

HEALTH CARE

VA hospitals are outperforming private hospitals, latest Medicare survey shows

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A nationwide Medicare survey released Wednesday found that veterans rated Veterans Affairs hospitals higher than private health care facilities in all 10 categories of patient satisfaction.

The VA takes care of about 9 million veterans at 1,255 facilities — the nation's largest integrated health care system. Despite many widely publicized scandals, VA health care has been consistently rated as competitive with private care in dozens of peer-reviewed articles.

"I strongly believe that the VA is the best option for veteran care. Study after study shows that quality and patient safety is at least as good if not better than our private sector counterparts," said Dr. Shereef Elnahal, VA undersecretary for health.

This most recent survey, known as HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems), showed that the VA beat out private facilities in all categories surveyed, such as patient satisfaction, hospital cleanliness and communication with nurses and doctors.

"This offers among the first opportunities to directly compare us with our private sector counterparts, and we're really happy with the results but we won't be content until 100% of hospitals are pinging in the right ratings," Elnahal told NPR.

Favorably comparing with the private sector is important for the VA, because Congress has expanded the VA's use of private care as an option when veterans have to wait too long or travel too far for a VA appointment. Private care is much more expensive for the VA.