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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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February 17, 2016

Linda A. Halliday
Deputy Inspector General
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Deputy Inspector General Halliday:

I write to call your attention to disturbing reports about the Cincinnati Veterans Affairs Medical Center, which provides medical care to over 40,000 area veterans. Whistleblowers, both current and former hospital employees, have alleged that the hospital has “engaged in a pattern of cost cutting that forced out experienced surgeons, reduced access to care and put patients in harm’s way”¹—including reductions in surgeries, such as spine and orthopedic surgeries for artificial limbs, staffing cuts, and failure to provide doctors with sterile surgical instruments.

There are also allegations of misconduct by Department officials in charge of the Cincinnati facility. In particular, press reports suggest that the hospital’s Acting Chief of Staff, Dr. Barbara Temeck, was receiving two salaries at the same time—one for her work as Acting Chief of Staff and the other as a thoracic surgeon, despite whistleblowers’ reports that Dr. Temeck only serves as an “assistant” in the operating room and never as the operating surgeon. More troubling, it has been reported that Dr. Temeck did not have a valid license to prescribe controlled substances (including hydrocone and a generic form of Valium) to the wife of the Department’s Regional Director, Jack Hetrick, who oversaw the Cincinnati hospital.

These allegations are deeply disturbing. Those who have served their country in uniform are entitled to the best possible medical care, and the public deserves to have confidence in the good judgment and professional integrity of those in charge of that care.

I ask you to undertake a swift and independent investigation of these matters, including not only reports of substandard clinical care, but also potential mismanagement and misconduct by the leadership of the hospital and the Department officials in charge of overseeing it. I would ask you, as well, to keep me and my staff apprised of developments in that investigation. Please

¹ Mark Greenblatt, Dan Monk, and Aaron Kessler, *Whistleblowers cite disorder at Cincy VA*, WCPO Cincinnati (Feb. 16, 2016), <http://www.wcpo.com/longform/34-doctors-nurses-at-cincinnati-va-alarmed-by-cost-cutting-quality-of-care>.

contact PSI Subcommittee staff member Mark Angehr at (202) 224-3721 to discuss this matter further.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Portman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rob Portman
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

cc: Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations