Access to timely medical appointments is critical to ensuring that veterans receive needed medical care. Over the past few years, there have been numerous reports of VA medical centers (VAMCs) failing to provide timely care to patients, including specialty care, and in some cases, these delays have resulted in harm to patients.

In December 2012, GAO reported that improvements were needed in the reliability of VA's reported medical appointment wait times, as well as oversight of the appointment scheduling process. Also in 2012, VA found that systemwide consult data could not be adequately used to determine the extent to which veterans experienced delays in receiving outpatient specialty care. In May 2013, VA launched the Consult Management Business Rules Initiative with the aim of standardizing aspects of the consults process.

This testimony highlights (1) preliminary observations from GAO's ongoing work related to VA's management of outpatient specialty care consults and (2) concerns GAO raised in its December 2012 report regarding VA's outpatient medical appointment scheduling, and progress made implementing GAO's recommendations. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed documents and interviewed officials from VA's central office. Additionally, GAO interviewed officials from five VAMCs for the consults work and four VAMCs for the scheduling work that varied based on size, complexity, and location. GAO shared the information it used to prepare this statement with VA and incorporated its comments as appropriate.

View GAO-14-509T. For more information, contact Debra A. Draper at (202) 512-7114 or draperd@gao.gov.