



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
VA Heartland Network-VISN 15  
1201 Walnut Street Suite 800  
Kansas City, MO 64106

The Honorable Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins  
United States House of Representatives  
1027 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 27, 2015

Dear Congresswoman Jenkins:

Thank you for your letter to the VA Heartland Network regarding the current status of the Emergency Department (ED) at the Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center (Topeka VA) in Topeka, Kansas. As of April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the Emergency Department at the Topeka VA is still in a state of "Pause" and continues to operate as a 24/7 Urgent Care Clinic (UCC). The recent hiring of the new Emergency Department Chief on April 5, 2015, along with additional Physicians and nurses have now made the Topeka VA eligible to be reinstated as a full-time Emergency Department. A site visit from by VA Central Office (VACO) will occur the 1<sup>st</sup> week of May and we anticipate the temporary "Pause" on the Emergency Department to be removed by the end of May.

The Topeka VA UCC currently has five (5) full-time staff Emergency Medicine Physicians, with the anticipation of a sixth ED Physician to begin in July of 2015. Currently there are thirteen (13) nurses, along with one health technician, and two (2) intermittent Registered Nurses.

To reiterate the current status of Topeka VA Emergency Department:

- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has determined that the Topeka VA Emergency Department is on a temporary "Pause" and shall function as an UCC until VHA has examined all policy and procedures, and staffing levels.
- All Veterans reporting to the UCC will be triaged and given the appropriate care, regardless of a scheduled appointment, who are in need of immediate attention for any acute medical or psychiatric/mental health care services.
- The UCC will operate 24 hours a day, 7 days per week with available ancillary services of the laboratory and radiology services at all times.
- The UCC is *not* designed to provide the full spectrum of emergency care services, nor does it provide emergency medical care, pediatric or maternity care, and does not accept emergency cases from the local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system as outlined by the Emergency Medical Treatment & Labor Act (EMTALA).
- All Veterans and their family members who are experiencing a medical emergency should immediately call 9-1-1.

Following up on the aforementioned staffing levels for the Topeka VA UCC, Dr. Fatima Khan has been hired as the new Chief of the Emergency Department at the Topeka VA. She began this new role as ED Chief on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The other addition to the ED team of physicians was Dr. John Dumbolton, who began serving Veterans on March 23, 2015.

Additional improvements to the UCC/Emergency Department include the following:

- Implemented Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to use a certified Physician Assistant (C-PA) in the UCC to help augment the ED Physician staffing levels since July 2014.
- Compliance of the July 2014 VHA Women's Health Directive, to ensure the UCC contains proper OB/GYN equipment and supplies for female Veterans, and/or their respective family members.
- Ensured full compliance of the July 2014 VHA Emergency Medicine Handbook requirements regarding medications and medical supplies, as well as all other requirements expected of the VHA Emergency Medicine Handbook.
- Additional Emergency Department Integration Software (EDIS) training for all ED staff on August 2014.
- Completion of facility asset study to propose and design the expansion the Topeka VA Emergency Department footprint back in December 2014.

Working closely with VACO, the Topeka VA has worked diligently to ensure all aspects and requirements have been met to remove the temporary 'pause' in ED status at the Topeka VA Emergency Department. We will continue to reiterate the importance for a timely resolution and/or decision regarding the temporary 'pause' status, during the next scheduled monthly call. The VA Heartland Network has no desire to delay this decision any more than you do, but it is imperative that the proper health care infrastructure and staffing levels are established, to trust that the Veterans shall receive the very best care and Emergency Medicine possible once the temporary 'pause' has been lifted.

A copy of this response was sent to The Honorable Congresswoman Jenkins. If you have any further questions, please have a member of your staff contact Mr. Kevin Arnhold, Executive Assistant to the V15 Network Director at (816) 701-3074 or by e-mail at [Kevin.Arnhold@va.gov](mailto:Kevin.Arnhold@va.gov).

I appreciate your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,



William P. Patterson, MD, MSS  
Network Director, VA Heartland Network  
VISN 15

Cc: The Honorable Lynn Jenkins  
United States House of Representatives