

ONE VA'S EXPERIENCE: ENHANCING GENDER SPECIFIC CARE FOR FEMALE VETERANS

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Women currently represent the largest growing segment of the VA population. There is a growing body of medical literature looking at gender differences in delivery of care for women, including the delivery of care for female veterans. The VA, historically providing care for aging male veterans, is now faced with providing care for a growing female population whose average age is 45. Nationally and locally the VA has explored ways to provide access and excellence in care addressing the unique needs of women, while at the same time dealing with budget constraints. Gynecology surgical services, breast care/mammography, and pregnancy are just some of the unique issues for our female veterans.

Until October 2005, limited in-house gynecology services were available at the Malcolm Randall VAMC. Women could get STD testing and pap smears via designated Women's Clinics and select providers within the outpatient network. Two outpatient clinics had gynecologists on staff. To address the needs of women veterans the NF/SG Veterans Health System successfully developed a system for delivering gynecological surgical services, building upon the primary care infrastructure and teaming with general surgery. Key items in our local model for delivering gynecological surgical services included: 1) creation of a gynecology section under Surgical Services with a consult referral framework; 2) partnering with General Surgery and urology residents training; 3) continuing to fee GYN oncology and pregnancy care; 4) instituting system-wide education; and 5) support by leadership. The results have shown increased provider/ patient satisfaction, dramatic decrease in Fee Services utilization, and cost savings. Female enrollees in our system increased 14% during this 3 year time period but utilization of fee basis referral for common gynecological services decreased over 70%.