

## Veterans Choose to Improve Health with TLC



Changing behavior takes time and a different approach for different people.

That's something Jane, a registered dietitian with the Telephone Lifestyle Coaching (TLC) program, knows quite well. She has 25 years of experience, including her work talking with participants enrolled in the Veterans Administration National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention pilot TLC program that addresses areas of behavior change such as weight loss and nutrition.

"What they appreciate is we take them step-by-step, baby step, at their pace," Jane said about participants in TLC. "We're meeting them where they're at and taking them along at the pace they're interested in going at."

Jane's expertise works well to help coach participants in areas such as weight loss and nutrition. TLC also addresses stress, physical activity, quitting tobacco and alcohol reduction. The program was launched in November 2011 with Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 4 being the first to send consult referrals for Veterans. Since that time VISNs 8, 15, 16 and 21 have all sent referrals and have Veterans taking advantage of TLC. The two-year pilot program has a goal of serving 4,500 Veterans per year with its phone-based coaching model.

"With our coaching skills, we're able to let them know they're being heard, but we're not just a sounding board," Jane said of the participant experience. "It's a delicate walk where we listen to them, but we also help them. We provide our clinical expertise but we still listen to them and hear them."

Her work already is paying off for many Veterans. Jane said many participants have several chronic conditions when they join the program, including one man who has already made great strides in reducing his weight by taking just a handful of calls.

"This is a man with type 2 diabetes," she said. "His unique situation is that he has terrible chronic pain. He even cried on the phone. He has some good tools. He has a health facility that he goes to, so he's been exercising regularly now and

he's actually lost six pounds in three weeks. He's losing two pounds per week, and right in the recommended range of half a pound to two pounds of weight loss each week.

"He has reduced his calorie intake through eating better, and he's exercising regularly. His whole demeanor has changed for the positive, and he's so thrilled with the weight loss he's experienced."

Now that the participant is making progress with his weight loss, Jane said she will begin working on addressing his chronic pain using Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction.

"The pain doesn't go away," she said. "It's more about helping his body to be less tense and his mind to be less stressed when he is in pain. That should help him feel even better over time."

Another Veteran Jane has been coaching through TLC has experienced a 16-pound weight loss since joining the program. He, too, has type 2 diabetes and has significantly improved his blood sugar levels as a result of the weight loss.

"Not only has he lost the 16 pounds in six weeks, but his blood sugars are staying in the normal range," Jane said, adding his family has been supportive of his recent healthy behavior change. "He actually put his wife on the phone, because she had a question about the recipe she was making that night. They're both very engaged."

As an experienced Registered Dietitian, Jane knows that changing eating habits – even the simplest adjustments – can make big differences in successful and healthy weight loss.

"I think the biggest thing has to do with how people are eating," she said. "What I've noticed is that some of the participants make progress with losing weight by simply changing how they eat."

They're learning how to eat more slowly and they're taking smaller bites. Just eating mindfully can cut back on the calories fairly significantly."

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Editor's Note –Telephone Lifestyle Coaching is a pilot program for Veterans interested in making behavior changes to improve their health. Patients are referred for coaching by their health care teams. The program is available in 25 medical facilities in VISNs 4, 8, 15, 16, and 21.