



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

52267

March 21, 2007

The Honorable Steve Buyer
Ranking Republican Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Buyer:

On March 7, 2007, I directed all VA Medical Centers to "conduct and supervise a full and immediate review of their facility's environments of care." That review is now complete, and I am pleased to provide you its results.

The review provides a thorough snapshot of the condition of VA's facilities at one moment in time, and the overwhelming majority of the issues identified are normal "wear and tear" items that are continually addressed through regular inspections and maintenance. The level of detail in the reports, and the corrective actions it enumerates, demonstrate the seriousness with which our facilities responded to my request. It also underscores the commitment of VA leaders at all levels to provide the best possible environments of care to the veterans we are privileged to serve. Many of the items identified are outside of areas in which patient care is provided. However, I have now ordered all Medical Centers to take corrective actions immediately.

VA plans to spend over \$1.1 billion on facility non-recurring maintenance over the next two years, so we believe that we have the resources necessary to immediately address the priority issues identified in the reports by VA facilities. However, if further assistance from the Congress proves necessary, I will work with the Committee to identify how best to address those needs.

It is noteworthy that the environments of care at VA facilities are inspected more frequently than any other health care facilities in the Nation. The Joint Commission for Accreditation of Health Care Organizations accredits all VA facilities on a 3-year cycle, and also makes unannounced visits. VA's Office of the Inspector General performs inspections on a similar cycle; and the Veterans Health Administration also has an internal inspection system, called SOARS, which visited 48 facilities in 2006. Finally, leadership teams at all facilities are required to conduct weekly "environment of care" rounds to promptly identify and correct problems, and I have asked all VA Networks to establish environment of care committees to regularly visit and inspect all the facilities within their Networks.

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The Honorable Steve Buyer

Thank you for your continued support of our Nation's veterans and the men and women who serve them.

Sincerely yours,



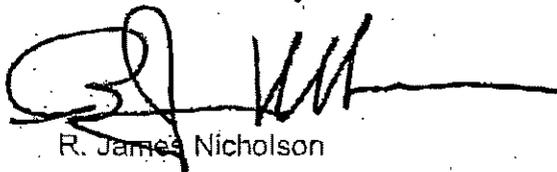
R. James Nicholson

Enclosure

**Department of
Veterans Affairs****Memorandum**

Date: March 7, 2007
From: Secretary (00)
Subj: VA Facilities
To: VA Medical Center Directors
Thru: VISN Directors (10N 1-23)

1. A variety of independent organizations have ranked the world-class health care provided by the Veterans Health Administration as the best in the United States. Our facilities are committed to providing the highest standards of quality and cleanliness. However, a series of recent events have compelled me to double our efforts to ensure that the environment at our medical centers, nursing homes, domiciliaries, and outpatient clinics meet the expectations of our veterans, their families, and the American public. Those who have served our country in uniform deserve nothing but the best that can be done. It is that simple.
2. As Medical Center and Network Directors, you all are responsible for the physical environment of your facilities. This includes all buildings and off-campus sites at which you provide care; it includes all floors, and all rooms, and spaces. To best guarantee that we have identified, isolated, and are engaged in a course of action to correct any deficiencies, I am directing you hereby to conduct and supervise a full and immediate review of your facility's environments of care. This Department is committed to identifying and remedying any and all problems. I know you share this commitment.
3. I have directed the Acting Under Secretary for Health to provide me a report of each and every deficiency identified by COB, Wednesday, March 14, 2007. Negative responses are required.
4. Thank you for your full cooperation on this critical project. The only way we can ensure that every possible action is being taken to correct problems is to be certain we have fully identified our problems. Americans have every right to depend on excellence on our part, and we will meet their expectations.
5. Thank you for your hard work and commitment to providing our veterans with the best medical care available in this country.



R. James Nicholson

National Roll Up of Environment of Care Reports

VISN	Facility	Description of substandard cleanliness conditions (e.g. infestation, mold, unsanitary conditions, peeling paint and exposed wall and ceiling structures)	Plan for correction including timelines (include the reason why the condition is not immediately correctible)
11	John D. Dingall (Detroit)	Wall in file room needs repair and painting.	CBOC contractor to complete repairs
11	Indianapolis VAMC	6 Patient cubicle curtains need replacement	Environmental Management Service will order replacement cubicle curtains for identified areas and install upon receipt by May 15, 2007.
11	Indianapolis VAMC	14 areas where chairs need cleaned	Environmental Management Service has begun cleaning all identified chairs and furniture requiring cleaning with completion by April 1, 2007. No additional cost associated as this is normal maintenance.
11	Indianapolis VAMC	27 Floor need stripped and refinished	Areas identified are primarily inpatient rooms also identified as needing door refinishing, patching and painting. EMS will coordinate work efforts with Nursing Service and Engineering to complete floor refinishing as rooms become available and Engineering completes work. EMS will complete by May 15, 2007. No additional cost associated as this is normal maintenance.
11	Indianapolis VAMC	48 Rooms of carpet need cleaned	Environmental Management Service is scheduling cleaning of carpets as space is made available by occupant. Completion of all areas identified, April 30, 2007. No additional cost associated as this is normal maintenance.
11	Indianapolis VAMC	Metal shelf has sharp edges to right of sink	Engineering Service will repair by April 1, 2007. No additional cost associated as this is normal maintenance.
11	Indianapolis VAMC	Table needs replaced	Temporary repairs have been made. Engineering Service will replace by May 30, 2007.
11	Indianapolis VAMC	1 Bottom sink cabinet is rusting	Will be corrected by Engineering by April 30, 2007
11	Indianapolis VAMC	2 Rooms with case work needing repair	Will be repainted by Engineering by April 15, 2007
11	Indianapolis VAMC	7 Mechanical space floors are cracked causing waster to leak into floors below	Engineering will schedule work with using Service and coordinate any temporary moves. Engineering will purchase material to complete work by August 30, 2007.
11	Indianapolis VAMC	40 Rooms of Carpet needs replaced	Work requires scheduling of furniture moves, availability of rooms, etc. Engineering will purchase new carpet and complete carpet replacement by August 30, 2007
11	Indianapolis VAMC	4 Patient lockers missing doors	New patient cabinets will be purchased by April 30, 2007. Installation conducted upon receipt.

National Roll Up of Environment of Care Reports			
V/ISN	Facility	Description of substandard cleanliness conditions (e.g. infestation, mold, unsanitary conditions, peeling paint and exposed wall and ceiling structures)	Plan for correction including timelines (include the reason why the condition is not immediately correctable)
11	Indianapolis VAMC	30+ Rooms have leaking windows causing damage below window	Refer to NRM Project 583-08-148. Complete 5/15/08
11	Indianapolis VAMC	Roof system leaking causing interior wall, window and ceiling damage on various floors	Refer to request NRM project 583-08-108. Complete 9/30/08
11	Indianapolis VAMC	Condensation causing window sill and wall damage in OR outer core area	Refer to NRM Project 583-08-104. Complete 9/30/08
11	Indianapolis VAMC	50+ Patient rooms with ceilings/walls needing to be patched/painted, doors refinished, door frames painted	Request funding of a new project to correct areas of concern. Target completion July 31, 2007.
11	Aleda E. Lutz VAMC (Saginaw)	Old, worn out carpet may harbor residue/bacteria from patients' personal accidents. Optimum infection control measures would include the removal of carpet and replace with tile for highest sanitary conditions.	Replace approximately 20,000 sq. ft. of carpet with commercial grade tile. Will require the hiring of three additional tradesmen to work during non-standard hours.
11	Aleda E. Lutz VAMC (Saginaw)	General Paint and Patch of walls, doors and stairwells throughout Medical Facility. 104 rooms in the facility need painting.	Paint and Patch of facility. Completion 7/31/07.
12	Hines	rust marks, tub cover laminate missing	To be completed 3/16
12	Hines	cabinet needing for the waiting room for books and puzzles	to purchase a cabinet this FY.
12	Hines	cast room- tiles off, leak under wall and close to electric outlets	fix leak under wall, secure outlets. Est completion 3/16
12	Hines	Clean windows on building 200	Plan to clean windows this fiscal year.
12	Hines	The Hoptel current uses 4 bed rooms and is not a home-like environment. Needs painting.	The strategic plan of the hospital is to move Contract to be awarded in March, with a target move in late May/early June. Completed 3/13/07
12	Hines	Automatic door tied open since doesn't work	To be completed by 3/14
12	Hines	baseboard in supply room pulled off	completed 3/12
12	Hines	baseboard pulling away fro the wall	Completed 3/12
12	Hines	bathroom wall tiles need to be cleaned	Completed 3/12