



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VA North Texas HCS Evaluation of Mental Health Program

Dallas – On May 19, VA North Texas Health Care System will resume admitting patients to the Acute Psychiatric Unit at the Dallas VA Medical Center.

Inpatient admissions to the psychiatric unit were temporarily suspended on April 5, 2008. This action was taken to assess abilities and environmental conditions of the mental health program, and to evaluate current operations of inpatient psychiatry to ensure the continued safety of our patients.

Through collaboration with VA and non-VA facilities in North and Central Texas, veterans presenting to the Dallas VAMC in need of inpatient psychiatric care were transferred as appropriate. Dallas VAMC mental health staff worked with these veterans to ensure a smooth admission process and quality level of care at these facilities. The primary receiving facility is the Waco VA Medical Center, Waco, Texas, which received the designation of *Mental Health Center of Excellence* through legislation passed by U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison in 2005.

Non-VA facilities include Parkland County Hospital, Zale-Lipshy, Green Oaks, and Hickory Trails in Dallas; Timberlawn, Dallas County; Texoma, Sherman; Trinity Springs, Fort Worth; and University Behavioral Health, Denton.

Two separate consultative reviews were conducted recently at VA North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS)

On April 16 - 17, the VA Office of Medical Inspector (OMI) conducted a site visit at VANTHCS to assess the mental health operation and to assist in improving suicide prevention efforts as well as other programmatic elements.

A verbal report from the review, with specific recommendations, was presented to Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Leadership and given to the Dallas VA Medical Center Leadership. The OMI expressed that the mental health program itself is adequate and identified minor environmental issues which need to be addressed. Action to address environmental issues such as removal of metal trashcans, linens hampers, and geriatrics chairs in the showers, as well as replacement of unit entrance doors that did not lock automatically, have been completed.

OMI recommendations currently in progress include increasing the amount of patient activity on evenings and weekends, assessing the efficacy of the Suicide Risk assessment tool, and reviewing the current inpatient mental health care delivery model to ensure continuity of care. The Dallas VA Medical Center has made progress on all these issues.

On April 22, a team from the VA Office of Mental Health Services, at the invitation of the Dallas VAMC, conducted a site visit to assist in the evaluation of the mental health program. They identified additional environmental, organizational and programmatic issues that can improve the delivery of mental health care.

Actions on many of these environmental issues, such as adding additional housekeeping staff, installation of new doors, and repositioning cameras/monitors have been completed or will be implemented in the near future. In order to provide timely assistance to patients, Mental Health nursing staff has been increased in the Emergency Department. In addition to actions listed above, Dallas VAMC is increasing the number of clinical staff, including an additional Suicide Prevention Coordinator, and is reassessing mixing of acuties on the Mental Health unit.