



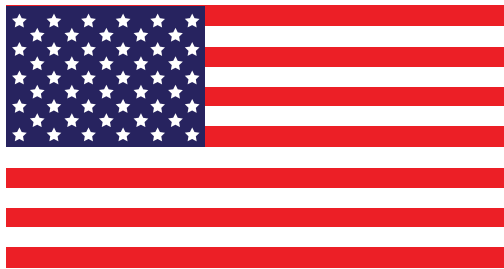
Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center Update

John Esterhai, MD

PVAMC Chief of Orthopaedics



WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT



“The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.”

—George Washington, President

“There are those who speak about you and say, he lost an arm, he lost a leg, she lost her sight. I object. You gave your arm, you gave your leg, you gave your sight as gifts to your nation that we might live in freedom. Thank you. And to your families, families of the fallen, and families of the wounded you’ve sacrificed in ways that those of us who have not walked in your shoes, can only imagine.”

—Peter M. Pace, General

Since 1776 Americans have been blessed by the opening words of our Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” For more than two centuries our men and women have been prepared to fight to protect these principles. Although less than one percent of our population

bears the military responsibility for our national defense, and although just over seven percent of all Americans living today have worn our Nation’s uniforms, that still amounts to 26.5 million veterans (of whom 1.7 million are women) deserving of special care.

The Philadelphia VA Medical Center (PVAMC) provides health care to 90,000 veterans living in America’s fifth largest metropolitan area. Our four-fold mission is to honor America’s veterans with world-class health care, advance medical knowledge through research, train health care professionals, and be prepared to serve in the event of a crisis.

The PVAMC is a tertiary referral center with more than 135 acute care beds, 95 of which are medicine-surgery beds, and a total yearly operating budget of more than \$380 million dollars. It is a fifteen minute walk from the Penn Presbyterian Medical Center and the Orthopaedic offices at 3737 Market Street. Our Orthopaedic residents and faculty are honored to help care for those who have served their country. Abraham Lincoln articulated the primary mission of the Veterans Administration Penn Orthopaedic Service more than a century ago: “To care for him who shall have borne the battle.”

The VA is the largest health care system (122 medical facilities) supporting graduate medical education in the United States and the second largest funding source for resident training (31,000 resident physicians) after the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. It is affiliated with 107 of the nation’s 129 medical schools.

The University of Pennsylvania Orthopedic rotation at the Philadelphia VAMC allows our PGY-2 and PGY-5 residents to care for veterans in an intensive, general orthopedic practice under the direct supervision of Drs. Ahn, Bernstein, Ecker, Esterhai, Farber, Gentchos, Hume, Kelly, Kuntz, Sheth, Steinberg, and Zgonis. Dr. Harvey Smith, our spine surgeon, teaches and works with a PGY-3 resident. Dr. Levin volunteers his time without compensation. The veterans who require care at a level of sophistication that we cannot provide are referred to sub-specialists in Universities throughout the region.

In addition to their dedication to direct patient care and resident education, Drs. Bernstein, Esterhai, Kuntz, Steinberg, and Zgonis have each applied for or been awarded research funding through the Veterans Administration competitive grant system. Under the direction of Drs. Mauck and Dodge our department’s Translational Musculoskeletal Research Center has five Merit Grants. Dr. Smith is actively engaged in his basic science spine studies funded by a prestigious five year Career Development Award. Our PVAMC clinical faculty members collaborate actively with intra and extra mural physicians and basic scientists including Drs. Jonathan Black,

Jason Burdick, George Dodge, Dawn Elliott, Kurt Hankenson, Annamarie Horan, Russ Huffman, Robert Mauck, Samir Mehta, Lachlan Smith, and Lou Soslowsky.

Drs. Mauck and Dodge direct our Translational Orthopedic Research Facility, in 4,500 square feet of superbly equipped research space. They have energized collaboration with scientists in Rheumatology and Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

We have been able to improve our preoperative patient evaluation process to expedite surgery scheduling with the addition of preadmission testing offices embedded in our clinic, improved peri-operative pain management, and post-operative floor care. We look forward to operating room renovations this year and adding OR and PACU personnel to extend the operating room duty day.

Mitchell (Chip) Staska and John Wheeler, our superb Physician Assistants, are our boots on the ground every day. They provide seamless, exemplary, tender care from initial patient referral through appropriate triage, outpatient evaluation, scheduling of appropriate testing and consultations, surgery, and post hospitalization care. Chip and John provide immediate, timely interaction with referring physicians and outside consultants, coordination of pre-bed evaluations, surgery scheduling, interaction with the primary care providers, liaison with VA referral health centers, acute and chronic pain management, and assist in the operating room! John coordinates Dr. Smith's Orthopaedic spine care for our veterans.

We have the best electronic medical record system in the country. All veteran records including consent forms and imaging studies are electronic. In-patient and out-patient progress notes, laboratory results, and imaging studies are available at the workstations on the in-patient units, offices, out-patient care areas and individual examination rooms from local and satellite VA care facilities across the country.

Ours is a surgical service. We do not attempt to provide primary musculoskeletal care. We have patient office hours on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. In FY 2015 Orthopaedics and Orthopaedic Spine saw 3471 consultations and 7068 office visits. We receive more than 15 new consultations five days a week. Every effort is made to insure that new patients are scheduled within thirty days of their primary physician's request for consultation. The Emergency Room is very busy. We perform scheduled surgery four days each week. In FY2015 Orthopaedics and Orthopaedic

Spine performed 636 surgeries. Orthopedics performs more major surgeries than any other service. None of this would be possible without the professional expertise, personal sacrifice, and wisdom of the Chief of Surgery, Lew Kaplan, and the anesthesiologist, nurses, administrative support personnel, and physician staff of the PVAMC.

Vince Lombardi said, "The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual." By God's providence and the hard work and daily diligence of everyone in anesthesia, instrument processing, nursing, and orthopaedics the infection rate for our total joints replacement patients has remained excellent. Several factors specifically contributed, including: improved pre-operative patient screening and preparation, rigorous instrument processing and packaging, heightened awareness of potentials for intraoperative contamination, optimal perioperative antibiotic dosing, and patient retention for on-site rehabilitation before discharge to the patient's home. In this time of increasing financial constraint and federal budget review we will likely be called upon to deliver more direct care and perform more research with fewer resources.

As I write this I anticipate that Dr. Marlene DeMaio, Captain, Medical Corps, U.S. Navy (retired) will be coming on board in the near future. For the first time the PVAMC will have a full time Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery. Dr. DeMaio's credentials are impeccable: twenty years of active duty Navy military service, President of the Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons, Member of the Board of Trustees of Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research, and Oral Examiner for Recertification and Part II for the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Many of the veterans for whom we care commute a long distance from central and northeastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware. Many have significant co-morbidities such as HCV and difficult psychosocial environments. Many have had multiple operations making reconstructive surgical approaches and wound healing more difficult. Not infrequently they have had a difficult time reintegrating into society after their military service. It has been said that "a veteran is someone who wrote a blank check, payable to the United States of America, for an amount up to and including his own life." Providing Philadelphia-level, state of the art, complication free, compassionate care requires extra, special diligence. It is a worthy goal to which we are fully committed.