

Veterans' Healthcare Verbatim

From Andy Berman, [Vietnam Veteran](#):

My worst experience was when, presumably a staffing shortage, led the VA to outsource a part of my care to a private medical provider. The VA discovered that I needed an operation to remove a large sarcoma that lit up under a PET scan, indicative of a cancerous growth under the skin.

I was sent to a local university medical center for the operation, where things did not go well. It was a classic example of the advantages provided by the VA healthcare system over private medical care. The surgeon who performed the operation to remove the cancerous growth was not aware of the side effects of the newly released oral medication I was taking at the time to suppress the CLL. Did he not read my medical records? Was he so specialized that he did not follow the latest developments in leukemia care? I don't know. But his failure to know that my anti-leukemia pills should have been suspended for a week prior to the operation led to serious bleeding for weeks afterward. Had the operation been performed at the VA itself that complication surely would not have happened. Full information about my medical history would have been passed from VA Oncology to VA Surgery which would have been fully aware of the need to temporarily suspend my leukemia medication.

With the coming of the COVID-19 crisis, the Minnesota VA took on the infamous "Fourth Mission" of the Veterans Administration. It began accepting non-veterans needing hospitalization for the COVID-19 virus, providing much needed relief to private sector hospitals. But because of the danger of exposure to the virus at the VA hospital, non-urgent appointments by veterans at the hospital were limited.

Thus my monthly IV infusions could not take place as usual at the VA. To its immense credit, on a monthly basis the VA has sent a nurse to my home with the medicine and equipment to administer the infusion in my living room. I am enormously appreciative of this, which has saved me from possible exposure to COVID-19 at the hospital.

The nurses sent, however, were not VA employees. They were working for a private contractor engaged in providing medical care in home visits. Alas, it was absolutely obvious that they did not have the level of training and skills that I have consistently encountered at the VA itself. While nothing terrible happened, there were some uncomfortable mishaps that left me yearning to return to the VA hospital.