



Illinois State Medical Society

June 15, 2016

Mr. Robert A. McDonald
Secretary
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the Illinois State Medical Society (ISMS), I write with great concern and disappointment on the released proposed rules by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) allowing advanced practice nurses (APRN) within the VA to practice independently of a physician's clinical oversight. This unprecedented action by the VA is not the right course of action to care for those men and women who have served our country, and I strongly urge that you reconsider these dangerous changes.

ISMS recognizes the challenges and enormous pressure that the VA currently faces to reduce wait times and improve quality for veterans seeking treatment throughout the VA health system. The unparalleled changes set forth in these proposed rules will have a detrimental impact on our veterans and undermine the delivery of care within the VA. ISMS believes that providing physician-led, patient-centered, team-based care is the best approach to improving the quality of care. With over 10,000 hours of education and hands on training, physicians play an integral and invaluable part to the health care team. Removing access to physicians reduces the standard of care and puts our veterans at greater risk.

In addition, as a practicing anesthesiologist, I am particularly concerned that physician-led anesthesia care may be removed from the surgical setting. With 12 to 14 years of education and over 14,000 hours of clinical training, physician anesthesiologists serve a critical role in providing safe anesthesia care. This is particularly true in cases of VA patients with poorer health statuses. Not requiring physician involvement in these situations will again lower the standard of care for our veterans when they are the most vulnerable.

On behalf of the physicians of Illinois, ISMS thanks the VA for the important role that you play in keeping our veterans healthy. While ISMS understands and agrees that improvements must be made to the VA health system, we vehemently disagree that allowing APRNs to practice independently will bring those desired outcomes. Every

veteran deserves the highest standard of care for the sacrifices they made for our country. These proposed changes will, however, reduce the standard of care and put our veterans at higher risk. To protect patient safety, the VA should continue to follow the team-based physician-led, patient-centered care that ensures greater integration and coordination of care for veterans in order to improve health outcomes. I again strongly urge that you reconsider the changes made in these proposed rules.

Regards,

William A. McDade, M.D., Ph.D.
Chair, Board of Trustees
Illinois State Medical Society

cc: Thomas M. Anderson, M.D.
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