



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

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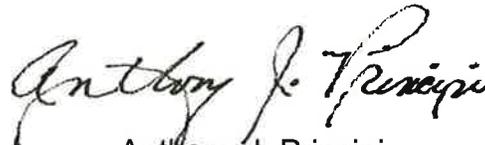
The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Waxman:

Thank you for your letter regarding health care services provided through the Department of Veterans Affairs Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (GLAHS). Enclosed is a fact sheet, prepared by the Veterans Health Administration, that provides additional information on the issues you raised in your letter.

If you have other questions or would like to discuss your concerns further, please have a member of your staff contact Dean Norman, MD, Chief of Staff, GLAHS, at (310) 268-3284, or the Network Director, Kenneth Clark, at (562) 826-5963.

Sincerely yours,


Anthony J. Principi

Enclosure

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Veterans Health Administration (VHA)
Fact Sheet**

Changes in Services and Staffing

There have been some changes in services and staffing at the Department of Veterans Affairs Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (GLAHS) over the past several years in order to improve efficiency, maintain quality, and serve as many veterans as possible. GLAHS has used a number of strategies to realign clinical staffing to most efficiently meet patient needs. Some employees have already been reassigned to vacant positions within the organization, and other reassignments are in process. The contracts of some part-time physicians have been terminated, and some full-time physicians will be reassigned to other areas in the medical center within their field of expertise.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

The total number of mental health inpatient beds at GLAHS has been reduced since 1995. The reductions were a result of changing the substance abuse treatment program and the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) program to an outpatient and community-based services model. One substance abuse program was closed in 1994, and the last closure occurred in 1995. The PTSD inpatient program closed in 1998. These beds were eliminated because patients that require this type of treatment typically do not require 24-hour nursing care, nor do they meet the acuity level for inpatient care. Two factors influenced the decision to convert Substance Abuse and PTSD care to the outpatient setting: 1) a study published by the VA's National Director of the Northeast Program Evaluation Center (NEPEC) concluded that inpatient PTSD treatment is less effective than outpatient and, 2) the conversion to outpatient substance abuse treatment was in response to published reports over the past 20 years showing that outpatient substance abuse programs are more effective than those in an inpatient setting.

Patients who require treatment in either of these programs, and who do not have permanent living arrangements, are offered lodging in programs located on the West Los Angeles campus with whom GLAHS partners, such as the Salvation Army and New Directions. Patients who have medical problems that require hospitalization, or who require more acute substance abuse treatment or PTSD care, are admitted to one of three inpatient psychiatric units. GLAHS reports that there are currently no waiting lists for inpatient mental health care, outpatient substance abuse, or PTSD programs.

Hepatitis C Patients

GLAHS has made significant progress in testing and treating an increased number of patients in both Primary Care and Mental Health programs. In Primary Care, 90% of patients are screened for Hepatitis C risk factors and, of those identified to be at high risk, 71% are tested for Hepatitis C. In Mental Health, the figures are 93% and 73%, respectively.

Dental Services

There are five sites within GLAHS where dental care is offered. For routine dental care, there is a waiting period for new appointments of approximately six months to one year. However, all eligible patients with urgent dental needs are seen on the same day. Meeting the demands for dental care continues to be a challenging issue, and local management is working to make improvements in the availability of services.