

Marc Migala

Director, Veteran Care Services

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, members of the senate, and fellow veterans. My name is Marc Migala, and I currently serve as the Director for Veteran Care Services at UPMC in Central Pa. I am a retired 20 year US Army Airborne Medic, with assignments and deployments to Iraq, Kuwait, Korea, and Ukraine. I obtained both my bachelor's and master's degree from Liberty University. I am currently responsible for the oversight of care delivery for veterans referred from the surrounding VA medical centers to UPMC's facilities in Central Pa., including 7 hospitals, the Hillman Cancer Centers, the Neurosciences Institute, the Heart and Vascular Institute, as well as many specialty services. With over 40 hospitals in total, UPMC is honored to be one of the largest providers of care for veterans not only in central Pa., but also across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

I am honored to be here with you today to highlight how UPMC has established, what I believe, to be the best practice to support veterans in their care delivery between community hospital and the Department of Veteran Affairs. Over the next 4-5 minutes you will hear and learn about the program's inception, the remarkable work currently being done, and its continued expansion.

An overview to set up the early years

In 2018 The MISSION Act dramatically changed how community care could be delivered for veterans. At its onset, community hospitals became flooded with referrals requiring expansive care for veterans. Increased access to care meant an increasing demand. Recognizing the unique needs of the veteran community and opportunity to build a Life Changing model, in 2019 UPMC began creating Veteran Care Services. At its onset, it was simply a "One Stop Shop" for VA staff, providing one phone number/fax number/email to begin coordinating care into UPMC Central PA. It was a dream for the VA. Seeing how well this worked into 2020, we began looking into the opportunity to increase this concierge service to the veteran patient as well.

Present Day

What this means to every veteran -

When a veteran is referred for care in the community and selects UPMC in Central PA, they are contacted by a UPMC Veteran Care Representative. This representative will be able to track and receive the referral from the VA, transcribe all provider orders from the VA,

schedule in ANY department in UPMC in Central PA, create the billing encounter, send all letters and correspondence between VA, UPMC, and the veteran. We can help veterans with UPMC patient portal support, directions to a facility while they are driving – and yes it has happened with lots of laughs and fun – it does not matter – our staff is able to help.

Not only did the expanded services assist the veteran, but the relationship with our community VA medical centers flourished. This collaboration afforded us the opportunity to streamline services such as our Path to Cardiac Cath which streamlined heart catheterizations within a week, Meds to Beds allowing the veteran to receive up to 14 days of a new medication in hand at discharge from the ER or Inpatient stay, and extremely important, the VA Community Nurse Liaison.

In 2021 UPMC and Lebanon VA piloted an embedded VA Registered Nurse Liaison to support veterans with discharge planning, repatriation to VA, and enrollment in VA benefits, or have an inpatient stay at three UPMC Central PA hospitals. The positive effects were astounding. Increased satisfaction between UPMC and VA for the veteran patient, better discharge planning, as well as an increase in VA enrollment in veteran benefits for not only healthcare, but all VA Benefits. The additional support these VA staff provide for our discharge planners, case managers, and UPMC staff is incredible.

This resounding success resulted in the signing of a VISN4 and UPMC Memorandum of Understanding allowing more VA staff in 8 additional UPMC facilities across the entire commonwealth! In December 2024, UPMC Altoona and James E VanZandt VA Medical Center established the Nurse Liaison as well. In just over a month, the Nurse Liaison has been remarkably well received by Veteran, UPMC Staff, and the community, resulting in 83 direct bedside contacts by the Nurse Liaison at UPMC Altoona in the month of February 2025!

But even with all the sunshine here, there are always opportunities to get better. Better for every veteran receiving care between the VA and a community hospital system. This is why now, more than ever, Veteran Care Services will continue to grow providing the same care coordination, discharge planning, and concerted, veteran centric care, delivered at UPMC across the commonwealth in more Life Changing ways.