July 26, 2021

**New dementia screening shows promise in   
early detection of cognitive decline**

By Melanie L. Thomas, MBA,   
Public Affairs Officer

The [North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System (NF/SGVHS)](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.northflorida.va.gov%2FNORTHFLORIDA%2Findex.asp&data=04%7C01%7C%7C836d2635eff74860dc1208d96d7c8351%7Ce95f1b23abaf45ee821db7ab251ab3bf%7C0%7C0%7C637661203805247255%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=aGpRs06FYmLf7oIxq7HLFA%2Bj%2BN%2BorrKmnfk1RqqJGfE%3D&reserved=0) has made improvements to easier and earlier identify Veteran patients with symptoms of cognitive deficits. The multidisciplinary approach’s aim is to assist with diagnosis and early access to resources, medication, treatment, and decision making for life planning and involvement in health care decisions.     
  
Jocelyn Almazan, registered nurse, The Villages Outpatient Clinic explains that, not only the screening is quick, easy to administer, and reliable, it is also a cost savings for those diagnosed with cognitive decline because according to the [Alzheimer’s Association](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.alz.org%2F&data=04%7C01%7C%7C836d2635eff74860dc1208d96d7c8351%7Ce95f1b23abaf45ee821db7ab251ab3bf%7C0%7C0%7C637661203805247255%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=yLvWnMBcajuvquZJZIuyum3zD1pXVIhpu%2F12D%2FMo8Ho%3D&reserved=0), early diagnosis can improve the overall outcome of disease progression and allows for treatment of reversible types of dementia while improving quality of life for others

Prior to the new screening process, health care providers utilized the Saint Louis University Mental Screen (SLUMS).

“Now, when a screening is warranted, a review is conducted and entered in for a consult by social work. At that point, further examination may be conducted, and based on the score, the provider may follow up with recommendations,” said Gladys Fontanez, Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, The Villages Outpatient Clinic.

The new screening process was originally piloted by nurses at The Villages Outpatient Clinic which resulted in Veterans being referred to neuropsychologists and earlier diagnosed with some form of dementia.

“We are really excited about the new screening process and are seeing it’s benefits, firsthand,” said Almazan.

Veterans who have cognitive decline concerns are encouraged to discuss the opportunity to be screened with their health care provider.

**About the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System**NF/SGVHS is one of the nation’s leading VA healthcare systems employing more than 5,800 medical professionals and support staff dedicated to providing high quality care to Veterans residing throughout North Florida and South Georgia. The organization operates 14 facilities to include two medical centers located in Gainesville and Lake City, a domiciliary and clinics located throughout a 50-county service area.