

POPLAR BLUFF VA MEDICAL CENTER

**Local Advisory Panel Meeting – Public Meeting
Poplar Bluff VAMC – Building 1, Room 2099
September 14, 2005, 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM**

I. Participants

- **Local Advisory Panel (LAP) Members:** Peter Almenoff, Chair, MD, Director, Heartland Veterans Network (VISN 15); Ronald L. Taylor, Executive Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; Sherri Hinrichs, Executive Director, Southeastern Missouri Area Health Education Center; Sydney Wertenberger, Associate Director for Patient Care Services, John J. Pershing VA Medical Center; and Lee White, American Legion Assistant State Service Officer
VA: Allen Berkowitz, VA OSI; Carlos Escobar, VISN 15 Team Lead; Nancy Arnold, MCD, Poplar Bluff CARES Team Chair and VAMC; Dwayne Coleman, Public Affairs Officer; Lou DeNino, VHA-VSSC; Paul Seegraves, Facility Trainer
Team PwC: Patrick Spoletini (PricewaterhouseCoopers), Paul Chrencik (PwC), Kristin Eberhard (PwC), Michael Bobbin (PwC)
Public: Tom Schulte from Senator Christopher “Kitt” Bonds office; Kristi Nitsch from Congresswoman Joanne Emerson’s office; Approximately 15 attendees

II. Opening Remarks: Peter Almenoff, MD

- Welcome remarks and thanks to the LAP and public for their attendance
- Introduction of LAP members, VA Staff, Team PwC, Local officers and representatives of congressmen

III. The Pledge of Allegiance: Led by Lee White

IV. Overview of Agenda and Public Input Procedures: Peter Almenoff, MD

- Review of protocol
- Emphasis that comments should pertain to the CARES Poplar Bluff study
- Public can submit written comments today via the comment box at the meeting or via mail or website up to 10 days following the meeting

V. Review of Administrative Meeting: Peter Almenoff, MD

- Review of Standard Operating Procedures
 - Public comment period was changed from 14 to 10 days following the public meeting.
- Review of study reports
- Questions for Team PwC regarding study analysis

VI. CARES Study and Business Plan Options (BPOs) Presentation: Patrick Spoletini

- Summary of first meeting, Team PwC roles and responsibilities, report on stakeholder feedback, presentation of financial analysis and CARES BPOs
- Team PwC discussed that the results of the Poplar Bluff study indicate that it is a more desirable option to maintain inpatient care at the Poplar Bluff VA Medical Center.
- The presentation and a supporting narrative are posted to the public website: www.va.gov/CARES. A summary of the BPOs is available for reference at this meeting.

VII. Questions and Answers/Comments open to LAP

- **Comment by Peter Almenoff, MD:** There is a 9.5% cost difference in the cost of outsourcing care in the community and providing care at the VA. However, to achieve the break even point there would need to be a 47% decrease in the cost of care provided in the local community. Requested that this figure is emphasized in the final report, and stated that he believes the cost difference is larger than 9.5%.
 - **Response by Patrick Spoletini:** Team PwC will address this in the final report.
- **Question by Ron Taylor:** Will the administrative and public summaries be on the website before ten days? The public may want to review the summaries before they send in comments.
 - **Response by Michael Bobbin:** The meeting summaries will be posted ten business days after the public LAP meeting.
- **Question by Sherri Hinricks:** How will the LAP and the public be notified of the Secretary's decision? Will the Secretary respond sooner regarding the Poplar Bluff decision since the study is finishing earlier than the other CAERS sites?
 - **Response by Allen Berkowitz:** OSI cannot speak on behalf of the Secretary but it is possible for the Secretary to respond sooner.
- **Question by Peter Almenoff, MD:** Could Team PwC comment on the quality of services at the Poplar Bluff VAMC?
 - **Response by Patrick Spoletini:** A quality issue that Team PwC took into consideration was the capability of other medical centers to handle the volume from Poplar Bluff if services were transferred. No other medical centers in the immediate area appear capable of handling the volume while still providing the same quality of care for veterans. Team PwC also considered if the service mix at other facilities met the service needs of the Poplar Bluff facility. JCAHO and other measures of quality were studied and it was concluded that the Poplar Bluff VAMC had the best quality scores within an 80 mile radius.
- **Question by Peter Almenoff, MD:** Did Team PwC have a chance to review the quality reports for the area's hospitals?

- **Response by Patrick Spoletini:** Team PwC reviewed the Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Health Care Organizations (JCAHO) studies of the hospitals in the Poplar Bluff area.
- **Question by a Member of the Public:** If the Poplar Bluff VAMC is closed, will the quality services be lowered in St. Louis or Memphis?
 - **Response by Allen Berkowitz:** All ambulatory care stays here, and the Poplar Bluff facility will not close. The question is if the 25 inpatient beds could be moved to another facility.
- **Comment by a Member of the Public:** Stated the future need for more beds at the Poplar Bluff facility. Commented that he agreed with the study results.

VIII. Summary of LAP Findings at Public Meeting: Peter Almenoff

- The cost of providing care at the VA is lower than contracting out for care in the local community.
- Breaking even on contracting out to the private sector requires a 47% reduction in cost of services from other providers.
- Poplar Bluff has sufficient quality of care and provides the best quality of care in the area.

IX. LAP Deliberation

- **Lee White:** Agrees with Team PwC conclusion
- **Sherri Hinricks:** Agrees with Team PwC conclusion
- **Sydney Wertenberger:** Agrees with Team PwC conclusion
- **Ron Taylor:** Agrees with Team PwC conclusion
- **Peter Almenoff, MD:** Agrees with Team PwC conclusion
 - The LAP agrees with the Team PwC recommendations. Suggestion to emphasize the 47% discount from other services providers required to reach the break even point in the report, and also emphasize the high quality of care provided at the Poplar Bluff facility.
 - Thanked Team PwC for their efforts on the study.
 - Public will give input if they choose, and this input as well as the input of the LAP and the Team PwC study will go to the Secretary as he makes his decision. The public will be notified of the Secretary's decision.
 - Thanked the public for attending the meeting.

X. Public Testimony

- **Testimony 1:** Complimented the positive feel, friendliness, and cleanness of the hospital.
- **Question by a Member of the Public:** Has the decision already been made in Washington and is this an exercise of futility?

- **Response by Peter Almenoff, MD:** The decision has not been made and the study results by the independent contractor will be seriously considered by the Secretary.
- **Response by Member of the Public:** If the Secretary follows the report, the hospital should remain open and if the hospital closes, it proves that this study was an exercise in futility.
- **Comment by Gene Higginbotham, Representative of US Senator Mark Pryor:** Thanked Nancy Arnold and the VA staff, as well as those who completed the study.

Meeting adjourned at 1:56 PM