

# Rural Promising Practice: Rural Osteoporosis Evaluation Service (ROPES)

*This model of care shows promise to increase rural Veterans' access to care and services, and is recommended for replication at other facilities.*

## Medical Issue

In the United States, 44 million Americans suffer from osteoporosis, a condition in which bone mass deteriorates, resulting in brittle and weak bones.<sup>1, 2</sup> One of the major complications associated with osteoporosis is the higher risk of fractures. Roughly two million fractures can be attributed to osteoporosis each year and osteoporosis continues to be a significant public health concern due to the growing aging population.<sup>3</sup>

## Access Challenge

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that between 200,000 and 400,000 Veterans suffer from osteoporosis. In 2010, the VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found that less than 28 percent of Veterans with low trauma fractures received appropriate osteoporosis care, and rural Veterans were at greatest risk for suboptimal care. For aging Veterans living in rural communities living alone, or with limited access to care, these compounding risks could lead to negative health outcomes and poor quality of care.

## Solution

The Durham VA Medical Center established the Rural Osteoporosis Evaluation Service (ROPES) program targeting rural Veterans at greatest risk for suboptimal care following a fracture. This program identifies and educates Veterans with low trauma fractures and evaluates their risk of osteoporosis, with a focus on improving Veterans' quality of life.

Within VISN 6, the ROPES program offers a centralized fracture liaison service that automatically triggers an osteoporosis e-consult after a fracture. Through the use of Clinical Video Telehealth, an osteoporosis nurse care manager and a metabolic bone disease specialist provide consult services to rural providers who treat Veterans.

To increase awareness among Veterans, the ROPES program provides educational materials to local VA medical facility waiting rooms and conducts outreach to Veterans with recent fractures. Providers are also educated using video teleconferences.

Since its establishment in 2012, the ROPES program has had a significant impact on increasing osteoporosis screening and treatment rates. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, the ROPES program provided assistance and training to 189 medical professionals and treated 400 Veterans.

## To Learn More

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) implements a targeted, solution-driven approach to increase access to care for the 3 million Veterans living in rural communities who rely on VA for health care. As VA's lead advocate for rural Veterans, ORH works to see that America's Veterans thrive in rural communities. To accomplish this, ORH leverages its resources to study, innovate and spread enterprise-wide initiatives through partnerships.

To discuss implementing a Rural Promising Practice at your facility or to learn more, visit [www.ruralhealth.va.gov](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov) or email [rural.health.inquiry@va.gov](mailto:rural.health.inquiry@va.gov).

<sup>1</sup> International Osteoporosis Foundation. (2016). Facts and statistics.

<https://www.iofbonehealth.org/facts-statistics>

<sup>2</sup> Nazrun, A., Tzar, M.N., Mokhtar, S.A., & Mohamed I.N. (2014). A systematic review of the outcomes of osteoporotic fracture patients after hospital discharge: Morbidity, subsequent fractures, and mortality. *Therapeutics and Clinical Risk Management*, 10, 937-948.

<sup>3</sup> Danila, M. et al. (2016). A multi-modal intervention for Activating Patients at Risk for Osteoporosis (APROPOS): Rationale, design, and uptake of online study intervention material. *Contemporary Clinical Trials Communication*, 4, 14-16.

