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News Release

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VA Mental Health Care Found Superior to Care in the Private Sector

WASHINGTON – *Psychiatric Services*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Psychiatric Association, has published a report showing that the quality of mental health care provided by VA is superior to that provided to a comparable population in the private sector.

According to the study, “In every case, VA performance was superior to that of the private sector by more than 30%. Compared with individuals in private plans, veterans with schizophrenia or major depression were more than twice as likely to receive appropriate initial medication treatment, and veterans with depression were more than twice as likely to receive appropriate long-term treatment.”

“The Quality of Medication Treatment for Mental Disorders in the Department of Veterans Affairs and in Private-Sector Plans” was funded by the VA with additional funding by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and by RAND Health. The authors report no financial relationships with commercial interests.

These findings were based on review of VA administrative data on more than 836,500 veterans and more than 545,400 patients seeking mental health care in the private sector. The authors computed VA and private sector national means for seven process-based quality measures related to medication evaluation and management. They also estimated national-level performance by age and gender. Patients in the study suffered from one or more serious mental health diagnoses including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, major depression, and substance use disorder.

The authors conclude that “Findings demonstrate the significant advantages that accrue from an organized, nationwide system of care. The much higher performance of the VA has important clinical and policy implications.”

“The results of this study underscore how VA is providing the best mental care possible for the Veterans we serve,” said Dr. David Shulkin, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. “It also provides another example of how VA health care is consistently rated higher than health care in the private sector in a number of health care areas.”

The full text of this report may be found on line at <http://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.201400537>