



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

095059

B-182297

2-11-75

095059

FEB 11 1975

B-182297

The Honorable William Proxmire  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Housing  
and Urban Development, Space, <sup>S. 320</sup>  
Science, and Veterans  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

4  
A  
R

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Your September 19, 1974, letter requested that we examine and report on conditions at the Veterans Memorial Hospital (VMH), Quezon City, Republic of the Philippines. In a letter to you, Mr. Leonard Hall, Commander of American Legion Post 4, Olongapo City, Republic of the Philippines, made allegations concerning poor sanitary conditions, poor food quality, and too many interns giving medical treatment at VMH.

VMH is a 750-bed hospital owned and operated by the Republic of the Philippines. In 1948 the United States gave the Republic about \$9 million to construct and equip VMH. The hospital was turned over to the Republic in 1955. Since then, the United States has paid most of the operating and maintenance costs through annual grants. In fiscal year 1975, \$2.05 million was appropriated for these purposes. The grant program is administered by the Outpatient Clinic of the Veterans Administration (VA) Regional Office, Manila. <sup>2707</sup>

We found no apparent unsanitary conditions at VMH. We did find some problems affecting patient comfort, such as food being served cold. There was no evidence that medical care is being overly entrusted to interns. Although VMH has significantly more interns than comparably sized VA hospitals in the United States, it has a comparable number of physicians and nurses.

In our opinion, differences between customs and practices in Philippine hospitals and those in U.S. hospitals are a major cause of the American veterans' complaints. For example, Philippine hospital patients normally have a visitor at all times to attend to their needs, keep food in their night stands, and have a diet consisting essentially of fish and rice. Moreover, VMH provides, at Republic expense, pediatric, gynecological,

2

16

C2-CE P4

~~706284~~

**095059**

MWD-75-58

and obstetric care to Filipino veterans' dependents and to certain civilians. Such care is not provided at VA hospitals.

CONDITIONS AT VMH

We interviewed 11 American and Filipino veterans who were patients at VMH, including two of the three veterans who made the allegations to the American Legion. Except for the two who had complained and one other, the veterans we spoke to were satisfied with the medical care and sanitary conditions at VMH. We made a comprehensive tour of VMH and an unannounced followup visit and found no apparent unsanitary conditions.

Instead we found

- wards and other areas clean and free of odor,
- housekeeping personnel using disinfectants when washing floors,
- floors buffed and clean,
- clean linens on beds,
- most window screens in good condition, and
- most bathroom and toilet facilities operational.

In addition, the sanitary conditions and orderliness at VMH appeared superior to that at five of six public and private Philippine hospitals we visited in the Manila and Olongapo City areas. The private hospital in Manila that appeared superior to VMH is, according to VA officials, the best in the area and correspondingly expensive.

The major complaint of the American veterans we interviewed was that the food was served cold. VMH does not have enough hot food conveyors and those it does have retain heat for only 15 to 30 minutes instead of for the 4 hours for which they were designed. A VMH official acknowledged this problem but said the hospital lacked the funds to buy new conveyors or repair the old ones. This problem probably affects American patients more than Filipinos, who, according to VA officials, prefer to eat their food cold. VMH officials also said that, upon request, the hospital will provide services, such as a special diet and additional coffee servings, tailored to American patients. However, American veterans we spoke to were not aware of these special services.

Also, wards generally lacked fans and many mattresses were in poor condition. VMH officials said many fans were being overhauled and that mattresses were programmed for replacement using Republic funds.

The VA office in Manila maintains surveillance over VMH conditions through twice-weekly visits by the Chiefs of the Medical Administration and Professional Services Divisions. However, inspection procedures do not provide for visiting every ward on a rotational basis. According to VA officials, veterans' complaints are investigated but patients are not routinely asked to comment on VMH services.

STAFFING

We compared VMH professional staffing with that of several comparably sized VA general hospitals in the United States. As shown below, although VMH has significantly more interns, it also has more physicians and about the same number of nurses.

<u>Number of</u>	<u>VMH</u>	<u>Average of four VA hospitals</u>
Physicians (including residents)	153	124
Interns	102	3
Nurses	266	255

We noted a relatively large group of interns accompanying physicians on visits to wards. This could partially account for veterans' complaints about medical care being entrusted to interns. However, in VA hospitals that are affiliated with medical schools, large numbers of interns are often present during ward visits. VMH is affiliated with the University of the Philippines.

CONCLUSIONS

The allegations exaggerated the conditions at VMH. The lack of major problems and the general satisfaction expressed by most veterans we interviewed indicate that VMH is providing adequate care. However, VA could improve its administration and surveillance of the hospital program.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ADMINISTRATOR

2 We recommend that the Administrator, VA, require officials of the regional office in Manila to:

- Prepare an information paper for American veterans who are patients at VMH explaining the VMH intern-training function, differences in customs and diets, and special services available.
- Revise the hospital inspection system to insure that all wards are inspected on a rotating basis.

AGENCY COMMENTS

VA officials agreed that our recommendations would improve VA's management of the VMH program and stated that action would be taken to implement them.

- - - -

e As your office requested, we did not obtain formal comments on this report. However, we discussed its contents with VA representatives. A copy is being sent to the Administrator of Veterans Affairs. Copies are also being sent, by agreement with your office, to the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations and Government Operations and to the Office of Management and Budget. We plan no further distribution of the report unless you agree or publicly announce its contents.

Sincerely yours,



Noting Comptroller General  
of the United States