

June 26, 2006

ENSURING TIMELY ACCESS TO OUTPATIENT DENTAL CARE

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive defines the policies and procedures required to place dental patients on the electronic wait list (EWLs) and to schedule future appointments when the services being sought are not available due to capacity constraints.

2. BACKGROUND

a. As with scheduling for other health care appointments, VHA's policy is to schedule patients for dental appointments within 30 days of the request. Dental clinics have employed a variety of methods to manage patient demand when the demand exceeds their current capacity to provide care. These differing methods have resulted in difficulty in accurately measuring and tracking patients waiting for dental treatment. The benefit of standardizing the use of wait lists and scheduling practices is to produce consistency in the reporting of scheduling delays.

b. VHA Handbook 1130.1, Dental Program Procedures for VHA Medical Facilities, outlines veteran eligibility for dental care. The provisions of this Directive apply to veterans in Dental Classes I – V.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that dental eligible veterans in Dental Classes I - V must be scheduled for appointments within 30 days of the request; if this cannot be done, the veterans must be placed on the EWL. *NOTE: There are no exceptions to this requirement.*

4. ACTION: Each medical center Director is responsible for ensuring that:

a. **Appointment is Made.** Eligible dental patients in Classes I - V are given appointments within the next 30 days or placed on the EWL within 7 calendar days of the date the request was created. Appointment requests may not be "held."

b. **Initial Screening Exam (if applicable).** Eligible dental patients in Classes I - V must be seen within 30 days of their desired appointment date for an initial examination. If the initial examination cannot be provided within this timeframe, the veteran must be placed on the EWL.

c. **Initiation of Treatment.** Treatment identified during the eligible dental patient's initial examination must be initiated within 30 days of the desired appointment date. If treatment cannot be initiated within this timeframe, the veteran must be placed on the EWL.

d. **Subsequent Treatment.** Eligible dental patients in Classes I-V must receive subsequent treatment within 30 days of the desired appointment date, based on medical need as determined by the provider. If subsequent treatment cannot be provided within this timeframe, the veteran must be placed on the EWL.

THIS VHA DIRECTIVE EXPIRES JUNE 30, 2011

VHA DIRECTIVE 2006-037

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5. REFERENCES: VHA Handbook 1130.1, Dental Program Procedures for VHA Medical Facilities.

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Office of Dentistry (112D) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be directed to (202) 273-8503.

7. RESCISSIONS: VHA Directive 2001-023, is rescinded. This VHA Directive expires June 30, 2011.

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