

Protecting The Voices of Veterans: *Speech Therapy Services at VA Medical Centers*

Article 9 in the TIMS Medical “Reimagining Telemedicine” Series



Veterans Administration Healthcare: Defining Excellence in the 21st Century
Source: va.gov

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Introduction

As colleagues and I have written in prior articles for the TIMS Medical [“Telemedicine Reimagined” series](#), new medical imaging technologies are transforming a widening range of medical tests and procedures, expanding opportunities for telecollaboration, telementoring, and remote medical education.

Systems and software that my company ([TIMS Medical](#)) provide are used daily across a [wide portfolio of customer installations](#) (non-profit and for-profit hospitals, clinics, medical schools, and other facilities).

As its title (“**Protecting the Voices of Veterans**”) suggests, this article specifically focuses on the use of **#medicalimaging** to benefit veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces and cites several “best practice” hospitals and medical centers operated by the Veterans Health Administration, that the **#TIMSMedical** team has been honored to work with.

The VA: Supporting U.S. Veterans

The [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) is the branch of the U.S. federal government responsible for programs and policies related to veterans and their families.

Since 1939, the VA has administered veterans' educational assistance and vocational rehabilitation, pensions and life insurance payments for disability or death related to military service, as well as benefits for medical care.

The U.S. Government has a long-standing history of providing medical care to veterans of the armed services going back to 1812, with the establishment of Naval Home in Philadelphia.

Since then, the [Veterans Health Administration \(VHA\)](#) of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has evolved into the largest integrated health care system in the United States, providing care at [1,293 health care facilities](#), including 171 VA Medical Centers and 1,112 outpatient sites of care of varying complexity to over nine million veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare program.



One of 171 VA Medical Centers in the US

Source: *military.com*

As the VHA focuses on meeting the needs of a very diverse demographic, its health facilities must address two specific trends:

1) A Growing Population of Aging Veterans:

In 2021: 37 percent of vets are 70+ years old, 36% aged 50-69, and 27% under 50 yrs. of age.

2) Veteran-Specific Medical Issues:

Health issues specific to U.S. veterans include (but aren't limited to) mental health or behavioral adjustment disorders, substance abuse, PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injuries, depression, suicide, and rehabilitation care.

TIMS Medical: Dedicated Partner in Supporting Veterans' Health

Among the thousands of TIMS Medical systems in use in healthcare facilities around the world, the **#TIMSMedicalTeam** is especially proud of the hundreds of installations we currently support at **more than 100** wonderful medical centers, hospitals, and clinics run by the VHA of the US **#Veterans** Administration, with more to come.



Speech Language Pathologist Elizabeth Starling (Tennessee Valley Healthcare VA Med Center, Nashville, TN) “fist bumps” a Vet to congratulate him during aphasia therapy
Source: va.gov

Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs), radiologists, and rehabilitation services providers at VHA facilities tell us that TIMS Medical is especially helpful to them in diagnosing and treating **speech, language, and swallowing disorders** that may occur in conjunction with many medical problems, including:

- Brain injury including a stroke or trauma to the head
- Progressive neurological disorders such as Parkinson’s Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Huntington’s Disease, muscular dystrophy and dementia or Alzheimer’s disease
- Injury or surgery to the head and neck
- Oral and laryngeal cancer
- Laryngeal abnormalities such as vocal cord paresis or paralysis
- Spinal cord injury and dysfunction
- Respiratory compromise including tracheostomy and ventilator dependence

The VHA is the #1 employer of Speech Language Pathologists in the U.S.

As the Veterans Health Administration is the largest U.S. integrated healthcare provider, it is not surprising that

The VHA is also the #1 employer of SLPs in the United States.



A VA Speech Language Pathologist counsels a veteran after surgery

Source: va.gov

According to the Veterans Administration:

- In 2021, the VA employs 459 Speech Language Pathologists, and offers related services to over 158 sites of care throughout the VA Health Care System.
- In Fiscal Year 2017 VA Speech-Language Pathology had over 374,000 patient encounters.
- Since the onset and impact of COVID-19-- the VA has offered speech and other services through a [“robust” telehealth training and treatment program](#), which makes telemedicine available as a modality to provide specialized care in settings closer to the individual’s home.

Five VA Medical Centers That Rely on TIMS Medical for Imaging

While we can't profile all of them in a single article, here are brief writeups on five **VA Med Centers** whose Speech Language Pathologists use TIMS Medical systems to serve those who served:

VA Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA)

www.pittsburgh.va.gov/



Members of the VA Pittsburgh Speech Pathology team gather around their TIMS 2000 SP MCP system

Source: *TIMS Medical*

Recognized as a “Geriatric Center of Excellence,” **VA Pittsburgh** is also well known an innovator within the national VA Health network. In 2018, it trained six speech language pathologists from six different VA health care facilities in a one-of-a-kind, intensive program to treat aphasia, a language disorder caused by brain damage, often following a stroke.

Those SLPs completed a 5-week residency which paired each of them in VA Pittsburgh’s Program for Intensive Residential Aphasia Treatment and Education, or [PIRATE](#).

In a [July 2018 post in VantagePoint](#) (the VA’s official blog), **Patrick J. Doyle, Ph.D.** (Member of the Board of the [Veterans Health Foundation](#) and previously Associate Director for 18 years at VA Pittsburgh) estimated that **“approximately 100,000 U.S. Veterans older than 55 have aphasia,”** and noted that expansion of PIRATE could be very helpful in addressing conditions associated with aphasia including veterans’ psychosocial adjustment, family role participation and the ability to function independently in society.

St. Cloud VA Healthcare System (St. Cloud, MN)

<https://www.va.gov/st-cloud-health-care/>



TMS Medical TMS 2000 alongside St Cloud VA's Siemens Luminos Agile Max Radiography/Fluoroscopy system

Source: TMS Medical

One of several large VA Health networks in the Midwest, Minnesota's **St. Cloud VA Healthcare System** serves more than 38,000 vets a year!

Through its medical imaging technologies, the St. Cloud VA's Audiology and Speech Pathology clinic offers services that help veterans with speech, language, fluency, voice, cognitive communication, swallowing, stuttering, and recovery from laryngectomy surgery.

Hunter Holmes VA Medical Center (Richmond, VA)

<https://www.richmond.va.gov/>



The talented team of SLPeeps at Hunter Holmes VA Medical Center

Source: [richmond.va.gov](https://www.richmond.va.gov/)

Established after World War II, and located south of downtown Richmond, VA, the **Hunter Holmes VA Medical Center** offers comprehensive speech-language pathology services to veterans and service members.

According to **Katina Sokol, CCC-SLP** (Speech Language Pathology Supervisor), she and her fellow SLP pros are dedicated to providing **“high quality, comprehensive, caring and timely services”** to individuals who have a wide range of speech, swallowing, language, voice, and cognitive-communication disorders.

James A. Haley Veterans Hospital (Tampa, FL)

<https://www.tampa.va.gov/TAMPA/>



James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in sunny Tampa, Florida

Source: [va.gov](https://www.tampa.va.gov/)

Activated in 1972 and based in Tampa, the **James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital (JAHVH)** provides comprehensive health care throughout four counties in Central Florida. Part of [the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network](#) that includes additional facilities in Florida and Puerto Rico, JAHVH is also affiliated with the University of South Florida (USF) College of Medicine in North Tampa, FL.

One of the top practitioners at the Haley Veterans Hospital is Speech Pathologist **Karyn Pingel**, who was featured in a [December 2020 VA "Borne the Battle" podcast](#). In that podcast Karyn shared how speech therapy helped Vietnam War Navy Veteran **Dave Hume** recover from a major stroke that left him speechless (literally).

After his stroke, Hume was diagnosed with [Global Aphasia](#), a communication disorder which impairs a patient's ability to process language. Unable to express any words or ideas, Hume thought his life was over. Yet, three days after his stroke, he met the person (Pingel) who would prove him wrong. Working closely with Hume, Karyn Pingel not only helped this vet to relearn how to speak and read, but also launch his own blog, and become a motivational speaker.

Beyond her ongoing success with Hume, Karyn is bullish about how the VA provides speech therapy to veterans nationwide. While some VA facilities in rural areas may not have a full-time speech pathologist, through the availability of a travelling SLP who works at several VA centers and expanded telehealth services, Pingel says if a vet needs speech language therapy **"they can get it."**

Malcom Randall VA Medical Center (Gainesville, FL)

<https://www.northflorida.va.gov/locations/gainesville.asp>



Malcom Randall VA Medical Center (Gainesville, FL)

Source: va.gov

When Gainesville, Florida's **Malcom Randall VA Medical Center** was dedicated on October 22, 1967, keynote speaker US Rep. Olin Teague declared "the veterans of the sunshine state can be assured they are never forgotten men." Since its founding, the Gainesville VA Medical Center has grown into one of the top five busiest VA medical centers in the country. The hospital is also affiliated with [the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health Care System](#) - the VA's largest Health Care System spanning 50 counties (40,000 square miles) between North Florida and South Georgia while proudly serving over 130,000 veterans.

Section Chief, Speech Pathology Services at the Gainesville, FL medical center until 2019 **Nan D. Musson, CCC-SP, MA** now serves as National Speech Pathology Discipline Lead within the Rehabilitation and Prosthetics Services Program Office at the Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition to working as a clinician at multiple VA facilities in Florida, Musson is active in research on aphasia, dysphagia and the development of intervention protocols using telehealth.

In May 2020, Nan Musson contributed [a popular post for the VA's VantagePoint blog](#) in which she detailed why "good hearing and speech are so important for veterans and service members." Beyond describing how VA-affiliated audiologists treat veterans who suffer from tinnitus (ringing in the ears) and sensorineural hearing loss (two of the most prevalent service-connected disabilities), Musson also noted (in her article) that:

"Over the past 25 years, VA speech-language pathologists have been the leaders in rehabilitation for patients with dysphagia or difficulty swallowing."

Support for AVASLP and Thanking America's Vets for Their Service



[ACASLP Conference 2021](#) (October 20-22, 2021)

Source: AVASLP

Beyond our support of honored customers at VA Med Centers across the US, TIMS Medical is proud to be an active sponsor and participant in an important upcoming virtual event:

The [ACASLP Conference 2021](#) - October 20-22, 2021 (online)

As its acronym suggests, the ACASLP Conference is an annual gathering of [The Association of Veteran Affairs Speech-Language Pathologists](#), an organization for speech-language pathologists employed by the VA and the [Defense Health Agency \(DHA\)](#).

While we're disappointed that COVID restrictions prevent an in-person gathering this year, the [ACASLP 2021 program](#) features a lineup of stellar speakers whose live presentations you can watch virtually. Since participation is limited, [click here to REGISTER NOW](#).

Conclusion

From Amarillo, TX to Wilmington, DE; Boston to San Francisco; and from Detroit to Dallas — in approaching 100 VA Medical Centers and hospitals across the nation: TIMS Medical systems are used every day by medical imaging professionals and other clinicians to diagnose and treat a broad spectrum of conditions experienced by America’s honored veterans.

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About this Article

This original article “Protecting the Voices of Veterans: Speech Therapy Services at VA Medical Centers” is the ninth in a series of educational [“Telemedicine Reimagined”](#) articles published by TIMS Medical, Inc.

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