

Tech at VA Dental Center in St. Louis warned officials about poor sterilization

By **Catherine D. Bertram** – 7/19/2010

Earlene Johnson worked as a medical supply technician at the St. Louis Veterans Affairs Medical Center, where almost 2,000 veterans may have been exposed to Hepatitis B and C and HIV due to poor sterilization practices. She testified, before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, that she warned her superiors that the dental equipment wasn't being adequately sterilized, but they ignored her and eventually fired her.

After her warnings, a year passed before the VA notified the veterans who had potentially been exposed.

Rather than use a special sterilizing machine, technicians evidently washed the dental instruments by hand, which does not clean the instruments as fully as the sterilizing machine. The improper sterilization took place over thirteen months, from February of 2009 to March 2010.

Earlier this year, the VA had to inform 3,000 colonoscopy patients of San Diego's Palomar Hospital that reused medical equipment might have exposed them to infection.