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April 21, 2008

## VA Hid Suicide Risk, Internal E-Mails Show

Follow-Up Reporting On Exclusive Investigation Reveals Officials Hid Numbers

By Armen Keteyian

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(CBS) *The Department of Veterans Affairs came under fire again Monday, this time in California federal court where it's facing a national lawsuit by veterans rights groups accusing the agency of not doing enough to stem a looming mental health crisis among veterans. As part of the lawsuit, internal e-mails raise questions as to whether top officials deliberately deceived the American public about the number of veterans attempting and committing suicide. CBS News chief investigative correspondent Armen Keteyian reports.*

In San Francisco federal court Monday, attorneys for veterans' rights groups accused the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs of nothing less than a cover-up - deliberately concealing the real risk of suicide among veterans.

"The system is in crisis and unfortunately the VAs in denial," said veterans rights attorney Gordon Erspamer.

The charges were backed by internal e-mails written by Dr. Ira Katz, the VA's head of Mental Health.

In the past, Katz has repeatedly insisted while the risk of suicide among veterans is serious, it's not outside the norm.

"There is no epidemic in suicide in VA," Katz told Keteyian in November.

- Follow up: VA Struggles With Vets' Mental Health.
- How we got the numbers behind the story.
- VA Doctor on Veteran Suicides.
- FY: Suicide Risk Resources and Warning Signs.

But in this e-mail to his top media adviser, written two months ago, Katz appears to be saying something very different, stating: "Our suicide prevention coordinators are identifying about 1,000 suicide attempts per month among veterans we see in our medical facilities."

Katz's e-mail was written shortly after the VA provided CBS News data showing there were only 790 attempted suicides in all 2007 - a fraction of Katz's estimate.

"This 12,000 attempted suicides per year shows clearly, without a doubt, that there is an epidemic of suicide among veterans," said Paul Sullivan of Veterans for Common Sense.

And it appears that Katz went out of his way to conceal these numbers.

First, he titled his e-mail: "Not for the CBS News Interview Request."



**VIDEO**  
Veterans Suicides In Question

In a recently filed lawsuit, the Department of Veterans Affairs is accused of deliberately misinforming the American public about the number of veterans committing suicide. Armen Keteyian reports.



(CBS)

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He opened it with "Shh!" - as in keep it quiet - before ending with "Is this something we should (carefully) address ... before someone stumbles on it?"

On Monday, **CBS News** showed the e-mail to Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif., who chairs the [House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#).

"This is disgraceful. This is a crime against our nation, our nation's veterans," Filner told **CBS News**. "They do not want to come to grips with the reality, with the truth."

And that's not all.

Last November when **CBS News** exposed an epidemic of more than 6,200 suicides in 2005 among those who had served in the military, Katz attacked our report.

"Their number is not, in fact, an accurate reflection of the rate," he said last November.

But it turns out they were, as Katz admitted in [this e-mail](#), just three days later.

He wrote: there "are about 18 suicides per day among America's 25 million veterans."

That works out to about 6,570 per year, which Katz admits in the same e-mail, "is supported by the CBS numbers."

In an e-mail late Monday to **CBS News**, Katz wrote that the reason the numbers were not released was due to questions about the consistency and reliability of the findings - and that there was no public cover up involved.

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by [pastyears](#) October 10, 2009 8:17 AM EDT

I am a also a veteran that has been fighting the VA for 40 years now. I understand very little about the psychiatry of PTSD but have seen the effects first hand. My own father was a Japanese prisoner of war for over 40 months. Life at home as a child was not pleasant but that is another story. I have seen veterans treated like dogs both at home and abroad. I have listened to a government talk and say it takes time to implement change. Its time for our troops to know that only those who have served and their families are the ones that have compassion for the people that are serving. Agovernment that will not deliver should be voted out of office but we are not the majority and we have no vote of confidence. The people in office should have to serve at least a month in a combat zone before denying benefits to those who have sustained pain, agony, and disabilities not seen before. Awar on terrorism without the proper psychological CIA, FBI, whatever training will continue to do its damage on our troops. Please call or write your representatives and tell them its time to take care of America that means take care of our troops by any means that is available. Healthcare, financial aid, education, Housing, the works after all they are doing a job that we and our politicians and families don't want to do!

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by [wgriff3245](#) August 9, 2008 4:43 AM EDT

The VA, US Army, the EPA, the IOM, have all been covering up the real reason why many vets, especially the Vietnam Era Vets are killing themselves. It is because of the US Army's widespread use of Agent Orange on it own troops. Every airman that served in Thailand on the seven bases, were all exposed to Agent Orange, and are now either died or dying from the effects. The VA is sticking with "Boots On The Ground" Policy in denying us vets and their children, who also are genetically affected by this, both compensation and health care. This why so many Vietnam Vets are killing themselves. While they lose everything, the VA continues to lie and denying all of us. This is the main reason why so many suicides among Vietnam Vets, either you live with the pain or you kill yourself. The VA and the US military is responsible for the murder of all of us. Agent Orange was used and tested throughout Southeast Asia and in several states in this country.

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Veterans for Common Sense v. Shinseki  
 No. 08-16728 archived on May 31, 2017

by **fran3839** April 23, 2008 11:10 PM EDT

Quite noticeable in your investigation was a lack of the Active Duty statistics on suicide and suicide attempts. I happen to know first hand of an incident at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Ms. Fortunately, it was not a successful attempt. This was an Air Force physician who had been, as many of his colleagues there, under the Command of a General who had no regard for the stress and pressure these physicians are facing on a daily basis. They are understaffed and overworked and yet the General continues to persist with more unreasonable demands on the physicians. The majority of the physicians at this facility are presently receiving psychological counseling because of the working conditions.

This is only one Air Force Base. One has to wonder what the statistics are across the entire Active Duty personnel. Some one needs to bring attention to the feeling of hopelessness our young men and women in the military are feeling. Something, the Generals and others in charge should be aware of.

As for the young Physician at Keesler Air Force Base is concerned, he was brought in front of the Medical Board after an intensive six week inpatient program. What did the Air Force decide to do? Although they decided he was okay to practice as a physician, they still decided (after 12 years of Service to his Country) to discharge him. Is this how they treat our young men and women on Active Duty? Punish them instead of helping them? This is shameful!!

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by **dog7771** April 22, 2008 9:52 PM EDT

DON'T THEY TRY TO HIDE EVERY DIRTY DEED? SICK WHITE HOUSE, SICK DOJ.. THEY NEED TO BE MARCHED UP TO THE DOCK&TRIED FOR WAR CRIMES. THAT CAN STILL BE DONE WHEN THEY LEAVE OFFICE, THAT IS, IF THEY LEAVE. A MANUFACTURED "NATIONAL EMERGENCY/PEARL HARBOR" WILL KEEP THIS EVIL REGIME IN POWER FOR A LOT LONGER THAN YOU EXPECT, KIDS. BE READY.

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by **cablumom** April 22, 2008 8:46 PM EDT

For all who have posted their personal stories here who need help and comfort I am so very sad. We are trying to do so here in our small town in California. Our son is in Iraq. We support several Veterans organizations. Find organizations if you can outside of the fucking VA, and we will keep pushing the VA over onto its Right side.

God bless you all.

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by **bobnjersey** April 22, 2008 8:28 PM EDT

[And the VA has been screwed up way too bad to blame it on Bush]  
[Posted by mjjw2 at 04:29 PM: Apr 22, 2008]

so then he should have known how screwed up it was then, no? as he sent off a few hundred thousand servicemen into a meat grinder shouldn't it have been obvious to anyone w/ any intelligence that the issues would be exaggerated by the increased load on the system?

i guess they were going to implement this plan just after the post invasion plan succeeded.

is he to blame for anything ... anything at all? he apparently doesn't think so ... he's protecting america!

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by **acolton1** April 22, 2008 8:21 PM EDT

What else is this administration keeping from the american public that they should not be doing.

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by **tibu987** April 22, 2008 8:19 PM EDT

It is time for a complete overhaul of the VA

From the lackadaisical employees who seem to have time for everything except taking care of the vets.

From the top, the decision makers who decide that a vet who has lost a quarter of his brain and head and is given a 10% disability.

And, for the VA hospitals that have a higher death and MRS A rate than all other hospitals.

Etc., etc., etc.

Our vets deserve nothing less than the very best care that this Country can give, NOTHING less.

And, it is our duty as appreciative Americans to see that our vets get the very best of everything.

Write the President, your senator, your congressman and tell them.

I do.

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by acolton1 April 22, 2008 7:58 PM EDT

Just another cover up by the Bush administration to make it seem that everything is going good with this war in Iraq. Yeah for George Bush and his administration for being so honest with the american public.

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by trhallma April 22, 2008 7:53 PM EDT

moht1021:

My husband went/s going through the same thing. He spent 6 months at Ft. Stewart, GA for mental health treatment, but they spent the whole time telling him he was faking it. I finally asked a SC Senator for assistance. It lit the fire, but the Army just released him from his contract to get him out of there! I had to get him &quot;help&quot; through &quot;marriage counseling&quot; so our insurance would pay for it. It has been almost 4 years and it is still no picnic! I don't understand what my husband is going through per se, but I KNOW when he is about to have another episode. I really wish there was someone that he could talk to that really does understand! Good luck because I know this is a lifetime problem with no quick fix!

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