

**RECORD VERSION**

**STATEMENT BY**

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**BEFORE THE**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**FIELD HEARING, SENATOR MAZIE HIRONO**

**JOINT EFFORTS BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
AND VETERANS AFFAIRS; HEALTH SERVICES FOR OUR VETERANS**

**AUGUST 19, 2014**

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

Senator Hirono, Distinguished Members of this panel, and Veterans – thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss some of Army Medicine’s initiatives to address the healthcare needs of our veterans in Hawaii. On behalf of the dedicated Soldiers and civilians that make up the Pacific Regional Medical Command, I want to extend our appreciation to Congress for the support given to military medicine, which provides the resources we need to deliver leading edge health services to our Warriors, Families, Retirees and Veterans.

The Army remains engaged in our Nation’s longest conflict of more than 13 years with nearly 1.5 million Soldiers having deployed once and more than half a million having deployed multiple times. This has challenged the minds, bodies, and spirits of our Soldiers and their Families.

As the US Army Pacific remains engaged throughout the theater, Pacific Regional Medical Command and Tripler Army Medical Center remain committed to supporting the Army Surgeon General’s four priorities that include combat casualty care, readiness and health of the force, ready and deployable medical force, and the health of Families and retirees.

Throughout this intensive period of military operations, Army Medicine, along with our Sister Services and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), has been evolving and adapting to meet the medical needs of our wounded, ill, and injured Service Members and Veterans. Over the past decade, the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs have increased collaborative initiatives to improve access, quality, and cost-effectiveness of care while reducing duplication of services. I would like to share some of our innovative collaborations here in Hawaii, as well as emphasize our commitment to continuous quality improvement and patient-centered care.

### **Sharing Agreements**

Tripler Army Medical Center serves as the tertiary care center for Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard Service Members, dependents, and retirees as well as

Veterans throughout the Pacific Rim. Strategically, this is increasingly important as the Department of Defense shifts its focus to the Pacific and our partners throughout Asia.

Tripler Army Medical Center has a robust sharing agreement with the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) that was established in 1991. This agreement is one of the oldest, most robust agreements in the Department of Defense. This joint venture was established as a result of a Department of Veterans Affairs request to build a new inpatient medical center in the Hawaiian Islands. Senator Inouye and others evaluated the current availability of services at Tripler and recommended this mutually beneficial partnership that would enable Tripler to serve as the VA inpatient facility.

Our partnership benefits both organizations. It provides major cost avoidance in building another federal hospital in the islands, provides foundational support to our graduate health education program, supports the complexity of veterans healthcare needs for inpatient, specialty outpatient and ancillary care, and is founded on the premise that reimbursements for Army care are less than reimbursements for care through civilian entities resulting in additional savings to the government.

Under the auspices of this sharing agreement, Tripler provides approximately \$20 million in support each year to VAPIHCS beneficiaries located throughout the Pacific. Clinical services provided to VAPIHCS include: Inpatient medical, surgical and psychiatric care; Outpatient medical specialty care; Central Materiel Service support like instrument sterilization; Ancillary support such as lab and radiology; and emergency room services.

Non-clinical support is also provided to the VAPIHCS including: Food Service; Information Management and Information Technology; Housekeeping; Security; and Radiation Protection surveys.

Tripler Army Medical Center also benefits from reciprocal staff support and services from the VAPIHCS in the areas of Ophthalmology, Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder Residential Rehabilitation Program and dialysis, estimated at approximately \$2M per year.

In general, operational support to the Pacific Islands Health Care System is seamless to the veteran and is deemed a very successful joint venture for patient care.

## **CAPACITY TO CARE FOR VETERANS**

As stated, Tripler Army Medical Center values our VA beneficiaries and proudly provides specialty care for our Veterans. Additional initiatives supported through the joint venture include state of the art Computer Assisted Design and Manufacture system technology fabrication for custom orthotics and prosthetics services; Interdisciplinary Pain Management Program, utilizing complementary alternative medicine for chronic pain; a VA Dialysis Unit, providing chronic and acute dialysis service; Sleep Disorders Center, providing a four-room in-house sleep study clinic; and Safe Patient Handling, providing lifts and ambulation track installation throughout the facility to increase our emphasis on patient safety.

After an extensive review, however, Tripler does not currently have the capacity to offer primary care services to Veterans Affairs Pacific Health Care System. The normal rotation or Permanent Change of Station moves of medical staff and active duty personnel that occur in the late spring and summer months results in a seasonal decrease in capacity. In September, once this rotation cycle has concluded, when staffing numbers have stabilized, we will relook our primary care capacity this review of capacity is required to ensure that Tripler does not unintentionally reduce access for DoD beneficiaries. If we determine that primary care capacity exists, significant DoD policy changes and guidance will be necessary to establish the authority for Military Treatment Facilities to provide primary care for our veteran population and includes a viable strategy to ensure continuity of care, and a corporate approach to reimbursement agreements.

Army Medicine is engaged in a comprehensive campaign to provide for the healthcare needs of all our beneficiaries. Tripler Army Medical Center remains committed to caring for combat casualties and ensuring the health and readiness of our military forces, their Families, and our Veterans. Since 1907, our Medical Treatment Facility has been an oasis of health and wellness for America's Heroes and Families in the Pacific region and will remain so for the next 100 years. Our strategy for continued success involves developing and implementing solutions with our DoD, VHA, and Civilian Medicine partners. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the committee and for your support to our Soldiers and Veterans.