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# Persistent Prescription Delays for VA Mental Health Patients at California Clinic

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Yesterday, the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) [reported](#) that veterans with significant mental health disorders at a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinic in Santa Maria, California, faced persistent delays in receiving prescriptions. In a letter to the White House and Congress, Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner detailed the confirmed allegations of a psychiatrist at the Santa Maria Community Based Outpatient Clinic, which is part of the Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. The VA found the delays unreasonable and had the potential to harm patients. Furthermore, in violation of VA policy, clinic staff was recording information about delays greater than seven days on a separate spreadsheet apart from the official backlog report, thus making the data in the official report “likely inaccurate,” according to the VA’s [investigation](#).

The VA’s investigative report also confirmed that the delays were the result of chronic understaffing at the clinic. In response, the VA has begun hiring more staff and conducted a workforce management review for all pharmacy services within the VA’s Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. Although the review concluded that there were no current prescriptions older than seven days elsewhere in the system, the review determined the VA was not in compliance with several prescription processing and staffing-related regulations. Regarding management accountability for the prescription backlog at the Santa Maria clinic, the review concluded that the senior pharmacy staff members who failed to report the prescription backlog were no longer on staff.

“The whistleblower’s disclosures are improving access to quality care for patients at the VA’s Santa Maria clinic,” said Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner. “The VA’s leadership paid attention to his concerns about dangerous delays and conducted a sweeping review of VA facilities in the Los Angeles area. This is yet another case that underscores the crucial role whistleblowers play in keeping agencies accountable.”

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*The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency. Our basic authorities come from four federal statutes: The Civil Service Reform Act, the Whistleblower Protection Act, the Hatch Act, and the Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). OSC’s primary mission is to safeguard the merit system by protecting federal employees and applicants from prohibited personnel practices, especially reprisal for whistleblowing, and to serve as a safe channel for allegations of wrongdoing. For more information, please visit our website at [www.osc.gov](http://www.osc.gov).*