

April 9, 2002

SUPERVISOR CERTIFICATION IN THERAPEUTIC AND RECREATIONAL SWIMMING POOLS

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive defines the type and extent of supervisory qualifications necessary to conduct a safe treatment program in Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) therapeutic and recreational swimming pools.

2. BACKGROUND: Since aquatic safety training and retraining courses offered by the more predominant swimming pool certification program in the United States (the American Red Cross) have changed in their respective titles, number of hours needed for certification, and scope, it is necessary to re-define VA qualifications in this particular treatment environment to ensure VHA's Aquatic Safety program.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that every VA therapeutic or recreational swimming pool be under the direct supervision of an individual having current water safety credentials and that during the operation of these pools (whenever patients or employees are in the water) there is the physical presence of a certified instructor.

4. ACTION: The medical facility Director, or designee, is responsible for ensuring:

a. All VA personnel responsible for conducting therapeutic and certain recreational or leisure activities (e.g., swimming instruction, aquatic exercise, employee fitness, small group game activities, etc.) using VA, private, or public swimming pool facilities, have successfully completed (and demonstrated appropriate current credentials) in the American Red Cross' Safety Training for Swimming Coaches course (or its equivalent from some other nationally recognized agency; e.g., Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), American Safety and Health Institute, etc.).

b. All VA Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&RS) therapists and Recreation Therapy personnel serving in a life-guarding capacity, while conducting employee fitness programs or a general recreation swimming program, have the more advanced Lifeguard Training course, or its equivalent.

NOTE: Current certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) as provided by the American Heart Association or other appropriate agency is recommended for all PM&RS and Recreation personnel who are involved in therapeutic or recreational swimming activities.

c. There is always at least one such qualified person, properly attired, in the immediate pool area when the pool is in use by patients. The ratio of such qualified personnel on duty at any one time to patients is dictated by local policy and with consideration of the types of impairments and physical limitations of the persons being served.

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d. Funding for therapists' or other responsible swimming pool supervisors' certification in the "Safety Training for Swim Coach," "Lifeguard Training" or equivalent water safety training courses is the responsibility of the local facility. *NOTE: Additional or more advanced water safety training is preferred: (i.e., Lifeguard Training, Water Safety Instructor's Training, etc.).*

e. Supervision of VA swimming pools, which are used for recreational swimming purposes, meet local ordinance requirements and are in compliance with state laws and/or regulations governing the supervision of such pools. The individual assigned to the supervision of the pool must be trained in the recognition of pool operation problems and corrective actions to be initiated or completed. Immediately prior to the use of the pool, this person must verify pool conditions are safe for use with or without restrictions.

NOTE: Chaplains utilizing the pool for baptismal services are exempted from these requirements. However, it is recommended that local policy provide for a therapist appropriately qualified in water safety to attend, but not participate in the baptismal service unless specific assistance in handling of the person to be baptized is requested by Chaplain Service.

5. REFERENCES: None.

6. RESPONSIBILITY: The Director, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service (117C), is responsible for the contents of this directive.

7. RESCISSIONS: VHA Directive 97-006 is rescinded. This VHA Directive expires on April 30, 2007.

S/ by Dennis H. Smith for
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Under Secretary for Health

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