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Whistleblower Cites Poor Lab Procedures in Veterans Hospital

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) announced that laboratory procedures in the St. Louis Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) are more rigorous and timely as a result of whistleblowing and a subsequent investigation.

The Veterans Affairs whistleblower came to OSC in early 2010 with multiple allegations of substandard laboratory practices. One was that insufficient nighttime and weekend staffing at the VAMC microbiology lab led to delays in responding to positive blood cultures; another was that the lab failed to use proper methods to preserve sensitive samples, which could result in false negative test results.

The investigation by the Office of the Medical Inspector (OMI) of the Veterans Health Administration confirmed these claims. As a direct result, the St. Louis VAMC has staff coverage around the clock to ensure quick response on positive blood cultures; it monitors the turnaround time of those cultures; and it now uses proper methods for samples. Beyond those changes, and also in response to the whistleblower's complaints, the OMI made further recommendations to the St. Louis VAMC, including a proposal to track employee competencies and proficiencies.

Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner said the laboratory changes are the latest example of how whistleblowers improve the federal government. "Our veterans will receive better health care because this whistleblower came forward," she said.

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency. Our basic authorities come from four federal statutes: the Civil Service Reform Act, the Whistleblower Protection Act, the Hatch Act, and the Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). OSC's primary mission is to safeguard the merit system by protecting federal employees and applicants from prohibited personnel practices, especially reprisal for whistleblowing. For more information, please visit our website at www.osc.gov.