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# News Release

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**VA NEW JERSEY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM PARTNERS WITH NEW JERSEY  
COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES TO OFFER  
LITERATURE & MEDICINE PROGRAM**

(LYONS, NJ) – The VA New Jersey Health Care System, in partnership with the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, is now involved in *Literature & Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Health Care*®, an award winning reading and discussion program for its health care professionals. This hospital based, scholar-led, humanities program benefits both VA staff and their veteran patients. The program gives participants the opportunity to reflect on their professional roles and relationships through short stories, poetry, fiction, and personal narratives in a setting where they can share their reflections with colleagues. It has a significant effect on the way participants understand their work in health care and their relationships with patients and with each other. It is an innovative and cost-effective way to improve patient care.

The New Jersey Council for the Humanities is one of 14 across the country to benefit from a major grant awarded to the Maine Humanities Council by the National Endowment for the Humanities for this innovative program designed to support health care professionals in VA Medical Centers across the country. As a physician at the first VA hospital to participate in the program stated, *Literature & Medicine* “has improved my enjoyment in the practice of medicine, lengthened the number of years of my

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practice and has placed bridges over many of the chasms between myself and my patients.”

*Literature & Medicine* sessions at the VA in New Jersey Health Care System are facilitated by Suzanne McConnell, fiction editor for the *Bellevue Literary Review*, who serves as discussion leader for the program. Literature selected focuses on the experience of war, re-entry into the community after military service, caretaking and compassion, along with other issues raised by the VA New Jersey Health Care System planning committee for *Literature & Medicine*.

A Clinical Social Worker at the Lyons Campus of the VA New Jersey Health Care System who has been involved in the *Literature and Medicine* since it started in January recently commented that “participating in the *Literature and Medicine* group has been a phenomenal learning experience. I now have a far better understanding of the experiences of the veterans I serve which has certainly enhanced my appreciation of their service to our country.”

“This is a very timely and important project,” noted Victoria Bonebakker, Associate Director of the Maine Humanities Council and Program Director of *Literature & Medicine*. “As health care professionals encounter increasing numbers of severely wounded Iraq veterans, many of them very young, while they continue to deal with the older and aging veterans of Vietnam and Korea, all amidst decreased resources and support, the opportunity to gain new perspectives on their work and their patients in community with their colleagues is vital.”

Since 1997, *Literature & Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Health Care*®, a program created by the Maine Humanities Council and offered in partnership with other state humanities councils, has reached hospital personnel in 28 states, providing them with facilitated reading and discussion groups that allow them to recognize and address the challenges they routinely face.

For more information, visit <http://www.mainehumanities.org/programs/litandmed/>.

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