

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



**Community Based Outpatient Clinic, VA Medical Center
in Louisville, Kentucky
March 25, 2016**

1. Summary of Why the Investigation Was Initiated

An investigation was initiated pursuant to information received by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) from a senior leader (Senior Leader 1), regarding potential improper appointment scheduling and falsification of audit data at the Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) Dupont, VA Medical Center (VAMC), in Louisville, KY. The allegation specifically stated that a supervisory medical support assistant (Supervisory MSA1) for the CBOC, altered a business office audit to change her clinic's monthly scheduling accuracy.

2. Description of the Conduct of the Investigation

- **Interviews Conducted:** We interviewed 10 Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employees.
- **Records Reviewed:** We reviewed the VHA Issue Brief.

3. Summary of the Evidence Obtained From the Investigation

Interviews Conducted

- Supervisory MSA2 explained that during the facility's business office monthly audits, two columns on a spreadsheet are completed:
 - "Appointment correct with desired dates & documentation? (Y/N)"
 - "Was there support documentation for the desired date? (Y/N)"

Supervisory MSA2 stated the most important column was the one regarding desired dates and documentation. She said that during her audit of CBOC Dupont several months ago, she determined that MSAs were scheduling appointments using the correct "desired date" and that the date was documented in a clinic note entered by a provider. As a result, she said she was able to mark "Yes" for the first column of the appointments audited. She stated she felt the comments written in the comment section of the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) were incomplete. Because she did not feel this section contained all the information she required of her employees, she marked "No" in the documentation section of the audit. She said she later found that Supervisory MSA1 had changed the No responses in the documentation column to Yes. She said the documentation column was a matter of interpretation and what she looked

for from her employees may not be what Supervisory MSA1 looked for from her employees. She stated that the documentation column on the audit workshop had no effect on scheduling accuracy.

- MSA1 said the desired date was either the date the doctor wanted to see the patient or the date the patient wanted to see the doctor. She said she was instructed to leave the desired date the provider wanted even if there were no availability for another 60 days. She said she had never been told to use an appointment date as the desired date when there was no availability and using the original desired date would cause an excessive wait time.
- MSA2 stated the desired date was either the date the veteran requested an appointment or it was the date the provider wanted the veteran to return to clinic (RTC). He said he had never been told to make the desired date the date of the appointment if the appointment and the desired date would exceed a 30-day wait time. When Supervisory MSA2 came to the clinic, she told him to include the desired date in the comment section when scheduling appointments in VistA. He said Supervisory MSA1 had told him to leave the desired date out of the comments because it was redundant.
- MSA3 said that according to her training, the desired date was either the date the veteran requested an appointment or it was the provider's RTC date. She said she was taught the desired date did not change even if there were no availability. She said Supervisory MSA1 was very emphatic about never changing desired dates. When Supervisory MSA2 came to the clinic, she worked with MSA3 on scheduling appointments. MSA3 said Supervisory MSA2 told her to include the desire date in the comment section when scheduling appointments in VistA. She said the training specialist also taught her to put the desired date in the comment section but that Supervisory MSA1 had told her to leave the desired date out of the comments because it was redundant. She said the information input into the comment section in VistA had no effect on the appointment or the wait times.
- MSA4 stated the desired date was either the date the veteran requested an appointment or it was the date the provider wanted the veteran to RTC. He said he had never been told to change the desired date to decrease the wait time. He said Supervisory MSA1 never told him to leave the desire date out, but he had heard her tell another employee not to put it in the comments, so that was what he did.
- Supervisory MSA1 said the facility's audit spreadsheet format was provided by the business office but was completed by each supervisor for the facility they were auditing. She reviewed a completed worksheet for a random month in 2014. She explained the two columns related to desired dates and proper documentation: for the first column, she looked to make sure the MSAs used the desired date the provider put in the RTC note. She said if she found the desired dates matched, she would place a "Y" in the column; if the desired dates did not match, she put an "N." For the second column, she stated if, when reviewing the desired dates for the first column, she found the desired date in the provider's note, she put a Y in the second column. If she did not find a desired date or the desired date was different from the one that was used by the MSA, she put an N in that column. She said if she saw the desired date in the doctor's note, she considered that

to be supporting documentation. She stated she reviewed the audit performed by Supervisory MSA2 and changed the No in section two to Yes. She said she made the changes because she felt the MSAs made the appointment using the correct desired date based on the information in the provider's note. According to Supervisory MSA1, there was no standardization for comments in VistA related to the desired date.

- A chief of an administrative office was shown a sample of the facility's audit and the two columns. The chief said the first column was the most important column. The chief explained that subordinate supervisors look for the mention of a desired date in the provider's note and ensured the appointment was scheduled with that desired date. If the appointment was scheduled correctly, the subordinate supervisor will put a Y in the column. For the second column, the subordinate supervisor looked for a note in the comments section of VistA. However, as long as there was a comment in the RTC note from the provider that included the desired date, that is appropriate documentation and the column should be marked Y. The manager said the MSA should annotate the desired date in the comments section of VistA.
- Senior Leader 1 stated he had been made aware of the allegation. He stated that since the allegation was made, changes for their monthly scheduling audits of CBOCs and other services had been implemented within the business office. Supervisors were no longer conducting monthly audits on their own employees but rather they would audit other services and CBOCs. He stated that the training specialist assumed the role of business office trainer around July 2014 and had been conducting training and refresher training for all MSAs. This training would assist in implementing standardization across all CBOCs and services.
- Senior Leader 2 advised she was unaware of any wrongdoing by any employee working as a scheduler. She further stated that she had recently visited all the clinics and CBOCs and no employees had expressed concerns about scheduling practices. She stated she was surprised to learn of the allegation involving Supervisory MSA1 when it was brought to her attention.
- Senior Leader 3 stated he had been made aware of this allegation and had forwarded the information to VA OIG. Once the wait time allegations at the VAMC Phoenix^{*}, AZ, were brought to the attention of VA, the Veterans Integrated Service Network was given instructions from the national level to have all VAMC Directors visit all clinics and each CBOC to meet with schedulers to discuss scheduling issues. He said he made an effort to visit as many facilities as he could but was not meeting with the schedulers to discuss wait list issues. He said he wanted to meet with the schedulers to discuss what they needed to accomplish their jobs. He learned that some MSAs needed additional monitors for their desk or they needed additional fax machines to work effectively. Even though he did not discuss policy, he said no employees reported being instructed to change desired dates or to manipulate wait times. He stated he did meet with employees at VAMC Louisville.

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

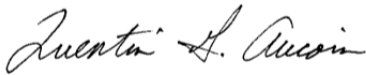
Records Reviewed

- We reviewed the VHA Issue Brief that summarized the allegations the OIG was requested to investigate. The Issue Brief documented that an administrative employee had received a phone call from an employee in the Business Office who was seeking advice on a situation she had recently discovered. According to the Issue Brief, Supervisory MSA1 had requested assistance in performing her monthly scheduling audit and Supervisory MSA2 agreed to assist. An employee reported that after Supervisory MSA2 completed the audit, Supervisory MSA1 went back into the tracking sheet and changed the “incorrect” appointments to “correct.” In addition, the employee stated that Supervisory MSA1 was reportedly instructing employees to use a desired date that was the same as the appointment date, thus providing an inaccurate wait time indication.

4. Conclusion

The investigation found that MSAs at CBOC Dupont were scheduling patient appointments correctly with respect to the desired date determination, in accordance with VHA Directive 2010-027. Although Supervisory MSA1 did change column 2 in the audit from a “No” to a “Yes,” the information in this column was more subjective or interpretive. The change was the result of a difference of interpretation between two supervisors and was found to have no effect on the scheduled appointment’s desired date or appointment wait times.

The OIG referred the Report of Investigation to VA’s Office of Accountability Review on June 28, 2015.



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