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## Is The VA Socialized Medicine?

By [John C. Goodman](#)

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Yes, the VA is socialized medicine according to [Paul Krugman](#) an “it works” he wrote, in a column a few years ago. But Sunday evening on [60 Minutes](#), viewers got a glimpse of what the word “works” actually means.

VA care means long waits for care, a bureaucracy that treats its clients more like “inmates” than like “customers” and all too often a deadly reminder that health care delayed can mean health care denied.

Among the *60 Minutes* findings:

- A nationwide investigation confirmed phony wait lists in Phoenix and 92 other VA centers.
- While the official records showed that vets in Phoenix were getting appointments in 14 days, the actual wait was more than 400 days in most cases
- In Pittsburgh, six vets died of legionnaire’s disease, even though the hospital knew its water system was contaminated.
- In Brockton, Massachusetts a Vietnam vet was hospitalized for eight years with a psychiatric disorder, but no one ever scheduled an appointment for him with a psychiatrist.
- Newly appointed Secretary Bob McDonald estimates that the VA needs an additional 20,000 doctors and nurses and medical professionals to meet the demand.

Krugman writes:

“The most efficient health care systems are integrated systems like the V.H.A.; next best are single-payer systems like Medicare; the more privatized the system, the worse it performs.”

Yet here is the reality: many veterans avoid the VA system entirely. Even though the care is free, [about 90 percent](#) of the 27 million veterans who could use the VA system choose not to, relying instead on private health insurance and other ways of accessing healthcare.

Moreover, [Michael Tanner](#) writes in a Cato Institute study:

“...it takes an average 160 days simply for a veteran to gain access to his health benefits, and the case processing backlog within the VA currently sits in excess of 344,000 claims. Appealing a VA decision is lengthy as well, requiring an average wait time of 1,598 days.”