

August 21, 2003

Mr. Everett Alvarez, Jr.
Chairman
CARES Commission
Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of the Secretary

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I am Dr.Carolynn Masters, Chairperson and Director of Gannon University's Villa Maria School of Nursing, Erie, Pennsylvania. On behalf of Gannon University, I am pleased to have the opportunity to present testimony and discuss the proposed Market Plan for the Erie area.

Following my reviewed of the *Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services* (CARES) Commission plan, I have identified the following points regarding the proposed changes.

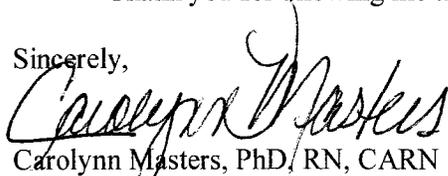
First, the Department of Veterans Affairs philosophy states that it is committed to provide a full range of health care services to the veteran population. The Veteran Affairs Medical Center is more than the bricks and mortar of a facility. The Veteran Affairs Medical Center is a place where individuals can go to receive comprehensive health care. The Erie Veterans Affairs Medical Center has successfully implemented contracted urological and orthopedic surgical services. In doing so, the Veterans Affairs Medical Center has demonstrated that it can remain fiscally responsible while holding true to the philosophy and mission of the Veterans Affairs.

Second, CARES purpose is to improve access to health care while addressing impact on staffing, the community, and the Veterans Affairs mission. The Erie Veterans Affairs serves seven counties across a very large, rural area. There already exists a concern that individuals in this area have limited access to health care. By decreasing services such as inpatient surgery, individual's access to health care may be further compromised. It could be difficult for individuals to travel the distance to Pittsburgh, Buffalo, or Cleveland. It could also prove a hardship on family members and friends who are necessary support systems for the patient undergoing surgery.

Finally, the Veterans Affairs is committed to providing quality health care to the population it serves. The term "quality" is very subjective, dependent upon individual patient perception. Perception of quality health care is dependent upon meeting their needs and access to health care. The Erie Veteran Affairs Medical Center has consistently received high quality ratings from the population it serves and should continue to do so.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to voice my opinion.

Sincerely,



Carolynn Masters, PhD, RN, CARN
Chairperson and Director
Villa Maria School of Nursing
Gannon University

Pittsburgh 8-27-03
Paul G

Testimony – Dr. Loren Roth

Pittsburgh health care institutions are recognized as some of the finest in the world. The University of Pittsburgh and the VA facilities in this network enjoy a strong and vibrant affiliation and the physician staff serving the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System is comprised of some of the finest providers the area has to offer. As VA Pittsburgh has provided training to physicians, the university has tracked the improvements in quality of service delivery with considerable pride. Among other innovations, the implementation of computerized patient records has afforded VA Pittsburgh the opportunity to demonstrate excellence in preventive care. The recent recognition of the cardiac surgery program is but one of many indicators of the consistently high quality of care that area veterans receive. The university and VA also collaborate in many areas of clinical research critical to the future of modern health care.

The projected growth in care demand by veterans in the area presents an opportunity to prepare to meet their needs through infrastructure enhancement. The plan for the western market of VISN 4 is well developed to support the predicted growth.

Of primary interest to the University of Pittsburgh, as an affiliate partner, is the proposal to consolidate the three divisions of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System into two. We support this proposal if fully funded for several, critical reasons. The modern facilities this plan proposes are an essential precursor to the delivery of excellent care. Patient confidence in and comfort with their care are enhanced when it is delivered in an

aesthetically appealing environment designed to meet modern space and privacy standards. The growing proportion of female veterans who will be seeking care in the coming decades demands additional attention to privacy that can be incorporated into the building of replacement space. Locating behavioral health services adjacent to the university will open opportunities for training and research that have been challenging to this point, given the burden of travel between the university and the other division. Another consideration important in our support of this plan is the efficiency that VA Pittsburgh can gain by maintaining two modernized facilities, rather than three. The efficiency realized will support investment into the high cost equipment essential to the continued delivery of state-of-the-art care. This type of care is critical to the training of the nation's future physicians, but more importantly will support the delivery of the outstanding care that America's veterans deserve.