



**Administrative Closure**  
**Physician Assistant Credentialing**  
**Grand Junction VA Medical Center (554/00)**  
**Grand Junction, CO**  
**MCI #2014-01740-HI-0437**

In February 2014, the VA Office of Inspector General Office of Healthcare Inspections received allegations from a confidential complainant that an employee at the Grand Junction VA Medical Center (facility) is practicing as a Physician Assistant (PA) and taking regular surgical call when in fact this individual is an Orthopaedic Physician Assistant (OPA).

According to the American Association of Physician Assistants, PAs and OPAs have significantly different training and responsibilities. A PA may diagnose and treat patients, order tests, and prescribe medications. An OPA has a limited scope of practice within orthopedics, working directly with the surgeon in a supportive role.<sup>1</sup>

In 1969, the American Medical Association (AMA), upon recommendation from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), adopted minimum educational standards for OPAs. Eight educational OPA programs were credentialed by the AMA in 1973. However, in 1974, the AAOS withdrew its sponsorship from the accreditation process. The AMA announced a moratorium on any additional OPA programs, and accreditation was discontinued following the graduation of the class that matriculated in 1974.

### **Inspection Results**

We notified Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 19 of the allegations regarding a facility employee practicing as a PA when, in fact, the individual was an OPA. The facility removed the employee from the call schedule and reduced his privileges while they reviewed the allegations.

As part of our review, we interviewed the confidential complainant, VHA Director of Physician Assistant Services, VHA Director of Credentialing and Privileging, and VISN 19 Quality Management Officer and Chief Medical Officer. We also corresponded with the VISN 19 Human Resources (HR) Officer and the VHA Workforce Management and Consulting HR Consultant. We reviewed the employee's credentialing and privileging file, VHA policies, and relevant medical literature.

In 1991, the employee was erroneously appointed as a PA at the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System, Sioux Falls, SD. The employee transferred to the Grand Junction facility in 2010. At the time of transfer, the facility's credentialing coordinator validated the employee's credentials and received an email from the VHA Director of Physician Assistant Services stating the employee was "grandfathered" into the position except for medication prescribing.

---


<sup>1</sup> PROFESSIONAL ISSUES: PAs and OPAs: The Distinctions. American Academy of Physician Assistants, February 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.aapa.org/workarea/downloadasset.aspx?id=573>. Accessed February 2014.

The employee functioned as a PA from 1991 until 2014 with [REDACTED]. During our inspection, we reviewed the employee's Ongoing Professional Practice Evaluations.<sup>2</sup> The employee scored a 4 on a scale of 1–5, with 5 indicating exceeds community standards or best practice.

VISN 19 investigated the employee's status with the facility's HR officer and the Acting Facility Director. They consulted VHA Credentialing and Privileging Director, VHA Director of Physician Assistant Services, and the VA Central Office, Supervisor HR Specialist, Title 38. In addition, the VISN consulted with legal counsel.

Since VISN 19 determined the employee was erroneously appointed as a PA and did not possess the required education as a PA, he was offered alternate job positions. An OPA is not an occupation covered by Title 38 in VA. The employee opted to retire effective August 19, 2014.

Based on our review, I am administratively closing this case.

 - 4/30/14  
JOHN D. DAIGH, JR., M.D.  
Assistant Inspector General for  
Healthcare Inspections

---

<sup>2</sup> OPPE is the ongoing monitoring of privileged practitioners and providers to confirm the quality of care delivered and ensure patient safety.