



**Claire McCaskill**

United States Senator

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Summary Report:

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

**Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program**

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Report No: 2014 – KC – 03



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<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 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 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
Observation & Results	9
▪ Background .....	9
▪ Review of survey question results .....	10
1. Ease of scheduling appointments .....	10
2. Ease of access to the appointment location at the facility .....	11
3. Respect shown to the veteran while at the VA facility .....	12
4. Communication by the VA staff while the veteran was at the facility .....	14
5. Amount of time to be seen by a provider .....	15
6. Cleanliness of the facility .....	16
7. Overall experience at the VA facility .....	17
8. Willingness to recommend the VA facility to other veterans .....	18
Veterans' Recommendations	21
Recognition of VA Employees	22
Follow Up	24
Conclusion	26

CLAIRE McCASKILL  
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## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 23, 2014

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 third Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey for the Kansas City 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. A review of the responses from the third round of surveys shows general satisfaction with the VA facilities in the Kansas City region. Based on the responses we received, I continue to believe that the staff and administration of the Kansas City Region VA Medical Center are committed, as I am, to ensuring and improving veterans' confidence.

I commend the VA administrators, employees and staff for their service and professionalism. I know they want to continue striving for improvements to ensure veterans have nothing but positive experiences while at Missouri VA medical centers. In this third summary report, Missouri veterans show their strong satisfaction with the Kansas City VA medical facilities while noting some room for improvement in their overall experiences. Since our last survey, the Kansas City VA Medical Center has shown improvement in several response categories, suggesting that VA staff are showing veterans the respect they rightly deserve and improving their communication with patients. It appears that the leadership at the Kansas City VA Medical Center recognizes 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 appreciate the help and support from my partners at the Kansas City Region VA as well as several Missouri veterans' organizations. Most importantly, I appreciate 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 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:

Brook Balentine  
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 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 Kansas City VA medical centers through the period ending May 1, 2014. 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 in 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 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, but was not necessarily limited to, those VA facilities located in the Kansas City region and statewide locations that received a Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program survey through the period ending May 1, 2014. In the Kansas City region, 289 veterans initiated the survey, and 261 of those veterans completed most or all parts of the survey during that period.

Information used to complete this report included:

- Completed and partial surveys collected 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](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 were carefully reviewed and selected for inclusion in the report based on the significance and relevance of the comment to the question. 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 question asked, being repetitive or missing key information to draw a conclusion.

### **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 May 1, 2014. During this period, 289 veterans initiated the survey, and 261 of those veterans completed most or all parts of the survey for the Kansas City region. Over seventy-three percent (73%) of the veterans indicated that they had received services at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. Below is a table which describes where the veterans received treatment:

Kansas City VA Medical Center	73.2%
Belton CBOC	0.4%
Cameron Clinic	1.1%
Excelsior Springs, MO CBOC	2.2%
St. Joseph Clinic	2.2%
Warrensburg Clinic	2.5%
Other	18.5%

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 55.4% 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	4.0%
Korean War	7.6%
Vietnam War	55.4%
Desert Shield/Desert Storm	19.9%
Iraq/Afghanistan	18.1%
Other	19.6%

These veterans utilized multiple services while at the Kansas City VA Medical Center. Two hundred sixty-one (261) veterans reported using the following VA clinic categories:

Primary Care	36.0%	Emergency Room	15.3%	Extended Care	2.3%
Outpatient Clinic	19.5%	Mental Health Services	19.5%	Dental	7.7%
Pharmacy	19.5%	X-Ray	16.1%	Laboratory	25.7%
Travel/Enrollment	4.2%	Main Lobby	15.7%	Specialist Visit	21.1%
Inpatient Care	8.4%	Women's Clinic	1.9%	Spinal Cord Injury Unit	1.2%
Prosthetics	5.8%	Podiatry	5.4%	CHAMPVA	0.4%
Other	36.8%	(examples: Senior Veterans Clinic, Neurology, Cardiology)			

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

This section summarizes the results of each of the questions. Results from the most recent survey (R3) are marked “current,” and results from the previous reports (R1 & R2) are also included.

#### **1. Ease of scheduling appointments**

A large percentage of veterans reported that they were able to easily schedule appointments at a VA facility; however, concerns were noted.

#### **Were you able to schedule your appointment easily?**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
Yes:	75.9%	78.3%	88.2%
No:	24.1%	21.78%	11.8%

Two hundred sixty-one (261) veterans responded to this question with 198 veterans stating they did not have a problem with scheduling their appointments at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. Although the vast majority of the veterans were pleased with the ease of scheduling their appointments, the veterans who indicated they were having trouble with making appointments stated most of their issues were with the time between scheduling the appointments and being seen by their doctor.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“Appointments are always scheduled months in advance. If a problem comes up it is impossible to get in to see my doctor & my only alternative is to go to the ER, which is overcrowded.”*

- *“There is a waiting period, sometimes short and sometimes a long wait. I was fitted in because I had a severe back injury and could barely walk.”*
- *“Always have to leave a message & they call back a day or two later. A couple times they didn't call back at all. The Eye & ENT Clinic is always Excellent. Primary Care is hard to get in.”*

**Recommendation:** Try to reduce the amount of time in advance that an appointment needs to be scheduled. Prioritize the most serious and time-sensitive conditions. If a scheduling delay occurs, front line staff should communicate this necessary information to the veteran in a timely manner.

### **VA Medical Center's Response:**

*KCVA recently implemented the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) model, which is a team comprised of a provider, RN, LPN and a Medical Support Assistant (MSA). Assigning patients to the PACT model of care ensures that patients have easier access to care by having a designated Point of Contact (POC) for their urgent needs. Routinely we schedule patients within 14 days of the patient's desired date. Additionally PACT teams build in capacity in their schedules to handle most walk in needs. Patients are encouraged and instructed to call their primary care team for any needs they may have. We also encourage patients to enroll in My HealtheVet in order to utilize Secure Messaging, which is a means to communicate any health care needs with their provider. Open lines of communication are encouraged between front line staff and clinicians to facilitate coordination of care in the event of an urgent need. Finally, we have implemented expanded clinical hours on weekday evenings and weekends to accommodate Veterans who may not be able to make daytime appointments.*

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

Most veterans continued to report that they were able to navigate the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region in order to find the location of their appointments.

### **Were you able to find your way to your appointment easily?**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
Yes:	88.5%	91.3%	98.7%
No:	11.5%	8.7%	1.3%

Two hundred sixty-one (261) veterans responded to this question with 231 veterans stating they did not have a problem finding their way to appointments at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. We view this as a strong sign that the VA continues to take the necessary steps to help veterans navigate the VA facilities.

**Recommendation:** Continue having greeters meet patients. Encourage all VA staff to offer assistance to patients needing directions.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"I have always found my way to my appointments very easily both at the Clinic and at the VA Hospital."*
- *"Volunteers had to assist."*
- *"I know the hospital well, but it would be hard to navigate if I was starting new. Even though the hospital has changed..."*

#### **VA Medical Center's Response:**

*We have hired a Lead Greeter to work alongside our greeters and volunteers to ensure staffing of the areas. Volunteers and greeters will continue to be available to assist arriving veterans and family members at KCVA. Both entrances to our hospital now have staffed "Welcome Desks" to assist Veterans and their family members. Additionally the medical center implemented a new program in 2013 called Veteran4Veteran Navigators. This is a group of Veterans who volunteer to assist patients and family members with directions, locating services and programs. This program is very successful and is an extension of the New Patient Orientation classes.*

### **3. Respect shown to the veteran while at the VA facility**

The reported respect shown at Kansas City VA facilities increased for this round of surveys. More than 82% of respondents reported that they are receiving the respect they feel they deserve during their VA medical experience.

#### **Were you treated with respect while at the VA facility?**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
Yes:	82.4%	73.9%	87.3%
No:	17.6%	26.1%	12.7%

Two hundred sixty-one (261) veterans responded to this question with 215 veterans stating they were treated with respect while at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. While there were several instances where veterans reported rude 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:

- *"99% of interactions were positive. Although the first (ER check-in) and last (Travel Pay) customer service experiences were horrible."*
- *"The person taking my call treated me with disinterest, road-blocked me and barely showed the vaguest hint of politeness."*

- *“Sometimes yes and sometimes no. Some employees are very pleasant and some are atrociously rude. The receptionist at the dental clinic was extremely rude.”*

**Recommendation:** The focus on excellent customer service is important. While annual training is required for Medical Center staff, front line staff may benefit from more frequent training to reinforce best practices. Additionally, all VA employees should be aware of the principles of superior customer service. Communication containing such guidelines should be easily accessible to every VA staff member.

### **VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*KCVA continues to focus on customer service; supervisors, Service Line Managers and Senior Leadership promote excellent customer service with employees at every level.*

*Performance plans for all employees at the Kansas City VA Medical Center include a specific customer service performance. Customer Service is a critical element in each employee’s performance plan, with a focus on providing excellent customer service to our KCVA Veterans.*

*KCVA has concentrated more on interpersonal skill sets when hiring new staff for vacant positions. Supervisors have incorporated customer service guidelines in the training plan for new staff. Customer Service & Customer Satisfaction training was a component of 2014 KCVAMC Supervisors training. We are in the process of developing Customer Service Training Sessions that are specifically targeted towards front line staff.*

*Primary Care has coaches and captains assigned to work with all members of the medical home team to develop processes around the patient – access, care coordination and continuity.*

*Currently, Kansas City VA Medical Center is participating in the Honoring Veteran’s Board Hiring Pilot, which aims to address customer service concerns with front line staff. As a recommendation from the board to help identify better candidates during the recruitment process, front line supervisors will be required to complete training courses to increase their interviewing skills and abilities. Supervisors will also be required to use specific customer service interview questions for all front line positions. These questions will include an answer guide with sample “best,” “average,” and “poor” responses. Additionally, the board is recommending front line staff be required to complete several customer service training courses: to better understand the Veteran population; to realize what exceptional customer service is; and how to give exceptional customer service.*

*Customer Service Rounds and principles have been implemented in the inpatient units as a means to improve customer services, patient satisfaction and employee satisfaction. The rounding began in April 2013 and over 1600 patient and/or family interviews have been conducted. Results and actions stemming from these interviews are shared with front line staff at unit based staff meetings.*

*The program is expanding in June 2014 to increase front line staff involvement with the interviews and service recovery. In preparation for front line staff participation, they will be given training on customer service and service recovery. Service recovery rounding is to be piloted in select outpatient areas in the near future.*

*Within the required Patient-Centered Care new employee training, tenants of customer service are discussed. There is a scenario in which attendees are asked to have a crucial conversation with a front line employee that is disrespectful to a patient. This scenario is aimed at the affective domain and has been very strong in formulating the value of respect.*

*We have ongoing communication with employees regarding customer service, and we utilize praise and award programs to recognize those who demonstrate they have made customer service the priority it deserves.*

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

A common frustration among respondents is the general lack of information and clear communication from the VA staff to the patients. While the dramatic increase in communication satisfaction since the last report is encouraging, some veterans continue to have poor communication exchanges with VA staff.

#### **Did the VA staff communicate well with you and clearly explain what was going on?**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Yes:</b>	79.3%	60.9%	90.0%
<b>No:</b>	20.7%	39.1%	10.0%

Two hundred sixty-one (261) veterans responded to this question with 207 veterans stating the VA staff communicated effectively with them at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. Several survey respondents commented on the poor communication and service received at the VA Pharmacy.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“This time everything was fine, however, that is frequently not the case. I often get the run around while I am at the VA. If my meds aren't ready I have to go see this person who has to sign off on this paper, then I have to take the paper to someone else in order to get my meds.”*
- *“They act like they are so busy that they can only afford to give you information one time and one time only, only to turn and start back conversing amongst themselves that has nothing to do with work or the hospital.”*

- *“I never got an explanation on what happened with my surgery and why I am having so many complications.”*

**Recommendation:** The Director’s Veterans Advisory Board is a key element to building and sustaining stronger communication practices. At the same time, transparency and accountability are essential to this effort. The Board’s findings should be made available to the staff and veterans, along with descriptions of follow-up actions.

### **VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*After each Veterans Advisory Board, staff review and address issues and concerns brought by the board members. Board’s recommendations are always shared with appropriate staff and Veterans groups. Examples include the improvements and changes made in beneficiary travel, medical center signage, and the information desks. Follow-up on recommendations is typically made to the board member bringing the concern. While the meeting agenda is developed by the board, medical center leadership can include a review of follow-up actions to the concerns discussed in previous meeting.*

### **5. Amount of time to be seen by a provider**

The percentage of veterans expressing that they were not seen by their providers in a reasonable amount of time has decreased during this survey period. However, veterans still reported some dissatisfaction with the amount of time between calling to schedule an appointment and the appointment itself.

#### **Were you able to be seen by your provider in a reasonable amount of time?**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
<b>Yes:</b>	75.5%	65.2%	90.2%
<b>No:</b>	24.5%	34.8%	9.8%

Two hundred sixty-one (261) veterans responded to this question with 197 veterans stating 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, especially to get their appointment scheduled.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *“To get a compensation review/medical evaluation appointment for injuries that occurred on active duty took 18 months to see a doctor at the VA.”*
- *“Almost impossible to get an appointment with a Urologist, Cardiologist, Neurologist, etc. The Neurology department doesn't even try to return calls to them when trying to get medications that they prescribed.”*



- *“I requested an appt. in OCTOBER and was given one in JAN of 2014.”*

**Recommendation:** Work with doctors to reduce the length of time patients have to wait to get an appointment scheduled.

#### **VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Access to all specialty clinics is reviewed regularly by department leadership and medical center leadership. Patients whose provider feels a need for the patient to be seen before the appointment can be accomplished at the KCVA, the care is purchased in the community if the Veteran agrees.*

*To increase capacity we have expanded clinic hours (Saturday primary and specialty clinics); evening clinics in primary care and mental health; added clinic locations for Mobile Medical Unit; added clinic space (recently opened the Honor Annex); promoting use of secure e-mail to providers and telemedicine; and we have added staff where needed. We have hired an additional physician (part time) for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; and we are actively recruiting for an additional Interventional Pain Medicine physician.*

*Primary Care and Mental Health recently conducted scheduling audits to ensure that scheduling practices are following the scheduling directive; this includes ensuring that the desired date for the appointment by the Veteran is clearly obtained and accurately recorded.*

*Schedulers and providers in specialty clinics have been instructed to include the input of the Veteran when making return appointments. This is not only a patient satisfier, but also the Veteran’s availability is key to the success on reducing no-shows.*

*Surgical clinics regularly review their access and are recruiting and hiring additional providers and care coordinators to track and monitor patient care.*

*We do a significant number of C&P exams and our average turnaround time is 20 days.*

#### **6. Cleanliness of the facility**

Veterans reported satisfaction in the cleanliness of the VA facilities in the Kansas City region, but some of the concerns continued to reference the facility’s normal wear and tear patterns that appear to stem from the age of the facility.

#### **Rate the cleanliness of the facility you visited.**

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
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%
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Two hundred sixty-one (261) veterans responded to this question with 197 veterans rating the cleanliness of VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region as Excellent or Above Average. Only 20 respondents rated the VA medical facility's cleanliness as Below Average or Poor.

The veterans' opinions of the cleanliness of the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region indicate that, overall, veterans are pleased with the cleanliness of the Kansas City VA Medical Center over the survey period.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"Facility reminded me of a hospital from the 1950s. The cleanliness was marginal. Given the age and condition, not as easy place to maintain."*
- *"There are times when it doesn't seem that they have the people to keep the restrooms clean."*
- *"The bathrooms are starting to get in ill repair and dirty with the doors on the stalls not locking and/or closing properly."*

**Recommendation:** Ensure housekeeping is monitoring high-traffic zones, such as restrooms and main entrances. Make telephone numbers visible for veterans to call when areas need attention.

#### **VA Medical Center's Response:**

*Environmental Management Service (housekeeping) currently has two staff members assigned exclusively to the cleaning of the high traffic restrooms and lobbies on the 1st floor from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday - Friday. In addition, we have placed visible signs on the restroom doors informing our patients, visitors, and staff members of the proper channels to follow for immediate housekeeping services.*

#### **7. Overall experience at the VA facility**

Over 66% of veterans reported Excellent or Above Average experiences at Kansas City region VA facilities. This was an improvement since the last summary report. Based on the responses to our survey, a continued focus on respect and communication at the VA medical facilities could sustain and improve veterans' overall satisfaction with their health care experience.

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

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
Excellent:	37.7%	22.7%	48.7%
Above Average (Good):	28.7%	31.8%	34.2%
Average/Fair:	13.5%	18.2%	14.5%

Below Average:	7.0%	9.1%	0.0%
Poor:	13.1%	18.2%	2.6%

Two hundred forty-four (244) veterans responded to this question with 162 veterans rating their overall experience at the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region as Excellent or Above Average. Forty-nine (49) respondents rated their overall experience at the VA medical facility as either Below Average or Poor.

**Recommendation:** Since the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program is an ongoing survey, continue collaborating with area veteran leaders and VA staff to help implement the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program recommendations for the Kansas City VA medical facilities. Over time, these actions could improve veterans' overall level of customer satisfaction.

### VA Medical Center's Response:

*Once received, the survey's formal report will be shared with our Veteran leaders and staff. KCVA continues to work closely with Veteran groups such as the Veteran Focus Group, Veteran4Veteran Navigators, and Veteran Service Officers. Veterans are included as participating members in key meetings such as the Patient Centered Care Council, Medical Center Strategic Planning, and project planning and activation teams. Monthly meetings are held with Veteran Service Organization representatives. Veterans are invited to speak/tell their story at Employee Town Halls and department staff meetings.*

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

A majority of veterans surveyed indicated a willingness to positively recommend Kansas City region VA facilities to other veterans. Over 77% of the respondents indicated they would recommend the VA to other veterans, which is a marked increase since the last summary report.

#### Would you recommend this VA facility to other veterans?

	<b>R3 (current)</b>	<b>R2</b>	<b>R1</b>
Yes:	77.5%	63.6%	93.4%
No:	22.5%	36.4%	6.6%

Two hundred forty-four (244) veterans responded to this question with 189 veterans stating they would recommend the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region to other veterans. Veterans who reported their unwillingness to recommend Kansas City VA medical facilities to other veterans seemed to focus on longer than expected wait times to see their doctor as well as poor communication experiences.

Below are sample positive comments from veterans:

- *"I could not get this quality of care anywhere else, for any amount of money."*

- *“I am happy with my health care needs. Great service and no long time waiting.”*
- *“For the amount of people serviced by this agency, they do a superb job. EVERY ONE of the people I deal with at the K.C.V.A. hospital are very helpful, professional and NEVER try to push anything off and do their job with courtesy and respect.”*

For those veterans who shared negative comments about the Kansas City VA Medical Center and would not recommend them, the reasons varied, but focused primarily on the length of time for getting an appointment.

Below are sample concerns from veterans:

- *“Takes too long to get appointments. Then you get one, they look at you, send you home and make another appointment. Then that takes forever.”*
- *“I have had more negative experiences at the KC VA than I do positive. It frequently does take hours to be seen regardless of appointment times. The ortho doctors have shown repeated disrespect to me and have made it clear to me they did not want to treat my condition that occurred during the deployment. The visit I am specifically filling out this survey for was an exception to the majority of my experiences. I finally found a doctor that cares and does a wonderful job. I would follow him to any facility if he were to ever move. - But it took 3 years to find him!! I was completely frustrated with prior VA doctors up to this point.”*
- *“I usually get excellent care at this facility; however, the pharmacy could use some improvement in that they are sometimes discourteous to patients and sometimes do not give the proper care in filling the prescriptions.”*

**Recommendation:** Work to improve communication between veterans and the VA Medical Center staff by working with veteran leaders in the community to develop recommendations to improve the overall experience at the Medical Center. Work with doctors to reduce the length of time it takes for patients to get an appointment.

### **VA Medical Center’s Response:**

*Veterans are included in the project planning and activation process, included in the 2 annual strategic planning retreats, included as members of the patient-centered care council and new patient orientation. The Medical Center Director meets with the Veteran Focus Group at their scheduled meetings and individuals with any concerns. Additionally he meets monthly with Veteran Service Officers. In 2013 a new program – Veteran4Veteran Navigators – was implemented to assist patients and family members in navigating the medical center building, services and programs. A monthly patient newsletter is published with current news about projects, programs, new services and contact information.*

*KCVA recently implemented the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) model, which is a team comprised of a provider, RN, LPN and a Medical Support Assistant (MSA). Assigning patients to the PACT model of care ensures that patients have easier access to care by having a designated Point of Contact (POC) for their urgent needs.*

*Shared Decision Making, (SDM) training and implementation of four PACT pilots started in May 2014. SDM are those decisions that are shared by doctors and patients, informed by the best evidence available and weighted according to the specific characteristics and values of the patient. Shared decision making places the patient as a partner in the care planning process.*

*The current scope of the pilot is for prostate specific antigen testing for prostate cancer screening. The desire is to expand SDM to more providers and for other patient preference sensitive items such as mammography and chronic disease management options.*

*Motivational Interviewing and TEACH training continues for all PACT teamlets. These strategies are well aligned with providing personalized, proactive, and patient-centered care.*

*Access to all specialty clinics is reviewed regularly by department leadership and medical center leadership. Patients whose provider feels a need for the patient to be seen before the appointment can be accomplished at the KCVA, the care is purchased in the community if the Veteran agrees.*

*To increase capacity we have expanded clinic hours (Saturday primary and specialty clinics); evening clinics in primary care and mental health; added clinic locations for Mobile Medical Unit; added clinic space (recently opened the Honor Annex); promoting use of secure e-mail to providers and telemedicine; and we have added staff where needed. We have hired an additional physician (part time) for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; and we are actively recruiting for an additional Interventional Pain Medicine physician.*

*Primary Care and Mental Health recently conducted scheduling audits to ensure that scheduling practices are following the scheduling directive; this includes ensuring that the desired date for the appointment by the Veteran is clearly obtained and accurately recorded.*

*Schedulers and providers in specialty clinics have been instructed to include the input of the Veteran when making return appointments. This is not only a patient satisfier, but also the Veteran's availability is key to the success on reducing no-shows.*

*Surgical clinics regularly review their access and are recruiting and hiring additional providers and care coordinators to track and monitor patient care.*



### 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 made to improve the VA facility they visited.

#### **What could be done to improve the VA facility you visited?**

Two hundred forty-four (244) veterans responded to this question with their recommendations to improve the VA medical facilities in the Kansas City region. Most of the recommendations from veterans deal with the same issues that have been outlined throughout this summary report.

Below are sample comments from veterans:

- *"Have more doctors available to care for the veterans. Seems there are not enough doctors to handle everyone in a timely manner. Having to wait months to get care or to even be allowed medication to help. Having to jump through hoops to get pain medication to help relieve some pain."*
- *"Better communication with patients and their families as to what to expect after such a traumatic experience."*
- *"When you walk in the door for the very first time it appears to be a scene of utter chaos filled with uncertainty as to where to start."*
- *"Labs are a confusing issue. Without checking with others you don't know when your turn is. The order of entry is not maintained by the lab."*
- *"Because of limited parking, one must arrive at least an hour or more [before an appointment] in order to find a place to park. IF it had been done 10 or more years ago, building a parking garage would go a long way in relieving this problem. If one would build a parking garage, it should go as far down as it rises above the ground with plainly marked elevators with easy access. It should have at least two covered walk ways, one underground and one above ground. The cost now would be extremely high but if this is put off, the cost will be prohibitive."*
- *"Possibly better facility maps for directions since rooms aren't necessarily numbered consecutively at the KC VA Hospital."*
- *"Valet parking would be a nice addition due to the long walking distances from the parking area to the building."*



### 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 eighty-nine (189) veterans responded to this question with acknowledgement of 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. J. N. in the Gold Clinic deserves recognition for excellence. He is the only ortho doctor I have met in three years that truly cares about the veterans and he strives to help us get better."*
- *"Dr. S. (primary care) and his staff do an excellent job in addressing the veterans' health concerns."*
- *"The older lady that provided scheduling and customer service for Comp & Pension was friendly, knowledgeable and very helpful."*
- *"The lady that takes the blood samples and has worked many years. Do not have her name however."*
- *"I was seen today by C. L. He worked with me to get a prescription that should improve my vision at "music reading distance" and allow me to continue a favorite hobby. Thank you C.!"*
- *"Don't know names, but from the volunteers opening car doors to the doctors & nurses, they have all been of the most exemplary & professional character."*
- *"My primary care Nurse Practitioner, C.H. I have been with her for more than 20 years and we have developed a very good rapport and I will be devastated when she leaves."*
- *"Dr. H. - Silver Clinic. Excellent, patient and cheerful practitioner. EENT clinic personnel (e.g. B.) very pleasant and helpful. Bravo."*

**Recommendation:** The Kansas City VA Medical Center is fortunate to have so many competent, compassionate professionals. Reward and acknowledge superior employees for their service and job well-done.

**VA Medical Center's Response:**

*The Kansas City VA Medical Center is committed to recognizing employees who exemplify the core values of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence (ICARE) which defines what we stand for and serves as our guide in performing our mission of serving Veterans. The employee newsletter highlights staff across the medical center with published complimentary comments from Veterans and/or family members. The Kansas City VA Medical Center recognizes employees through our special contribution and award and recognition programs. Each month a staff member is showcased on our electronic signage and how they have demonstrated one of the core values. An award implemented in 2013 recognizes employees on the spot --- WOW Award; this award is a huge favorite and being utilized by our managers. The Patient Centered Care award recognizes employees whose actions demonstrated their commitment to our mission in serving Veterans. Each month one employee is selected as the Employee of the Month; the nominations for this award come from other employees. And annually one department/service-line is selected as the Service of the Year, receiving a lunch served by executive leadership and a trophy to display in their area. We appreciate the Veterans who responded to your survey and identified employees who provided excellent service.*





## 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 first report, or stated they were already taking action on some of these concerns mentioned in the summary. This section reports the status of the implementation of those commitments.

### Respect shown to the veteran while at the VA facility

In the second Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center stated *"This past year our medical center is placing a great emphasis on becoming more patient-centered in our daily interactions. Approximately 70% of our staff have attended patient-centered retreats. These retreats are designed to create awareness and reinforce the medical center's commitment to patient-centered care."* What is the current status of this initiative aimed at improving patient care?

#### VA Medical Center's Response:

##### Update of Patient Centered Care (PCC) Training:

KCVAMC	<i>Patient Centered Care Roles and Responsibilities</i>	284	<b>93%</b>  <i>Percentage of FTE attended a Patient-Centered Care Offering as of April 2014</i>
	<i>Patient Centered Staff Retreats</i>	1287	
	<i>What EMS Does Matters (Role of EMS in PCC)</i>	34	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1605</b>	
	<b>FTE as of end of calendar 2013</b> <i>(Includes part time and contract.)</i>	<b>1723</b>	

### Amount of time to be seen by a provider

In the second Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program Summary Report, the VA Medical Center stated *"A key project this summer looked at improvements to meet the demand of our patients in our specialty care clinics. Service lines are in the process of implementing the recommendations from this project."* What is the current status of this implementation and the time it takes for a veteran to be seen by a provider?



## VA Medical Center's Response:

*To increase capacity we have:*

- *expanded clinic hours (Saturday primary and specialty clinics);*
- *expanded evening clinics in primary care and mental health;*
- *added clinic locations for Mobile Medical Unit;*
- *added clinic space:*
  - *recently opened the Honor Annex which has allowed us to expand specialty care clinic space – to include Podiatry, Neurosurgery, Dermatology and Plastics*
  - *expecting imminent approval for a new clinic in Johnson County, KS that will include some specialty care. This will further expand specialty space and access.*

*We are promoting use of secure e-mail to providers, in home telehealth and telemedicine;*

*Staff have been added where needed to include a recently hired additional physician (part time) for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; and we are actively recruiting for an additional Interventional Pain Medicine physician.*

*Primary Care and Mental Health recently conducted scheduling audits to ensure that scheduling practices are following the scheduling directive; this includes ensuring that the desired date for the appointment by the Veteran is clearly obtained and accurately recorded.*

*Schedulers and providers in specialty clinics have been instructed to include the input of the Veteran when making return appointments. This is not only a patient satisfier, but also the Veteran's availability is key to the success on reducing no-shows.*

*Surgical clinics regularly review their access and are recruiting and hiring additional providers and care coordinators to track and monitor patient care.*



## CONCLUSION

The Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program in the Kansas City region continues to gain traction. This summary report details ways the VA can improve veterans' experiences at the VA medical facilities. This is part of a series of steps the VA is taking to continue improving veterans' experiences 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. The VA has provided responses that indicate that they are taking veterans' concerns seriously and are continuing to implement procedures, policies and training to streamline the scheduling of appointments, the length of time it takes to get an appointment and improve communication with the veterans. The Kansas City VA's Veterans' Advisory Board comprised of veteran service officers, veterans and VA staff who meet regularly to review and analyze information on actions, progress and results is an asset for the Kansas City VA and a positive approach for providing veterans the quality customer service they deserve.

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 to fill out the surveys as their participation in the Veterans' Customer Satisfaction Program is essential 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: Ed Slater, Mike Davis, DJ Coyle, Bob Wonnell, Kathy Lee, Randy Barnett and Bob Larkin, among others.