

VA OIG Podcast Transcript 20180607-17

Semiannual Report to Congress, October 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018

June 7, 2018

[Ms. Barbara Wright] I'm Barbara Wright, the VA OIG's director of the Office of Special Reviews. I'm speaking with Inspector General Michael Missal about the OIG's Semiannual Report to Congress or what we call the SAR. The newest SAR chronicles the OIG's oversight of the Department of Veterans Affairs from October 1, 2017, through March 31, 2018.

The publication of the new SAR is a great opportunity to review the OIG's oversight of the VA's programs and operations for the last six months. As always, the SAR includes measures of the OIG's activities, our recommendations, and underscores the impact of the OIG's oversight work on behalf of veterans and VA.

Mike, what story does this SAR tell about the OIG's recent oversight activities?

[IG Michael Missal] The SAR shows how we can make a real difference in the quality and timeliness of the services and benefits received by our veterans. The SAR highlights the broad array of exceptional work performed by our five oversight groups which are Investigations, Audits and Evaluations, Healthcare Inspections, Contract Review, and our newest group, the Office of Special Reviews. We are focused on doing work that is most impactful in as timely a manner as possible. The SAR shows that we are meeting our mission of effective oversight of VA's programs and operations.

[Ms. Barbara Wright] The OIG is involved in a wide range of oversight activities, including program audits, healthcare inspections, and criminal investigations to mention a few. What trends or themes with the OIG's oversight work do you see?

[IG Michael Missal] There are a number of trends that are reflected in the SAR. First, we are focused on governance and leadership at VA. VA is a large and complex agency that is extremely challenging to manage. For VA to be most effective, it needs to have the right tone at the top and the most efficient governance structure. We therefore examine in all of our work whether the leaders are doing their jobs and whether the governance structure promotes effective leadership. Second, we are looking to do the most impactful work given our limited resources compared to the size of VA. We cannot take on every matter brought to our attention and must be mindful of the projects we work on. In determining what projects to undertake, we look at a number of factors including the number of veterans impacted, the dollars involved, whether veterans or taxpayer dollars are being put at undue risk, whether we recently worked on the issue or program, whether the matter is representative of a larger issue, whether a particular public interest will be served, and whether our work will have a deterrent effect. These are not the only factors we looked at, but some of the

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more significant ones. Third, that all of our work products are meeting at least five standards. We work hard to make sure our work products are accurate, timely, fair, objective, and thorough. I believe that we met these standards in the reports and other work products included in the SAR.

[Ms. Barbara Wright] So, to follow up on those comments, the SAR is full of interesting statistics about the OIG's work. Are there any particular statistics from this SAR that you would like to highlight?

[IG Michael Missal] The statistics in the SAR reflect the tremendous work and impact of the OIG's staff in the reporting period. The OIG issued 155 reports and other work products on VA programs and operations. Those investigations, inspections, audits, reviews, evaluations, and other matters identified approximately \$1.7 billion in monetary impact, resulting in a substantial return on investment of \$25 for every dollar expended on OIG oversight. Moreover, the OIG Hotline received more than 16,000 contacts over the six months from veterans, their families, VA employees, and others. Further, OIG investigators made 150 arrests for crimes such as fraud, bribery, embezzlement, identity theft, drug diversion, and personal and property offenses. The work of the OIG resulted in 853 administrative sanctions and corrective actions. The OIG made 810 recommendations to improve the operations and programs of VA. A listing of all recommendations are included in our website.

[Ms. Barbara Wright] Are there any reports that you want to highlight that were highly impactful or positively affected VA operations and programs moving forward?

[IG Michael Missal] I believe that all of our reports are significant and have a meaningful impact on the programs and operations of VA. One report that shows the integration of the work of the OIG is entitled *Critical Deficiencies at the Washington DC VA Medical Center*. This report began when we received an anonymous complaint that the DC medical center did not have an effective inventory system. We quickly went on site and confirmed that the inventory system was not operating as expected. We determined to issue an interim report at the time because patients were put at undue risk, that VA knew of the issue, and VA had not corrected the problem. We continued our work and made a number of significant findings. We issued the final report during this SAR period and made 40 recommendations that were accepted by VA. A number of our recommendations focused on the lack of leadership across various levels at VA.

As a result of this report, VA initiated a number of actions to improve services at the medical center including appointing new leadership, addressing concerns with

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supply shortages, improving sterile processing, reducing delays in prosthetics, and securing storage areas. Additionally, VA is using the findings in this report to address similar concerns at other VA hospitals by starting unannounced audits of these issues and increasing VA Central Office oversight of Veterans Integrated Service Networks, also known as VISNs, and individual hospitals. This report is a good example of how the OIG is placing a greater emphasis on collaboration between our various oversight groups including audit, healthcare inspections, and criminal investigations. I expect that going forward more of our work products will include multiple directorates so that we can ensure the most effective oversight.

[Ms. Barbara Wright] The SAR is a comprehensive document but it obviously doesn't cover all the OIG's activities. What isn't included in the SAR that you want to share?

[IG Michael Missal] One thing that I want to emphasize is the dedication and commitment of all of our staff. They're working hard every day to meet our mission of effective oversight. Every one of our staff has an important role to play in our work and their effective execution allows us to do our work in a thorough and integrated way. I also want to thank Congress for the support and confidence they have shown in us and the other stakeholders including veterans and veterans service organizations for the information provided to us to enhance our work. We have a tough and challenging task, but we are committed and focused on ensuring VA provides the best possible service that benefits veterans and that taxpayers money is spent appropriately.

[Ms. Barbara Wright] Inspector General Missal, thank you for your time this morning.

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