

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE
CAPITAL ASSET REALIGNMENT FOR ENHANCED SERVICES
(CARES) COMMISSION

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SUBJECT: EGLIN AFB SHARING INITIATIVES AND
FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

STATEMENT OF: COLONEL GARY S. FORTHMAN
COMMANDER, EGLIN AFB HOSPITAL

26 AUGUST 2003

Mr. Chairman:

It is an honor to have the opportunity to discuss with you how the 96th Medical Group is working with the VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System to provide comprehensive, quality healthcare to the veterans and patriots of Okaloosa County.

The men and women of the 96th Medical Group place enormous value on our relationship with the VA. We wholeheartedly subscribe to the promise of improved service to our patients and realize economies of scale that the sharing of healthcare resources holds.

The focus of our efforts is to cultivate the relationship through sharing arrangements first. We started this with an Ear, Nose and Throat physician in

December 2002. As this collaborative effort strengthens I envision moving the relationship from one of sharing to a proactive partnership that meets the missions of both agencies while benefiting the servicemember, veteran and taxpayer.

In this partnership we must continue to address the ongoing challenges of different, but not mutually exclusive, missions, populations and cultures. Our military treatment facilities are constantly involved in wartime readiness and training activities. As we continue to respond to the ever-changing health care environment, we must develop creative approaches to health care delivery while retaining the flexibility to respond to the demands of our dual mission of deployed and in-garrison healthcare delivery.

Establishing a Community Based Outpatient Clinic at Eglin Air Force Base is a tremendous step forward in caring for our great veteran patriots. It opens the door to opportunities for further integration of services that may not currently be feasible. This clinic will dramatically improve access to timely, cost-effective, quality health care services to veterans in Florida. As the construction and renovation project in our current hospital nears completion in late 2005, our partnership with the VA will have the ability to move towards a seamless

continuum of inpatient care, and selected outpatient care, while also enhancing the range of services available to DoD beneficiaries.

However, our partnership must not be limited to just the VA and DoD. It must include fostering close relations with all our healthcare partners in the surrounding communities. Their diversity and expanded capabilities are essential for both agencies to successfully execute their missions.

I share a common vision of quality health care for our men and women serving our country, their families, and those that have served us so well in the past. Our concern for the well-being of our servicemembers extends beyond just their time on active duty. The men and women of the 96th Medical Group look forward to working with the VA and our colleagues in the community to make this happen. This will definitely be a win for the VA, a win for the DoD and a huge win for the American taxpayer!

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to report on the challenges and opportunities at Eglin Air Force Base. Thank you for your continued advocacy and support of our nation's veterans, and for taking care of the men and women who have served and continue to serve this great nation.