



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on June 25, 2009

VA Hospitals Botching Treatments

This would explain why a previous study found that more than 10,000 veterans who underwent routine colonoscopy procedures at four VA hospitals in Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee had possibly been exposed to hepatitis and HIV viruses. Fifty-three of these veterans have so far tested positive for either hepatitis or HIV. Though some of them could have been infected in other ways, the improper cleaning procedures used with the colonoscopy equipment does point the finger of blame toward the VA hospitals.



On June 24, [FOXNews.com reported](#) that the American Legion, which regularly visits and inspects VA hospitals, is investigating a different scandal at the medical center in Philadelphia. Joe Wilson, deputy director of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission for the American Legion, says that doctors at the Philadelphia center gave 92 out of 116 veterans incorrect dosages of radiation for prostate cancer over a span of six years. The physicians responsible for the repeated mistakes were finally discovered and fired last year, but that may be small comfort for those 92 veterans.

VA officials have responded with regret and vowed to do better. CNN quoted Dr. William Duncan, the VA's associate deputy undersecretary for health quality and safety, as saying, "I cannot guarantee to any veteran that they will not have an adverse event occur in our facility. I can guarantee that we are dedicated to reducing those adverse events to the lowest possible level and we take this extremely seriously." Representative Tim Walz (D-Minn.) was not satisfied: "I know we talk about adverse events, but going in for a routine colonoscopy and later being told you have HIV is not just an adverse event. That's absolutely catastrophic."

The American Legion's Wilson told FOXNews.com that lack of oversight and poor funding are part of the problem. "The average age of VA facilities is about 49 years," Wilson said. "That's too old. In the private sector the average age of facilities is about 12 years." The Philadelphia medical center is 57 years old. Too often the limited funding that is available must go to repairs and maintenance. The Philadelphia incidents, though, were primarily the result of physicians being improperly trained and supervised. The [New York Times reported](#) on June 20 that one doctor, Gary Kao, not only failed to report the errors he was making, he rewrote his surgical plans to cover up his mistakes.

America's veterans deserve much better than this. But with government in charge and largely left to police itself, improvements in care may be hard to sustain. It is strange, then, that President Barack Obama wants to subject all Americans to a government-run, public healthcare plan when the VA scandals prove that government is certainly not the best provider of healthcare. If this is how the federal government treats those who have sacrificed life and limb for their country, imagine how responsive it will be to the average American in need of treatment.

Photo of VA facility in Murfreesboro, Tennessee: AP Images



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