

SHERROD BROWN
OHIO

COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

BANKING, HOUSING,
AND URBAN AFFAIRS

HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 11, 2011

Senator Patty Murray
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murray:

This week, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun notifying 535 veterans who were patients at the Dayton VA Medical Center that they may have been exposed to certain blood-borne pathogens, including Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, or HIV. Veterans at risk of infection received care from a provider in the Dental Clinic who allegedly did not follow proper infection control practices for a reported 18-year period. Considering the scope and magnitude of this situation, and the unacceptable fact that so many of our nation's veterans have potentially and needlessly been exposed to serious infection risks, I request that the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs hold a hearing to investigate this dire situation.

According to information from the VA, employees at the Dental Clinic voiced concerns in late July 2010 about the infection control practices of a single practitioner. Some of these concerns reportedly included reusing dental equipment on patients without proper sterilization and not changing gloves between patients. After being made aware of employee concerns, the VA began an investigation into the allegations and reassigned four dental employees – including the practitioner in question – to other duties outside of dental service. There have also been allegations about serious failures of management and leadership in the clinic and in the Medical Center. I would note that these issues are not confined to Dayton, and have been occurring with shocking regularity throughout the VA health care system.

We have promised the men and women of our armed forces that if they risk their lives to defend our country, we will provide them with the benefits they have earned, including high-quality medical care. It is shocking that over 500 veterans may have risked their lives, not only on the battlefield, but in the VA health system.

It is imperative that we work together with the VA to determine how this situation was allowed to continue for 18 years, how we can work to right this wrong for all the veterans and families affected, and how we can ensure that this never happens again.

I look forward to working with you on this important hearing.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator