

Senator Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman

OPENING STATEMENT

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Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate

Oversight Hearing on
Hiring Practices and Quality Control in VA Medical Facilities

November 6, 2007

Aloha. This morning's hearing will focus on hiring practices and quality controls in VA hospitals and clinics. Among the issues we will address are the recent events at the Marion, Illinois, VA Medical Center. VA's internal tracking found a sharp and disturbing increase in the number of deaths at that hospital. In addition, they found cases of serious and unexpected complications from routine surgeries performed there.

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, it is very important to me that all veterans get the best possible care from the best possible health care practitioners. To achieve that goal, we must ensure that all providers are appropriately checked for their credentials and privileges.

I note that the Inspector General's office is in the midst of an investigation about the personnel involved in those events at the Marion VA, and because of this the IG will not be testifying.

Knowing of Senator Durbin's interest, and with Senator Burr's concurrence, I have asked Senator Durbin to join us on the dais for this hearing. While this issue was brought to my attention due to the troubling situation at the Marion VA, it may indeed have implications for the entire VA health care system and the more than 140,000 providers employed by VA.

When the IG's investigation is complete, the Committee will review that report to ensure that no structural problems exist in VA's process to appropriately screen its employees. If systemic problems are found, we will work to address them.

Thank you all for being here. I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses.