



STATE OF MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

HASTINGS VETERANS HOME

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November 9, 2010

The Honorable Senator Al Franken
United States Senate
Suite SH-320
Washington, DC 20510-2309

Dear Senator Franken:

This letter is in response to your request for information on corrective actions being taken at the Minnesota Veterans Home – Hastings (MVH – Hastings) in response to recent survey findings. As you are aware, the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) conducted a “for cause” survey of the Minnesota Veterans Home in Hastings July 27-29, 2010. During this survey, the VA indicated that 69 standards were fully met, while three standards were provisionally met. A copy of the survey, which contains MVH – Hastings’ corrective action plan, is attached for your review.

Following the survey, MVH – Hastings began correcting the provisionally met standards. On September 29, 2010, the Minnesota Veterans Home in Hastings received a letter from the US Department of Veterans Affairs, signed by Steven Kleinglass and Peter Henry, stating that the facility had been awarded a full certification rating for 2010. A copy of this letter is also attached for your review.

The Hastings Veterans Home and Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) was not aware of and did not obtain a copy of the memorandum from Steven Kleinglass to the Inspector General (dated September 7, 2010), or the results of that investigation, until your office forwarded it with your letter dated Oct. 8, 2010. I am deeply concerned we did not receive a copy given the serious nature of the findings – in particular the substantiated finding of retaliation. While this topic was mentioned in the survey, it was never a focal point and not a significant portion of the corrective action plan. Had the Home known this was a substantiated finding, we would have taken immediate action to address the issue.

Following is an update on the corrective actions plans underway for the findings in the September 7th memorandum:

1. Retaliation

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) takes the finding of retaliation very seriously. When the copy of the September memorandum was received, immediate action was taken.

- An internal investigation has been launched, and the administrator and director of nursing have been put on leave while it is conducted. MDVA is working aggressively to finalize the investigation in a timely manner.
- All staff will complete mandatory special training on Resident rights, the Vulnerable Adult Act and specific facility policies. There are three mandatory training sessions scheduled for November, 2010.
- MVH—Hastings is rewriting and updating its grievance policy. The new policy will be shared with Residents within 30 days, and staff will receive appropriate training immediately upon receipt.

2. Poor Access to Medical Care

- MVH – Hastings has replaced the medical director.
- An additional full-time nurse practitioner has been hired, giving the contract physicians more time to see each Resident.
- A clinic nurse position has been developed to assist with in-house appointments for physicians and nurse practitioners. Doing so has made access to the physicians and nurse practitioners much easier for the Residents.
- A very specific plan to implement “person-centered care and culture change” is in place and has been put into action. Training is being expedited.
- The medical director and administrator have addressed the lack of communication and bedside manner with the contract physicians. The medical staff has received coaching sessions and the Home will track progress and any complaints or concerns, and address them in a timely manner.
- Both contract physicians have been made aware of MVH – Hastings’ expectation for person-centered, excellent Resident care. For example, it is expected that the physician will meet with the Resident prior to any medication changes.
- The Home has contracted with a part-time psychiatrist to assist with mental health issues and training.
- Self-administration of medications has been implemented, and a majority of Residents are pleased with the practice. A process has been put in place to address any outstanding staff communication issues.
- There has been a leadership change in the nursing department. With this new leadership, the Home will continue to increase communication between Residents, staff and families, and identify and remove any roadblocks to Resident care.
- Communication techniques will be included in the mandatory training for all staff.

- Facility policies are now available in a CD format, making access for the Residents quick and easy. Hard copies of individual policies are also available upon request. Individual policies are discussed as needed by the appropriate department head at Resident advisory meetings and town hall meetings.

3. Social workers not assisting veterans in securing living arrangements in the community

- Discharge planning begins on the day of admission and is reviewed at the Residents' care conferences. Residents are encouraged to attend their care conferences, and participate in developing their discharge plan with the care team.
- If a Resident is interested in pursuing employment and/or education to obtain or resume competitive employment, staff is trained to recommend the vocational rehabilitation and work therapy programs available. Resident average length of stay is two and a half years, with the majority of Residents moving successfully back into the community.
- The "person-centered care" initiative has greatly increased the number of successful discharges. A Person-Centered Care Committee has been established and will meet weekly to identify areas of improvement and discuss implementation techniques. Goals of the committee include I-Centered Care Plans, fostering independence and communication between staff and Residents to assist them in attaining their short- and long-term goals.

Again, the Department takes these findings very seriously and is working to quickly address and resolve them. The Minnesota Veterans Homes has zero tolerance for the behaviors and actions identified through this investigation. Providing the best care possible for our nation's heroes remains our top priority.

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your inquiry and am happy to address any additional questions you may have. Additionally, I invite you to tour, meet and talk with the Veterans who reside at the Minnesota Veterans Home in Hastings as your schedule allows.

Sincerely,



Gilbert Acevedo
Deputy Commissioner for Veterans Health Care
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs