

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



**VA Medical Center in Louisville, Kentucky  
March 25, 2016**

**1. Summary of Why the Investigation Was Initiated**

This investigation was initiated by allegations sent to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Office of Investigations regarding manipulation of wait times and scheduling data at the VA Medical Center (VAMC), Louisville, KY. Specifically, a supervisory medical support assistant (MSA Supervisor) allegedly instructed other MSAs in the Outpatient Surgery Clinic to use a different “desired date” in order to show a reduction in wait times and avoid scrutiny on the facility’s AEG\* Reports.

**2. Description of the Conduct of the Investigation**

- **Interviews Conducted:** VA OIG conducted 12 interviews.
- **Records Reviewed:** VA OIG reviewed AEG Reports and VA employee emails.

**3. Summary of the Evidence Obtained From the Investigation**

**Interviews Conducted**

- MSA1 told VA OIG staff that an MSA supervisor was conducting a monthly audit for the Business Office and called MSA1 into his office to question him about his use of certain desired dates and, specifically, why MSA1 was using the desired date as the date the provider put in the return to clinic (RTC) note. The MSA Supervisor told him that he should be using the desired date provided by the patient. MSA1 told the MSA Supervisor that he was trained by a training specialist to use the provider’s desired date. MSA1 stated that the MSA Supervisor asked MSA2 about desired dates, as well, and MSA2 told the MSA Supervisor that she had also been using the providers’ RTC date as the desired date. MSA1 said that the MSA Supervisor never told him not to use the provider’s desired date and never instructed him to change the desired date to make the wait time appear less than what it should be. He added that this was the only conversation he had with the MSA Supervisor about desired dates and that it lasted less than 5 minutes.

A training specialist stated that prior to this incident MSAs who schedule for the Outpatient Surgery Clinic told her that an MSA supervisor was telling them to use different desired dates when scheduling appointments. She could not provide names of

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\* The AEG Report lists appointments with desired dates, creation dates, and has a comments section. The report is used to review the “return to clinic” or consult dates to assist in ensuring accuracy in scheduling and is sent out as a training tool to assist schedulers, as well as point out potential errors. The acronym “AEG” comprises the initials of the individual who first developed the template for this report and has no specific meaning.

specific employees who approached her and asked for clarification. The training specialist said MSA1 and an MSA supervisor were discussing a scenario in which a patient and provider agreed the desired date should be November 6, 2014. There was no availability in the clinic until January 20, 2015. MSA1 scheduled the appointment for January 20, 2015, and recorded the desired date as November 6, 2014. She said MSA1 told her that his MSA supervisor told him to change the desired date to January 20, 2015. She informed MSA1 he had scheduled the appointment correctly and used the appropriate desired date. MSA1 was confused because he reported to the MSA Supervisor and he was receiving conflicting information. MSA1 told her that MSA2 was present during part of the conversation with the MSA Supervisor. The training specialist later discussed with a manager in the Business Office what she had been described by MSA1 and that the manager advised her to have MSAs 1 and 2 document the situation in writing. She said that MSA2 provided a written statement. MSA1 refused at first because he did not want to get anyone in trouble, but later signed a statement that the training specialist wrote for him after reviewing it five times.

- MSA2 said the topic of discussion between MSA1 and the MSA Supervisor was about a desired date when the provider put a date range in the RTC note. MSA2 stated the provider wanted the patient to return in 4–6 weeks. MSA2 said she and MSA1 were taught that the desired date was the 4-week date; the MSA Supervisor said the desired date was any time within the 4–6 week range. When the patient chooses a date inside that 4–6 week range, that date becomes the desired date regardless of when the appointment is made.

MSA2 said that MSA1 was upset because he felt he was getting conflicting information since the Business Office was not on the same page as a whole. She said that MSA1 told the MSA Supervisor that he did not want a bad evaluation because he wished to advance at VAMC Louisville and wanted a spotless record. The MSA Supervisor told MSA 1, “I’m the one writing your evaluation, not (training specialist).” MSA2 said that the entire conversation was light-hearted and conducted in a somewhat joking tone, and clarified that she felt that the MSA Supervisor’s comment about being the one to write MSA1’s evaluation was said in a manner to reassure MSA1 and to alleviate his concerns.

Regarding the statement that she wrote for a training specialist, MSA2 stated that she was hesitant to do so because she felt her statement would be used in an inappropriate way, and that the training specialist attempted to make the conversation appear to be hostile, and that in MSA2’s own opinion, it was not. MSA2 said that the training specialist had written a statement for MSA1 to sign regarding his conversation with the MSA Supervisor. MSA2 stated that MSA1 refused to sign that statement unless the training specialist removed certain statements, and that MSA1 felt that the training specialist had a vendetta against the MSA Supervisor. MSA2 said that MSA1 told her that he was pressured into signing the statement, because the training specialist told him that if he did not, and he was later found to have been using incorrect desired dates, it would be his own job on the line, and not the MSA Supervisor’s.

MSA2 said that the MSA Supervisor never put out instructions about using different desired dates when scheduling appointments to avoid showing up on the AEG Report, a

report that lists all appointments an MSA made when the appointments were scheduled more than 30 days past the desired date. According to MSA2, the MSA Supervisor never advised or instructed MSAs to use the appointment date, not the actual desired date, to avoid the AEG Report.

- MSA3 said an MSA supervisor made several changes regarding scheduling once he became the supervisor. For example, he told MSAs not to use date ranges when scheduling appointments. If a provider put in the RTC note for the patient to be seen again in 2–3 weeks, MSA3 said they were to contact the clinic and get a specific date before scheduling the appointment. MSA3 said the MSA Supervisor also sent an email to the MSAs advising them that if appointments were not scheduled according to his wishes, corrective action would be taken. MSA3 provided copies of emails for review.
- MSA4 said that if the MSA Supervisor performed a scheduling audit and found something that was incorrect, he would discuss it with her. One change she recalled the MSA Supervisor instructing MSAs to make was in scheduling appointments related to the format of the note entered into the comments section of the system.
- MSA5 said that the MSA Supervisor never told him to change a desired date or make the desired date the same as the appointment date. MSA5 said he was not sure if the MSA Supervisor ever said anything to him about errors on a monthly scheduling audit likely to affect his evaluation.
- MSA6 said that he did not notice any changes in the use of desired dates when the MSA Supervisor took over as supervisor, and that he did not recall the MSA Supervisor telling him to use the appointment date instead of the RTC date as the desired date. He added that the MSA Supervisor never discussed desired dates with him during an audit. MSA6 also stated that the MSA Supervisor never told him to change the way he scheduled appointments, nor did he ever tell MSA6 to schedule appointments a certain way or it would affect his evaluation.
- A Business Office manager stated that a training specialist told her about the allegation when she came to see her about confusion regarding desired dates. The training specialist said the MSA Supervisor told MSAs 1 and 2 that the training specialist had given them wrong instructions about desired dates. The Business Office manager stated that she did not discuss the issue with the MSA Supervisor.
- The MSA Supervisor said that he thought he got along well with the training specialist prior to this incident, until an unrelated disagreement between the two occurred earlier in the same week as this situation (see the conversation between him and MSAs 1 and 2 regarding desired dates). The MSA Supervisor stated that he believed that, ultimately, he and the training specialist were giving MSA1 the same information, but were simply explaining it differently. The MSA Supervisor said that he and the training specialist even discussed the matter after the aforementioned conversation with MSAs 1 and 2 regarding desired dates, and that they agreed that they might have confused MSA1 on what was being explained. The MSA Supervisor stated that he left the training specialist's office unaware that she still had concerns. He stated that he never instructed

any MSA to change the desired dates to reduce wait times on appointments. In addition, he said he had never intimidated or bullied any employee with their annual evaluation. He also said he had always told employees, “Don’t listen to the person to your left or right, they don’t write your evaluations. There are a lot of bad habits. Need to do things according to policy.”

- VAMC Louisville Senior Leader 1 told VA OIG staff that the training specialist had been conducting instruction and refresher training for all MSAs. This training was to assist in implementing standardization across all VAMC Louisville Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) and departments, as well as provide clarification of desired dates for all MSAs.
- VAMC Louisville Senior Leader 2 stated that when this allegation surfaced, she was unaware of any wrongdoing by any employee working as a scheduler. She also stated that in her role as a senior leader, she visited all the facilities and CBOCs, and no employees expressed concerns about scheduling practices. She said she was surprised to learn of the allegation involving the MSA Supervisor.
- Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 9 Senior Leader stated that he had not been made aware of the allegation against the MSA Supervisor. He added that when the VAMC Phoenix\* allegations were brought to the attention of VA, VISN 9 received instructions from the VA Central Office to have all VAMC directors visit all facilities and CBOCs to meet with schedulers to discuss these issues. He stated that no employees reported being instructed to change desired dates or manipulate wait times, and that he did meet with employees at VAMC Louisville.

### **Records Reviewed**

- VAMC Louisville AEG Reports covering the period from September 2014 through January 2015 were reviewed. The MSA Supervisor was the supervisor of a specific clinic for the first 2 months of that period. Although the number of patients appearing on the reports as having been scheduled outside the 30-day requirement was lower during those 2 months than afterward, employees interviewed stated that the MSA Supervisor never instructed them to use the appointment date as the desired date in order to reduce the wait list times on the AEG Report.
- Review of emails provided by MSA3 found that the MSA Supervisor discussed the format of comments in the system and told MSAs not to schedule appointments when the provider used a date range (4–6 weeks, for example). In one email, the MSA Supervisor wrote, “I do not want our percentage ratings to drop and I do not like giving bad evaluations.” This statement was referencing comments in the system not being entered in the correct format. MSA3 did not have any emails that instructed MSAs to use a desired date other than the date in the RTC note.

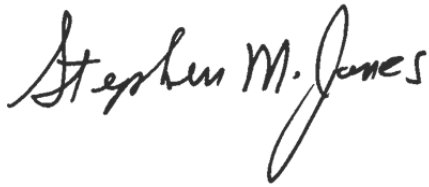
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\* Any reference to Phoenix in this summary refers to wait time allegations that surfaced at VAMC Phoenix in early 2014.

#### 4. Conclusion

The investigation found that with regard to the desired date determination, MSAs in the clinic were scheduling patient appointments correctly, in accordance with VA directives or policies, specifically Veterans Health Administration Directive 2010-027. Furthermore, all MSA employees reported that the MSA Supervisor never instructed them to use a date other than the correct desired date when scheduling appointments.

The OIG referred the Report of Investigation to VA's Office of Accountability Review on June 23, 2015.



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For more information about this summary, please contact the  
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