THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

AUG 7 2006

The Honorable John W. Warner
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The House Appropriations Committee Report 109-359, of the Department of Defense (DoD) Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2006, requested the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ASD (HA)), in conjunction with the TRICARE Regional Director for the South, to report a plan expanding existing capabilities to ensure that potential regional Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and related mental health challenges in this area are adequately addressed, and to include Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital (PPMH).

The TRICARE contract requires Humana Military Healthcare Services (HMHS) to develop provider networks for the delivery of Prime and Extra services for 100 percent of the South Region. HMHS must also ensure that provider networks and services can be adjusted as necessary to compensate for changes in military treatment facility (MTF) capabilities and capacities. The network shall complement services provided by MTFs in the region and shall be sufficient in number, mix, and geographic distribution of fully qualified providers to provide the full scope of benefits for which all Prime enrollees are eligible.

The plan to expand existing capabilities to ensure potential PTSD and related mental health challenges in the South Region are adequately addressed, consists of:

- Focusing on network recruiting based on the Graduate Medical Education National Advisory Committee (GMENAC) network staffing standards and utilization patterns.
- Identifying new providers who enter remote locations to see if they are interested in becoming network providers.
- Negotiating with PPMH to become a network provider.
- Monitoring access to care.

HMHS provided a network implementation plan prior to start of health care delivery that defined how they would meet network adequacy requirements. HMHS divided the entire South Region into 53 geographically defined Prime Service Areas (PSA). HMHS applies staffing standards derived from GMENAC requirement ratios, their own experience, and best commercial practices to provide an adequately sized network. With the exception of one psychiatrist in the Del Rio, Texas, PSA and one mental health facility in the Beaufort, South Carolina, PSA, HMHS meets or exceeds its targeted number of providers, behavioral health specialists, and mental health facilities for the 51 remaining PSAs as indicated in the April 2006, HMHS South Region Network Adequacy Report.

To continue meeting the demands for mental health services within the South Region, the TRICARE Management Activity (TMA), through its South region contractor, Humana Military Healthcare Services (HMHS), carefully monitors referral rates to ensure HMHS meets or exceeds the performance standard of 96.25 percent of all referrals going to a network or MTF provider. Additionally, an analysis of military health system mental health utilization patterns in the Gulf South and Southeast between 2002 and 2005 illustrates a large increase in utilization for all levels of care by active duty service members, members of the National Guard, Reservists, and their dependents. Outpatient visits have increased by more than 20 percent, while inpatient admissions have experienced more than a 23 percent increase in that same period of time. Despite the increase in utilization, HMHS has consistently exceeded the performance standard since implementation of the present contract. Currently 99 percent of behavioral health referrals are made to a network or MTF provider.

While the current network is adequate in most areas in the Region, TMA and HMHS continue to analyze those remote locations within the larger PSAs that have few providers. With regard to mental health services in the area immediately surrounding Albany, Georgia, the location of Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital, the following table shows current facility network capabilities and travel distance from the Navy Branch Medical Clinic located in Albany, Georgia.

Facility	City, State	Distance in Miles	Services
Turning Point Hospital	Moultrie, Georgia	44 9	Adult inpatient detoxification, rehabilitation and full-day partial hospitalization program substance abuse
Archbold Northside Center for Behavioral and Psychiatric Care	Thomasville, Georgia	58 9	Adult, adolescent and child inpatient psychiatry, adult and adolescent detoxification and rehabilitation, adult, adolescent and child full-day and half-day partial hospitalization program psychiatric and substance abuse

In addition to these facilities, HMHS has identified the following non-network facilities with Joint Commission Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations certification that include mental health services within 60 miles from the Navy Branch Medical Clinic.

- Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital, Albany, Georgia, is 8.9 miles from the MTF.
- Sumter Regional Medical Center, Americus, Georgia, is 44.4 miles from the MTF.

HMHS has contacted these two facilities to confirm available mental health services and to recruit them into the TRICARE network. Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital has expressed interest in becoming a network mental health provider for HMHS and is currently reviewing the contract.

At the end of February 2006, the TRICARE South Region behavioral health network contained the following contracted providers:

Inpatient Psychiatric Programs	210
Inpatient Substance Abuse Detoxification and Rehabilitation Programs	126
Residential Treatment Programs (RTC)	14
Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHP) Psychiatric Treatment	9
Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHP) Substance Abuse Treatment	86
Psychiatrists (MD, DO)	1,564
Psychologists (PhD)	2,009
Master's Level Providers	5,294
Nurse Practitioners	143

Of the 9,010 total individual providers, 2,364 providers representing 2,757 unique locations have specifically indicated that the treatment of PTSD is a special area of focus in their practice. In addition to the civilian TRICARE network, the Veterans Administration has 28 facilities, 46 community outpatient based clinics and 27 outpatient clinics within the South Region that provide mental health services under contract to us.

Excluding situations where providers are not available, the contract requires HMHS to ensure that standards for access, in terms of beneficiary travel time, appointment wait time, and office wait time are met for beneficiaries residing in a TRICARE Prime service area. Additionally, these standards shall be met in a manner which achieves beneficiary satisfaction with access to network providers and services set forth in the contract. Authorization letters provide guidance to beneficiaries on how to

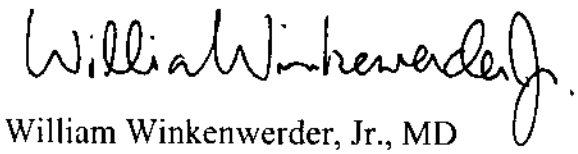
report any access standard discrepancy. While they do not specifically identify mental health access standards, TRICARE Management Activity beneficiary satisfaction surveys for the first quarter, 2006, indicate that 66.7 percent of those surveyed were either very satisfied (40.7 percent) or somewhat satisfied (26 percent) with their ability to get an appointment for civilian health care as soon as they desired.

Although referral patterns suggest an adequate network is in place, HMHS continues to conduct focused network recruiting based on monthly reviews of utilization patterns and feedback from our beneficiaries regarding expected changes in a particular population. Finally, it is important to note that in some remote service areas, there may be only a limited number or total absence of behavioral health providers with whom to contract. Beneficiaries who reside in these areas may experience a longer waiting period or travel time for an appointment. HMHS continues to survey these locations through updates from state and local medical societies to identify when additional providers relocate to the area, in which case they will initiate contracting efforts. HMHS has expanded recruiting efforts to include pediatricians and family practice physicians who have additional training or certification in behavioral health TMA is pleased to report HMHS is meeting TRICARE access standards for mental health in the South Region. In 2005, Humana processed over 112,250 medical treatment facility mental health authorizations of which 99.72 percent met TRICARE access standards.

In our commitment to provide accessible quality behavioral health care to all TRICARE eligible beneficiaries, the TRICARE Management Activity will continue to monitor access to care in the South Region and look for new opportunities to expand the mental health provider network

Thank you for your interest in the Military Health System.

Sincerely,



William Winkenwerder, Jr., MD

cc:
The Honorable Carl Levin
Ranking Member