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Is the VA Mental Healthcare Scheduling System 'Gamed?' *Two Senators Seek Audit*

By Stephen Spotswood

WASHINGTON — Frustrated by the numerous reports of veterans unable to receive timely mental healthcare at VA facilities, legislators have called for the VA Office of the Inspector General to conduct a formal audit of wait times.

In a letter to the VA IG, Sen. Patty Murray, (D-WA), chairwoman of the Senate VA Committee and Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), the committee's ranking Republican, raised issues that have emerged in recent hearings.

Most notably, they are concerned about the contradiction between what VA staffers in the field are saying about their difficulties in getting expeditious care to veterans compared with the more optimistic tone VA officials have taken with Congress.

The senators specifically asked for an investigation of how accurately VA was tracking wait times.

"[Does] wait-time data VA collects represent an accurate depiction of veterans' ability to access those services?" Murray and Burr wrote in their letter. "In addition, we ask that your office evaluate whether VA is accurately and completely reporting the data they collect."

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New Army Surgeon General Is First Woman, Nurse to Hold Top Medical Position

By Sandra Basu

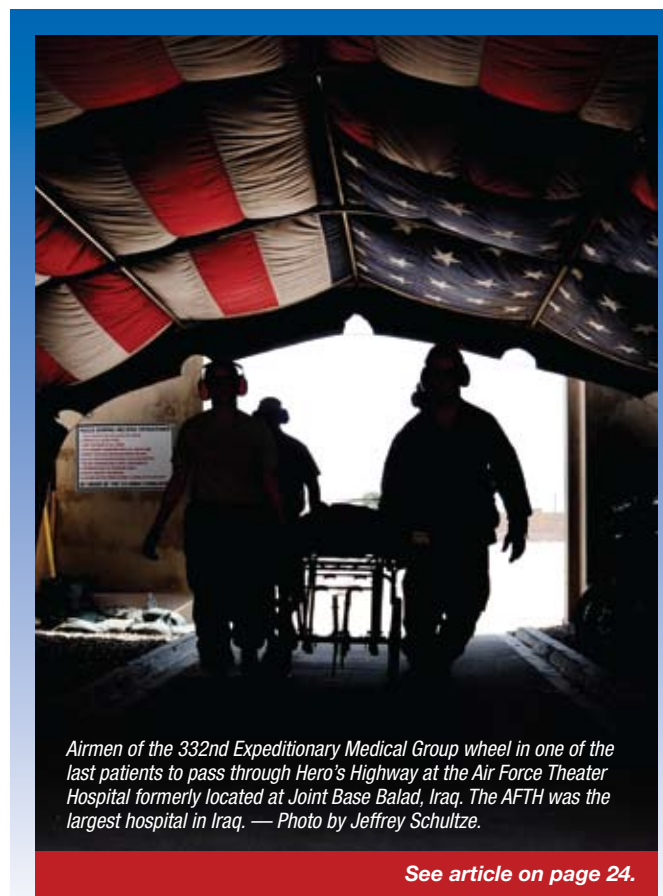
WASHINGTON — With the swearing in of Lt. Gen Patricia D. Horoho, RN, as the Army's 43rd surgeon general, for the first time a woman or a nurse has been officially in command of the Army's largest medical organization. Horoho is both.

Horoho replaced former Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. Eric Schoomaker, MD, who has served as commander since December 2007 and will retire this month.

At Horoho's swearing in and promotion on Dec. 7, she thanked her family and spoke of the importance of Army Medicine's mission.

"I understand that there are significant challenges ahead and continued operational demands," Horoho said. "One of Army Medicine's greatest challenges over the next three to five

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Airmen of the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group wheel in one of the last patients to pass through Hero's Highway at the Air Force Theater Hospital formerly located at Joint Base Balad, Iraq. The AFTH was the largest hospital in Iraq. — Photo by Jeffrey Schultze.

See article on page 24.

Acute Kidney Injuries Sharply Increase Wounded Death Rates

By Annette M. Boyle

SAN ANTONIO, TX — Kidney injuries have dramatically increased death rates in military personnel evacuated to burn units in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Up to 30% of those wounded troops suffer acute kidney injury (AKI) and, with the severe form of the injury, nearly two-thirds of those die, compared with a rate of 2 in 1,000 of patients without the condition, according to a new study published in the *Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*. Even those with minimal AKI have significantly increased death rates of between 4% and 8.3%, depending on what measurement system is used.

As dire as the situation may sound, that information also creates opportunities for saving lives, according to Capt. Ian Stewart, MD, USAF, of the San Antonio Military Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, TX.

While age, injury severity and burn area cannot be altered, "AKI represents a critical variable, and it's the only one you can change. If we intervene, we may be able to alter the outcome," said Stewart, who was one of the study authors.

Researchers used the two mostly widely-accepted classification systems for AKI, Acute Kidney Injury Network (AKIN)

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