

Department of  
Veterans Affairs

# Memorandum

Date: — FEB 8 2012

From: Deputy Under Secretary for Health Operations and Management (10N)

Subj: Visitation Policy Outreach

To: VISN Directors (10N1-23)

1. In order to respect the rights of Veteran patients and to ensure Joint Commission standards are met, medical centers are required to do the following:

a) Publish current written visitation policies which include the specific language: *"The medical center respects the patient's right to make decisions about his or her care, treatment and services, and to involve the patient's family in care, treatment, and services decisions to the extent permitted by the patient or surrogate decision-maker. 'Family' is defined as a group of two or more persons united by blood, or adoptive, marital, domestic partnership, or other legal ties. The family may also be a person or persons not legally related to the individual (such as significant other, friend or caregiver) whom the individual considers to be family. A family member may be the surrogate decision-maker, as defined in VHA Handbook 1004.02, if authorized to make care decisions for the individual, should he or she lose decision-making capacity or choose to delegate decision making to another. The medical center allows a family member, friend or other individual to be present with the patient for emotional support during the course of stay. The medical center allows for the presence of a support individual of the patient's choice, unless the individual's presence infringes on others' rights or safety, or is medically or therapeutically contraindicated. The individual may or may not be the patient's surrogate decision-maker or legally authorized representative. The hospital prohibits discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression."*

b) Add the above specific language to all Patient Rights and Responsibilities publications, including, but not limited to medical center policies, Veteran information brochures, signage, posters, and websites.

c) Add the above specific language to all website pages/links regarding Visitation/Visitors and Patient Information.

d) Add the last statement regarding non-discrimination to all pertinent Veteran and employee policies and publications.

e) Ensure new employee orientations, as well as ongoing staff education and training, include discussion about visitation policies and practices, comprehensive non-discrimination definition and Veteran rights to involve individuals of their choice to provide support.

f) If visitation in general, or by a specific individual or individuals is medically or therapeutically contraindicated, a provider order will be placed in the medical record as an individualized patient limitation. The progress notes in the patient's chart will reflect the provider's rationale for this order.

3. Specific language on visitation policy will be included in the Veterans Health Benefits Handbook (Handbook). This initiative will deliver a tailored health care guide to each Veteran enrolled in the VA health care system.

4. Although the Joint Commission standards address inpatient care and visitation, the same principles of allowing Veterans to choose who may be involved in their care and provide support apply to all VHA care sites, as does the comprehensive non-discrimination policy. Documents published for ambulatory care sites should also include the above statements, modified as needed, to specify Veteran rights and responsibilities when receiving outpatient care and treatment.

5. Additional information regarding VHA's approach to addressing health equity will be forthcoming to ensure the needs and preferences of Veterans' needs and preferences are consistently met.

6. VISN Directors are asked to provide a summary of their VISN's compliance using the attached checklist to the Office of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Administrative Operations (10NA) no later than noon, Tuesday, February 14, 2012.



William Schoenhard, FACHE

Attachments: Visitation Policy Checklist