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WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 16, 2018

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The Honorable David J. Shulkin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

I am appalled and stunned by a recent claim of egregious medical malpractice at the VA Hospital in West Haven, Connecticut, and urge you to expeditiously enforce the authorities Congress provided to remove any employee found responsible for such reprehensible negligence. There should be nothing less than full accountability to ensure the safety and wellbeing of veterans seeking medical care, not only in West Haven, but in every VA facility nationwide. To that end, I request that you immediately initiate a review of the circumstances in this case and take all necessary measures to ensure our veterans receive the world's best medical care, nothing less. As soon as is practicable, please provide me the updates on your review, and any conclusions and actions you may take as a result.

The brave men and women who have sacrificed their lives for our safety, trust you as the highest official in the VA's chain of command, to ensure they are in the most capable hands when they seek medical treatment. I am deeply disturbed by reports that a scalpel may have been left in the abdomen of a veteran, Glenford Turner, after a 2013 Prostate Cancer procedure at the West Haven VA – resulting in nearly four years of severe abdominal pain. I ask that you identify all the facts surrounding this case and share all information with my office as soon as possible.

The complaint in this case indicates that the doctor admitted responsibility to the veteran and that a tort claim was filed but that the VA never responded to such filing. If the doctor's admission is true and the VA did not take steps to resolve the claim, then the agency has compounded the medical negligence. I urge you to review the VA's handling of this tort claim and provide information regarding how this tort claim was handled and whether such process comports with the VA's procedure for reviewing and assessing liability in medical malpractice claims.

As Secretary of the VA, you have a responsibility to ensure that VA hospitals are staffed with the best possible providers, and that those who fail to provide safe, quality care, are immediately removed from the medical facility. In the absence of holding providers accountable for malpractice, the VA fails to uphold its commitments to our nation's veterans. As you requested, Congress recently authorized enhanced accountability measures to eliminate any bureaucratic barriers that would impede you from swiftly firing or suspending bad employees. As such, I fully expect any VA employee found to be responsible for Mr. Turner's suffering to be immediately held accountable for such unfathomable negligence.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter. I look forward to working with you to ensure our nation's veterans receive the health care they need and deserve.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate