

## SITE VISIT REPORT

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- I. VISN Visited  
**VISN 15**
  
- II. Dates of Trip  
June 30 – July 2
  
- III. Sites Visited During Trip
  - a. Poplar Bluff, MO
  - b. Kansas City, MO
  - c. Leavenworth, KS
  
- IV. Commissioners/Staff in Attendance  
Commissioner Ray Boland  
Commissioner Patricia Vandenberg  
Commission Staff: Pamela Graff
  
- V. Overview of Visit to Poplar Bluff
  - a. Commissioner/Staff Impressions of Tour

The Commissioners and staff unanimously agreed that the site visit was beneficial and provided the Commissioners insight into the issues facing the network and the Poplar Bluff facility. Additionally, this experience allowed Commissioners and staff to appreciate the rural nature of the Poplar Bluff facility and the great distances veterans travel to receive care in this market area.

Commissioners also commented on the benefit this site visit had on overall stakeholder perceptions with regard to the CARES process and on the role of the Commission.

- b. Summary of Meeting(s) with VISN Leadership (can combine if more than one meeting)
  - i. Attendees
    - 1. Nancy Arnold, Medical Center Director
    - 2. Vijayachandran K. Nair, MD, Chief of Staff
    - 3. Sydney L. Wertenberger, Clinical Coordinator Primary Care/CBOC, Nurse Executive
    - 4. DeWayne Coleman, Staff Assistant
  
  - ii. Meeting Forum  
Breakfast meeting with medical center leadership

iii. Topics of Discussion

Medical Center leadership provided an informal overview of the facility, past and current initiatives, and their perception of the overall CARES process.

iv. What did we learn? Outline potential issues for hearings

Commissioners learned that the facility is a significant distance from other available care in the VA system. Currently, it is not uncommon for veterans to travel 60-80 miles to receive care in the VISN 15 Eastern Market. Poplar Bluff is a small facility with 16 operating internal medicine inpatient beds that do not meet the current demand for care (occupancy rate is at 112%). These beds serve the local veteran population as well as admissions from the 40 bed long term care unit at the Poplar Bluff facility. Removing these inpatient beds means that veterans would be required to travel 150 miles to the St. Louis facility for care.

Poplar Bluff is an innovative site and was an early adopter of the CBOC concept, which has been highly successful in this rural region. Commissioners visited a CBOC that is collocated with the state veterans home in Cape Girardeau and were impressed with the facilities and the federal/state partnership.

c. Summary of Stakeholder Meeting(s)

i. Describe Meeting Forum

Stakeholder meeting was held as a MAC

ii. Stakeholders Represented

State Director, Individual veterans, veterans organizations, local union leadership, DoD, Congressional staff members for Senator Kit Bond and Congresswoman Joanne Emerson. (Approx. 40 attendees)

iii. Topics of Discussion

Generally, veterans expressed concern about future deterioration of services at Poplar Bluff as a result of the CARES process. This meeting allowed Commissioners to explain the role of the CARES Commission and to dispel misperceptions on the purpose of CARES.

iv. What did we learn? Outline potential issues for hearings

Commissioners should expect solid Congressional presence at the Poplar Bluff hearing. There is significant stakeholder interest in retaining inpatient services at the Poplar Bluff facility.

VI. Overview of Visit to Kansas City and Leavenworth

a. Commissioner/Staff Impressions of Tour

Kansas City is a large, tertiary care center and teaching facility that has undergone significant renovations over the last several years. A number of these changes have been undertaken to accommodate an increasing need for outpatient care and to update an old facility. Parts of the facility have been retro-fitted to accommodate outpatient care, but the infrastructure is not well suited for this type of care delivery, leading to inefficient patient flow and limited available waiting space. Kansas City is operating at capacity and must frequently divert patients to other facilities.

Leavenworth is an acute care facility with a focus on primary care, psychiatric treatment, and extended care supported by nursing home care units and a domiciliary for homeless veterans. This facility provides ER and psychiatry services to DoD beneficiaries at Fort Leavenworth. It is located on a campus with historic post-Civil War VA buildings that are currently being assessed for an enhanced use initiative with a local developer.

b. Summary of Meeting(s) with VISN Leadership (can combine if more than one meeting)

i. Attendees

Peter Almenoff, VISN Director

Robert Malone, Director VAEKHCS

Kent Hill, Director Kansas City Medical Center

Staff

ii. Meeting Forum

Dinner with VISN Director

Meeting with Kansas City Medical Center Staff

Meeting with Leavenworth Medical Center Staff

Facility Tours

iii. Topics of Discussion

Kansas City and Network leadership team provided a comprehensive overview of VISN 15, the facilities, and overall issues. This included a review of the CARES Process and current planning initiatives. Network and facility staff shared views on the CARES process and on the data, initiatives, and significant forecasted growth for this network.

Leavenworth staff provided an overview of the mission of this facility, DoD sharing initiatives, enhanced use proposals, and concerns regarding the proximity issue with Kansas City raised during the CARES process.

iv. What did we learn? Outline potential issues for hearings

Commissioners learned that the missions of Kansas City and Leavenworth facilities are significantly different with little overlap or duplication of services. This is significant in light of the proximity issue raised during the CARES process between these two facilities. Additionally, since Kansas City is operating at capacity, the possibility of assuming additional workload does not seem to be plausible at the present time.

Finally, we learned that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs recently visited Leavenworth and publicly promised that the site would not be closed.

c. Summary of Stakeholder Meeting(s)

i. Describe Meeting Forum

Stakeholder meeting was held as a MAC

ii. Stakeholders Represented

Individual veterans, veterans organizations, State Director, Congressional staff for Senator Kit Bond, enhanced use partner. (Approx. 20 attendees)

iii. Topics of Discussion

There was significant concern voiced about the possibility of the possible closure of the Leavenworth facility. Additionally, several attendees discussed Sen. Graham's letter and its mention of the Leavenworth facility.

iv. What did we learn? Outline potential issues for hearings

Commissioners should expect solid Congressional presence at the Leavenworth hearing including possibly Senator Bond.

VI. VISN Related Comments

Network did an outstanding job organizing and facilitating the Commission visit.