

CLEARANCE OF VOLUNTEERS FOR DRIVING ASSIGNMENTS

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive outlines the policy and procedures which must be followed for medically clearing volunteers for VHA driving assignments.

2. BACKGROUND:

a. This Directive is intended to be used in conjunction with VHA Handbook 1620.2, which outlines provisions for the description of volunteer duties, background checks, and Without Compensation (WOC) appointments. VHA has an obligation to ensure safe transport for patients. A capable and competent driver is a critical component of this obligation.

b. VHA employees after appropriate medical clearance examinations, transport patients in motor vehicles. As large numbers of Veteran patients are without personal transportation opportunities, VHA relies heavily on volunteers to transport them. VHA recognizes the importance and utility of the Veterans Transportation Network supported by the Disabled American Veterans, described in the VHA Handbook 1620.2. Neither the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) nor VHA has formally defined explicit criteria that clinicians should use to determine driving ability. Currently, VHA uses forms developed by OPM for both volunteer drivers and wage-grade drivers to determine the fitness of both groups. *NOTE: It should be kept in mind that the physical demands placed on a volunteer driver are generally not as great as the physical demands placed on a wage-grade driver.*

c. Clinicians should be aware of standard resources including a website dedicated to transportation medicine (<http://home.att.net/~NataH/>) and the recently published guidance from the American Medical Association and the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA)(see subpar. 5d). Peer-reviewed scientific literature is also available.

d. Practices for clearing volunteer drivers across VHA have varied. In some facilities, the full Department of Transportation (DOT) examination for commercial drivers except for the drug-testing component was required. In others, no written, formal program existed. This Directive brings consistency to how VHA facilities clear volunteer drivers.

e. Implementation of this Directive will require staggering medical examinations over a period of time.

f. VHA affirms its commitment to patient and occupational safety in the service of Veterans and understands that implementation of these standards may preclude some volunteers from performing transportation duties. *NOTE: Such exclusion in no way undervalues the contribution that all volunteers can, and do, make to the delivery of health care. VHA is grateful for volunteers' participation, and will make every effort to identify suitable and meaningful alternative assignments for volunteers that are unable to serve as drivers.*

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g. Volunteers should be assessed individually to determine if they are able to operate a motor vehicle safely. Clinicians must use their individual clinical judgment in determining the frequency of these examinations. Although many of the medical conditions outlined in this Directive are more prevalent in older populations, these criteria apply to drivers of all ages.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that the designated Occupational Health officials at each VHA facility must ensure all volunteer drivers are medically cleared for driving assignments using the standards in Attachment A.

4. ACTIONS:

a. **Chief Voluntary Service Program Officer.** The Chief Voluntary Service Program Officer, or designee, is responsible for ensuring that:

(1) Volunteers who are interested in a driving assignment are properly interviewed and screened, and have obtained the required documentation (see VHA Handbook 1620.2).

(2) All volunteers with a driving assignment receive appointments for physical examinations with the facility Occupational Health Office.

(3) The volunteer is assisted in obtaining any screenings and other services required by Occupational Health as a result of their physical examination. Wherever possible, the local Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility will provide the tests needed (for example: stress tests) at no cost to the volunteer. VA facilities will not undertake medical diagnostic testing to confirm the presence of a disease or accept responsibility for treatment of the condition unless the volunteer is enrolled in the VA health care system and requests VA care.

(4) A volunteer is not assigned to driving duties if not cleared by Occupational Health.

(5) A letter is provided to all volunteers who are not cleared for driving assignments. This letter must thank them for their interest in volunteering, offer them an alternate volunteer assignment, and inform them that they may re-apply as a driver if their health condition changes.

(6) Volunteer drivers, at a minimum, undergo a medical clearance examination every 4 years. Any driver cleared to drive despite any of the conditions specified in this Directive must be examined at least annually. Any driver cleared must also be examined after any major medical event.

b. **Chief, Occupational Health.** The facility Chief, Occupational Health, or designee, is responsible for:

(1) Determining whether a volunteer should drive for VA based on available information, to include private medical documentation. This decision may be changed on receipt of additional information concerning the volunteer's condition.

(2) Scheduling and completing physical examinations of drivers in accordance with the specific requirements outlined in Attachment A.

(3) Completing Attachment A and attaching it to the completed OF 345 (see Att. C). *NOTE: This OPM form is also available at: <http://vaww.ceosh.med.va.gov/Forms/OccHealth/of-345.dot>.*

(4) Informing the Chief Voluntary Service Program Officer of its determination regarding whether the volunteer is medically cleared to drive for VA as soon as possible after the completion of the examination.

(a) If a volunteer fails any of the standards listed in Attachment A, Occupational Health will not clear the volunteer for driving assignment.

(b) Occupational Health may decide to permit a volunteer with a long-standing safe driving record to continue driving until any additional needed information is available if:

1. The volunteer does not fail any standards listed in Attachment A, and
2. Does not pass certain standards because additional information is needed pertaining to a remote medical event.

NOTE: In order to ensure the safety of both drivers and passengers, driving clearance will be temporarily suspended if all information required to make a final determination is not received within 60 days of request.

(5) Sending written notice to a volunteer when:

(a) More information is required to make a decision on volunteer drivers' suitability. This letter must thank them for their willingness to participate in the program, advise them of the written results of their examinations, request whatever additional information is needed (see Att. B), and include the results of any screening tests completed.

(b) The volunteer driver or volunteer driver applicant is not accepted. This letter must include the reason(s) for non-acceptance as a volunteer driver.

(6) Referring volunteers who are not medically cleared for driving duties to their treating provider, wherever appropriate, for further medical evaluation.

5. REFERENCES:

- a. VHA Handbook 1620.2, Volunteer Transportation Network.
- b. Official Form OF-345, Physical Fitness Inquiry for Motor Vehicle Operators. <http://vaww.ceosh.med.va.gov/Forms/OccHealth/of-345.dot> .
- c. Transportation Medicine. Occu-medix/Natalie Hartenbaum, M.D. (<http://home.att.net/~NataH/>).
- d. The Physicians Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers. American Medical Association and NHYSA. 2003. <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/10791.html>.

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6. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards (136) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be addressed to (202) 273-8459.

7. RESCISSIONS: None. This VHA Directive expires July 31, 2009.

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Attachments

DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 7/30/04
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 7/30/04

ATTACHMENT A

**VA FORM 10-0423, PHYSICAL STANDARDS AS CRITERIA FOR CLEARING
VOLUNTEERS FOR ACCEPTANCE OF DRIVING ASSIGNMENTS**

Below is an embedded copy of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 10-0417, Pre-Screen Application for WRIISC Referral. This form can also be found on the VA Forms web site at: <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms> . This is to be used for local reproduction.



Acrobat Document

ATTACHMENT B

SAMPLE INTERIM LETTER

Dear _____:

Thank you for taking the time to visit Occupational Health for a physical examination under the Volunteer Transportation Service Program. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is dependent on volunteers like you to help veterans get the care they need and may otherwise be unable to obtain. We appreciate the time you are willing to spend having your fitness evaluated to ensure that all veterans are safely transported to and from our facility.

During your examination, we found the following condition(s):

that require(s) follow up. Please provide [fill in specific additional information or test results needed in order to review applicant's request for reconsideration]. Voluntary Services will assist you in scheduling a follow up appointment to further determine your ability to drive.

When we have these results, we will be able to evaluate whether you will be able to drive under the formal guidelines for our drivers. If you are not cleared for a driving assignment, we hope you will consider volunteering for other services. We are grateful for your participation in our Volunteer Program.

Thank you

ATTACHMENT C

**OFFICAL FORM (OF) 345, PHYSICAL FITNESS INQUIRY FOR MOTOR VEHICLE
OPERATORS**



OF345.pdf