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December 2, 2016

Director Lisa Howard
Department of Veterans Affairs Sierra Nevada Health Care System
Ioannis A. Lougaris VA Medical Center
975 Kirman Avenue
Reno, NV 89502

Dear Director Howard,

As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and a Senator representing Nevada's veterans, I write to you today regarding the Reno Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center's (VAMC's) efforts to care for women veterans. I appreciate your attention as a director to this matter and value our shared commitment to ensuring the Reno VAMC serves as an example of quality care from the VA.

Caring for our nation's veterans, including the increasing female veteran population, has been a priority of mine in the Senate. In fact, I have introduced bipartisan legislation (S.471) to improve women's access to VA care, as well as ensured the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing in 2015 to examine the VA's efforts to ensure privacy, safety, and dignity for women veterans. At my request, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently conducted a review of the VA's care for women veterans, specifically focused on VAMCs complying with the VA's environment of care (EOC) for women veterans, availability of VA providers for gender-specific care, and access to gender-specific care for women veterans utilizing the VA Choice Program.

Unfortunately, the GAO found that the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) lacks complete and accurate data on whether VAMCs are in compliance with the VA's EOC standards. I am committed to ensuring every VA facility that serves Nevada's veterans is meeting the highest standards for delivering care. That is why I respectfully request your response to the following questions about the Reno VAMC meeting the needs of women veterans:

1. Is your facility conducting weekly inspections – also known as EOC rounds – to ensure compliance with the VA's EOC standards for women veterans, which includes privacy, dignity, sense of security, and safety considerations in all clinical spaces?
2. When was the last time an instance of non-compliance with EOC standards for women veterans was identified during an EOC round?

a. In 2016, how many instances of non-compliance with EOC standards for women veterans have been reported to the VHA Central Office through the online tool available to each VAMC?
b. Is your facility reporting every instance of non-compliance?
c. In each instance of non-compliance, was the issue resolved within 14 days as required by VHA policy?
d. During a week in which your facility is completely in compliance, is this compliance noted in a system or reported to the VHA Central Office?
e. Is there a specific individual in your facility delegated the responsibility for addressing and following-up on non-compliance?

3. When conducting an inspection of all patient care areas twice per fiscal year, does your facility ensure that the rounds team conducts its inspection when every examination room and other areas are available for inspection?
4. The GAO found common areas of noncompliance in the facilities it visited. Does your facility ensure full compliance in the following areas?
    a. Auditory privacy at check-in clerk station;
    b. Auditory privacy in procedure and testing areas;
    c. Privacy curtains in all examination rooms;
    d. Sanitary products available in all women's restrooms;
    e. Restricted access to examination and procedure areas.
5. How many unique women veterans are utilizing VA care in the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System? If the data is available, how many unique women veterans are utilizing non-VA care in the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System?
6. Does the Reno VAMC have a GYN on-site? Is this individual full time or part time?
7. How many women's health primary care providers does the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System have? How many of these providers are part time versus full time?

Again, I appreciate your attention to this issue of accountability for Nevada's heroes and request a response by December 29, 2016. It has been a privilege to work in collaboration with you to serve veterans, and I look forward to continuing our partnership together.

Sincerely,

DEAN HELLER
U.S. Senator