



**Claire McCaskill**

United States Senator

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Summary Report:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Integrated Service Network 15 Medical Centers  
Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital

**Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program**

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Report No: 2015 – COL – 03



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<http://www.mccaskill.senate.gov>



## **Columbia Region Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program**

Since arriving in the United States Senate, Senator Claire McCaskill has made keeping our nation's promises to veterans one of her highest priorities. As the daughter of a World War II veteran, Claire knows the vital sacrifices that veterans have made for the security of our country and in defense of our core values and freedoms. In return for their service, she believes that our country owes veterans a sacred debt of gratitude, which includes access to safe, quality, reliable medical care through our U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system of hospitals and clinics, both in Missouri and across the country.

Following a series of highly-publicized incidents in 2010, which called into question the standard of care provided by the St. Louis VA Medical Center - John Cochran Division, Claire reached out to Missouri veterans and VA administrators to address the erosion of confidence in the overall quality of care and customer service at John Cochran VA Medical Center. Although many veterans report positive experiences with the medical care at John Cochran, concerns persist among veterans with the customer service they receive at the Center and, to a lesser extent, other VA medical facilities in Missouri. In response, Claire announced plans for a "secret shopper" program for veterans—formally named the Veterans Customer Satisfaction Program—to rate the quality of service at Missouri VA facilities and to provide the VA with targeted, helpful feedback about veterans' positive and negative experiences at the VA medical centers.

Following the announcement of the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program, Claire and her staff collaborated with leaders from various Missouri veterans' organizations and VA administrators to shape the program. Through this collaboration, a constructive, confidential survey was developed that would be useful to the VA medical centers and act as an independent resource for veterans to make recommendations. The Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program acts as an independent, transparent voice for veterans. It has three major goals:

- (1) Improve communications between veterans and VA medical center personnel;
- (2) Improve overall customer service ratings of VA medical centers in Missouri; and
- (3) Improve the willingness of veterans to positively recommend Missouri VA medical facilities to other veterans.

This report represents the third Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report for the Columbia region facilities and includes a continuing compilation of survey data as reported directly by Missouri veterans.



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CLAIRE McCASKILL  
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## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 28, 2015

To the Director of the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital,  
Members of the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital, and Missouri's Veterans:

I am pleased to release the results of my third Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey for the Columbia region. When I first proposed this "secret shopper" program, I told you that I would not be happy until Missouri's veterans are happy. I meant it then, and I mean it now. After reviewing the responses from this round of surveys, I am encouraged by the strong satisfaction ratings of VA facilities in the Columbia region. In this third Summary Report, Missouri veterans, again, give strong satisfaction ratings to the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital. However, there is still room for improvement in the amount of time it takes to see a provider and in communication between the VA and veterans. Overall, the results confirm my belief that we are maintaining a high rate of veterans' confidence in the Truman VA.

I remain appreciative of the hard work and professionalism shown by the VA administrators, employees and staff. I know they are committed, as I am, to continue striving for improvements to ensure veterans have nothing but positive experiences while at Missouri VA medical centers. It appears that the leadership at the Columbia VA Medical Center recognize their tremendous obligation in serving Missouri's veterans, and I appreciate their commitment to responding to the concerns expressed to me in these surveys within 30 days.

Additionally, I am grateful for the help and support from my partners at the Columbia Region VA and several Missouri veterans' organizations. However, most importantly, I am grateful to our veterans for their service, sacrifice and support for the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program. Together we *can* and *will* improve the quality of customer care in Missouri's VA medical facilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claire McCaskill". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "M".

Claire McCaskill  
United States Senator

The following members of my staff participated in the preparation of this report:

Kristen Wright

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**Would you like your voice heard?**

Veterans can complete a survey of their current experience at a VA facility at:

<http://mccaskill.senate.gov/vcsp/>.



## REPORT

We have reviewed the responses received from the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program (VCSP) survey for the Columbia region. The small number of survey results that we received from veterans visiting VA medical centers in other regions in the state were reviewed by senate office caseworkers and responded to on a case-by-case basis if casework was necessary. When these survey results from other regions included recommendations for improvements with the overall Veterans Affairs (VA) medical system, we incorporated those comments in the current report. The scope of our review included, but was not necessarily limited to, comments received about the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital and its Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (collectively referred to as Truman VA or VA) through the period ending April 13, 2015. Comments received after that period will be reviewed in the next Summary Report.

The objectives of our review were to:

- Identify specific concerns from veterans regarding the customer service received while interacting with the Truman VA;
- Identify areas where communication can be improved between veterans and the Truman VA;
- Identify criticisms impacting the overall customer service ratings of the Truman VA;
- Identify concerns that impact the willingness of veterans to positively recommend the Truman VA to other veterans;
- Report the full range of responses received from the veterans regarding the Truman VA; and
- Issue a public report of the survey conclusions and resolutions of any identified issues.

Our methodology included reviewing responses submitted on the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program surveys, identifying any specific urgent issues and working directly with the veteran to get an immediate response from the VA, and submitting other concerns identified in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program to the VA. Some of the veterans elected not to take immediate action regarding issues identified in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey.

Prior to the issuance of the report, representatives of various veterans' service organizations reviewed the Summary Report and made recommendations for suggested improvements at the VA facilities. Their comments and recommendations have been incorporated in this report.

The VA has provided responses to all recommendations.



### SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) oversees the largest healthcare system in the nation through a network of 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks. Missouri is mostly comprised of Veterans Integrated Service Network 15 with a large portion of Southwestern Missouri in Veterans Integrated Service Network 16 and small portions of Northern Missouri in Veterans Integrated Service Network 23. In order for the VA to gauge the satisfaction of veterans receiving care at individual VA medical centers, the VA established the Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients in 2002. The Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients was designed to consolidate multiple VA health care survey programs into a single program that collects data on both inpatient and outpatient experiences of veterans at a VA medical center. The Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients focuses on the quality of *care*.

With the Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients serving as a blueprint, Senator McCaskill's office, veteran leaders and the VA worked together to develop an independent survey to serve as a resource veterans can use to make recommendations to each individual VA facility regarding the quality of *customer service*.

#### Scope

The scope of this review included those VA facilities located in the Columbia region through the period ending April 13, 2015. In the Columbia region, four hundred (400) veterans completed the entire survey during that period.

Information used to complete this report included:

- Completed surveys from veterans who received care at a VA facility.
- Communications with and information received from representatives from the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Marine Corps League, Vietnam Veterans of America, the Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations, and VA officials.

#### Methodology

During our review, a database established by and internal to the senate office was used to accumulate results and compile data in tabulated form. In instances where veterans reported the need for immediate or urgent assistance in response to their case, additional information was gathered so the VA could respond immediately to their needs.

Survey questionnaires were available through veterans' service organizations, from VA patient representatives and online at [www.mccaskill.senate.gov/vcsp](http://www.mccaskill.senate.gov/vcsp). Veterans self-reported their

customer service experience at the VA facility either directly online or by submitting a written survey to a veterans' service organization or to Senator McCaskill's office that was then entered into the database.

All survey responses, excluding any identifying respondent information, were provided to the VA. In addition, all completed surveys were reviewed independently by representatives of the veterans' service organizations who reviewed comments to be included in the report. Reported comments were chosen based on the significance and relevance of the comment to the given statement. Those comments not selected for reporting were taken into consideration when writing the report but were not directly quoted due to the comments not having as significant a level of relevance to the statement presented, the comments missing key information to draw a conclusion, or volume.

Beginning with the current Summary Report, survey questions and rating scales appear differently from previous reports. In previous versions of the survey, veterans were posed questions with binary response options: "Yes" or "No." Going forward, survey questions and response options have been rewritten to allow veterans to choose an appropriate response in a range of options from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Survey questions now appear as a statement, and veterans have rated their agreement with the statement on a scale spanning 1 through 5, where "5" indicated Strong Agreement and "1" indicated Strong Disagreement.

### **Limitations**

Data presented are compiled from survey information submitted voluntarily by veterans. The comments included were obtained directly from the surveys. These comments were not verified by the senate office through additional procedures for accuracy, validity or completeness.

This is not meant to be a scientifically-constructed study.



## OBSERVATIONS & RESULTS

### Background

This Summary Report covers the period ending April 13, 2015. During this period, four hundred (400) veterans completed the survey for the Columbia region. In the survey, veterans reported the era that they served. All eras of veterans from World War II to present day were represented with Vietnam era veterans comprising sixty-four percent (64%) of the respondents. Some veterans indicated that they served in multiple eras of service. Below is a table which details the service eras of veterans participating in the survey:

WWII	1.0%
Korean War	8.3%
Vietnam War	64.0%
Desert Shield/Desert Storm	16.3%
Iraq/Afghanistan	12.8%
Other	13.5%

Veterans also specified which VA facility they visited. More than seventy-seven percent (77%) of the veterans indicated that they had received services at the Harry S. Truman VA Medical Center in Columbia. Some veterans indicated that they received services from multiple facilities at the Truman VA. Below is a table which describes where the veterans received care:

Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital	77.8%
Fort Leonard Wood CBOC	4.3%
Jefferson City CBOC	3.5%
Kirksville CBOC	3.5%

Lake of the Ozarks CBOC	6.8%
Mexico CBOC	3.0%
Sedalia CBOC	2.8%
St. James CBOC	5.3%
Other	8.8%

These veterans utilized multiple services while at the Truman VA. Four hundred (400) veterans reported using the following categories:

Primary Care	41.3%	Emergency Room	5.0%	Extended Care	1.0%
Outpatient Clinic	12.5%	Mental Health Services	10.8%	Dental	3.5%
Pharmacy	6.8%	X-Ray	10.8%	Laboratory	20.5%
Travel/Enrollment	2.0%	Main Lobby	5.8%	Specialist Visit	22.8%
Inpatient Care	2.5%	Women’s Clinic	0.3%	Spinal Cord Injury Unit	0.3%
Prosthetics	3.0 %	Podiatry	5.8%	Family Health (CHAMPVA)	0.8%
Other	23.5%	(examples: MRI, Ophthalmology, Dermatology, Surgery)			

### **Review of survey question results**

This section summarizes the results of each of the survey questions. Results from the most recent survey (R3) are marked “current,” and results from previous reports (R2 & R1) are also included. Beginning with the current Summary Report, survey questions and rating scales appear differently from previous reports. In previous versions of the survey, veterans were posed questions with binary response options: “Yes” or “No.” Going forward, survey questions and response options have been rewritten to allow veterans to choose an appropriate response in a range of options from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” Survey questions now appear as

a statement, and veterans have rated their agreement with the statement on a scale spanning 1 through 5, where “5” indicated Strong Agreement and “1” indicated Strong Disagreement.

To allow for comparison of results from previous Summary Reports, the current responses have been placed underneath the previous response options for each question.

### 1. Ease of scheduling appointments

The reported ease of scheduling appointments at the Truman VA remained strong for this round of surveys. Veterans’ concerns were noted.

#### I was able to schedule my appointment easily.

	R3 (current)	R2	R1
<b>Yes:</b>		85.2%	82.9%
<b>No:</b>		14.8%	17.1%
<b>Strongly Agree:</b>	56.0%		
<b>Mostly Agree:</b>	23.3%		
<b>Neutral:</b>	8.5%		
<b>Mostly Disagree:</b>	4.5%		
<b>Strongly Disagree:</b>	7.8%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 317 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that scheduling their appointment was easy. Many veterans expressed satisfaction with pre-scheduled appointments, such as regular check-ups. In these situations, veterans indicated that their previous preferences for time and day were noted for future appointments and they were sent a reminder in the mail. However, a few veterans noted that they did not receive a notification or reminder of their pre-scheduled appointment, though they believed they should have. Most veterans who indicated having trouble with making appointments continued to state most of their issues were with scheduling appointments over the phone and being unable to reach VA support staff who could schedule an appointment.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“The initial process was confusing. I had to coordinate with Columbia, then have them make an appointment in Marshfield. The front desk person in Marshfield didn't seem too familiar with the process, and I think I did some steps that weren't actually necessary. She was nice, but I felt a little lost with making my first appointment.”*
- *“I live approximately 93 miles (2 hours) from Columbia VA facility. I must go annually for a physical exam. I have repeatedly asked for assignment to the facility located in Osage Beach which is about 32 miles distant. I am told for over a year now (18) months that I am on a waiting list due to a lack of Doctors in Osage Beach. When I inquire, I am transferred from Dept. to Dept. searching for the proper person who can answer the question regarding re-assignment to Osage Beach without results. Messages have been left, but never a call back. The notice received inviting application to visit a local civilian Doctor*

was met with a "you do not qualify" answer coldly, without explanation. It leaves me with no-one cares attitude."

- "The clinic schedules my appointment on a semi-annual basis, and sets up the appointments well in advance. Their phone calls allow plenty of notice and allow me to postpone if needed."

**Recommendation:** Ensure that the scheduling system is user-friendly for veterans. Implement a reliable message-taking system, so that veterans can get the information they need quickly. Develop a reporting system for veterans who do not receive appointment reminders to make sure the oversight is addressed in a timely manner.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*VA Central Office continues to develop a new scheduling system that will enhance customer service to Veterans who receive care and treatment from the VA healthcare system. In the meantime, our scheduling clerks and Veterans are largely satisfied with systems that support patient scheduling. Truman VA recently implemented redesigned appointment reminder post cards that are mailed to Veterans two weeks prior to their appointments. This has made information clearer and more readable, and includes a map with directions as well as telephone numbers should there be questions. Additionally, our Veterans receive “audiocare” system appointment reminder phone calls two to three days prior to their appointments. Finally, we will continue to emphasize to Veterans that use of the Secure Messaging function within the MyHealtheVet program can be of significant benefit for messages to and from providers including information about appointments.*

**2. Ease of access to the appointment location at the VA facility**

The reported ease of access to the appointment location at the facility was positive for this round of surveys. Veterans’ concerns were noted.

**I was able to find my way to my appointment easily.**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Yes:</b>		97.6%	97.6%
<b>No:</b>		2.4%	2.4%
<b>Strongly Agree:</b>	73.5%		
<b>Mostly Agree:</b>	13.0%		
<b>Neutral:</b>	6.0%		
<b>Mostly Disagree:</b>	2.3%		
<b>Strongly Disagree:</b>	5.3%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 346 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that it was easy to find their way to appointments at the Truman VA. This is a strong sign that the VA has taken the necessary steps to help veterans navigate the VA facilities. Veterans who expressed concerns often mentioned the ongoing renovation that is taking place at the Harry

S. Truman Memorial Veterans’ Hospital, which makes finding a specific room or doctor confusing.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- “You can't walk down a hall way without a person asking if they can help.”
- “Front desk folks are very helpful. I would still prefer an online map and directory.”
- “Have been there before, some remodeling was going on but signage was very clear to get around construction area.”

**Recommendation:** Continue current effort of having greeters and staff assist patients if needed. Continue to update signage and staff when changes are made within the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans’ Hospital while renovations occur. Consider having a room guide on the wall or maps available to help patients find specific rooms.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA will maintain its successful Ambassador Program and the Voluntary Service Program will continue to explore expanding its patient transport volunteer assignment to include helping Veterans get to their clinic appointments. This will be essential as we embark upon several major construction projects that will impact way finding in the facility. The way finding renovation project for the first and second floors of the facility has begun. When it is completed later this summer, we anticipate significant improvement in signage, color scheme and other “landmarks” that will aid Veterans in finding specific areas. Finally, we will update the previously developed map and endeavor to keep it current.*

**3. Cleanliness of the facility**

The reported cleanliness of the VA facilities continues to be very high for this round of surveys. Veterans’ concerns were noted.

**At the time of my visit, the VA facility was clean.**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Excellent:</b>		67.3%	51.2%
<b>Above Average (Good):</b>		22.3%	29.3%
<b>Average/Fair:</b>		8.4%	17.1%
<b>Below Average:</b>		0.4%	2.4%
<b>Poor:</b>		1.6%	0.0%
<b>Strongly Agree:</b>	69.5%		
<b>Mostly Agree:</b>	17.0%		
<b>Neutral:</b>	7.0%		
<b>Mostly Disagree:</b>	2.8%		
<b>Strongly Disagree:</b>	3.8%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 346 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that the VA facility was clean. Many veterans commented positively on the high level of cleanliness in the VA facilities. Almost all of the negative responses stem from the high volume of use in bathrooms and entry areas.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“The clinic is always well-maintained.”*
- *“Bathrooms in main area could have used some cleaning during the day.”*
- *“Being 100% disabled, service-connected, the only place I go for Medical care is the VA here. Never have I observed the Hospital to be in any other condition than really clean. And I've been going there for at least 5 years.”*

**Recommendation:** Continue to have housekeeping monitor high-traffic areas for cleanliness, paying special attention to main entrances and restrooms.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA concurs with the recommendation. The facility’s housekeeping managers and personnel are committed to maintaining a clean and safe environment. During the past year, we added three supervisory housekeeping positions to help with overall management of that important function in our facility.*

**4. Amount of time to be seen by a provider**

In previous rounds of this survey, this question was phrased, “Were you able to be seen by your provider in a reasonable amount of time?” Veterans commented that the intent of this question was unclear, since it could be interpreted to mean the wait time in the lobby on the day of the appointment, or it could be interpreted to mean the wait time between the requested and actual appointment. For this round of surveys, the question was rephrased in order to clarify intent.

The reported reasonableness of the amount of time it took to be seen by a doctor declined slightly this round of surveys, showing an opportunity for improvement. Despite the VA’s efforts to complete all new appointments within 30 days of scheduling, there are still many veterans who believe they are waiting an unreasonable amount of time to receive care.

**From the date I initially requested the appointment, I was able to be seen by my provider in a reasonable amount of time.**

	R3 (current)	R2	R1
<b>Yes:</b>		85.3%	78.0%
<b>No:</b>		14.7%	22.0%
<b>Strongly Agree:</b>	51.3%		
<b>Mostly Agree:</b>	20.0%		

<b>Neutral:</b>	12.8%		
<b>Mostly Disagree:</b>	4.8%		
<b>Strongly Disagree:</b>	11.3%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 285 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were able to see their provider in a reasonable amount of time at the Truman VA. There is still improvement to be made in wait times to receive care from the VA.

Many veterans who reported a longer-than-expected wait time attributed the problem to low staffing levels at VA facilities. Others who expressed concerns were in situations where care either required visiting a different Truman VA facility for follow-up or a specialist visit, or going outside of the VA system to receive care. Veterans indicated that these situations created long wait times due to miscommunication or lengthy communication between facilities and providers.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“It was only about 2 weeks from the time after I requested a hearing test, which is very reasonable.”*
- *“No problem with the original appointment with the Mexico clinic but they recommended that I go to physical therapy. It took two weeks just to get an evaluation appointment at the Columbia VA hospital then another three weeks to actually get an appointment for physical therapy. It was five weeks from recommendation to actually getting a start date for physical therapy.”*
- *“They do the best they can with the staff they have. I used to see my Doctor about every 6 to 7 months. Now it is more like 12 months or more.”*

**Recommendation:** Continue filling vacancies in a timely manner to help reduce wait times and increase the Medical Center’s capacities in critical areas. Continue to hire new providers in high-demand and specialty areas to ease pressure on current providers. Streamline referrals so that veterans can quickly receive care they need, especially when the veteran needs to visit a new VA location or a private provider.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA has been diligent in filling vacant clinical positions when they occur. During FY 2015, we have added positions at several of our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (+9), established new positions at the Medical Center (+15) and have begun recruiting/hiring +54 positions that have been funded through the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. Through the first half of FY 2015, Truman VA has added 31 Full Time Equivalent Employees. Many of the new personnel are helping us enhance our internal capacity in specialty care services as well as to expand some of those clinical activities into our community clinics. In addition, we are expanding the use of our telehealth applications in the community clinics, which allows Veterans to travel less distance to the community clinic and still receive clinical services/treatment from clinicians in Columbia. Continued use of substantial non-VA funding for selected clinical services*

*along with the Veterans Choice program helps us improve the timeliness and access to care for many Veterans.*

### **5. Communication by the VA staff while the veteran was at the facility**

The reported clarity of communication from VA staff remained roughly at the same level this round of surveys, showing an opportunity for improvement. Veterans’ concerns were noted.

#### **VA staff communicated well with me and clearly explained what was going on.**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Yes:</b>		88.5%	87.8%
<b>No:</b>		11.5%	12.2%
<b>Strongly Agree:</b>	61.3%		
<b>Mostly Agree:</b>	16.8%		
<b>Neutral:</b>	7.0%		
<b>Mostly Disagree:</b>	7.8%		
<b>Strongly Disagree:</b>	7.3%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 312 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that VA staff communicated effectively with them at the Truman VA. There is still improvement to be made in communication between the VA and patients to ensure patients have a good understanding of their specific situation and general VA policies.

Those who responded positively often point out specific nurses or doctors with whom they have a relationship and can effectively communicate to get their questions answered. However, veterans with concerns cite many different instances where communication could have been improved. Of those veterans expressing concerns, many stated that they were not satisfied with the information they were given about initial contact with the VA, what they were entitled to, and what steps were needed to receive benefits and care.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“The medical staff that has taken care of me for these many years communicate well, professionally, and explained in details which I could understand. No problems with communications.”*
- *“I do not always get notified of the results of tests.”*
- *“They treat you OK once you are in for an appointment but they totally lack the ability to communicate with their patients outside of a face to face meeting. Do not call if you want any information. You will be put through a maze and end up back where you started without ever speaking to someone you tried to contact. If you leave a message it is EXTEREMLY rare that they return a call. I had one Doctor my Heart Doctor who was friendly and helpful, who would call you back. She no longer works there.”*

**Recommendation:** Continue to stress the importance of clear, consistent communication among all VA doctors and employees, both to patients and with other medical and benefits staff. Continue to train all staff that each veteran should have their questions and concerns directly addressed. If needed, adjust scheduling to allocate more time to each appointment so that neither veterans nor doctors feel rushed.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA reinforces the need for clear, consistent communication throughout the organization through a variety of mechanisms including the I CARE initiative, customer service training incorporated in fully implementing Patient Centered Care, regular employee meetings including Town Hall events for all employees, and greater utilization of the Secure Messaging application in MyHealtheVet. As we move forward with Patient Centered Care, we have identified personnel who will serve as PCC Trainers. Our providers use their best judgment concerning necessary time for each patient appointment/interaction in an environment in which elements such as patient demand, available clinic appointments and case-by-case assessment of a patient’s clinical needs must be considered.*

**6. Receiving necessary care while at the VA facility**

Efficiency of care is a key indicator of strong customer service satisfaction. That is why, beginning with this Summary Report, surveys will include veterans’ feedback on the following statement. For this report, the reported receipt of necessary care was mostly positive.

**I was able to get the care I needed during my visit.**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Strongly Agree:</b>	61.5%		
<b>Mostly Agree:</b>	14.3%		
<b>Neutral:</b>	9.3%		
<b>Mostly Disagree:</b>	6.0%		
<b>Strongly Disagree:</b>	9.0%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 303 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were able to receive the care they needed during their visit. Most of the concerns expressed by veterans were related to the wait time in between completing a test/procedure and receiving the results, or between a procedure being ordered and it actually taking place. In other instances, veterans indicated that it is not just the wait time, but the lack of any follow through when results or an appointment were expected.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“I’m happy with the service and care I received. The podiatrist ordered a pair of boots for me with orthoses, and when there was a problem with the order and I emailed my podiatrist, he responded by calling me back on the telephone personally and explaining it to me.”*
- *“The doctor that I saw on this appointment ordered some tests to be done so that he could determine a course of treatment..... It’s been over a month and the tests that were ordered still have not been scheduled.”*
- *“Got labs taken but no explanation on cart and test kit.”*

**Recommendation:** Improve record keeping to ensure that any necessary follow up takes place in a reasonable amount of time. Ensure timely communication and appointment scheduling when additional care is required based on a provider’s recommendations. Communicate with patients even when they are not in the VA facility for an appointment, so they are kept up to date on their care.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Use of Secure Messaging in MyHealthVet can significantly improve the timeliness of communication between Veterans and Truman VA. Truman VA has hired nine nurse care navigators to assist in care coordination and communication with Veterans regarding specialty care appointments and follow up care. Recently, a Truman VA staff member received an award for helping to establish a specialty care 72-hour post-procedure follow up note. This note is used by clinic nurses to make follow up phone calls to Dermatology and General Surgery patients following procedures. Because of this note, both services have been able to identify quality improvement opportunities including patients who might require additional care post procedures. This note has been a great addition to the follow up protocol of both clinics and has enhanced communication between clinical staff and Veterans.*

**7. Respect shown to the veteran while at the VA facility**

The reported respect shown to veterans while at a VA facility remained strong for this round of surveys. Veterans’ concerns were noted.

**I was treated with respect while at the VA facility.**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Yes:</b>		89.6%	87.8%
<b>No:</b>		10.4%	12.2%
<b>Strongly Agree:</b>	70.5%		
<b>Mostly Agree:</b>	14.0%		
<b>Neutral:</b>	9.3%		
<b>Mostly Disagree:</b>	2.3%		
<b>Strongly Disagree:</b>	4.0%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 338 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were treated with respect while at a Columbia VA facility. While there were a few instances where veterans reported apathetic treatment by certain VA staff, there appears to be an overall culture of respect at the Truman VA.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“I feel that the doctor was just going through the motions and was not listening to my problems.”*
- *“It's like seeing a group of friends when I go in for treatment.”*
- *“The only time I felt somewhat demeaned was an appointment with a mental health Doctor. I did not ask for the appointment (it was an evaluation for PTSD). She said that I was not in the Infantry so I was not a combat veteran. I guess she didn't think Mortars and RPG's coming into your compound as combat. Leading the Reaction team when your compound got hit as not combat. I admit I was a little put off by that attitude.”*

**Recommendation:** Continue to develop and share a set of customer service principles that every VA employee should practice when interacting with veterans on a daily basis. Continue to recognize staff who show exceptional care when dealing with veterans. Make sure that patients are aware that they may go to the Truman VA’s Patient Advocate to express their concerns. Ensure that patients who work with a Patient Advocate receive an adequate response to their concern.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA recognizes, supports and reinforces the importance of good customer service. Our longstanding Customer Service “Star” Award program continues to be popular with Veterans, their families and employees. A recipient of this recognition award is named monthly and publicly recognized at a recognition ceremony. The I CARE initiative and implementation of Patient Centered Care similarly reinforce the importance of good customer service as does the national MyVA initiative from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Our institutional approach with regard to the role of the Patient Advocate is for concerns/complaints/questions to be handled at the earliest point of contact by any and all Truman VA employees throughout the organization.*

**8. Willingness to recommend the VA facility to other veterans**

The reported willingness to recommend the Truman VA to other veterans remained strong for this round of surveys. Veterans’ concerns were noted.

**I would recommend this VA facility to other veterans.**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Yes:</b>		90.3%	82.1%
<b>No:</b>		9.7%	17.9%
<b>Strongly Agree:</b>	63.3%		

<b>Mostly Agree:</b>	18.0%		
<b>Neutral:</b>	8.3%		
<b>Mostly Disagree:</b>	4.0%		
<b>Strongly Disagree:</b>	6.5%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 325 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they would recommend the VA medical facilities in the Columbia region to other veterans. Veterans who would not recommend the Truman VA to others had several different reasons for their responses. Their constructive responses focused on a need for improvement in wait-times, communication with patients and other providers, as well as staffing.

Below are sample positive comments from veterans:

- *“I have visited this facility 3 times & have been impressed with each visit & have stated that to other veterans several times. I have no complaints with the Truman facility.”*
- *“It is I believe, the best rated VA in the country for a reason. I recommend that anyone wanting good honest health care to go here. Also, all of the people in charge need to look at this hospital and spread what they do nationwide.”*
- *“I have made several visits here to different departments and everyone from the volunteers to the Docs are courteous and professional. The facility is always clean.”*

Below are sample concerns from veterans:

- *“This facility and others like it have a history of misdiagnosis and 'take a pill and go away' mentality. Also it feels like some information is kept hidden from me.”*
- *“I know they try; they are just so busy. It is hard to see everyone that is there, the waiting room is always packed.”*
- *“In the last year the VA has went down. I was really happy when I first started going but know I have no clue what is going on and cannot get them to help me or explain stuff. They will not respond to outside doctor's inquiries either. I went in for stints they tell me it cannot be done and I am only plugged about 25%. I go to a heart doctor and he tells me yes it can be done and that I am plugged over 80%. He tries to get with the VA to find out why they would not put the stints in other complications they know about that he does not. But they will not respond to him.”*

**Recommendation:** Implement a review mechanism to assess current customer service strategies and make adjustments as needed. Increase veteran involvement in ongoing processes to improve wait times, communication, respect, etc. Make sure veterans know that the VA values their constructive comments.

## VA Medical Center's Response:

*Truman VA's Customer Service Board is charged with the responsibility to monitor and assess the results of our patient satisfaction results. In addition, an underlying principle of Patient Centered Care is to enhance the participation of Veterans who are receiving VA health care services in ongoing projects and initiatives. In FY 2015, Truman VA established a Veteran and Family Advisory Council that provides another formal feedback mechanism for the facility. The Council began meeting in April.*

### 9. Overall experience with personal doctor or nurse

A veteran's confidence in his/her personal doctor or nurse is key to evaluating overall customer service experience. For this reason, a new question was added to the survey for this period. The reported satisfaction with a personal doctor or nurse was strong. Veterans' concerns were noted.

#### How would you rate your overall experience with your personal doctor or nurse?

	R3 (current)	R2	R1
<b>Excellent:</b>	60.5%		
<b>Above Average (Good):</b>	19.3%		
<b>Average/Fair:</b>	11.5%		
<b>Below Average:</b>	3.3%		
<b>Poor:</b>	5.5%		

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 319 indicating that their overall experience with their personal doctor or nurse was Excellent or Above Average. Veterans who described positive experiences frequently commented on clear and empathetic communication and quality care. Veterans who expressed dissatisfaction with their personal doctor or nurse had several different reasons for their responses. Some common citations were a lack of follow-up, poor communication, and longer-than-expected wait times.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"The Doctor is always up on my physical problems/needs and always explains my personal situation to my satisfaction. He is attentive to my questions and shows a genuine concern for my well-being."*
- *"The doctor did not wish to hear my concerns about the growing issues that are continuously put off by having me try medications, which tend to be the same over and over again. When something doesn't work, don't just rush patients through the system to get what you need accomplished. Take time to evaluate the patient and listen when the same issue has not been fixed and is a continuous problem for them."*
- *"Follow up after visit was poor. Dr. also works elsewhere and is only in clinic 2 days a week and it was difficult to find her to get questions answered. Took several emails and three weeks to get a response."*

**Recommendation:** Continue to recognize staff who show exceptional care when dealing with veterans. Continue to improve the time it takes for veterans to be seen by a provider and to make all necessary follow-up communication with veterans.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA’s staff reward and recognition program allows us to recognize exceptional performance of individuals including positive interactions with Veterans. Our Patient Services organization has begun implementing a program entitled “5 Pillars of Nursing” that reinforces good customer service.*

**10. Overall experience at the VA facility**

The reported overall experience with the VA Medical Centers remained strong, but still showed an opportunity for improvement. Veterans’ concerns and recommendations were noted.

**How would you rate your overall experience with the VA Medical Centers?**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Excellent:</b>	49.0%	54.0%	46.2%
<b>Above Average (Good):</b>	24.0%	25.3%	15.4%
<b>Average/Fair:</b>	14.5%	11.4%	23.1%
<b>Below Average:</b>	6.8%	3.8%	7.7%
<b>Poor:</b>	5.8%	5.5%	7.7%

Four hundred (400) veterans responded to this question with 292 indicating that their overall experience with VA Medical Centers was Excellent or Above Average. Veterans who expressed concerns often cited limited parking, lack of staffing, and poor levels of communication and respect. Many of the comments and recommendations referenced the same issues that have been outlined throughout this Summary Report.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“Specialty Care is not or does not have enough professionals for the number of patients they see. Many times double booked which causes them to rush though each person and always late appointments unless you have the first appointment of the day.”*
- *“Overall great care and treatment. Should be some way to contact provider without going through long procedures and leaving message and waiting for weeks for doctor to get back with you.”*
- *“Always treated like I was only person they had to work on while I was there.”*

**Recommendation:** Continue to monitor performance criteria the hospital already has in place to work toward continued improvement. Continue to implement and reinforce “I CARE” so that all veterans utilizing the Truman VA are respected, receive quality and timely care, and understand their options for getting questions answered and concerns addressed.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA will maintain a commitment to delivering high quality health care and exceptional customer service to Veterans. We continue to strengthen our Systems Redesign Program where we have a number of initiatives identified to improve care and processes.*



### VETERANS' RECOMMENDATIONS

The current summary report discloses various issues regarding the customer service received by veterans and other matters as presented below. This section includes some recommendations that veterans have made to improve the VA facility they visited. Most of the recommendations from veterans referenced the same issues outlined throughout this summary report. All comments were provided to the VA.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“The time the appointment is scheduled to time of appointment needs to improve.”*
- *“I liked it better when they scheduled my appt. at my previous visit. They would notify me as a reminder that the appt. was coming up about a week prior...”*
- *“It would be helpful to have direct telephone numbers to the various clinics. When I need to reschedule an appointment or have a question for the staff in Jefferson City or at the Lake of the Ozarks, I have to call the Columbia number, they take a message, send a message to the other clinic, and then they (maybe) call me back. By the time they call me back (supposedly within 48 hours), sometimes my issues is moot. The people that I talk to are usually very accommodating, pleasant, and try to be helpful. But what an inefficient waste of tax dollars! What could have been taken care of with one person and one phone call requires many because of the system.*
- *“I should be able to contact my PC's office directly for a simple question or request.”*
- *“VA communications need much attention. I recently ordered medicine, which requires 2 prescriptions to be filled at the same time, and 1 was sent, and 2 weeks later, the other was finally sent. Also have a problem setting up a regular appointment with my primary care dr.”*
- *“Excellent doctors when we can see them. Let us keep them. Pay them more. Pay regular veterans that work there and put more veterans in charge that have some disabilities, as this really makes a difference!!!”*
- *“They keep cutting travel pay. They need to restore the money they have taken away. As nothing is cheap in the automobile maintenance and insurance!”*



### RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONALISM OF VA EMPLOYEES BY VETERANS

#### **Is there a provider or a department that does an excellent job that you would like Senator McCaskill to know about?**

There are many great professionals working in the Columbia region's VA medical facilities, and it is important to acknowledge their hard work and dedication. Two hundred ninety-eight (298) veterans responded to this question with acknowledgement of appreciation for a provider or a department at the VA medical facilities in the Columbia region.

Below are sample responses from veterans. At the request of the VA, employees' names were replaced with their initials to protect their privacy. All responses, in full, were provided to the VA Administration to alert them to employees who were singled out for their professionalism and performance:

- *"The Blue Team nursing staff and reception personnel, all the Lab Techs, all the Endocrinology staff, all Neurology staff and all Green Team staff."*
- *"It was my first real visit. I was really impressed with the way I was treated and by the treatment I received. I could not have had any better service no matter where I went. My primary doctor Dr. KA was very good and made me feel at ease and explained everything so that I could understand what was going on."*
- *"Everyone at the Mexico Clinic is great. I've never had any trouble getting an appointment and the staff is wonderful to deal with."*
- *"Dr. KG, Orthopedic Surgeon, Specialty Clinic."*
- *"Dr. V at the Jefferson City Clinic has been a very good provider for the Jefferson City VA. He has helped me a lot."*
- *"My doctor is LA and I am with the White team and I am very happy and proud of her and she is doing a fine job with me and I want to thank her publicly for her service and excellent help."*
- *"The Audiology Dept. is top notch. I get better service and care there than I was getting from a private audiologist before I started using the VA. My audiologist, Ms. K, is very courteous and professional seeing to it that I am getting the best results possible from my hearing aids, from proper fit to being sure they are adjusted right. She encourages me to make a follow up appointment if I feel I need to. She makes me feel like I am her most important patient, but I'm sure most all of her patients feel the same way!!!"*

**Recommendation:** The Truman VA deserves high praise for the many dedicated and compassionate professionals who care for our nation’s veterans. Continue to ensure that those employees who provide superior care and customer service are properly recognized and rewarded.

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA will continue to reinforce and reward outstanding performance in meeting the needs of Veterans we serve. The Customer Service “Star” Award and I CARE integration will continue to be employed.*



## FOLLOW UP ON VA MEDICAL CENTER'S RESPONSES

Since the first Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the Truman VA agreed to act on a number of the recommendations outlined in the previous reports, or they were already taking action on some of these concerns mentioned in the report. This section provides an update on the status of the implementation of those commitments.

### Ease of scheduling appointments

In the second Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the Truman VA stated, *"We are working on action plans for our Strategic Plan's timeliness goal that will help us meet an objective to provide more same-day, face-to-face acute care appointments."* What is the current status of the action plans for the Strategic Plan's timeliness goal? Is the Truman VA currently meeting its objective of providing more same-day, face-to-face acute care appointments?

#### VA Medical Center's Response:

*In both Primary Care and Behavioral Health, we have improved access to create additional capacity for same-day, face-to-face appointments. Truman VA has performed well in meeting timeliness standards.*

### Ease of access to the appointment location at the facility

In the second Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the Truman VA stated, *"We can and will devise an updated, simplified version of a facility map to aid our Veterans...In addition, we are moving forward with a 'way finding' project that will address signage and appearance of the facility."* Since the last survey, has the facility map been completed? What is the status of the way finding project?

#### VA Medical Center's Response:

*The facility map was completed and will be updated on a more regular basis to keep current with changes and movement of functions within the Medical Center. The Way Finding project is underway and should be completed by August 2015.*

### Communication by the VA staff while the veteran was at the facility

In the second Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the Truman VA stated, *"One of our Strategic Plan's most important objectives is to provide a personalized care plan that is patient-centric, addresses what is important to individual Veterans, and is communicated in a way that Veterans fully understand so that they and their families can participate more fully in their care plans. We employ the principle of shared decision making for all treatment teams. This*

*is reinforced through Patient Centered Care training for all employees.” What is the status of the Strategic Plan? What process is in place to determine the effectiveness of the Plan in improving communication with veterans?*

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Truman VA’s Strategic Plan is regularly monitored by the Strategic Planning Board as well as by the facility’s Executive Leadership Team. Every objective of a goal in the Strategic Plan has at least one performance measure. The Patient Centered Care goal addresses improved communication with Veterans. A few of the actions that have resulted from the objectives of this goal include the establishment of the new Veteran and Family Advisory Council, an expectation that every medical center service will complete a Patient Centered Care project and the implementation of Project RED (Re-engineering Discharge). The software for this project and additional color printers have been procured for a new discharge document that will include education for the patient, a care plan, a list of medications, the dates of follow-up appointments, and contact telephone numbers for nurses and providers. Project RED should be in place before the end of FY 2015.*

**Willingness to recommend the VA facility to other veterans**

In the second Veterans’ Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the Truman VA stated, *“We want to be an eligible Veteran’s first choice for health care. This means not only sustaining the high quality of care provided and our strong customer service results, but it also means improving access to care. We currently do very well with access for primary care and mental health care. Our big focus for the year ahead will be specialty care.” How is the VA proceeding with its focus on specialty care and are these actions adequately addressing the staffing and access concerns expressed in this Summary Report?*

**VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*The three most important actions taken during the past year include the addition of patient navigators in specialty care outpatient clinics, expansion and planned expansion of specialty care services in several community clinics and conducting service-specific focus groups with Veterans.*



## CONCLUSION

The Truman VA in the Columbia region continues its strong record of success providing veterans in Mid-Missouri high quality customer service. This Summary Report details ways the VA can improve veterans' experiences at the VA medical facilities in the Columbia region. This is part of a series of steps the VA is taking to continue improving veterans' experiences at the regional VA facilities. The veterans who filled out the survey provided honest, constructive information regarding their experiences at the VA medical facilities during their recent visits. With this information, we compiled a Summary Report that reflects veterans' experiences and concerns at these facilities.

The VA's Survey of Healthcare Experience of Patients Report provides the VA with a general overview of veterans' overall quality of care. Alternatively, the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey provides the VA with some specific examples of the quality of the veterans' experiences at the Columbia region VA facilities.

Overall, feedback from Columbia region veterans was largely positive. However, it is clear from the surveys that there is always room to improve veterans' experiences at the Truman VA. The VA has provided responses which indicate that they are taking veterans' concerns seriously and are continuing to implement procedures, policies and training to streamline the scheduling of appointments, address cleanliness and way-finding at the VA facilities, and improve communication with the veterans.

In order to maintain this momentum, we need to continue working together to identify areas of concern at the VA medical centers, to address the issues and to improve the quality of service that we provide to our veterans.

We encourage our veterans to continue filling out the surveys as their participation in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program is critical to the success of the program. The senate office will compile the Summary Reports and the VA Medical Center's responses on an annual basis.

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