

VA**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media RelationsWashington, DC 20420
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www.va.govFOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 7, 1997

Washington, D.C. -- The integration of Chicago's Lakeside and West Side Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers under a common management structure is completed, VA has announced. The integrated facility is called the VA Chicago Health Care System.

"I believe that we have established a solid foundation for a fully integrated health-care system," said Dr. Kenneth W. Kizer, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "Facility integration enhances clinical services and preserves programs in these fiscally constrained times."

Completion of the VA Chicago Health Care System integration followed Kizer's acceptance of final recommendations from the Integration Coordinating Committee, chaired by Dr. Christopher Terrence, Chief of Staff of VA's New Jersey Health Care System. A Stakeholders Advisory Group, chaired by Mr. George Cramer, Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, represented community, veterans service organization and congressional interests, and provided valuable input to the committee.

The committee recommended that 32 services in clinical and administrative areas and practice specialties be united. Among these are nutrition, food, nursing and pharmacy services. Sixteen new service chiefs already have been named.

In accepting the recommendations, Kizer noted that the integration would increase veterans' access to VA health care; modernize care at the two facilities; allow the two facilities to coordinate resource decisions and achieve economies of scale; and ensure that consistently high quality care is provided to veteran patients at both facilities.

"The work of the committee was comprehensive and responsive," said Kizer, "and I thank the many people outside VA who were part of the review process. I am confident that we have done the right thing for veterans and the community."

Before integration, the Lakeside and West Side VA Medical Centers, which are located six miles apart, shared essentially the same patient population base. The two facilities already shared programs in nuclear medicine, chaplaincy, music therapy and human resource management.

Director of the management team is Joseph L. Moore, who was the Lakeside director for 17 years.