

May 16, 2008

ACCESS TO URGENTLY NEEDED OUTPATIENT PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive defines expectations for access to urgently needed outpatient prescription medications.

2. BACKGROUND:

a. Urgently needed outpatient medications are medications that, in the clinical judgment of the prescriber, if not taken within 24 hours of determining the need of those medications have the potential to result in serious patient harm.

b. Local restrictions on the use of overnight mail or package delivery service to deliver urgently needed outpatient prescription medications have the potential to cause unnecessary hospital visits, hospitalizations and patient harm.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that at the request of a VA prescriber, VA medical center pharmacy staff will make urgently needed outpatient prescription medications available to patients within 24 hours of notification, using the most appropriate means available. This requirement applies to all points of service including Community Based Outpatient Clinics.

5. ACTION:

a. **Facility Director.** The facility Director, or designee, is responsible for ensuring written policies are established to address the timely delivery of urgently needed outpatient prescription medications.

b. **VA Prescriber.** The VA prescriber must notify the pharmacy when a new prescription or refill is urgently needed due to a change in the patient's clinical condition. *NOTE: If the prescriber determines that medication is needed sooner than 24 hours, the prescriber needs to make arrangements for the patient to receive urgent medical care or instruct the patient to contact the local emergency medical care system.*

c. **Chief of Pharmacy.** The Chief of Pharmacy must contact the patient or the patient's representative to determine the most appropriate means to make the prescription available and must take all necessary steps to make the prescription available. This may include:

- (1) Making the prescription available at a VA pharmacy for pick up.
- (2) Providing the prescription through a non-VA pharmacy under contract to VA.
- (3) Mailing or shipping the medication overnight via commercial or government carrier.

THIS VHA DIRECTIVE WILL EXPIRE MAY 31, 2013

6. REFERENCES: None.

7. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Pharmacy Benefits Management Services office (119) is responsible for the content of this Directive. Questions may be referred to (202) 461-7326.

8. RESCISSIONS: None

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP
Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 5/19/08
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 5/19/08