

June 19, 2014

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6050

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Dear Chairman Sanders and Senator Burr:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to express our strong support for your legislative efforts to ensure that eligible veterans receive quality health care in a timely manner. We have been dismayed by the recent disturbing reports of unconscionably long wait times and the unacceptable, unworkable appointment scheduling system at Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) medical centers and other facilities. In response to these reports, the AMA, at its recent Annual Meeting, resoundingly adopted new policy that supports the provision of full health benefits to eligible veterans to ensure that they can access the medical care they need outside the VA in a timely manner.

The AMA strongly supports the provisions in Title III of your bill that would provide the VA with expanded authority to provide medical services to veterans through agreements with non-VA physicians and other health care providers, and require the VA to exercise that authority to ensure that all eligible veterans receive requested health care in a timely fashion. In order to deal quickly with the crisis in veterans' access to timely care and encourage non-VA physicians to participate, we believe that the temporary program authorized by your legislation to allow veterans to seek care outside the VA must be simple and easy to implement, with the fewest hurdles for both veteran patients and providers. Accordingly, as you work to reconcile the differences between your VA reform legislation, "The Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act of 2014," (S. 2450, which passed the Senate as H.R. 3230) with the House-passed VA reform legislation, "The Veteran Access to Care Act of 2014" (H.R. 4810), we offer the following recommendations on provisions that should be included in the final legislation:

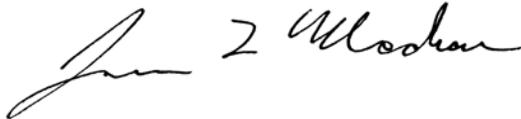
- It should be made clear that the legislation applies to care received from non-Department physicians and other health care providers as well as health care facilities;
- The payment rate for non-VA physicians/providers should be at least as much as the Medicare rate for the services and treatments provided;
- Physicians who are participating Medicare providers should not need to provide verification of their licenses and credentials to the VA, since such verification is already done by the Medicare program; and

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- It should be made clear that any agreements or arrangements between the VA and non-VA physicians for the provisions of medical services are exempt from current “federal contractor” affirmative action obligations pursuant to Executive Order 11246, the Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 (VEVRAA), and Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 503), as is the case under Medicaid and Medicare.

It is unacceptable that thousands of eligible veterans have been unable to access needed medical care in a timely fashion. The AMA urges you and your colleagues to expeditiously reach agreement with your counterparts in the House of Representatives to enact final VA reform legislation. We look forward to working with you to achieve this goal and to help provide timely access to entitled care for eligible veterans. Our veterans deserve no less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James L. Madara, MD