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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Follow-Up Miami VA Hearing Leads to More Questions

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs heard testimony from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on problems that have plagued the Miami VA Medical Center (VAMC) for years including patient safety, compliance, budget and leadership issues, as well as several recent incidents involving veteran deaths. Members of the Committee were clearly disturbed by trends, which have yet to be resolved.

“It is my belief that the failures in leadership and patient safety that were brought to light in 2009 are still occurring to this day,” stated Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

In 2009, it was discovered that endoscopes were not being properly cleaned at the Miami (VAMC), putting more than 2,000 veterans at risk of blood-transmitted diseases. After an initial round of notifications, the facility then had to send two subsequent rounds of notifications after VA failed to properly identify all potentially affected patients. Since that time, the Miami VAMC has been the subject of numerous oversight inquiries and multiple reported problems.

“Chairman Miller has been our guardian angel when it comes to safeguarding the healthcare for our nation's veterans,” stated Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chairwoman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and a Miami area Representative. “He recently came to Miami and toured the facility to make sure that all the problems had been resolved. Sadly, they were not, and that is why we are here today.”

In addition to unsafe medical practices, employees have been arrested for selling personally identifiable information of patients, and recently an involuntarily admitted patient escaped and was killed by police officers, likely the result of Miami VAMC's failure to follow proper security procedures. Despite repeated failures in these and other areas, top leadership has faced minimal disciplinary action.

“It's clear that there is a total failure of responsibility and accountability with the leadership at the Miami VA Medical Center. As a veteran, much of what I heard today is appalling. Our veterans have the right to expect the best medical care and that is clearly not happening at Miami. I'm even more concerned now than at the beginning of the hearing today. While I have no doubt that most of the VA system is made up of dedicated and conscientious professionals, what we have uncovered in Miami is deeply troubling and must be resolved,” stated Rep. Bill Johnson, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

Today's hearing left Members with more questions about the practices at the Miami VAMC and wondering if these problems extend beyond Miami.

“Multiple investigations have taken place, disciplinary recommendations put forth, new processes and procedures developed, new policies established, yet the problems are not fixed,” Miller said. “We have an obligation to our veterans to get to the bottom of these concerns and ensure they are not systemic across the VA medical system.”

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RT @HouseVetAffairs demands more accountability at the Miami VAMC. #Vets deserve better.

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RT @HouseVetAffairs @CongJeffMiller will continue investigations on Miami VAMC. Improper practices at VA medical facilities are unacceptable.

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