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OSC Honors Three VA Whistleblowers with ‘Public Servant of the Year’ Award

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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This morning, the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) presented three Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) whistleblowers with its Public Servant of the Year award. The VA whistleblowers played early and important roles in uncovering problems in patient care at VA medical centers in Phoenix, Arizona, and Jackson, Mississippi. All worked directly with OSC and also have testified before Congress on their whistleblower experiences.

The three whistleblowers are:

Dr. Katherine Mitchell – Dr. Mitchell disclosed critical understaffing and inadequate triage training in the Phoenix VA medical center’s emergency room and other problems.

Dr. Phyllis Hollenbeck – Dr. Hollenbeck blew the whistle on chronic understaffing at the Jackson VA medical center, problems with the supervision of nurse practitioners, and other issues in early 2013.

Dr. Charles Sherwood – Dr. Sherwood brought forward concerns improper practices in the Jackson VA medical center’s radiology department.

“By speaking up, Katherine Mitchell, Charles Sherwood, and Phyllis Hollenbeck turned the public spotlight on serious threats to patient health and safety at the Phoenix and Jackson, Mississippi VA Medical Centers,” said Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner in her written remarks for the awards ceremony. “Because of their efforts, veterans are now far more likely to receive the treatment they deserve.”

“They are part of a much larger group of whistleblowers who have contributed to much-needed reforms at the Veterans Health Administration,” Lerner added.

“Although there is still work to be done, the new leadership at the VA has swiftly taken corrective actions to improve access to care and to hold individuals accountable,” Lerner said. “The VA has also renewed its commitment to listen to employees who speak out.”

VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson and House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller also offered remarks during OSC’s awards ceremony.

Upon request, OSC can provide photos and a link to a video of the event later today.

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.