

Frequently Asked Questions

Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center and the Medical University of South Carolina

1. What is the current relationship between the Charleston VA and MUSC ?

The Charleston VA and MUSC have a long history of sharing and collaboration, especially in the areas of clinical care, education, and research. In July 2006, former VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Jonathan Perlin established the Collaborative Opportunities Planning Group (COPG). The goal of the COPG is to explore mutually beneficial sharing opportunities between the Charleston VA and MUSC which will improve the access, quality, and cost of healthcare for veterans and the citizens of South Carolina.

2. Will a new VA hospital be built in Charleston ?

One of the goals of the COPG is to review construction options for the Charleston VA including a new VA hospital. Any decision regarding a new VA hospital will be made by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

3. Will the Charleston VA and MUSC merge ?

No. The discussion has always focused on how the Charleston VA and MUSC can enhance their relationship by increasing collaboration and sharing to improve the delivery of healthcare for veterans and the citizens of South Carolina.

4. Who would be in charge of any new arrangement, VA or MUSC ?

VA and MUSC will each continue to oversee the care they deliver in their facilities, or any new facilities.

5. Who would pay for any new facility that is built, VA or MUSC ?

VA and MUSC are working together to develop options that would be financially acceptable to both VA and MUSC. For VA, the final decision rests with the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

6. In any new arrangement, who gets priority for care, veterans or civilians ?

Any plan that is developed will have to improve access for veterans and recognize veterans' priority. Current VA eligibility policies will continue to be followed.

7. Will the VA continue to have it's own Pharmacy ?

Yes. VA will continue to provide both inpatient and outpatient pharmacy services to veterans.

8. Will the Charleston VA lose its name or identity ?

The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center will continue to be an independent veterans' facility.

9. How will the VA's Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC's) be affected by this collaboration ?

There will be no change to the operation of any of the current CBOC's operated by the Charleston VA, including clinics in North Charleston, SC; Myrtle Beach, SC; Beaufort, SC; and Savannah, GA.

10. What will happen to VA employees in any collaboration ?

Both the Charleston VA and MUSC will continue to employ their own staff who will work in separate areas.

11. Is the VA buying MUSC new equipment ?

One of the collaborative options being considered is for VA to buy \$6.7 million dollars in Radiology and Radiation Therapy equipment which will be housed in MUSC facilities. The lease agreement covering this equipment would provide a revenue stream to the VA to support patient care and/or lower the cost of specialty services purchased by the VA. The contracts for this venture are currently in negotiation. Veterans would have equal access to the equipment operated by MUSC.

12. Has Congress approved funding for a new VA Hospital in Charleston ?

Congressman Henry Brown, Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health, sponsored H.R. 5815 which proposes \$70 million dollars for the planning of a replacement VA facility in Charleston.

Senator Larry Craig, Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, sponsored S 3421 which did not authorize any funding for a replacement VA facility in Charleston.

The next step for H.R. 5815 and S 3421 is for the bills to go to conference between the House of Representatives and the Senate. A date for conference deliberations has not been identified.