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VA Hospital in Northport, N.Y. Ran Unaccredited Residency Training Program in Nuclear Medicine for Three Years

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C./November 30, 2011

The Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Northport, N.Y. (VAMC-Northport) operated an unauthorized nuclear medicine program for three years and stopped the practice only when a whistleblower's allegations forced an agency investigation. As a result of the unauthorized program, four people who were not qualified to practice medicine in the United States practiced nuclear medicine on veterans and veterans' families. Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner sent the report on the matter to the President and Congress earlier this month.

Whistleblower Colin Clarke, M.D., filed a complaint with the Office of Special Counsel in 2010, alleging that even though the residency training program voluntarily withdrew its accreditation status in 2007, the Chief of the VAMC-Northport Nuclear Medicine Service continued to recruit and accept trainee physicians in nuclear medicine. Over 4,000 patients received care in the nuclear medicine department during this time; there is no indication that any patient was harmed.

As a result of the whistleblowing and the subsequent investigation, two VA officials, including the Chief of Staff, were reprimanded. In addition, the VAMC-Northport modified its residency validation process, requiring additional verification and approval steps prior to submitting a request to fund a residency program.

Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner commended Colin Clarke for speaking out on the unaccredited program, noting that his whistleblowing led to the immediate shutdown of the unaccredited program. "Our nation's veterans will receive better care because Dr. Clarke had the courage to come forward," she said. "I am grateful to him and to all government employees who bring these public safety cases to our attention."

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.