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April 6, 2015

Dr. William Patterson, Director  
VA Heartland Network  
1201 Walnut Street  
Suite #800  
Kansas City, Missouri 64106

Dear Dr. Patterson,

We write to you with continued concern about the status of the Emergency Room operation at the Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center in Topeka, Kansas. We are sure you agree that our nation's veterans deserve top-quality care, and therefore request a status update on previous concerns at this facility in our state and district.

To provide background on the timeline of the efforts so far, a letter was sent to then-VA Secretary Eric Shinseki on August 22, 2013 raising concerns with staffing levels at the facility. The October 22, 2013 response to that letter indicated that you were working to resolve staffing issues. In late 2013, a substantial amount of information was submitted from current and former patients, current and former employees and their families, and the local media, to the VA's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. After review, we were informed that the information was relayed to the Assistant Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Operations and Management. On January 31, 2014, we were notified that Colmery-O'Neil would "temporarily pause from Emergency Room services to Urgent Care services," effectively eliminating a source of emergency care for area veterans.

Still, 430 days later, the emergency room at Colmery-O'Neil remains closed. In that time, the Chief of Staff left the facility, the Deputy Chief-of-Staff also left the facility, and today both of those leadership positions remain vacant. On February 4, 2014, a meeting was held with the Director for the Office of Rural Health (ORH). The director was asked about the urgent care/emergency room closure at the Topeka VA. The ORH subsequently passed this request for information to another directorate – either VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) or VHA's Operations and Management – but neither provided an explanation for the continued closure. On April 28, 2014 then-Secretary Shinseki was invited to Kansas to visit VA medical facilities, including the Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center in Topeka to discuss

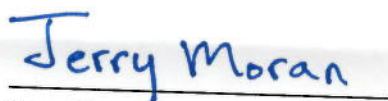
the lack of physicians in rural Kansas but particularly the shortage in the emergency room of the Topeka VA medical center. This visit never occurred.

We met with Mr. Rudy Klopfer on June 13, 2014, and were told at that time the facility was ready to re-open, but had not been given the authority to do so from the VA. After the meeting, we once again reached out to VA OIG to readdress the Topeka VA's emergency room closure, and did not receive an explanation or solution to address the ongoing closure. Each inquiry from our offices has been met with deflative statements and excuses as to why Colmery-O'Neil cannot be a fully functional VA Medical Facility. More than thirteen months later, veterans are still not able to access their local facility to receive emergency care. To say this is troubling is an understatement.

We ask you to please provide us with an update on the support you have received from the VA Central Office (VACO), the status of the emergency care unit, the status of current hiring actions, other additional hires to be made, and a detailed timeline to make certain the emergency services at Colmery-O'Neil will re-open. We would also like your assistance in receiving an explanation from the VACO of the investigation by the office of the Assistant Deputy Undersecretary for Health and Operations Management.

Kansas veterans deserve answers from the agency whose mission it is to serve them and thank them for their sacrifice. The problems within the VA system are widespread, egregious, and completely unacceptable. As Members of Congress who represent Kansans, we want to support you and work with you to restore the VA to an organization that veterans trust and is worthy of their service to our nation. To start this process, problems such as those we have outlined regarding VA's inaction with the Colmery-O'Neil, must not be put off or disregarded. The VA must take judicious and swift action to resolve this situation. We respectfully request your timely and detailed response to our inquiry.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran  
United States Senator



Lynn Jenkins, CPA  
United States Representative