



System Worth Saving Site Visit Report

- **Date:** September 17, 2020
- **Location:** St. Cloud VA Health Care System/ Virtual Site Visit
- **Attendees:**
 - Rehab Committee Members*- Chairman Wilson Spence, Gary Munkholm, Daniel Tengwall, Lynn Lyons and Jim Finley
 - *Department Service Officer*- Jeremy Wolfsteller.
 - St. Cloud VA Health Care System*- Director Brent A. Thelen, Chief of Staff Scott Bartley, Nurse Executive Breta Monroe, Associate Director Cheryl Thieschafer, and Public Affairs Officer Barry Venable.

- **Purpose**

The American Legion Dept. Rehabilitation Committee is tasked with staying engaged with agencies that aid Minnesota veterans. The committee does this by conducting System Worth Saving Site Visits throughout the year. These locations include Sioux Falls, Fargo, St. Cloud and Minneapolis VA Health Care Systems, St. Paul Regional Offices, Minneapolis, Hastings, Luverne, Fergus Falls and Silver Bay Veterans Homes. Additional Site Visits are conducted at VA CBOC's, Vets Centers, and Minnesota nonprofits that serve veterans when the budget allows.

St. Cloud VA Health Care System Overview

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System serves Veterans in central and west central Minnesota via the VA Medical Center in St. Cloud and VA Clinics in Alexandria, Brainerd and Montevideo. The Health Care System began serving Veterans in 1924 and now delivers care to more than 39,000 Veterans in the Upper Midwest region.



Services are delivered through outpatient clinics and the following beds: 15 acute psychiatry beds, 225 extended care and rehabilitation beds, and 148 Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (RRTP) beds. The Health Care System provides primary and subspecialty medical, urgent, specialty and mental health care; acute psychiatry services; and extended care and rehabilitation services. Specialty outpatient services offered include audiology, dental, endoscopy, ambulatory surgery, laboratory, orthopedics, optometry, podiatry, pulmonology, radiology, urology, otolaryngology, respiratory therapy, rheumatology, hematology/oncology, cardiology, neurology, nephrology, and women Veteran's health care. The Health Care System does not maintain an inpatient medical unit.





Those needs are met by utilizing the local St. Cloud Hospital and transfers to the Minneapolis VA Health Care System 80 miles to the south. The Health Care System also provides a number of special emphasis services including residential and outpatient mental health and substance abuse programs, a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) treatment program, a Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program, outpatient programming for serious mental illness, homeless Veterans programs, a suicide prevention program, a Post 9/11 Transition and Care Management program, a Women Veterans program, an Incarcerated Veteran Program, and a Veterans Justice Outreach Program. Extended Care and Rehabilitation services include Home-Based Primary Care, Adult Day Health Care, Memory Care, Hospice Care, Short Stay and Nursing Home Care, including ventilator care.

Meeting Minutes

Patient Wait Times: Per VA MISSION ACT, Veteran Health Administration's standard for primary care, mental health care & non-institutional extended care services is 20 days, and 28 days for specialty care from request date.

- **St. Cloud VA Health Care System:** Prior to March 2020, wait times all fell within VA suggested times. As a result of Veteran Health Administration required pandemic response measures, wait times significantly increased for mental health, primary care and specialty care. The HCS was able to address some of the Mental Health and Primary Care wait times using telehealth services to conduct appointments. Some Specialty Care appointments are up to a 4 month wait as the services do not allow for telehealth options.
- **Medical Services with Longer Wait Times:** Dental, optometry, podiatry, audiology and PSYCH testing. Because of long wait times veterans can choose to use the CCN, although wait times in the private sector may be longer.
 - A new optometry clinic is expected to open sometime in 2021. This will help reduce veteran wait times.
 - Dental services are being provided but capacity is reduced as a result of required COVID-19 precautions. This is due to the "open-bay" design of the St. Cloud VA Dental Clinic and the need to undertake precautions for aerosol generating procedures. Referrals to CCN are available, but a considerable backlog is still present in the community.
- **Community Contract Specialty Care Provider:** CentraCare and other community providers takes referrals for specialty care services when longer wait times accrue, or services are not available.

Panel Sizes: VHA patient centered management module (PCMM) standard via Directive 1406 for primary care range 1,000-1,400. Recommended baseline for FTE Physician PACT is 1200. For mid- level FTE PA or NP, recommended range is 800-900. Panel sizes refer to the assigned veterans a PCP has per year.

**Panel sizes are especially important as they can contribute to physician burnout and or shortened appointment times.*

- **St. Cloud VA Health Care System:** MD's, NP, PA panels. Based on FTE, MD's can be up to 1400 and mid- level NP, PA's 800-900.
- St. Cloud VA Health Care System's average for 1 FTE Physician is currently over the recommended guidelines due to turnover of multiple Primary Care Providers. Currently 4 PCP's are averaging panel sizes around 1,469. Panel sizes are expected to drop, with 2 PCP being hired and 4 more coming soon.
- Both Brainerd and Alexandria CBOC's have dropped in panel sizes from last year. This can be contributed to hiring more primary care providers.
- MD's tend to stay at the CBOC longer while mid-level NP, PA's have a higher turnover rate.





VIP Staff Vacancies:

Mental Health Medical Director, Primary Care Service Line Director, Surgical & Specialty Care Service Line Director. Although MH is still recruiting a Medical Director, they have filled all but one psychiatrist position.

Facility Demographics: *Authorized and Operating Bed Capacity, daily census for all inpatient programs:*

- Authorized beds in FY20 was 455. Operating capacity is 412 due to the establishment of a 24 bed COVID-19 ward in the CLC. To date, the COVID-19 ward has not been used. Average daily census is 270, inclusive of the beds in the CLC, MH RRTP, and Acute Psychiatry unit.
- The HCS received 60 CLC patients from Minneapolis VA Health Care System to enable space to care for acute COVID-19 patients in Minneapolis.
- (FY18) St. Cloud VA Health Care System had roughly 549,197 outpatients, (FY19) 440,059 and (FY20) as of 9/12/20 is 363,432.

Enrollment:

- St. Cloud VA Health Care System has approximately 63,550 veterans within their geographical market, although not all may be eligible for VA health Care.
 - Current veterans enrolled and that used the VA at least once in FY 19 is 39,398.
 - St. Cloud VA Health Care System's market penetration is 75.7% which ranks 3rd in the nation for market penetration.
 - Enrollment consists of 2,107 females and 37,291 males; more females and less males compared to last year.
 - St. Cloud VA Health Care System has 27 Counties within its veteran market.

 - *Funding allocations for the last three fiscal years:* (Salaries, maintenance & repair funds, construction and unspecified). Due to COVID-19 and VA's 2-year budget we can anticipate a budget issue in 2022.
 - FY18: \$355,256,552
 - FY19: \$359,720,416
 - FY20: \$409,351,914
 - *Non-VA Community Care:*
 - Pre-authorized care (TriWest/Optum): 10/1/19-8/31/20
 - Outpatient \$61,150,759
 - Inpatient \$50,963,926
 - Unauthorized care emergencies: 10/1/19-8/31/20 under 38CFR 17.4005-17.4030, 38 USC 1728 and 1725.
- *Notify VA with 72 hours of emergency by calling 844-724-7842 or emailing VHAEmergency-Notification@va.gov*
- Outpatient \$1,600,537
 - Inpatient \$1,223,450





- **Veteran Health Administration is currently conducting a market assessment under The Mission Act:**
 - St. Cloud VA Health Care System plans on using this information to capture some of the remaining eligible veterans within their market, (approx. 18,000).
- **Women Veteran Program**
 - Current clinic is closed due to remodeling efforts to expand services. Plans to reopen 2021.
 - 720 female veterans are assigned to the women's clinic PCP. Another 1,580 are assigned to 11 designated women's health PACT Teams, which include the CBOC's.
 - There is 1 psychiatrist and 13 psychologists that facilitate all veterans MH needs at the HCS.
- **Suicide Prevention Efforts**
 - Doubled staff in FY19
 - Established a coalition of community partners in prevention efforts.

St. Cloud VA Health Care System Comments

- Use of virtual care modalities has increased 1,000% overall during the pandemic: VA O I&T Increased Telehealth Access Through Partnerships with T-Mobile and Verizon VA's new partnerships with T-Mobile and Verizon give Veterans mobile access to VA telehealth—for free. Veterans using these mobile network providers can now access VA systems and telehealth resources using VA Video Connect (VVC) via the public internet without being billed for the data used, removing cost barriers for participating and receiving the VA health care they need.
- Tele-Health services, IT infrastructure specifically bandwidth in certain areas CBOC's are located is lacking. This limits the ability to offer more telehealth services.
- Throughout the pandemic, the St. Cloud VA has focused on delivering care safely by reducing transmission risk. To date, there have been no inpatient or residential Veterans with COVID-19. Additionally, robust screening efforts and aggressive use of virtual care have limited exposure among outpatient Veterans. A significant lesson learned during the pandemic is that virtual care works, and we encourage Veterans to take advantage of virtual care for safety, convenience, and access to care.

Department Rehabilitation Chairman: Wilson Spence III

Department Service Officer & Committee Secretary: Jeremy Wolfsteller

