

Rev. Ricardo C. Flippin

Rev. Ricardo C. Flippin Charleston, West Virginia
Senator Arlen Specter
United States Senate
Committee on Veterans Affairs Washington DC
Re: Philadelphia VA

Dear Senator Specter:

I would like to thank you for your interest in the situation at the Philadelphia VA, and for inviting me here today.

Although I was born and raised in Philadelphia, I had been absent from the Philadelphia area from the time that I left to join the Air Force. I returned to Philadelphia in 2004 to take care of my mother, whose health was failing. As I did not have a private physician in this area, I decided that I would try to take advantage of my benefits as a veteran and I sought medical care from the Philadelphia VA. This was my first contact with the VA health care system.

On April 15, 2004, I made my first trip to the Philadelphia VA, because my family doctor in Charleston had told me that my PSA was increasing and that I should make a point of following up with the doctor, when I got Philadelphia. A PSA test was performed on my first visit, which showed a level of 7.04. It took the VA until May 9, 2005, to actually treat my prostate.

On June 3, 2004, I returned to the Philadelphia VA and was given a referral for an urology consult. This consult took place on June 29, 2004. I was scheduled for a biopsy, which took place on August 26, 2004. On September 23, 2004 I was advised that I had cancer. In December of 2004, I met with the physician to discuss my options. In January 2005, I believe that I met with a radiation oncologist. He was quite convincing that brachytherapy was the best option for my situation and that he had received good results from this procedure in the past and had performed hundreds of them. My procedure was not scheduled until May 9, 2005. By then, my mother had passed away and I had returned to Charleston West Virginia, to be with my wife, my granddaughter and niece.

During the time after my procedure, I had medical problems that required me to return to the VA on several occasions for additional medical care. Eventually, the VA sent me to Ohio State University for an additional procedure with a specialist. Until I received notification from the VA, in Philadelphia, that they were investigating my medical care, as well as the medical care of other veterans, no one ever told me that there had been any problem with the procedure that was performed at the Philadelphia VA. To date, no one from the Philadelphia VA has specifically told me what went wrong with my procedure, nor have I been advised as to what the effects of this procedure have and will be on me.

On July 2, 2008, they sent me a letter saying "...Our review of your treatment program has indicated that there is a possibility that you received a radiation dose to your prostate gland that was less than your physician intended..."

Which led me to believe, that there was something wrong with the seeds, or perhaps the equipment? The letter never mentions that other parts of my body, apparently, got a radiation dose greater than my doctor intended.

On August 15, 2008, they sent me a letter saying that the treatment did not meet the VA's standard of care:

The results of the CT scan indicate that the treatment you received did not meet VA's high standard of care. You recently were notified by telephone of this result and this letter is being sent to confirm that conversation. We have also advised your VA primary care physician of this fact, and we will send him/her a copy of this letter.

They sent me some forms for filing a claim, which was nice of them, but not one person in the VA told me what the effects of the surgery that I received were. No one from the Philadelphia VA, no one from the Charleston VA, has written me, or called me, and said that I'm more likely to get a reoccurrence, no one has said that I should come in more regularly for monitoring, no one from the VA has said that you're going to be fine. I learned from the newspaper that they had 6 veterans go out to the Seattle VA to have their procedures redone, so I hope that I'm not that bad. It is particularly upsetting that they have not told me anything about my future because some of the NRC materials make it seem as if a very thorough investigation has been commissioned by the VA and that an expert has reviewed each of the cases. As a matter of fairness, one would think that they would have told each veteran what the results of the outside study were, or that they would

have provided this information to my primary care doctor, to help them with my future medical care.

For the last several years I have worked with a program designed to help veterans deal with the issues that they face. My biggest concern is that there may be veterans out there who have had this happen to them, and they have not gotten the message from the VA. As someone who spent twenty years on active duty in the Air Force, and as someone who regularly works with veterans, to see that they get the services that they need, I know that are probably some veterans out there who didn't open the letters that they got from the VA, because they were from the VA, they didn't return the phone calls they got from the VA, because they were from the VA, and my hope is that the attention that this hearing is creating will make those guys, or more likely their spouses or family members, go back and open those letters and get the follow up treatment that they may need.

Finally, I really can't add anything to the discussion about Dr. Kao. I have never met the gentleman. He was not the doctor who I met with to decide which type of therapy to select. I was surprised to learn this week that he was a contractor; no one told me that my surgery was going to be done by someone who did not work for the VA. Thank you for your concern about the medical care that veterans are receiving from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Respectfully Submitted,
Ricardo C. Flippin