE Prime Remote program Oct. 1, 2001.

- DoD will have a five-year period to phase in making chiropractic care available to active duty troops.

TRICARE and health affairs officials are still working out the details on these changes and will announce them when plans are complete, Cumberland said.

TRICARE managers are also working to increase access to school physicals, eliminate the need for some nonavailability statements and some referrals for specialty care. Some of these issues may not come to pass before a new TRICARE contract is awarded, perhaps in 2003 or 2004, program officials advised.

Dr. H. James Sears, executive director of the TRICARE Management Activity, called the changes outlined in this year's budget legislation "the biggest platter of benefit changes" since the mid-1960s. TRICARE, he said, is adding benefits and continues to lower beneficiaries' out-of-pocket costs and, in the process, taking the irritants out of the TRICARE program and improving accessibility."

-USN-

Headline: New laser vision center opens at NNMC

By Lt. Cmdr. Ed Austin, National Naval Medical Center

BETHESDA, Md - The National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) opened a laser refractive surgery center under the Navy's Corneal Refractive Surgery Program, which makes the surgical procedure available to active duty Sailors and Marines.

The new facility, located in the Ophthalmology Clinic at NNMC, started screening candidates for the surgical program in October and conducted its first laser surgeries in mid-November.

The program is intended to serve those active duty members whose mission effectiveness and personal safety would be most enhanced by eliminating the need for wearing eyeglasses or contact lenses while performing their military duties.

While active duty Navy and Marine Corps personnel may request evaluation to determine suitability for surgery regardless of job specialty or warfare community, priority will be placed on Sailors and Marines whose military duties require them to work in extreme physical environments that preclude the safe use of glasses or contact lenses.

Among the first to have the procedure done at NNMC's new Laser Vision Center was a group of Sailors assigned to the Experimental Dive Unit in Panama City, Fla. According to BM1 Troy Larck, who wears contacts when he dives, this will eliminate the need for wearing lenses.

"I have had a contact lens slip out of place during a dive, and there is not much you can do about it while you have your helmet on," Larck said.

QM2 Randall Chase, who has never been able to wear contact lenses comfortably due to his astigmatism, looks forward to not having to worry about eyeglasses. Both Sailors looked on as their shipmate HM1 Robert Huffman led the group getting the

laser surgery.

Lt. Cmdr. Greg Wheelock, Director of the Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Fleet Liaison Unit located in Indian Head, Md., was also among the first to have the laser surgery. Shortly after a post-surgical exam, he was able to read words on a sign that he would not have been able to read without his glasses before the surgery.

His duties require him to not only perform underwater dives, but parachute jumping as well. He indicated that contact lenses can be awkward when parachute jumping, due to the airflow across the eyes. He will now be able to leave the lenses behind.

NNMC's Laser Vision Center offers the corneal refractive surgical procedure known as PRK or Photorefractive Keratectomy. The PRK procedure uses the laser to remove a small disc-shaped sliver of the central cornea. PRK, an FDA approved refractive surgery procedure, is currently the only procedure offered under the Navy program.

LASIK, or Laser In-situ Keratomileusis, will not be offered until further studies being conducted in the military adequately establish its safety in the operational environment.

Members requesting PRK will be screened by an optometrist or ophthalmologist to determine if they are clinically eligible for the surgery. If clinically suitable, the member's unit commander must endorse the request and determine the member's priority level. Once a command-endorsed request is received, the NNMC Laser Vision Center staff will review requests for final determination of clinical appropriateness and priority.

The most time-consuming aspects of the process are pre-surgical evaluations and post-surgical follow-up care. NNMC's new center has four specially equipped examination rooms to perform the pre- and post-operative visits. The center has three refractive-surgery trained technicians and one optometrist to perform initial screening exams and counseling

There are currently nine doctors on staff at the center who will perform the laser procedure.

According to Cmdr. Joe Pasternak, MC, director of the center, the NNMC Laser Vision Center becomes one of only three such centers available for corneal refractive surgery under the Navy program. He projected that with the new state-of-the-art equipment and available staff, the center will be able to offer the procedure to approximately 80 Sailors and Marines a month.

In addition to the new center at NNMC, the laser surgery is currently available at Naval Medical Center San Diego and Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, Va. More detailed descriptions about the priority groups, as well as sample forms and letters used to request the surgery are available on the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery website at:

navymedicine.med.navy.mil/PRK/refractive_surgery_information.htm

For more information regarding the services offered at NNMC's Laser Vision Center, call (301) 295-1200.

Headline: New saliva test detects Tuberculosis

From Naval Dental Research Institute

GREAT LAKES, Ill - The invasive and time-consuming skin test for TB may become something of the past thanks to the continued research by scientists from the Naval Dental Research Institute.

Researchers are developing a one-visit, inexpensive, five-minute screening test for exposure to the bacteria that causes TB.

The saliva and other oral fluid-based tests are simple to perform and use procedures that can be learned in a few minutes and do not require any special qualifications.

Salivary and oral fluid-based diagnostics may present tremendous readiness possibilities for the military. They allow rapid screening of diseases to be made at one appointment without complicated laboratory tests.

This technology holds potential for rapid detection of antibodies signaling exposure to many diseases and environmental substances.

-USN-

Headline: Hospital awarded for community service

From Naval School of Health Sciences

PORTSMOUTH - Naval School of Health Sciences (NSHS) Portsmouth was recently recognized for its participation in several community service activities.

The Commander, Mid-Atlantic Region lauded NSHS Portsmouth for its contributions to the Personal Excellence Partnership Program. The award is in recognition of NSHS's ongoing partnership with Mount Hermon Elementary School in Portsmouth, VA.

Among other things, volunteers from NSHS assist with school events, tutor students and participate in school beautification projects.

Representatives from the Portsmouth Mayor's office recently visited the command and presented Commanding Officer, Capt. Charles Mount, NC, with mementos of appreciation for the command's participation in "Make a Difference Day."

As part of in "Make a Difference Day," NSHS Portsmouth staff and student personnel volunteered time and energy to cleaning several yards belonging to elderly residents in Portsmouth.

Finally, NSHS Portsmouth's Command Master Chief, HMCM(SW) John Bayerlein, was recognized as a finalist for the Military Citizen of the Year award by Hampton Roads' Chamber of Commerce.

Master Chief Bayerlein stressed that this recognition was not due solely to his participation in community service events, but was a culmination of the time and effort that the personnel of NSHS Portsmouth devote to our neighbors in the community.

-USN-

Navy Medical Center is recognized for its efforts

By Robert Jones, Navy Medical Center Portsmouth

PORTSMOUTH, Va - Medical Center Portsmouth was the

recipient of special recognition for Outstanding Community Service to the Portsmouth Clean Community Commission and for participation in the Adopt-A-Spot Program.

The Portsmouth Clean Community Commission held its 3rd annual recognition ceremony on October 18, at the Sand Bar Center.

The event was hosted by the Clean Community Commission Executive Coordinator, Claudia Cox-Wynn.

Mr. Robert Wall, the Facilities Management Department's Environmental & Natural Resources Manager accepted the award on behalf of the command.

In August 1999, the Facilities Management Department's Environmental Branch signed on with the Clean Community's Adopt-A-Spot Program. The Environmental Branch selected the shoreline as the Adopt-A-Spot area of participation.

Due to our extensive shoreline and prominence on the Elizabeth River, "it makes sense to chose this area," said Robert Jones, an Environmental Protection Specialist with Facilities Management Department's Environmental Branch. As stewards of our natural resources, we are obligated to protect our environment.

NMCP has also been participating in "Clean the Bay Day" events since its inception 10 years ago. During that time, close to 100 tons of debris has been collected from NMCP shoreline by over 2000 volunteers.

-USN-

Headline: Atsugi Clinic becomes unexpected delivery room
From U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka, Japan

YOKOSUKA - The best place to treat a broken leg is not the Mother-Baby Ward of a hospital, and the best place to birth a baby is not the ER or Acute Care Clinic. However, when there is little or no time you do what is necessary.

That's what happened in Atsugi when the Lalas family found themselves ready to deliver - far from USNH Yokosuka and with no time to get to a nearby Japanese hospital.

"Mrs. Lalas had an appointment and she came in a little early saying she was having contractions and thought maybe the baby was on its way," said CDR Dave Floyd, senior medical officer and family physician at Branch Medical Clinic Atsugi.

Mrs. Maria Divina Lalas is the wife of AMH1 Ferdinand Lalas of VFA-27.

When Matthews and Floyd examined Lalas, she was ready to deliver. Emergency equipment was made available, the staff prepared itself and minutes later, Keane Aiven Lalas entered the world.

"We don't normally do deliveries here, but in an emergency, when there just is not time to go to the local Japanese hospital, or go all the way to Yokosuka, we're prepared to deliver the baby here," said Floyd.

"The healthcare facility here is one of the best," said AMH1 Lalas. "It's a good place and there's nothing to worry about."

According to Floyd, "That's the message we want to get to

the fleet. We want them to relax and do their job out there, knowing we're here to take care of their family."

For the Lalas family, good medical care is one of the main reasons they've decided to stay in the Navy and extend in Atsugi.

"I know my kids are in good hands here," said AMH1 Lalas.

-USN-

Headline: TRICARE question and answer

Question: If my family moves to a different region, are we (active duty) automatically assigned a new Primary Care Manager, or do we have to re-enroll?

Answer: Enrollment in TRICARE Prime entails the assignment of a Primary Care Manager, enrollment in DEERS, and communication with the member on what enrollment in the TRICARE program means. For active duty members, enrollment is automatic. For active duty family members, enrollment in TRICARE Prime is on a voluntary basis.

Currently, if you move to a different region, you will have up to 30 days at the new site to enroll. Your old region will cover you for care until you enroll at the new region. Enrolled members will start a new 12-month enrollment period.

-USN-

Headline: Healthwatch: It's cold and flu season again

By Capt. Robert E. Hoyt, MC, Naval Hospital Pensacola

Before you know it, cold and flu season will be here, and you may be ready to say "Doctor, can you help me." But before you ask your doctor for help, here are some things you need to know about colds and flu - or upper respiratory infections (URI).

URIs are caused by viruses that effect the nose, ears, throat, sinuses and chest during the late fall and winter months. Most are mild and are resolved without any type of treatment.

The common cold is caused by more than 200 types of viruses. Symptoms include low-grade fever (less than 101 degrees), nasal congestion, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, sneezing and mild sore throat. The fever disappears in a few days, and the nasal symptoms usually go away within two weeks.

The Flu has a higher fever than the common cold (101 to 104 degrees) but the muscle aches, headaches, and fatigue are more severe. Cough, runny nose and sore throat are also common. Flu can seem to sap your strength, and most people will spend several days to a week in bed.

Colds and flu are both caused by viruses. Unlike bacteria, antibiotics do not affect viruses. Patients may get some relief from the symptoms of colds and flu using over-the-counter medicines, like decongestants and pain relievers, but many of these do not help you recover. The vast majority of people improve with time without any treatment.

-USN-

Comments and ideas for MEDNEWS are welcome. Story Submissions

are highly encouraged. Contact MEDNEWS editor, At email:
mednews@us.med.navy.mil; telephone 202-762-3218, (dsn) 762, or
fax 202-762-3224.

-USN-