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United States Senate

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Ms. Judith L. Johnson-Mekota
Director, Iowa City VA Health Care System
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
601 Highway 6 West
Iowa City, IA 52246

Dear Ms. Johnson-Mekota,

I write to you today in light of the VA Office of Inspector General's report titled, "*Healthcare Inspection – Review of Primary Care Ghost Panels, Veterans Integrated Service Network 23, Eagan, Minnesota*", report number 16-01708-340. This report disclosed that the Iowa City VA HCS, has also taken part in the practice of "ghost panels". As you know, assigning patients to "ghost panels" or primary care providers who are no longer employed with the VA is in violation of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policy.

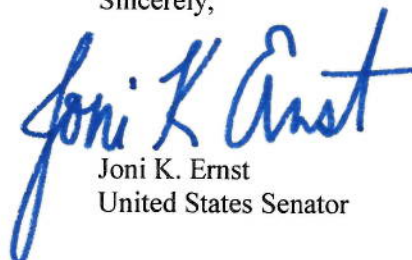
Specifically, the report finds that the Iowa City VA HCS has assigned 1,245 active patients to primary care providers who are no longer employed with the VA. I cannot emphasize enough how upsetting it is that of the many primary care providers in the VISN 23 region, the Iowa City VA HCS would participate in the abhorrent practice of "ghost panels".

While the report does not say that any of the 1,245 veterans were denied timely care, this raises red flags that they may have been placed outside of the system that allows for accurate and honest measures of wait times.

I have written to both yourself, as well as Network Director for the VA Midwest Health Care Network Janet P. Murphy, requesting a concrete plan of action describing exactly how and when these 1,245 veterans will be re-assigned or re-distributed to quality care providers. These veterans deserve to know whether they were assigned to primary care providers who do not even work at the VA, and I request that these servicemembers be notified immediately of their status of care.

Again, I cannot adequately describe how disappointed I am to hear that this practice was allowed to take place in the Iowa City VA HCS. The quality of VA care in Iowa has been above the national average, but this news comes as a disturbing reminder that more must be done to hold the VA accountable. I request an immediate response in regards to your plans moving forward on re-assigning or re-distributing these 1,245 Iowa veterans and ensuring they get the care they need.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

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