

I have learned that the Milwaukee County District Attorney's office is conducting a criminal investigation into the attempted diversion of a prescription medication from the large pharmacy at the Milwaukee Zablocki VA Medical Center.

VA Spokesman Gary Kunich tells me an employee has been suspended and the case was referred to the district attorney. Kunich said the employee attempted to send lidocaine patches out of the pharmacy to a veteran who is not enrolled for care at the Milwaukee VA. Lidocaine is a painkiller and the patches are applied directly on the skin. It is not an opioid and is not a controlled substance. Kunich says there are procedures and safeguards in place and the prescription was intercepted before it got out of the VA facility.

Kunich would not name the employee but I have learned she learned she is a pharmacy manager and one of the highest ranking employees in the VA pharmacy. I am not naming her as she has not been charged. VA sources say the manager was given a 30-day suspension. Kunich would not confirm this but did say there was a suspension and further action is possible, depending on the outcome of the criminal investigation.

Milwaukee County Deputy District Attorney Kent Lovern confirms his office is investigating the attempted prescription diversion. The VA's Kunich acknowledged the agency doesn't know if any material was successfully diverted prior to the incident involving the lidocaine patches.

The U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs Committee, chaired by Senator Ron Johnson, is also investigating. The state's other large VA facility, located in Tomah, was the site of massive abuse of painkiller prescriptions earlier in this decade. The Milwaukee facility was not linked to that scandal. In the ongoing case, the prescription involved in a painkiller but is not a controlled substance or opioid.

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