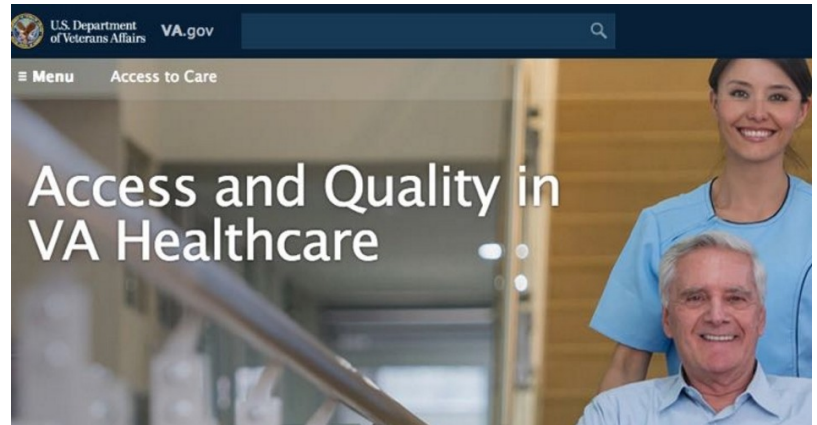




VA Endangers Patients by Hiring Doctors With Troubled Past

Despite supposedly rigorous hiring policies, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has hired doctors with histories of malpractice and even criminal convictions, some of whom have gone on to harm VA patients as well, a [USA Today](#) investigation reveals.

The newspaper — which in October [reported](#) that the VA “has for years concealed mistakes and misdeeds by staff members,” a fact borne out by a recent [Government Accountability Office report](#) — found enough cases of physicians who shouldn’t be working at the VA that the agency forced out one of the doctors and is undertaking its own investigation of others.



According to the story, while the VA’s hiring process at first appears bulletproof, it has one gaping hole: “When applicants disclose prior problems with medical licensing short of revocation, malpractice or criminal histories, VA hospital officials have discretion to weigh the providers’ explanations and approve their hiring anyway.” In at least one instance, and “potentially ... an unknown number of other[s],” the VA illegally hired a doctor whose state license had been revoked, which an agency spokesman told the paper was the result of “incorrect guidance” given to the local VA hospital.

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But how much guidance should local VA officials require to know not to hire a doctor who lost his license after, as *USA Today* puts it, “more than a dozen malpractice claims and settlements in two states, including cases alleging he made surgical mistakes that left patients maimed, paralyzed or dead”?

That’s what happened in the case of neurosurgeon John Henry Schneider. Schneider started out performing surgeries in Montana. After a long list of complaints against him in that state, he shifted his practice to Wyoming and even set up his own insurance company to pay his malpractice claims. Over the next six years, he racked up at least eight more malpractice complaints — so many that his insurance company went bankrupt, leaving claimants in the lurch. Eventually, after one of his patients died from an overdose of narcotics — drugs that he took exactly as prescribed — the state revoked Schneider’s license.

Earlier this year, he applied for a job at the VA hospital in Iowa City, Iowa, forthrightly detailing his troubled history, including his license revocation. In April, he started working at the hospital with similar results. “Schneider performed four brain surgeries in a span of four weeks on one 65-year-old veteran who died in August, according to interviews with Schneider and family members,” writes *USA Today*. “He has performed three spine surgeries on a 77-year-old Army veteran since July — the last two to try and clean up a lumbar infection from the first, the patient said.” In September, he “was arrested



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 5, 2017

on federal criminal charges of lying and trying to conceal assets in his bankruptcy case in Montana,” but when he returned to work and told his bosses what had happened, they kept him on. Only when *USA Today* brought matters to the VA’s attention did the agency finally move to fire Schneider, who instead resigned.

Schneider’s hiring was clearly outside the bounds of federal law, which prohibits the VA from hiring doctors whose licenses have been revoked in at least one state. However, what of the many other doctors with questionable pasts who have been hired legally? The paper didn’t find much encouraging news about them, either:

A VA hospital in Oklahoma knowingly hired a psychiatrist previously sanctioned for sexual misconduct who went on to sleep with a VA patient, according to internal documents. A Louisiana VA clinic hired a psychologist with felony convictions. The VA ended up firing him after they determined he was a “direct threat to others” and the VA’s mission.

Of course, as *USA Today* points out, the VA’s own policies attract quacks. Since Washington pays all malpractice claims against VA personnel, the agency is a magnet for doctors who can’t get private malpractice insurance, virtually guaranteeing that the worst ones will end up treating America’s veterans.

The ongoing scandals at the VA should give pause to anyone who believes a complete federal takeover of the healthcare system would be a good idea. If the feds can’t provide quality, corruption-free care to roughly [nine million](#) people, how can they possibly do so for 320 million?



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