

## SITE VISIT REPORT

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**I. VISN 6, VA Healthcare Network, Northwest Market**

**II. Date of Visit:** July 1, 2003

**III. Sites Visited During Trip:**  
Beckley, West Virginia

**IV. Commissioners/Staff in Attendance:**  
CHAIRMAN EVERETT ALVAREZ, JR.  
COMMISSIONER ROBERT RAY  
COMMISSION STAFF: CAROLYN ADAMS

**V. Overview of Visit to Beckley,  
Commissioner/Staff Impressions of Tour**

The Beckley Medical Center was constructed in 1948 and is a well-maintained, immaculate facility. The Medical Center has current construction to add a third floor to the clinic addition. The original clinic addition was completed in 1995. This addition will provide more outpatient primary care treatment area.

The Medical Center appeared to be well organized with appropriate staffing to provide patient care.

**Summary of Meeting with VISN Leadership:**

**Names and titles of Attendees:**

Mark Shelhorse, M.D. VISN 6 Chief Medical Officer  
Jerry Husson, Director, Beckley VAMC  
Stephen Lemons, Director, Salem VAMC  
Brian Stiller, Associate Director, Beckley, VAMC  
David Crandall, M.D., Chief of Staff, Beckley, VAMC  
Dan Mueller, VISN 6 Planning Manager  
Pam Howell, VISN Communications Manager  
Mark Hall, VSSC Cares Consultant for VISN 6  
Butch Miller, VISN 6, VSO CARES liaison

**Meeting Forum:**

The Meeting was an informal session with Dan Mueller giving an overview of the VISN 6 markets. Mr. Husson and Mr. Lemons reviewed the Northwest Market.

**What did we learn:**

The Northwest Market contained a small facility planning initiative. Beckley is projected to have fewer than 40 beds in FY 2022. The health status of the population in West Virginia is one of the worst in the nation. The economy is very depressed with coal mining being the major source of employment. There are geographic barriers with a 5 hour driving time to a tertiary medical center.

There is limited healthcare capacity in the community. Beckley Medical Center management has inquired about community bed availability, Raleigh General would only provide one bed. Beckley ARH had no bed availability.

Beckley refers its specialty care to the Salem, VAMC or the Richmond, VAMC. The Salem, VAMC and Beckley, VAMC are in the same market and have a very good working relationship and a good patient referral program.

Beckley has defined itself as a Critical Access Hospital based upon the fact that there is no availability for veteran healthcare in the Community.

Beckley is to have a loss of its two surgical beds by 2010. Most of their current surgeries are on an outpatient basis but they feel they have a need for a few surgical beds if they have to keep patients overnight.

Beckley has proposed construction of a 70-bed nursing home increasing its long-term care bed capacity to 120. Construction funding has not been approved. The Commissioners noted that Beckley has experienced a small decline in their extended care program and wonder why a new nursing home unit is proposed.

West Virginia has no State VA Nursing Homes although there is a groundbreaking scheduled in Clarksburg, WV soon.

An access road leading directly into the Beckley, VAMC from I-64 has been proposed in the State legislature. Although it was not funded this year, local management indicated they felt it would be funded within the next two years.

VISN and local management have had continuous communication with the stakeholders. This has been accomplished through meetings with their VISN Veterans Advisory Council (VAC), town meetings, mass mailings, and through their internet site. They have had little feedback from any stakeholders including employee representatives.

Beckley has an affiliation with the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine. Although, it currently has no students from the school.

**Items Outstanding Questions/Follow-up:** None

**Summary of Stakeholder Meeting(s)**

**Describe Meeting Forum**

The meeting was an informal session with Chairman Alvarez giving an overview of the Commission and the Commission hearings. Attendees introduced themselves. Open discussion followed the introductions.

**Stakeholders Represented:**

Harvey Davis, Retired Enlisted Association, Chapter 102  
Kathy Hendricks, WV Department of Veterans Affairs  
Jack Tincher, Chairman, WV Veterans Coalition  
Douglas Gorsuch, AL Post 100 & VFW Post 6723  
Lee Fisher, Adjutant, AL Post 33  
Jacob Stafford, DAV National Executive Committee & DAV Chapter 56  
Joseph Johnson, President, AFGE Local 2198

**Topics of Discussion:**

The group discussed the economy of West Virginia as well as the commute times to tertiary care. They were concerned if Beckley closed, care would be through referral to Salem, Durham or Richmond and that would be too far for family participation in the Veterans care.

They expressed their concerns about the quality of the community healthcare and indicated the local hospitals had waiting times. They did not feel the numbers CARES based its decisions on were accurate and the migration had not been taken into consideration.

They felt included in the CARES process and had received monthly briefings. They want to continue to receive updates and communication.

They were very positive about local management, the VET center and the care they received at Beckley. They were most complimentary of the women's clinic.

**VISN Related Comments: None**

*Prepared by:* Carolyn Adams

*Approved by:* Chairman Everett Alvarez  
Commissioner Bob Ray