

Jonathan B. Perlin, MD, PhD, MSHA, FACP Acting Under Secretary for Health Department of Veterans Affairs

Statement of  
Jonathan B. Perlin, MD, PhD, MSHA, FACP  
Acting Under Secretary for Health  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
before the  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States Senate

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Chairman Craig, Ranking Member Akaka, members of the Committee and its staff. Good morning.

Before I begin my statement, may I mention that my wife Donna, my son Benjamin, and my parents, Dr. and Mrs. Seymour Perlin, are all here with me today. Their love and support has made it possible for me to devote my unwavering focus to veterans' health issues in the past few years. Without their help, I could not possibly have qualified for the office for which I have the honor of your consideration.

Mr. Chairman, when I was a medical school student, I had the privilege of receiving part of my training at a VA medical center. My time at VA was my favorite part of the entire medical school experience. I had the privilege of taking care of some of the last Buffalo Soldiers and World War I doughboys along with veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

I especially enjoyed talking to these older veterans about their connection to American history, and almost invariably to witness the humble selflessness they displayed when they spoke of what they did in service to our nation. Sometimes their stories were sad or tragic; sometimes they were humorous; sometimes incredibly heroic; but they were always filled with passion, and with a patriotism and pride I had never encountered before.

Years later, when given the opportunity, I gratefully returned to VA. I returned for the opportunity to serve America's heroes, and to help our nation meaningfully and tangibly express our gratitude to the men and women of all generations who successfully defended our freedom while in uniform.

Since I came back to VA Central Office in 1999, to lead VA's performance measurement and quality management program, I have proudly been a part of the singular transformation of the Veterans Health Administration into an organization the Washington Monthly recently said produces the "best care anywhere."

There are many reasons for this transformation.

VHA's performance measurement system enables us to hold ourselves accountable for providing the best care for veterans. A recent RAND study focusing on our care demonstrated to the nation

and the world that it is possible to measurably and rapidly improve health care quality--and that specific improvement initiatives are the right way to do so. Placing significant emphasis on performance measurement is not an academic exercise?it improves real outcomes for real veterans.

Our revolutionary Electronic Health Record system provides better, safer and more consistent care to veterans by harnessing information technology to serve the clinical care needs of America's veterans;

Our path breaking research program has given us the first effective therapies for tuberculosis;

Better fitting, lighter artificial limbs;

The implantable cardiac pacemaker;

The CT scanner and MRI machine;

And the nicotine patch.

Today, VA researchers, focusing on veterans' needs, are on the verge of dozens of new discoveries and developments ? like the artificial retina ? that will improve care, restore function, and enhance the health and well being of veterans and all the world's citizens;

And, last but by no means least, we are reinventing existing programs, enthusiastically creating outreach initiatives, enhancing specialized clinical care, and collaborating with our Department of Defense partners to better serve our newest generation of returning heroes. It is VHA's highest priority to ensure their seamless transition back to our society, and we are making significant progress in this area.

Just this week, for example, we announced that we will be hiring fifty veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom to provide timely outreach services to veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. They will join fifty other veterans previously hired by the Department for the same purpose.

But for all our successes in the last ten years, I know that the past is but prologue to the present? and the future.

We have the incredible opportunity, today, to move VA health care from intervention to prevention;

To be able to predict outcomes with near-certainty before treatment is begun;

And to truly provide our patients with the kind of high performance, high value, high quality, safe, patient-centered health care that will enable us to fully meet President Lincoln's great goal to care for those who shall have borne the battle and for their families.

Mr. Chairman, General Omar Bradley wrote in his memoirs about his experiences as Administrator of Veterans Affairs that: "Nothing I have done in my life gave me more satisfaction than the knowledge that I had done my utmost to ease (veterans') way when they

came home.? In every VA role that I've had ? as medical student, house officer, young staff member, and certainly now ? I've understood General Bradley's sentiment, and appreciate the privilege I have been given to serve America's Veterans.

I am humbled that the President has nominated me to lead the Veterans Health Administration for the next four years. I promise you, and I promise America, that I, too, will do my utmost to ease the way for today's veterans and their families?those who are already home, and those who are still fighting overseas.

If confirmed, I will work with you and all members of this Congress to build a safe, effective, compassionate health care system that will fully meet the needs of the men and women it is VHA's privilege, and honor, to serve.

Thank you.