



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

October 22, 2013

The Honorable Lynn Jenkins
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Jenkins:

Thank you for your letter regarding medical attrition staffing at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Topeka, Kansas, a division of VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System (VAEKHCS). Providing quality health care to our Nation's Veterans is our priority.

I asked the Under Secretary for Health to review the issues you raised, and I have been assured that the Emergency Department (ED) remains open to Veterans seeking immediate or emergent care. The ED and urgent care providers continue to appropriately assess and triage patients based on their health care status. Providing quality health care to Veterans may require patient diversion, based on bed availability, low staffing levels, and required specialists.

Five ED staff have left VAEKHCS in the last 12 months. It is standard practice to interview departing personnel to obtain a better understanding of what the Veterans Health Administration may do to retain their employment, and these five internal medicine providers were interviewed. A summary of those interviews follows: one accepted a promotion at another VA facility; one moved to be closer to family; one retired; one moved when the spouse was relocated; and one accepted a higher salary and better work schedule at a private facility in the Topeka area.

William Patterson, M.D., Network Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network 15, is working closely with the facility Director to augment plans to address medical staffing and continue to aggressively recruit to fill vacancies. The VAEKHCS has hired full-time physicians, fee basis physicians, and mid-level providers to cover inpatient services, pulmonary care, neurology, and the ED. However, recruitment is ongoing in several areas of the hospital, including ED and urgent care areas.

Thank you for your interest in VA health care in Kansas. If you have any further questions, please have a member of your staff contact Mr. Jon Coen, Congressional Relations Officer, at (202) 461-7627 or by e-mail at Jon.Coen@va.gov.

I appreciate your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Eric K. Shinseki".

Eric K. Shinseki