

MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH November 18, 2014



One of the biggest challenges we face in the long term as we build our internal capacity to provide timely access to high-quality care for Veterans is the shortage of clinicians and other health care professionals. This provider shortage was one of the underlying causes of the problems that occurred in Phoenix and elsewhere. And it's not just a VA challenge—health care professionals are in high demand and short supply for all of health care.

Our noble mission and wonderful patients are our best recruitment tools. Young people who are looking for rewarding careers in health care couldn't make a better choice than working for VA, where they can make critical contributions to the health of the nation's 22 million Veterans—and all Americans—through our groundbreaking research, education and training opportunities, and high-quality clinical care.

Beyond the inspiring mission and patients, we also offer some attractive recruitment and retention incentives, like the Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP). This program authorizes us to reimburse educational loan debt to recruit or retain health care professionals for critical positions that are difficult to fill. We use this program as a recruitment and retention incentive to help health care professionals pay down their qualifying education loans. The EDRP targets providers who would likely decline an opportunity to work for VA, or who would leave VA employment without this incentive.

The EDRP incentive assists health care professionals in reducing their qualifying loan balances and aids in recruiting employees by reimbursing loan payments of up to \$120,000 over a five-year service period—the recently enacted Veterans Choice Act doubled the maximum amount of reimbursement from \$60,000. While employees already participating in the EDRP program cannot reapply for new agreements, they will continue to be reimbursed in accordance with the terms of their existing agreements.

An EDRP retention incentive may be authorized if, without one, VA would likely lose, for any reason, an employee whose retention is essential because of unusually high or unique qualifications, or a special need. Each facility is responsible for determining which critical, hard-to-fill positions are eligible for the EDRP based on the needs of that facility.

Local recruitment plans should include a list of the specific, difficult to recruit and retain health profession occupations, or specialties within an occupation, that are being supported or recommended by a facility for this incentive. I encourage facilities to use this and all other available recruitment and retention tools to help us attract the best and brightest health care professionals to a rewarding career taking care of Veterans.

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