

**Testimony of Dr. David Shulkin
Nominee to be Under Secretary of Health
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs
May 5, 2015**

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and to everyone who is here today that cares deeply about the health of our Veterans, thank you for the opportunity and privilege to address you. I am deeply honored to come before you today to seek your endorsement to become the Undersecretary for Health in the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

I'm grateful that several members of my family are with me today. First, my wife, Dr. Merle Bari, who I met in medical school and have been married to for 27 years. Her encouragement and support during this process and her commitment to our Veterans have inspired me. We are here with our daughter Jennifer, who will graduate next month from the University of Pennsylvania and will be attending law school in the Fall. My parents are also here with us today. My dad, Dr. Mark Shulkin is a psychiatrist who served as a Captain in the United States Army and my mother Sunny Shulkin, a psychotherapist. Both of my parents inspired me not only to pursue a career in medicine, but to always put the patient first. Not able to join us today is our son, Daniel, who will graduate next month from NYU where he will receive a Masters in Public Administration.

Over the past few weeks I have had the opportunity to speak to many of you, and heard from many others around the country about their concerns for the VA health system. I appreciate both the candor of these conversations and the overwhelming support and commitment I have felt from so many about improving the VA Health System. I know these past several months have been extraordinarily difficult for Veterans and all of those who care so much about providing the type of care and services our American heroes deserve. I hear the disappointment and frustration that so many feel about the VA. We all agree: The status quo is simply not acceptable. I want to assure you, that if confirmed, it will be my sole mission and focus each and every day to ensure that we rebuild the VA health system to be one that provides our Veterans with the highest level of quality care. If confirmed, I pledge to work with you to restore trust and pride in our VA health care system. I also want to ensure you that I recognize the gravity of the mission before us and what is at stake, if together we do not succeed in making the necessary changes and improvements.

My connection to those that have served this country is well engrained in my fabric. I was born on an Army base in Highland Park Ill. My father cared for active military on the base and throughout my life has sensitized me to the psychological and medical needs of those who served our country. Both of my grandfathers served in the US Army in World War I and my paternal grandfather, Joseph Shulkin, served as Chief pharmacist at the Madison Wisconsin VA. He would regularly share with us that it was all of our duties to give back to those who served our country. My wife and I both spent

considerable time in numerous VA Hospitals during both medical school and in our residency training. I am indebted to the dedicated health professionals at the Philadelphia VAMC, the West Haven VAMC and the Pittsburgh VAMC who contributed to my training and learning. Given that experience, and continued engagements with VA during the course of my career, it was difficult for me to have watched from the sidelines last year, as the failings of the system came to light. I am honored that President Obama has nominated me to be part of the team that puts the pieces back together again and builds a much stronger and more capable system to serve our Veterans.

I was trained as an internal medicine physician and a researcher in health policy and the assessment of clinical outcomes. My career has focused on managing large health systems and improving quality, patient safety, and integrated systems of care. Although I have spent much of my time in management and administration, my core identity has remained as a physician and caregiver. My focus remains on providing patients and their families with quality care by accountable organizations. Over my career I have developed systems that helped people choose better quality doctors and hospitals, enhanced reporting and learning from patient safety incidents, improved access and scheduling patient appointments, and facilitated the transparency of outcomes. I have also launched and run an accountable care organization and a physician organization that have worked tirelessly to identify and eliminate gaps in care and have demonstrated real improvements in quality. If confirmed, I look forward to bringing this experience, and my priorities and focus to support the VA system.

Over the past 25 years, I have led a number of complex health care organizations, including a large inner city hospital and some of the country's best academic healthcare systems and medical schools. I've worked as an entrepreneur, clinician, author, teacher, and researcher. In my current capacity as President of Morristown Medical Center, a large tertiary care hospital in Northern New Jersey that is part of the Atlantic Health System, I have provided leadership during a period of great transformation. Over the last five years, we have been recognized by Inside New Jersey and Castle Connolly as the "Best Overall" hospital in the state in almost all clinical categories. We've been identified as the safest hospital in the state by Consumer Reports, selected by Fortune Magazine as one of the best places to work in America, and named by US News and World Report as having five specialties in the top 50 in the country. All of this occurred during a time that we have improved both our clinical outcomes, our patient satisfaction scores and our financial strength.

While leading this institution, I have learned there are no shortcuts to achieving great results. It requires creating a vision, setting high standards, engaging the workforce, focusing on implementation, ensuring open and regular communication, and holding people accountable. During these past 25 years I have learned a great deal about how to help complex organizations achieve excellence and I believe this experience will serve me well in working with Secretary McDonald and each of you to guide in the transformation of the VA system.

The VA needs change. The VA needs more doctors, more nurses, and greater efficiency from its current systems. It needs to advance its culture of accountability and eliminate those from the system that have lost their commitment to doing what is right

for our Veterans. While progress is being made, there is much more work still to be done, while recognizing the extraordinary work that occurs in the VA every day, the time has come to create the VA System of the future. A system that has superior access and the highest standards for quality of care and the quality of caring. I have spent time with Secretary McDonald and his team and have seen his passion and vision for doing what it will take to make these changes. The Blue Print for Excellence to improve VA is a well thought out and comprehensive plan. The Choice Plan and the ability to offer seamless care between VA and the DOD and care in the private sector are also critical and efforts I would fully support. It would be my intent, if confirmed, to ensure that these strategies and initiatives are implemented.

The Undersecretary of VHA is a significant position with significant opportunities. The most important reason I seek this position is my duty to do whatever I can to provide the best healthcare possible to our Veterans. The VA also offers the potential to impact the training and education of countless future physicians, and to bring new research discovery and practice changes that will impact all Americans. We have the opportunity to end homelessness and prevent suffering and suicides for countless of brave Veterans. This is clearly the most exciting time in healthcare that I've experienced in my career. The innovations of today and tomorrow, new technology, and human creativity will allow us to dramatically change the way we deliver healthcare and improve our results.

With the support of the members of this Committee and others in Congress, the Veterans Service Organizations, the dedicated employees at the VA, and the American people, together we can make VA the finest healthcare system in the country. There is no more noble mission and it would be my distinct honor and privilege to be part of this effort. Our veterans deserve the very best, and with your support, I am confident we will succeed.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.