



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington DC 20420

IL 11-2005-002

In Reply Refer To: 113

July 22, 2005

OFFICE OF PATIENT CARE SERVICES' INFORMATION LETTER
USE OF GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM (GPS) DEVICES

1. This Information Letter provides information on the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) devices for traumatic brain injury patients.
2. Pursuant to Public Law 107-135 Section 210, dated January 23, 2002, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs was directed to carry out an evaluation and study of the feasibility and desirability of providing a personal emergency response system, a GPS device, to veterans who have service connected disabilities. A report was issued in March 2002 by a multidisciplinary workgroup composed of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinicians and administrative staff. VA concluded that the current existing technology and associated personal GPS-Emergency Response System infrastructure was not in place or proven on a national basis. Therefore, VA did not find it feasible or desirable to furnish such systems with the exception of vehicle-mounted units authorized by special legislation under the Automobile Adaptive Equipment Program (Title 38, United States Code, Chapter 39 and implementing regulations in Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations 17.155-17.159).
3. Public Law 108-447 requires VA to establish a new Prosthetics and Integrative Health Care Initiative to ensure that returning war veterans with loss of limbs and other very severe and lasting injuries have access to the best of both modern medicine and integrative holistic therapies for rehabilitation. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs designated four VA Medical Centers as Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers. The Centers are located at Richmond, VA; Tampa, FL; Minneapolis, MN, and Palo Alto, CA. These comprehensive medical centers provide a full spectrum of specialty and subspecialty services to service members and veterans sustaining multiple traumas, such as: amputation, brain injury, visual and auditory impairment, spinal cord injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health conditions.
4. The Prosthetics and Integrative Health Care Initiative provides an excellent opportunity for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to focus on innovative approaches and extend the scope of rehabilitation services into areas that are consistent with a younger and more active group of veterans. Even with severe impairments, these individuals are motivated to pursue their lifelong ambitions and participate in society at the highest level possible. It is VHA's responsibility to provide the highest levels of care, including new holistic therapies, alternative models of care, therapies that focus on a return to an active lifestyle in the community, provision of new technologies, and management of long-term sequelae such as pain.

July 22, 2005

5. Since GPS devices appear to be a new emerging technology with a variety of uses, such as insuring safe, independent travel for traumatic brain injury patients, disabled veterans may benefit from it. GPS devices serve not only serve as a travel and location guide, but can insure a certain degree of safety. For these reasons, the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service Strategic Healthcare Group (PSAS SHG), VA Central Office, will provide, through VA Form 10-2641, Authorization for Issuance of Special and/or Experimental Appliances, GPS devices to traumatic brain injured veterans including soldiers who are still on active duty but are being treated in VA Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers for severe injury. VA Form 10-2641, prepared by the Prosthetic Representative and submitted through the VISN Prosthetic Representative, needs to include at a minimum:

- a. Diagnosis,
- b. Prognosis,
- c. Level of functionality,
- d. Alternative technologies considered,
- e. Assurance that the veteran has the capacity to operate a GPS device, and

f. The prescription or VA Form 10-2641 signed by a physician specializing in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders, or Neurology.

6. PSAS SHG processes the VA Form 10-2641 and obtains the concurrence of the respective specialty physician in VA Central Office before giving approval to the facility to procure the GPS device.

7. References

a. Automobile Adaptive Equipment Program (Title 38, United States Code, Chapter 39 and implementing regulations in Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations 17.155-17.159).

b. Public Law 108-447, Prosthetics and Integrative Health Care Initiative.

c. Personal Emergency Response Feasibility Report (Report to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives), 2002.

5. Questions may be directed to Frederick Downs, Jr., Chief Consultant, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service Strategic Healthcare Group, at (202) 254-0440.

Madhu Agarwal, M.D., M.P.H.
Chief Patient Care Services Officer

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