



ATTACHMENT D
American Federation of Government Employees

Affiliated with AFL-CIO
Local 1882
V.A. Medical Center/Fort McCoy
Tomah, WI 54660

*Hand delivered to:
Congressman Kind
Congressman Obey
Senator Feingold*

Date: April 17, 2009
From: AFGE Local 1882 AFL-CIO
Subject: Issues at V. A. Medical Center; Tomah, WI
To: Ben Balkum, President
AFGE Local
V.A. Medical Center
Iron Mountain, MI

Hello Ben,

1. I understand that you will be visiting some of our Representatives on Capitol Hill the week of April 19, 2009. I am writing with the hope, time permitting, you will be so kind as to inform our Representatives of some of the more significant concerns AFGE LOCAL 1882 Officers, and many others, have concerning care of the Veteran patients at this health care facility.
2. **Providers' Privileging/Credentialing:** Some months ago, AFGE learned that this Agency is forcing unsolicited Privileges/Credentials upon the Providers who work here. Example: Providers (M.D., Ph.D., Physician Assistants, Nurse Practitioners) apply for a position at this Medical Center and there is an agreement between the Chief of Staff and the Providers that they will work as an outpatient provider in the Ambulatory Care Outpatient Clinic, Monday through Friday, administrative hours. The Provider accepts the position and moves here. Once on board, the newly hired Providers are handed a different set of Privileges/Credentials and told to sign them. The Providers will state that the Privileges/Credentials are not what he/she agreed to prior to being hired. Regardless, the Providers are forced to sign the new Privileges/Credentials, or lose their jobs. This has meant that Providers who have come here must work: Outpatient; in addition to Inpatient and Urgent Care --- which also means they are working off-shifts.

These Providers become anxious and concerned since many of them have not worked Urgent care since their Residency. At this facility, there are extremely ill patients presenting at Urgent Care -- and we do not have an Emergency Room nor an ICU. Therefore, often times, the patients who present to Urgent Care are more like Emergency Room candidates. And, again, the Providers I speak of have specialty in outpatient clinic patient care; therefore, it is often time the Urgent Care RN's who are re-orienting the Dr.'s to the Urgent Care needs of the Veteran patients.

Another example of forcing privileges/credentials on Providers is: A memo is prepared by administration which reads: 'I am requesting the following additions to my clinical privileges---'Ventilator Management,' etc. The canned memo is handed to the provider for their signature. Typically, the Provider will respond: "There must be some mistake. I did not request these privileges." They will be told --- "You must sign the paperwork!" Keep in mind that many of the outpatient providers will not have worked with ventilators since perhaps residency years and yet are expected to be competent after signature on a memo and viewing a 20 minute video.

3. A second serious concern is the fact that many of the Veterans served at this facility are **prescribed large quantities of narcotics**.

There are providers and Registered Pharmacists who refuse to prescribe or to fill large quantities of narcotic prescriptions as ordered by the Chief of Staff, Dr. David Houlihan. It is a known fact that if the providers or pharmacists refuse to follow Dr. Houlihan's orders, they will be yelled at and perhaps fired. Quite recently a Pharmacist refused to fill an order for 1,000+ narcotic tablets for a 30 day supply for one of Dr. Houlihan's patients --- the Pharmacist viewed the order as "unethical." This Pharmacist received a verbal thrashing from the Chief of Staff. (Many providers have left because of the harassment). This type of pressure makes it difficult for the providers to "do the right thing" for the patients.

If some of the patients do not receive the narcotics they request, they will go to the Patient Advocate and file a complaint against the Provider. (NOTE: The 2 Agency Patient Advocate positions report directly to the Chief of Staff, which appears to be an conflict of interest and unethical.) When a patient visits the Patient Advocate with a complaint against a Provider, this is tallied against the provider and viewed as a "negative event." Recently, a Provider was terminated/fired because she received "too many complaints." Some of these complaints were due to the fact she would not reorder narcotics for some of the patients who appeared to be at risk for further addiction/abuse. Additionally, this same Provider challenged the fact that she was forced to signed Privileges/Credentials she did not agree to prior to being hired.

The Chief of Staff has instructed the providers they are not to do "urine/drug screens" prior to ordering narcotics for patients, because the screening can be "inaccurate." For example, if a Veteran patient had been prescribed narcotics and came in early, prior to renewal date, to get more of the prescription narcotic, there could be reason to question what may be happening with the drugs; and, in some cases Providers may have ordered a urine/drug screen. A urine screen could show if the patient is or is not ingesting the medication. A clean, or trace, urine could very well indicate the Veteran patient is not him/herself actually consuming the narcotics. There are several Veteran patients with narcotic contracts here --- regardless, very often these veterans are able to continue to receive narcotics most times they request. To the best of my knowledge, most Providers -- per instruction -- no longer order urine/drug screens as an assessment tool prior to ordering/re-ordering narcotic medications.

Many of the patients call Dr. Houlihan "The Candy Man" because of the easy access to narcotic drugs/medications at this facility.

There have been several unexplained deaths at this Medical Center. In 2008, there were three (3) suicides of veterans while sitting in parked vehicles on the Medical Center grounds. These patients were counseled by Psychiatrist/Chief of Staff Dr. David Houlihan.

Please know we have many concerns for our Veterans and for the Employees. I have taken the liberty to attempt to explain two (2) of the most significant concerns at this time. If you are able to assist the Veterans, AFGE and many others will be eternally grateful. If, on the other, there is a different venue I should be taking; e.g., contacting the Office of Inspector General – please so inform and I will do what it takes to ensure a safer care environment for our U.S. of A. Warriors.

Respectfully Submitted,

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