

Often we only read the one sided efforts of a few in many news articles. Recently, some of you may have read the article in the Marietta Times in regards to the Portsmouth Ohio Veterans CBOC which is in the Chillicothe VAMC area of responsibility. As many of us know, the VA overall has had a great deal of struggles and embarrassing moments, but I think most of us would agree that the health care we receive today is pretty dog gone good compared to years ago. In this article, you will find an intended response of the Chillicothe VAMC Director Ms Wendy Hepker. She is trying to get this published and explained that she had tried to no avail to get the VA side of the story with the Portsmouth article. In case we never see it on the news or in the paper, please read the following:

April 10, 2015

An Open Letter to the Veterans of my community (and those who love them),

Your Chillicothe VA Medical Center is proud to provide health care services to you. We, every one of the nearly 1500 employees of your VA Medical Center, recognize that we've struggled over the last couple years to provide appointments within the timelines you request and deserve. We have worked hard on that, and we are much improved.

Many new primary care providers have joined our team. They join with the rest of our highly skilled, compassionate and dedicated professionals, and are here to serve you. Greater than 90% of the time we are able to offer you a primary care appointment in less than 30 days— we've actually provided more than 16,000 of them already this year!

We are dedicated to providing care "closer to home," which why we have Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) in Lancaster, Athens, Marietta, Cambridge, Wilmington and Portsmouth. In addition to our main facility in Chillicothe, each of these clinics offers primary care and basic mental health care; we also offer podiatry and optometry care in these clinics rather than asking Veterans to travel to our main facility for these high demand services. We frequently partner with physicians from the community to provide these services in our clinics and are very grateful for their expertise. However, it is because Veterans choose to wait for those

optometry and podiatry appointments at their CBOC that it appears appointments are “delayed” as recently reported. Many VA’s across the nation choose to offer these services only at their main facility, not in the CBOC. I do not apologize for our efforts to offer care closer to home – even if the “numbers” do not look so good as a result.

Did you know the Chillicothe VA Medical Center offers care and healing each day to more than 145 Veterans residing in our community living centers – for a range of care from short term rehabilitation to hospice/ end of life care? Each day we also have at least 65 Veterans participating in mental residential rehabilitation programs taking the courageous steps on a recovery journey from PTSD, depression, addiction, or other illnesses. This year alone we’ve reached more than 100 homeless Veterans, some with children, and helped them to safe, secure and stable housing.

Can we be better? I know we can. I am privileged to serve with a terrific team of dedicated staff: from physicians and nurses, mental health specialists and allied health providers, housekeepers to facilities management experts, who also believe we can. Each day we are working to improve the access to services and make sure you have an exceptional care experience with us.

I thank you for your service to our country and for trusting us to be your health care partner. I hope that you gladly identify the Chillicothe VA Medical Center as “*my VA*” - just like I do.

With a grateful heart and determined spirit I serve as your Chillicothe VA Medical Center Director,

*Wendy Hepker*

Thanks to Ms Hepker and the VAMC Staff for your efforts!