

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2506

April 17, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin
Secretary
U.S. Departments of Veteran Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20420

Secretary Shulkin,

As you know, nearly 15% of active duty service personnel are women and that percentage is expected to continue to rise. Women make up the fastest growing demographic of patients seen by the Veterans Health Administration (VA). Now more than ever it is imperative that we take care of those women veterans here at home who have protected and fought for our freedom abroad. It is a commitment we made and a commitment we must keep.

Currently, only 60 out of 168 VA Medical Centers nationwide have on-site access to mammography services. Women veterans who live near and utilize a VA Medical Center without mammography services must obtain a referral to seek those services at a non-VA facility. Recently it was brought to our attention that the VA Medical Centers in Missouri did not provide onsite mammography services but instead sent their veterans off-site to a non-VA provider. Getting regular mammograms is important for detecting breast cancer in its early stages. Requiring women veterans to seek off-site services at non-VA facilities increases the time and steps needed to get this important diagnostic service.

In 2013, the Baltimore VA Medical Center released a study on expansion of mammography services in the VA after their mammography screening program was expanded in 2008 to accommodate the growing female veteran population. According to that study, the center saw a 1200% increase in mammography volume, indicating that they had successfully expanded mammography services in their facility. However, they concluded that "VA hospitals may benefit from acquiring a full complement of on-site breast care services rather than improving flow between VA hospitals and non-VA breast care center having specialized resources."¹

Given the study done by the Baltimore VA Medical Center and the growing number of women veterans, we would like to know the VA's plans for increasing women's health services at VA facilities. Specifically:


- 1) How many referrals a year does the VA administer to women Veterans for mammogram services at non-VA facilities?
- 2) What kind of personnel is needed to provide on-site screening and diagnostic mammography services at VA facilities?

¹ <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamasurgery/fullarticle/1740708>


- 3) How many personnel per facility are needed to provide on-site screening and diagnostic mammography services?
- 4) What are the current requisites used by the VA to determine placement of on-site screening and diagnostic mammography services at VA facilities?
- 5) Does the VA have a long term plan to expand comprehensive breast cancer screening and treatment services at every VA Medical Center?

The women who selflessly serve our country in the military have earned the right to quality care. We must ensure that caring for our veterans is a top priority. It is imperative that we make every effort to provide quality, timely and effective care at the VA.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and we look forward to your response. Should you have any questions or require additional information please contact Julie Moorhead with Rep. Sam Graves' office at Julie.Moorhead@mail.house.gov or 202-225-7041 or Vivian Laiti with Rep. Cleaver's office at Vivian.Laiti@mail.house.gov or 202-225-4535.



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