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June 10, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to express our dismay in regard to disturbing reports that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has failed to provide access to care for our Nation's veterans. All Americans should have access to health care, especially those who bravely served our country. Widespread reports of unconscionably long wait times and poor appointment scheduling at the VA are therefore extremely alarming to us. **The AMA strongly urges you to take immediate action to provide timely access to entitled care for eligible veterans utilizing the healthcare sector outside the VA until the VA can provide entitled care in a timely fashion.**

While national media coverage has recently brought attention to this important issue, unacceptably long wait times and persistently flawed and inaccurate scheduling management have been known issues at the VA for quite some time. In 2001, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that veteran clinics with long waiting times often had poor scheduling procedures or did not use their staff efficiently.ⁱ In 2007, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) found that schedulers were not following established procedures for making and recording medical appointments.ⁱⁱ In 2012, the VA OIG found that the VA did not have a reliable and accurate method of determining whether they were providing patients timely access to mental health care services.ⁱⁱⁱ Also in 2012, the GAO reported that inconsistent implementation of the VA's scheduling policy and other problems impeded veterans medical centers' ability to schedule timely medical appointments.^{iv}

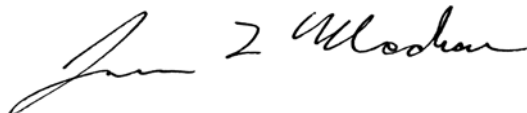
These serious problems have persisted and severely limited veterans' access to necessary medical care. An audit completed by the VA on June 3, 2014 found that 57,000 new VA patients requesting appointments will have to wait as long as three months before a doctor will see them.^v The audit also showed that another 63,000 in the VA system have not been able to secure appointments. This is simply unacceptable. Our Nation's veterans should have timely access to needed medical care. At a minimum, until such time as the VA can marshal its resources to provide the care promised to our veterans, the VA must expediently provide coverage for entitled care outside of the VA system.

Abraham Lincoln described our Nation's duty to its veterans in his Second Inaugural Address when he said "let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan." In 1959, the VA took up the latter part of

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Lincoln's words as its motto. In light of recent reports of excessive wait times and poor access to quality care, the VA should renew its commitment to this important mission. While we are aware of legislative efforts to address this issue, we urge you to act now to provide timely access to entitled care for eligible veterans utilizing the healthcare sector outside the VA until the VA can provide entitled care in a timely fashion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD

ⁱ Government Accountability Office. *VA Health Care: More National Action Needed to Reduce Waiting Times, but Some Clinics Have Made Progress*. August 2001. Available at: <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-01-953>.

ⁱⁱ Department of Veterans Affairs. *Audit of the Veterans Health Administration's Outpatient Waiting Times*. September 2007. Available at: <http://www.va.gov/oig/52/reports/2007/VAOIG-07-00616-199.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Veterans Affairs. *Review of Veterans' Access to Mental Health Services*. April 2012. Available at: <http://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-12-00900-168.pdf>.

^{iv} Government Accountability Office. December 2012. *Reliability of Reported Outpatient Medical Appointment Wait Times and Scheduling Oversight Need Improvement*. Available at: <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-130>.

^v Department of Veterans Affairs. June 2014. *Access Audit: Results of Access Audit Conducted May 12, 2014, through June 3, 2014*. Available at: <http://www.va.gov/health/docs/VAAccessAuditFindingsReport.pdf>.