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# Pentagon to target its hospitals providing poor care following review



By **Dan Lamothe** October 1 at 2:44 PM [Follow @danlamothe](#)

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel wants an plan within 45 days in the cases of health facilities found to be poor performers in a system-wide review. (Larry Downing/Reuters)

A system-wide review of the military’s healthcare system has determined that eight facilities run by the Pentagon have “significantly higher than expected” rates of patients getting sick following treatment but that the system overall provides quality care.

Results of the review, [released Wednesday](#), found wide disparities in the care provided by the military, with some aspects of the system performing better than in the civilian healthcare system and others ranking “below national benchmarks.”

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel [ordered the review in May](#), as allegations about poor care provided by the the

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Department of Veterans Affairs prompted an assessment of the system that is run by the Defense Department separately and provides healthcare to the military's active-duty service members and their families. At the time, the commander of one of the Army's largest medical facilities had been recently ousted following concerns over its surgical unit.

"The bottom line finding is that the military healthcare system provides healthcare that is comparable in access, quality and safety to average private sector healthcare. But we cannot accept average," Hagel told reporters at a briefing on Wednesday. "We can do better."

The hospitals identified in 2012-2013 for improvement in "patient morbidity," in which a subject gets sick after medical treatment, include the following:

- Mike O'Callaghan Federal Medical Center at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada;
- Madigan Army Medical Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington;
- San Antonio Military Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston in Texas;
- Womack Army Medical Center at Fort Bragg in North Carolina;
- Naval Medical Center San Diego;
- Naval Medical Center Portsmouth in Virginia;
- Evans Army Community Hospital at Fort Carson in Colorado;
- Fort Belvoir Community Hospital in Virginia.

This graphic in the report outlines the facilities identified with morbidity rates considered below average:

This graphic in the Military Health System Review report, released by the Pentagon on Wednesday, details which facilities have patients who get sick after treatment. (Defense Department graphic)

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In a memo released alongside the review, Hagel said that he wanted any facility found to not be providing timely access to care to provide a plan within 30 days to improve. Facilities found to “outliers” in patient safety will have 45 days to develop an action plan. Within 90 days, the health system’s administrators must develop a way to provide better oversight across all of its facilities, Hagel said.

The military’s health care system includes more than 50 hospitals and 600 clinics around the world, and a budget of more than \$50 billion. It serves 9.6 million Americans entitled to health care coverage through the Defense Department.

The report also detailed so-called “sentinel events” in the system, in which an unexpected death or injury occurs or could occur due unexpected circumstances. The review found that the military’s healthcare facilities fare favorably when compared to civilian ones in terms of how frequently occur.

However, between 2010 and 2013, Pentagon healthcare facilities still reported 71 instances of a patient retaining a foreign object after surgery, 57 adults dying unexpectedly, 40 surgeries being conducted on the wrong part of a body, 34 infants dying unexpectedly and 28 instances in which delayed treatment contributed to significant health problems.

This Defense Department graphic shows reported cases in which serious medical problems occurred unexpectedly in treatment.

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Dan Lamothe covers national security for The Washington Post and anchors its military blog, Checkpoint.

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