



Association of VA Anesthesiologists

February 9, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
801 Vermont Avenue
Washington, D.C., 20402

Dear Secretary McDonough:

The Association of VA Anesthesiologists (AVAA) wants to be amongst the first to warmly welcome you to the Department of Veterans Affairs. As physicians working on the VA frontlines in both the operating room and critical care units, we have a shared commitment and responsibility to ensuring that our Veteran patients receive the best health care possible. **It is because of that commitment that we urge you to promptly review the actions of the outgoing administration related to the April 21 “Stone Memo” and their push to abruptly change the way healthcare has been delivered for more than 75 years in the VA. We believe the lives of Veterans have been put at risk by this memorandum.**

At the outset of the pandemic, the AVAA Executive Board along with over 300 VA Physician Anesthesiologists cosigned a letter invoking our right to Stop-the-Line. While the Stop-the-Line program was established to encourage VA employees to speak out directly to VA leadership when they believe Veterans are potentially being put at risk, we were never allowed a meeting with Secretary Robert Wilkie after reaching out to him twice on this critical health safety issue.

Our letter was sent to the Executive-in-Charge (EIC) and Secretary on May 11, 2020. It was sent again on Sept. 14, 2020 due to their lack of response. To date, the VA Anesthesiologists have yet to receive a response and the opportunity to meet with the VA Secretary. The letter presents in great detail our concerns, including the lack of any consultation with VA’s Anesthesiologists on the development and issuance of a memorandum written April 21, 2020 by Veteran Health Administration, EIC, Richard Stone, M.D, encouraging the autonomous practice of nurse anesthetists in the VA. We believe changing the Physician-led team-based model of anesthesia care in the VA to nurse-led autonomous care inevitably lowers the quality of care and could jeopardize patient safety as physician management and oversight are removed from Veterans’ care. The letter concludes with a direct request that the memorandum be immediately rescinded.

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Association of VA Anesthesiologists

We are hopeful that your leadership will restore the integrity and quality of healthcare delivery at the VA. We request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to address our May 11, 2020 letter invoking VA's "Stop-the-Line" initiative. We believe the April 21st memorandum and the actions taken by the EIC, Dr. Richard Stone, directly jeopardizes the quality of Veterans' health care and unnecessarily puts the lives of Veterans at risk.

We applaud your leadership during the Obama administration towards preserving Physician-led anesthesia care in the VA, and we look forward to your ongoing efforts to strengthen the quality of health care available to our nation's Veterans. It is our hope that our combined voices on this critically important issue will merit your immediate attention. We look forward to speaking with you directly regarding our concerns.

Sincerely,

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