

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



**Dental Clinic, VA Medical Center in Denver, Colorado
March 17, 2016**

1. Summary of Why the Investigation Was Initiated

The investigation was initiated based upon an anonymous complaint received through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline alleging that a manager in the VA Medical Center (VAMC) Denver Dental Clinic instructed an employee to destroy/dispose of all information and charts related to patients on the waiting list.

2. Description of the Conduct of the Investigation

Interviews Conducted: VA OIG interviewed a scheduler for the Dental Clinic, an administrative employee for the Dental Clinic, a dental assistant, and a manager in the Dental Clinic.

3. Summary of the Evidence Obtained From the Investigation

Interviews Conducted

- A scheduler for the Dental Clinic stated she had no concerns about the clinic or how it was being run. She stated the medical support assistant (MSA) is responsible for scheduling new patients, while the dental hygienists are responsible for scheduling routine cleanings, and the individual dental assistants are responsible for scheduling patients for their assigned dentist. She stated they used the electronic waiting list (EWL); however, it had only been in use for a short unspecified time period when the scheduler was interviewed. When new patients come in, a chart is created for them and they are then input into the EWL. Once on that list, the chief of Dental Service reviews the list and assigns patients to specific dentists. The hard copy chart goes back to an MSA, who is then responsible for setting an appointment for the veteran and removing the veteran's name from the EWL. She opined it took about 6–9 weeks from initial contact with new patients until they are finally seen for an appointment. Prior to the EWL being used, they just used the charts and ensured they were bundled by month. They did not use any other type of waiting list, electronic or paper. She had no knowledge of anyone being asked to destroy any wait lists or patient files and heard nothing resembling this.
- An administrative employee for the Dental Clinic stated she was responsible for human resources (HR) actions, procurement, payroll, and anything else that needed attention. Her only complaint about the clinic was that they were understaffed. She did schedule patients, but only as a backup. She felt the clinic ran very smoothly and had not seen any issues with the scheduling of patients. They now used the EWL and it had really helped;

before that, it was all paper files. No other types of waiting lists had been used by this clinic. She was never asked to destroy any wait lists or patient files and knew of no one else who was asked to do this. They worked very hard to see all their patients and the doctors will fit patients in any way they can.

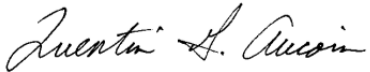
- A dental assistant (DA1) stated she did not use any type of wait list and did not think any of the DAs had one either. When a patient needed to be seen, she made sure he/she was seen. If a patient needed to be seen in a year from now, the patient went on a recall list maintained on the computer. About a month before that patient's appointment, the system would generate a postcard that was sent to the veteran reminding him/her to contact the clinic to get an appointment. She felt this system worked great and had not seen any issues. She was never asked to destroy wait lists or patient files and knew of no one else who was asked to do this.
- DA2 stated the clinic was run like a dictatorship and the manager micromanaged the clinic. She had not seen any problems with the scheduling of patients and felt the clinic was running smoothly on this front. She knew about the EWL but was not that familiar with it. She was familiar with the recall list and thought it worked, except when the veterans forgot to call in. She did not have any other type of wait list and never had. She made it a point to contact her patients to ensure they were being seen. The manager for the clinic never asked her to destroy any type of wait lists or patient files and she knew of no one else who was asked to do this.
- The manager for the Dental Clinic stated she felt the clinic was running smoothly, but had its issues like anywhere else. These issues included staffing, budget, and the occasional patient complaint. Her clinic was a little different than most because she had three separate entities that schedule patients; the MSAs for new patients, the hygienists for their patients, and the DAs for veterans assigned to specific providers. Overall, she felt all three groups were scheduling patients properly and had not seen any issue. She stated her clinic started using the EWL about a year prior to the interview and it worked well. Once a patient was on the EWL, she would assign that patient to a dentist and send the chart back to the MSA for appointment scheduling and removal from the EWL. They had never used any other type of wait list, either electronic or paper.

They had begun to use the recall list in which the system auto generates postcards that were sent to patients reminding them to contact the clinic for an appointment. So far, this system had worked well. She denied asking anyone to destroy any type of wait list or any patient files. The only thing she could recall related to this was when a medical chart was permanently removed from the clinic. When a patient died or moved away from Denver, that patient's medical chart was broken down, not destroyed. The file was taken to the medical records section for scanning. This used to be done by her secretary, but he retired a year ago. She had a new secretary, but she had been on the job for only less than a month. In the time between her prior secretary's retirement and the new hire, each DA was responsible for taking files to medical records. This was something most DAs had never done, so she felt there might be confusion in the process. She again denied ever asking anyone to destroy any list or file.

4. Conclusion

The investigation did not substantiate the allegation that a manager in the VAMC Denver Dental Clinic instructed an employee to destroy/dispose of all information and charts related to patients on the waiting list.

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



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For more information about this summary, please contact the
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