

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



**VA Medical Center at Audie L. Murphy VA Hospital,
in San Antonio, Texas
March 8, 2016**

1. Summary of Why the Investigation Was Initiated

On June 9, 2014, a confidential complainant (CC) employed by the Audie L. Murphy VA Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, contacted the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline and alleged that clerks and technicians assigned to the sleep clinic were made to schedule appointments incorrectly in order to make the “desired date report” reflect a shorter wait time.

2. Description of the Conduct of the Investigation

- **Interviews Conducted:** OIG investigators interviewed eight employees in connection with the allegations. Employees interviewed included: CC, supervisory technician, former supervisory analyst (currently employed at a different VA facility), administrative supervisor, technician, medical support assistant, acting chief of Sleep Medicine, and the STVHCS Director.
- **Records Reviewed:** The OIG investigators reviewed performance plans and appraisals. Investigators also reviewed applicable scheduling data. However, the Sleep Medicine section was not listed on the South Texas Veterans Health Care System (STVHCS) Medicine Clinic Access Dashboard; therefore, no further information could be gleaned from reviewing those documents.

3. Summary of the Evidence Obtained From the Investigation

Interviews Conducted

- CC reported an employee assigned to the Sleep Medicine section’s CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) Clinic was instructed by a supervisory technician to schedule patient appointments by using the “next available date” as the patient’s “desired date.” During that time, staff received reports that listed appointments for which the appointment date was too far out from the patient’s desired date. The supervisory technician instructed the employee to cancel and reschedule those appointments so that the patients’ desired dates could be changed to match their appointment dates. This did not cause the appointment dates to change; it merely caused the appointments to disappear from the desired date report.
- The supervisory technician denied setting appointments with a desired date other than what the patient asked for. However, when asked about her handling of scheduling error spreadsheets, she stated that she did cancel and reschedule the appointments in question with a different desired date than what the patients had originally selected. She stated

that the patients were not contacted about this and that they never found out since their appointment dates did not change. The employee further stated that she was never instructed by anyone in management to change the desired dates; she simply believed that it was what they wanted as it was the simplest way to resolve the scheduling errors. The employee also stated that she may have instructed other employees to resolve scheduling errors in the same manner.

- We interviewed a former supervisory analyst who stated that when she was employed at the Audie L. Murphy VA Hospital, she forwarded scheduling error spreadsheets to various clinics. These spreadsheets were generated by the Medical Administration Service (MAS) and listed errors that needed to be corrected within 24 hours. She denied instructing anyone to cancel and reschedule the appointments on the spreadsheets or to change the patients' desired dates. In addition, she denied instructing anyone to "zero out" wait times. Lastly, she denied providing any specific guidance to schedulers on how to correct scheduling errors since she believed that the schedulers had already been properly trained.
- An administrative employee reviewed copies of the former supervisory analyst's fiscal years (FYs) 2011, 2012, and 2013 performance appraisals. She explained that the former supervisory analyst's performance ratings were never based entirely on any single performance measure; rather, she was rated based upon her ability to effectively communicate and address problems in order to improve system-wide access over a period of time. The administrative employee stated that the former supervisory analyst would not have benefited in any way by instructing clerks to change desired dates or zero out wait times. Moreover, the administrative employee stated that she herself would not benefit in any way from the improper scheduling practices because her own performance appraisals were not based on her ability to meet any single performance measure. The administrative employee stated that she could not think of anyone in management who would directly benefit from the improper practices and she suggested that if these practices were taking place, it was likely due to the fact that the clerks in question had not been properly trained.
- A technician stated that up until last year, she scheduled patients by using the next available appointment date as the patient's desired date. She did this by finding the next available date in the appointment system, and if the patient agreed to the appointment, she would then go out of the system and go back in, this time using the agreed-upon appointment date as the patient's desired date.
- A scheduling staff member indicated that she has been continuously assigned to Sleep Medicine since 2014. She stated that she was initially trained to schedule by using the next available appointment date as the patient's desired date, which resulted in the computer showing zero-day wait times. However, about 3 months ago, there was a meeting at which she was instructed to begin using the date that the patient gives as the desired date, regardless of appointment availability. She subsequently forwarded three examples of emails that she had received, which instructed her to reschedule patient appointments; however, none of these examples pertained to manipulation of patient wait times. All three examples were cases in which the employee was asked to contact

patients, and to schedule them to come in sooner than their original appointment dates.

- The acting chief of Sleep Medicine stated that he never instructed anyone to zero out wait times, nor was he aware that this was going on. He did not believe that he personally benefited in any way from schedulers zeroing out wait times, and he stated that he did not know of anyone who personally benefited from this scheduling practice.
- The STVHCS Director denied instructing anyone to manipulate patient appointment data and stated that she has never told anyone that use of the Electronic Wait List (EWL) was not permitted. The director indicated that she has never been aware of any secret or “off-the-books” patient wait lists, nor was she aware of any instances in which patient appointments were canceled in order to report better patient access.

Records Reviewed

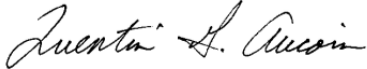
- OIG investigators reviewed copies of the former supervisory analyst’s performance plans, performance appraisals, and awards for FYs 2011, 2012 and 2013. The review did not disclose any instance in which the employee was given an award or bonus specifically tied to patient wait times measures.
- OIG investigators reviewed copies of the supervisory technician’s performance plans, performance appraisals, and awards for FYs 2011, 2012, and 2013. The review did not disclose any instance in which the employee was given an award or bonus specifically tied to patient wait times measures.
- OIG investigators reviewed copies of the former chief of Sleep Medicine’s performance plans and performance appraisals for FYs 2010 and 2011. The review did not reflect anything of evidentiary value.
- OIG investigators reviewed copies of the acting chief of Sleep Medicine’s performance plans and performance appraisals for FYs 2012 and 2013. The review did not disclose any instance in which the employee was given an award or bonus specifically tied to patient wait times measures.
- A review of scheduling data obtained by the VA OIG Investigative Data Systems and Analysis Division (51D) revealed that during the years 2011–2013, nearly all sleep medicine appointments were scheduled to show zero-day wait times by making the desired date match the appointment date. This was done pervasively in almost all cases by all schedulers.

4. Conclusion

The investigation substantiated that from 2011 through 2013, schedulers in the Sleep Medicine section of the Audie L. Murphy VA Hospital in San Antonio, TX, zeroed out patient wait times by basing the patients’ desired dates on clinic availability. Several employees stated that they had been trained to schedule patients by using the next available appointment date as the patient’s desired date. In addition, the supervisory technician

admitted that she resolved scheduling errors by canceling and rescheduling the appointments in question with a different desired date than what the patients had originally selected. The supervisory technician also admitted that she may have instructed other employees to resolve scheduling errors in this manner.

The OIG referred the Report of Investigation to VA's Office of Accountability Review on April 17, 2015.



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For more information about this summary, please contact the
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