Claire McCaskill

United States Senator

Summary Report:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Integrated Service Network 15 Medical Centers
Kansas City VA Medical Center

Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program

Report No: 2016 – KC – 05

http://www.mccaskill.senate.gov

Kansas City 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 high 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 reported positive experiences with the medical care at John Cochran, concerns persisted among veterans with the customer service they received 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 fifth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report for the Kansas City region facilities and includes a continuing compilation of survey data as reported directly by Missouri veterans.

Table of Contents | Page

Report 6

Scope & Methodology 7

Observations & Results 9

- Background 9
- Review of survey question results 10
  1. Ease of scheduling appointments 11
  2. Ease of access to the appointment location at the VA facility 13
  3. Cleanliness of the VA facility 14
  4. Amount of time to be seen by a provider 15
  5. Communication by the VA staff while the veteran was at the facility 17
  6. Receiving necessary care while at the facility 18
  7. Respect shown to veteran while at the VA facility 20
  8. Willingness to recommend the VA facility to other veterans 21
  9. Overall experience with personal doctor/nurse 22
  10. Overall experience at the VA facility 23

Veterans' Recommendations 25

Recognition of VA Employees 26

Follow Up 28

Conclusion 31

CLAIRE McCASKILL
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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 31, 2016

To the Director of the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center,
Members of the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and Missouri's Veterans:

I am pleased to release the results of my fifth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey for the Kansas City region. After reviewing the responses from this round of surveys, I am encouraged by the commitment of both Missouri veterans and VA officials in the Kansas City region to come together for the sake of improving veterans' experiences at VA facilities. In this fifth Summary Report, Missouri veterans indicated their strong satisfaction with the Kansas City VA medical facilities while noting some room for improvement in their overall experiences. Since the last survey, the Kansas City VA Medical Center has shown some improvement in several response categories, suggesting that VA staff are showing veterans the respect they rightly deserve and improving their communication with patients.

When I first proposed this "secret shopper" program, I told you that I would not be happy until Missouri's veterans are happy. I mean it as much now as I did then. Today, I am pleased that more and more veterans are telling me how the Kansas City VA has continued to improve. The report suggests veterans' experiences at the VA are generally improving across the board; however, we must be careful to avoid drawing too strong a conclusion based on number of responses. Looking ahead, it is important that we keep the momentum growing that we have established over the last few years with the robust participation among our veterans. We must sustain this timely, transparent process to ensure our veterans are satisfied with their VA health care experience. To that end, I have instructed my staff to continue working with the veterans' organizations in executing a robust outreach strategy to promote even greater participation.

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 ensuring veterans have a positive experience while at Missouri VA medical centers. It appears that the leadership at the Kansas City 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 Kansas City Region VA as well as 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, starting right here in Kansas City.

Sincerely,

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

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

Corey Dillon
Jason Rauch
Nick Rawls

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 Kansas City region. The small number of survey results that we received from veterans raising specific concerns about their care or benefits were reviewed by senate office caseworkers and responded to on a case-by-case basis if casework was necessary. The scope of our review included, but was not necessarily limited to, comments received about Kansas City VA Medical Centers and its Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (collectively referred to as Kansas City VA or VA) through the period ending April 4, 2016. Comments 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 Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify areas where communication can be improved between veterans and the Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify criticisms impacting the overall customer service ratings of the Kansas City VA Medical Center;
- Identify concerns that impact the willingness of veterans to positively recommend the Kansas City VA Medical Center to other veterans;
- Report the full range of responses received from the veterans regarding the Kansas City 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, Claire's office, veteran leaders and the Kansas City VA Medical Center worked together to develop an independent survey to serve as a resource veterans can use to make recommendations to each individual VA medical center regarding the quality of customer service.

Scope

The scope of this review included those VA facilities located in the Kansas City region through the period ending April 4, 2016. In the Kansas City region, two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received 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, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Modern Warfare, Disabled 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. 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 Claire's office that was then entered into the database.

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

As of Summary Reports released in May 2015, survey questions and rating scales appear differently from previous reports. In earlier versions of the survey, veterans were posed questions with binary response options: "Yes" or "No." Beginning last year and 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 currently appear as a statement, and veterans have rated their agreement with the statement on a spectrum that spans from Strong Agreement to 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 4, 2016. During this period, two hundred twenty-five (225) survey responses were received in the Kansas City 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 over sixty-two percent (62.3%) of the respondents. Some veterans indicated they served in multiple eras of service. Below is a table which details the service eras of veterans participating in the survey:

WWII	1.8%
Korean War	7.6%
Vietnam War	62.3%
Desert Shield/Desert Storm	13.0%
Iraq/Afghanistan	11.7%
Other	15.2%

Beginning with this survey period, respondents were asked to indicate their gender. Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this question. Below is a table which indicates the gender composition of respondents:

Male	88.7%
Female	11.3%

In the survey, over seventy-four percent (74.2%) of veterans indicated that they had received services at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. Some veterans visited multiple VA facilities. Below is a table which describes where the veterans received treatment:

Kansas City VA Medical Center	74.2%
Belton CBOC	2.2%

Cameron Clinic	2.2%
Excelsior Springs, MO CBOC	4.9%
Nevada CBOC	3.1%
Warrensburg Clinic	8.0%
Other	5.5%

These veterans utilized multiple services while at Kansas City region VA medical facilities. Two hundred twenty four (224) responses indicated that veterans utilized services from the following VA clinic categories:

Primary Care	23.7%	Emergency Room	8.0%	Extended Care	0.9%
Outpatient Clinic	17.0%	Mental Health Services	10.3%	Dental	3.6%
Pharmacy	23.7%	X-Ray	2.2%	Laboratory	16.5%
Travel/Enrollment	1.3%	Main Lobby	5.8%	Specialist Visit	17.0%
Inpatient Care	5.8%	Women's Clinic	1.8%	Spinal Cord Injury Unit	0.4%
Prosthetics	1.8%	Podiatry	4.0%	Family Health (CHAMPVA)	2.2%
Other	33.0%	(examples: Senior Veterans Clinic, Neurology, Cardiology)			

Review of survey question results

This section summarizes the results of each of the survey statements. Results from the most recent survey (R5) are marked "current," and results from the previous reports (R1 – R4) are also included. Beginning with the last Summary Report (R4), 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 spectrum that spans from Strong Agreement to Strong Disagreement.

1. Ease of scheduling appointments

The reported ease of scheduling appointments at a VA facility was mostly positive for this round of surveys; however, concerns were noted.

I was able to schedule my appointment easily.

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:			75.9%	78.3%	88.2%
No:			24.1%	21.8%	11.8%
Strongly Agree:	47.1%	42.9%			
Mostly Agree:	19.1%	16.1%			
Neutral:	9.8%	13.0%			
Mostly Disagree:	11.1%	11.0%			
Strongly Disagree	12.8%	17.0%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this statement with 149 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they did not have a problem with scheduling their appointments at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. The veterans who indicated they were having trouble with making appointments stated 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:

- *"I have been trying for over one month to make an initial appointment with my PCM. I keep leaving messages and I get told someone will get back with me. I have made over 7 phone calls just to make an appointment and I still do not have one."*

- *"Instead of allowing the Veteran the ability to make a future appointment while they are in a specialty clinic, the veteran is told that they will receive a reminder card in the mail to remind the veteran to call and make the required appointment. This practice is both annoying to the Veteran and costly for the VA Administration. Just allow us to talk face-to-face and make our appointments and save the money that is wasted on printing the post - card - like reminders and the POSTAGE associated with them."*

- *"My schedule makes it difficult to set and keep appoints. The staff is incredible about helping me re-arrange or schedule multiple appoints on the same day, making it much less costly in time and money to get the care I need."*

Recommendation: Continue to work on and monitor improvements to the scheduling system and ensure that Veterans can easily access Patient Advocates and Quality Management staff.

VA Medical Center's Response:

Improvement initiatives include the following:

The MyVA Access Initiative is being implemented throughout Kansas City VA Medical Center (KCVAMC). The primary focus of this effort is to create a more patient-centered scheduling process. It is designed to engage Veterans more directly by (a) offering appointments and follow-up options upon leaving the clinic, if preferred; (b) giving the opportunity to make appointments on a face-to-face basis; (c) allowing Veterans to choose an appointment convenient to them, rather than being assigned a date and time.

As part of the MyVA Access Initiative, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) will begin the roll out of a new scheduling package referred to as the VISTA Scheduling Enhancement project. We are scheduled for our initial overview of the new product in June, 2016.

The use of text messaging is being explored as an option for scheduling appointments as well.

AudioCare, the postcard and telephone reminder systems, is used to generate reminders to Veterans for upcoming appointments. Contact information for scheduling issues along with date, time, and location of the appointment is included in the communication.

A multi-disciplinary telephone improvement team has been established as well with the goal to develop processes for first call resolution. Leadership from key areas are implementing best practices and allocating resources to improve the overall call efficiency. Examples of efforts include the following:

- *A new automated callback system called "QWorks" is being piloted in some of the clinical and administrative areas. The system places calls in a queue that are then automatically distributed to staff as staff become available, thereby eliminating the need for Veterans to be placed on hold for long periods of time. It allows staff to personally call every Veteran who has called into the line.*

- *Reports produced through the automated call distribution (ACD) system are monitored weekly. Feedback from correlated data associated with abandonment rates, calls in the queue, hold time, average speed of answer, and an overall grade of service is provided to each location in an effort to improve telephone access.*

Finally, the number of Patient Advocates recently was increased from two to three. Patient Advocate phone activity is monitored daily with work assignments adjusted accordingly. The Patient Advocates are located in the Quality, Safety, and Value Service line. When there is a concern regarding the quality of care provided, the concern is immediately forwarded to the appropriate personnel to review the issue and take appropriate action.

2. Ease of access to the appointment location at the facility
Most veterans continued to report that they were able to easily navigate the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region in order to find the location of their appointments.

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

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:			88.5%	91.3%	98.7%
No:			11.5%	8.7%	1.3%
Strongly Agree:	64.0%	56.8%			
Mostly Agree:	15.1%	18.7%			
Neutral:	12.4%	11.0%			
Mostly Disagree:	1.8%	4.0%			
Strongly Disagree:	6.6%	9.5%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this statement with 178 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing they did not have a problem finding their way to appointments at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. We continue to view this as a strong sign that the VA continues to take the necessary steps to help veterans navigate the VA facilities.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"There is not always someone at the entrance that can direct a veteran to where their appointment is. An improvement would be to have someone always available during all clinic hours that can answer Patient questions or direct Patients to correct clinic."*

- *"For every apt. they always ask, do you know where it is? If not, they give really good directions on how to get to the correct clinic."*

- *"There are always plenty of people to direct and help."*

Recommendation: Continue having greeters meet patients. Encourage all VA staff to offer assistance to patients needing directions. Make recent clinic location changes apparent on signage in the hospital and on appointment reminders.

VA Medical Center's Response:

As recommended, KCVAMC will maintain the greeting program through use of employee greeters and volunteer way-finders. If a Veteran looks lost or in need of assistance, staff are on the look-out to escort them to their appointment area.

Way-finding kiosks and kiosks that allow patients to check in for their appointments upon arrival have been installed as well. In addition, if the clinic has been temporarily relocated, this information is included on the back of appointment reminder cards sent to Veterans.

When a construction project requires a service to be relocated, the facility has a very robust signage program that is maintained regularly. Once construction is complete, permanent, updated signage is placed.

3. Cleanliness of the VA facility

Veterans reported satisfaction in the cleanliness of the VA facilities during this survey period.

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

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:			37.2%	39.1%	49.4%
Above Average (Good):			38.3%	34.8%	39.5%
Average/Fair:			16.9%	21.7%	7.4%
Below Average:			3.8%	0.0%	2.5%
Poor:			3.8%	4.3%	1.2%”
Strongly Agree:	56.4%	50.4%			
Mostly Agree:	24.4%	25.4%			
Neutral:	14.7%	15.3%			
Mostly Disagree:	0.9%	4.3%			
Strongly Disagree:	3.6%	4.6%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this statement with 182 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region were clean. Also, the veterans appeared to be pleased with the work done by the maintenance and cleaning staff. Only ten (10) responses expressed criticism of the VA medical facility’s cleanliness.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“I watched maintenance clean rooms, between new admits. They were MORE thorough than I have seen at other KC hospitals. Every single surface was cleaned and chloroxed, from door handles to remotes and everything in between.”*

- *“Facility is mostly clean, but lab had stains on the floor when blood was drawn two days before appointment. Lab tech stated he had asked for it to be cleaned. Housekeeping needs to clean-up.”*

- *“Although the hospital was very busy, the areas were clean.”*

Recommendation: Continue to ensure housekeeping is monitoring high-traffic zones, such as restrooms and main entrances. Specifically, consider establishing a minimum daily frequency for cleaning restrooms. Also, continue to make telephone numbers visible for veterans to call when areas need attention.

VA Medical Center's Response:

Environmental Management Services (EMS) continues to monitor and maintain the high traffic restrooms. The restrooms are checked hourly and cleaned when needed. The EMS contact number is posted within the restrooms.

4. Amount of time to see a provider from the date requesting the appointment

Wait times appear to be relatively unchanged since the last survey period. The percentage of veterans expressing that they were not seen by their provider in a reasonable amount of time was consistent with the previous report.

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

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:			75.5%	65.2%	90.2%
No:			24.5%	34.8%	9.8%
Strongly Agree:	42.7%	41.8%			
Mostly Agree:	16.8%	15.9%			
Neutral:	16.9%	17.9%			
Mostly Disagree:	8.4%	8.1%			
Strongly Disagree:	15.1%	16.4%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this statement with 134 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were seen by their VA provider in a reasonable amount of time at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. In some cases, veterans reported that they had to wait longer than they thought was necessary.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"After initial visit with my primary care provider, orthopedic couldn't see me for 3 months."*
- *"I stopped trying to get in to see the Endocrinologist because it was a wait of months and then, they would send a card or call and say that they had to cancel that appointment and reschedule it still further out."*

- *"I have not had problems getting appointments that I need when I need them."*

Recommendation: Continue current efforts to ensure that staff vacancies are filled in a timely manner in order to reduce the length of time patients have to wait to see their doctor.

VA Medical Center's Response:

A group practice management structure that incorporates lean management principles to improve clinic access is now being utilized. This has resulted in the development of teams that have a strategic focus on a single issue to improve access. During the timeframe from January, 2016 to March, 2016:

- *Telephone access has improved;*
- *New teams to answer phones were implemented resulting in an increased call volume by approximately 2000 calls;*
- *Call abandonment rates were reduced from 21.1% to 14.3%; and*
- *Speed of response has decreased from 207 seconds to 97 seconds.*

Other improvement activities include:

The Group Practice Manager and Lean Manager are methodically reviewing clinics' present access data and meeting frequently to pilot new changes and improve productivity and efficiency. The focused clinic review "helps develop access slots" and "educates" specialty sections on best practices. For example, Orthopedics increased 30 patient appointment slots per week and Neurology improved productivity and added 15 patient appointment slots per week.

Primary Care has (a) started holding monthly Saturday clinics; (b) added float providers to prevent clinical cancellations; (c) begun using gap fee basis providers; and (d) implemented patient inability to appoint (PITA), a new process to ensure no patients are scheduled out greater than 30 days from their preferred date.

Mental Health has (a) implemented "Open access" for our Substance Use Disorder (SUD) provider for same day appointments, (b) performed scheduling audits and process improvements to reduce the number of missed appointments for peer support specialists, and (c) focused and improved the Primary Care Mental Health Integration consult process related to Veteran needs.

A MyVA Access declaration was held on April 26, 2016 where employees reaffirmed their commitment to improving access for our Veterans through national information sharing, innovation diffusion, and project development.

Work continues with community partners to give Veterans a choice for care if wait times exceed desired timelines.

In addition, Human Resources is tracking speed of hire (60 days to tentative job offer) as well as utilizing the following:

- *30 Medical Support Assistant (MSA) hiring model;*

- *Enhanced Physician Recruitment Model;*
- *Tracking monthly measures which follow recruitment of critical positions until all identified positions are filled;*
- *100 day project to review and remove any unnecessary steps in the on-boarding process;*
- *Yellow Belt (lean) Project that focuses on reducing the number of days to establish an enter on duty date for Registered Nurses (RNs).*

Finally, the recruitment request submission system was redesigned reducing the turnaround time for review of recruitment requests from 14 days to 2.

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

Historically, poor communication between patients and VA personnel has been the main reason veterans and their families contact the senate office. While some veterans reported having difficulty communicating with VA staff, the data continues to show a large percentage of veterans reported positive communication exchanges. However, the data shows that progress remains with regard to communication.

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

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:			79.3%	60.9%	90.0%
No:			20.7%	39.1%	10.0%
Strongly Agree:	56.0%	45.8%			
Mostly Agree:	16.8%	18.4%			
Neutral:	8.8%	10.7%			
Mostly Disagree:	6.7%	9.2%			
Strongly Disagree:	11.5%	15.9%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this statement with 127 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that the VA staff communicated effectively with them at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. Several survey responses expressed disapproval regarding unsatisfactory communication experiences with VA staff.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"The family was kept updated by physician, nurses, lab, x-ray or pharmacy. We were informed of each test to expect and diagnosis on a regular basis."*

- *"Very poor follow up with the patient. I had to inquire as to the test results. The results were bad and the doctor asked me what I wanted to do. I thought that doctors were supposed to advise me."*

- *"They don't always return phone calls and sometime quick to transfer the call to someone else that can't help."*

Recommendation: Continue to improve communication best practices between medical staff and patients, urging staff to listen to patient concerns and provide complete answers to their questions regarding care.

VA Medical Center's Response:

Medical and nursing staff have been involved with incorporating communication best practices in their care of Veterans. For example:

The nursing care model strongly supports nurses and their role as care coordinators and patient advocates, assisting the Veteran and their family members with questions and concerns throughout the continuum of care. Nursing staff continues to be supported and empowered to advocate for their patients, serve as contributors to the interdisciplinary plan of care, and facilitate communication amongst the care team.

Goals for improved physician/provider communication includes process improvements with weekly meetings of the telephone improvement team to develop "first call resolution" for Veterans calling the medical center and to ensure calls are answered as opposed to leaving voicemail.

Over the past few months, employees have received VA 101 training designed to enhance employees' commitment to Veterans by providing them with a better understanding of who they serve as well as ideas for increased customer service and improved listening skills.

6. Receiving necessary care while at VA facility

Efficiency of care is a key indicator of strong customer service satisfaction. Accordingly, the data suggests that a majority of veterans are pleased with the VA's healthcare efficiency.

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

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Strongly Agree:	51.6%	46.7%			
Mostly Agree:	16.9%	11.8%			
Neutral:	8.9%	12.1%			
Mostly Disagree:	4.4%	7.5%			
Strongly Disagree:	17.8%	21.9%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this statement with 154 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they received the care they needed during their visit.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"My father visited a specialist he was referred to by his general doctor at the VA. His hand has been locked up for a while and he was referred to get it checked out. The specialist proceeded to pull and yank on his hand several times which caused him a lot of pain. They looked at the x-rays and said they could see nothing wrong with it on there. Still my father cannot move his fingers and it was in more pain when he left than when he went. The only thing the doctor gave him was a referral to physical therapy which has not contacted him yet."*

- *"My tests were not scheduled till after my planned visit. Then without any test results the doctor put in his notes that he thought I was faking. Test performed after my visit showed torn ligaments. Since then I have seen a different doctor."*

- *"My PCP addressed my health concerns today, applied relevant diagnostic techniques, and prescribed a reasonable treatment plan."*

Recommendation: Continue current efforts to ensure that all physician/staff interactions with patients during appointments include a willingness to listen patiently to veterans' concerns regarding their care. Ensure that sufficient time is allowed for physicians to meet with patients during visits to address concerns and answer questions regarding care.

VA Medical Center's Response:

Medical and nursing staff have been involved with incorporating communication best practices in their care of Veterans. For example:

The role of RN Care Coordinator/care manager, a vital component of the interdisciplinary care team, continues to grow. The RN Care Coordinator serves not only to manage complex care processes and ensure timely access to care within a given care area, but to enhance coordination across services and specialties through interdisciplinary care planning.

Through group practice and lean management techniques, KCVAMC has effectively changed the duration of specialty care clinics to assure appointment slots are of adequate duration to allow providers ample time to respond to patient questions and prepare for the next day's patients. This includes implementation of LEAN huddles which resolves potential issues for the upcoming day. These principles allow for more quality time with the provider and ensure "today's work is done/completed today."

7. Respect shown to the veteran while at the VA facility
The reported respect shown at the Kansas City VA facilities remained high. More than seventy-five (75) percent of the responses received reported respectful interactions between veterans and staff at the Kansas City VA facilities.

I was treated with respect while at the VA facility.

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:			82.4%	73.9%	87.3%
No:			17.6%	26.1%	12.7%
Strongly Agree:	60.0%	53.9%			
Mostly Agree:	15.5%	15.6%			
Neutral:	12.0%	11.2%			
Mostly Disagree:	3.1%	7.8%			
Strongly Disagree:	9.3%	11.5%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this statement with 170 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they were treated with respect while at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. While there were several instances where veterans reported unsatisfactory treatment by specific VA staff, there appears to be an overall culture of respect at the Kansas City VA Medical Center with some room for improvement.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"Everyone was respectful. And almost everyone smiled."*
- *"Everyone is very courteous and friendly and all thank me for my service."*
- *"Overworked staff are too tired to be friendly. Just get it done and move on."*

Recommendation: Continue efforts to educate all VA staff on the importance placed in *"I CARE: VA Core Values and Characteristics."* Those employees who best display *I CARE* values deserve to be properly recognized, and those employees identified as lacking should receive additional guidance.

VA Medical Center's Response:

All KCVA staff are trained on the I CARE values during new employee orientation. In addition, managers and supervisors give our I CARE awards to those employees who exemplify the I CARE values.

8. Willingness to recommend the VA facility to other veterans

The data suggests that veterans are now more inclined to positively recommend the Kansas City region VA facilities to other veterans than the previous survey period. Since the last Summary Report, willingness to recommend Kansas City VA facilities has grown from 59.7% (R4) to 67.6% (R5).

I would recommend this VA facility to other veterans.

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Yes:			77.5%	63.6%	93.4%
No:			22.5%	36.4%	6.6%
Strongly Agree:	53.4%	44.4%			
Mostly Agree:	14.2%	15.3%			
Neutral:	14.6%	18.4%			
Mostly Disagree:	5.3%	9.8%			
Strongly Disagree:	12.4%	12.1%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this statement with 152 strongly agreeing or mostly agreeing that they would recommend the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region to other veterans. However, concerns were noted.

Below are sample positive comments from veterans:

- *"I cannot say enough good things about this facility. I hear all of the other complaints, but I have not had one bad experience. I am so thankful for their care, I shudder to think what would happen if it is allowed to be privatized."*

- *"I had a number of civilian doctors who it seemed were more concerned about their schedule and insurance than my health. I have received the best healthcare of my life at VA. They diagnosed my primary health problem, educated me on how to address the problem through changes in my diet. The provided proper medications and follow up. My health is significantly improved and my only drawback is that I have had to by all new clothes since I have lost nearly 40 lbs."*

- *"I get better care here than at any civilian facility. They are excellent in all respects."*

Below are sample concerns from veterans:

- *"Parking is typically limited. For mental health patients this can be stressful (PTSD)."*

- *"Any specialty clinics take too long to be seen in after primary care physician refers you."*

- *"Too much red tape. Thank God for Medicare."*

Recommendation: Continue present efforts that give quality of care and customer service priority of place in the Kansas City VA Healthcare System.

VA Medical Center's Response:

The newly formed Patient Experience Council has been charged to specifically look at ways to improve the overall Veteran experience while at the KCVA. Twice per week, the members of the council visit inpatient wards and talk with Veterans and their families about their experience at the KCVA and ask the Veterans how it could be improved. The Patient Experience Council looks at the results of the inpatient visits and determines what can be fixed on that same day and what fixes are longer-term in nature. The goal of the council is to provide as many same day solutions as possible and work together on any long-range fixes.

9. Overall experience with your personal doctor or nurse

A veteran's confidence in his/her personal doctor or nurse is key to evaluating overall customer service experience. Since the last report, veterans' satisfaction with their physician or nurse has increased.

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

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:	54.2%	46.7%			
Above Average (Good):	17.7%	16.1%			
Average/Fair:	12.9%	16.4%			
Below Average:	3.6%	9.5%			
Poor:	10.7%	11.2%			

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this question with 162 indicating that their experience with their personal doctor or nurse at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region was "Excellent" or "Above Average." Thirty-two (32) respondents rated their overall experience with their personal doctor/nurse as either "Below Average" or "Poor."

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"If the hospital doctor were treating patients in private practice, he would be my choice. Friendly, caring and well-spoken in diagnosis, treatment and release. He touched my father's hand, each time he came in his room. Made eye contact with him and made him feel 'worthy' of the best care he could give."*

- *"My doctor listens to me and takes the time to explain what I need to do and why. The nurses have been very courteous and always provide the information I need to take care of myself. I don't think my care could get much better as it is excellent."*

- *"My doctor is kind of mean-spirited."*

Recommendation: Continue to implement the recommendations of the veterans' advisory group, the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program and VA Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) surveys to improve customer service and quality of care at all VA facilities.

VA Medical Center's Response:

The KCVAMC strives to provide the best possible service to all of our Veterans and their families. In order to meet the needs of the Veterans, a Patient Experience Council was established in 2016 to focus on increased communication with our Veterans. The Patient Experience Council has started to perform weekly rounds on the inpatient units where they sit and talk with Veterans and their families about care that they are currently receiving. The members of the council also provide real time solutions to remedy any complaints that the patients may have. The Patient Experience Council also reviews all SHEP scores and determines which areas can be improved upon.

Listening to the concerns of our Veterans continues to be a major focus for the KCVAMC. There are monthly meetings with all of our Veteran Service Organizations where they are able to share concerns that they have had when dealing with Veterans. In addition, KCVAMC hosts Stakeholder Town Halls where Veterans are invited to come and talk with hospital leadership.

10. Overall experience at the VA facility

Since the last report, satisfaction with veterans' overall experience at Kansas City VA facilities has risen slightly. The VA Medical Center's continued focus on respect and communication through the "I CARE" Program appears to be improving veterans' overall experiences.

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

	R5 (current)	R4	R3	R2	R1
Excellent:	42.7%	34.9%	37.7%	22.7%	48.7%
Above Average (Good):	22.2%	22.5%	28.7%	31.8%	34.2%
Average/Fair:	16.9%	16.1%	13.5%	18.2%	14.5%
Below Average:	7.1%	12.4%	7.0%	9.1%	0.0%
Poor:	11.1%	14.1%	13.1%	18.2%	2.6%

Two hundred twenty-five (225) responses were received to this question with 146 indicating that their overall experience at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region was "Excellent" or "Above Average." Forty-one (41) respondents rated their overall experience at the VA medical facility as either "Below Average" or "Poor."

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"Overall I am grateful for the care I have received because it has always been excellent. The horror stories I have heard about the VA on the news have NEVER been my experience. In fact, my experience with VA Healthcare has been just the opposite. I have always had excellent experiences with the VA."*

- *"Very accommodating, I volunteer as a result one day a week every week so I can return the favor. It is very rewarding."*

- *"They lack proper communication with the patient; they act like the patients do not have a need to know, they are more interested in getting personal work done than taking care of patients. I speak about 25% from my many observations."*

Recommendation: Continue to implement the recommendations of the veterans' advisory group, the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program and VA Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) surveys to improve customer service and quality of care at all VA facilities.

VA Medical Center's Response:

The KCVAMC recently established a MyVA Community Board that consists of VA staff, local Veteran organizations, and Veterans. The MyVA Community Board will help sync Veteran services within the community and make getting resources to Veterans much easier and more streamlined. The KCVAMC leadership team has also started reviewing all Patient Advocate complaints from the past 24 hours on a daily basis. This has allowed for timely response rates to issues brought up.

VETERANS' RECOMMENDATIONS

The current Summary Report discloses various issues regarding the customer service received by veterans and other matters as presented below. This section summarizes the 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 report.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"VA has too many patients for too few doctors and nurse practitioners. They are slow to act when a patient has a problem that can't be helped with pills or shots. They always do the minimum they can. You have to be persistent to get real help."*

- *"Remove the red tape required to see a specialist in a civilian facility when VA facilities are understaffed or over-booked."*

- *"Be able to dispense prescriptions. If you need medication, you have to wait until they come in the mail, usually a week later. WHAT GOOD DOES THIS DO when you are sick NOW."*

- *"Parking lot needs expanding but everything else is OK."*

- *"Have more specialized staff available."*

- *"Keep up the good work. Maintain the facilities and continue to keep them up to date."*

- *"Allow appointments to be made at other CBOC or VA Hospitals when appropriate. I physically am closer to Sedalia than Warrensburg, but cannot use that CBOC or Columbia VA Hospital due to not being assigned to that area."*

- *"Have a place for the spouse or family member to sleep in their room so that they can be together during the recovery process."*

- *"So many improvements have been made in parking, lobby renovation, improved seating in waiting areas and overall maintenance that I believe the maintenance staff are working on systematic, planned improvements."*

- *"Pharmacy, if one needs prescriptions stat, we must purchase them at a local non-VA pharmacy, sometimes at a very high cost. VA needs to have a plan that would allow us to get one-time only, short supply at local pharmacies. For ongoing meds, we still would utilize the VA mail order."*

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 Kansas City region's VA medical facilities, and it is important to acknowledge them for their hard work and commitment to service. One hundred seventy-three (173) responses were received to this question acknowledging veterans' appreciation for a provider or a department at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City 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:

- *"Dr. S in Audiology. The hearing test was very professional and she was encouraging about my results. She took impressions of my ears and ordered hearing aids for me the same day."*

- *"Dr. H's nurse, I believe her name is C, she is so excellent. If my wife calls about some symptoms I am having she always listens, asks questions and we get to either see the DR. or have a test or something is done to ease our minds. She is so sweet, caring and a powerhouse of efficiency. She is an amazing nurse and person."*

- *"My CBOC Primary care doctor. She is one wonderful lady. Kind gentle, informative, and a very good listener. I dread the day that she retires."*

- *"Dr. T, Mental Health PTSD; he's the best."*

- *"Pulmonary Dr. P does an excellent job and understands my health issues and the two of us have developed a plan for any future problems that I may experience with my COPD."*

- *"Dr C, BHC, DR H, Optometry, T A, Cardiology, Dr. N, Primary Care, Everyone caring for me during the years has been great at this facility!!!!!"*

- *"H B is a social worker at the VA hospital. She works with veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. She has helped me more in the last eight years than anyone else at the VA. She has made the difference in my life and with dealing with the VA. Assisting with making sure I get appointments and making sure I get my medicine as well. She has went above and beyond in my opinion."*

- *"Dr. V has been my prostate cancer doctor for 10 years. He is the greatest doctor I have ever met. He will bend over backward for his patients to help them. I have had stage 4 advance prostate cancer for about 8 years and I'm still here. Thanks to God and Dr. V."*

- *"R G, the director of the Anti - Coagulation Department…I really respect R's professionalism and I readily put my blood-thinner diagnosis in his capable hands."*

Recommendation: The men and women of the Kansas City VA Healthcare System provide superior levels of care for our nation's veterans. Their dedication, compassion, and professionalism deserve our praise and respect; efforts should continue to recognize those who best represent the Kansas City VA Healthcare System.

VA Medical Center's Response:

KCVAMC's Compensation and Pension (C&P) unit's performance is currently one of the top two in the country. It was recently awarded the Bronze Foundation Award for Quality and Excellence.

In addition, the C&P program manager recently has received personal recognition from the Secretary of the VA and was one of this year's distinguished Woman of the Year nominees.

FOLLOW UP ON VA MEDICAL CENTER'S RESPONSES

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

Ease of scheduling appointments

In the fourth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center stated:

> *The Kansas City VA is always working on ways to improve our scheduling practices. Some of the actions that we have taken to do this are as follows:*
>
> *1. We now use an automated Audio-care system in all of our clinical areas. This system gives Veterans a reminder phone call a few days before their appointments to remind them of their appointment. Veterans are also sent postcards prior to their appointments to remind them of the date, time, and location.*
>
> *2. We are testing a new Phone Tree system in certain areas to ensure that phone calls are routed to the appropriate staff. This will allow Veterans to get in contact with the correct clinical team.*
>
> *3. An Automated Call Distribution system is in place that allows supervisors to monitor our incoming phone calls and to ensure that our staff is ready to answer calls as they come in.*
>
> *4. The Kansas City VA recently implemented an electronic Return to Clinic (RTC) order system. The RTC is put in by the provider so that when a Veteran checks out with a clerk the clerk is able to schedule the Veteran for a follow up appointment on the spot. This eliminates the need for the Veteran to have to call the VA for an appointment.*
>
> *5. A new automated callback system called "QWorx" is being piloted in some of our clinical areas. This system allows Veterans the option to call and leave their phone number in the system. The system will then place all of the numbers in a queue and will automatically distribute the numbers to staff once the staff becomes available. This will eliminate the need for the Veteran to be placed on hold for long periods of time and also allows staff to personally call every Veteran who called into the line.*

What is the current status of these initiatives aimed at improving the scheduling system for veterans?

VA Medical Center's Response:

1) Audio care and postcard reminder systems are updated as clinic locations or hours change.

2) A multi-disciplinary improvement team was established with goals to implement best practices and allocate resources to improve the overall call efficiency. Stakeholders from key areas were included on the team. In addition, the phone tree system is still being used.

3) See response for number 2.

4) Appointments and other follow-up options such as Return to Clinic (RTC) orders are being offered to Veterans upon leaving the clinic. In addition, the MyVA Access Initiative is being implemented in an effort to create a more patient-centered scheduling process that allows the Veterans the option to choose an appointment date and time that is convenient to them.

5) Reports produced through our automated call distribution (ACD) system are monitored on a weekly basis with feedback provided to those locations in an effort to improve telephone access.

Amount of time to see a provider from the date requesting the appointment

In the fourth Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center stated:

> *The Kansas City VA is working hard to ensure that all Veterans receive timely access to healthcare. We have expanded clinic hours so that Veterans can get appointments before or after work, we are increasing the services offered at our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), and we are actively hiring more providers and nurses to increase our overall capacity. Also, in accordance with the new Veteran's Access, Choice and Accountability Act, any Veteran who we cannot see within 30 days of their clinically indicated date or their desired date is being offered the choice to receive their healthcare in the community at the VA's expense.*

What does the Kansas City VA's internal current data indicate as the average amount of time it takes for patients to be seen by a provider?

VA Medical Center's Response:

Internal data indicates the wait time for completed appointments for KCVAMC are 2.74 days for primary care; 4.58 days for specialty care; and 3.47 days for mental health.

National averages are 4.66 days for primary care; 6.13 days for specialty care; and 2.64 days for mental health.

Source: http://www.va.gov/HEALTH/docs/DR44_042016_Retrospective_Wait_Times_Desired_Date_by_Division.pdf

CONCLUSION

The Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program in the Kansas City region is making progress with regard to customer service at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. This summary report details ways the VA can improve veterans' experiences at the VA medical facilities, and highlights the steps the VA is taking to continue improving veterans' experience at the VA medical center in the Kansas City region. 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 Kansas City region VA facilities.

It is clear from the surveys that there is always room to improve veterans' experiences at the Kansas City Region VA Medical Center. However, based on the feedback from veterans, it appears that veterans are increasingly satisfied with the Kansas City VA's health care efficiency, communication, and scheduling practices. The Kansas City VA should continue its efforts to communicate more effectively with veterans across multiple platforms, as well as its efforts to promptly respond to veterans' needs as expressed to the Patient Experience Council. It is evident that these measures are positively impacting veterans' overall satisfaction with the Kansas City VA and their willingness to recommend the facility to other veterans.

In order to maintain this momentum, we need to continue to work 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.

Special thanks to the members of various veterans' service organizations who assisted in the development and completion of the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program: Roland Norris, Philip Hafler, Bob Wonnell, Randy Barnett and Bob Larkin.