

## **Statement from Medical Center Director DeAnne Seekins:**

Good morning. I am DeAnne Seekins, the Durham VA Medical Center Director. Thank you all for joining us today. I would also like to thank two of our community partners Mr. Randy Cash from the American Legion and Ms. Lois Harvin-Ravin Director, Durham County Veteran Services for joining me.

On Friday evening, February 24, photos were taken in the Durham VA Medical Center's Emergency Department during an extremely busy time. We provided care to approximately 130 Veterans that day. When the photos were taken, there were approximately 50 patients in the Emergency Department area—23 receiving care and 26 in the waiting area. The photo posted on social media depicts one Veteran lying on the floor and several others waiting to be seen.

I became aware of the incident on Saturday evening and took swift action. We immediately began investigating the allegation. The next morning, my Nurse Executive contacted the concerned family to get additional details about the situation. Their concerns included timeliness of care and a staff member being rude. I would like to thank the McMenamins for caring enough to bring the situation to our attention.

As a result of the allegation, we removed the employee from patient care. Our staff also reviewed the medical records to ensure the appropriateness and timeliness of the clinical care provided to our patients. We also identified a team to investigate the allegations of rude behavior by a staff member.

The entire investigation concluded yesterday evening, and as promised, I am here to provide an update.

Unfortunately, our team substantiated the allegation of rude behavior from one of our employees, which runs counter to our values. As a result, we have taken the appropriate disciplinary actions based on the incident.

Despite our employees' failure to meet the high standards we demand when it comes to serving our Veterans, I want to reassure everyone the Veteran pictured lying on the floor was not neglected. We spoke personally with the Veteran. He stated that he was on the floor because he was more comfortable there and was in fact extremely satisfied with his quality of care and experience. We also reviewed security footage of the incident. Each time the Veteran repositioned himself from a

chair to the floor staff responded in less than two minutes providing a safe, more appropriate area for him to rest. They also provided him a warm blanket and footstool for additional comfort.

Our Executive leadership team attempted to reach all the Veterans visible in the photo and were successful in speaking with two of the three. The second Veteran also indicated his satisfaction with his quality of care and experience. Another Veteran who was in the area during the incident has since come forward to provide his input regarding the high quality care he received during his visit to the Emergency Department that night. The third Veteran has been actively engaged with his treatment team throughout the week. The investigation also determined that the wait times for all Veterans seen were appropriate based on their clinical assessment.

Veterans come to us in their most vulnerable moments – when they are sick and at times in excruciating pain. They deserve a safe and comfortable place while waiting for care and to be treated respectfully at all times. Our review of the incident has brought to light some additional steps that we will take to improve the comfort of the Emergency Department. We plan to add additional recliners, and implement a surge plan for high volume days that includes providing patients with juice and snacks while they wait. Furthermore, we will strongly reinforce our ICARE values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence to all staff. As the daughter of a World War II Veteran, it saddens me that we didn't meet our own expectations that every Veteran deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Nothing less is acceptable in our medical center.

I am grateful to live in a community that cares so passionately about our Veterans. I want to thank all of you, and all of our Veterans who entrust us with their care. It is truly an honor to serve.

Before I open the floor for questions, I would like to give my Chief of Staff Dr. Ken Goldberg, also our Nurse Executive Dr. Greg Eagerton, the American Legion Mr. Cash, and community partner Ms. Lois Harvin-Ravin an opportunity to make brief statements.