

January 9, 2013

EXTENDED HOURS ACCESS FOR VETERANS REQUIRING PRIMARY CARE INCLUDING WOMEN'S HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTERS AND SELECTED COMMUNITY BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive defines the policy for providing access to Primary Care Services, including Women's Health and General Mental Health Outpatient Services, outside of regular business hours.

2. BACKGROUND: It is VHA's commitment to provide quality care for eligible Veterans when they want and need care. The Veteran population is continually evolving and their expectations for care evolve with them. Over the past 5-7 years, significant progress has been made to improve access in Primary Care, Specialty Care, and Mental Health services. The Telehealth expansion, implementation of the Patient Aligned Care Teams, launch of Specialty Care Access Networks and Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes and the continued implementation of the Uniform Mental Health Services Handbook, have established a strong foundation to meet or exceed the modern expectations of our Veterans.

a. **Definitions**

(1) **Regular Business Hours.** Regular Business Hours for VHA services are considered to be from 8:00 a.m to 4:30 p.m, Monday through Friday.

(2) **Extended Hours.** Extended Hours comprise of hours of operation beyond 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. There must be at least one session (minimum 2 hours) of service offered in the extended hours.

(3) **Primary Care Services.** For the purpose of this Directive, Primary Care Services includes "full range" of services delivered in clinics with the stop codes 322, 323, 348, 350, or 531, which constitutes the core of Primary Care Services. It includes Primary Care Services in Women's Health Services. The intent of "full range" is to avoid walk-in clinics or situations where there was a clinic but the patients could not have blood draws, x-rays, or pharmacy, that are available during regular clinic hours.

(4) **General Mental Health Outpatient Services.** For the purposes of this Directive, a "full range" of Mental Health Outpatient Services includes services delivered in clinics with the stop codes 502, 512, and 513 Mental Health Clinic-Individual, Mental Health Consultation, and Substance Abuse -Individual, which constitute the core of general Mental Health Outpatient Services. These services must include, at a minimum, diagnostic interviewing, treatment planning, delivery of medications and follow-up (including labs and other needed tests as well as follow-up of effectiveness and side effects), delivery of psychotherapy (individual, couples, or family) and other psychosocial services. Other clinics with 500 series stop codes may also be included in extended hours care.

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3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that each VHA medical center and Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) that treat more than 10,000 unique Veterans per year must provide access to a full range of Primary Care Services, including Women's Health and Mental Health General Outpatient services that extend beyond regular business hours at least once on weekdays and once every weekend, at times and venues that match Veteran demand and expectations. There must be at least one session (minimum 2 hours) of service offered during the extended hours.

4. ACTION

a. **Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director.** The VISN Director is responsible for ensuring:

(1) Primary Care, including Women's Health, offers a full range of services in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers and CBOCs, treating more than 10,000 unique Veterans each year, during extended hours, which occur on at least 1 weekday per week and at least once every weekend. *NOTE: Other services at all sites including CBOCs are strongly encouraged to provide outpatient care during extended hours. In addition to face-to-face services, use of Telehealth modalities during extended hours is strongly encouraged as a convenient option for Veteran patients.*

(2) General Mental Health outpatient clinics offer a full range of services in VA medical centers and CBOCs treating more than 10,000 unique Veterans each year during extended hours at least 1 weekday per week and at least once every weekend.

(3) Local data such as utilization, no show rates, cancellation rates, and feedback from Veteran Service Organizations and other stakeholders are used to determine which extended hour option(s) i.e., (morning or evening) best meet the needs of each facility's Veteran population. However, the clinic must be available at least once on weekends.

(4) The current state of extended hour access at the medical center and CBOC, treating more than 10,000 unique Veterans, level is to be reported by April 30, 2013 to the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Operations with a copy to the Chief Patient Care Services Officer. Full implementation is expected no later than July 31, 2013. Compliance is determined and monitored through internal reports generated from Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) appointment data in the Corporate Data Warehouse.

(5) Implementation progress must be reported to the Under Secretary for Health through the appropriate leadership channels on a monthly basis until implementation is complete. After 1 year of implementation, a reassessment must be completed to review utilization and to determine the best option for delivering extended hours service.

b. **Medical Facility Director.** The medical facility Director is responsible for ensuring:

(1) Primary Care, including Women's Health, and General Mental Health services are provided during extended hours at least 1 weekday per week and at least once every weekend at

all VA medical centers and CBOCs, treating more than 10,000 unique Veterans each year, where such services are provided.

(2) Appropriate staffing and resources are provided to enable those clinics to operate in an optimal manner.

(3) Appropriate efforts are made to inform the Veteran population of services offered during extended hours.

(4) Other services provide outpatient care during extended hours as the need for such care is identified. This includes appropriate staffing and resources to enable those clinics to operate in an optimal manner.

5. REFERENCES: VHA Handbook 1160.01, Uniform Mental Health Services.

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Office of Patient Care Services (10P4) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be addressed at 202-461-7590.

7. RESCISSIONS: None. This VHA Directive expires January 31, 2018.

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Under Secretary for Health

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