

House Veterans, Military and Homeland Security Committee

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Veteran/Military/Homeland Security Comm.

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Good Morning Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak today on behalf of The Department of Veterans Affairs facilities in Kansas. My name is Laura Snow; I am the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) Program Manager for VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System (EKHCS).

Background:

Kansas has two VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) on three campuses, thirteen Community Based Outreach Clinics (CBOCs) and two Veteran Centers. All of which provide mental health services to Veterans and their families. Attachments A

Mental Health Coverage:

- o The VA Medical Center operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- o The nursing telephone triage line is available from 4:00pm to 8:00am, 7 days a week.
- o The National Crisis Hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- o The VAMCs and the Veteran Centers offers group, individual, marriage and family counseling at a wide variety of convenient hours.
- o The Community Based Outreach Clinics are required to have professional medical and mental health staff, provide access to diagnostic testing, have treatment capability, and will make referral arrangements as needed.

What makes us uniquely qualified to treat veterans?

- o VAMCs are a Veteran-focused culture. All the patients are Veterans, many of our staff are Veteran's, and our professional development is focused on Veteran issues.
- o By seeking services through a VAMC, we become the lynchpin in their treatment plan. The Veteran has access to a wide variety of mental health services not just in one of our facilities, but throughout our nation.
- o The VHA has a national electronic medical record system. A Veteran can have access to medical records from any VA facility.
- o A treatment team is designed to closely monitor high risk Veterans through our Suicide Prevention Program

As I mentioned earlier, the VHA system is a Veteran-focused culture. The VHA can offer integrated Primary Care and Mental Health services. While many different

organizations may offer all of these same services, the VHA offers them in one service network that recognizes and treats issues that are unique to Veterans.

Outreach:

Each VAMC is mandated to host an annual Welcome Home Event for Veterans. EKHCS recently hosted an event this year at the Topeka Zoo. Forty two different agencies were on hand to answer questions and provide information to Veterans and their families. Five hundred and forty six Veterans and family members attend this event. Plans are underway to replicate this event in western Kansas.

The Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) Program has a large outreach component. The team consists of a Program Manager and Clinical Case Manager(s). Case managers work closely with Military Treatment Facilities (MTF) and the Department of Defense (DOD) to ensure that Veterans make a seamless transition from active duty to Veteran status. VAMCs provide deploying and demobilizing soldiers information on services available to them following their deployment. VAMCs attend Demobilizations, Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Programs (YRRP), Post Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRAs), Gray Area Briefings and works closely with the Warrior Transition Units (WTUs) to ensure that Soldiers, Veterans and families are provided with a host of resources to assist with the reintegration process. The resources include but are not limited to; physical and mental health access, symptoms and how they manifest, financial resources, how to access their VA Home Loan Benefit, utilize their GI Bill, how to file a service connection claim, check on an existing claim, file an increase on a claim. When appropriate, a referral for a Gulf War Registry Exam is provided. OEF/OIF/OND era Veterans are provided with contact information for their local OEF/OIF/OND team.

Kansas also hosts a VA Health Resource Center (HRC). The HRC is a call center that receives phone calls from Veterans across the nation but in the last five years has expanded their service to include making outreach phone calls to OEF/OIF/OND and Women Veterans informing them of resources available to them in their specific location.

Conclusion:

In response to the increased number of Veterans seeking mental health services, the VAMCs in Kansas have added 104 behavioral health service staff members in the last five years. These staff members have allowed Kansas VA facilities to increase the number of mental health visits provided to our Veterans and families. Kansas VAMCs strive to meet the needs of our nation's heroes by redesigning and adding programs to fit the changing requirements of the Veteran cohort. It is also important to point out that not every Veteran has a physical or a mental health need. So the number of Veterans living in Kansas does not coincide with the number of Veterans that require services.

What I would like you to most remember from my testimony today is that the VHA is a Veteran-focused culture and in the last three years has made great strides in outreach

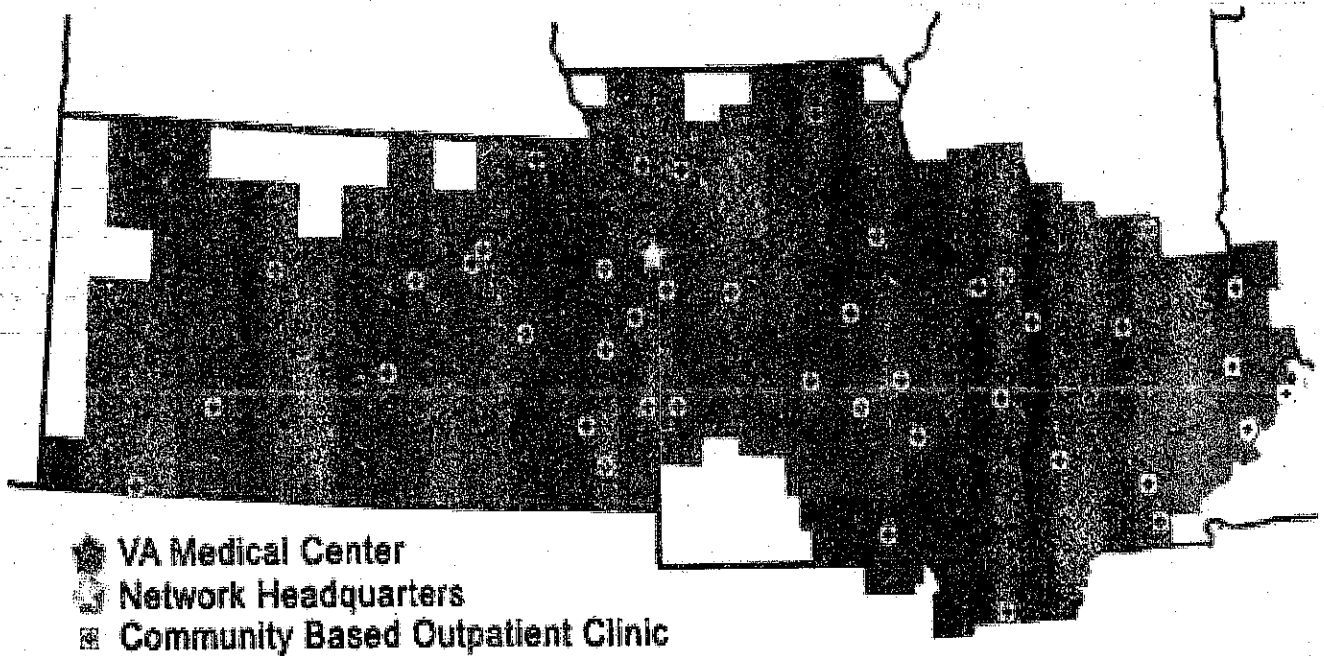
efforts. VHA currently has collaborative relationships with all branches of the Department of Defense, The Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Community Mental Health Centers, local Colleges and Universities as well as a host of community agencies that provide resources to Veterans.

VHA participates in the Army's Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee (ISFAC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administrations (SAMHSA) Military Families Strategic Initiative, Service Systems Development Program (SSDP).

We are all here because we care about Veterans. I have the upmost respect for all of my fellow presenters and look forward to our continued work in providing outstanding care to our Military, Veterans and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, again for the opportunity to present today.

VA Heartland Medical Facilities and Outpatient Clinics Map
Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 15



The VA Heartland Network (VISN 15) includes seven VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) on eight campuses and forty-two community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) in six states (Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Arkansas, Kentucky and Indiana).