



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

July 28, 2015

The Honorable Dan Newhouse
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Newhouse:

Thank you for your June 18, 2015, cosigned letter regarding reports of mismanagement in emergency rooms at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals, specifically the incident involving a Veteran at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System (VAPSHCS).

I would like to begin by apologizing for the incident that occurred with the Veteran on February 28, 2015, at VAPSHCS. The VAPSHCS telephone operator mishandled this call and provided incorrect guidance to this Veteran. Instead of contacting our VA Police and having the VA Police go out to the parking lot to assist, the operator directed the Veteran to call 911. The Veteran did contact 911 and was assisted into the facility. Once in the Emergency Department, the Veteran was provided proper medical care by the Emergency Department staff.

Although the Veteran ultimately received appropriate medical attention, it was clearly wrong for this Veteran to be referred elsewhere for the little help he needed. Immediately following this incident coming to light, I sent a message to all employees asking them to use this as a learning opportunity and to think a little harder about our I-CARE values (Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence) and the customer service experience we want every Veteran to have, every time. These core values and the basic principles of doing the right thing for Veterans, taking ownership, and being good stewards of taxpayer dollars should guide our day-to-day decisions.

As a result of this incident, VA is actively working to improve our overall service to all Veterans. The VAPSHCS Chief of Staff met with the Veteran on May 12, 2015, to formally apologize for the mishandling of the phone call and to gather more information to provide a better response to similar situations in the future. The Veteran appeared to be satisfied with this meeting and was also complimentary of the care that was provided by the Emergency Department staff. Based on the information provided by the Veteran and internal reviews, VAPSHCS leadership mandated customer service training, which has been completed for all telephone operators and Administrative Officers of the Day to ensure proper customer service is provided when a telephone call is received. Also, VAPSHCS has reviewed standard operating procedures related to requests for assistance and is in the process of retraining all appropriate staff. VAPSHCS continues to strive to provide the best care and customer service for the Veterans we serve.

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The Honorable Dan Newhouse

In addition to taking immediate action to address the specific issues at VAPSHCS, we also formed a task group to look at existing policy in order to provide guidance on how to appropriately respond to individuals needing assistance in both emergency and non-emergency situations on the grounds of VA facilities. This task group is also looking at current regulations, The Joint Commission standards, and our national policies as they relate to appropriate responses governed by the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act. In addition, a national survey was conducted at all sites asking about responses to various types of requests for assistance including emergency code situations, non-emergency requests for assistance, and requests for mobility assistance. Once the findings are complete, this task group will prepare a memo to all facility leadership providing guidance on how VA will respond to individuals needing assistance in both emergency and non-emergency situations at VA facilities.

Should you have additional questions, please have a member of your staff contact Ms. Mandy Hartman, Congressional Relations Officer, at (202) 461-6416 or by email at Mandy.Hartman@va.gov. Similar letters have been sent to other cosigners of your letter.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,



Sloan D. Gibson



The Retired Enlisted Association

WASHINGTON OFFICE

1001 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 102

Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Telephone: (703) 684-1981

Fax: (703) 548-4876

Email: LMadison@treadc.org

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CHARTERED BY CONGRESS

June 22, 2016

The Honorable Dan Newhouse
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Newhouse:

On behalf of the members of The Retired Enlisted Association, a Congressionally-chartered veterans' service organization and the largest association in the nation created specifically for enlisted retirees and veterans from all branches of the Armed Forces, I am writing in support of your legislation, H.R. 3216, the Veterans Emergency Treatment (VET) Act.

This bill would require VA emergency departments to provide emergency care to enrolled veterans by applying the statutory requirements of the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA) to emergency hospital care furnished by the VA.

We are pleased to endorse your legislation that will help support and protect the health, welfare, and wellbeing of our nation's veterans.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Respectfully,


Larry Madison
Legislative Director