

**CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THERAPEUTIC AND
RECREATIONAL SWIMMING POOL STAFF**

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes authority and policy for treatment programs in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) therapeutic and recreational swimming pools.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This VHA Directive reflects updated information on aquatic therapy certification and safety training.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** None.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Director, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service (10P4RP), is responsible for the content of this Directive. Questions may be referred to 202-461-7444.
- 5. RESCISSION:** VHA Directive 2007-018, dated May 18, 2007, is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of January 2020.

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CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THERAPEUTIC AND RECREATIONAL SWIMMING POOL STAFF

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive defines the type and extent of qualifications necessary to conduct a safe treatment program in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) therapeutic and recreational swimming pools. **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. 7301(b).

2. BACKGROUND: Aquatic safety training and retraining courses offered by the most predominant swimming pool certification program in the United States (the American Red Cross (ARC)) have changed in their respective titles, number of hours needed for certification, and scope. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine VA qualifications in this particular treatment environment to ensure the safety of 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 VA personnel (hereinafter "personnel") having current water safety credentials and that during the operation of these pools an appropriate number of certified personnel are present as required by this Directive.

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

a. There is always at least one appropriately qualified and certified personnel as outlined in paragraphs 4.a.(1)-(3) below, properly attired, in the immediate pool area when the pool is in use by patients or staff. **NOTE:** *The number of such qualified personnel on duty to patients at any one time is determined with consideration of the types of impairments and physical limitations of the persons being served. A certified lifeguard is recommended if available through local resources, in addition to personnel outlined below.*

(1) 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 pool facilities must successfully complete and maintain current Basic Life Support for the Healthcare Provider certification or its equivalent, as well as credentials and competency as appropriate for the program provided.

(2) Additionally, personnel conducting recreational swimming instruction, employee/patient fitness programming (e.g. group water aerobics or recreational game/sport activities) in the deeper pool depths must have Lifeguard certification or Water Safety Instructor Certification to be able to effectively teach swimming and ensure water safety for the group activity.

(3) All other personnel providing therapeutic aquatic exercise programming must have Basic Life Support for the Healthcare Provider or its equivalent and Basic Water Rescue certification.

(4) Available certifications and education programs are:

(a) ARC Lifeguard Training.

(b) ARC Water Safety Instructor.

(c) Basic Water Rescue.

(d) ARC First Aid and CPR/Automated External Defibrillation (AED) for the Professional Rescuer and Health Care Provider Training courses (or their equivalent from some other nationally recognized agency; e.g., Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), American Safety and Health Institute, etc.). **NOTE:** *It is recommended that personnel involved in one-on-one or small group therapy programs pursue advanced training and continuing education, and/or certification in Aquatic Therapy techniques (e.g. Aquatic Therapy and Rehabilitation Industry Certification (ATRIC), The Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program, Aquatic Exercise Association (AEA) Aquatic Fitness Professional Certification, Adapted Aquatics Instructor, etc.). Funding is recommended for certification of personnel in Lifeguard Training, Water Safety Training, ARC's Basic Life Support for the Healthcare Provider, First Aid and CPR/AED for Professional Rescuers and Health Care Providers Training, or equivalent safety training courses and advanced aquatic therapy training. Training funds, if authorized, are the responsibility of the local facility.*

b. Sanitation and mechanical supervision of VA swimming pools used for therapeutic and recreational swimming purposes meet VHA and local ordinance requirements.

c. Persons designated as swimming pool operator(s) follow all elements outlined in the swimming pool operations and maintenance program developed at the local facility.

d. Persons assigned environmental management responsibilities maintain the pool area, locker rooms, and restrooms in a sanitary manner, in accordance with established guidelines, and policies.

e. Both the swimming pool operator and environmental management staff are trained to recognize issues in pool sanitation and operation problems, and are able to take corrective actions that must be initiated or completed prior to authorized use.

f. Immediately prior to the use of the pool, the personnel verify in writing through maintenance logs developed by the local medical facility that pool conditions are safe for use with or without restrictions based on pH levels, clarity, cleanliness, temperature, presence of rescue devices, etc.

g. External organizations are only allowed access to VHA swimming pools if they provide their own adequate number of certified lifeguards with current certificates of training. These current certificates of training must be made available to the facility Director or designee prior to approval for use of the pool. **NOTE:** *Facilities that have child care programs, day care programs requesting to utilize the VA swimming pool, etc. must provide their own certified lifeguards with current certificates of training, which must be provided by the Child Care Program Director to the VA medical facility's Director, or designee, prior to approval for use of the pool.*

h. Chaplains utilizing the pool for baptismal services may be exempted from obtaining lifeguard certification and water safety instructor certifications. However, when there are no chaplains properly certified it is recommended that local policy provide for personnel appropriately certified in CPR and basic water safety to attend, but not participate in the

baptismal service, unless specific assistance in handling of the person to be baptized is clinically required.

5. REFERENCES:

- a. American Red Cross (ARC) website at: <http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/Learn-About-Our-Programs>.
- b. American Safety & Health Institute website at: <http://www.hsi.com/takeaclass/>.
- c. Aquatic Exercise Association website at: <http://www.aeawave.com/>.
- d. Aquatic Therapy & Rehab Institute website at: www.atri.org.
- e. Arthritis Foundation website at: <http://www.arthritis.org/>.
- f. Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) website at: <http://www.ymca.net/>.