

More than 57,000 U.S. Veterans Waiting for First Appointment



Washington, June 10 (RHC)-- According to an internal audit of the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 57,000 veterans have been waiting at least 90 days for an initial medical appointment. An additional 64,000 vets who enrolled for VA healthcare over the last decade were never seen by a doctor, according to the audit.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs released the results of the audit Monday in a 54-page report on the scheduling practices that caused the scandal the department is addressing. In recent months, several VA medical centers have been destroying and falsifying records to hide the long wait times faced by veterans seeking care.

The audit found employees at 24 sites felt "threatened or coerced" to enter incorrect information when reporting wait times. The report said the VA's goal of providing veterans an initial appointment within 14 days is unattainable due to increasing demands for care and a lack of providers.

Veterans' groups expressed outrage at the report and members of Congress called the Veterans Affairs' scheduling practices "criminal." "Evidence of secret waiting times, falsification of records, destruction of documents, and other potential criminal wrongdoing has appalled and angered the nation, and imperiled trust and confidence in the Veterans Health Administration," reads a letter signed by 21 Senators to Attorney General Eric Holder demanding the Justice Department conduct a criminal investigation of the

VA scandal.

Sloan Gibson, acting VA Secretary in the wake of Eric Shinseki's resignation from the post as a result of this scandal, said Monday these problems "demand immediate action."

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