Health Care for Soldiers—They De­serve and Get the Best

In past years, Congressional testi­mony by the Surgeons General of the three military departments has paint­ed a gloomy picture of military med­ical care. Even the Pentagon's top health official, Dr. William Mayer, has labeled the military health care system "not ready for war... not ready for peace." Fortunately, their warn­ings have not fallen on deaf ears.

Congress has provided funds for the deployment of fully equipped hos­pital "packages" overseas. To meet the need for trained health care pro­fessionals to staff these battlefield medical units, Congress has also pro­vided incentives to encourage doctors and nurses to join one of the reserve components and has proposed legisla­tion for registration by the Selective Service System of persons qualified in health care occupations that are es­sential to the Armed Forces.

At the same time the military de­partments must meet a statutory and moral obligation to provide health care for about 10 million people, of whom only 20 percent are on active duty. In the last several years, a few isolated problems have surfaced that fed the misperception that this largest­in-the-world medical system was a sec­ond-rate one.

The services are making important improvements to the quality of medi­cine provided our men and women in uniform and to those who served be­fore them and all their families. Among these are: strict credentialing and firm licensing requirements for the provid­ers of military health care, limits on off-duty employment, prompt correc­tive action for reported substandard care and close supervision of nonphy­sicians.

To make the peacetime health care system more accessible to its benefi­ciaries, the military is trying a system of walk-in clinics under contract to qualified civilian health care provid­ers. Additionally, the Army is com­pletely automating its patient appoint­ment system and has increased the number of support personnel to help improve the appointment process.

With the backing of Congress, these important changes in our military health care program will result in lasting ex­cellence in quality, readiness and effi­ciency. Our soldiers and their families deserve no less.