

VA Has Improved, but Treatment Delays Need to Be Addressed Says Attorney Shanin Specter

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Philadelphia, PA: Well-known attorney Shanin Specter has been flying "legal sorties" into the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for a long time.

Although, Specter says, VA care has improved substantially "from the bad old days," the current problems are definitely reminiscent of the VA of previous decades.

The Department of Veterans Affairs and Veteran medical malpractice suits continue to surface, and Specter currently represents a number of former servicemen and women and their families engaged in combat with Veterans Affairs over improper medical care.

A new report, "Friendly Fire: Death, Delay & Dismay at the VA," from the office of Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), says hundreds of deaths can be tracked to the department's incompetence and delays. In the past, the VA has taken responsibility for 23 deaths, but Senator Coburn's report says,

"It is not possible to put a precise number on how many people have been harmed by delays in medical care at the veterans administration," says Specter. "But it is axiomatic that medical care, when delayed, will cause harm in a lot of circumstances."

Senator Coburn's report details a number of cases. Most notably, a Navy veteran who was forced to wait months for care and had to be rushed to the hospital only to be sent home despite a note on his chart indicating his condition was urgent. He died of bladder cancer one week after finally getting an appointment at the VA hospital.

"For example, when there is a suspected cancer diagnosis, if there is not a prompt test and a determination and prompt treatment, then that will worsen the prognosis," says Specter. "You can't make people wait to see a doctor for three months when they have an urgent medical issue."

"I think that the care provided at the VA hospitals, when it is provided in a timely fashion, has improved a lot over the decade," says Specter. "It used to be that the VA was the stepchild of the American medical system, and for the most part, that is no longer true."

"However, the delays in getting care are an entirely different situation," Specter adds. "And it is a reminder of days gone by where care at the VA was substandard. Now the issue is not so much substandard care, the issue is can you get the care; and I have to say this has to be addressed."

"When you have delays, you are going to have more deaths and other complications that are going to affect quality of life," says Specter.

Coburn's report also includes one of Specter's cases. He obtained a highly publicized \$17.5 million result for an ex-marine, Christopher Ellison, who, in 2007, suffered a stroke while driving home after a VA dentist continued with a multiple tooth extraction despite the fact that Ellison's blood pressure was crashing.

The VA has continually claimed that it is short of funds. However, Senator Coburn's report says that VA funding has actually increased, and when adjusted for inflation, VA funding has increased by over 92 percent in the last 10 years.

Some of that money been paid out in legal settlements. According to the Coburn report, lawsuits have cost the VA close to a \$1 billion.

Shanin Specter has obtained more than 200 verdicts and settlements in excess of \$1 million. Many of Specter's cases involve issues of social justice, and corporate and government responsibility. He is known for his attention to detail, his tenacity and fearless pursuit of justice. Among his many achievements, Specter won a \$105 million wrongful death personal injury case - the largest personal injury verdict ever in Pennsylvania - on behalf of a woman who was killed by a fallen power line. He is a partner with Kline & Specter in Philadelphia.