



**Rehabilitation  
Institute of  
Chicago**

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July 28, 2003

Mr. Carl Henderson  
Director, Office of Public Affairs RO  
536 South Clark St.  
PO 8136, Room 668  
Chicago, IL 60605

RE: Public Hearing of July 30, 2003  
US Department of Veterans Affairs

Dear Mr. Henderson:

Pursuant to the public notice and process provided therein, attached please find written comments for the record, as submitted by on behalf of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago.

Sincerely,

Joanne C. Smith, MD

**Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago  
Testimony  
Public Hearing on Lakeside VA Hospital Redevelopment  
July 30, 2003**

We at the Rehabilitation Institute appreciate the opportunity to address an important challenge faced by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Chicago area veterans it serves.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has embarked on a significant course of action as a result of the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services Program (CARES) program. Established to ensure the long-term viability of the VA system to provide high quality, highly accessible health care to our nation's veterans, the CARES program has an important and ambitious goal. Rising health care costs, rapid technological advances in medicine, and various demographic changes in the veteran population -- including movement to different parts of the country -- are just some of the challenges the VA must face as it reconfigures the assets and resources of its system to better serve veterans into the future.

The relocation and upgrading of programs and services provided by the Lakeside VA Hospital is one critical path in the CARES program. The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago recognizes how difficult and disruptive the closure of Lakeside is to the many veterans who have come to depend on the care provided in this location. As an organization dedicated to enhancing health through continuity of care, we deeply empathize with the veterans who must endure a period of disruption and change in their care. As such, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago is committed to collaborating with the VA on a plan that will improve the Department's ability to provide the healthcare

options for the veterans of Chicago. Further, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago commits to exploring innovative ways that veterans now served at Lakeside can continue to access rehabilitation services on a continuous basis.

The ties between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago are historic. In fact, RIC owes its very existence to the pioneering work and vision of Dr. Paul B. Magnuson, at one time Chief Medical Director for the Veterans Administration. Rehabilitation medicine was invented in the VA system, and Dr. Magnuson saw a need to expand this capability to the civilian population. As a member of President Truman's Commission on Health Needs of the Nation, he accepted the challenge to provide comprehensive rehabilitation services to Chicago and the Midwest. Out of his vision and tireless work, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago was born. Today, and for the past 13 years, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago has been ranked the Best Rehabilitation Hospital in America.

We believe that the best and highest use for the Lakeside VA Hospital site is for continued healthcare delivery. Such use is consistent with the concentration of the world class health care institutions existing in the immediate area, specifically Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, and the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and Northwestern Memorial Hospital are both committed to invest in facilities and services that will strengthen the City of Chicago and this region by offering its citizens improved access to the highest quality health care and rehabilitation services available anywhere in the nation, while contributing important funds needed by the VA as it strategically redistributes its assets to better serve Chicago area veterans.

Participation of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago in the future development of the Lakeside property will serve multiple purposes. We must act on our

Mission to provide access to the highest quality rehabilitation care and to favorably impact the quality of life for the growing number of people with disabilities who seek our services. To advance our progress in making meaningful advances in rehabilitation technology and outcomes, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago must invest in our educational and research program aligned with Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, through which we have been successful and must continue to innovate, discover, and transfer our knowledge and expertise throughout the world. Moreover, to strengthen our influence on closing the gaping holes in social and civil rights for the disabled, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago must maintain its keen focus on advocacy by expanding its activities and resources. Our efforts in these areas will not only serve veterans and citizens in Chicago, across the VA system, and the nation, but also drive advances and innovations in the field of rehabilitation from which all people will gain tremendous benefits – today, and well into the future. Today, and as it was almost 50 years ago when the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago first opened its doors under the influence of Dr. Magnuson, one of the central missions of the VA health care system is also the core mission of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago – to enable injured and disabled veterans and civilians to achieve productive, independent, and fulfilling lives. We can think of no more appropriate use of the Lakeside VA Hospital site than the continuation and expansion of this shared legacy.

As mentioned earlier, we recognize the closure of the Lakeside VA Hospital is difficult and disruptive for the veterans served there. We at the Rehabilitation Institute are eager to discuss with the Department of Veterans Affairs creative ways we may work together to help mitigate that disruption to veterans by serving current Lakeside patients who have need of rehabilitation services upon the closure of the facility. In addition, we are eager to help the Department respond to the concerns expressed about the lack of sufficient inpatient capacity during the transition period between the closing of Lakeside and completion of

the new facility at Westside. The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago is committed and ready to work with the Department to develop creative solutions, transitional and permanent, to continue to provide the highest quality rehabilitation services available anywhere in the world to Chicago area veterans, both on an inpatient and outpatient basis.

Expanding the capacities of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and Northwestern Memorial Hospital through the development of new facilities on the Lakeside property will have tremendous benefits for the City of Chicago and its residents. The project will create significant economic benefits through the creation of construction jobs and permanent employment, and many contracting opportunities for Chicago businesses.

Chicago's status as a world-class city is rooted, in part, in the strength and quality of its institutions. We take great pride and derive great benefits from our corporate, civic, cultural, academic, community, and healthcare institutions. The ability of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and Northwestern Memorial Hospital to expand facilities and services will enhance Chicago's reputation as a preeminent center for the delivery and advancement of health care. Moreover, access to the best medical care available anywhere is a key factor in Chicago's reputation as one of our nation's most livable cities.

Our commitment to the City of Chicago is mirrored by our commitment to our immediate neighbors in the Streeterville area. We believe strongly that the development of new healthcare facilities at the Lakeside property will enhance our neighborhood and benefit our neighbors. We are committed to work closely with area residents and organizations as we plan, design, and develop the site. We are committed to open an ongoing communication with our neighbors to address concerns they may have and consider their input if this project is allowed to move forward.

The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago is eager to work closely with governmental, civic, academic, institutional, and community organizations so that it can participate in the leasing and redevelopment of the Lakeside VA Hospital site. We believe that by working together, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Chicago area veterans, the City of Chicago, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Northwestern University, the citizens of the greater Chicago community, and the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago can develop a model for the nation as it reconfigures its health care system to better meet the needs of veterans across the country. We believe our vision for use of the Lakeside property will serve the interests of veterans and the VA, will allow for advancements in the quality and state of rehabilitation medicine and, working directly with Northwestern Memorial Hospital, will result in new and improved clinical services which will directly benefit the City of Chicago and its citizens. We believe that this is a vision of which Dr. Magnuson would be proud.

Thank you for your time and attention to our comments.