

Veterans Choose to Improve Health with TLC



“In the end, it’s all about continued support,” says TLC Coach Krista.

Krista has been a Quit Coach® with the American Cancer Society® Quit For Life® Program for nearly 4 years. When the Veterans Health Administration National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention launched the pilot Telephone Lifestyle Coaching (TLC) program in late 2011, she transitioned her years of experience to work with Veterans focused on quitting tobacco, losing weight, and achieving four other targeted behavior change goals.

“We’re following participants throughout the process,” Krista said. “They remember talking to me, and they’re building that relationship with me.”

TLC was launched in November 2011 with Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 4, the first of five networks 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 goal of the 2-year pilot program is to serve 4,500 Veterans per year by providing them phone-based coaching in six areas of behavior change – weight loss, nutrition, stress management, physical activity, quitting tobacco, and alcohol reduction.

Within the first couple of months, Krista said she already has seen tremendous progress in many of the participants she has been coaching. One tobacco user, in particular, has made great strides in his attitude toward being able to quit tobacco. After taking just four calls with Krista, he has increased his confidence in being able to quit from “not likely” to “extremely likely.”

“He has been able to cut his smoking from two packs a day to one pack a day,” she said. “Limiting his smoking was more than he ever thought he could do, and now he’s confident he’ll be able to quit.”

Many of the patients referred from VA health care providers express interest in addressing several of the program’s other goals, including nutrition and stress management.

“I have found that my participants are very receptive to the support, and are engaged and appreciative,” Krista said. “They’re very willing to be in the program, listen to what I have to say, and give it a try.”

Krista also said she believes her role as a TLC coach allows for additional, personalized care for Veterans. She said she hopes her work is seen as an extension of what the busy providers at VA facilities already are doing to help patients.

“Doctors don’t have time to sit and work through all of the barriers that come up when (participants) need to make big behavior changes,” Krista said. “We really can take that time—I will spend 20 to 30 minutes on the phone with someone just talking about their goals and what’s getting in the way of those goals.”

Krista said she is confident that the participants are seeing and feeling the benefits of the TLC program.

“These people know there’s someone there who cares about them,” she said. “They can call anytime they need support, and I think that means a lot to them.”

END

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.