Veterans Health Administration

Office of Health Equity

What is it all about?

November 4, 2013

Uche S. Uchendu, MD
Chief Officer, Office of Health Equity
uchenna.uchendu2@va.gov

Office of Health Equity -VHA 10A6
Washington DC

HSR&D Cyber seminar November 4, 2013
VHA Office of Health Equity - What is it all about?

- How is VHA joining the dialogue on health disparities in vulnerable populations?

- What actions can each of us take in our areas of influence to move towards attainment of the highest level of health for all?
Poll Question #1

• What is your primary role in VA?
  – student, trainee, or fellow
  – clinician
  – researcher
  – manager or policy-maker
  – Other
Global Perspective – making a case for health equity

- Benefits of reducing health inequalities

- The benefits of reducing health inequalities are economic as well as social.

- The cost of health inequalities can be measured in

  - human terms - lost years of life and active life
  - Economic terms - the cost to the economy of additional illness

- What is the global burden of disease?

- What is the Veteran burden of disease?
Action model to achieve Healthy People 2020 overarching goals.
Indicators of Population Health

1. "Upstream Forces"
   - political
   - social
   - cultural
   - economic
   - spiritual
   - ecological
   - technological

2. Proximal Causes of Health: physical & social environments; and biological factors (including gene-environment interactions)

3. Life-Course Processes

4. From Individuals

5. Disparities Across Sub-populations:
   - race, ethnicity & gender;
   - SES; & geography

6. Health Services/System Interventions

7. "Health Outcomes"

ACA and Health Equity

The National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities (NPA) was established by HHS OMH to mobilize a nationwide, comprehensive, community-driven, and sustained approach to combating health disparities and to move the nation toward achieving health equity – 2000 Partners.

The mission of the NPA is to increase the effectiveness of programs that target the elimination of health disparities through the coordination of partners, leaders, and stakeholders committed to action.

VA made commitment as one of the federal partners in NPA.
The Veterans Health Administration provides appropriate individualized health care to each Veteran in a way that eliminates disparate health outcomes and assures health equity.

Office of Health Equity champions the advancement of health equity and reduction of health disparities.
VHA Office of Health Equity – VHA Strategic Plan

- **VHA Strategic Plan Goal 1 of 3:**

  **VHA GOAL (1): PROVIDE VETERANS PERSONALIZED, PROACTIVE, PATIENT-DRIVEN HEALTH CARE**

- **Objective: (NLC Committee -HDC, HQVC)**

  1e. **Quality & Equity** – Veterans will receive timely, high quality, personalized, safe effective and *equitable health care*, irrespective of geography, gender, race, age, culture or sexual orientation

- A section on the VHA strategic plan means weaving it into discussions at all levels of policy, decision making, resource allocation, practice, performance plans etc.
VHA Office of Health Equity - Organizational Structure

Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health

OHE Chief Officer

Executive Assistant
Program Assistant

Communication & Cultural Competency
Program Management Officer
Program Analyst
Training Specialist

Program Analyst

Health Care Outcomes
Program Director
VHA Office of Health Equity- With USH
VHA - Organizational Structure: OHE = 10A6
Health equity is attainment of the highest level of health for all people.

Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health and healthcare disparities.
A health disparity is a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social or economic disadvantage.

Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater social and/or economic obstacles to health and/or a clean environment based on these:

- Racial or ethnic group
- Gender
- Age
- Geographic location
- Religion
- Socio-economic status
- Sexual orientation
- Mental health
- Disability
  - cognitive /sensory / physical
- other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion
VHA Office of Health Equity - Definitions

- Not all health differences amount to a health disparity
- A subset of differences linked with social disadvantage
- Adverse health in a socially disadvantaged / vulnerable group
Question for Participants

- Which of the following Veterans is likely to have a health disparity?
  - [ ] Select all that apply

A. An African American male who served in Vietnam and lives in Hope, Arkansas
B. A Transgender white Veteran with PTSD who lives in Iowa City, Iowa
C. A Hispanic female Veteran with HIV who lives in Houston, Texas
D. 60 year old unemployed Veteran who sleeps on the steps of the Capitol in DC
E. A Native American Veteran who lives in Winnemucca, Nevada
The issue with Averages...

- “The poor are getting poorer, but with the rich getting richer it all averages out in the long run.”

[Cartoon image from cartoonbank.com New Yorker 2000]
Quotes on Health Disparity and/or Health inequity

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." -- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Excerpt from comments made in a Civil Rights protest against racially discriminatory practices of Chicago hospitals. March 1966, Chicago

• "It is time to refocus, reinforce, and repeat the message that health disparities exist and that health and equity benefits everyone" – Kathleen G. Sebelius, Secretary, Health & Human Services (HHS disparities Action Plan)
Raising the bar by elevating the disadvantaged outliers

- Performance Measures track percentage on target for particular measure

- **What if we tracked the same measure(s) with an equity lens?**

- What if the percent on target is broken down by age, gender, race, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, mental, medical and physical disabilities?

- Would your facility still meet the measure for all populations?

- If the answer is no, THIS IS your call to action!
OHE Mission

- Champion efforts to address health disparities through education, training, communications and information
- Coordinate programs, projects and initiatives that address health disparities and equality, in order to bring synergy and break down silos within the organization
- Represent VHA and serve as liaison to other governmental and non-governmental organizations working to achieve health equity
- Position VHA as a national leader in achieving equitable health care and outcomes
- Capitalize on the existing network of minority advocates ... to coordinate and harness efforts to advance health equity by achieving equitable health care and outcomes
VHA Office of Health Equity - Goals and Functions

- Leadership
- Awareness
- Health Outcomes
- Diversity and Cultural Competency of the Workforce
- Data, Research and Evaluation
  - Five-goal framework of the NPA National Stakeholder Strategy for Achieving Health Equity
  - The Affordable Care Act under Title IV, “Prevention of Chronic Disease and Improving public Health”; Section 4302 – “Understanding health disparities: data collection and analysis”
Leadership

Leadership - Strengthen and broaden the ability of VA leadership to address health inequalities and reduce health disparities through operations, policy, oversight and research.
VHA Office of Health Equity - Goals and Functions

❖ Awareness

❖ Awareness - Increase awareness of the significance of health inequalities and disparities, their impact on the nation, and the actions necessary within VHA to improve health care and health outcomes for disadvantaged populations
Health Outcomes

- Improve health and health care outcomes for Veteran sub-populations experiencing health disparities

- The Affordable Care Act under Title IV, “Prevention of Chronic Disease and Improving public Health”; Section 4302 – “Understanding health disparities: data collection and analysis”

- Also linked to the Community Health Needs Assessment Provision of ACA
VHA Office of Health Equity - Goals and Functions

- Diversity and Cultural Competency of the Workforce

- Diversity and Cultural Competency of the Workforce
  Improve cultural and linguistic competency and the diversity of the VA workforce involved in advancing the health and well-being of Veterans

  - Also linked to the Workforce Diversity section in ACA
Data, Research and Evaluation

- Improve the availability, coordination, and utilization of data and diffusion of research and evaluation outcomes in order to track progress towards the achievement of health equity.

- The Affordable Care Act under Title IV, “Prevention of Chronic Disease and Improving public Health”; Section 4302 – “Understanding health disparities: data collection and analysis”
- Integrative VHA Health Equity Action Plan *

- Comprehensive Health Equity Communication Plan

- Analyses using process, outcomes, and satisfaction metrics that enhance understanding and track progress towards achieving health equity

- Multifaceted Cultural Competency Training Program
Audience question

- **Five-goal framework of the NPA National Stakeholder Strategy for Achieving Health Equity includes all the following except:**

  - A. Affordable Care Act
  - B. Awareness
  - C. Health Outcomes
  - D. Diversity and Cultural Competency of the Workforce
  - Data, Research and Evaluation
Established by the VHA PDUSH

Memo signed March 21, 2013 tasked to Program offices

Chief Officer, Office of Health Equity = Chair of the Coalition

Coalition responsible for:

- Assuring that there is a comprehensive and aligned approach across VHA
- Ensuring the availability of necessary resources, and
- Ongoing assessment of impact on improvements
VHA Office of Health Equity - Health Equity Coalition

> Charge

- Maintain a professional connection to the mission and leadership of OHE
- Advise & assist OHE in the development of the Health Equity Action Plan
- Commit appropriate organizational resources to
  - Implement the initiatives, programs and strategies in the Health Equity Action Plan
  - Set milestones and review progress to ensure timely completion of initiatives
- Provide the necessary support to ensure that VHA emerges as a national leader in coordinated, system-wide efforts to achieve health care equity
- Encouraged to engage as appropriate with external organizations that have expertise in health equity
VHA Office of Health Equity - Health Equity Coalition > Membership

- Center for Minority Veterans
- Office of Communications
- Office of ADUSH for Clinical Operations
- Network Director – identified by 10N
- Office of Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation
- Office of the ADUSH for Informatics and Analytics
- Office of ADUSH for Policy and Planning
- Office of Nursing*
- Office of Public Health
- Office of ADUSH for Patient Care Services
- Office of Women’s Health
- Office of Research and Development
- Director Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion
- National Center for Ethics in Health Care
- Office of the ADUSH for Workforce Services
- Office of ADUSH for Quality, Safety & Value
- VISN Chief Medical Officer*
VHA Office of Health Equity - Health Equity Coalition

Kick off

- Maiden meeting - Thursday, May 30, 2013
- The expanse of coverage for vulnerable Veteran populations noted
  - Agreed to prioritize over time
  - Take stock of “what we know” and include other stakeholders

- Presentations: Health Equity + Policy and Planning + Informatics and Analytics + Public Health + ESP

- Meetings – May 30, June 25, July 24, 2013
- 1.5 day Face to Face meeting September 2013 – >>>>>>>>

- Draft of the First VHA Health Equity Action Plan
  - A guide and in flux as we chart new territories in VHA Health Equity.
VHA Office of Health Equity - Current Projects

Health Equity Coalition*

- VHA Strategic Plan goal 1 Objective e- Quality and Equity
  Goal 1e- in progress with OP&P, OSI – complete. NLC next, then implementation

- Clinical Look at Unconscious Bias – CLUB In response to ACMV 2012
  OHE in collaboration with CHERP – Houston, Martinsburg and Pittsburgh - Conclusion anticipated in Q2 of FY14

- Healthcare Equality Index – HEI 2013 Complete! LGBT Workgroup task to OHE
  92 VAMCs made Leader status - 121 participated

- Creating awareness of OHE mission and building critical partnerships
  Presentations/dialogue within and outside of VHA including ALL OF YOU On this cyber seminar!

- Active involvement on the Federal Interagency Health Equity Team – FIHET
  OHE active on the workgroups including one exploring a federal disparity/health equity related data repository
  Exploring Community Health Workers
Audience Poll by Molly

- Have you seen the OHE Call For Papers for VA Health Equity American Journal of Public Health Supplement?
  - Yes
  - No
  - May be
  - Do not know
  - What is that?
121 VAMCs participated, 92 made Leader status!

HEI Press Conference July 2013 @ VACO
Military Cultural Awareness Workgroup* - Complete
Chaired by OHE Lisa Red- Recommendations in review and discussion for next steps
Did you know there was a TMS training for Military Cultural Awareness?

Exploratory work & education on health outcomes & issues on LGBT Veterans
In progress by OHE Dr. George Brown and Dr. Kenneth Jones with IRB via Mountain Home TN VAMC

Collaboration with the Patient Care Services LGBT coordinators
LGBT coordinators aligned under Patient Care Services – Dr. Michael Kauth and Dr. Jillian Shipperd

Collaboration with Researchers and Data Analysts - > *Think Tank July 2013
Input and project ideas + collaboration opportunities

Evidence Synthesis Program topic nomination
OHE topic nomination for HSR&D ESP on PC Access for Mentally Ill Veterans – > Durham ESP Center

American Journal of Public Health Supplement on VA Health Equity
Have you seen the OHE- AJPH Call For Papers? Deadline Jan 10, 2014!
VHA Office of Health Equity – Project CLUB “Pilot”

- Clinical Look at Unconscious Bias – CLUB
  - OHE in partnership with CHERP

- The pilot intended for PACTs – MD, RN, LPN, SW, Pharm-D, MSA & Dieticians

- Interactive cultural competency training program for PACTs that addresses unconscious bias

- Assess feasibility and acceptability of the program by implementing it in a small sample of PACTs

- Collect preliminary data to assess the impact of the program on select patient and provider outcomes
VHA Office of Health Equity - What is it all about?

- How is VHA joining the dialogue on health disparities in vulnerable populations?

- What actions can each of us take in our areas of influence to move towards attainment of the highest level of health for all?
What can you do?

- VHA Strategic Plan Goal 1 Objective e
  - Quality and Equity

  1.e.1. (Strategy): VHA will develop an understanding of where health and health care inequities exist and identify factors that contribute to inequity in Veteran populations, and intervene to eliminate inequities.

- Performance Plan:
  - Demonstrates understanding of where health and health care inequity exists and addresses disparities.
What can you do? A conceptual framework


[Diagram showing the process of detecting, understanding, and reducing health disparities.]

What can you do?

First generation

Document the existence of health disparities

Second generation

Explain reasons for health disparities

Third generation

Provide solutions for eliminating health disparities
Health Disparities Research

- **Health disparities research** = a broad multi-faceted field that includes basic, applied, clinical, social and behavioral research that relates to significant disparities in the overall rate of disease incidence, prevalence, morbidity or survival rates in a population, including individuals and members of such populations.

- Includes the causes of such disparities and methods to identify, prevent, diagnose and treat such disparities, with the eventual goal to addressing causes and implementing solutions.
Health equity action research trajectory
Population Health Research

- Population health research examines the health outcomes of a group of individuals, including the distribution of such outcomes within the group.

- Research approaches include metrics of health outcomes, patterns of health determinants and policies and programs that link these two.
What can you do?

- Cast an *equity lens* on all decisions and actions
- Become aware of your unconscious bias
- Get culturally competent
- Target *vulnerable Veteran* populations for Quality Improvement and Research Projects
- Recall performance measure questions earlier...
Raising the bar by elevating the disadvantaged outliers

- Performance Measures track percentage on target for particular measure.

- **What if we tracked the same measure(s) with an equity lens?**

- What if the percent on target is broken down by age, gender, race, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, mental, medical and physical disabilities?

- Would your facility still meet the measure for all populations?

- If the answer is no, THIS IS your call to action!

- Repeat exercise for several other scenarios relevant to your work and area of influence.
Did you Know?

- You may already be doing work that is addressing health disparities.
- If you are working with any of the vulnerable populations, you are in a position to make a difference.
- The demographics and vulnerable populations vary from one VAMC to another - one size does NOT fit all.
- You can take control of the activities pertinent to your region/facility and demographics.
- OHE wants to partner with you and learn about your best practices/work in health equity.
Quotes on Health Disparity and/or Health inequity

The “Geography of Opportunity” – the spaces and places where people live, work, study, pray, and play powerfully shape health and life opportunities.

HPI’s research, publications, activities, and projects are designed to accelerate progress beyond listing and analyzing a litany of health disparities. Rather, they are directed toward collective strategies that will produce real change—and real opportunities for health. --

Geography and Health – the U.S. Context and Health – Brian D. Smedley NIMHD summer 2013

http://www.jointcenter.org/hsi/
The pursuit of Health Equity *should be* everyone’s business.

It is a journey that takes time and effort.

What can you do today in your area of influence to improve health equity?

At a minimum - in all your actions - *do not* increase the disparity.

Thank you!
Useful Links:

- CFP VA Health Equity Supplement

- National Partnership for Action (NPA)
  [http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/](http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/)

- The Economic Burden of Health Inequalities in the United States
  [www.jointcenter.org/hpi](http://www.jointcenter.org/hpi)

- Office of Health Equity
Question/Comments...

Contact Information:

Uche S. Uchendu, MD
Chief Officer, Office of Health Equity
uchenna.uchendu2@va.gov

Do you have Implicit (Unconscious) Bias?
• Take the test @
• https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/