

CARES Commission Site Visit Report

VISN 16: VA South Central Health Care Network/Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System

Dates of Visit: Sep. 3, 2003

Sites Visited: VAMC Little Rock, Arkansas
VAMC North Little Rock, Arkansas

CARES Commissioners/Staff:

Commissioner Joseph Binard

Randy Estes, Commission Staff

Overview of Site Visit:

VAMC Little Rock is a tertiary medical center with strong affiliation to the University of Arkansas. **VAMC North Little Rock** is primarily a long-term care facility with Nursing Home, Psychiatry, and Domiciliary inpatient beds/ SCI out patient clinic. The purpose of the site visit was to evaluate the recommendation from the draft national plan to locate a new 30-bed Spinal Cord Injury unit at the North Little Rock campus.

VA Representatives in Attendance/Name & Title:

George H. Gray, Jr. Director
Robert D. Shimp, Associate Director
Dr. Nicholas Lang, Chief of Staff
Dr. Robert Safirstein, Chief of Medicine
Dr. James Phillips, Assistant Chief of Medicine
Dr. Sarkis Nazarian, Chief of Neurology
Dr. Richard Gray, Chief of Physical Medicine and rehabilitation Service
Dr. William White, Associate Chief of Staff for Education and Operations
Dr. Jeff Clothier, Associate Chief of Staff for Mental Health Services
Landrum Marshall, Chief Prosthetics and Sensory Aid services
Julie Brandt, Chief Nursing services
Edith Altheimer, Chief Social Work
Ray Lipin, Chief Engineering Service
Danny Ketchum, Facility planner
Eunice Biddle, Prosthetics and Sensory Aid Services
Fran Ragsdale, Surgery Service
Judy Seidenschnur, Mental Health Services
Marie Lisko, Surgery Service

We were also met by the PVA representative, Mr. Cliff Dupree.

Tours of Facility:

Little Rock VAMC: Mr. Gray led a driving tour of the campus, pointing out the severe shortage of usable land around the facility and the lack of sufficient parking. Of significant interest was an abandoned facility adjacent to the campus that belongs to the State of Arkansas. The land included in this property would be a valuable addition to the parking capabilities if it could be transferred to the VA and the building demolished. Also of interest is a very new facility associated with the University dedicated to spinal injury research and treatment that is located adjacent to the VA campus.

North Little Rock VAMC: Mr. Gray led a driving tour around the outside of the campus and a walking tour inside. This campus is located @ 10 miles across the river from the Little Rock campus and has significantly larger grounds and available space for a building site.

Exit Briefing with Facility Leadership:

A large conference was held with all the significant leadership both clinical and administrative to discuss the options for locating a new SCI unit in the Little Rock area. A significant point that came from this discussion is that the impetus for this proposal did not originate with the original development of the CARES market plan either at the local or the Network 16 level. The proposal was included in the draft National Plan as part of the work done in the undersecretary's office after the original CARES plans were submitted. Little support, either on a basis of need or practicality, was shown for the proposal. Most of the discussion centered around the pro's and con's of locating the unit at the Little Rock campus versus the North Little Rock campus. These are listed below:

PRO'S:

- Access to 24-hour medical and surgical and support services (required by SCI patients)
- Easier to recruit and maintain specialty clinicians
- Supports affiliation
- Good potential for relationship with new Spine Research Facility

CON'S:

- More difficult to build on congested campus
- Construction will cost more
- Parking needs likely will require a new parking structure

Recommendation:

IF demographic data clearly shows the need for a new SCI acute inpatient unit in the Little Rock area, the most efficient, effective and safe environment for patient care would be at the Little Rock campus, not the North Little Rock campus.

Prepared by: Randy Estes, CARES Commission Staff
September 4, 2003

Approved by: Joseph Binard, MD, CARES Commissioner