

**ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION
BY THE VA OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
IN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS
REGARDING PATIENT WAIT TIMES**



**VA Medical Center in Gainesville, Florida
February 26, 2016**

1. Summary of Why the Investigation Was Initiated

A former Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee alleged that Medical Administration Services (MAS) clerks at the VA outpatient clinic (OPC) in Tallahassee, FL, were purposely manipulating scheduling data in the VA scheduling system, known as the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA). Due to Tallahassee VA OPC falling administratively under the Malcolm Randall VA Medical Center (VAMC), VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) agents decided to interview MAS clerks at the Malcolm Randall VAMC Gainesville to determine if similar issues allegedly occurring in Tallahassee were present there.

During the course of the investigation, a current VAMC employee reported that a paper wait list file existed in the Malcolm Randall VAMC pharmacy in Gainesville, FL.

2. Description of the Conduct of the Investigation

- **Interviews Conducted:** In addition to the complainants, we interviewed the Primary Care supervisor, an Ambulatory Care supervisor, MAS clerks, and a data analyst.
- **Records Reviewed:** VA OIG employees reviewed job competencies, training materials, and a report addressing a paper waitlist being maintained by the pharmacy.

3. Summary of the Evidence Obtained From the Investigation

Issue 1: Manipulation of Records

Interviews Conducted

- The complainant, a former employee, stated that he had information that MAS clerks at OPC Tallahassee were purposely manipulating the patient "desired date" for an appointment in VistA. He stated that when the actual and desired dates were greater than 14 days apart, the MAS clerks were instructed to enter the actual date as the desired date.
- The Primary Care supervisor stated that he understood the requirements of scheduling patients and the related time frames. He said that there was no incentive or encouragement to keep wait times low or keep appointment dates within the 14-day window. He added that the facility emphasized entering accurate dates. He had not been instructed to change any scheduling practices in the recent past and the current procedures have been constant for the past 2 to 3 years. He further stated that he had not been instructed to alter, change, delete, or destroy any paper or electronic records,

nor had he seen or heard anything that would be indicative of improper procedures being conducted at the VAMC or elsewhere.

- An Ambulatory Care supervisor acknowledged having read the VA policy on scheduling patient appointments and was familiar with its contents. He said that there was no incentive or encouragement to keep wait times low or keep appointment dates within the 14-day window. He was familiar with the term desired date, and said that the desired date is the one requested by the patient. However, if the date requested was not available, and the patient agreed to the first available date, the date agreed to by the patient would be entered as the desired date. He believed that this is in accordance with VA directives and policy, and was not done to improve the facility numbers. He stated that he had not been instructed to alter, change, delete, or destroy any paper or electronic records, nor had any scheduling practices changed recently. He also said that he had not seen or heard anything that would be indicative of improper procedures being conducted at the medical center or elsewhere. He added that the policy is not clear on the issue of consults.
- MAS Clerk 1, who worked for a specialty service, stated that most appointments were scheduled at the request of the provider and discussed with the patient at checkout. Clerks do not ask patients when they would like to be seen due to the embarrassment that it would cause if the requested date were not available. Clerks offer a few choices to the patient, and list the desired date as the one chosen by the patient. In addition, some appointments are made over the phone. If the patient cannot be reached, he sets a date and time, and leaves a message for the patient to call back if that date does not work. He had read and was familiar with VA policy on scheduling patient appointments. When asked if there was any incentive or encouragement to keep wait times low or keep appointment dates within the 14-day window, he said no. He had not been instructed to change any scheduling practices in the recent past. He also stated that he had not been instructed to alter, change, delete, or destroy any paper or electronic records. He also had not seen or heard anything that would be indicative of improper procedures being conducted at the VAMC or elsewhere.
- MAS Clerk 2, who worked in one of the clinics, stated that the date requested by the patient is the date used for desired date. She had read and was familiar with the VA policy on scheduling patient appointments and had received training related to it. She said that there was no incentive or encouragement to keep wait times low or keep appointment dates within the 14-day window. She also denied having been instructed to change any scheduling practices in the recent past. She stated that she had not been instructed to alter, change, delete, or destroy any paper or electronic records. She had not seen or heard anything that would be indicative of improper procedures being conducted at the VAMC or elsewhere.
- MAS Clerk 3, who worked in Primary Care, stated that the date requested by the patient was the date used for desired date. She had read and was familiar with the VA policy on scheduling patient appointments and had received training related to it. When asked if there was any incentive or encouragement to keep wait times low or keep appointment dates within the 14-day window, she stated “no.” She had not been instructed to change any scheduling practices in the recent past. She also stated that she had not been

instructed to alter, change, delete, or destroy any paper or electronic records. She had not seen or heard anything that would be indicative of improper procedures being conducted at the VAMC or elsewhere.

- MAS Clerk 4 stated that the date requested by the patient was the date used for desired date. She stated that she had read and was familiar with VA policy on scheduling patient appointments and had received training related to it. She denied that there was any incentive or encouragement to keep wait times low or keep appointment dates within the 14-day window. She had not been instructed to change any scheduling practices in the recent past and she had not been instructed to alter, change, delete, or destroy any paper or electronic records. She had not seen or heard anything that would be indicative of improper procedures being conducted at the VAMC or elsewhere.
- MAS Clerk 5, who worked in Primary Care, stated that the date requested by the patient is the date used for desired date. She had read and was familiar with the VA policy on scheduling patient appointments and had received training related to it. When asked if there was any incentive or encouragement to keep wait times low or keep appointment dates within the 14-day window, she stated “no.” She had not been instructed to change any scheduling practices in the recent past and had not been instructed to alter, change, delete, or destroy any paper or electronic records. She had not seen or heard anything that would be indicative of improper procedures being conducted at the VAMC or elsewhere.
- A data analyst stated that the date requested by the patient was the date used for desired date. He had read and was familiar with the VA policy on scheduling patient appointments and had received training related to it. He denied that there was any incentive or encouragement to keep wait times low or keep appointment dates within the 14-day window. He had not been instructed to change any scheduling practices in the recent past nor instructed to alter, change, delete, or destroy any paper or electronic records. He had not seen or heard anything that would be indicative of improper procedures being conducted at the VAMC or elsewhere.

Records Reviewed

The Job Specific Competencies were reviewed for each of the individuals who were interviewed. These competencies were signed by the interviewed employees during the past year. Competencies included the following statements: “Determines the proper desired date by asking the patient, ‘What is the first day you would like to be seen?’ and ‘Follows other rules established in VHA [Veterans Health Administration] Directive 2010-027.’”

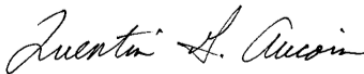
Issue 2: Paper Waiting Records

During the course of the investigation, the Pharmacy manager notified the chief of Pharmacy at the Malcolm Randall VAMC Gainesville that she was maintaining paper records of patients waiting for appointments. This was ultimately reported through the chain of command to the VA OIG. The report stated that a specialty clinic maintained a file of 23 patients who could not be immediately scheduled in VistA due to the time between appointments. The clinic schedulers were unaware of the recall module in VistA, so they were not using it. The schedulers were provided training on and access to the recall module in VistA and the 23 patients were immediately entered into the recall module in VistA.

4. Conclusion

Investigation into the scheduling practices of MAS clerks identified two employees who were not determining the patient's desired date correctly under VHA directives or policies, specifically VHA Directive 2010-027. In addition, a pharmacy employee was maintaining a paper file system for 23 patients waiting to be scheduled for treatment instead of entering the patients into the VistA system recall list, as required. This issue was addressed by VAMC staff.

The OIG referred the Report of Investigation to VA's Office of Accountability Review on September 8, 2014.



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For more information about this summary, please contact the
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