



Federal Update for October 27 - 31, 2014



Central Alabama VA Healthcare System Director Removed

Montgomery, AL – Today the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) formally removed the Director of the Central Alabama Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHCS) from federal service. This decision followed an investigation by the Office of Accountability Review (OAR) in which allegations of neglect of duty were substantiated.

This removal action underscores VA's commitment to hold leaders accountable and get Veterans the care they need. OAR, which reports directly to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, assists VA facilities in accelerating leadership accountability actions and ensuring that such actions are applied consistently across the Department.

The Veterans Health Administration will begin recruiting a Director for CAVHCS. To ensure continuity of care for Veterans and leadership for VA employees during the recruitment period, Dr. Robin Jackson, Deputy Network Director, VISN 7, has been designated acting CAVHCS director.

Secretary McDonald Op-Ed in the Baltimore Sun: VA is critical to medicine and vets

By Robert A. McDonald
October 24, 2014

During preparation for my confirmation as secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA), I was repeatedly asked, "Why doesn't VA just hand out vouchers allowing veterans to get care wherever they want?" For a department recovering from serious

issues involving health care access and scheduling of appointments, that was a legitimate question.

After nine weeks at VA, travel to 31 VA facilities in 15 cities, discussions with hundreds of veterans and VA clinicians, meetings with 75 Members of Congress, two hearings before the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs committees and dozens of meetings with Veterans Service Organizations and other stakeholders, I can answer that question. Veterans need VA, and many more Americans benefit from VA.

Almost 9 million veterans are enrolled to receive health care from VA — a unique, fully-integrated health care system, the largest in the nation. The VA stands atop a critical triad of support — three pillars that enable holistic health care for our patients: research, leading to advances in medical care; training that's essential to build and maintain proficiency of care; and delivery of clinical care to help those in need. VA's accomplishments on all three pillars and contributions to the practice of medicine are as broad, historically significant and profound as they are generally unrecognized.

VA is affiliated with over 1,800 educational institutions providing powerful teaching and research opportunities. And our research initiatives, outcomes and honors are tremendous. Few understand that VA medical professionals:

- Pioneered and developed modern electronic medical records;
- Developed the implantable cardiac pacemaker;
- Conducted the first successful liver transplants;
- Created the nicotine patch to help smokers quit;
- Crafted artificial limbs that move naturally when stimulated by electrical brain impulses;
- Demonstrated that patients with total paralysis could control robotic arms using only their thoughts — a revolutionary system called "Braingate";
- Identified genetic risk factors for schizophrenia, Alzheimer's and Werner's syndrome, among others;
- Applied bar-code software for administering medications to patients — the initiative of a VA nurse;
- Proved that one aspirin a day reduced by half the rate of death and nonfatal heart attacks in patients with unstable angina;

- Received three Nobel Prizes in medicine or physiology; seven prestigious Lasker Awards, presented to people who make major contributions to medical science or public service on behalf of medicine; and two of the eight 2014 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America medals.

No single institution trains more doctors or nurses than VA. More than 70 percent of all U.S. doctors have received training at VA. Each year, VA trains, educates and provides practical experience for 62,000 medical students and residents, 23,000 nurses and 33,000 trainees in other health fields — people who go on to provide health care not just to veterans but to most Americans.

The 278,000 employees of the Veterans Health Administration work in a system spanning all 50 states and beyond, providing — from Maine to Manila — a high volume of quality, clinical care. Our 150 flagship VA Medical Centers are connected to 819 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, 300 Vet Centers providing readjustment counseling, 135 Community Living Centers, 104 Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Centers, and to mobile medical clinics, mobile Vet Centers and telehealth programs providing care to the most remote veterans. That network of facilities allows VA to deliver care to veterans from the greatest generation of World War II to the latest generation from Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2013, VA provided over 90 million episodes of care; that's an average of over 240,000 each day. And since 2004, the American Customer Satisfaction Index survey has consistently shown that veterans receiving inpatient and outpatient care from VA hospitals and clinics give a higher customer satisfaction score, on average, than patients at private sector hospitals.

Finally, VA is uniquely positioned to contribute to the care of veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI), prosthetics, PTSD and other mental health conditions, and the treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes and hepatitis. The work we do in these areas, as well as many others, produces results and life changing improvements in care for veterans — and for all Americans and people around the world who suffer from these conditions.

Fixing access to VA care is important; we have a plan to do that and are dedicated to implementing it. That process will take time — but it must be done, and we will be successful. Those who fully understand the value of the department in research, training, and clinical care understand that veterans and all Americans

need and deserve their VA to continue providing exceptional care to those we serve.

VA Demonstrates New Telehealth Scheduling System to Veteran Service Organizations

WASHINGTON – Representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) met today with Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) at the Washington VA Medical Center for a hands-on demonstration and discussion about VA’s telehealth programs and services.

The hands-on demonstration included a presentation of VA’s new Clinical Video Telehealth scheduling software which launched last month and is intended to improve how VA employees schedule telehealth appointments.

“As we launch new programs and services, it is important to include our VSO partners,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “Today’s demonstration is an important part of our collaborative process. We welcome our VSO’s feedback. Like us, their goal is to ensure Veterans have the access to the quality care and services they have earned.”

Telehealth rapidly is becoming a popular option, particularly for Veterans who do not have a VA health care facility close to home. In fiscal year 2014, VA’s national telehealth programs served over 690,000 Veterans and accounted for more than 2 million virtual visits.

For more information about VA’s telehealth program, visit www.telehealth.va.gov/.

VA Guarantees its 21 Millionth Home Loan

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced this month that it has guaranteed 21 million home loans since the Home Loan Guaranty program was established in 1944 as part of the original Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the “GI Bill.” This achievement comes during the year-long commemoration of 70 years of the “GI Bill,” which established a wide range of

benefits for Veterans returning from World War II, including low-cost home loans, education and vocational training.

“This vital program offers Veterans, Servicemembers and their families the keys to homeownership and is truly a testament to our Nation’s commitment to enhancing the lives of those who served our country,” said Allison A. Hickey, VA’s Under Secretary for Benefits. “Twenty-one million home loans guaranteed, with the last one million guaranteed in just two years, is just one example of how VA employees are privileged to continue to serve and give back to our Veterans through the GI Bill.”

VA’s Home Loan Program provides housing-related benefits and services to make home ownership possible and affordable for eligible Veterans, Servicemembers and surviving spouses, who want to buy, build, repair or adapt a home. Nearly 90 percent of all VA loans are made with no down payment. In fiscal year (FY) 2014, the Home Loan Program guaranteed roughly 35,000 loans per month, resulting in a total of 438,398 VA home loans guaranteed for the year. The total value of all outstanding VA loans exceeds \$380 billion. During FY 2014, the program also approved 1,253 grants to seriously disabled Veterans for the purchase, modification, or construction of a home specially adapted to meet their individual housing needs.

Through loan servicing efforts, the Home Loan Program also assisted nearly 80,000 borrowers avoid foreclosure in FY 2014. These actions saved taxpayers nearly \$2.8 billion in avoided claim payments. Data from the Mortgage Bankers Association show that mortgages guaranteed by VA have had the lowest foreclosure inventory rate for the last 25 quarters when compared to all other types of home loans in the nation, including prime loans.

Veterans may obtain a certificate of eligibility for a VA-guaranteed home loan through the joint Department of Defense—VA web portal eBenefits, at www.ebenefits.va.gov, or by contacting their lender.

For more information about the VA Home Loan Program, visit the program’s home page at www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans

National Creative Arts Festival in Wisconsin Showcases Veterans' Artistic Talents

Exhibits Open to Public and Media Washington, DC – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announces that the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee is hosting more than 100 Veterans from across the country for the 2014 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival; the event began Oct. 27 and will end Nov. 2.

The National Creative Arts Festival event will feature the gold medal-winning entries from 53 categories of art, ranging from oil painting to leatherwork to fiber art in an exhibit at the Grand Rotunda of the Milwaukee Theatre on Sunday, November 2 from noon to 2 p.m. Tickets are free but must be reserved by contacting 414-389-4099. The performance is also open to media.

The weeklong Festival, presented by VA and the American Legion Auxiliary showcases the artistic achievements of Veterans from across the country that placed first in national art, music, dance, drama and creative writing division competitions. The Veterans are participating in workshops, rehearsals and artistic interaction sessions, culminating in Sunday's art exhibit and stage show performance, open to the public.

Among many other therapeutic benefits, the Festival encourages artistic expression to help Veterans dealing with PTSD and other psychological issues. More than 3,500 Veterans participate nationally in regional competitions which culminate in the annual national event.

“The Creative Arts Festival is another example of how VA is committed to utilizing a full spectrum of health care options,” said VA Secretary Robert McDonald. “From traditional medicine to cutting edge treatments, we will continue to use a holistic approach to treat our nation’s Veterans.”

The Festival relies heavily on the outstanding support provided by numerous American Legion Auxiliary volunteers. For more information, visit www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov.