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2ND DISTRICT, ARIZONA

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June 18, 2014

The Honorable Dr. Robert Jesse
Undersecretary of Health
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Mr. Jonathan H. Gardner
Southern Arizona VAHCS Director
3601 South Sixth Avenue
Tucson, AZ 85723

Dear Dr. Jesse and Mr. Gardner,

I write to you today to request additional information regarding the Southern Arizona Veterans Affairs Health Care System's practices and techniques for scheduling health care appointments for veterans. I want to verify the accuracy of the data released on June 9 to ensure that our veterans are not falling victim to "secret" secondary lists designed to make wait times appear shorter than they actually are.

While wait times for the Southern Arizona VAHCS were reported as shorter than the national average, wait times for new patients are still too long. The audit notes that wait times were computed using the "desired date." In the VA Inspector General's interim report of May 28, interviews with schedulers found that they were "manipulating the waiting times of established patients by using the wrong desired date of care." I believe that this raises questions about the validity of the wait time data in your audit that was released on June 9.

Additionally, I have concerns that the data on quality and access to veterans' healthcare showed only the average data evaluated at the Southern Arizona VAHCS. Community Based Outpatient Clinics in the more rural areas of my district may be experiencing quality of care and wait times that are different, or potentially worse, than the average figures expressed in the report. Therefore, I again ask the VA to survey and release wait time data for *all* facilities, including the Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Southern Arizona.

The data released by the Veterans Administration is a step toward the kind of transparency that should be standard practice. However, transparency is needed moving forward as the VA works to reduce the wait times for all veterans at all VA medical facilities.

The 85,000 veterans I represent in Southern Arizona have stepped forward to serve our nation and we now must give them the prompt, efficient and quality care they were promised.

Thank you for your service to our veterans and for your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Barber". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ron Barber
Member of Congress