Department of Veterans Affairs **VHA DIRECTIVE 99-021**
Veterans Health Administration
Washington, DC 20420 **May 11, 1999**

NATIONWIDE TELECONFERENCING SYSTEM (VANTS) POLICY

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive establishes policy, procedures and responsibilities regarding utilization of the Veterans Affairs Nationwide Teleconferencing System's (VANTS) audio and video teleconferencing bridges.
***NOTE**: Use of the VANTS system will be for official use only.*

2. POLICY: It is Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy that VANTS serves as the primary teleconferencing system for its employees. Only VA employees are authorized to make reservations and/or serve as the primary moderator for conference calls.

3. ACTION

a. **VANTS**. It is the responsibility of VANTS to provide a customer-oriented service with clear audio or video quality conferences, prompt conference starting times, operator-assisted trouble-shooting and flexible scheduling times.

(1) **Audio.** The audio system is to be used for national conference calls, or other scheduled calls between multiple facilities (e.g., more than five sites).

(2) **Video.** The video system is to be used for scheduled calls between multiple facilities (e.g., three or more sites), or when connectivity is necessary between incompatible networks.
***NOTE:** This mode of conferencing is a two-way service utilizing specialized equipment connected to an Integrated Service Digital Network (ISDN).*

b. **VANTS Facility Coordinator.** A VANTS Facility Coordinator is designated to handle audio teleconferencing issues. It is the responsibility of each VANTS Facility Coordinator to assist persons at their facilities with general questions regarding conference equipment, locations having VANTS equipment, and the distribution of the VANTS monthly nationwide and selected station conference call schedule. Facilities are requested to report all changes, to include the name of their Coordinator, telephone number, facility name and/or the number used for the VHA conference call as they occur. The changes can be faxed to the VANTS Reservation Desk at (304) 262-7616.

c. **Customers**. It is the responsibility of the requesting office to follow the procedures as outlined in Attachment A of this directive.

4. REFERENCES: None.

5. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Director, Department of Veterans Affairs Nationwide Teleconferencing System (194D), Office of the Chief Information Officer, is responsible for the contents of this directive.

THIS VHA DIRECTIVE EXPIRES MAY 31, 2004

6. RECISSION DATE: This VHA Directive expires May 31, 2004.

S/ by Thomas Garthwaite, M.D. for
Kenneth W. Kizer, M.D., M.P.H.
Under Secretary for Health

Attachment

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ATTACHMENT A

PROCEDURES FOR USING THE VA NATIONWIDE TELECONFERENCING SYSTEM (VANTS)

1. Scheduling

a. **Reference Numbers.** Teleconferences will be scheduled by dialing the following telephone numbers, which are designated for the Veterans Affairs Nationwide Teleconferencing System's (VANTS) reservations. ***NOTE:*** *These telephone numbers may also be used for general inquires. Additional VANTS information can be found at: http://vaww.va.gov/vants/*

(1) Audio. The number to schedule an audio teleconference is (304) 262-7600.

(2) Video. The number to schedule a videoconference is (304) 262-7620.

b. **Required Information.** When scheduling any conference call, basic and necessary information will need to be provided in order to determine bridge availability. This includes conference name, date and time requested, number of participants and requester's name and telephone number. If scheduling a videoconference, the conference bandwidth (e.g., 112/128K, 336/384K, 448/512K, 672/768K) and a list of sites to be connected, need to be provided.

c. **Additional Information.** When scheduling a new conference call, additional information is required from the requester for tracking purposes. This includes contact's name, facility name, three-digit station number, routing symbol, facility mailing address, name of moderator, and the room and commercial telephone number from where the moderator will be calling. Also requested, if different from the contact, are the moderator's facility name, three-digit station number and routing symbol. The requester will be asked to name the conference, to categorize the conference participants, and provide a purpose for the conference.

d. **Time.** All conference calls are scheduled in Eastern Standard Time (EST) between October and March and Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) between April and September. Normal hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Eastern Daylight Time. ***NOTE:*** *VANTS is prepared to operate conference calls 24 hours-per-day, 7 days-per-week in support of national emergencies.*

e. **Canceling or Re-scheduling an Existing Conference.** It is recommended, whenever possible, that the requesting office notify VANTS at least 24 hours in advance when a conference call is to be cancelled. If a conference needs to be re-scheduled, advise VANTS as soon as possible.

2. Conference Participation

a. **Audio.** Customer preference, bridge availability and number of lines requested are the primary factors in determining conference type and how participants will be connected to their conference. Conference call types are as follows:

(1) Meet-Me. The participants of a Meet-Me call dial a pre-determined toll-free number to reach their conference. There are two types of Meet-Me conferences: Standard and Controlled.

(a) The Standard Meet-Me conference type requires participants to dial the pre-determined toll-free number 5 to 8 minutes prior to the scheduled conference. After connection, the caller will first hear a recording and, depending upon conference size, the VANTS Operator may ask the exact name of the conference the caller wants to join. ***NOTE:*** *Because VANTS conducts numerous conferences simultaneously, it is imperative to know the name of the conference.* There is no limit to the number of lines that may be scheduled for a Standard Meet-Me conference type.

(b) The Controlled Meet-Me conference is used when only specified participants will be allowed to join. A participant in a Controlled Meet-Me must know the name of the conference, must give his or her name and/or facility name, and/or enter a conference access code. A list of participants allowed to join this type of conference is provided to VANTS by the requester. There is a 20-line limit for a Controlled Meet-Me conference type.

(2) Blast-Dial. Participants for a Blast-Dial conference call are dialed simultaneously by the VANTS Operator. The requester will provide the VANTS operator with a list of facilities and/or participant names, and commercial telephone numbers. Participants for this type of conference are dialed five to ten minutes prior to the scheduled starting time. Conferees hear a repeating message instructing them to press 1 on their telephone keypad to join the conference. The VANTS operator accesses the conferees that are unable to connect to the conference. The requester is also provided a toll-free number that participants can dial directly to join the conference if they are unable to connect through the Blast-Dial. Blast-Dial is reserved for certain regularly scheduled conference calls and is subject to the Director, VANTS', approval.

(3) Unattended. Participants for an unattended conference are provided a toll-free number and an access code which will automatically connect the participants to their conference call. To help ensure the success of an unattended conference call, an instructional page is available at the VANTS web site address or the page can be faxed to the requester for distribution. There is a 20-line limit for this type of conference call.

b. **Video.** Date, time, and total number of ports requested are the primary factors in determining conference type and how participants will be connected to their conference. The VANTS videoconferencing system has been established to be used as a dial-in (Meet-Me) system. "Audio-only" lines are available upon request for sites without video equipment or for participants who may be on travel status.

3. Equipment

a. **Audio.** It is recommended when dialing into an audio teleconference that all participants utilize teleconferencing equipment or speakerphones with mute capabilities.

b. **Video**

(1) Standardization. It is necessary for all participants to use standard video equipment when dialing into a videoconference. VANTS policy recommends facilities only acquire videoconferencing equipment that conforms to the following International Telecommunications Union's (ITU) standards:

(a) H.320 standards for videoconferencing.

(b) T.120 standards for data sharing and collaboration.

(2) Interoperability. Interoperability within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) depend on the adoption of international interoperability standards. All major videoconferencing vendors are implementing these standards in today's videoconferencing equipment and software applications.

(3) Network. VANTS policy recommends that no video equipment be acquired without first considering the network and its required interfaces. It is recommended that all videoconferences within the VHA utilize direct FTS2000 network connectivity when available for lowest usage cost. When this is not possible due to off-net connectivity requirements, each facility should obtain service from the Local Exchange Carrier (LEC) for the Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), Basic Rate Interface (BRI) or Primary Rate Interface (PRI). After the LEC assigns telephone numbers to the new circuits, requests can be sent to Communications Services Office (194D), at telephone number (301) 427-3950, asking that the LEC numbers be Primary Interchange Carrier (PIC) to the FTS2000 network. This will assure that long distance videoconferences are carried over the FTS2000 network, thus providing the most cost-effective transport method.