



Letter to the Editor: Accessible, safe, high-quality VA health care (WORD COUNT: 497)

Dear Editor:

There has been a lot of discussion and media coverage of recent about the Commission on Care and the report the group released publicly that included recommendations for the future of VA health care. As VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald said on July 6, VA will continue to work with Congress, the Commission, other federal agencies and Veterans organizations as each recommendation is reviewed very closely.

Across the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, we are proud of the changes we have put in place to increase access to health care services and improve the quality of care. As the fourth largest VA healthcare system in the country, we served nearly 108,000 Veterans and completed more than 1.4 million outpatient appointments (about 4,000 appointments per day) across southwest Florida from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. In addition, we provided nearly 31,600 authorizations for Veterans to receive care in the community in 2015 – a 40 percent increase in authorizations when compared to 2014. These numbers continue to trend up as we approach the end of fiscal year 2016.

During the month of June alone, the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System completed 78,543 appointments. About 98.7 percent of the appointments completed in June occurred within 30 days of the clinically indicated date or Veteran's preferred date. This number continues to trend in a positive direction as we make progress with improving access.

Same day access to health care services is available. Emergency and urgent care services are available at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center, as well as walk-in opportunities for primary care. In addition to primary care, same day access is also available through certain specialty care clinics to include mental health, cardiology and audiology.

Because of the continuous improvements we have achieved, we receive a tremendous amount of feedback from Veterans, their loved ones, and other stakeholders from an array of systems available to listen to "the voice of the customer." Included in this feedback are compliments. To put this into perspective, in 2012 we received just over 100 compliments all year. The number of compliments we receive today versus just four years ago is remarkable, and we are on track to set a new record for compliments this year. Just this month, we surpassed 1,500 compliments for the fiscal year and still have several months left in this fiscal year. As a leader, this tells me that we are doing better today communicating with Veterans and making available appropriate systems for Veterans to voice feedback.

We are committed to maintaining and improving the trust and confidence Veterans have in the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System and our ability to provide care that is grounded in VA's core values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect and excellence. As VA health care systematically improves across the country, the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System will continue to provide safe, effective, high-quality health care to the men and women we have the honor and privilege to serve every day.



Suzanne M. Klinker
Director, Bay Pines VA Healthcare System

About the Author

Suzanne M. Klinker was appointed as the Director of the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System in May 2012. With dedication to the organization's I CARE values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence, she oversees health care delivery for the entire organization which includes one large medical center, eight outpatient clinics and 4,100 employees. In 2015, the healthcare system treated more than 108,000 Veterans and completed 1.4 million appointments.