

# The Fierce Urgency of Now:

## How the VA is Uniquely Equipped to Lead in Addressing the Challenges of NASH and Why It Must

February 2, 2021

Presenter:

Donna R. Cryer, JD  
Founder and CEO  
Global Liver Institute



# Agenda

## What we'll cover today:

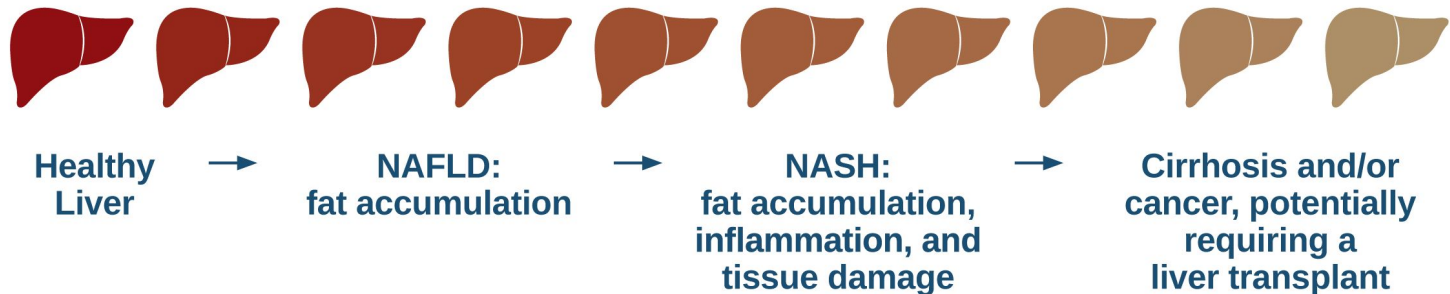
- One Marine's Challenge
- Too Many NASH Patients' Journey
- New Developments from the Field → Going Beyond the Biopsy
- Ways VA Providers Can Help
- Resources from GLI for Providers
- Questions & Answers

# One Marine's Story



# What is NAFLD/NASH?

- Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a condition where there is too much fat built up in the liver. If left untreated, it can lead to serious liver problems.
- Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) is caused when that extra fat turns into inflammation (swelling in the liver) and fibrosis (scarring) of the liver. If severe enough, that can lead to cirrhosis or liver cancer, potentially requiring a liver transplant.



# Too Many NASH Patients

- It is estimated that up to 40 million people in the U.S., including 10% of American children, are living with NASH.
- The VA provides care to over 9 million Veterans enrolled in the VA.
- **12-fold increase in active service members diagnosed** with NAFLD from 2000-2017.
- **Common comorbidities for NASH:** High blood pressure, diabetes, high blood cholesterol, and triglycerides
  - **25% of patients in the VA system** have type 2 diabetes.
  - **78% obesity rate among VA health patients.**
  - 1 in 10 patients who are obese may have asymptotically advanced to liver disease from benign fatty liver without detection.

<https://www.va.gov/health/aboutvha.asp#>

<https://echosens.us/aligning-with-veterans-administration-white-paper/>; Liu, 2017.

Available at: <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/01/29/nonalcoholic-fatty-liver-disease-way-among-service-members.html>; accessed May 4, 2020.



# GLI Initiatives

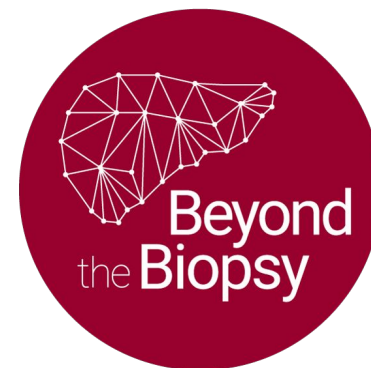


The first patient-driven collaborative advocacy effort to address NASH in the U.S.



Held the second Thursday in June with partners from around the globe

**June 10, 2021**



Initiative promoting awareness and education about the use of non-invasive diagnostics as an alternative to biopsies

# 2019 International NASH Day



Kim Martinez, patient advocate, and Dr. Nadege Gunn, former U.S. Air Force.

Learn more about NASH Day at [www.international-nash-day.com](http://www.international-nash-day.com)



# NASH Patient Journey and GLI Actions

## Levels of Awareness



Reluctance to Screen



No Consensus on Screening



No Clear Clinical Pathway



Psychosocial Issues

## Hurdle

- Low awareness of liver health, NAFLD/NASH
- Low awareness = Disease detected at later stages.

## GLI Response

- Creation of NASH Council
- Education and Awareness Campaigns: *The Language of NASH*
- International NASH Day
- GLI Live



# NASH Patient Journey and GLI Actions

Levels of Awareness



**Reluctance to Screen**



No Consensus on Screening



No Clear Clinical Pathway



Psychosocial Issues

## Hurdle

- Complex, multi-faceted disease
- Heterogeneous patient population
- Lack of screening = Disease progresses

## GLI Response

- Beyond the Biopsy Initiative
- Clinical Workflow Workgroup
- Patient/Clinician Education

# NASH Patient Journey and GLI Actions

Levels of Awareness



Reluctance to Screen



No Consensus on Screening



No Clear Clinical Pathway



Psychosocial Issues

## Hurdle

- Over-reliance on liver biopsy → risky, invasive, expensive, sampling variability

## GLI Response

- Beyond the Biopsy Initiative
- Partnership with NIMBLE Consortium
- NASH Council Policy Workgroup

# NASH Patient Journey and GLI Actions

Levels of Awareness



Reluctance to Screen



No Consensus on Screening



No Clear Clinical Pathway



Psychosocial Issues

## Hurdle

- Assigning patients to the right specialist for care
- Heterogeneity of Management
- Lack of FDA-approved medication

## GLI Response

- Clinical Workflow Workgroup
- NASH Council Policy Workgroup

# NASH Patient Journey and GLI Actions

Levels of Awareness



Reluctance to Screen



No Consensus on Screening



No Clear Clinical Pathway



Psychosocial Issues

## Hurdle

- Emotional, social, and financial impacts

## GLI Response

- Lifestyle Workgroup
- Live and Online Support Groups (launching 2021)

# Ways VA Providers Can Help

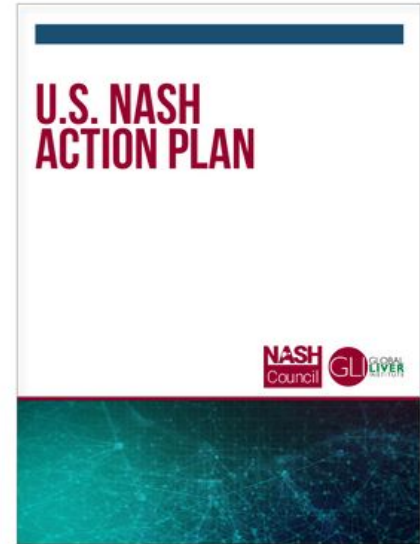
Through a commitment by all stakeholders to work together in a strategic way, we can prevent the unnecessary loss of lives to NASH and the most closely associated diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease.

## Clinical:

- Learn how and when to use non-invasive diagnostics to diagnose, stage, and monitor progress/response of patient
- Provide coordinated team care within the VA - including dietitians, nutritionists, exercise specialists, and bariatrics as appropriate (consider establishing integrated fatty liver disease clinic at VA facilities)
- Participate in training on patient-provider communication to improve discussions of diagnosis, prognosis, risks, and treatment options at each stage of NASH

## VA Health System:

- Clarify coordinated care pathways within existing VA resources for early and advanced stage NASH patients including access to services with primary care, specialists for concurrent/ comorbid conditions, hepatologists, and diet/ exercise/behavioral counseling
- Expand procurement, training, and accessibility of noninvasive diagnostics throughout the VA health system
- Establish or expand veteran's education initiatives particularly for at-risk populations



# GLI Resources



Download GLI resources:  
[www.GlobalLiver.org/Resources](http://www.GlobalLiver.org/Resources)



# 2021 Priorities

## 5 Things that NASH Patients and Caregivers Need Most:

1. Awareness and Sense of Urgency to Act
2. Updated Guidelines for Standards of Care and Care Pathways
3. Adoption and Reimbursement of Non-Invasive Diagnostics
4. An FDA- and EMA-Approved Therapeutic
5. Integration into Public Health Priorities

# Questions?

Thank you!



[www.GlobalLiver.org](http://www.GlobalLiver.org)

