

NEWS FROM NOVA

SUMMER 2008

Volume 29

Number 3

Building on NOVA's History

By Nancy Claflin, RN, PhD



Nancy Claflin, RN, PhD

It's an honor and a privilege to be serving as NOVA President. I'm especially grateful to be following in the footsteps of NOVA's leaders. Our NOVA chapter in Phoenix owes its jump start to NOVA Past President **Margaret Kruckemeyer**. Margaret attended a conference in Phoenix while she was NOVA President, and made a visit to the medical center which helped our chapter's revitalization. We also received helpful visits from NOVA Executive Director **Deborah Beck** and NOVA Past Presidents **Dianne Nelson** and **Vince Elliott**.

With their help, the Phoenix chapter has grown from just a few to over 125 members today.

I had been a NOVA member for years but never attended an Annual Meeting. When I came to my first Annual Meeting, I felt warmly welcomed into the NOVA family by NOVA leaders, members, and staff. The program was outstanding and I was so impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication of the NOVA members that I decided I could never miss another one. Several meetings later, at the NOVA meeting in 2001, NOVA Board Member Denise Carey asked me if I would run for the NOVA Board of Directors. I was pleased to be asked and submitted my name for the NOVA ballot for the next year.

When I first joined the NOVA Board of Directors, **Sarah Myers** was president and **Vince Elliott** was president-elect. I watched in awe as **Sarah Myers** testified before Congress. Our chapter obtained a videotape of her testimony, and we showed it over and over to chapter members. **Vince Elliott** was an inspiration during his term as NOVA President; propelling NOVA into the future. I owe my ability to find my way around Washington to **Vince** with his unerring sense of direction and useful tips (always avoid the diagonal streets, for example). **Dianne Nelson** has been my mentor since I joined the NOVA Board of Directors. **Dianne's** compassionate and determined leadership brought new life to NOVA. During the past two years, we've been extremely fortunate to have **Cecilia McVey** as NOVA's President. Her passion and enthusiasm for NOVA and for nursing have

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Testimony Submitted By
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs and
presented on May 21 2008 by Cecelia McVey,
Immediate Past President of NOVA

To the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Regarding the
VETERANS' MEDICAL
PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION ACT OF 2008

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, the Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) would like to thank you for inviting us to present testimony on the Veterans' Medical Personnel Recruitment and Retention Act of 2008.

I am Cecilia McVey, BSN, MHA, RN Associate Director for Patient Care/Nursing at the VA Boston Healthcare System and am here today as the Immediate Past President of NOVA. NOVA is the professional organization for registered nurses employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

NOVA respects and appreciates what our labor organizations such as AFGE and NAGE do for VA nurses. NOVA clearly deals with VA on RN professional matters, not working conditions for which VHA RNs have their union representatives. Because this Committee has invited NOVA to share its views on this bill, however, I am here to offer the following observations.

NOVA has identified retention and recruitment of healthcare staff members as a critically important issue in providing high quality health care to America's heroes. As Veterans Health Administration (VHA) executives face growing

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Join us for NOVA's 29th Annual Meeting
in New Orleans, LA - April 22-25, 2009

10,000 Members by the Year 2010

A bold challenge but if every NOVA member gets involved, we can meet this goal.



By Deborah Beck

Membership is the backbone of every professional organization, and NOVA constantly struggles with retaining and recruiting new members. Membership retention and recruitment is not just the responsibility of the Board of Directors, Membership Committee and staff, but of every member. Members need to share with their

colleagues the benefits of belonging to the only professional organization of VA nurses, and the Membership Committee has created a new program to get all NOVA members involved.

- The *Every-Member-Get-A-Member* campaign has already begun and will conclude on December 31. For each new member you sign up, you will become eligible for a drawing in January. Every member recruited gives the recruiter one chance; ten new members and the recruiter has ten chances. What could be easier?

The Grand Prize winner will receive \$250 cash and \$100 will be donated to the NOVA Foundation in the winner's name. Also, a letter from the NOVA President which states the winner's accomplishments and the phrase, "include this letter when you submit your annual proficiency to the NPSB" will be sent to the top five recruiters.

- NOVA has been conducting a spring *Member-Get-A-Member* campaign for about a decade. This campaign annually generates over 200 members and will continue in 2009. Members recruiting 15 new members will receive a complimentary Annual Meeting registration and by recruiting an additional 10 members a complimentary three night stay at the Royal Sonesta/New Orleans will be included. The Annual Meeting program is excellent and provides networking opportunities with colleagues from around the country.
- Board members will be contacting non-renewing members to ask them to rejoin but also find out why they let their membership lapse which will provide valuable information in setting policy and developing programs for NOVA.

Two new membership programs will be unveiled in the near future which will help us reach our 10,000 by 2010 goal. Mary Raymer and Dianne Nelson are working on an emeritus program for retired nurses and formed a committee for this program at the recent Annual Meeting. Cheryl Knowles is working with the staff of the American Nurses Credentialing Center to develop a program especially for VA nurses. Stay tuned!

If every member gets one new member in 2008 and 2009, NOVA will begin 2010 with over 10,000 members. You can make a difference!

Board Briefs

The NOVA Board of Directors met in Boston, MA on April 9, 2008. The following actions were taken:

- Reviewed and updated the NOVA Strategic Plan
- Tabled proposed revisions of NOVA Policy and Procedure Book until July meeting.
- Bylaws Chair to submit suggested revisions at the July meeting.
- Approved nomination of Joy Ilem for the Vernice Ferguson award which will be presented at the January 2009 Legislative Roundtable.
- NOVA History was updated and made available on website.
- Thelma Roach-Serry was appointed co-chair of the membership committee.
- Reviewed plans for the 2009 Annual Meeting in New Orleans at the Royal Sonesta Hotel, April 22-25, 2009.
- Approved pilot of two regional NOVA meetings, one in Washington DC metropolitan area, and one in Southern California.

Call for 2009 National Election Nominations

The following positions will be open during the next election:

- President-Elect
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Four Board of Director's positions

Any NOVA member may self-nominate by sending the completed candidate information to the Nominations Committee. A NOVA member may nominate another member, but written permission must be obtained prior to submitting paperwork.

The qualifications for candidates are:

1. Must be national member of NOVA for at least two years.
2. For President and President Elect, must serve on the national NOVA Board for at least one year prior to taking office.
3. Must comply with the requirements set forth by the Nominating Committee and approved by the Board of Directors.
4. **All nomination paperwork must be typed or printed legibly.**

If you are interested, please email or call National Office and request a copy of the procedure. nova@vanurse.org or (202)833-1577

Nominations must be received no later than November 15, 2008.

NOVA's Annual Education Program & Business Meeting

The 2008 Annual Education program was held in Boston, MA, April 9-12, 2008. The program began Wednesday afternoon and finished on Saturday morning. The NOVA Foundation held a reception and silent auction on Wednesday evening and raised \$5,000 for nursing scholarships and research grants.

During the Award Luncheon and Business meeting, the following individuals were honored and/or recognized for their achievements: **Catherine Bailey, RN** was presented with the Barbara Chambers Award; Joy Edvalson, RN received the Professional Nurse Award for Clinical Excellence, but was unable to attend so the award was presented to her during Nurses Week at Greater Los Angeles where she works. Joy, wound care program coordinator and NOVA member, was also the recipient of the Secretary's Award for RN in an expanded role. **Joan Clifford, RN** received the Professional Nurse Award for Leadership. Board members **Ron Hopper** and **Marian Ehrhardt** received recognition plaques for their service to the NOVA Board of Directors.



Mary Sullivan, Dr. Kizer, & Nancy Claflin at Annual Education Meeting

The following paragraphs cover a few of the many exciting sessions and several of the PowerPoint presentations are available for download on the NOVA website under the "meetings" link.

This is probably a topic you have never thought about; Death Dealing Caregivers, healthcare professionals who are serial killers. Mary Sullivan, forensic nurse with the VA Phoenix Healthcare System, and Dr. Ken Kizer, former Undersecretary for Health, and current CEO and Chairman of Medsphere Systems Corporation, presented forensic cases within and outside the VA system. The cases included healthcare professionals such as physicians, nurses, and respiratory therapists. Many cases were widely known after the fact. The focus was on how the individuals were eventually caught, how their coworkers dealt with these situations, and the need for system changes within healthcare, both administrative and public policy changes.

Treasure Hunting – NOVA Style: On April 11, 2008, under cold cloudy skies, ten teams dubbed the Flickering Flames, Happy Hippies, Neon Cowboys, Silly Flip-flops, Checkerboards, Ruthless Pirates, Hot Tamales, Hot Pink Butterflies, and Jungle Animals set

out from the NOVA Annual Meeting at the Radisson Boston, taking Boston by storm while hunting for treasure. They were armed with a camera, ten dollars, a subway pass, treasure maps, their creativity, camaraderie, team spirit, and of course the famous team scarves that reflected the team names and were worn on various parts of the body. The event was sponsored by GLHN Associates (Bill and Dianne Nelson).

Following the route of the ducks in Robert McClosky's *Make Way for Ducklings*, NOVA Members visited places such as the Boston Police Department, Boston Public Library, Fanueil Hall/Quincy Market, the trolleys; several places in the Public Gardens including the Swan Boats, the duckling sculpture, and the frog pond. The Castle, Old South Church, Trinity Church, the Theater District, Copley Place, the Gazebo, and Newberry Street touted as "one of most expensive streets in the world" were also on the treasure route. Of course, what visit to Boston would be complete without a visit to Cheers "where everybody knows your name"?

There was buried and not so buried treasure to be found at all of these locations. Some examples of treasure were team pictures with a Boston Police Officer, a store employee at Copley Place, and under the Cheers sign to name a few. Each team member was required to have the team bandanna visible on some part of their body in all team pictures.

In order to locate the treasure, the teams talked with cab drivers, Boston citizens, and just plain strangers who were no longer strangers after they met our NOVA Colleagues. The treasure hunters also met friendly NOVA faces belonging to Ceci Mc Vey, Joan Clifford, and Maureen Levesque who held the secrets to more buried treasure along the way.

After three and half hours of exploring the city of Boston, the treasure hunters returned to the Radisson Boston exhausted but bearing great riches. I was a member of the Silly Flip Flops and I think the greatest treasure for me was enjoying the company of my team while seeing Boston on the run, and experiencing the fun of seeing us come together as a team and utilizing the strengths of each member to try and "bring home the gold" so to speak.

The winners were as follows: First Place -The Happy Hippies who won Cheers socks and a \$15 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble, Second Place-the Neon

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President McVey presented the Barbara Chambers Award to Catherine Bailey.

Testimony Submitted By
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs and
presented on May 22 2008 by Cecelia McVey,
Immediate Past President of NOVA
To the
U.S. HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Regarding
HUMAN RESOURCES
CHALLENGES WITHIN
THE VETERANS HEALTH
ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, the Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) would like to thank you for inviting us to present testimony on Human Resource issues in the VA.

I am Cecilia McVey, BSN, MHA, RN, Associate Director for Patient Care/Nursing at the VA Boston Healthcare System and am here today as the Immediate Past President of NOVA. NOVA is the professional organization for registered nurses employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

NOVA respects and appreciates what our labor organizations, such as AFGE and NAGE, do for VA nurses. NOVA clearly deals with VA on RN professional matters, not working conditions for which VHA RNs have their union representatives. Because this Committee has invited NOVA to share its views on this bill, however, I am here to offer the following observations.

The Veterans' Health Administration (VHA) is the third largest civilian employer in the Federal Government and one of the largest health care providers in the world. VHA is facing significant challenges in ensuring it has the appropriate work force to meet both current and future workforce needs. This workforce is critical to ensure we are able to provide the care our Nation's heroes deserve. These challenges are further exacerbated by an aging workforce in general and in nursing specifically and the high number of employees' retirement eligible each year.

Nursing and other Medical Center workforce members are dependent on timely and efficient recruiting. Human Resources Departments across VHA are not able to function optimally due to systems that have not kept pace with private sector recruitment abilities.

Although there are numerous barriers to timely and efficient recruiting the following three are the top three:

1. Although certain pay setting flexibilities do exist, such as recruitment bonuses/retention allowances, above minimum entry rates, and the special rate authority, additional pay flexibilities are needed in order for VA to be able to successfully compete for the best candidates in the marketplace. The current general schedule and locality pay system which works hand in hand with the

classification system is antiquated, cannot respond quickly enough and has a number of major barriers. For example:

- a. Retention allowances.
 - (1) They are not considered base pay for benefits such as retirement and life insurance. Candidates declined positions based on this limitation.
 - b. Special pay rates.
 - (1) There are restrictions on how far the pay table can be expanded.
 - (2) You cannot use special rates to address recruitment/retention issues of a subgroup within an occupation
 - (3) Approval process for special rates is too slow to address current market conditions.
 - (4) The major focus of the criteria is whether you are getting qualified candidates to apply and not whether the candidates are highly qualified.

c. Above minimum rates.

- (1) Allows manager to appoint the applicant above the minimum step. There are many situations where the manager needs to offer a highly qualified candidate more money than the existing experienced staff. There is no mechanism to increase the pay of the existing staff to maintain pay parity.
2. The application process (how to apply) is too cumbersome and very confusing for those in the private sector who are used to a much faster and simpler process. Staffing Specialists must help many of the would-be applicants to navigate through the maze of the federal application process. Applicants are frustrated by the duplication of information that they are required to provide, such as the information on federal application for employment, information for background investigations, and credentialing. The enormous amount of paperwork, data base entries, and checklists associated with fulfilling all of the hiring requirements further delays the process. This leads to hiring additional FTE to manage the processes.
3. A consistent theme across the country is that applicants are looking for money for professional development not just in clinical occupation but administrative as well. Tuition reimbursement is limited to a few select occupations at this time such as Nurses.

Some suggested policy changes recommended are as follows:

1. More positions should be converted to Excepted Service, i.e., hybrid Title 38 such as Nursing Assistants, Health Technicians, Medical Support Assistants, Radiation Safety Officers, and Information Technology Specialists for example. Due to the constraints associated with recruiting through the Delegated Examining Units, the process is often too difficult and generally does not provide a list of "highly qualified candidates" and discourages potential hires.
2. More pay flexibilities should be provided. Pay reform similar to the Physician pay reform where there is a market pay component would provide the needed flexibility for VA facilities at the local

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Long Beach – Chapter 126By **Larry Lemos, RN**

The Long Beach NOVA Chapter held another successful yard sale on Saturday April 19, 2008. VA staff, family, and friends donated items for this popular event held twice a year to raise money for nursing scholarships at our local VA. Our local chapter, together with the California Paralyzed Veterans Association, gives scholarships each year during Nurses Week. This year **Barbara Switzer, RN** received the Marie Carley Scholarship of \$750.00, given in honor of this former Associate Chief of Nursing Education. **Sheryll Corpus, Pamela Larsen, and Wilson Macale** all received scholarships of \$500.00 toward advancing their education.

Palo Alto Chapter 129By **Mary Montufar, RN**

Mary Montufar and Gigi Beckner with NOVA Chapter 129 poster during National Nurses Week.

This has been a busy spring for members of Chapter 129. Congratulations to **Christine Camp, RN**, who recruited 15 new NOVA members before April 1, 2008 as part of the "Get-A Member Campaign" and was awarded a free registration to the National NOVA Conference.

The latest edition of INNOVATIONS, Chapter 129's newsletter, is on the chapter's website <http://www.vanurse.org/paloalto/index.html>. The current edition includes the chapter's 2008 calendar of events, biographical and contact information on current board members and a farewell interview with **Alice Naqvi** who retired as chief nurse on April 30, 2008.

Chapter News



National Nurses Week celebrations were held May 5-9 at VAPAHCS. NOVA officers helped with registration at events in Palo Alto and Livermore. Posters and fliers saluting nurses were distributed throughout the medical center. At receptions held for nursing staff during the week, NOVA Board members distributed packets describing NOVA's history of advocacy for Veterans Health care, membership information, and fliers about the new disability insurance sponsored by the organization. A special thanks goes to board member **Gigi Beckner, RN**, Chapter 129 Secretary who served on the planning committee for the Nurses Week, and distributed small mint candy boxes with a salute from NOVA to the nursing staff. These were a big hit. Thanks, Gigi, for the great idea!!

At the quarterly membership meeting on 5/21/08 our guest was VAPAHCS Director **Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, FACHE**. Ms. Freeman discussed some of the medical center's upcoming events, priorities and projects. A nationwide search is underway to fill vacancies in chief nurse positions for Extended Care, Nursing Education and Nursing Service. **Gen. James Peake**, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, was at the facility on May 27 to visit the Polytrauma and Spinal Cord Injury Centers, the Telehealth Program and to meet with staff. A summer educational meeting is planned for July 30, 2008 at the Sheraton Hotel Palo Alto. The dinner seminar will be on the topic "The Use of Psychotropic Medications in the Management of Inpatients." **Dr. Karen Larsen, MD**, Consulting Psychiatrist, Extended Care Service VA Palo Alto Health

Care System, will be the guest speaker. We hope to see many new and familiar faces at this popular event.

Tampa - Chapter 166By **Mary Seaman, RN**

On February 27th, the Tampa NOVA Chapter held its 4th Annual Red Dress/Red Tie Night. This year's event was attended by 197 people and highlights of the program included a guest appearance by Alan Prophet a well known corporate comedian who has performed with such luminaries as Smokey Robinson, James Brown, Huey Lewis & the News, as well as Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons. The event was held at the Tampa Palms Golf and Country Club and seven nursing scholarships totaling over \$4,500 were awarded. The Tampa Chapter uses this benefit annually to raise funds for their scholarship program and to promote VA nursing to the community.

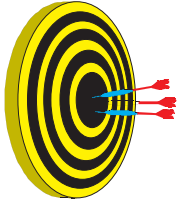
The Red Dress/Red Tie event has become so popular with staff that it has become the social event of the year for nursing and hospital staff. If you would like to join us for an enchanting evening and could use a vacation in sunny Florida next February, contact Mary at (813) 979-3672 as seating next year may be limited due to its growing popularity. So save the date! Next year's event will be held on Friday, February 13th and you won't want to miss out on this fabulous evening of fun and entertainment for a great cause.



Red Dress Gala held February 27, 2008.

Be a News from NOVA Reporter

News From NOVA would like to have news from each chapter. Write a few lines about what your chapter did this year and send a picture. Sharing what you do can provide recognition for your chapter as well as ideas for other chapters. The following are News From NOVA deadlines: August 24, 2008 Send the information by email to larrylemos@yahoo.com. Questions? Call me at (562) 826-8000 x 4146. Thank you for sharing your information with News From NOVA!



On Target: National Staffing Methodology for VA Nursing Personnel Program

By Mark Balch, Administrative Resident
Alan Bernstein, Program Director
Karen Ott, Program Director
Office of Nursing Services,
VA Central Office

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) under the leadership of the Office of Nursing Services (ONS) is leading an effort to implement a nationally standardized staffing methodology for VA nursing personnel. The Office of Nursing Services serves as the consultant and advisor to the Under Secretary for Health on all matters relating to VA nursing, provides national policies and guidelines for all nursing personnel, and is responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of the National Strategic Plan which supports patient care, education, and research. In the health care industry, employing appropriate staffing levels and skill mix of nursing staff to deliver care are among the most readily recognized root causes of patient safety issues. Recent studies have found that lower nurse-to-patient staffing ratios are associated with higher rates of adverse events, and higher hours of nursing care per patient day (HPPD) are related to lower rates of negative patient outcomes. Thus, appropriate staffing levels and staff mix must be sufficient for the nursing workforce to perform their duties in an effective and efficient manner, and a national policy will serve to support a consistent staffing standard across the VA.

This project is a culmination of efforts that began over a decade ago. In the 1980's and early 1990's the VA determined staffing needs using an industrial engineering model. This model was based on frequent observations by individuals called work samplers who would watch nursing staff perform their duties and calculate how much nursing time was needed to take care of different categories of patients in different areas of the hospital. This method was questioned and challenged because, among other issues, it did not measure the full scope of work required by nursing, as work sampling could not occur often enough to capture the changing patient populations and care requirements. It also focused on tasks rather than professional judgment, so that qualitative information was not taken into consideration, such as experience and educational background of nursing staff. Experts, both internal and external to the VA, reviewed best practices and innovative approaches to staffing and determined that an expert panel-based approach be adopted, which combined professional judgment of nurses with the many factors that contribute to patient care workload.

Early efforts to implement an expert panel-based nurse staffing approach were met with some challenges. For example, it was not written into a policy and did not provide a nationally standardized approach to staffing. Furthermore, the methodology required manual data collection and was labor intensive. To address these issues, ONS chartered an interdisciplinary team of VA nurse managers, physicians, nurse executives, representatives from VA Nursing Outcomes Database (VANOD) and Decision Support System (DSS), as well as representatives from fiscal and the Organizational Productivity, Efficiency, and Staffing Office at VA Central Office. This team is responsible for the development and implementation of a national staffing policy to be published this summer 2008. The initiative began with a national nursing strategic planning meeting in July, 2007, whereby 2008-2012 National Nursing Strategic Goals incorporated the following objective: "Using system redesign principles, deploy an automated, data-driven, evidence-based staffing methodology that support patient-driven care delivery models." A five-year plan has been developed with three primary objectives:

- 1) Publish a national directive with core data sets and outcome measures to analyze staffing effectiveness;
- 2) Implement mechanisms for automated data extraction;
- 3) Implement mechanisms for data collection across the system to analyze correlations between patient outcomes and staffing.

By 2012, the goal is to achieve a standardized, automated staffing methodology for nursing personnel that is simple, reliable, and evidence-based. The staffing policy will include standardized definitions and nomenclature and a step-by-step approach to determine projected staffing requirements and formulate staffing plans. Tools are also being developed to support the methodology, including an excel spreadsheet that automatically calculates projected full-time employee (FTE) requirements and staff mix once the nurse manager and nursing staff collaborate to populate the spreadsheet with workload data. These tools are under development and scheduled for completion by August of 2008. The policy will also include language that stipulates a movement towards an automated system for data collection to minimize manual data collection.

Automating the methodology will require integration with VANOD, a program under ONS which houses nursing sensitive indicators and other workload data to identify trends and areas for improvement. An effort to automatically populate pertinent workload data into standardized templates and tools that support the methodology process will commence this summer 2008. Along with automated extraction of data, the VANOD team of ONS is collaborating with nursing experts and IT staff to stan-

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Forces of Magnetism: Force #2 Organizational Structures

By Sandra K. Janzen RN



The organizational structure in a Magnet environment must embrace a shared governance philosophy where the voice of nursing is realized. Today's healthcare environment requires engagement of staff to develop new ways to improve patient care. Without staff engagement, excellence in the patient care outcomes will not be achieved. The evidence is

compelling to develop models that demonstrate shared leadership structures. The difficulty with these structures is for direct care providers to become engaged and for managers to challenge their assumptions and patterns of leadership. Nursing's impact is more visible through a shared governance structure because nurses assume ownership of patient outcomes and realize empowerment by creating change within their own environment. Change is critical to thrive in today's healthcare arena where patient outcomes are public information found in newspapers and on websites. The underlying philosophy of shared governance is that nursing staff, as well as team members, partner along with patients and families to achieve new levels of involvement that demonstrate shared decision making. Without the positive work environment exemplified in shared governance models, the highest patient and family engagement will be unrealized. Organizations must be willing to create direct care environments where nurses feel comfortable knowing that their expertise is valued and used in creating change.

NOVA Congratulates

Susan T. Brooks, MS, RN, from the VA Maryland Healthcare System received a Bronze Award for Outstanding Supervisor.



Ms. Lynda Olender, MA, RN, ANP retired on February 1, 2008 as Chief Nurse Executive from the James J. Peters VA Medical Center. Ms. Olender served 40 years in the VA system. Ms. Olender is currently working as a Consultant for Creative Health Care

Management.

The Staff at Greater Los Angeles gathered on May 29, 2008 to celebrate the career of **Janice Roper, PhD, RN** who retired after over 40 years with the VA. Dr. Roper will continue to serve as a consultant to GLA on a fee-basis status.



NOVA Foundation Article

By Mary Seaman, RN
Vice Chairman, Nova Foundation
& Marine Corp Marathon Chair



Have you ever thought of running a marathon but worried, perhaps, you either wouldn't qualify or didn't have the stamina to complete the run? Well, I believe almost anyone can achieve this goal with a little bit of dedication and perseverance.

In 1998, I was asked to participate in the Boston Marathon as a charity runner with Dana Farber Cancer Institute. At 48, and having never run more than seven miles, I thought only momentarily that this wild idea was out of reach for me, and the invitation was clearly intended for more serious, fit and younger runners than I was at the time. In addition, I was relatively new to the Boston area and didn't know a lot of people which I also thought would negatively impact my ability to raise funds for the charity. It's amazing how thoughts like, "I can't possibly do that," negatively impact our decisions.

I want to share a story with you that reflects how one person can change the world for others. I completed the Boston Marathon and more than doubled the fundraising goal that was pre-set in order to run with the group. I found that those challenges which seemed insurmountable at the time were really a mirror image of my own thought patterns and not my ability to achieve my goals. Running the marathon was great, but running for a cause felt even greater.

It's now ten years later and I find myself as a nurse campaigning for quality care for veterans and supporting the scholarly endeavors of the nurses who care for America's heroes.

I would like to invite you to join us in either the Marine Corp Marathon or 10K walk/run on October 26, 2008 in Washington, D.C. The Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs (NOVA) Foundation is the first charity nursing partner with the Marine Corp Marathon. We feel honored to be the nurses who care for those who have borne the battle.

We have reserved a spot especially for you and have removed the fund raising qualifier for this year. Our group only asks that participants do their best to raise funds for the NOVA Foundation and help us increase the awareness of our nursing endeavors in the community.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to walk/run with us this coming fall. You can sign up now or find out more information on our website: www.vanurse.org. Please don't hesitate to call us if you have any questions at (202) 296-0888.

Your support is greatly needed. I promise you a wonderful time and a renewed strength of both body and spirit at the end of the day on October 26th. See you in D.C.

NOVA FOUNDATION DONORS

NOVA Foundation donations received between
01/01/2008 and 05/31/2008

\$500 - \$999 CONTRIBUTION

Theresa Kelley
Palo Alto Chapter
Donna Soroczak
Terri Bortot
Vincent Elliott
Rosalie Sanchez-Motley

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Yolanda Nurse
Beverly E. Ross
Larry Lemos
Nancy Clafin
Annis B. Turney

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Sherry Sandreth
Rita Scott
Valerio Garcia
Jennifer Burke
Karry Dohlen
Farr Rosemary

Welcome Aboard

2/15/08 – 5/31/08

110 Phoenix HCS

Shannon Ahumada
Coleen Beard
Randy Blackmer
Mary Grosskopf
Gloria Fout
Elizabeth Lutz
Aida Saguros

Peggy L. Williams

168 Augusta VAMC

Edwinia Bell-Wright
Martha Susan Clem
Geodora Frazey
Lashondra Hagin
Judy E. King

Lisa Lyell
Colette Martin
Jo Mayer
Rosetta Moss
Janice Simmons
Willie-Mae Welch
Roxanne White

114 Southern Arizona HCS

Rochelle Lambert

188 Northern Indiana HCS

Catherine Soares

322 Louis Stokes Cleveland VAMC
Mark Obloj

120 Central California HCS

Shelley Cheney
Rhonda Eisenzimmer

202 VA Eastern Kansas HCS

Dee Duling-Mulford
Denise Scott
Debra Tangari

326 Dayton VAMC
Leondria Nair

126 Long Beach HCS

Barbara Switzer

210 Alexandria VAMC

Vivian T Green
Stephanie Jackson

328 Jack C. Montgomery VAMC
Lisa Lessley

129 Palo Alto HCS

Bonnie Hanley
Mozettia Henley
Ann Hextrum
Catherine Schiavone

224 Edith Nourse Rogers VAMC

Kim Choi
Nancy Dasaro
Alan Flagg
Carol Sbaschnig

342 Coatesville VAMC
Stacey Beebe
Maria Jinky Valdez

130 Greater Los Angeles HCS

Hub Freeman
Thomas Irons

226 Boston HCS

Norah Alper
Sandra Boswell
Mary Lynne Cavanagh
Laura Clemente-Padial
Stacey Diramio
Entela Izzo
Sarah Lyon
Eileen F. McCormack
Donna Simono
Susan N. Vickory
Maribel Vidro

344 Erie VAMC
Donna Yarnell

346 Lebanon VAMC
Valerie Miskell

138 San Diego HCS

Karen McKinsey
Beth Palmer

232 Northampton VAMC

Michael Begley
Rodney Duda
Robert Edgley
Brenda Garbiel
Joseph Grab
Marie Knapps
Denise Lamarsh
John Mascia
Gary Matteson
Miranda Osvaldo

358 Providence VAMC
Susan Austin
Cynthia Averill
Elise Chapman
Bonnie Dinwoodie
Linda Thorp

144 Eastern Colorado HCS

Patricia Lynch

360 Ralph Johnson VAMC
Alice R Womack

152 Connecticut HCS

Luisa Canestri
Dorio Faith
Ann Lewis
Katherine Loehr
Maria Maiaroto
Christina Tangredi

384 North Texas HCS

Audrey Collins-Mack
Shirley Lynch
Beverly Phenix

154 Wilmington VAMC

Deidra Haliburton

388 Michel E. Debakey VAMC
Rosemary Farr
Kelly Irving
Julius Penning

160 N. Florida/ S. Georgia HCS

Karen Harris

416 White River Junction VAMC
LeeAnn Heeremans

164 Miami HCS

Rose Bertrand
Beena Bijoy
Stephanie Brown
Mary Delancey
James Dickinson
Rachel Louissaint
Betzaida Perez
Debbie Sommer

246 Minneapolis VAMC

Angela Mund

420 Hunter Holmes McGuire VAMC
Judith Craggs
Suzette Davis
Brenda French
Myra Schindler

165 West Palm Beach VAMC

Catherine Scantlan

252 G.V.(Sonny) Montgomery VAMC

Lynda M. Hawkins
Kathleen McKinney

422 Salem VAMC
Deborah Klein

166 James A. Haley Veterans Hospital

Francine Keller
Dorothy Lehner
Erin Meredith
Rose Nwokoye
Anna Pfeiffer
Teresa Prendes
Andrea Weiss

260 St. Louis VAMC

Rosemary Bauer
Colleen Berding
Jessica Bytnar
Mary Coleman
Carol Easton
Tracey Ferguson
Debra Goddard
Melissa Hartsell
Elizabeth Henson
Mila Hyde
DJ Jackson-Durity
Valerie Johnson

428 Spokane VAMC
Kimberly Brewer
Rodney Deaux
Douglas Rogers

432 Jonathan M. Wright VAMC
Diana Nelson

438 Huntington VAMC
Erich Philson

Recent Chapter Number Changes

As the VA system continues to consolidate medical centers, ambulatory care centers and veterans centers into larger health care systems, some NOVA Chapters may notice a change in their chapter number.

Members of the former Chapter #162 (Lake City VAMC) are now listed as members of Chapter #160 - North Florida / South Georgia Veterans Health System.

Members of the former Chapter #278 (Lyon VAMC) are now listed as members of Chapter #276 - New Jersey Health Care System.

Members of the former Chapter #284 (Batavia VAMC) are now listed as members of Chapter #294 - Western New York Health Care System.

Members of the former Chapters #292 (St. Albans VAMC) & Chapter # 302 (New York VAMC) are now listed as members of Chapter #290 New York Harbor Health Care System

Members of the former Chapter #382 (Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center) are now listed as members of Chapter # 384 North Texas Health Care System

Members of the former Chapter # 412 (Waco VAMC) are now listed as members of Chapter #410 Central Texas Health Care System.

2009 NOVA Awards – Call for Nominations

It's time to nominate a colleague for one of the NOVA Awards! Deadline for submission is December 15, 2008. NOVA awards honor individuals or groups who have made significant contributions to NOVA, the nursing profession, the health care of veterans, or in service to our country. Now is the time to send in nominations for these outstanding awards. Send the information to **Sharon Johnson**, Awards Chair, at SJDST120@gmail.com; nominations may also be sent to NOVA@vanurse.org. NOVA will be awarding the following at the 29th annual conference in New Orleans, LA, April 22-25, 2009.

NOVA Veterans Award: This award is presented to an individual veteran or group of veterans in recognition of dedication, accomplishment, and sacrifice to our country through one of the following: personal sacrifice in the service of country; improving the quality of national or veterans' health care; or the enhancement of the nursing profession. The nominee does not have to be a member of NOVA but must be nominated by a NOVA member or chapter.

NOVA Distinguished Service Award: This award is presented to an individual or group for distinguished service to the nursing profession of the Veterans Health Care System through one or more of the following: enhancement of the image of nursing; improvement of the health care of the veteran; impact on nursing recruitment or retention. The nominee does not have to be a member of NOVA, but must be nominated by a NOVA member or chapter.

NOVA Professional Nurse Award for Clinical Excellence: This award is presented to a professional nurse who has made an outstanding contribution to the nursing profession or the Veterans Health Care System through excellence in clinical practice. Some examples might include serving as a role model and mentor for other nurses; initiating innovative health care practices; participating in lifelong learning to expand professional knowledge. The nominee must be a member of NOVA, and must be nominated by a NOVA member.

NOVA Professional Nurse Award for Leadership: This award is presented to a professional nurse who has made an outstanding contribution to the nursing profession or the Veterans Health Care System through leadership ability. Some examples might include serving as a role model or mentor for newer nurses; impacting nursing retention and recruitment; advancing nursing research and scholarship. The nominee must be a NOVA member and does not need to hold a managerial position, but must be nominated by a NOVA member.

Barbara Chambers Award: This award is presented to an individual NOVA member or group of NOVA members for outstanding contributions to NOVA through active leadership roles in the organization; significant contributions to the objectives of NOVA. The nominee must be a current or former member of NOVA.

Vernice Ferguson Award: This award is presented to an individual or group for significant contributions to the NOVA Foundation in order to further the mission of the Foundation by devoting volunteer time to a specific educational/ research program and/or fundraising activity; contributing monetarily to the scholarship, education, or research programs; demonstrating a passion for VA nurses and veterans, which results in a third-party contribution. The nominee does not have to be a member of NOVA, but must be nominated by a member of NOVA or the NOVA Foundation Board.

Silver Star Chapter Award: This award is presented to an outstanding local NOVA chapter. These chapters are the backbone of the organization. Local chapters are "where the action is." Members meet, share ideas, have fun, learn from educational speakers, share nursing stories and innovative ideas, enjoy food, plan legislative activities and carry on the work of the organization. Several chapters have been outstanding over the years. This award recognizes "grassroots" efforts by chapters. The Chapter needs to be recognized by the NOVA National Office as an active chapter (bylaws on file, at least 10 members, etc.). For this award, the Chapter needs to fill out the application which is available on the web page and send it to the National Office by December 15, 2008.

VA Nurses Called To Active Duty

By Margaret Kruckermeyer, RN

You may know Kathy Hayes RN as a NOVA member from Dayton VA Medical Center where she works as a Hospice Coordinator. What many do not know is that Kathy was called up to serve in IRAQ as Chief Nurse overseeing a Combat Support Hospital in Tikrit. Not only is she missed at her work assignment at the Dayton VA where she truly honored and served veterans and their families in one of their greatest living life challenges and needs but now she is on the "front line for us all."

I hope she, like so many of our other VA employee colleagues will feel cherished not only while serving overseas but also upon their return. Together we can make a difference in the lives of those who are serving and have served in the past to include the sacrifices also of being a supporting family member /child of those who are bearing the battle for us all to keep our country safe and free.

Here is Kathy's newest address where she will most likely serve over the next 12 months in Iraq.

KATHLEEN A. HAYES COL, AN, Chief Nurse
TF 345th Combat Support Hospital
COB Speicher, Tikrit
APO, AE 09393

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PRESIDENT cont. from page 1

kept NOVA focused on serving our members and providing the best care for veterans.

NOVA's Board of Directors have enthusiastically given their time and energy to make NOVA great. It's been an honor working with all of them. We are also extremely fortunate to have a terrific staff, who continue to make us look good; our Executive Director **Deborah Beck**, Deputy Executive Director **Susan Dove**, Account Executive **Luke Zorich**, and our newest staff member, Director of Administration **Luba Litvinova**.

Early in its history, NOVA developed the following statement: *NOVA recognizes the impact of the legislative process on the health care of the nation's Veterans. The politically aware nurse can influence legislation that affects professional practice while continuing to serve as an advocate for the Veteran patient.* NOVA's founding members shared a concern for the viability of nursing as a profession, the survival of the VA healthcare delivery system, the quality of care for the veteran patient, and the enhancement of the VA nursing service. Today, NOVA embraces those same concerns.

In 1984, NOVA President **Elaine Lloyd's** opening conference address included the following: *"Each year that NOVA exists we become a stronger voice for ourselves, for VA nursing and in the broader nursing community. Today when the opinion of the VA Nurse is desired there is an avenue for that voice to be heard and that is through NOVA. We must create the climate so that we can be heard."* Now, we must continue to ensure that NOVA's voice is heard as we move forward into the 21st century.

Since it was founded, NOVA has grown to represent VA nurses from all over the United States. These nurses have pursued their goals resolutely and have been able to significantly influence our nation's legislators on issues of veterans' health care. NOVA has been identified as a source of expertise and guidance regarding the VA nurse.

NOVA has published three books that showcase our rich history. In 1990, NOVA published its second five year history. This is an excerpt in the forward of that book from the Disabled American Veterans: *"More than any other category of health care professionals we know, VA nurses have continuously had to do the best possible job with the least possible resources. The fact that quality health care continues to be provided to veterans today is the most enduring testament to your legacy of professionalism, commitment, and care."*

NOVA's membership DVD ends with the following statement: *"VA nursing needs a strong, unified, informed voice which speaks for our profession, its rightful place in health care, and its impact on advocacy and optimal care for our patients. NOVA is that power and voice! This is what NOVA can do for you!"*

Challenges remain, including increasing membership and strengthening NOVA chapters. The members of the NOVA Board of Directors join me in committing ourselves to work enthusiastically and tire-

lessly for the betterment of NOVA. We will continue our knowledge based decision making, considering the impact of everything we do on you, the NOVA members as we work to meet your needs. I want every NOVA member and every chapter to be heard and acknowledged, for you are the heart and soul of NOVA. Every RN in the VA should be a member of NOVA. This year, the NOVA Board is asking each NOVA member to recruit one additional member as a commitment to strengthening NOVA's voice. New NOVA members will be welcomed by a group of nurses who share their commitment and passion for veterans' healthcare and VA nursing.

Just as **Denise Carey** invited me to consider running for the NOVA Board of Directors, I am inviting you. Please think about contributing more to NOVA, and put in an application to run for the NOVA Board of Directors to share your time and ideas. If you aren't able to commit to joining us on the NOVA Board, we are also looking for members for NOVA's Membership Committee. Opportunities also exist to serve in NOVA chapters. If you don't have a chapter, we'll help you get one started. If you aren't able to make a commitment to a national office or committee at this time, the NOVA Board still wants to hear from you on how we can work together for the future of NOVA. We'll be putting out another NOVA membership survey, and we need your input.

There's an exciting opportunity to raise funds for the NOVA Foundation through the Marine Corps Marathon. Please think about joining me in Washington, DC on October 26. It was an amazing experience to walk in the 10K last year. I'll be doing it again, and I'm inviting you to walk with me. You don't have to be an athlete or a marathon runner to help raise money for scholarships for VA nurses and VA nursing research.

Robert F. Kennedy said "Few will have the greatness to bend history itself but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation." Join me and the NOVA Board of Directors in helping to change a small portion of events in NOVA's history.

Chapter Contributions to NOVA Foundation

NOVA Chapters are encouraged to make a contribution to the NOVA Foundation in the name of a deserving nurse colleague. Chapters should develop their own criteria for the nomination of individuals to be recognized. These individuals will be listed in the newsletter.

TESTIMONY MAY 21 *cont. from page 1*

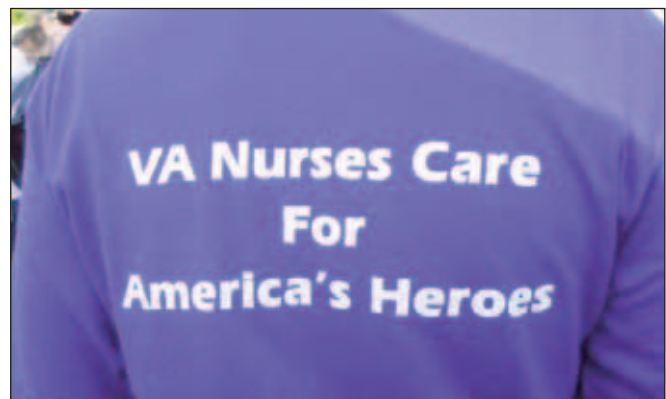
vacancies, elevated turnover due to retirements and increasingly complex care delivery, the demands on the workforce today are greater than ever.

NOVA supports the Veterans' Medical Personnel Recruitment and Retention Act of 2008 based on the following rationale.

- Waiver of offset from pay for certain reemployed annuitants will allow VA to bring back a corporate and clinical knowledge housed in these individuals and allows VA to utilize some of its most precious resources. During this time of a critical nursing shortage, it is more important than ever to keep these valuable resources to provide the best care to veterans. There aren't comparable restrictions on nurses who retire from the military.
- Senior Executive Schedule Position in VHA is critical to ameliorate the pay inequities which have grown with each subsequent year. Nurse Executives and Medical Center Directors, for example, do not receive pay comparable with their peers in the private sector. This underscores the need for VA to move quickly to remedy a problem that is already manifesting itself in turnover and in recruitment problems for key upper level positions in the VA. The mean salary, for example, for a Nurse Executive is \$129,000. Many Nurse Executives did not receive additional pay in the form of a bonus that is included in retirement computation under Public Law 108-445, because the bonus was not mandatory.
- There is a need to increase the pay limitation contained in 38 USC 7451 (c)(2) for VA nurses from level five (currently \$136,200) to level four (currently \$145,400) of the Executive Schedule to address the pay disparity between the nurse five maximum rate and the GS-15 maximum rate in some geographic areas.
- A change to 38 USC 7451 is needed to increase the pay cap under the nurse locality pay system. With an increase to EL-4, each nurse pay schedule, which is currently limited by the EL5 cap, would be recalculated based upon the existing beginning rate for the grade. This change would also favorably affect the same issue which pertains to the Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA). Presently, the pay of 286 of the 531 CRNA's (54 percent) in VA is frozen at the Executive Schedule, Level V (\$139,600). A search of a commercial website that lists job openings for CRNA's revealed that in 66.8 percent of the listings, the potential pay rates exceeded the VA cap.
- Information and training on Locality Pay Surveys would also assist in applying a law which is not flawed but merely needs the appropriate application in order to be successful. VA nurses are concerned they do not receive appropriate pay raises due to this inappropriate application of the law which impacts both recruitment and retention during this critical nursing shortage. We support any and all activities that lead to increased educa-

tion and enhancement as well as knowledge of application of Locality Pay Law.

- Reestablishment of the Health Professionals Scholarship Program (for non-VA employees) needs to be reinstated to compete for recruitment of students, who are not currently VA employees.
- NOVA's recommendation would be to include the addition of the following to Section 4 – Improvements to Certain Educational Assistance Programs and reinstate the scholarship program, as described in USC 7611-7618 (expired 1988) with the following additional provisions.
- Qualifying education or training leading to employment in Title 38 or Hybrid Title 38 Occupation. Priority for funding of the occupation education to be determined by the Department of Veterans Affairs based on recruitment needs.
 - Provision of funding at 25 million dollars per annum. These additional monies would allow funding of other high need occupations such as pharmacists, since the law that expired did not include all Title 38.
 - Inclusion of the revised definition of nurses who wish to work the 36/40 work week as utilized in the community will address this misinterpretation of the statement in the current VHA handbook and should read, "The Secretary may provide, in the case of nurses employed at such facility that such nurse who works six regularly scheduled 12 hour periods of service within a pay period shall be considered for all purposes to have worked a full 80 hour pay period." Currently use of this retention tool has been rendered ineffective and not applicable because of the interpretation.
 - NOVA also requests your support to eliminate the 19th step restriction under the special rate authorization for LPN/LVN as had been done previously for Physical Therapists and Pharmacists based on the highly competitive market for this occupation. This has been a longstanding issue and we look forward to its resolution of this critical and worthy group of caregivers that we are consistently unable to hire due to current regulations.
- NOVA appreciates the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs attention to these timely actions to further enhance the VA workforce.



ANNUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM *cont. from page 4*

Polka Dots who won a ten dollar gift certificate to Barnes and Noble or Amazon .Com, Third Place – the Silly Flip Flops who won a ten dollar gift certificate to Amazon.Com. The Checkerboards came in Fourth and won a five dollar gift certificate to Starbucks. Thank you Dianne and Bill Nelson and the NOVA Planning Committee chaired by Maureen Lévesque for this wonderful team building adventure. Cheers to and for Boston and NOVA!!



President McVey presented the Professional Nurse Award for Leadership to Joan Clifford

Hospice Care: What To Tell The Patient - **Dr. Matthew Russell** gave an eloquent and articulate presentation about hospice care and when and what to tell the patient. He presented this from a nursing perspective and gave accolades to nurses for their invaluable role in the care and education of hospice patients. Dr. Russell gave an overview of the paradigms of care and the continuum of care models. He contrasted the medical based curative or disease based model to the more appropriate palliative focused model of care.

The palliative focus involves the patient and family in identification of unique and individualized end of life goals. Hospice is a mode of quality of life care, including physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of the individual patient's needs.

Dr. Russell also spoke about the aspects of how and when to present the idea of hospice care to the patient and family, which generally happens when there is rapid clinical decline and loss of ADLs. He discussed the importance of being present for the patient and family and to give them the information they desire and need to make an educated decision about entering into hospice care. Also, to be present for the patient and family and allowing them the opportunity to have emotional responses and to let them vent.

Dr. Russell gave a very informative presentation about the fact that hospice is another type of interdisciplinary treatment that provides palliative care to those individuals who need assistance with end of life issues.

Retirement Revolution - VA Nurse Emeritus proposal: **Dianne Nelson RN, BSN**, Retired, and **Mary Raymer, RN, PhD**, shared a proposal to develop a program for the unique group of NOVA members who are retired or planning to retire within the year. Their forum sought to present information and share ideas on keeping VA nurses engaged in NOVA. They are planning to look at NOVA nurses just as nurse executives look at staffing. They discussed the definition of

emeritus, generally given to a person of importance upon retirement. In 2008, fifteen percent of NOVA nurses will be eligible for retirement, with 4% eligible to retire each year through 2013. Applied to NOVA, this could be 120 nurses per year. Currently, few NOVA members who retire retain the NOVA membership. There isn't an established role or incentive for retired nurses to remain in NOVA, and they would like to change that by developing a program. They are looking to identify ideas to retain nurses who will be active in NOVA after retirement. These may include a membership fee that is further reduced from the reduction in place already, a mentor program, a national initiative to directly benefit veterans, such as a service project, and working with the membership committee to promote membership.

The General Session on Saturday morning concluded with a presentation by **Terri Gaffney, RN, MPA** Vice President of Gannett Health care Group on "Writing for Publication." Ms. Gaffney encouraged all of the participants to overcome both the internal and external barriers we have to writing and share our stories. Topics for publication can be research findings, best practices, new directions in nursing, new trends in nursing management, and even personal stories. She stated that the journal selection for publication should match the content and topics of the submission. She suggested one way to overcome the fear of the first publication is to co-author with others. Research, organization and perseverance will get across that first publication barrier. After that just keep writing!

Harbor Lights – Closing Thoughts: **Mary Seaman** presented a wonderful closing presentation for the Annual meeting in Boston which highlighted various sites and historical events in "Beantown." She enlightened us about the preparation that is needed for the Boston Marathon in which she once participated and successfully completed. Her oratory and visuals were lively and colorful and the presentation was interactive with audience participation. While audience participants were shouting out quick responses to posed questions or statements, Mary was firing (tossing) token gifts to those who responded correctly.

In closing the presentation, Ms. Seaman transitioned our focus to the 2009 Annual Meeting in New Orleans. She alerted us to get our minds and spirits ready for a great time in the "Big Easy" and she advised us to be prepared to roll up our sleeves and give support to that community through "Habit for Humanity." Here We Come New Orleans!



Joy Edvalson received the Professional Nurse Award for Clinical Excellence.

TESTIMONY MAY 22 *cont. from page 5*

level. Another option would be to provide legislation that would address the barriers in paragraph 1 above.

3. Classification Standards are in need of review and revision. Many of them are too old and no longer reflective of the types of duties and responsibilities that are typically performed. Given that these are used to determine the pay, they often serve as a barrier to appropriate and effective pay setting.
4. Given the sizeable numbers of employees at or near retirement age, succession planning is becoming increasingly more important, especially for critically important positions. In order to successfully transition workload from retirees who possess a wealth of experience to their successors; transitional recruitment is required which can take up three to six months of addition FTE per situation.

One other critical issue of concern relates to the impact on patient care if 38 USC 7422(b) exclusions were to be repealed. Some of the issues that I foresee would have a negative impact on the care of our Veterans include the following:

- RN reassignment decisions made on the basis of clinical competence.
 - Performance appraisals/proficiency reports.
 - Fitness for duty issues as determined by Professional Standards Boards.
 - Clinical competence issues as determined by Professional Standards Boards.
 - Disciplinary and major adverse actions based on patient care or clinical competence issues.
- Determination of clinical competence is best

reserved for those responsible in ensuring that quality patient care is delivered. Our veterans deserve the best that VA has to offer and although the majority of our employees are excellent, there are a few marginal performers who put patient safety at risk. Moreover, clinical supervisors and managers must retain the authority to make clinical decisions such as which personnel are best suited for particular assignments and the appropriate staff mix for a given clinical setting.

Inherent in bargaining is the element of timeliness. If an employee needs to be removed from direct patient care or if providers' hours must be extended to meet growing patient care needs, those changes must be made immediately and cannot wait for the completion of protracted negotiation. National Level bargaining on policy or program changes is currently taking 120 days or longer. Local bargaining usually takes less time but still can result in delays, despite the best of intentions. If clinical matters were subject to bargaining, critical clinical programs such as extending the hours of mental health clinics or mandating traumatic brain injury training for all providers could not be implemented for months, which would unacceptably put patients at risk.

VHA has been a leader in health care and has earned an excellent reputation as one of the best health care providers in the country. In order to continue to this reputation, VHA staff will need to have new skills and competencies to treat this new generation of Veterans. Nimble and flexible HR processes are critical to VA's future success.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify here today about these important personnel issues.

ON TARGET *cont. from page 7*

standardize the data management for outcome measures at the local and national level. The Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes that it is essential to publish a national directive so that all facilities are applying the same processes and collecting the same data. The intent is to aggregate data on a national level and analyze correlations between patient outcomes and staffing levels and staff mix to continuously improve processes for a more effective and efficient staffing methodology.

A standardized staffing methodology for nursing services will support a national process to systematically measure the impact of staff levels and staff mix on patient care outcomes. Accordingly, facilities will have the necessary tools and methods to aggregate, share, and compare data with one another, ultimately leading to system-wide comparative data analysis and national benchmarks. This, in turn, leads to continuous quality improvement and results in the provision of increasingly effective, efficient, and high quality health care for veterans.

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Our Mission Statement

“NOVA: Shaping and Influencing Health Care Within The Department of Veterans Affairs.”

Our Vision Statement

VA nurses will provide high quality nursing care. VA nurses will have an optimal work environment. VA nurses will be well informed on relevant issues that impact VA healthcare and nursing practice. VA nurses will have a strong voice in the legislative arena. VA nurses will have a strong presence at the VHA corporate leadership level. VA nurses will be NOVA members.

important INFORMATION

NEWS FROM NOVA, edited by Larry Lemos. This newsletter is yours, please feel free to quote, photocopy, or share, but always reference **NEWS FROM NOVA**.

NEWS FROM NOVA is the official publication of the **Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs**. It is published four times per year. Subscription price is included in annual dues for members. Postmaster: send change of address and correspondence to NOVA, 1726 M Street NW, Suite 1101, Washington, DC 20036.

It is extremely important that you notify the National Office as soon as possible whenever you have a **change of address** or VA facility. Crucial legislative and other correspondence will then reach you in a more timely manner. If you have not received your election ballot, **NEWS FROM NOVA**, Annual Meeting brochure, or dues notice, please contact National Office so we can correct the problem.

REMINDER:

Put your questions or requests in writing when communicating with NOVA National Office.

Use our website for faster service: www.vanurse.org or fax your comments to: 202-833-1577

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