

Ongoing VA Misconduct and Whistleblower Retaliation– A Timeline

April 23, 2014: Based on reports from whistleblowers Dr. Katherine Mitchell and Dr. Sam Foote, CNN says at least 40 veterans died waiting for appointments at the Phoenix VA as the result of scheduling manipulation.

May 13, 2014: CBS News reports allegations made by Germaine Clarno, a social worker at Hines VA in Maywood, Ill., and VA employee union president, that employees at Hines used secret wait lists in order to receive bonuses.

May 14, 2014: Senator Kirk calls for the VA Inspector General to expand its ongoing investigation to include Hines VA.

May 15, 2014: The VA Office of the Inspector General notifies Senator Kirk that it had opened an investigation into the allegations regarding Hines VA.

May 16, 2014: Senator Kirk speaks on the phone with VA Secretary Eric Shinseki regarding the Hines VA allegations. Secretary Shinseki agrees to Senator Kirk's request to expand IG investigation into all VA hospitals in Illinois.

May 21, 2014: Senator Kirk sends a letter to the VA Acting Inspector General Richard J. Griffin requesting investigation into specific claims of scheduling manipulations, bonuses and delays in treatment at Hines VA.

May 22, 2014: Senator Kirk calls for the resignation of Hines VA Hospital Director Joan Ricard.

May 27, 2014: Senator Kirk receives notice from the VA Heartland Network (VISN 15) that two secret wait lists were identified in the network, and that eight veterans at Marion VA Medical Center in Marion, Ill., waited 90+ days for appointments.

May 30, 2014: Senator Kirk meets with Germaine Clarno and two other Hines VA whistleblowers – a physician and a clinician – regarding additional allegations of misconduct, including unread echocardiograms, that demonstrate a culture of corruption at Hines.

June 1, 2014: Senator Kirk meets with hundreds of veterans at the Berwyn, Ill., VFW to hear about their experiences with the VA.

June 9, 2014: The VA releases the preliminary results of a nationwide audit, which found that nearly 900 patients in Illinois enrolled in the VA system but never had appointments.

June 13, 2014: Senator Kirk sends letter to Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson calling on the Secretary to declare a state of emergency allowing veterans immediate access to non-VA care.

July 3, 2014: Senator Kirk sends letter to Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson requesting investigations of the origins and status of the New Enrollee Appointment Request (NEAR) list as well as any correspondence among the facility's senior leadership around the period the alleged cover-up took place.

July 24, 2014: Senator Kirk sends a letter to White House Deputy Chief of Staff Robert Nabors, who the White House appointed to investigate VA backlogs and mistreatment of veterans, requesting that he join in on a meeting with Hines VA whistleblowers--including Hines VA's Germaine Clarno--in his Chicago office to discuss their experiences as employees at the Hines VA.

July 25, 2014: Senator Kirk convenes with White House Deputy Chief of Staff Nabors and whistleblowers in Chicago to discuss misconduct and corruption at Hines VA, including long wait times for veterans and mold discovered in the facility. They meet with hospital whistleblowers, including Germaine Clarno.

July 25, 2014: Senator Kirk sends a letter to Acting Inspector General Richard Griffin of the Veterans Affairs citing the consistent flooding and presence of mold throughout Hines VA. In light of these findings, Senator Kirk renews his call for Hines VA Director Joan Ricard to step down.

July 31, 2014: Senator Kirk sends a letter to newly-confirmed VA Secretary Robert McDonald addressing the retaliatory actions--including restricting access to computer hardware needed to perform her job--that Germaine Clarno, a social worker at Hines VA, suffered.

October 7, 2014: Following Senator Kirk's calls for dismissal, Hines VA Director Ricard steps down.

January 9, 2015: Senator Kirk calls on Acting Inspector General Richard Griffin to appoint new inspectors and to investigate complaints and allegations at Hines.

April 21, 2015: Senator Kirk demands answers from VA Secretary McDonald on patient death at Hines and near-billion dollar cost overrun at Denver VA.

May 19, 2015: Senator Kirk-led VA bill funds veteran's care at record levels passes Committee and heads to Senate floor.

July 13, 2015: Senator Kirk and Representative Charlie Dent (R-Pa.-15) send a letter to President Barack Obama urging him to nominate a permanent Inspector General (IG) to oversee the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the numerous ongoing investigations into misconduct, mistreatment of veterans, and retaliation against whistleblowers at the agency.

July 30, 2015: On National Whistleblower Day, Senator Kirk chairs a hearing of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs. Along with Dr. Lisa Nee, witnesses include Dr. Katherine Mitchell, the whistleblower who broke the Phoenix VA scandal last year that led to the resignation of Secretary Shinseki; Danielle Brian, executive director of the Project on Government Oversight, a nonpartisan watchdog group that investigates corruption and misconduct within government agencies; Linda Halliday, Deputy Inspector General and acting head of the VA OIG; and Carolyn Lerner, Special Counsel at the OSC.

August 5, 2015: Dr. John Sturman, an employee of the Danville VA, was arrested for over-prescribing narcotics for pain management which led to 35 patient deaths. Before coming to the Danville VA, Dr. Sturman was employed at Indiana University Hospital and contributed to the deaths of 35 patients. The Danville VA denies knowing that Dr. Sturman was under investigation when he was hired.

September 22, 2015: Senator Kirk sends a letter to Acting Director of the Danville VA Diana Carranza requesting answers about how Dr. Sturman was hired and whether or not patients in Danville had complaints about him while he was employed at the center.

October 30, 2015: VA Office of Inspector General releases a report evaluating a clinic in Marion, Illinois and finds that nearly all of the “independent practitioners reviewed did not have the necessary skills and training to perform their jobs.”

November 2, 2015: The House Veterans Affairs Committee holds a hearing about abuse of a relocation program that paid out more than \$2 million to VA executives. Diane Rubens and Kimberly Graves were subpoenaed to appear before the committee, but they both pled the fifth and refused to answer any questions during the hearing.

November 5, 2015: Senator Kirk introduces the Veterans Patient Protection Act, which forces the VA to address reports of abuse and punishes the managers who retaliate, ignore, and intimidate veteran whistleblowers.