

December 3, 2002

Dear Stakeholder:

On June 6, 2002, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the beginning of a new initiative designed to continue to bring VA's health care system into the 21st century. The goal of this new planning process, Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES), is to realign and enhance VA health care to meet veterans' needs now and in the future.

On November 22, 2002, VA released CARES Planning Initiatives for all Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN's). What are CARES Planning Initiatives? Simply put, they are the gaps between what we have now and what we will need in the years 2012 and 2022. It is important to remember that Planning Initiatives are not decisions or plans; they are gaps that have been identified. The plans will come as we analyze the gaps and decide what to do with them.

During the next two months, VISN 6 will develop market plans to deal with the gaps and identify strategies for meeting the projected demand. We will keep you informed as ideas and recommendations are developed. The VISN 6 CARES Steering Committee and each medical center in VISN 6 will be working to develop market plans for each market area. Final CARES market plans are due to the National CARES Program Office by the end of February 2003. After that, an independent national CARES Commission will review the draft National CARES Plan before making a recommendation to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

To assist with your understanding of the process, I am enclosing several documents for your review. I encourage you to review this material, and share it with others. CARES is a long-term strategic planning process and nothing is final until the national plan is approved. Throughout the development of CARES Market Plans, stakeholders (veterans, VA employees, union officials, academic affiliates, elected officials, veterans service organizations, and others) will be involved through CARES briefings, mailings, and solicitation of comments. The VISN 6 Internet Web site is a place where information can be accessed and comments made via an electronic comment card. Additional information about CARES will be posted as it becomes available. You can access the VISN's Internet site at <http://www.va.gov/netsix-cares/>, or you can visit VA's national CARES Web site at <http://www.va.gov/CARES/>.

Please be assured that VISN 6 employees remain dedicated to providing quality health care for veterans. CARES will enhance and expand high-quality health care for veterans in the years ahead. If you have questions or need additional information,

contact your local medical center's public affairs officer, or contact Pam Howell, VISN 6 CARES Communications Coordinator, at 919.956.5541.

Sincerely,



Daniel F. Hoffmann, FACHE
Network Director, VISN 6

Enclosures (7)

1. CARES Brochure
2. VA News Release, dated 11/22/02
3. CARES Phase II update, dated 11/22/02
4. VA Qs & As, dated 11/22/02
5. Deputy Secretary's "VA CARES" fact sheet
6. CARES PI's – PowerPoint presentation
7. VISN 6 Public Affairs Officers' Listing