

TESTIMONY

DOUGLAS A. WALLIN
ACTING DIRECTOR

VA REGIONAL OFFICE, PITTSBURGH, PA

VBA
Panel 4

AUGUST 27, 2003

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the CARES Program as it relates to the Pittsburgh VA Regional Office.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is fully supportive of the goals of the CARES Program.

As Acting Director of the VA Regional Office in Pittsburgh, I can attest to the positive relationship enjoyed with VISN 4 and especially the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System as we both strive to assure that veterans receive the full care and benefits to which they are entitled. Our combined efforts to process veterans claims for compensation quickly and accurately have been highly successful.

As a result of the CARES planning process and the joint VBA and VHA co-location efforts, five goals were established to evaluate potential co-location opportunities. These are:

- Improve Service to Veterans
- Improve Operational Efficiency
- Reduce Net Costs
- Maximize Use of VA Assets and
- Improve Employee Working Conditions

The planned construction of additional space at the Heinz division of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System affords an opportunity for the Pittsburgh VA Regional Office to co-locate at the Pittsburgh health care facility. Such a co-location would reduce costs of leasing current space while providing the veteran the opportunity to receive health care and benefit services at the same place. I support the plan to include VBA co-location in the construction planning.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you or the members of the Commission may have.

BUTLER HEALTH SYSTEM

JOSEPH A. STEWART, CHE
President and Chief Executive Officer

August 15, 2003

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Mr. Everett Alvarez, Jr.
Department of Veterans Affairs
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Dear Mr. Alvarez:

I am in receipt of your invitation to appear at the hearing before the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission taking place at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System on August 27 at 10:00am. I look forward to providing oral testimony before the Commission on this day. This letter serves as a written statement in support of the oral testimony that I will be providing.

Butler Memorial Hospital (BMH) is an independent, not-for-profit community hospital that has been serving the residents of Butler County, PA and the surrounding area for over 100 years. The community we serve is made up of nearly 200,000 people. We are a full-service acute care healthcare organization.

The hospital is at point in time in which its Board of Trustees is answering a very important question: Should critical expansion needs be addressed on the existing campus or at a new location? We believe that the CARES process may create an exciting opportunity for the Butler Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) and Butler Memorial Hospital to create a state-of-the-art healthcare delivery system for both veterans and community residents, on the existing campus of the Butler VAMC.

The option of developing a new hospital on the campus of the Butler VA Medical Center is an opportunity to build upon what is already a very successful track record of working together:

- Together, we just completed the 2nd successful joint agreement in the provision of CAT scan services
- A number of BMH physicians are consultants at the Butler VAMC
- BMH provides diagnostic imaging services at the Butler VAMC and at BMH
- The Butler VAMC performs some laboratory tests for BMH
- Butler area veterans requiring medical, surgical, and psychiatric care are often admitted and treated at BMH
- We have a reciprocal agreement to provide aid to each other in the event of a disaster

Furthermore, we believe that an enhanced use agreement between the Butler VA Medical Center and Butler Memorial Hospital would allow the following benefits to be realized:

- A truly innovative model could be developed that would demonstrate to the country how a VA/private sector partnership could facilitate and contribute to the well-being and health of veterans and community members alike
- A wide continuum of the best care available would be provided in one location with convenient access
- The VA could meet very substantial projected demand for specialty and ancillary services through BMH
- This project would meet the President's management agenda, specifically the goal on pursuing partnerships with community organizations
- This project would meet the Secretary's priority areas, specifically operational efficiency and co-location.

CARES gives the Butler VA Medical Center and Butler Memorial Hospital an incredible opportunity to build on our longstanding successful relationship. Together, we can demonstrate to the country that Veterans Affairs and the private sector can work together to provide nothing less than world-class healthcare to veterans and communities.

It is our hope that such a partnership can be achieved in a timeframe beneficial to the peoples we serve.

I am available to you and the Commission at your pleasure to discuss and answer any further questions that you may have. Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely yours,



Joseph A. Stewart
President & CEO
Butler Memorial Hospital