Introduction

Debate over privatization of the Veteran’s Health Administration (VHA) escalated recently after an investigative report uncovered long wait times that may have led to deaths of veterans seeking care at VA facilities.

Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA) pays for veteran’s care in the private sector if a veteran lives forty miles from a VHA facility or if wait times exceed 30 days. However, only 27,000 veterans have used the Veterans’ Choice card.1

“The VA is a system constructed to provide holistic care for the life of that patient. The private system is not constructed with those ideas in mind.”

- Carl Blake, Paralyzed Veterans of America

“The VA today is a system worth saving, not dismantling.”

- Joe Davis, Director of Public Affairs for the Veterans of Foreign Wars

Background

Access to Care in the VHA

Two main problems with access to care: wait times for appointments, especially for primary care, and the physical location of many VHA facilities.

Wait times have been severely affected by two realities: the large number of returning veterans from the Middle East, and a national shortage of primary care providers and other specialists in VHA facilities.2,3

Quality of Care in the VHA

Quality of care provided by the VHA is graded better than the private sector.

- The New England Journal of Medicine compared the quality of VHA facilities to fee-for-service Medicare on 11 different measures and found VHA to be “significantly better” on all 11.4

- The Annals of Internal Medicine: in seven out of seven measures in treatment of diabetic patients, the VHA out-performed commercial managed care systems.4

- The National Committee for Quality Assurance ranks different players in health care on 17 different performance measures and the VHA surpassed all the other systems in each category.5

- Journal of Clinical Oncology: survival rates for older men with cancer in the VHA were better than or equivalent to the survival rates of similar fee for service Medicare beneficiaries.6

Cost of Care in the VHA

The Congressional Budget Office: the VHA represents a cost savings when comparing physician care, inpatient care, and cost of pharmaceuticals.8

The American Legion’s written testimony to the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs: the “VHA’s full range of services would have cost about 21% more than private sector care.” However, only 27,000 veterans have used the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) pays for veteran’s care in the private sector if a veteran lives forty miles from a VHA facility or if wait times exceed 30 days. (VACAA) pays for veteran’s care in the private sector if a veteran lives forty miles from a VHA facility or if wait times exceed 30 days.

Stakeholders Against Privatization

“Sending millions of older, sicker Americans - many of them requiring specialized care for rare and complex health problems into the waiting arms of private insurers, private doctors, and private pharmaceutical firms is a recipe for chaos and defacto rationing on a grand scale.”9

- Jon Perr

Stakeholders For Privatization

Concerned Veterans for America (CVA) would restrict the VHA as an independent government-chartered non-profit corporation with two functions: provide health care services for service-related injuries and pay for services, including private health coverage with VA funds.

Unintended Consequences

Would Privatization of the VHA System Improve Cost, Quality, and Access to Care for Our Veterans?

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Health Policy Fellowship 2015

Recommendations

Increase access by increasing the number of primary care practitioners and behavioral health providers:

- Create incentives to recruit military physicians
- Expand the scope of practice of other primary care providers
- Allow combat medics and corpsmen to work in the VA
- Tailor more customer service towards VHA physicians
- Streamline the J-1 Visa process
- Allow ABPS as an acceptable board certification for employment

References


2. Congressional Research Service.


