



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

April 12, 2011

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Durbin:

I am pleased to inform you that the Under Secretary for Health has approved the reopening of inpatient surgery at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Marion, Illinois, at the standard level. Standard-level surgeries include procedures with low risks for complications such as appendectomies, hernia repair and other minimally invasive operations requiring an inpatient stay. As you may recall, the facility resumed all approved outpatient surgical procedures in 2008.

The Marion VAMC has taken numerous actions to prepare for the reopening of standard-level inpatient surgery as detailed in the enclosed fact sheet. This includes successful reviews by the Surgical Consultant's Office, the Office of the Medical Inspector, and the Office of Inspector General. The Marion VAMC received full accreditation by The Joint Commission after their independent external review in the fall of 2010.

VA is confident that Veterans will again receive top-quality inpatient surgical care at the Marion VAMC. Reopening standard-level inpatient surgeries at Marion will provide Veterans in the area with more convenient access to safe, high quality health care. The VAMC also received approval for several infrastructure improvements that will enhance the services provided to Veterans who receive their care at the facility.

The Medical Center Director is planning a formal announcement to employees, Veterans, and the community to share this important news.

I appreciate your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Eric K. Shinseki".

Eric K. Shinseki

Enclosure

Department of Veterans Affairs

Fact Sheet

Reopening Inpatient Surgery at the Marion VA Medical Center

Statement:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is pleased to announce the Marion VA Medical Center (VAMC) will resume standard-level surgery. Standard-level surgeries include procedures with low risks for complications such as appendectomies, hernia repair and other minimally invasive operations.

The VAMC has taken numerous actions to prepare for the reopening with complete confidence, including completely successful internal reviews by the VA's Office of Inspector General (OIG), and Medical Inspector. The Marion VAMC also completed an independent external review in fall 2010 resulting in full accreditation by The Joint Commission (TJC) -- an independent agency that evaluates and accredits health care organizations.

VA is confident that all previous issues have been addressed and Veterans will again receive the top-quality care they earned with their service. In fact, the Marion VAMC received a "best practice" acknowledgement by TJC for Credentialing and Privileging program processes now in place.

Facts:

- VA is committed to providing Veterans with the best quality health care.
- Resuming standard-level inpatient surgeries at the Marion VAMC will improve convenience and quality of care for the Southern Illinois Veterans we serve. Local VA providers will provide Veterans with seamless coordination of their care, managed by their local VA team from surgery to hospitalization, to rehabilitation, to home.
- Marion VAMC increased staffing from 1,074 employees in 2007 to 1,382 in 2011. Staffing includes a full cadre of general surgeons, anesthesiologists and nurses to support a standard-level inpatient surgery program.
- Marion VAMC completed successful reviews by the VA's OIG and Medical Inspector, as well as TJC, an independent not-for-profit organization. The facility received a "best practice" acknowledgement by TJC for Credentialing and Privileging program processes.
- The Marion VAMC also received approval for several infrastructure improvements that will further enhance Veterans' surgical services:

- An ongoing \$13 million initiative to relocate and expand the surgical suite and emergency department. Current projects are in the design phase.
- Modernization of a 16-bed inpatient ward. Planning is ongoing with construction to begin in Summer 2011.
- Construction of a state-of-the-art physical rehabilitation center funded by a \$3.9 million donation by the Illinois AMVETS Service Foundation.
- Construction of a \$1.975 million radiology suite to house new MRI and CT units.
 - o The new state-of-the-art MRI unit is already installed and will increase availability of service while reducing scan times for Veterans.
 - o The new 64-slice CT scan unit will be available for use early this summer.

Veterans Health Administration
April 2011