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NEWS RELEASE

VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System
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Tennessee Valley Healthcare System designated “LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader”

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – This week, VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System (TVHS) announced their “LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader” designation from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC). The designation was awarded in the 11th edition of the Healthcare Equality Index (HEI). A record 626 healthcare facilities actively participated in the HEI 2018 survey, with HRC Foundation proactively researching key policies at more than 900 additional non-participating hospitals. Of those included in the HEI, 418 earned a “LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader” designation.

TVHS is one of only two facilities in Tennessee to earn the distinction.

“It is wonderful to see our facility be recognized for its effort to provide excellent care to all who served our country, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Veterans,” said psychologist and TVHS LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager Dr. Nicholas Denton.

The 11th edition of the HEI marks the second year that participants are given a numerical score based on their LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. HEI participants are given scores in four criteria: foundational elements of LGBTQ patient-centered care, LGBTQ Patient Services and Support, Employee Benefits and Policies and LGBTQ Patient and Community Engagement. Participants that receive the maximum score in each section earn the coveted status of “2018 LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader.”

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In the 2018 report, TVHS was among 418 facilities which earned HRC's "LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader" designation with a score of 100. Another 95 facilities earned the "Top Performer" designation for scoring from 80 to 95 points. With 82 percent of participating facilities scoring 80 points or more, healthcare facilities are going beyond the basics when it comes to adopting policies and practices in LGBTQ care.

Of the hospitals who did not participate in the HEI but were scored based on research, only 63 percent have patient non-discrimination policies that include both "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," and only 53 percent were found to have an LGBTQ-inclusive employment non-discrimination policy. The equal visitation policy, at 93 percent, is the only one that comes close to matching the rate of the participating facilities.

TVHS established an LGBT Equality Care Workgroup composed of staff across several clinical disciplines and administrative roles. The workgroup functions as a resource for clinical providers with questions about serving LGBT Veterans.

"We strive to ensure that TVHS remains a safe and welcoming environment to all who served our country," said Dr. Denton. "Our workgroup is also involved in the community to reach out to Veterans who may not know that they can be treated within VHA and respected for who they are."

The announcement coincides with LGBT Health Awareness Week, a week-long observance to bring awareness to the unique health needs and disparities of the LGBT community. Dr. Denton said LGBT Veterans are often at greater risk for mental health concerns, substance abuse, trauma, and other health concerns, and research shows that transgender Veterans are at far greater risk of suicidal behavior than the broader Veteran population.

"This distinction as a Leader in LGBTQ Healthcare Equality shows that Tennessee Valley is excelling at reaching out to provide excellent care to some of the most vulnerable members of our community," he said.

TVHS is an integrated tertiary health care system comprised of two hospitals, the Alvin C. York Campus in Murfreesboro and the Nashville Campus, as well as more than a dozen community-based outpatient clinics located in Tennessee and Kentucky. TVHS provides ambulatory care, primary care, and secondary care in acute medicine and surgery, specialized tertiary care, transplant services, spinal cord injury outpatient care, and a full range of extended care and mental health services.

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