

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 4, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Washington DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

Veterans who receive care through the VA deserve the highest standard of care available. This high standard applies throughout an entire episode of care, but is most critical when a veteran sees their physicians. It should go without saying that physicians hired by the VA should be fit to practice and have a track record of providing quality care. However, a disturbing report in USA Today found that the VA has knowingly hired providers who have a history of providing substandard care.

A neurosurgeon featured in the article had “a dozen malpractice claims and settlements in two states” and had his license revoked in one state, yet he was hired to work at the Iowa City VA this April. His hiring goes against Veterans Health Administration Handbook 1100.19 which states:

“Applicants...who had such license, registration, or certification revoked for professional misconduct, professional incompetence, or substandard care by any of those States, or voluntarily relinquished a license, registration or certification in any of those States after being notified in writing by that State of potential termination for professional misconduct, professional incompetence, or substandard care, are not eligible for appointment.”

According to the report, the neurosurgeon’s licensure revocation and other malpractice claims were on his application. It is unacceptable that it was only as a result of USA Today’s report that the VA determined that hiring this neurosurgeon was illegal.

Accordingly please provide the following:

- 1) Please describe the “incorrect” guidance that was given to hospital officials in Iowa City that led to the hiring of the neurosurgeon.
- 2) On his application the neurosurgeon listed the previous malpractice suits and the revocation of his medical license. As part of his contract with the VA, was the neurosurgeon required to be monitored while providing care?
- 3) The VA is initiating an “independent, third-party clinical review” of the care the neurosurgeon provided. Will the results of the third-party review be shared with the patients and their families?
- 4) What steps is the VA taking to determine how many providers at the Iowa City VA were hired illegally and what actions will the VA take if they determine that additional providers were hired illegally?
- 5) What discretion do VA hospital officials have in regard to hiring providers who have not had their licenses revoked but have had problems with their State Licensing boards?

Thank you for your attention. Please respond by December 11, 2017.

Sincerely,

  
Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator

  
Joni K. Ernst  
United States Senator