



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH
WASHINGTON DC 20420

A MESSAGE FROM THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH

Hurricane Sandy affected the lives of tens of thousands of people on the northeast coast through flooding, electrical outages and other disruptions. Our Veterans - who rely on VA facilities for their health care – were no exception. This letter is to express my pride and appreciation for your critical and timely interventions before and after the storm devastated the New York area.

I echo Secretary Shinseki's words of praise for our VHA employees who excelled in looking after the safety and well being of Veterans and their fellow VHA employees prior to, during, and now in the aftermath of this very destructive storm. You demonstrated that VHA employs world class health professionals who prove time after time that our concern for our Veterans and VHA employees remains our highest priority in every situation.

Many of our VHA family in these stricken areas have worked long selfless hours even though their own lives were affected in some way by the storm. They chose to make personal sacrifices to help our patients and their fellow VHA employees throughout this crisis. Our thoughts and hearts go out to VHA staff whose homes and lives have been affected by flooding, power disruption and other devastation.

I congratulate you on the following actions for our Veterans and VHA staff:

- Our Manhattan hospital was evacuated, safely and efficiently on October 28 due to the foresight and professionalism of VA employees;
- Approximately 100 patients were evacuated;
- VHA identified all immediately available inpatient and long-term care beds that could be occupied by either Veterans or by non-VA beneficiary citizens, if required;
- The Veterans Integrated Service Network 3 moved quickly to account for patients and staff, assess requirements, and re-direct Veterans to available medical care; and
- VHA moved generators, additional mobile communications teams, damage assessment teams, and mobile kitchens to assist affected facilities.

There is still much work to do in recovering from Hurricane Sandy, but as we begin the process of restoration, rebuilding and returning to our normal routines and responsibilities, the entire VHA family is grateful for your dedication. VHA human resource advocates remain available to assist our employees with these efforts as well.

To quote Secretary Shinseki, "As frustrating as these difficulties are for us, please bear in mind that they are even more difficult for the Veterans we are privileged to serve; as always, treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve, and let's all do everything we can to ensure they receive the care and benefits they have earned—even in these difficult circumstances."

Again, thank you for your support and commitment to our Veterans.


Robert A. Petzel, M.D.