



**Sioux Falls VA Health Care System
South Dakota Veterans Commission
January 2016**

Thank you for the invitation to provide this brief update about the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System.

Good news is we hired a Chief of Staff, Dr. Jack Wempe, who began duties the end of last summer. A new research coordinator also recently came on board. Service line leadership positions have been filled in Mental Health and Extended Care & Rehab. In addition, we hired 75 new team members over the last year to meet the increased workload of caring for Veterans with more complex medical needs.

The new integrative health program begun in 2015 has helped Veterans with chronic illnesses find relief with acupuncture, health coaching, massage therapy, aromatherapy, yoga and tai chi classes, plus other therapies that emphasize wellness and healing of the whole person. Dr. Christopher Pierson, our chiropractor and the very first chiropractor in the VA system, has now been with us for over 11 years.

We fortunately were able to overcome a significant budget challenge in FY2015 to close a \$7 million budget gap in operating funds while maintaining our core values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence. The budget shortfall was predominately due to increased use of Non-VA Care consults. Locally, and nationally, Veterans have elected not to use the Veterans Choice Program. To ensure continued timely access for Veterans, Sioux Falls elected to provide non-VA care for these Veterans in the community at a cost of approximately \$7M. Progress is being made with additional providers approved by the third party administrator, and we have recently seen an increase in the number of Veterans agreeing to care provided through this program. The budget for FY2016 is similar to last year's, and we continue to strive to be good stewards of the funds available. We're pleased to be able to reinstate treatment for Hepatitis C.

Some spending changes, however, have been initiated. All travel is closely monitored with the exception of clinical services. Several projects were reinstated including occupational/physical therapy renovation (project begun), emergency dept./oncology project, a dental building, a clinical lab addition, prep for a new CT, an asbestos abatement project, and a building for alternative health. After careful consideration, the local homeless drop-in center was not funded effective August 31. We have connected all impacted Veterans with other community resources to meet their needs, and the Volunteers of America who hold this contract are attempting to find local donors to keep the center open.

Renovation of the acute care medical/surgical units continues, and the new addition to Wards 2S & 3S is complete. An open house will be held January 19 from 11:00 AM – 12N on Ward 2S. We invite you to join us. As soon as patients are moved to the new area, renovation will begin on the existing space with estimated completion of the entire project late summer 2016. The new surgical suites being built outside the Emergency Dept. entrance are on schedule will also be complete in 2016. The women's health clinic had an open house for Women Veterans on August 18 and an open house and ribbon cutting for the public on August 26. Construction on the new primary care addition above the existing clinic space is in progress. This construction required we close the Emergency Dept. entrance, and ambulances are now redirected to the front door (approximately 18 months).

On June 30, the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System and Dakotas Regional Office partnered on the Summer of Service open house, which included the unveiling of the new Congressional Medal of Honor stamp. South Dakota's only surviving Congressional Medal of Honor recipient was an honored guest. The Summer of Service kickoff was intended to build partnerships with the community and grow the number of individuals and businesses that serve Veterans. Another Summer of Service event occurred August 19, when we hosted our 14th annual VA Show and Shine car and motorcycle show.

VA Secretary “Bob” McDonald selected Sioux Falls to work with community partners to form a MyVA Community. This has begun as a subgroup of the Sioux Falls Area Chamber of Commerce Military & Veterans Affairs Committee. The SD Dept. of Veterans Affairs is a member of this board. Sioux Falls was chosen as one of the first 50 sites because of the strong and longstanding VA leadership in the community. The group’s main responsibility will be to share understanding of the challenges Veterans and service members transitioning to civilian life face – and to use their collective strengths and abilities to improve those experiences. They will also strengthen VA’s local collaboration with community providers, create forums where entities can learn about each other and work together on behalf of Veterans.

We appreciate the collegiality of our South Dakota colleagues and your partnership in providing the services and care Veterans earned and deserve.