Department of Veterans Affairs **VHA DIRECTIVE 2000-020**
Veterans Health Administration
Washington, DC 20420 **July 20, 2000**

DIVERSITY POLICY

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes the diversity policy for VHA.

2. BACKGROUND

a. In a February 1993 letter to all employees, and in the 1994 Performance Agreement between President William J. Clinton and Jesse L. Brown, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Secretary Brown set forth:

(1) Vision and values;

(2) The direction Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) would take to promote diversity; and

(3) Specific practices that would establish VA as the leader among all Federal agencies in the pro-active management of diversity.

b. In August 1995, the Under Secretary for Health established a Diversity Advisory Board to address issues affecting diversity in the work place. The Diversity Advisory Board had three primary objectives, to:

(1) Increase awareness and sensitivity about diversity in the VHA work force through dissemination and coordination of information;

(2) Serve as a resource to VHA managers in the promotion of diversity and advancement of underrepresented employees into executive positions; and

(3) Identify barriers to advancement of underrepresented employees and identify and develop programs or initiatives to break down the barriers.

c. To ensure that VHA becomes an employer of choice, valuing and managing cultural diversity in the workplace is a sound business practice which promotes quality patient care. To manage diversity is to create an environment in the workplace that allows all employees to perform at their individual best. Fostering diversity is a responsible step that removes institutional and attitudinal barriers that inhibit individuals from advancing as far as their talents will take them. The success of VHA is dependent not only on its ability to provide a supportive work climate for all employees, patients, and customers, but also fostering such a climate that reflects the community's diversity. Given the changing mix of VHA employment and customer base, a diverse work force strengthens VHA’s organization's competitive advantage by being more adaptive and creative in meeting customers' needs. Accordingly, the promotion and practice of managing cultural diversity successfully will become second nature to the manager and foremost to our leaders.

THIS VHA DIRECTIVE EXPIRES JULY 31, 2005

d. **Definitions**

(1) **Diversity.** Diversity is defined as: "Those human qualities that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet present in other individuals and groups." Diversity includes everyone; it is not something that is defined by race or gender. It extends to age, personal and corporate background, education, function, and personality. It includes lifestyle, gender, sexual orientation, geographic origin, physical abilities and qualities, tenure with the organization, exempt or non-exempt status, and management or non-management status.

(2) **Managing Diversity.** Managing diversity is defined as: "A comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment that works for all employees." Within VHA, managing diversity means approaching diversity simultaneously at three distinct levels:

(a) Individual,

(b) Interpersonal, and

(c) Organizational.

NOTE: *Managing diversity is not meant to replace the accountability and responsibility of existing supervisory structures. Managing diversity is changing the root culture which in turn generates long-term changes.*

e. The distinction between Diversity and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and/or Affirmative Action Programs is outlined as follows.

EEO and/or Affirmative Action	**Diversity**
(1) Government-initiated	Voluntary
(2) Legally-driven	Productivity driven
(3) Quantitative	Qualitative
(4) Problem-focused	Opportunity-focused
(5) Assumes assimilation	Assumes integration
(6) Responsive	Proactive
(7) Centralized	Decentralized (Empowered)
(8) Uniform and/or Corporate	Individuality

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that all key VHA officials value, promote, and effectively manage cultural diversity in the work place. ***NOTE:*** *A diverse work force is VHA's greatest potential strength when managed properly. The success of diversity in VHA is dependent upon the ability to empower the entire work force and the customers.*

4. ACTION

a. All VHA managers and supervisors are expected to promote, create, and ensure a culturally diverse work force, embracing the values and needs of all individuals through:

(1) Long-term commitment;

(2) Strategic and business planning;

(3) Broadening mindset through education and experience; and

(4) Managing for full utilization of human resources.

b. All managers and supervisors have outcome-based performance requirements related to the way in which they respect individuals and value their contributions to the mission of caring for patients, to include empowerment of all employees, and customer service.

5. REFERENCES

a. Letter to all VA employees from Secretary Brown, dated February 16, 1993.

b. The 1994 Performance Agreement between President William J. Clinton and the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The agreement states that VA will "become an employer of choice; create a work environment free of discrimination and harassment that recognizes the value of diversity; and offer employees the opportunity to reach their full potential."

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Chairperson, Diversity Advisory Board (10B2), is responsible for the contents of this Directive.

7. RESCISSION: This VHA Directive will expire July 31, 2005.

S/ Frances Murphy, M.D. for
Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.
Acting Under Secretary for Health

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