



# Stanford United Students for Veterans' Health Newsletter

## USVH Quick Facts

-  Serves long-term care patients in Veterans Affairs (VA) Hospitals
-  Founded in 1994
-  Headquartered in the Haas Center for Public Service
-  5 chapters nationwide in:  
Worcester, Massachusetts  
Santa Clara University  
Stanford University  
San Francisco State University  
University of Texas
-  Over 62 active volunteers in the Stanford chapter
-  Volunteering shifts happening every day of the week

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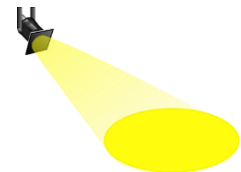
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Join Stanford USVH!

## Interview with Dr. Stephen Ezeji-Okoye, Deputy Chief of Staff, VA Palo Alto Health Care System

### Did you always know you wanted to work with veterans?

No, I didn't, but I was a Stanford house officer, and so during my internship here [at Stanford Medical School] I was introduced to the VA. The main thing that struck me was just an aura of happiness amongst the patients who were here. You don't necessarily think of a hospital as a happy place - patients aren't always happy for the reason they're in the hospital or an outcome. What I thought was interesting [at the VA] was there was the sense of camaraderie among the patients themselves. And you have a lot of people from different generations spending time together, other vets pushing around another vet, swapping stories, talking about shared experiences that might cross generations. That was one thing that attracted me to the VA, the special feeling about the place. The other [reason] was that it was the fact that when we provide care we provide the full continuum of care. We didn't have issues about did they have the right insurance, or can we get them the right care they needed, and can they afford their medications.

### What makes the VA Palo Alto Health Care System unique?

It's really the continuum of services that we have. For the most part, we really take care of every aspect of a veteran's care. That has great appeal to me, because health has to be about more than just the absence of disease - it's also about if people attain their highest degree of health, or highest degree of wellbeing, and can we help them maximize what they want to get out of life. We've put in a system of vocational rehab programs and even a housing program where we're working with to get people from a homeless state to a housed state. There's really a lot the VA has to offer, addressing social aspects of health like homelessness, or vocational rehab training. It's a very holistic approach to care. This VA in particular, we have a lot of special programs, such as our Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center or Fisher House. Families are integral to [veterans'] recovery, so that why we have things like the Fisher House, where veterans' family members can fly across the country and be close by and provide

that support. The Fisher House provides free lodging that really provides a mechanism for people to stay here for a short or long period of time without adding the financial strain of living in the Palo Alto area. The Defenders Lodge is primarily for veterans that travel a long way and need a place to stay during the course of the treatment.

### How do you balance your responsibilities as Deputy Chief of Staff and a practicing physician?

Sometimes it's hard. I had to limit my clinical time to 10-15%, but I think it's important to still do that work because it connects me directly to the veterans. And the other [reason] is that it gives me a better idea of what the other clinicians are having to go through - what are the direct impacts of policy changes that we implement, and how does that play out. It's also a great source of personal satisfaction, to be a primary care provider, to take care of people. I have people who I've been taking care of for twenty years or so, so we've definitely gotten older together. But we've also had the opportunity to see milestones in their lives, from getting married, or having grandchildren, getting to learn more about them and understand their goals and what they aspire for their lives. I think the relationships with the patients is the biggest reward, and I didn't want to give that up. I also think it really helps me have a perspective of what it means to help run clinical programs within the hospital. It's also kind of a break. When I do my clinic, I like to be in the moment of feeling what it's like to be in clinic. I don't think I would want to be doing it any differently because I find it rewarding to have the opportunity to influence the work environment I'm in, to be able to provide input, to be able to try to make clinical care better or the environment better for those working in the hospital.

I feel very lucky and fortunate to have experiences early on in my career where people have showed me the power of empowerment, and the power of teamwork, and the power of communication, viewing from the lens of what's best for the patient and not "I'll only do my work in my area, and you only do your work in your area."



*"I find it rewarding to have the opportunity to influence the work environment I'm in, to be able to provide input, to be able to try to make clinical care better or the environment better for those working in the hospital."*

- Dr. Ezeji Okoye, MD, Deputy Chief of Staff, VA Palo Alto Health Care System

I think those are all important for balancing administrative and clinical work - the only reason to exist on the administrative side is to make it easier to deliver clinical care and make that clinical care better.

### Would you like to send a message to our volunteers?

One of the key things is that you're willing to engage with them and spend time. That in itself is incredibly precious. One of the nursing homes had a wall on it, and it was an all-white wall with pictures of all the nursing home residents when they were young. They must have been 18, 20, 25, maybe 30 years old, sort of in their prime of life. Someone in the bunch referred to it as "when we were people". When you see them now, and they're very old and frail, it's hard to see the connection between the person who they are now and the person they were. The pictures of when they were young, reminds me that person is still there, they just don't look or act the same. But it's still the same person, and being able to spend time be able to learn more about who they are or what they went through, that companionship is powerful. You have now become part of an organization that is larger than yourself that really represents sacrifice and commitment to ideals that the country is founded upon. I applaud you for doing that.

## Recap: USVH Movie Night

USVH Directors of Special Events, Montana Morris and Alyssa Morrison, planned a movie night on February 28, 2016 for the veterans at the Menlo Park Division of the Palo Alto Health Care System. Six USVH volunteers arrived early Sunday afternoon to set up a projector for the screening, pop fresh popcorn from a popcorn machine, and set up various refreshments. At 3 pm, volunteers wheeled in thirteen veterans from different wards across the Menlo Park VA. The veterans enjoyed the screening of *The Martian* starring Matt Damon, a film about an astronaut who struggles to survive alone on Mars while scientists work to bring him home to Earth.

Thank you volunteers, and thank you veterans!



USVH Directors of Special Events Montana Morris and Alyssa Morrison planned a movie screening of *The Martian* for veterans at the Menlo Park VA.



## Spotlights

### History: How the Menlo Park VA Wards were Named



Each USVH group is assigned a unit, or ward, to visit every week. Ever wondered how the Menlo Park Wards were named, or how they differ from each other? Names of each unit are derived from a site within or maintained by the National Park Service. Each unit also has a unique medical specialty.

**Unit A - Acadia** is a secured specialized dementia care unit and memory care program.

**Unit B - Bryce** is a locked geriatric/psychiatric behavioral unit.

**Unit D - Denali** is an open geriatric/psychiatric unit for residents with medical complications and mental illness.

**Unit E - Everglades** is an open geriatric/psychiatric unit for residents with both psychiatric and medical complications.

**Unit F - Friendship** is an open geriatric/psychiatric unit and palliative care program with residents with both psychiatric and medical complications. Friendship is the only unit that allows for smoking.

**Unit G - Glacier** has 10 beds reserved for long term care and 8 beds for respite care with length of stay ranging from 1-2 weeks with some special cases being longer.

Thanks to Ann Nguyen for providing this information.

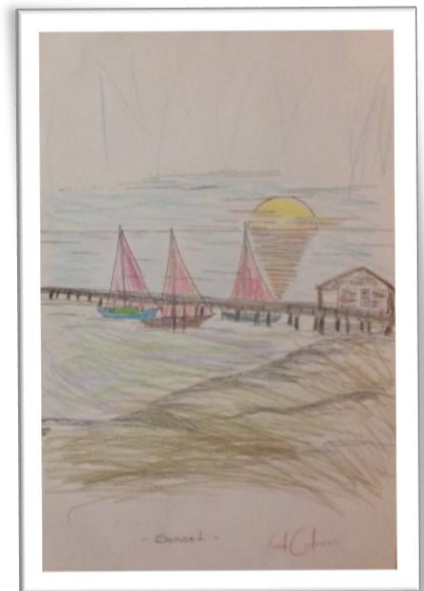


## Health: Art Therapy

Veterans participated in arts and crafts during a recent USVH shift. Art therapy can help veterans, especially those with mental health needs, by encouraging creative expression of feelings. Art therapy was first offered by Veteran's Hospitals (VA) in 1945 in Topeka, Kansas. The art therapy was originally included as part of psychiatric services provided to returning WWII veterans. Research is ongoing about using art therapy to treat combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Below is some of the artwork the veterans at the Menlo Park VA produced.

Sources:  
<http://www.arttherapy.org/upload/useofarttherapywithveterans.pdf>,  
<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ777008.pdf>



## Want to Get Involved with Stanford USVH?

Hey guys! We're looking for as many new recruits as possible right now to help support and better the lives of our veterans.

- \* We volunteer 2 hours per week.
- \* We provide carpools for getting to and from the VA.
- \* The timing is very flexible (14 different times are offered per week).
- \* Leadership positions are available.
- \* It's a great way to give back to the community and do something positive!
- \* It's an opportunity for hands-on experience with veterans suffering from PTSD, Alzheimer's, Dementia, and Parkinson's.
- \* It's meaningful clinical experience.

The USVH is a truly amazing program, and it brightens the days of everyone involved. The veterans light up the moment they see us walk through the door, and volunteers always leave with smiles on their faces.

If you are at all interested in applying or have any questions at all, please email us at [carlyo@stanford.edu](mailto:carlyo@stanford.edu). Applications will be released during the first week of spring quarter!

Thanks for reading!

