



For God and Country

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October 3, 1990

MEMORANDUM TO: Those listed below

FROM: John Hanson

SUBJECT: ABC-TV "Prime Time Live" Series on VA hospital care

Last Thursday, (September 27) "Prime Time Live" featured a story about the Wade Park (Ohio) VA Medical Center in Cleveland. The picture was not a pretty one, and Secretary Derwinski's response to it is attached. In addition to his response, VA's chief medical inspector is in Cleveland to look at the facility. Last week's programs generated some calls from Legionnaires to the PR Division here. Most of the callers wanted to complement ABC for the work. We encouraged them not to act as members of the organization until we could look into the problems.

Diane Sawyer, the correspondent who covered the story, said that ABC investigated 10 other hospitals and found similar bad conditions.

A follow up story will be on "Prime Time Live" tomorrow night -- October 4 -- at 10:00 p.m. (EDT).

One of the producers for the program asked for information about the Wade Park facility about 6 weeks ago. Our last review of the hospital was a number of years ago, and the information she got from us was not useful. As it turns out, Wade Park is scheduled for a visit by a representative of our Field Service in mid-October.

I asked the ABC person for information about the other 10 hospitals, and explained that we need to know if we're missing something by calling early to arrange a visit. She promised that she would begin to release information to me this Friday, and would continue as long as ABC felt that such releases would not jeopardize future stories.

Of course, all information will be shared with the VA&R Division.

Copies to: Robert W. Spanogle
Executive Directors
Division Directors (Indianapolis and DC)

SECRETARY DERWINSKI'S RESPONSE TO ABC STORY ON CLEVELAND VAMC

"I am disappointed more in sorrow than anger that ABC has shown such a lack of objectivity and malice in their portrayal of VA health care at the Cleveland Medical Center and elsewhere.

We do not claim to have a perfect system, however, the facts do not support ABC's oversimplified conclusions. We believe we deliver quality health care to our veterans and we continue to work to improve it.

We welcome and will cooperate with outside scrutiny, as we did with ABC, and from that, an accurate picture should emerge.

The program segment on "Prime Time Live" is a distortion of the VA system and is a disservice to VA's employees and the veterans they serve."



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October 4, 1990

AMERICAN LEGION RESPONSE TO ABC-TV REPORTS ON VA HOSPITALS

The neglect and abuse shown in the ABC "Prime Time" reports during the past two weeks are the result of Congress' continuing refusal to fund veterans health programs adequately, according to the world's largest veterans organization.

American Legion National Commander Robert S. Turner expressed his "extreme distress" at the conditions shown in the ABC features.

"For years American Legion national commanders have called for increased funding for VA hospitals, to no avail," Turner said. "Three weeks ago I told members of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees that an additional \$2 billion is necessary in the next budget to address some of the more pressing needs facing the health care system. That increase is the minimum needed and will only begin to help.

"Health care for America's veterans is an extension of the cost of war, and this country cannot afford to turn its back on the men and women who defend the nation."

The Legion's call for full funding of VA health care has gone unheeded for years, and the result has been a steady degradation of care for veterans. "By and large, the people who work in the VA health care system are dedicated, caring people," Turner said. "We've worked closely with VA in its accrediting procedures for doctors and in the expansion of the system to train medical students.

"Good intentions are not enough. The country's commitment to its veterans must be unconditional. Otherwise," he said, "we cannot assure those who fight our future wars that they will be taken care of appropriately."

more

Legion Response -- add 1

The Legion commander promised an expansion of the Legion's ongoing visits to VA hospitals, and has asked American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary volunteers to report problems they see in the VA health care system.

"I'm certain that all citizens are as outraged as we veterans are at the reported treatment," Turner said. "Our commitment to veterans and their well being has never been stronger."

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