

## Bilirakis Joins Brown-Waite in Looking into VA Psychologist Complaint

Gus joined his colleague Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite (R-Fla.) at the James Haley VA Medical Center today for a meeting to discuss with officials allegations that unlicensed psychologists there receive too little supervision.

Concerns were raised earlier this month when a complaint was filed by a Haley VA licensed psychologist alleging a lack of supervision of unlicensed psychologists treating veterans for mental health care.

This Dec 5th story from the Tampa Tribune has the details . . .

Veterans who go to James A. Haley VA Medical Center for mental health care are unknowingly treated by psychologists who are inexperienced and not fully licensed, according to a complaint filed last week with a state board.

Hiring unlicensed psychologists is legal, but Haley is skirting the state's requirements by not sufficiently supervising them as they treat patients, the complaint alleges. It was filed with the Florida Board of Psychology by Brian Nussbaum, one of Haley's licensed psychologists.

Nussbaum claims there are 12 unlicensed psychologists on a staff of 34. John Pickens, a regional VA spokesman, acknowledged there are unlicensed psychologists at Haley, but said there are only nine and that they are all closely supervised.

Today Gus joined Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite in having a discussion with Nussbaum and other Haley VA officials.

Bill Levesque over at St. Pete Times wrote a brief post about the meeting on the Times's breaking news blog . . .

Nussbaum said the atmosphere at the VA hospital doesn't encourage a frank discussion of the problem. He said his concerns were not adequately addressed by his bosses.

"I'm sitting alone here," Nussbaum told a panel that included several of his bosses. "People have expressed support. But they're afraid of losing their job ... And that's a concern."

Haley officials denied that any of the unlicensed people receive inadequate supervision. In fact, officials said the unlicensed psychologists were asked if they are adequately supervised and all said yes.

Levesque went on to write . . .

All agreed having an open discussion was valuable. Although Brown-Waite invited other members of the Tampa Bay area congressional delegation, only Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor, showed up.

Brown-Waite said she is concerned the VA didn't have better and clearer guidelines about supervision. And she expressed concern about a possible profit motive by Nussbaum, who she accused of offering to supervise some people for pay.