

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 20, 2014

Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW, Room 500
Washington D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I am writing concerning the recent reports of fraudulent management of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) medical appointment records. I understand that an Inspector General investigation is ongoing and that you are conducting a National Access Stand Down to assess scheduling processes across VHA. As new reports continue to surface of secret waitlists at VA facilities around the country, I am concerned that the scale and scope of this crisis may be greater than previously thought. I look forward to reviewing the findings of these assessments and, in particular, the extent to which any of these fraudulent practices may have impacted Ohio veterans.

As you are aware, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has examined issues related to access problems delaying medical care for our veterans, including the manner in which VHA manages its waitlists. Specifically, GAO has recommended that you direct the Under Secretary for Health to take actions to improve the reliability of outpatient medical appointment wait time measures, consistently implement scheduling policies, and appropriately train and allocate staff to manage the scheduling process. If recent allegations are found to be substantiated, it is clear that significant work remains on these recommendations.

As you are aware, in contrast with VHA, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has made it a practice to publish a weekly workload report including data related to the processing of benefits claims across the VBA enterprise. Making this information public has been an important step in improving VBA processes. It gives individual veterans an understanding of the potential wait time for their claim to be processed. It allows Veterans Service Organizations to better understand the current workload and serve as a more effective partner in guiding veterans through the process. Finally, it provides the American people with insight into how the VBA is conducting its mission of providing for our veterans.

As you continue to assess and make changes to improve your medical scheduling process, I ask that you review the feasibility of increasing the transparency of VHA scheduling and wait time measures. While some data on appointment scheduling is included in the annual VA Performance and Accountability Report, it is entirely insufficient in providing the regularity and fidelity of reporting to be informative. In light of these shortcomings, I would like to better understand the steps you are taking to increase transparency of VHA medical appointment wait lists. Specifically, have you evaluated the feasibility of making wait list data for individual Veterans Integrated Service Networks, medical centers, and clinics accessible via the VHA website? Are there any resource factors or policies that have prevented this from occurring? What steps are you taking to address these issues to facilitate making this data publicly accessible?

I appreciate your time and attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Rob Portman
U.S. Senator