

Hospital Program Presentation
Robyn Kuznik, National Ambassador
2021 National Convention

The Hospital Program is near and dear to our hearts and brings love and support to veterans and their families in the communities we serve.

It could be you, your hero, a loved one or a close friend who has had a medical condition and spent time in a hospital or long-term facility.

This Program offers hope and encouragement with compassionate care.

This year, I wanted to bring attention to a program that exists in some VA facilities. Have you ever wondered what the Veteran's end-of-life protocol is in either a VA or non-VA facility?

That is the question I asked myself when my father passed away five years ago.

- Did the non-VA facility know that he was a Veteran?
- Was proper respect shown to him after his passing in the facility?

After researching this, I learned that some VA facilities have an Honors Escort Program that is part of their end-of-life protocol for Veterans who depart in their care. One great example is the Wilkes-Barr VA Medical Center in Wilkes Barre, PA. The Honors Escort Program has a solemn procession, signifying the passing of the Veteran.

Veterans, staff and visitors along the route take a moment to recognize the loss and honor the Veteran and family members as the procession passes. It is performed by trained employees who volunteer their time to do this.

Some VA facilities have an Honors Escort Program, and others do not. I encourage each of you to reach out to your local VA facility and find out if they have an Honors Escort Program.

This an opportunity to educate staff of non-VA facilities in end-of-life protocol for our nation's heroes.

Veterans' Health Care – The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the largest integrated health care system in the United States Providing care to more than 9 million veterans at more than 1,255 facilities.

The Mission Act gives veterans access to health care in VA facilities and in the community.

The VHA is committed to meeting the health care needs of our **Women Veterans**. Look ahead and plan something special on June 12th for Women's Veterans Day to celebrate their service.

VA facilities are working hard to make sure their Women Facilities meet the needs for female specific services to include Mental Health Services including counseling for Military Sexual Trauma and more.

The National Salute to Veteran Patients takes place the week of February 14 and is an opportunity to thank a special group of men of women. Here are a few examples for this special week:

- Make Valentine Day themed tray favors for Veteran patients.
- Organize a community Valentine Card Drive – here an example of a flyer for a card drive.
- Organize a student essay, art, or coloring contest.

Volunteer Recruitment & Recognition

This is one of the most important things I want to share with you. We need more members to participate in the Hospital Program! The number of volunteers and hours reported for this program has declined by nearly 50% in the last four years!!

In 2016-2017, there were 56538 volunteers reported; 2017-2018 60063 volunteers reported; 2018-2019 44638 Reported; and in 2019-2020 only 31902 volunteers were reported. Volunteer hours have significantly declined from 816377 in 2016-2017 to 479894 in 2019-2020.

Remind your members that they can volunteer occasionally and regularly and should fit their personal availability. Some volunteer Opportunities can include bingo, reading, holiday parties, patient meal assistance and more.

We need to recognize our member volunteers by saying thank you, present them a certificate of Appreciation which is free on the program and publicity resource page of our website. Apply and present hospital pins, which are free from headquarters. Host a volunteer luncheon, reception, or another event to thank them for doing a great job!

Do not forget to nominate a member for Hospital Volunteer of the Year. In the 2019-2020 program year, a total of 35 Department nominations were received by National. That means that 15 Departments did not nominate a single member of their Department for this award. Remember... More Volunteers = More Veterans we can Serve!!!

For the Awards for Auxiliaries, we will be looking for the Most Outstanding implementation of Outreach education of the Honors Escort Program. Reach out to your VA and Non-VA Facilities in your area to see if they have an Honors Escort Program, and if not share information on what the VA does for End-of-Life protocol and how to pay respect to Veterans who depart in their care. Please refer to the 2021-2022 Program Book for more details.

As said by John F. Kennedy “As we express our gratitude, we must never forget the highest appreciation is not to utter words – but to live by them”.