

Blowing the Whistle on Patient Abuse, Waste & Fraud in the Dept. of Veterans Affairs VA Whistleblowers Coalition May 15, 2007



Dr. Jeffrey Fudin

Founder / Chair VA Whistleblowers Coalition

Clinical Pharmacy Specialist, Stratton VA Medical Center - Albany, NY

Adjunct Associate Professor of Pharmacy Practice, Albany College of Pharmacy

www.paindr.com www.vawhistleblower.com www.VAWBC.com

Disclosures

- This lecture has not been reviewed, nor is it supported or disputed by the Department of Veterans Affairs institutions, its affiliates, or any other Federal institution.
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VA Whistleblowers Coalition

Founded April 2005

- A 35 member group comprised of
 - Medical doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, engineers, supply service, the far majority of which are health care providers.
- Additional 25 pseudo-members
 - Fearful of retaliation if their facility learns of affiliation
- Partner Groups
 - National Security Whistleblower Coalition
 - Liberty Coalition
 - Patient Quality Care Project
 - American Society of Physicians and Surgeons
 - Semmelweis Society
 - others

What We Want...

- VAWBC supports REAL whistleblower protection for VA employees to foster an environment of excellent medical care unhampered by government cover-ups of patient harm and abuse, including fraud waste and abuse of funds that should go towards patient care.
- We request that Congress hold public hearings into the abuses of VA staff and that VA **administrators** that participate in clandestine activities be **punished for their actions**, past and present.

1992

- The failure of governmental agencies to protect whistleblowers' rights impairs the system of checks and balances that was designed to prevent governmental abuse of citizens. Yet, **the DVA continues to “discourage the reporting of poor quality care by harassing whistleblowers or firing them”**.

Continuing Deficiencies In The Department Of Veterans' Affairs Medical Quality Assurance Program. Thirty-eighth Report By The Committee On Government Operations. HR 102-1062. The U.S. House of Representatives. November 9, 1992. Hearing on whistleblowing and retaliation in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Washington, DC: U.S. House of Representatives, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. March 11, 1999:1–60. Available at: <http://veterans.house.gov/hearings/schedule106/mar99/3-11-99/news.htm>. Accessed May 8, 2007.

1999, Terry Everett, (R-AL)

- "...retaliation against VA whistleblowers [is] was common and goes unpunished. The VA's failure to follow the law has created an atmosphere of fear and reluctance of its employees to come forward with reports of wrongdoing."

Hearing on whistleblowing and retaliation in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Washington, DC: U.S. House of Representatives, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. March 11, 1999:1-60. Available at: <http://veterans.house.gov/hearings/schedule106/mar99/3-11-99/news.htm>. Accessed May 8, 2007.

2001 Congressional Report

A 2001 Congressional report specific to whistleblower reprisal complaints indicates that **of 700 total submissions, only 0.57% of agency officials were held accountable for their retaliatory actions.**

Kaplan E. U.S. Office of Special Counsel, Fiscal Year 2001 Report. Available at <http://www.osc.gov/documents/reports/ar-2001.pdf>.

2005 New York Times

In February 2005, the New York Times reported that the VA healthcare system is, "... fraught with **“persistent complaints** about abuse of **power, cronyism** and **reprisals** against whistleblowers.”

Sontag D. In harms way. Abuses endangered veterans in cancer drug experiments. New York Times. February 6, 2005.

Demographics (28-40% of all states)

Current Membership

California	Colorado
Georgia	Arizona
New Mexico	Nebraska
Iowa	New York
Alabama	Louisiana
Florida	Pennsylvania
Tennessee	Washington (state)

Afraid to Join

Texas
South Carolina
Maine
Michigan
Illinois
Virginia

VAWBC Member Tribunal



- No medical provider should ever need to choose between safety to a veteran and career/family
- No VA employee of any type should ever need to choose between disclosing waste, fraud, or abuse and career/family

VAWBC members tell their stories!