

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1502

July 12, 2016

Director Judith Johnson-Mekota
Department of Veterans' Affairs Medical Center
601 Highway 6 West
Iowa City, Iowa 52246-2208

Dear Director Johnson-Mekota:

I write today to inquire about the Iowa City Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) Medical Center's policies regarding mental health department admissions. It is with great sadness that I recently learned of a constituent's suicide following his visit this July to the Medical Center, and I am troubled by the reported circumstances surrounding his passing.

Specifically, I was disturbed to receive reports that the veteran had been turned away after he reached out to a psychiatrist at the VA to request that he be admitted to the Medical Center's mental health department. According to a posting that the individual wrote on a social media website, his request was denied despite him explaining that he was in crisis and needed urgent assistance. The veteran tragically took his own life shortly thereafter.

We owe those who have served access to high-quality health care, and that must include timely, robust mental health services that meet the unique needs of our veterans. No veteran should ever have to struggle alone with mental health issues after fighting for our country. According to the VA, approximately 20 veterans commit suicide per day – one is too many.

For this reason, I write today to learn more about the Iowa City VA Medical Center's procedure for processing requests for admission to the Center's mental health department. Under what circumstances are veterans who show signs of being in crisis denied admission to a VA mental health department? Why might an individual explicitly requesting in-patient psychiatric care be denied? Does the VA follow up with veterans if they are denied in-patient psychiatric care to inquire about their condition?

I know that you share my deep concern for our veterans' mental health and safety, and I thank you in advance for your response to this inquiry. As the details of this specific incident come to light, I look forward to working with you to ensure that no veteran's call for help goes unanswered.

Sincerely,



Dave Loebsock
Member of Congress