November 6, 2017

Dear Editor:

As we approach a very important holiday on November 11, 2017, Veterans Day, we want to share our utmost respect and appreciation for each and every Veteran we are privileged to serve at the Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center and Healthcare Annex in Saginaw, and Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) in Alpena, Bad Axe, Cadillac, Cheboygan County, Clare, Gaylord, Grayling, Oscoda, and Traverse City. VA employees take great pride in serving Veterans and their families and show this through their values of ICARE (Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence).

Veterans Day has been set aside each year to pause and remember the many sacrifices made by Veterans. Those who experienced extreme combat or other active duty conditions, those who were injured or became ill because of those experiences, many who still struggle with transitioning within their communities, others who won’t seek medical or mental health care because they may feel someone deserves it more than them, or they just do not want to seek help.

We provided care to 36,331 Veterans, of which 1,915 are women, in a 35-county catchment area, contributing to 422,849 Outpatient Visits and 973 Admissions during our Fiscal Year 2017 (October 1, 2016 – September 30, 2017). We have experienced many amazing accomplishments during that timeframe, some of which are noted below:

- Our VA implemented a designated smoking area for our outpatient Veterans and visitors, and no longer allow smoking for Veterans who are admitted.
- We completed infrastructure projects which included a redesign of parking lots, repaving, covered walkways, and a beautiful new four-season activities pavilion for Veterans and visitors to enjoy.
- Our grounds crew has been extremely busy, along with local businesses, in landscaping and maintenance to support a welcoming appearance.
- We are completely reconstructing our Sterile Processing Service and with the help of Covenant Hospital here in Saginaw, we are using their facility for our sterile processing needs until construction is completed.
- Our access for outpatient medical care continues to be evaluated and improvements made wherever possible to allow Veterans to get the care they need at the time they need it. We also work very closely with community partners for care through Provider Agreements and the Choice program.
• Our VA engaged in over 120 community events or speaking engagements this year, and serves alongside several community agencies to support Veterans with resources the VA may not have at the ready. We have partnered with Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency and their Veteran Community Action Teams (VCATs) in four regions which cover our 35-county primary service area to collaborate on issues impacting Veterans on such challenges as transportation, financial assistance, housing, and more.

• We held quarterly Veteran Community Town Halls throughout the State this past year and heard first hand from Veterans, their family members, and others, the good and the bad. We formulated action plans and committed to helping those with specific care needs, as well as looked for process improvement opportunities voiced at those meetings. We plan to hold quarterly Town Halls in additional cities in our primary service area this year as well, but with a spin. Our approach is a bit different, whereby we are specifically inviting Veteran Service Organizations, VCAT Leadership Members, Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, and our Congressional Liaisons, to congregate in more of a business-style forum to share strategic direction, challenges, and recommended solutions.

To share our strategic direction, we provide four major areas our Medical Center staff will be working on. These include Greater Choice for Veterans through evaluation of inpatient services and infrastructure, and opportunities to improve and expand our outpatient primary care, along with modernizing our systems and processes which will focus on expanding women’s health, implementing whole health with concentration on pain management and increasing integrated therapies, and becoming more Veteran-centered. Another major priority is suicide prevention and sharing widely opportunities for everyone in our community to learn how they can help someone who is contemplating suicide connect with the right VA care and services. Lastly, there are opportunities for management to evaluate and realign resources. As you can see, we are committed to doing whatever we can to ensure Veterans know the care and services they receive will be through a safe, quality approach, for years to come.

This is only a brief snapshot of the great things happening at the VA and clinics throughout Michigan.

I want to personally take this opportunity to reach out to Veterans and their families and welcome them to any one of our VA facilities. Although eligibility for care and services vary from Veteran to Veteran, it never hurts to pay us a visit and learn more about how you may be eligible for care, prescriptions, and more. We encourage individuals to visit www.ebenefits.va.gov or call 1-800-406-5143, extension 13120 or 13121 to ask for an enrollment packet. We also welcome you to visit our website at www.saginaw.va.gov to learn more about your hometown VA.

In closing, I want to thank each and every VA employee. You do amazing work each and every day. Without you and your loyalty to Veterans, we would not be the proud VA health care organization we are today.

Happy Veterans Day to each and every Veteran, and if you receive your care with us, thank you! We are proud to serve those who have served!!!
With My Gratitude,

Ginny Creasman, PharmD, FACHE
Medical Center Director, Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center, Saginaw, MI