

VFW Outraged by Sexual Assaults at VA

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The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is outraged by news that America's disabled veterans could become a victim of sexual assault when they visit a Department of Veterans Affairs facility.

According to a report released yesterday by the Government Accountability Office, 284 alleged assaults occurred at the VA between January 2007 and July 2010. Included were 67 rapes, 185 cases of inappropriate touching, and other assaults between patients against patients, patients against staff, and staff against patients.

"It is inexcusable for security equipment and incident reporting procedures to be so broken that patients and staff alike may fear for their personal safety," said VFW National Commander Richard L. Eubank, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Eugene, Ore.

"What matters now is for the VA to immediately clean its own house and to hold everyone accountable for their actions," he said. "We have far too many veterans — especially women veterans — who need the VA to be a place of healing and not a threat."

The GAO report was based on visits to only five of VA's 152 medical centers, and interviews with only four of their 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks, or VISNs. This led House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (D-Fla.) to ask "How widespread is this problem?"

The VFW national commander fully agrees, and now expects Congress to increase its oversight of the matter through more hearings and legislation, such as H.R. 2074, introduced by Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle (R-N.Y.).

"All veterans and employees need to be treated with the utmost respect in every facility," said Eubank. "This is a zero tolerance issue, and nothing less is acceptable to the VFW."

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To read the full GAO report, entitled "VA Health Care: Actions Needed to Prevent Sexual Assaults and Other Safety Incidents," go to <http://www.gao.gov/>.