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Monthly Report from the Director

VA | Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center

Consistently providing the highest level of quality care for our Veterans who often have much more complex medical needs than the general population is not only the mission, but also the hallmark, of the VA. And while for many years VA employees and patients have known that excellence in health care provided through VA is true, there is now a new report by a trio of leading research groups that found VA outperforms private sector health providers on several key measures. The study, conducted by Grant Thornton and McKinsey & Company, the RAND Corporation and the MITRE Corporation, is the topic of a recent article in *American Prospect*. Key findings of the report range from lower post-op morbidity for VA patients compared to non-Veterans receiving non-VA care to rates of mortality declining more quickly in VA over time than in non-VA settings for specific conditions. The report also found that VA health providers offer better mental health, better obesity counseling, and better blood pressure control. While there have been several national media stories focused on VA issues over the past year, this article accurately identifies VA as a leader in the medical field and lauds VA employees for succeeding in providing excellent care despite recent reports and the complexities involved in caring for such a diverse patient population.

Our VA—your VA—achieved a 5-Star quality rating in 2015, and the highest overall performance rating possible in the VA. We also achieved 3rd best efficiency rating, improving from 39th in 2014. We consistently ranked in the top 10% of private and public sector hospitals for quality of care according to HEDIS measures. We decreased our employee turnover rate to 6.79% which is significantly lower than the VHA rate of 9% and the private sector healthcare turnover rate of 18%, while improving on some 90% of employee satisfaction scores

according to the All Employee Survey.

At our VA, our Tele-mental Health services provide access to care for Veterans across the Southeast with standards the private sector seeks to emulate. Our scores on diabetic metrics exceed the national average in multiple categories, as do our scores on cardiovascular risk metrics and cancer screening. We also score as well or better than area hospitals in numerous areas including unplanned readmission and death rate for pneumonia, and for heart attack. And our response time to answer the phone is routinely under 15 seconds on average thanks to the hard work of our Call Center team to improve service for our Veterans. Our HEDIS and ORYX composites scores, which measure inpatient and outpatient quality, for diabetes, ischemic heart disease, prevention, tobacco and behavioral health screening also exceed national averages comparing our VA against public and private sector hospitals across the country. And we have maintained this level of care while exceeding the national average providing 98% of appointments within 30 days.

These measures are very important because they assure our Veterans and their families that they are receiving the very best care anywhere right here at their VA. The measures are also important—as is the recent study and the *American Prospect* article—because they recognize the quality care our team delivers and our Veterans receive every day. I invite you to read the full article at <http://prospect.org/article/report-va-outperforms-private-sector-key-measures>.

Parking Update

It is very exciting to see the cranes moving and the sections of the parking deck joined together as construction of the new structure continues. The deck, which will expand parking for patients and employees, will open in summer 2016 as part of our overall parking

plan. Many Veterans are also using the offsite lot and shuttle service—and they love it! We have received many positive comments about the convenience of the offsite parking option and the courtesy of the shuttle drivers. I also encourage our Veterans to use the complimentary valet parking at the front entrance of the VA. By offering all of these parking options, we hope to enhance our Veterans' experience each time they come to their VA.

Fisher House Charleston

Later this year, we expect to break ground on Fisher House Charleston. This grassroots community effort, led by Mr. and Mrs. Trux Emerson, will build a 17-suite home away from home for Veterans receiving care at our VA and their families at no cost to them. Fisher House Charleston will make it possible for Veterans to have their loved ones with them, helping them heal while they are in the hospital without financial burden. The house, which will be built at 150 Wentworth St. just about a mile from our VA, will feature a family-style kitchen and dining area, living room, and several other amenities to ensure families are cared for while they focus on caring for their Veteran. To learn more about how you can help, visit www.fisherhousecharleston.org.

Finally, I want to thank the almost 70,000 Veterans who have entrusted their health care to us. This is your VA and our goal every day is to provide you the very best in medical services and patient experience. If you have a suggestion, please send it to charlestonpao@va.gov. Your feedback helps us make your VA better every day. Thank you for your service and for the privilege of serving you.

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