

hospitals, patient safety teams identify every step that led up to a blunder or close call to determine needed changes. For example, the VA has instituted a process to ensure that surgeons operate on the correct person or body part. One step includes asking patients to say their full names and birth dates out loud and to identify the body part to be cut.

Bagian's greatest challenge was shifting the attitudes of VA staffers. Few people reported a gaffe, for fear that they or the person who made it would suffer. "The VA had the most punitive, hardest culture I had ever seen," says Kizer; he and Bagian wanted to change the VA's punishment-oriented ways to an open, nonpunitive environment. But the staff didn't begin to respond until top managers showed they were serious. In the new VA, for example, managers could be fired, fined, and even jailed for retaliating against workers who file mistake reports.

Reports began coming in. More than 30,000 close-call and error reports have been filed at the VA without anyone being punished. "Staff gets to have input about how to provide better care," says Sotomayor, a VA nurse for 15 years. "The attitudes of people have changed." They take pride in the results, such as a decline in patient falls and a pacemaker redesigned by the manufacturer because of a close call. And other hospitals have noticed. Jennifer Daley, chief medical officer and senior vice president of clinical quality at Tenet Healthcare Corp., is using the VA as a blueprint to improve performance at the nation's second-largest for-profit hospital operator.

"There is room for improvement," says Bagian. "We're not perfect, make no mistake about it." But now the drive to enhance safety has become an accepted part of the VA. Caregivers on the front lines turn in a steady flow of ideas, such as requiring that doctors key in the full name rather than the first few letters when ordering a prescription. That minimizes the chance, say, that a patient who needs clonidine, a blood-pressure medicine, will get clozapine, an antipsychotic.

Augustin Martinez simply appreciates that he took his brother's advice. "I was fortunate I was a veteran. Otherwise, I don't know what else I would have done," Martinez says. "I don't think I would be here today."

#### SMALL STEPS THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

These are a few of the changes the VA has put in place to make patients safer.

#### FALLS

Problem: In older patients, falls were the top cause of injury and the No. 1 cause of deaths resulting from injury.

Solution: Bedside floor mats. Putting the bedside table, call button, and light switch within easy patient reach. Outfitting at-risk patients with hip protectors.

Did it work? In a six-month trial at 31 VA facilities, there were 62 percent fewer major injuries from falls.

#### INFECTIONS

Problem: Infections caused by an antibiotic-resistant strain of *Staphylococcus aureus*, largely spread by healthcare workers' hands, were killing patients or making them very ill.

Solution: In 2001, the VA's Pittsburgh Healthcare System mounted a hand hygiene campaign, raising awareness of the need for disinfecting hands and for gloving and using gowns and masks, and making sure such supplies were always at hand. At the same time, infection monitoring was increased.

Did it work? Such infections have been cut 85 percent in the general surgical unit, 50 percent in the surgical ICU.

#### BLOOD THINNERS

Problem: Delays in follow-up care for discharged patients taking blood thinners such

as warfarin, which can cause bleeding complications if patients are not carefully monitored.

Solution: The VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System in Michigan recently required doctors to ensure that these discharged patients are seen within a week in one of its clinics. Their blood levels and medication dosage can be checked, and they can be counseled about diet, because certain foods interfere with blood thinners.

Did it work? It's too early for clinical results, but reportedly all such patients have had follow-ups, lab tests, and counseling within one week of discharge.

### HONORING PHIL AND BRYSON GAPPA

#### HON. MICHAEL C. BURGESS

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 21, 2005

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Phil and Bryson Gappa for their act of patriotism and selflessness.

As a visual statement to help others remember, Mr. and Mrs. Gappa created a memorial dedicated to honor those who sacrificed their lives for our country. One hundred and seventy hand-painted ornaments, each recognizing and honoring a Texas soldier killed in Iraq, adorn two large trees in the front lawn of their Lewisville home.

The memorial and tribute to the soldiers also serve as a heartwarming display for families of the victims. One family described seeing the memorial as a special and spiritual experience. They were moved that the couple had put time and effort into a cause when never even having met many of the soldiers.

It is with great honor that I stand here today to honor Phil and Bryson Gappa for their wholehearted public display of respect and patriotism. Through their contribution, they not only stand as devoted American citizens, but serve as an inspiration to others.

### EXPRESSING GRATITUDE TO THE MEMBERS OF ALPHA BATTERY FORWARD, FIRST BATTALION, 109TH FIELD ARTILLERY DIVI- SION OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

#### HON. PAUL E. KANJORSKI

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 21, 2005

Mr. KANJORSKI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask you and my esteemed colleagues in the House of Representatives to pay tribute to the 124 members of the Alpha Battery Forward of the First Battalion of the 109th Field Artillery, based in Kingston, Pennsylvania, who have returned after service in Iraq.

We welcome home our brave soldiers with gratitude for their selflessness. During times of war, it is important that we realize the sacrifices our troops endure. Through voluntary military service, Americans proudly uphold ideals, consistently emerge as leaders and valiantly ensure democracy.

The Alpha Battery consists of: Jean Luc Robert Adams, Thomas Charles Albanese, James Robert Albright, Kevin Francis

Armitage, Tyler Scott Barnes III, Bernard Alfred Barry III, Jason John Bedew, John Willard Bedew, John A. Bilski, Jarrad J. Bogaski, Craig Joseph Bondra, Charles Earl Boyer;

Donald Brenner, Frank Donald Brizgint Jr., Andrew Khareme Brown Jr., Nikolas James Butrej, David Wayne Butz, Robert Leo Charnichko, Stephen Nicholas Chronowski, Nicholas Anthony Cipriani, Kevin Jeffrey Clocker, Michael Thomas Collis, Richard John Colorusso, James Randall Conley, James Henry Crown, John Daniel Crispell, William Patrick Cunningham, Erik Lee Daniels, Robert Darin Davis, Brian Lee Deats, Steven Eugene Deininger, Anthony Delgiudice, Anthony Joseph Derosia, Timothy James Dickson, Matthew Christopher Dohman, David Russell Duke Jr.;

Cory Alfred Dumont, Rodney Everett Durant Jr., Anthony Thomas Eddy, Matthew Charles Eddy, Jason Daniel Ellis, Jeremy Edward Endrusick, William Andrew Eppley, Gomez Juan Francis Fernandez, Timothy James Finley, James Carl Fisher, Hando David Galutia, Michael Brian Gifford, Daniel Robert Giniewski, Steven Frederick Griffiths, William Robert Grosz Jr., Charles David Gundrum, James Allie Harper III, Pierce Samuel Heffner, Sean Michael Hess, Joseph Patrick Hogan Jr.;

Eric Ronald Holzman, James Jesse Hoskins, Ian Charles Hughes, Michael Huntzinger, Michael Joseph Jeziorski, Gerald Wayne Johnson II, Dylan Stewart Jones, Richard Michael Jones, Christopher Kashi, Matthew Thomas Kearns, Peter Scott Kelchner, Avery Reed Kessler, Sean Paul Kilbourn, Joshua Boyd Kimmins, Ronald Joseph Knorr Jr., William Lawrence Koepke Jr., Paul Anthony Konschnik;

Mark Steven Kozen, David James Krzak, Jeffrey Anthony Kwiecien, Joshua James Lake, Sean Michael Lehman, Colin Michael Liput, James Edwards Mason II, Jeffrey Charles Mead, Michael Carmine Meloro, Heath Adam Middaugh, Dominic Michael Nardelli, Ronald Otto Neher Jr., Jed Joseph Nolan, Matthew Brent Noll, Adam Charles Olisewski, John David Oros, Keith Leon Paller, Jason Palmer, Joseph Michael Perrins, Robert Richard Perrins, Robert A. Pissott Jr., Charles William Plantamura, Brian Douglas Powell, Richard Lee Herman Price II, Mark Anthony Robinson, Anthony Jason Rodriguez, Donald Paul Rorick Jr.;

William Roy Ross Jr., Edward Arnold Rowell, Walter Charles Rudaski Sr., Joseph Andrew Ruotolo, Scott Allen Seelye Sr., Robert Daniel Senchak, Erik William Shaw, Jeremy Paul Shuman, Gordon Alan Simerson, Robert J. Slovik, Andrew Sromovski, Bret Joseph Stemrich, James Reeves Stokes, Brian Patrick Turlip, Jarret Paul Tuttle, Jason Francis Veneziale, Victor Verdekall, Randy Joseph Wagner, Charles A. Williams, Geoffrey Michael Williams, Lawrence Michael Wolfe, Michael Anthony Yuscavage, Vincent Roger Zardus, and Daniel Joseph Zyskowski.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you join me in thanking these soldiers for their courage and love of country. It is truly an honor to serve them in the United States Congress. Please join me in welcoming these fine Americans home.