

VA social worker who appeared to mock veteran suicides has resigned

A social worker at a Veteran Affairs Medical Center in Indianapolis who sent an e-mail that appears to poke fun at veterans' mental health problems, including suicide, has resigned, according to the [Indianapolis Star](#).

The e-mail by Robin Paul, who was a manager at the Indianapolis hospital's transitional clinic for returning veterans, [showed a combat veteran as a Christmas elf ready to hang himself](#) with holiday lights and another begging for a hit of Xanax.

Paul submitted her resignation last week. She said she and her family have been subjected to "harassment and hostility" as a result of the e-mail's publication.

"Even though I have had an excellent work history with the VA, my career with the VA is effectively over as a result of this incident and the resulting public and political pressure," she said in a statement provided through her attorney, Barclay Wong.

Paul told the paper that the e-mail was taken out of context, but she also apologized for it and said she "used poor judgment in sending it out."

When first asked about the e-mail, Paul responded, "Oh, my goodness." She then referred a reporter to the hospital's public affairs department, which e-mailed the Star a statement for her:

The Dec. 18 e-mail was obtained by the Star. It shows a toy Christmas elf posing as a patient in what appears to be the hospital's transitional clinic — called the Seamless Transition Integrated Care Clinic — for former troops.

“I would like to sincerely apologize for the email message and I take full responsibility for this poor judgment,” Paul said. “I have put my heart and soul into my work with Veterans for many years.”

The e-mail was sent to the “IND STICC Team” with the subject, “Naught [sic] Elf in the STICC clinic.”

One photo depicts the elf looking between the legs of a female doll. “Trying his skills as a primary care provider (doing a pap),” the e-mail says.

Another shows the elf and a note with the words, “Out of XANAX — please help!” A caption says, “Self-medicating for mental health issues when a CNS would not give him his requested script.”

A third photograph of the suicidal vet has a caption that says, “Caught in the act of suicidal behavior (trying to hang himself from an electrical cord).”

The e-mail provoked national outrage. And it comes at a time when VA says that veterans who take their own lives is a crisis that happens 22 times a day.

Veterans of Foreign Wars and some members of Congress called for her removal.

“We can only hope that the other 350,000 VA employees completely understand the wake-up call that comes from this unfortunate yet preventable incident — that veterans are the only reason your federal department exists, which means serving them must be a 100 percent, all in commitment by every employee, every day,” Joe Davis, a spokesman for the VFW, told the Star.