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**United States Senate**  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

March 20, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We were dismayed to receive the attached letter from David M. Walker, Comptroller General of the United States describing serious concerns about the quality of care provided to residents of the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH). Mr. Walker reports concerns expressed by health care professionals, including an increase in the number of resident deaths, an increase in the proportion of residents admitted directly into the intensive care unit at Walter Reed, indicators of inadequate medical care at the AFRH, and observation of blood, urine, and feces spattered rooms at the home. Mr. Walker also reported concerns about retaliation against residents who questioned the quality of care at the home.

We have also received information from a volunteer at the AFRH about poor maintenance of the home. The volunteer asserts that the maintenance staff has been reduced from 127 to 9 personnel, despite an increase in the number of residents. Apparently, residents are not able to get staff assistance for such simple things as replacing light bulbs or obtaining needed furniture.

We strongly endorse Mr. Walker's recommendation that the Department of Defense immediately undertake an independent investigation of the quality of health care and other services provided by the Armed Forces Retirement Home.

We look forward to hearing from you about your plans to investigate the conditions at the Armed Forces Retirement Home and to ensure that the enlisted retirees who reside there are assured of appropriate care and living conditions.

Sincerely,

  
John McCain  
Ranking Member

  
Carl Levin  
Chairman

Attachment



GAO

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

March 19, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates  
The Secretary of Defense

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In the course of conducting a statutorily required study of the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH), GAO received allegations from health care professionals concerning the quality of health care provided by the home. GAO believes that these allegations should be examined because AFRH residents—a vulnerable population of elderly, enlisted, military retirees—may be at risk. Many of these residents are single or widowed and have no close family members to help ensure that they receive appropriate treatment. As you know, the Secretary of Defense is responsible for appointing the chief operating officer of AFRH, who is subject to the authority, direction, and control of the Secretary of Defense, and is authorized to provide to AFRH support services necessary to enable it to carry out its functions.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 required GAO to assess the “regulatory oversight and monitoring of health care and nursing home care services” provided by AFRH.<sup>1</sup> Although oversight and monitoring are related to quality of care, we did not expand the scope of our study to include an examination of the quality of health care services provided by AFRH because a 2005 lawsuit concerning access to and quality of care is under appeal with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. As a matter of policy, GAO generally avoids addressing matters that are pending in litigation.

However, in the course of our interviews on AFRH oversight, we were referred to health care professionals who expressed serious concerns about the quality of care provided by the home. The health care professionals who raised these concerns have recently treated AFRH residents and said that, in the past, AFRH officials have retaliated against those who questioned AFRH quality of care. Their concerns included:

- A rising number of resident deaths, despite the fact that AFRH is now limiting admissions to relatively healthy retirees.
- Increases in the rates of admission to Walter Reed Army Medical Center from AFRH and in the proportion of residents admitted directly to the intensive care unit.

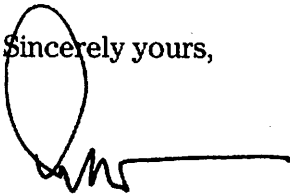
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<sup>1</sup> Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 909(b), 119 Stat. 3136, 3405.

- Residents admitted to Walter Reed Army Medical Center with the most serious type of pressure sores and one admission with maggots in the wound. (A pressure sore is a wound that can develop when an individual with impaired mobility receives inadequate care.)
- Failure of AFRH to ensure that a resident with a kidney transplant received appropriate care, resulting in hospitalization.
- Observation of blood-, urine-, and feces-spattered rooms among residents living independently, suggesting that they were inappropriately placed and should reside in either the assisted living or nursing home setting.

We believe that the Department of Defense should immediately undertake an independent investigation of the quality of health care services provided by AFRH. For example, the Department could work with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the federal agency responsible for oversight of nursing homes paid under Medicare and Medicaid, to conduct an investigation. We would be happy to discuss other alternatives.

Sincerely yours,



David M. Walker  
Comptroller General  
of the United States

cc: Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness  
Department of Defense Inspector General  
Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Senate Armed Services Committee  
Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Senate Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs Committee  
Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee  
Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, House Armed Services Committee  
Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, House Oversight and Government  
Reform Committee  
Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, House Veterans' Affairs Committee