



VOICE OF THE VETERAN SURVEY FY2011

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY FOR HEALTH
OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

SUMMARIZED BY THE

Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Crosswalk of Core Characteristics Identified thru VA Visioning Process and Voice of Veteran Focus Groups

A Patient-Centered Health Care System starts with the Veteran, with his or her life. It begins with an exploration of what matters to the Veteran: what matters to them in their life and what they want and need their health for. If health issues are barriers to living their life fully, we partner with them so they are “mission-ready” for life. We recognize that Veterans are men and women who put their country first and made sacrifices. We owe them the best in health care built for and around them, the individual...the Veteran.

As part of the VHA’s commitment to Patient Centered Care, a series of focus groups were conducted to hear directly from Veterans and their families regarding their perceptions and ideas of the core characteristics VHA should embrace. Between March 22 and April 8, 2011, 54 focus groups with 473 participants, both Veteran users and non-users, were conducted across the country. Information from these focus groups and 191 previously conducted ones was synthesized and a set of Veteran-identified core characteristics emerged. This list of 11 core characteristics were found to be most pervasive as Veterans expressed repeatedly and in their own words their hopes and dreams for their healthcare system. A similar list developed by leadership as a pre-decision draft is compared to the core characteristics expressed by the Veterans themselves. The characteristics identified by the Veterans that relate to those in the re-decisional document are indicated with an asterisk. Four areas were found to be most closely aligned with the voice of the Veteran characteristics. These included Respect, Advocacy, Integrated, and Accessible. The important characteristics identified by Veterans and their families were focused on building relationships and on the emotional and partnering aspects of their care. Of note is the language used by the Veterans. The language used by the Veterans was more straight-forward and simple, expressed in every-day terms. For example, terms “to be heard” and “convenience” were used by the Veterans and “accessible” was the term used in the pre-decisional document.

VA Core Characteristics	Voice of the Veteran focus Groups: Core Characteristics Identified by Veterans <i>*Represents characteristics closely aligned with VA Core Characteristics</i>	
Trustworthy	Dignity and Respect*	Camaraderie
Accessible	To Be Heard	Efficiency*
Quality	Privacy	Convenience
Innovative	Choice*	Physical Access
Agile	Partnerships with Providers*	Improved Dining Experiences
Integrated	Family Involvement	

Recommendation: As VHA adopts the VA Visioning core characteristics, we should consider more explicitly addressing the areas identified by the Veterans. We should also be mindful of the language of Veterans and how they express their aspirations for VHA. We should invite Veterans and their families to be at the table with us as we plan and move toward the future vision of Patient Centered Care.

EXECUTIVE SYNOPSIS

The Voice of the Veteran Focus Group Project was undertaken at the request of VHA’s Ad Hoc Focus Group Task Force and Deputy Under Secretary William Schoenhard to assist the VA in defining core characteristics to make VHA an organization of first choice for Veterans’ health care. The summary presented below is representative of themes compiled from views and opinions gathered during 54 Veteran focus groups with nearly 473 participants conducted between March 22 and April 8, 2011, over 30 separate VHA locations. Supplemented with information collected during previous focus groups, the voices of 1,774 Veterans across 61 sites are represented in this document. Focus groups are an extremely important source of qualitative data about any organization. In addition to on-going

satisfaction surveys with patients and employees, these focus group data can aid in identifying trends, common feelings and concerns, and has allowed the facilitators to delve more deeply into the beliefs and perceptions of participants.

Focus group questions and processes for this project were developed with specific objectives to identify opportunities to improve the delivery system and enhance the competitive position; understand Veteran wants, needs, and desires for their healthcare delivery system; obtain Veteran feedback on an ideal healthcare delivery system; hear Veterans' definitions of quality and access; and learn from eligible Veterans who receive care outside the VHA their reasons for not using the VHA healthcare system, their perceptions of care, and what would make them change their minds and choose to use VHA healthcare services.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP THEMES

The overarching goal for this project was to help identify the core characteristics and attributes of healthcare most important to Veterans. Upon review and analysis of the thousands of comments received from Veterans over the course of this project, the themes presented below were derived from responses and remarks heard most pervasively and frequently across sites.

Primary themes heard throughout this project, some with clarifying information, include:

- Always treat Veterans with respect and dignity.
 - Ask and listen to Veterans
 - Personalize each encounter
 - Partner with Veterans as intentional and active members in planning for their healthcare
 - Insist on helpfulness and professional behavior from staff
 - Know that first impressions made by front line staff are lasting
 - Respond to call buttons in a timely manner
 - Attend frequently to those who are bed- or wheelchair-ridden
 - Pay close attention to hygiene for Veterans needing assistance with daily living
 - Protect each Veteran's physical privacy
- Design and redesign processes to be Veteran-centric rather than VHA-centric.
 - Redesign scheduling processes for clinics appointments for Veteran choice and convenience
 - Redesign physical therapy appointments for Veteran choice and convenience
 - Modify Pharmacy processes to reduce turnaround time
 - Expand hours and days of operation to accommodate working Veterans
 - Schedule appointments at Veteran's convenience rather than the clinics'
 - Eliminate "three strikes and you're out" process for missed appointments
 - Expedite ability to be seen by a specialist
 - Eliminate waits, delays, and physician no-shows

- Offer care locally to minimize long distance travel
- Establish partnerships between Veterans and physicians to engage in more meaningful ways.
 - Establish routine relationships rather than seeing a different physician each time
 - Reduce physician turnover
 - Allow adequate time for each encounter with a provider
 - Be sensitive to the effect on Veterans when working with a provider of an ethnicity he or she previously fought against
 - Educate physicians and staff on each war era to better understand Veterans
- Provide for affordable emergency care services.
- Emphasize wellness and prevention.
- Capitalize on competitive advantage of Veterans' desire for camaraderie and assembly.
- Proactively encourage family involvement in all aspects of Veterans' healthcare.
- Address food issues, from Canteens to inpatient trays
- Expand Access to Women's Health Services
 - Longer hours of operation
 - Additional healthcare services
 - Female physicians for gynecological care, always
- Enhance Mental Health Services
 - To reach those most in need earlier
 - Provide by skilled Veterans who can relate to combat experience
- Augment technology to improve access to information.
 - Improve comprehensiveness of MyHealtheVet
 - Assure medical records are accessible across the entire VHA
 - Allow appointments to be scheduled online
 - Offer live chats with physicians
- Equip Veterans with resources, tools, and information to easily navigate and access complex medical centers.
 - Parking
 - Way finding
- Educate Veteran patients on full complement of pain management options available; reduce reliance on prescribing and (over prescribing) pain medication.
- Ensure medication safety and accuracy of active medication list.
- Provide for additional therapeutic activities or distractions (beyond TV).
- Establish a patient navigator for every Veteran.

- Teach Veterans about resources, access and benefits once they are ready to learn but before they are lost to the VA.
- Clarify and follow through with benefit eligibility information.
- Initiate external public relations campaign to improve public image of VA healthcare.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP THEMES WITH REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

Always Treat Veterans with Respect and Dignity	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to Veterans, and support them to participate intentionally and actively in their plans of care • Personalize each encounter • Enforce customer service expectations and professional behavior when interacting with Veterans (eye contact, smiles, attentiveness) • First impressions made by front line staff matters • Respond to call buttons in a timely manner • Attend frequently to those who are bed- or wheelchair-ridden • Provide for more therapeutic activities or distractions during hospitalizations (not just TV) • More attention to hygiene for CLC Vets needing assistance with daily living • Protect each Veteran's physical privacy 	<p>"It was a compliment and an honor to be here today and the reason we both came is because we felt that this has just never been done before, and I've been here a long, long time."</p> <p>"I think just being familiar – I've come before when people call me by my name and that may not seem like a real big deal but when they have that attitude I kind of look forward to it myself. Instead of just the drudgery of the appointment having someone to recognize me and say, 'Hey how are you doing sir?' That's huge."</p> <p>"Treat me as a real person and not a social security number."</p> <p>"I don't like how if you tell them up here that something is wrong with you, it takes them five days to get to you and then they don't listen to you what your problems are, where it hurts and tell the nurse and the nurse is rude as hell to you, and it's like, I live here, and we put up with this stuff almost on a daily basis."</p> <p>"There is a culture of laziness in the front line. I go in there and they are talking about their neighbor is getting ready to go on vacation or reading a book and they don't look up, don't have nothing to do with anybody."</p> <p>"Some of those guys cannot get fair treatment, just because they are homeless Veterans."</p> <p>"I know the Vietnam Vets, some of the problems that stems with our healthcare and our mental health care is that fact we are liars until we've proven who we are."</p> <p>"I had an argument with one of the policemen here and I told them you have to be more careful when they treat us. They treat us as a patient, they look at us like we have an illness but we have a lot of syndromes. Police in here they are nice since I told them that, they changed a little bit. But they got an attitude."</p> <p>"More than one Veteran in a hospital room is too much. No room for family, no privacy."</p>

Design and Redesign Processes to be Veteran-centric rather than VHA-centric	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign clinic appointments and Physical Therapy scheduling, and Pharmacy processes for Veteran choice and convenience • Modify Pharmacy processes to reduce turnaround time. • Expand hours and days of operation to accommodate working Veterans • Expedite ability to be seen by a specialist • Eliminate waits, physician no-shows • Schedule appointments at Veteran's convenience more so rather than the clinics'. • Eliminate "three strikes and you're out" process for missed appointments • Offer care locally to minimize long distance travel 	<p>"I can only work 8 – 5 so I just can't come in."</p> <p>"I only have so much leave I can take from my job to come here for appointments and since they are only open during weekdays, well."</p> <p>"Each time I call in, I listen to this recording that never ends and you never, ever get to a live person."</p> <p>"I needed to see a doctor on Veteran's Day, but they were closed for the holiday. Now, isn't that ironic?"</p> <p>"If you want to see your primary, you can't just call up and ask for that. You have to call and make an appointment and often it's 4 – 5 months out."</p> <p>"If I have an appointment with any one of those three [non-VA] doctors, it's never more than thirty minutes that I'm in there waiting, but I could have an appointment with the VA at 8:00 this morning and still be waiting at 2:00 in the afternoon."</p> <p>"I left a message with Audiology and they called me twice within a couple of hours the next day but I didn't have my phone with me. The first was to say this is your second call and if you don't call back we're going to cancel this window. And the third one was we're terminating this, you need to call your PCP to send out a new referral if you want an appointment. And that all happened within barely more than a 24 hour period."</p> <p>"You take your prescription to Pharmacy and they say it will be 15, 20 minutes, and 3 hours you're still waiting. They've got three windows there, but only one is open."</p> <p>"I live way in the mountains so I go to a remote clinic, and that's been really nice that they've been able to do that. That has been excellent for me anyway, because I can talk to the doctor right there in the deal [van]. "</p> <p>"We have to go all the way to Fort Mead in South Dakota which is 227 miles one way. I don't think that's – that Hot Springs is not being very accommodating to the Veterans especially as I'm getting older and if I get sore as hell driving over there."</p>

Establish Partnerships between Veterans and Physicians to Engage in More Meaningful Ways	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage continuity between providers and patients • Rather than seeing a different physician each time, establish a steady patient base • Reduce physician and medical student turnover • Allow adequate time for each encounter with a provider • Be sensitive to the effect on Veterans when encountering a provider of an ethnicity he's previously fought against • Educate physicians and staff on each war era to better understand Veterans 	<p>"It's upsetting to me, because once you meet a doctor and you bond together, by the time you have a good working relationship, they give you a new doctor."</p> <p>"Whenever I've been a patient in the VA, I get one doctor today, I get Joe Doe tomorrow, I get Suzy Smith the next day and nobody knows what the original set of circumstances is. You have to repeat it all. You have to start all over again."</p> <p>"I think it's at least important that they provide for the medical personnel, small education classes based on the wars."</p> <p>"I know the doctors are only allotted like fifteen minutes per patient and that includes seeing the patient, doing the charting and ordering the labs and prescriptions and stuff like that – even like how you were saying to look at the total person, the one I went to - just total tunnel vision."</p> <p>"He plays with the computer for about fifteen minutes, then he'll get up and listen to my heart for one minute and that's it, that's all the time I get with him. Ten years and he's never tested my prostate or nothing."</p> <p>"A lot of times they hear you but they don't hear you. So they are already deciding what they gonna do with you in probably the first two minutes you sitting there. Because they ask you one or two questions and after that they start looking at the computer fixing a way to get you out. I'm just telling you how it works, and I've been there almost 20 years."</p>

Emphasize Wellness and Prevention	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WWII, Korean and Vietnam Vets were primarily uninterested in wellness. Younger Veterans and women Vets, however, articulated a greater interest in being proactively involved with wellness, prevention, and improving vitality in general. 	<p>"I know for myself, whenever I get a notice from the Women's Health Clinic, there's always something in there promoting women's health, whether it be breast exams or cholesterol levels. And they also send out a newsletter to the women Veterans, which is nice but I think they should do that for everybody."</p> <p>"I have a great doctor at the Baptist, he's very into wellness. He's a wellness doctor so when I tell him that I juice raw vegetables, you know...he asks me what kinds of supplements I take and I take D's and E's and this and that and he says just be careful with certain juices because they're high in sugars, and we talked about it."</p> <p>"My healthcare program from the company that I retired from Exelon – they have a magazine that comes out monthly and it's on tips for good health, foods to eat, things to avoid, seasonal things. Now it's winter here's what you need to watch out for. Here are medications that you should really think twice about and all those kinds of things."</p> <p>"I don't like people pulling punches with me. I want them to say, 'Hey, you are gaining weight. This is why you are having this problem. You need to lose some weight. Back off the table a little bit and exercise.'"</p> <p>"...that MOVE program it's probably one of the best programs that they've got out here because you've got different things – the nutrition to help with your diabetes and all that, they set you up in the physical program that you can do, you know."</p>

Capitalize on Competitive Advantage of Veteran's Desire for Camaraderie and Assembly	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take advantage of Veteran's desire to be together, to come to the VA to socialize and support one another. 	<p>"In the last while I've come around to meet some guys and we have coffee certain days – we hang out."</p> <p>"A lot of the older Vets come here to hang out but I have a job to do. I need to be in and I need to be out and they want to go up there and they want to talk to the prescription guys and sit there and joke and that's fine but I got stuff to do."</p> <p>"Maybe they should have like a morale welfare area set up to where they can sit and chit chat and play games you know tell their stories. I mean just like a morale welfare that has maybe some computers set up and have library space."</p> <p>"Just a common area to go to hang out because I get tired of sitting there...."</p> <p>"But another thing that would help is allowing.....all of us Veterans to get together on a regular basis, at least like once a month would be nice. Because it's actually good therapy for us, because a lot of us, you know, we get new guys coming in all the time. Usually, on average, we have one to two a day coming in to our VA, and they don't know the system, but I do and other Vets because I've been on station for quite a while, and that would help them a lot, to get them coming in and us being able to help one another, as far as therapy and, you know, recreation things... whether it be playing softball or something where we can help each other. You know, unless, and I know yesterday there was... one of the older Vets was having a real difficult day, and if he was able to call other Vets, it would help him a lot."</p>

Proactively Encourage Family Involvement in all Aspects of Veterans' Healthcare	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite family to be a part of a Veteran's care, both inpatient and outpatient. • Provide spaces for family 	<p>"....everybody's very helpful, everybody, you know, always wants to make sure that the family members are treated with the utmost respect and are kept in the loop, and that's the way that it should be with any of us."</p> <p>"On the one occasion where my wife accompanied me she was allowed into the exam room and she was allowed to be engaged and the provider was very respectful. I appreciated that."</p> <p>"I never got the feeling that my spouse was welcomed at all."</p> <p>"I didn't know 'til now that spouses could come to Urgent Care."</p> <p>"....no patient should ever go to a doctor's office visit or a hospital admission without an advocate from within the family or extended family and close friends to take notes and make sure they know the names of all the doctors that treat them."</p> <p>"My young woman I'm seeing for counseling asked me to have my wife and my daughter come in with me on one of my visits. And I did that and she went out of her way to make them feel comfortable which I was appreciative of. She explained to them things that I wasn't capable of explaining so she was really my advocate at that point."</p>

Address Food Concerns of Veterans, Family and Staff	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address food issues from Canteens to inpatient trays to include choice, taste, temperature, hours of operation, healthy choices, specialty diets 	<p>"You know to bring your lunch when you come here. I got three appointments today but the cafeteria closes at 2pm."</p> <p>"There [non-VA hospital] you get room service and the food was marvelous with all these choices."</p> <p>"In outside hospitals I think food service has really changed over the last probably ten years – they've recognized the patients. Very seldom would you hear a patient say I really enjoyed the food which I have heard it recently. But not in here. It hasn't changed at all."</p> <p>[Non-user] "They knew everything about me. And when you are in the hospital room, I got good room service too, and the food was marvelous with all these choices."</p> <p>"The only food I've had is at the Canteen and so we won't discuss that."</p>

Expand Access to Women's Health Services	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Health Services appreciated; desire exists for more <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longer hours of operation Additional healthcare services Female physicians for gynecological care, always 	<p>"I'm very glad we have the Women's Center and everything is all in one place."</p> <p>"Conversely with the Women's Health Center, you don't have enough doctors or times or specialists. And with all of my fellow sisters coming back, the VA to me has been overwhelmed with females. I can only see (her) on Tuesday afternoons down in Brockton. I work full time so have to take the whole day off."</p> <p>"The best department in this whole VA system in Murfreesboro is the Women's Clinic. Sorry guys. If everything else worked the way the women's clinic works, it would be a perfect world."</p>

Enhance Mental Health Services	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximize Mental Health Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reach those most in need earlier Provide by skilled Veterans who can relate to combat experience 	<p>"I have to deal with some pretty tough issues now and she (the psychiatrist) is the best thing that's ever happened to me."</p> <p>"...who is a Colonel who is saying this, this and this but he's never suffered that PTSD. He doesn't know the exact situation that someone is in when they're there."</p> <p>"The VA psychological staff and PTSD staff, there's not one swinging dick that's ever seen combat. Not one; any of them...it's the whole issue."</p> <p>"In like the last year is they've got private security working here, none of them for the most part are Vets, they're short with you and they don't really know anything about the place."</p>

Provide for Affordable After-Hour and Emergency Care Services	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address convenient and affordable after hours and emergency care for all Veterans. Educate Veterans and local municipalities (e.g., police, ambulance) on preferred mechanisms. 	<p>"I told them I was a VA patient and in two days they transported me but the transportation alone cost \$1700 and now they put collection on me."</p> <p>"Yeah, I mean if you have TRICARE you can jump into an urgent care clinic and they'll cover it or of course the ER if needed."</p> <p>"I'm a policeman and if they could call 911 and say they are a Veteran and where to take them and even send someone to respond, that would be great. We don't always know where to take Vets for emergencies, nor do we have a number to call to find out."</p>

Augment Technology to Improve Access to Information	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make My HealtheVet more user friendly with additional options (Kaiser system put out as an example) • Assure medical records are accessible across the entire VHA • Allow appointments to be scheduled online • Offer live chats with physicians 	<p>"My HealtheVet is a good start but it needs to be expanded and user friendly. It's difficult to get into, and difficult to find things."</p> <p>"Theoretically we're supposed to have the same database for all VA hospitals, but I can't even get them to communicate my information between one city in North Carolina and another."</p> <p>"...starting to use bar coding. So that now they don't come in and give you the wrong medication, they've first got to match that up."</p> <p>"It [My HealtheVet] works great for refilling medications."</p> <p>"Three years ago Kaiser entered everything into their computer system. Now by 8:00 am my lab results are available on my computer and if you want to see last year's results you just have to push the bar graph button."</p>

Equip Veterans with Resources, Tools, and Information to Easily Navigate and Access Complex Medical Centers	
Supporting Information	Representative Quote
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address way finding on medical center campuses, both inside and outside. • Ease Veterans' ability to park conveniently then move to care location. 	<p>"Where in the hell do you go? This is a whole city in itself, and you walk in one door and you don't know where you're at, you don't know what to do."</p> <p>"Parking is limited anyway but three fourths of the patient places are filled by staff. If we would simply enforce that, many of our Veterans would have closer parking to park in."</p>

Educate Veteran Patients on Full Complement of Pain Management Options Available	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer options on pain management early on in treatment; reduce reliance on prescribing (and overprescribing) pain medication. 	<p>"I said, no, I do not like taking medicine either, so I do not want to go that route. It is just the idea that he gave me choices instead of trying to just cover it up and telling me that he was going to give me some pain pills. That really made me feel good."</p> <p>"I do have to say it is very much a 'pill-first' kind of methodology here."</p> <p>"I've been on pain medication for 4 years and was like, does the VA offer acupuncture? He's like, yea they do, but it was never mentioned, like it's a hush hush thing."</p> <p>"Let's give you another pill. And at one time they had me on so many pills, the shrinks did, you know I'm lucky if I could get out of bed at 3 o'clock."</p> <p>"When you're drugged up so much, when you take all this stuff before you go to bed to be able to sleep, you're drugged up so much the nightmare's still there, but you can't wake up."</p>

Establish a Patient Navigator for Every Veteran	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist each Veteran personally with learning to navigate the system, learn the many rules, benefits, and processes. Make certain they know how to contact their navigator 	<p>"We're Veterans. We're broken. The Patient Rep or someone must be more available, like with a 1-800 number. They have their numbers listed, but they are never there, they never answer."</p> <p>"It is bad, just walking into it not knowing anything about it. You can go to the information desk but they're not going to help you learn the ins and outs. And really be your own advocate and say hey dude I've been sitting here talking to you about this for two years— look it up."</p> <p>"Perfect, great but it would be nice to be able to have somebody that is almost like a case manager to help you get those appointments, get those referrals pushed along rather than I know like I've been waiting over two months for a referral from my primary care physician into like orthopedic or physical therapy just to get an appointment."</p> <p>"What we learned we learned on our own. No one hands you information saying this is how you do this. They don't want to tell us that because it means they are opening themselves up for more."</p>

Ensure Medication Safety and Accuracy of Active Medication List	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure medication safety and accuracy of active medication list in EMR 	<p>"Physicians prescribe too many medications but give no explanation."</p> <p>"Last time I was admitted it took my whole stay before they got my drugs straightened out. It's not very reassuring to get confusion with your meds."</p> <p>"They've got a problem with their computer system as far as medications go. My primary is in Bedford, but I wind up here in West Roxbury a lot. If the doctor in West Roxbury changes a med, it never gets to my primary. The computers in West Roxbury talk to the ones in Brockton, they talk to the ones in JP, Bedford never knows."</p> <p>"I'm fortunate and I'm grateful for anything and everything that I get. One of the medications I'm on is \$964 a vial and it only lasts me three weeks. I couldn't afford that on the outside."</p>

Address Preferences of Eligible Veterans Who Have Elected to Get Healthcare Elsewhere	
Supporting Information	Representative Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each encounter should be personalized. • Clarify and follow through with benefit eligibility information • Provide family care for Veterans • Healthcare must be convenient • Continuity with physicians • Initiate external public relations Campaign to improve public image of VA Health Care 	<p>“Out there they treat me as though I’m an individual.”</p> <p>“I think I would consider coming here if I had a better explanation of just exactly what my benefits are. I’ve had none of that.”</p> <p>“In 1968 I was told I was ineligible. I think in recent years they have changed the eligibility but until I heard Tony on the radio about this session I didn’t know where to go.”</p> <p>“I don’t come here because I can’t bring my wife and kids.”</p> <p>“Like most of them I have both because sometimes to get the referral to other clinics in the VA system takes so very long that it’s easier just to pay a little bit more, go outside the system and get it done.”</p> <p>“There is a stigma about going to the VA hospital for certain types of help. And I don’t want that stigma.”</p> <p>“One of the reasons I came here today is because I wanted to find out what is going on, do I come here for my care or not? So the issue, big letters for me was trust. Do I trust this system? I been...I was in it heavily back in the mid-70s and I wanted to see what is going on. I hear all the positives, I hear some bad things here so I am trying to see, okay, is this a good place for me? Do I trust it? Are the surgeons, are the staff, anybody from top to bottom, are they there for us?”</p>

CLOSING COMMENTS

The quality and the commitment of the clinicians and staff who work at the VA and who have dedicated themselves to serving our Veterans are unparalleled. Twenty-first century healthcare focuses on the health and healing of Veterans, the care they receive, their partnership with clinicians, offered with respect and commitment. It is delivered by a great team of people who place our Veterans at the center of all that they do, who address the whole person, and who are world-leading, cutting-edge health care innovators. In fulfilling our responsibility to optimize the health and healing of each and every Veteran.

A Patient Centered Health Care System starts with the Veteran and begins with an exploration of what matters to each Veteran. This report is an important step in understanding the core characteristics of the kind of health care system that Veterans want. Integrating this understanding in the design of our facilities, the processes we use, and the relationships we foster. With this report, we create the foundation for transformation to the healthcare of the future. The need for transformation has never been greater and the imperatives are professional, financial, and moral. In this way, we will provide the future of health care to our Veterans today.

ⁱ Planetree conducted the focus groups surveys referenced in this document and prepared the original survey document for the VHA Deputy Undersecretary for Health and Operations Management.