

February 6, 2012

Dear Veteran:

From December 12 to 16, the VA Black Hills Health Care System held seven public forums to discuss proposals for the improvement of Veterans' health care services in portions of western South Dakota, Nebraska, and Wyoming.

Thank you if you were able to attend the forums and provide feedback. This letter requests your feedback to the proposals and provides a general summary of the proposals that were discussed at the public forums. While we are engaged in these discussions with you, we want to be clear that there will be no change in the way you receive your health care from VA Black Hills Health Care System. Many changes are proposed; however nothing has been decided and no final decisions have been made.

Again, the driving factor that led to these proposals is our need to deliver the highest quality care, which you earned through your service to a grateful Nation. We also want to decrease travel times for you and your family members. We know that in the coming years, the Veteran population in our area will continue to decline. The more prepared we are for the future, the better we can assure the quality and safety of your health care.

The improvements to the VA Black Hills Health Care System that were proposed and discussed at the public forums include (a longer version of the presentation can be found online at <http://www.blackhills.va.gov/VABlackHillsFuture/>):

- **Opening a new Hot Springs Community Based Outpatient Clinic either co-located with the Fall River Hospital, the State Veterans Home or at a free-standing site.** This VA-staffed clinic would provide the same outpatient care Veterans currently receive, but in a modern, more efficient building for providing health care, primary care, mental health, and limited specialty care. You will continue to receive care from the same physicians and nurses you currently see. We want to continue to provide dialysis and would like to purchase pharmacy, laboratory and x-ray services at the Fall River Hospital.
- **A phased plan would be implemented to close the VA Hot Springs inpatient and nursing home units, operating rooms, and urgent care facilities.** Again, you would still receive these medical services in Hot Springs. VA would buy the care from providers in Hot Springs and in your local communities. This would actually provide your health care even closer to your home. The goal is to make health care, especially specialty care, more accessible, and save Veterans long-distance travel. The same VA nurses you are used to seeing will be helping manage your care between VA and non-VA providers.
- **Services in Rapid City would be enhanced by expanding the VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic.** Expansion in Rapid City would take care of more Veterans and would also provide x-ray, lab, pharmacy and physical therapy services - allowing VA to provide more services where more Veterans live.

- **Building a new Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program facility (also known as the Domiciliary) in Rapid City.** This new structure would be designed to meet modern health care standards and help us better accommodate disabled Veterans, more female Veterans, and Veterans with children. Veterans would benefit from increased access to job training and job sites, state-of-the-art home-like facilities, educational opportunities, housing options following treatment, and other community services. This new facility would allow VA to phase out use of the Hot Springs Domiciliary which is out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- **Enhance services at the Fort Meade VA Medical Center by building new operating rooms and renovating the inpatient medical/surgical/intensive care units.**

VA recognizes these proposals may have a significant impact on our Veterans and employees, especially those of you who live and/or work in the Hot Springs area. Again, our primary goal with these proposals is to preserve the best possible access to the health care you have earned. Stronger partnerships with other health care agencies in your communities will make that possible.

I also want to assure you that no VA employee will be forced out of their job because of these proposals. If the proposed changes or other changes are implemented, employees impacted will be offered other jobs within VA or offered early retirements and separations with buy-out support to ensure that the people who dedicated themselves to your care are treated with dignity and respect.

We want to hear from you. If you did not attend one of our town halls, please take this opportunity to provide us feedback. What are your questions, concerns and ideas? You may contact us using the information below; please do so.

Sincerely,



Stephen R. DiStasio, FACHE
Director

GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VA BLACK HILLS' FUTURE

By Phone: 605-720-7085	By Email: VABlackHillsFuture@va.gov	On Facebook: www.facebook.com/VABlackHills	By Mail: Attn: Director's Office 113 Comanche Rd Fort Meade, SD 57741
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Please visit our website at:

<http://www.blackhills.va.gov/VABlackHillsFuture/>

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