

**VA OIG Podcast Transcript Episode 20170922-1**

Inspector General Michael Missal Interview

September 2017

[Michael N.] Hi and welcome to this episode of the VA OIG podcast.

I'm Mike Nacincik, VA OIG's Public Affairs Officer, and your host for this episode.

I'm excited to introduce today's guest, Inspector General Michael Missal. Confirmed by the Senate as the Inspector General in April 2016, Inspector General Michael Missal has been in office for 16 months. The last, almost year and half, has seen significant changes at the VA OIG under Inspector General Missal's tenure.

Sir, welcome to the podcast, and thank you for joining us today.

[IG Michael Missal] Mike thanks for having me and it's great to participate in this podcast program.

[Michael N.] Sir, You came to VA OIG during a time of transition. What were your initial priorities?

[IG Michael Missal] When I started on May 2, 2016, I didn't have any preconceived ideas of any changes that I wanted to make. I wanted to listen to the staff, learn the agency, talk to stakeholders, talk to other people interested in the work of the VA OIG, and then make any changes in a thoughtful deliberate manner. However, I did say on day one, that this office was always going to follow three fundamental principles. First that we were always going to be independent and avoid even the appearance of the lack of independence.

Independence is critically important to the OIG. Put another way we make reports to congress, we make reports to the secretary but we don't report to either one of them. Secondly, that we were going to be fully transparent by promptly releasing reports of our work that are not otherwise prohibited from disclosure. I consider ourselves a fiduciary of the public and the public is entitled to know what we do and what we find in our work. And third, that our work must always maintain the highest level of excellence and for us to do that our

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work must meet five standards.

First of all it must be accurate, there is no substitution for that, we just got to get it right. Secondly, it has to be timely for our work to be most effective it has to be put out in as prompt a manner as possible. Third, our reports must be fair. In many instances there are multiple sides to a story and we have to make sure that we provide all sides to the story. Fourth, we must be objective. We must look at things in an objective manner and call it as we find it. And finally we must be thorough. When we look at something we must make sure that we follow each of the threads and report as appropriate.

[Michael N.] Now that you have been here for close to a year and a half, what are your impressions of the OIG and your focus?

[IG Michael Missal] My impression of the OIG is that we an incredibly dedicated, committed, and hardworking staff that is focused on doing the right thing. With this kind of staff we can have a greater impact on our mission of effective oversight of the programs and operations of VA. My focus is really meeting our mission of effective oversight, that's what I spend most of days doing, how we can better meet that mission. And to do that I'm really focused on four things. One is to ensure we are doing the most impactful work. We are a relatively small office to do oversight over an agency like VA which is the second largest federal agency with a budget of about \$180 billion and over 370,00 employees. So we must make sure the work we do is really the most meaningful impactful work. Secondly, we must be timely. I can't emphasize enough how important it is for our work to come out as close to the events at issue as possible. That will make it as meaningful as possible. Third, we speak through our reports. We have to make sure that the reports we put out are of the very highest quality. For us to again be as effective as possible we have to put out the highest quality reports. And fourth, I want to have a positive and stimulating work environment for our staff to ensure that we're able to recruit people, the highest quality people, maintain people, and

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develop our people. Again this will help us meet our mission of effective oversight.

[Michael N.] What changes have you made and what other changes do you anticipate in the future?

[IG Michael Missal] We've made a number of enhancements since I've been here. We are really focused on the higher risk areas of VA because we can't possibly look at everything, so we are really focused on making sure we are looking at areas that could be of high risk. We are trying to be proactive and more proactive than we have been, because we certainly are presented with lots of opportunities to look at things, but you need to be proactive to ensure you are covering as broad an area as possible. To do so we are relying more heavily on data analytics and predictive analytics to help us determine what areas we should look at. We are also focused on leadership and governance of the programs and operations of VA. When we see an issue that's problematic we only want to see it once. One of the ways to best ensure you only see it once is to look at the root cause and look and see if there is a leadership or governance issue that can help prevent it happening again in the future. To do this we've made a number of enhancements in our operations. For instance we've enhanced our benefits and health care inspections to look more closely at the various programs of VA as well as looking at leadership to try to determine if there is an issue with the tone at the top of the various programs. We created a rapid response team to be able to move more nimbly and quickly and report more quickly on any issues we find. We are focused on more impactful cases in our criminal investigations group to again be as strong a deterrent as possible for various problems that are out there with respect to the programs and operations at VA. We are always looking to meet one of values which is to continually improve our operation. So our changes are all made to allow us to better meet our mission of effective oversight and we will continue to look at making additional changes.

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[Michael N.] Sir, how do you measure success?

[IG Michael Missal] We measure success primarily in two ways. First of all there are the quantitative measures. We look at the financial benefits that we provide. We also look at successful prosecutions, we look at the number of reports we publish, and we also look at the number of recommendations. There are other quantitative metrics that we look at; those are some of the principle ones. However there are a lot of qualitative measurements as well that are much harder to measure but they are important to us. VA is a unique agency as it operates the largest integrated health care system in the United States. It has over seven million patients that they serve and last year they had about 85 million medical appointments that were provided through VA. So therefore there are all sorts of opportunities to improve services that veterans get not only in health care but in the benefits and cemetery system as well. So we are really looking to see if the work we do helps improve how VA provides services and benefits that veterans have so richly earned and deserve.

[Michael N.] Finally, how do you see the role of the OIG going forward?

[IG Michael Missal] I am optimistic and confident of the role of the OIG going forward. We have made a number of enhancements in the last year and half that will improve the way we operate. We are continually looking for ways to get even better so that we can provide even more effective oversight. We will make sure that the areas we cover includes those that are the highest risk and impact. We will be both proactive and reactive. We will issue timely reports of the highest quality. We will make sure that our recommendations are effective to improve the programs and operations of VA. Veterans deserve the best services and benefits from VA and we will do our part to ensure they receive them .

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[Michael N.] Sir, thank you taking the time to join us today. I hope you'll come back for future episodes.

[IG Michael Missal] I'm happy to do so.

[Michael N.] Thanks for listening and stay tuned for our next podcast. The OIG's podcast is produced by VA OIG staff and is available on the VA OIG's website.

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