



Message from Kristi Green, MSN, RN | Woman Veterans Program Manager

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Welcome to Walla Walla VA Medical Center's new women's health newsletter, appropriately named "Walla Walla VA's Women Warriors Update". We plan to provide a quarterly update on educational health related topics for women Veterans.

I am Walla Walla VA's women Veterans program manager (WVPM) and I have over 18 years of nursing experience in a variety of areas that include women's health, pediatrics, post-anesthesia care, gastrointestinal, management/director, and an associate professor of nursing. I am an advocate for patient safety, quality care, and connecting the patient with the right providers and services.

As the WVPM, I promote educational opportunities for staff to enhance their knowledge, skills, and communication. I also review data and associated trends while collaborating with our women's health medical



director and the team to identify barriers and solutions. The WVPM is a resource for women Veterans and the providers.

We are currently conducting quarterly focus groups to provide women Veterans an opportunity to voice their opinion on a variety of

topics. Not only will the voices of women Veterans be heard, but we will use your voice as a guide for working together to implement needed changes.

We will also continue to host town hall forums - two per year - which will provide women Veterans an opportunity for their voices to be heard, to ask questions, or seek educational tips.

We want to provide answers to *your* questions and allow women Veterans an opportunity to improve how health care is delivered to women Veterans! I welcome your comments, opinions, and needs—that is what I'm here for.

How the program helps women Veterans

The Walla Walla VA provides a range of services to meet the needs of Women Veterans. We strive to provide exceptional care in every aspect of your life. We address individual needs and work in a timely manner to promote comprehensive health care services in a sensitive and safe environment.

Services offered include primary care, gynecology, transgender, maternity, infertility, psychiatric/mental health, whole health, telehealth, military sexual trauma, and health and wellness, which includes pre-

ventative, physicals, labs, and yearly screening for cervical and breast cancer.

The Walla Walla VA has designated women's health primary care providers specializing in caring for women. We have a women's health program consisting of a team who specialize in women's health, overseen by a women's health medical director, to assist the primary care providers in caring for women Veterans. The team includes a women's health nurse practitioner, a nurse navigator/maternity care coordinator, and a women Veterans social worker.

Meet Walla Walla VA's women's health team

Diane Levine, MS, APRN, WHNP

Diane is a board-certified women's health nurse practitioner who is the new designated women's health primary care provider. She specializes in gynecology, obstetrics, and all aspects of women's health. She comes to the Walla Walla VA from Indian Health Service where she spent several years caring for Navajo women and their families.

Some of the services Ms. Levine will provide include well woman exams, cervical cancer screening, clinical breast exams, contraception, gynecological concerns including treatment of infection, incontinence, abnormal bleeding, STI screening, menopausal care, and hormone replacement therapy. She provides preconception counseling, pregnancy testing and first visit for maternity care.

Ms. Levine highly values her commitment to providing excellence in health care to women of all ages. She provides high quality, evidence-based health care that is competent, compassionate, and has a positive impact on the lives of her patients.

Michele Spencer, RN, BSN

Michele is the women's health navigator/maternity care coordinator.

As a nurse navigator, she tracks mammogram and PAP tests. She also provides consults throughout the process, which includes verification that the Veteran attended appointments and obtained test results, verifies the physician's follow-up plan has been communicated to the patient, and provides timely communication to the Veteran regarding their healthcare status.

As a maternity care coordinator, she conducts intake calls to women Veterans to discuss VA maternity benefits, provides additional resource information, and identifies care needs.

After the initial intake call, the maternity care coordinator will call at 12 weeks gestation, 20 weeks gestation, 28 weeks gestation, 36 weeks gestation, right after delivery, and 6 weeks postpartum. During these calls, questions or concerns regarding benefits are identified and addressed. In addition, educational resources are provided. For those Veterans who choose to breastfeed, a lactation package containing a breast pump, breastfeeding bras, breast pads, and an abdominal binder are also ordered and mailed to the Veteran following their 28 weeks gestation call.

Marie Alexander, MSW, LSCWAIC, LMSW

Marie is the women's health social worker. One of the benefits of women's health social work is that it will increase accessibility to counseling and resources for the women Veterans and their caregivers.

Women's health social work is designed to be available for warm hand-offs and same-day appointments, if possible, as well as scheduled counseling appointments. The women's health social worker will work with women Veterans of all ages and demographics.

Marie will assist with pregnant Veterans that includes providing information for WIC, housing, food banks, and referrals. She will also provide education related to the VA and community resources, entitlements, advance directives/living wills, as well as promote whole health.



Update your contact information

We want to know we can reach you. Do you know if your mailing address, email address, and phone numbers are up to date in your health record?

Some of you received this newsletter by email and others received it in the mail. You may also have received a copy of this newsletter from a VA employee, your provider team, or elsewhere.

Future editions of this newsletter will be delivered to those interested via email and also posted on our website. We will also be using home and cell phone numbers for upcoming tele-town (telephone) halls we hope you will participate in.

So we can send you future newsletters and other information via email and invite you to future tele-town halls, here are a few ways to get your record updated:

1. In My HealtheVet.
2. At your next scheduled visit.
3. At www.va.gov's website.
4. Call the Walla Walla VA at 509.525.5200, then press "2" and "2" or ask for Eligibility.

Rest assured your information is held in the strictest of confidence, and any mailings, emails, or phone calls you receive from the Walla Walla VA are from a trusted source.



Sign up for the next women's health focus group

If you are interested in participating in one of our upcoming – and confidential – women's health focus groups to help us continue improving how care is delivered to women Veterans, let us know. **Upcoming dates are January 5, May 4, and August 3 in 2022 from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. PT.** Sign up today by contacting linda.wondra@va.gov and let us know which date(s) you are interested in.



Health tips & important contact information

Cervical cancer screening – pap test (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2021b).

- Recommend every 3-5 years (depending on the type of testing) for women ages 25-65.
- Recommend no screening for women 65-years-of-age and older (prior screening results ~ negative).
- Recommend no screening for women who have had their uterus and cervix removed (no prior history of a high-grade precancer or cancer in the cervix).
- The survival rate increases the earlier cervical cancer is detected and treatment is started.

Breast cancer screening – mammogram (ACS, 2021a)

- Recommend women ages 40-44 have the option to have a mammogram screening every year.
- Recommend women ages 45-54 have a mammogram screening every year.
- Recommend women ages 55 and older have a mammogram screening every year or every other year.
- Recommend women older than 55 years-of-age continue having mammogram screenings if they remain in good health and expect to live for an additional ten years.
- The survival rate increases the earlier breast cancer is detected and treatment is started.
- Talk with your primary care provider about cervical cancer and breast cancer screenings. If you don't have a provider – no problem. Contact Kristi Green, Walla Walla VA's WVPM, to assist you in connecting with a women's health primary care provider.



And be sure to keep these numbers and websites handy so you are prepared to help someone else or yourself:

- Women Veterans Call Center | 855.829.6636 | www.bit.ly/WomenVetsCallCenter
- Apply for VA Benefits | 877.222.8387 | www.benefits.va.gov
- Veterans Crisis Line | 800.273.8255 | www.veteranscrisisline.net
- My HealtheVet | 877.327.0022 (help desk) | www.myhealth.va.gov
- Make an appointment the Walla Walla VA | 509.525.5200, then press "2" and "2"

