

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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**Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Hearing on Technology for Patient Safety at Veterans Hospitals**

Chairman Smith: The long delays and unacceptable quality of VA health care for tens of thousands of our veterans has recently become public.

Following up on a series of letters to the VA Inspector General and others, I recently met with Acting VA Secretary Gibson at the Audie Murphy Memorial Hospital in my district in San Antonio. I was reassured that he sincerely wants to fix the problems facing our veterans. But we need swift action and strong resolve to fix such a broken system at the VA.

Veterans who live in the 21st Congressional District of Texas and across our country should have the best health care America can provide. American veterans have made tremendous sacrifices to protect and defend our freedoms. They deserve the best health care possible, as soon as possible.

Today's hearing will enable us to understand more about patient safety and how scientific research and new technology can boost efforts to prevent patients from contracting serious infections while they are hospitalized.

A number of VA hospitals are among the worst in the United States in terms of inflicting preventable infections on their patients.

Hospital-acquired infections are a serious public health problem that affects patients in hospitals all across the country. In the worst-performing hospitals, which includes some VA hospitals, up to 10% of patients are harmed by such infections.

A few years ago, a state agency in Pennsylvania analyzed millions of hospital records and found that the in-hospital mortality rate among patients who contracted infections was about five times higher than among patients who weren't infected.

Research has shown that most of these infections are preventable if hospitals and medical personnel adhere to systematic prevention measures. This starts with essential steps such as thorough, repeated hand-washing and isolation of infected patients.

However, hand hygiene and other common-sense measures have been only partially successful. We are fortunate to have with us this morning three physicians who are experts in the field of preventing hospital-acquired infections.

We also have representatives from two companies that have developed new tools and technologies to prevent infections in hospitals. I look forward to learning more about the science behind fighting harmful hospital-acquired infections.

I'm particularly interested in how the VA health care system, the largest integrated health care system in America, could deploy scientifically proven technology and practices, with the goal of setting the highest standard of patient safety in all of its hospitals.

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