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News Release

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VA Announces Iron Mountain Medical Center to Remain Open

WASHINGTON – The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced his decision to continue inpatient services at the Iron Mountain, Mich., VA Medical Center. The facility also will maintain its current role as a telemedicine hub, one of the most sophisticated and extensive telemedicine programs in the United States.

In announcing the decision, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi said, “The Iron Mountain VA Medical Center is the only VA facility in this rural area of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. I am pleased that this medical center, so essential to meeting the needs of veterans, will remain open.”

The announcement is the outcome of a new planning process called CARES (Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services), which VA initiated in October 2000.

VA contracted with Booz-Allen & Hamilton to conduct a pilot CARES study in Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 12, which covers the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Wisconsin and the Chicago area. Nine options were announced in June 2001 for these three areas within VISN 12.

Following an extensive evaluation, three preliminary options were selected, one for each market. The department then initiated a 60-day public comment period. Comments were reviewed by VA’s National CARES Steering Committee before recommendations were presented to the Under Secretary for Health, then to the Secretary for the final decision.

“The changes that we are making throughout VISN 12 will enable us to make the best use of our resources, redirecting them where they are most needed and, at the same time, enabling us to treat more veterans in more locations,” said Principi.

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In addition to maintaining the Iron Mountain VA Medical Center, a new community-based outpatient clinic is recommended in Gladstone (Delta County).

In the Central Market, which encompasses Wisconsin, 75 nursing-home beds will be transferred to the Madison VA Medical Center from the Tomah VA Medical Center, bringing Madison to full capacity. The Tomah and Milwaukee VA medical centers will be renovated, and both facilities will maintain their current missions. Milwaukee also will continue to supply spinal cord injury services.

In addition, three community-based outpatient clinics are recommended in Green Bay and Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., and Freeport, Ill.

In the Southern Market, which encompasses the Chicago area, inpatient services will be shifted from the Lakeside Division of the VA Chicago Healthcare System to its West Side Division. VA will continue to maintain its large, multi-specialty clinic at Lakeside. The Lakeside Division property will be made available for other governmental and commercial uses.

The Hines VA Medical Center also will be renovated, including the Blind Rehabilitation and Spinal Cord Injury Centers. Sharing opportunities between the North Chicago VA Medical Center and the adjacent Naval Hospital Great Lakes will be enhanced.

The first phase of the CARES process was a pilot study. Subsequent CARES studies will be conducted throughout the VA health care system. This process is expected to be completed in two years.

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