

Mr. Christopher Shea Wilkes  
VA Truth Tellers  
3646 Youree Drive  
Shreveport, Louisiana 71105

On August 17, 2017 I grudgingly mailed a letter to President Donald Trump concerning a continued failure to provide timely treatment to our veterans by the Overton Brooks Veterans Affairs Medical Center (OBVAMC) in Shreveport, Louisiana. The disclosure to President Trump concerned the fact that a large number of our Veterans at the OBVAMC are waiting for approval to receive care outside the VA, scheduling of appointments with Non-VA providers, and Non-VA provider report downloads. I placed the blame on the inability of the VA and the Tri-West system to work together to provide quality care to our veterans. In fact, at the time I sent the letter to President Trump, there were over 2,000 veterans waiting to be provided with timely care and services. I pleaded to the President, "Many of these Veterans need immediate care and without it some will die. This inexcusable situation must be remedied immediately."

After learning about my disclosure to the President, the leadership of the OBVAMC increased their focus to remediate these problems which had been existing and growing for over a year. Numerous VA employees were called in on Saturday August, 19, 2017 and Sunday August 20, 2017 to schedule the backlog of appointments. This is a typical VA reactionary response to problems, it is its modus operandi. The problem was known to exist by the VA leadership at OBVAMC, but since the problem was not known to exist outside of the VA, it was all but ignored. It is amazing that significant progress was able to be made on this failure in a matter of 48 hours, but only after the light was shone upon it. Our veterans deserve a VA that is proactive in solving problems, not one that is in denial and is reactive only once well known internal problems are exposed to the public.

On Tuesday, August 23, 2017, I met with OBVAMC leadership to discuss the scheduling backlog that I disclosed in my letter to the President. To my surprise, the local leaders with whom I met were very open and candid about the problem. They laid out their plan to analyze how the problem occurred and how to find a remedy for it.

After, what I felt was an unusually fruitful conversation and a recognition of the problem by local VA leadership, I was shocked to see the official VA response from the VA Office of Public Affairs. In this response the VA's bureaucracy once again sticks its head in the sand and attacks the

messenger rather than addressing the problem.

The VA press release does not address the fact that over 2,000 veterans were on a list and waiting for care, it does not address the fact that communication between Tri-West and the VA is extremely poor, and it ignores the numerous instances of VA retaliation against whistleblowers. It does not address why the problems existed or how the VA intended to solve the problems. It does not admit that numerous employees were called in over the weekend to work overtime to rapidly correct the deficiencies. Rather, it returns to its fantastical world where its short comings do not exist. It blames the backlog on the lack of specialty providers. While it is true that in some specialties there is a dearth of providers, it is not true across the board. Additionally, the VA does not address the fact that many providers in these medical specialties no longer see VA patients because they have been waiting years for payment for their prior services. The problem is not with the providers, it lies with the bloated bureaucracy of the VA. Very simply, the VA system refuses to look in the mirror and admit and address its problems.

The VA press release attempts to discredit my current disclosure, by arguing that my prior disclosure of an unauthorized “secret” waitlist was “unsubstantiated.” In doing so it relies upon a completely debunked Office of Inspector General report. The report cited by the VA press release was so completely flawed and skewed against reality that the Office of Special Counsel took the extraordinary step of reporting the flawed OIG report directly to the President of the United States. It is well accepted throughout the VA that wait times and access numbers were being falsified throughout the entire VA system. In the VA’s Orwellian world, failures are successes and reports from the Office of Special Counsel to the President citing the VA’s failures are defined as “unsubstantiated”.

Finally, the VA press release claims that the numerous instances of retaliation against me were “unsubstantiated”. Contrary to this false assertion, these claims have been substantiated and as a result continue as an open investigation within the Office of Special Counsel. Ironically, as the VA press release announces that retaliation is not “tolerated”, it publicly castigates and attempts to intimidate me by continuing to insinuate that my prior claims were “unsubstantiated”. I am beginning to believe that the VA does not realize that the term “unsubstantiated” does not mean what they think it means.

As I wrote to President Trump, “... some attempts have been made to correct the VA’s systemic leadership problems, I fear it is much too late to turn the tide within the current system. Those responsible for these mistakes are not held accountable and their careers continue to progress

with little to no accountability. The problems are hidden from the VA's Washington leadership and the entrenched bureaucracy remains." This is a drastic time in our VA system, it is obvious from instances such as the recent press release that the VA refuses to admit and address its problems. Meanwhile, our veterans continue being placed on waitlist only hoping to receive the treatment they earned before it is too late.



Christopher Shea Wilkes