



VA Whistleblowers Claim Harassment and Retaliation

Two whistleblowers are claiming that they were virtually run out of a Veterans Affairs hospital in Jennings, Louisiana, after they reported widespread corruption, the [Daily Caller reports](#).

The VA dominated the news cycle years ago after reports that a Phoenix facility had been altering its scheduling books and that at least 40 veterans had died while awaiting care. Since that revelation, significant evidence of corruption, waste, and fraud in VA facilities have come to light, and the whistleblowers who dare to make complaints have faced significant [retaliation](#).



Crystal LeJeune and Harvey Norris are the latest victims. Both are former employees of the Alexandria, Louisiana, VA Medical Center system, of which the VA hospital in Jennings is a part. They both claim that they uncovered widespread abuse, fraud, and [waste](#), specifically in the Home Based Primary Care (HBPC) department, and experienced retaliation for speaking out about what they observed.

In her complaint to the Office of Special Counsel (OSC), LeJeune indicates she witnessed “patient neglect” and the falsification of medical records, as well as deceitful time documentation and tampering with government vehicle-tracking systems.

For example, LeJeune states that one of the nurses claimed to have visited 11 patients in one morning, a near impossibility. She claims that while patients were supposed to be seen every 30 days, many had gone unseen for much longer.

LeJeune contends that she began experiencing harassment at work when she brought these issues to light.

It [started](#) with an investigation in September 2012 that forced her to be moved to a temporary assignment, LeJeune explained. She said that she was eventually cleared from that investigation, but it was only the beginning of the harassment.

Another hospital employee, a dietician named Tabitha Nicholas, even began taking notes about LeJeune.

“Tabitha was taking notes as to my comings and goings since I first started at HBPC. Every time I left the office, she went to the front door/window to make sure I was gone (I actually saw her). She reported my every move to my supervisor at the time,” [LeJeune stated](#) during the 2012 inquiry into the hostile work environment.

She claims she was followed and had her photo taken by another employee, and that false allegations were made against her. In 2016, photos had been taken of her desk that allegedly held unattended sensitive patient information. It was later determined that the photographs were manipulations.

She also indicates her Christian faith had been disparaged in a staff meeting.



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 18, 2018

“There is an email between supervisors where Tabitha Nicholas questioned my Christianity and stated I needed to find God, in a meeting that I was not present [at],” LeJeune states.

Curt Cashour, press secretary for the Department of Veteran Affairs, dismissed LeJeune’s allegations, saying she “did not provide any information that supports [her] assertion [of] any threatening conduct directed toward [her],” Cashour stated. “There was insufficient information to conclude with a substantial likelihood that the actions of HBPC employees amounted to wrongdoing.”

In contrast to Cashour’s claims that there was insufficient evidence to support LeJeune’s allegations, an investigation by the VA’s Office of Resolution Management produced a near [700-page report](#).

LeJeune ultimately took medical leave after she was followed to a restaurant by Nicholas, who took photos of LeJeune and the other hospital employees with whom she was having lunch. The photos were used to trigger another investigation.

Finally, in June 2018, she was granted medical retirement.

When Norris started at the HBPC in November 2016, most of the problems observed by LeJeune years earlier were still taking place.

“What happened was that I found all sorts of problems: the overbilling, misuse of government, and filing false documentation,” he recalls. For example, he learned that the nurse practitioners had formed their own corporation and were funneling patients illegally to their company.

But when Norris filed a complaint with the VA Office of Inspector General, Cashour dismissed his claims.

“VA has asked Mr. Norris several times for evidence backing up his complaint. To date, Mr. Norris has not provided anything that backs up any of his claims. VA stands ready to look into this right away should Mr. Norris provide evidence and/or documentation backing up his claims,” Cashour wrote.

Norris began experiencing [retaliation](#) a short time later. While having dinner at a truck stop with LeJeune and another VA employee in February 2017, he noticed Nicholas and another VA employee taking notes on Norris and his colleagues.

An investigation was then launched against Norris for misuse of a government vehicle that he used to drive to the truck stop for dinner.

Norris explained that he had used the vehicle for a presentation in St. Martinville, followed by a meeting with a veteran at a Waffle House a few miles from the presentation. He then went to see the doctor who would be handling the veteran’s case in the Jennings VA. Norris was found to be in violation for failing to comply with his original itinerary, which called him to go to a hospital in Alexandria immediately from his presentation, and was ultimately demoted and given a two-week suspension.

According to Norris, he was not permitted to see the complaint against him, or the photographs taken of him. He also was not permitted to know who filed the complaint, though he assumed it was Nicholas, since she had been seen taking pictures of him.

Norris decided to look for another job, and on the day he resigned, he received another write-up.

Norris says he is relieved that he has switched jobs. Unfortunately for the patients at the Jennings VA, however, it seems anyone who cares enough to report corruption is not around long enough to ensure change can happen.



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 18, 2018

LeJeune's and Norris' experiences are not unique in the VA. A 2014 press release from the OSC indicated it had received complaints from employees at VA facilities in Puerto Rico, as well as in 18 states — Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. Reports of retaliation continued to be reported each year since that press release, underscoring how impotent the OSC has been in addressing the problem.



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