



Office of the Dean  
and Executive Vice President

March 29, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin, MD  
Secretary, US Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

On behalf of the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW), I want to congratulate you on your appointment as US Secretary of Veterans Affairs. As Dean of the School of Medicine at MCW, I also want to thank you for your commitment to enhancing the working relationship between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the academic community.

The relationship with the VA is one of the most partnerships of Academic Medical Centers (AMCs) across the country. To that end, I look forward to working with you in the years to come through the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and its Council of Deans (COD). I currently serve as Chair-Elect of COD and will become Chair this November; as such, I also am a member of the AAMC Board of Directors. I promise you that during my tenure as Chair, we will make a steadfast commitment to continuing to look for ways to improve the working relationship between our AMCs and the VA.

For background, MCW has long been the academic partner of the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee (Wis.), and we are humbled and proud of what we've accomplished together. In particular, I would like to thank the VA for working with MCW recently to help address the critical psychiatry shortage in Wisconsin by financially supporting the creation of a new Graduate Medical Education (GME) psychiatry residency program in Green Bay. This new residency program will play a critical role in improving mental health not only for our area veterans, but for the entire population of Northeast Wisconsin.

As Dean, I do have one specific request that may seem a bit parochial. For the past four years, I have been working to secure an agreement with the VA to lease laboratory space on MCW's main campus in Milwaukee. The Zablocki VA laboratories and our main campus are five miles apart. Leasing space at MCW would serve to improve and expand research for our veteran population by co-locating the facilities in which MCW faculty are engaged in biomedical research. The distance and time needed to travel between our lab facilities minimizes economic efficiencies and creates an obstacle for VA faculty to utilize the cores at MCW. It also impedes the collaborative environment necessary for faculty to maximize outcomes for our veterans. The bottom line is that the current configuration is preventing dollars from being used in the most efficient and effective means possible.

I would greatly appreciate your facilitation of a resolution of this issue, so that we may advance biomedical research for our veterans in a collaborative and cost-efficient manner. You may recall that you and I had a brief discussion about this in the past, but I would be happy to discuss this with you in more detail at your earliest convenience.

In addition, there are other issues essential to AMC and VA relationships that I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you. These include understanding and addressing the cost to provide specialty care to our veterans, currently subsidized by AMC physician practice; and providing flexibility and authority to local VA Directors to efficiently contract and manage service agreements.

Thank you again for your commitment to partnering with Academic Medical Centers to benefit the health of our nation's Veterans. I look forward to working with you and wish you the very best in your new role as Secretary.

Warm regards,

Joseph E. Kerschner, MD