Voluntary Service

Volunteer Handbook

Phone: (956) 291-9093
Fax: (956) 430-9371
E-mail: VCBVolunteer@va.gov

Mail: VATVCBHCS
Voluntary Service (135)
2601 Veterans Drive
Harlingen, TX 78550

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VOLUNTARY SERVICE VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION AND MANDATORY TRAINING

Welcome to the VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System!

You're joining a team of dedicated Volunteers and Staff that do their best to provide excellent service to our Veterans. The goal of Voluntary Service is to provide Volunteers with a positive, safe, and clean environment for working, learning new tasks, setting and obtaining personal goals, and meeting new people while serving our Veterans. The information in this packet will help prepare you for becoming a VA Volunteer.

In order to provide a safe environment for Patients, Visitors, Volunteers and Staff, topics which increase awareness in the following areas are included in this document:

- GENERAL ORIENTATION
- SAFETY, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND FIRE PREVENTION
- HEALTHY INFECTION PREVENTION PRACTICES
- TUBERCULOSIS
- BLOODBORNE PATHOGENS
- HAZARD COMMUNICATIONS
- EQUIPMENT AND UTILITY MANAGEMENT
- HICS EMERGENCY SYSTEM
- TERRORISM
- SECURITY MANAGEMENT
- SEXUAL HARASSMENT
- DIVERSITY AWARENESS
- WORKPLACE VIOLENCE
- PRIVACY POLICY
- INFORMATION SECURITY

After reviewing this information you will have the opportunity to direct additional questions to the Voluntary Service staff or designees in the outlying areas. Applying to serve as a volunteer does not guarantee that you will automatically be placed. Volunteers must be interviewed and accepted by the area supervisor. A signed record of this training will be maintained in your volunteer personnel file located in the Voluntary Service office, and training must be updated annually.

Mitchell Hanks
Chief, Voluntary Service

Thank You for Volunteering to Serve Our Veterans!

GENERAL ORIENTATION

Excellent Customer Service is expected from all Volunteers.

- Smile and greet Veterans, visitors, and staff when you pass them.
- Be courteous and willing to help in all interactions.
- Keep Veterans' health and personal information private.
- Represent the VA, volunteers, and employees positively.
- Pass it on! Let others know when they provide *you* with excellent service!
- Problems? Direct Veterans to the Patient Advocate if they have concerns.
- If you have questions about your assignment tell Voluntary Service or your supervisor.

Safety is #1 and volunteers are expected to help maintain a safe environment.

- Accidents do happen and MUST be reported to your supervisor right away.
- There is zero tolerance for Patient Abuse of any kind, verbal, physical, or neglect.
- There is zero tolerance for Alcohol and Drug use prior to or while on duty.
- Weapons are prohibited on station and strictly enforced by the VA Police Service.
- Report accidents, abuse, alcohol, drugs, or weapon use to your immediate supervisor or the VA Police Service.
- Borrowing and lending money, purchasing cigarettes or alcohol, or giving gifts to patients is strictly prohibited.

Professional Behavior of Volunteers enhances the Veterans' experience.

- Behave in a professional manner while on duty and on breaks.
- Respect patients' rights; **do not distribute religious or political materials**.
- Be dependable, call your supervisor if you are unable to volunteer.
- Wear your VA photo ID badge above your waist at all times while on duty. Contact Voluntary Service and the VA Police Service if it has been lost or stolen.
- Sign in on the clip board at the beginning of your shift or if you are at a clinic or an after hours volunteer, use a monthly sign in sheet.
- Volunteers can be terminated (fired) either by Voluntary Service or their immediate supervisor for failure to adhere to hospital policies.

Volunteer Benefits include serving Veterans, learning new skills, meeting people and more!

- Annual Awards for volunteering at least 100 hours (youth awards start at 50 hours).
- Flu shots, Tuberculosis screening, and physicals (for drivers) are provided free.
- Scholarships are available for youth volunteers.
- Access to hundreds of courses through the on-line Employee Education System.
- Opportunities to serve on planning committees and focus groups.
- Invitation to special events and tours for Volunteers and Veterans.

IN STYLE – VOLUNTEER DRESS CODE

VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Veterans Health Care System is a professional setting where many disciplines work together to support patient activities. All Volunteers have an important role in maintaining a safe environment for Patients. While you are volunteering and representing VATVCBHCS please observe the following dress code:

- Observe the highest standards in personal hygiene.
  - Clean hair, body, and clothes.
  - Use unscented perfumes, colognes, lotions, oils, and soaps.
  - Practice infection prevention by washing hands and using sanitizer often.

- Dress suitably for a professional work environment.
  - A collared shirt or blouse is appropriate for most assignments; slacks, skirt, or capris are suitable. Jeans or shorts are only allowed for specific non-patient care assignments (e.g., drivers, warehouse).
  - Clothing must be in good condition and clean.
  - **No:** halter tops, tank tops, or midriff, low-cut, or revealing shirts/blouses.
  - **No:** shorts, miniskirts, or low-cut pants that show skin or undergarments.
  - Avoid excessively tight clothes and controversial or derogatory artwork or words.
  - Caps are to be worn outside only, unless a military service organization is displayed.
  - If you are unsure of what to wear, check with Voluntary Service or your supervisor.

- Footwear
  - Specific footwear may be required (i.e. closed toe, steel toe, non-slip)
  - Flip flops are not allowed
  - Shoes with strings must be tied.

- Hair may need to be tied back or in a hair net.

- Clothing and Accessories can become a safety hazard
  - Be aware of hanging items that can be pulled by patients or caught in machinery.
  - Chains and body piercing rings (except for earrings) are considered a safety hazard and should not be worn on duty.
  - Pants and skirts should not be so long that they drag on the floor.

Thank you for understanding and supporting our mission of providing a safe, professional environment for Patients, Visitors, Volunteers, and Employees!

SAFETY, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND FIRE PREVENTION

It is the goal of the VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System to provide a safe and healthful environment for Patients, Visitors, Volunteers and Staff. Staff and Volunteers are responsible for exercising safe work practices and reporting unsafe or unhealthful conditions.

Personal injuries occurring during a work assignment **MUST** be reported to the immediate supervisor AND to Voluntary Service. The Occupational Health Clinic physician or a health care provider will evaluate injuries and illnesses occurring while on duty in your assigned areas.

Each person is responsible for protecting one's self by wearing appropriate clothing, shoes and additional outerwear as conditions warrant. If machinery is used during an assignment, safety rules are to be followed. ***REMINDER**-----Careless behavior or use of illegal drugs or intoxicating beverages are prohibited while on government property. Smoking is restricted to outside designated areas only.

Staff and Volunteers are to become familiar with emergency phone numbers at their worksite, recognize the intercom announcement for fires and disasters, know the location of fire alarm boxes and extinguishers, know the evacuation plan for the area of assignment and know his/her responsibility during a fire. Since stairs are used during a fire, know the location of the nearest stairwell (where appropriate). Immediate supervisors will provide additional safety and fire information that pertains to the assigned work area.

The acronym "**RACE**" is used at this facility and serves as a reminder for the safe and correct order in which to respond to a fire:

RESCUE: REMOVE anyone from immediate danger.
ALARM: ACTIVATE closest fire alarm box and Dial 911
(Check your work area for a specific emergency phone number)
CONFINE: CLOSE doors in order to confine fire and smoke.
EVACUATE: EVACUATE to a safe area. Use an EXTINGUISHER for small fires only.

There is only one type of fire extinguisher used at the VATVCBHCS facilities: an ABC multi-use extinguisher for electrical, paper and chemical fires. Although there are trained emergency response teams, every employee and volunteer **MUST** be knowledgeable about fires, the use of a fire extinguisher and how to contain a fire in order to save lives.

Remember "**PASS**" if you need to use an extinguisher:

PULL: PULL the pin that unlocks the operating lever.
AIM: AIM low at the base of the fire.
SQUEEZE: SQUEEZE the lever above the handle to discharge the extinguishing agent.
SWEEP: SWEEP the nozzle from side to side: moving carefully toward the fire.

Codes

During your duties as a Volunteer, you may hear different codes announced on the overhead PA system. If you are the first to see an emergency, activate the response team by dialing the VA Police at extension 69911.

The following are the codes currently used at the VA:

CODE BLUE – Medical
CODE RED – Fire
CODE GREEN – Violent Behavior

Stolen Property

If you discover that a government-owned or personally-owned item is missing or stolen:

- Report it to your supervisor
- Report it to the VA Police Service

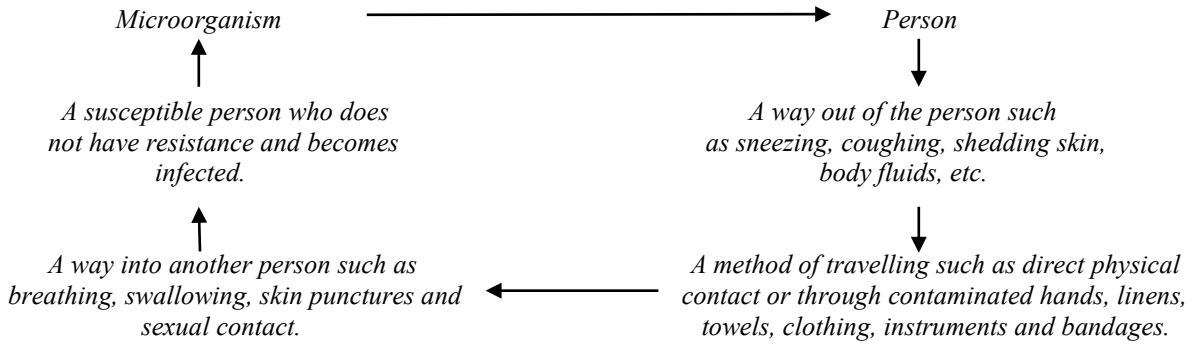
If you find an unclaimed item, or someone has lost an item, go to the information desk or to the Administrative Officer to log it in the Lost and Found or to claim the item.

Contraband

Contraband includes drugs, alcohol, and weapons. It is illegal to bring contraband on campus; if you see contraband, report it immediately to the VA Police Service and to your supervisor.

HEALTHY INFECTION PREVENTION PRACTICES (HIPP)

HIPP are measures taken by each individual to prevent the spread of infections. They include hand washing, respiratory etiquette, environmental cleanliness, and vaccinations. Everyone serving Veterans and their families, regardless of job assignment, has the responsibility of preventing
Patient, Family, Volunteer and Staff infections by using HIPP. Infections are costly. Billions of dollars are spent annually on illnesses steaming from infections. There are six links in the infection chain. All six must be present in order for an infection to occur. They are:



The most important means of interrupting the chain and thus reducing infections is **HAND WASHING.** If your hands are visibly soiled, the best procedure is to use warm water and an antimicrobial soap worked into a lather, scrubbing both palms and back of hands for a minimum of 15 seconds, rinse and dry completely, then use dry towels to turn off the faucet and open the door.

Hand washing should be done:

- Before and after work task.
- Before and after physical contact with another person.
- After handling contaminated items.
- After using the bathroom.

- After blowing your nose.
- Before and after eating.
- Whenever hands become visibly soiled.

If your hands are not visibly soiled, you may use an alcohol based hand sanitizer. The hand sanitizer dispenser will deliver about a nickel size amount onto your hand. You are to rub the hand sanitizer on both of your hands until dry covering all surfaces including the palms, back of the hands, between fingers and finger tips, and your wrists.

Wall-mounted hand sanitizers are also located throughout the facilities and are very effective at reducing the spread of infection. They are inside and outside of exam rooms and procedural areas. There is one mounted near the sign-in desk for Volunteers and it should be used after you sign in.

Another important HIPP is respiratory etiquette which is the proper containment of droplet dispersion of pathogens when a person sneezes or coughs. The HIPP to prevent spread of infections from coughing and sneezing is to cover your cough with the bend of your arm or a tissue to prevent spread of droplets. Immediately dispose of the tissue after use. Hand hygiene should be practiced after coughing **or** sneezing. A face mask can be obtained through the receptionists and may be worn if you have frequent episodes of coughing or sneezing.

Another important measure to prevent the spread of infections is to monitor your own health. Please abide by the following rules:

- ✓ Stay at home if experiencing symptoms of a cold, fever, skin rashes, sneezing, abdominal distress, diarrhea, vomiting or any other symptoms of not feeling well.
- ✓ Seek medical attention if the above symptoms persist.
- ✓ Obtain immunizations which are required or recommended, particularly the annual influenza vaccine and the pneumonia vaccine**,** i.e. flu, pneumonia.
- ✓ Obtain annual tuberculosis tests to protect self, patients, visitors and family.
- ✓ Take precautions when working in a patient area or when transporting patients and wear protective gear, i.e. gloves, mask, gown, cap and booties, as indicated.

If you **UNDERSTAND** what causes infections and how they are spread, **KNOW HIPP** and **LEARN** the infection prevention and control procedures for your job, you will **CONTRIBUTE** to the reduction of infections in the health care environment.

TUBERCULOSIS

Tuberculosis (TB) is a bacterial infection caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis (MTB). MTB is generally transmitted through the respiratory route on airborne droplet nuclei. Droplet nuclei are generated when a person with pulmonary (lung) TB coughs, sneezes, talks or sings. Prolonged close contact with a person having active TB may lead to infection. TB occurs primarily in the lungs, but it also occurs in the kidneys, bones, brain and other organs.

Some people with TB don't look or feel sick because their TB germs may not be active. When TB germs become active in a person, the person may exhibit the following symptoms:

- ✓ Coughing
- ✓ Weakness

- ✓ Weight loss
- ✓ Night sweats
- ✓ Fever

Should you become exposed to a patient with active TB, the Infection Prevention and Control Office and Employee Health services of the VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend HCS will determine your exposure status. Follow-up by the Employee Health Physician at your facility may be indicated.

Health care workers are commonly screened for tuberculosis before employment. You also will be required to obtain a TB skin test (Mantoux), which is a subdermal injection (just below the skin). You will be asked to return to the Employee Health nurse at your facility in two days after the injection to determine your reaction. Persons who have a positive reaction to the Mantoux Skin Test (TB) do not necessarily have active tuberculosis. Positive reactions will be followed up to rule out the active disease. If you have a history of being a positive reactor to the TB test, be sure to inform the health care provider administering the test. **People who are positive reactors should not receive a TB skin test again; however, the health care provider will evaluate them for signs and symptoms.**

Patients suspected of having infectious TB or those diagnosed with active untreated TB are placed on Airborne Precautions in special isolation rooms, which have negative pressure ventilation. The isolation rooms must be kept under negative pressure so that the room air does not seep out of the room into the adjacent hallway or other rooms. If there is a need for you to enter these rooms, you will be fit-tested for special particulate respirators called a N95 or NIOSH mask by your facility's Employee Health team. Volunteers are not required to enter negative pressure isolation rooms.

The VA TexasValley Coastal Bend HCS maintains a formal TB screening program of all Employees/Volunteers, initially with a two-step process, and annually thereafter. Each year in January most Volunteers will complete their yearly TB test.

BLOODBORNE PATHOGENS

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) determined that health care workers face significant health risks as a result of occupational (on the job) exposure to bloodborne pathogens such as HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C viruses. The OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard was established to protect employees from possible exposure.

Employees who are most likely to have occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens are:

- ✓ Laboratory personnel
- ✓ Housekeeping staff
- ✓ Home care providers
- ✓ Sterile Processing Department (SPD) staff
- ✓ Physicians, nurses, and phlebotomists

There are three bloodborne pathogens which pose the most serious occupational threat. These are Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV). Although these three bloodborne pathogens are the most serious and the most

commonly encountered, there are others such as the organisms that cause Hepatitis D, malaria and syphilis.

The most common are defined as:

- ✓ **HIV** is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, which causes AIDS. The virus attacks the body's immune system, reducing its ability to fight disease
- ✓ **Hepatitis B Virus (HBV)** is a serious viral infection that affects the liver and is spread through exposure to a virus in an infected person's body fluids. While the Hepatitis B virus is not as widely publicized, it is actually more common and more infectious than HIV.
- ✓ **Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)** is spread mainly through blood transfusions and intravenous drug abuse. It resembles Hepatitis B in that it attacks the liver. Symptoms of active HCV are milder than those of HBV or may not even be present. However, HCV is more likely to cause a chronic carrier state and more likely to lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and death.

Transmissions of bloodborne pathogens, including HIV and Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C viruses, may occur if infectious blood or body fluids contact the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth. The pathogens are also transmitted via needle sticks, puncture wounds, or cuts from other contaminated sharps.

The VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend HCS uses the term "standard precautions," which means you should treat all patients' blood and body fluids as if they are infectious.

Wear gloves when handling specimens and wash your hands every time you remove the gloves. After handling specimens, wash your hands before eating, drinking, smoking or applying cosmetics. Specimen containers should be handled only if they are clean and dry. Ask the staff to clean and dry the container prior to handling. Wear gloves when carrying them.

Do not handle contaminated needles or sharps. If one is discovered, report it to staff for disposal. **Never** reach into a waste container.

Do not keep food or drinks in areas where blood or potentially infectious materials are present. Do not eat or drink where there is any risk of potential for exposure to bloodborne pathogens.

When you are uncertain about potential exposure as it pertains to your work assignment, consult your supervisor immediately.

The procedural response to bloodborne pathogens is outlined in the VATVCBHCS Policy Memorandum entitled "Procedural Response to Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure" PM 111-10-82. Summarized, you should do the following:

- ✓ Implement a first aid wash with soap and water or plain water at the nearest eye wash station, if an eye exposure occurs.
- ✓ Notify your immediate supervisor and the volunteer coordinator at your work site within 15 minutes of the incident's occurrence.
- ✓ Report to the Employee Health at your facility.

HAZARD COMMUNICATION

Each employee has the right to know of any chemical hazards associated with the work place. The supervisor has the following responsibilities regarding hazard communication:

- ✓ To maintain up-to-date inventories and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for each chemical associated with the work unit or environment. The MSDS sheets are made available to all employees upon request.
- ✓ To assure that all containers holding hazardous chemicals are labeled.
- ✓ To assure that all employees are trained in the safe handling of chemicals.
- ✓ To provide safety equipment if needed.
- ✓ To follow procedures as outlined in the Waste Assessment and Disposal Policy, if there are accidental exposures or spills.

Employees and Volunteers have the following responsibilities:

- ✓ To determine if chemicals are involved in work assignment.
- ✓ To familiarize self with information about each chemical by reading the MSDS sheet.
- ✓ To follow safety instructions and use provided safety equipment, as appropriate.
- ✓ To report all spills or accidental exposures to the immediate supervisor.

EQUIPMENT AND UTILITY MANAGEMENT

Employees must receive training on any equipment used in their line of work. If you have questions in the use of equipment that you may be operating, please consult your immediate supervisor.

Generally, all Patient care equipment is inspected regularly and Employees who are to operate equipment receive initial training with refresher training done annually. All medical and non-medical equipment used in the VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System's facilities is safety tested prior to being placed into service. You have the additional responsibility of properly maintaining and safeguarding the equipment.

Any personal equipment must be approved and inspected prior to being brought to your work area for use.

HICS (Hospital Incident Command System)

The Hospital Incident Command System (HICS) is initialized when there is an external or internal disaster and is announced via the overhead paging system. Your role may vary depending upon the facility or the assignment. In the hospitals, teams have been designated to perform certain functions during a disaster. Each team receives training throughout the year in order to perform efficiently and effectively. In all outlying facilities, consult your supervisor for

guidance. As a Volunteer, you may be asked to become a part of the labor pool for general assignments.

When a disaster is announced over the intercom system, you should return to your work area and report to your supervisor. At that time you will be given instructions regarding what actions you will need to take. An "all clear" will be announced on the intercom signaling the end of the emergency. **Consult your supervisor in the clinic and the outlying facilities in order to become familiar with the disaster response procedures.**

If away from the work station, the volunteer is required to return and report to the immediate supervisor in order to be counted as present and safe. Review specific procedures with your immediate supervisor.

(1) Internal Disaster**:** An internal disaster is an event which causes or threatens to cause physical damage and injury to the facility, Patients or personnel within the facility. Examples of internal disasters are fire, explosion, radiation accident, telephoned bomb threat, utility failure, communication failure, and hazardous material incidents.

(2) External Disaster**:** In the event of a major external disaster where there is no major damage to the facility, action will be taken to assist the community. Examples of external disasters are tornadoes, major fires, floods, freezing weather emergencies (snow, ice) and hazardous material incidents. Volunteers may be asked to assist if and when it is deemed appropriate. Notify your area supervisor that you will not be able to come in.

(3) Bomb Threat: A bomb threat is communication (letter, note, telephone call or person) that conveys a threat against the government, personnel, visitors, or government property, or states intent to interfere with government activities by threatening to use an explosive device. The person receiving the threat will promptly notify the supervisor who will respond according to hospital policy.

TERRORISM

The VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System has implemented training on terrorism. Although three types of terrorism are discussed in this document, each person is asked to report any suspicious activity or illness to the immediate supervisor or to a manager (e.g. Chief of Staff, Director, Safety Office, Police Service). Assure that action is taken.

Chemical Terrorism

Agents such as nerve gas, cyanide, blister agents, pulmonary agents, Ricin (castor bean toxin) or T-2 (mycotoxin) may be used in a chemical attack. Each has its specific length of time before the onset of symptoms. Be alert to the following:

- ✓ Groups of individuals who may become ill around the same time.
- ✓ Increased incidences of illnesses in previously healthy people.
- ✓ Increase in these non-specific syndromes: sudden, unexplained weakness; drooling, tearing and diarrhea; eyes, nose, throat and chest irritation; shortness of breath; skin redness, blistering, itching and sloughing; or unusual outbreak of illnesses of people attending the same event.

Ionizing Radiation Terrorism

Both external and internal absorption radiation are considered in this training document. Be alert to the following:

- ✓ Acute radiation syndrome such as nausea and vomiting, reduced central nervous system functioning, and hemorrhage may occur.
- ✓ Specific syndromes of concern, especially with a 2-3 week prior history of nausea and vomiting, are thermal burn-like skin effects, immunological dysfunction with secondary infection, a tendency to bleed, bone marrow suppression, and hair loss.

Biological Terrorism

Terrorists may use such biologicals as anthrax, botulism, plague, pneumonic tularemia and smallpox. Each has its own incubation period prior to the onset of symptoms. Be alert to the following:

- ✓ Groups of individuals who may become ill around the same time.
- ✓ Sudden increase of illnesses in previously healthy people.
- ✓ Sudden increase in these non-specific illnesses: pneumonia, flu-like symptoms or fevers; bleeding disorders; unexplained rashes or other skin irritations; neuromuscular illness; simultaneous outbreaks in human and animal populations; and unusual illnesses in groups who have attended the same meetings or activities.

SECURITY MANAGEMENT TRAINING COURSE

After completion of this course, you should understand the following:

- How and what criminal or suspicious activity is to be reported to the VA Police by dialing extension 69911.
- Whom to report criminal or suspicious activity to where VA Police or Security guards are assigned.
- The reporting requirements outlined in Policy Memorandum **07-09-01** "Police Notification Procedures".
- Information on how office furniture should be arranged to allow for you to make a quick safe exit.
- Who can initiate a Code Green and Code Green procedures.
- Bomb Threat Procedures.
- What to do if confronted with an individual who has a weapon.
- How to and the importance of protecting the crime scene.

INTRODUCTION:

The following situations could happen to you while you are here at work:

- While providing service to a customer, they become irate and attack you.
- You are in your office and you receive a threatening phone call from someone.

- Your wallet or purse has been stolen from your work area.
- You see a non-law enforcement person with a firearm, knife or other weapon walking on VATVCBHCS property.
- You are taking a smoke break at one of the designated smoking areas and observe a person throw a suspicious package behind some hedges.
- You receive a telephone call from an unknown person who is telling you there is a bomb.

These are some examples of what might happen while you are at work. Do you need to report this to anyone and if so to whom? This training course will help answer these questions for you.

During the past few months there have been several incidents that have occurred at various facilities within the VATVCBHCS that have necessitated responses, and in some cases emergency response by the VA Police or local police where Security guards are assigned. Probably the incident that quickly comes to mind is the situation that actually happened. Two staff were wounded when a Beneficiary fired on them with a flare gun. The Beneficiary was forced into a room where he remained. After the VA police and Local Police responded the Beneficiary surrendered and was taken into custody.

The outcome of this incident could have been a lot worse but fortunately it wasn't. There really wasn't anything that anyone could have done at the time to prevent it. Everyone involved including the victims and personnel who responded could not have handled that situation any better than they did.

That incident and perhaps others like it, illustrates the purpose of this training. This training is to inform you of what actions you should take if you are the **victim** of or the **witness** to some form of criminal or suspicious activity, or emergency situation that happens on VATVCBHCS property. These type of situations include:

- Physical Assaults
- Verbal Threats
- Disturbances
- Code Green Situations
- Fire/smoke
- Theft of government or personal property
- Non uniformed law enforcement persons seen possessing firearms, knives or other weapons
- The use or possession of alcohol or illegal narcotics
- Vandalism/Fraud

Who do you report these incidents to?

What phone numbers do you call?

When should you report these incidents?

PRESENTATION:

General Reporting Procedures - Like any good citizen of a city, town or member of a neighborhood it is expected that VA Employees will report criminal or suspected criminal acts to the proper authorities. For many years, and ***especially*** in this day and age of terrorism, and high profile criminal acts that are dominate in the news media, law enforcement officers rely heavily on citizens (employees) to bring to their attention the knowledge that a person may be involved in a crime or a situation that may need to be investigated.

VATVCBHCS Policy Memo **07-09-01**, entitled "Police Notification Procedures," states that **"An employee or anyone affiliated with the VATVCBHCS is authorized, urged and expected to notify the VA Police, as soon as possible when they are aware that a crime or other reportable incident has occurred, is occurring or appears imminent."**

The kinds of crimes or incidents we are talking about are:

- Theft of or missing government or personal property
- Assaults or threats to employees or the general public
- Disturbances
- Suspicious persons, groups or activities
- Disorderly Conduct
- Suicides or attempts
- Unlawful introduction or possession of marijuana, drugs/narcotics or alcohol
- Drunkenness
- Possession of firearms or other weapons
- Bomb Threats
- Threatening telephone calls
- Loitering
- Gambling
- Soliciting
- Sexual Misconduct
- Fire
- Any other suspicious activity not mentioned above.

When incidents such as these occur, notify the VA Police first. When such incidents occur at Laredo OPC, contact the contract security guard first and then your supervisor.

In most cases, persons involved will be asked to provide a written statement of their knowledge of the incident. The VA Police will provide a form for the witness to record their statement.

When you receive these forms from the VA Police, it is important that they be promptly completed. This will enhance your recall of the facts and will also assist the VA Police in speeding up their investigation. The content of these Witness Statements should include the nature of the incident (what happened), where did the incident take place (exact location), describe who was involved (were they employees, patients, male/female and a physical description) and any other pertinent information that would assist the VA Police in their investigation.

When notifications are made to the VA Police, it can usually be done by telephone or in person at the police desks. For Laredo Outpatient Clinic, the security guard will be notified, respond and when the situation is under control will contact the VA Police.

The phone numbers available to contact the VA Police are as follows:

- Management Office – located in Room 116 at 956-430-9310 or extension 69911 from any outpatient clinic.

It is important to emphasize to all of our employees within VATVCBHCS that have VA Police assigned to notify the VA Police first and foremost. Policy memorandum **07-09-01** states, "***When other federal or local law enforcement officers are needed, such requests will be routed to the VA Police, who will notify the appropriate law enforcement agency."*** The only exception is when a VA Police Officer is not assigned to that facility, such as at the Victoria or Laredo clinic, where we have contract security guards assigned. The Security Guard will be notified and the local police by dialing 911 if it is a life and death situation (e.g. man with gun/knife or other weapon).

The evidence that is located at a crime scene is very important to the solving of that crime or for collecting evidence that can be used in a court of law. Any employee or other persons affiliated with VATVCBHCS who acquires or becomes aware of evidence that should be preserved should promptly notify the VA Police or local police at those sites that do not have VA Police assigned. The VA Police or the local Police will take custody of those items that are evidence and maintain them in what is known as a "Chain of Custody."

It is important that you realize that this evidence should not be handled or disturbed except when it is absolutely necessary to provide treatment for the victim. We understand that in a hospital environment it is instinctive to want to clean up bodily fluids and to spruce things up; however, when a crime has taken place that is not appropriate and can actually harm the criminal investigation. If items are touched, moved, sanitized, etc., key evidence can be destroyed or compromised. A good rule of thumb is not to tamper with anything related to a crime or anything you think may be related to a crime. One of the first things the VA Police will do is to secure the crime scene so that this evidence will be protected.

- **Example:** Code Blue Team was unsuccessful in reviving a suicide victim. All of the tubes the medical team inserted into the victim should remain until the Medical Examiner arrives. Any bodily fluids or weapons will not be moved.

CODE GREEN SITUATIONS:

Code Greens are responded to by members of the Psychiatric Emergency Response Team and are common within VATVCBHCS. This team is comprised of specially trained hospital staff members that include VA Police.

What is a Code Green?

- A Code Green is any situation involving an individual (beneficiary, employee or visitor) who becomes uncooperative, hostile, threatening or disruptive to the hospital environment. If this situation escalates to the point where the hospital staffs' safety is in jeopardy, or if the individual has a weapon or other dangerous object the VA Police will handle this situation because it has changed from a Code Green to a law enforcement matter.
- A Code Green situation typically arises when you as an employee are rendering some kind of service to a beneficiary, another employee, etc., and you now feel threatened by that person's behavior. It is important to remember that you should not wait until the situation is out of control before calling a Code Green.

No one will criticize you for calling a Code Green response.

Who can initiate a Code Green Response?

- Policy Memorandum 116A-07-06, covers the implementation of the Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (Code Green Team). This Policy Memorandum states, "***The decision to initiate a Code Green may be made by any hospital staff member in the event of an emergency."***

HOW TO DE-ESCALATE VIOLENT SITUATIONS:

There are some things you can do to lessen the likelihood of being a victim of violence:

- Get away from the situation as soon as possible.
- If available use duress alarms.
- Let the VA Police, a supervisor or co-worker know that you will be dealing with someone you know to be prone to violent behavior so that your interaction with this person can be monitored.
- Arrange the office furniture so you have fast easy access to exit the room.
- Do not be argumentative or "talk down" to the individual.
- If attacked, physically resist unless there is a clear danger to your life. (Scream, bite, kick, scratch, make a scene, etc.)
- Act fast, use your natural defenses, run, call for help and notify the VA Police.
- If a weapon is involved, cooperate. DO NOT resist and try not to agitate your assailant. DO NOT attempt to disarm the subject.

BOMB THREATS:

Bomb threats are another form of violent behavior we need to know how to respond to. Policy Memorandum 07-2009-04, "Bomb Threat Procedures," outlines the actions you should take in the event you receive a bomb threat.

If you receive a bomb threat, it will probably be received by telephone. Bomb threats can also be received by mail or even in person. No matter how these threats are received, quick action must be taken to eliminate the threat. Actions that you should take if you receive a bomb threat by telephone are:

Keep the caller talking as long as possible. Ask questions such as:

- When is the bomb set to go off?
- Where is it located?
- What kind of bomb is it?
- Why are you doing this?
- Who are you?
- What is your name?

Make notes on what the caller says and on such things as:

- Accent
- Tone of voice
- Voice mannerisms
- Background noises

A good tool to use to help you is VA form 10-43 (671) "Report of Bomb Threat or Threatening Phone call check sheet." Every telephone in every work area should have one of these forms close to the telephone.

Have another person immediately notify the VA Police. **If you are at a site where there are no VA Police then contact the local police by dialing 911.** If someone else is close by, have that person make the notifications to the VA Police and your supervisor while you are still talking to the caller.

Once the VA Police receive notification of a bomb threat, the specific information received is critical in determining:

- Who will be notified (services, key personnel, etc.).
- Will the entire facility or certain portions be evacuated?
- Where will personnel and/or equipment be evacuated?
- Is there time for a search?
- Will outside agencies need to be notified by the VA Police (e.g., local police bomb squad, K-9 unit, etc.)?

SEARCHES FOR BOMBS:

If a search has to be conducted of your work areas, you may be enlisted to assist in the search. This is mainly due to your familiarity with the layout of your work area and knowing what looks out of place or unusual.

There are designated services that would be responsible for searching certain areas. For example:

- **Environmental Management Service** is responsible for searching restrooms, hallways, stairwells, unoccupied rooms, etc.
- **Nursing Service** would quietly search nursing units and prepare for possible evacuations if ordered to do so by the Director or designee.
- **Engineering Service** would search outside of buildings, roof tops, mechanical areas, flammable storage areas, etc.
- Service Chiefs and supervisors, from all services, are responsible for informing their employees to inspect their work areas periodically during their tour of duty and especially at the end of their tour of duty for suspicious objects. Rooms, areas, closets, cabinets, desks, etc., that are infrequently used should be locked when not occupied.

There is no specific description that applies to what a bomb or explosive device looks like. Bombs can be hidden in ordinary objects such as:

- Briefcases
- Paper bags
- Thermos Bottles
- Flashlights
- Toolboxes
- Soda water cans

When searching your area for bombs or explosive devices look for what does not belong or does not fit in your surroundings. A search should be done in teams of two. The team should move through the area to be searched together, individually looking, but remaining within hearing distance.

If a suspected bomb is found, ***DO NOT TOUCH IT***, or use a radio in the immediate area. One of the team members will clear the surrounding area and keep people away while the other member reports the find to the VA Police and your supervisor.

Also keep in mind that when persons are asked to evacuate an area, do not mention the word "bomb". Say something like: "We have an emergency in this area, will you please move to "__?"

The following will also be accomplished:

- Open all doors and windows in the area to minimize blast effect.
- Stay as far away as practical and keep a wall or substantial furniture item between you and the object.
- When the search of your area is completed it will be reported to the control center through the chain of command.

SUSPICIOUS MAIL HANDLING PROCEDURES:

In the recent past the VATVCBHCS was in the midst of a nation-wide Anthrax scare. During that period, many of us were probably fearful of suspicious letters, or packages, especially those coming through the Postal System.

Only a short time later, this particular threat seems to have subsided, but we must remain vigilant and take precautions against threats to our safety such as explosives, biological or chemical agents that could come through the mail. Some telltale signs to be aware of include:

- Letters or packages with no return address
- Excessive postage
- Handwritten/poorly typed addresses
- Misspelling of common words
- Oily stains/discolorations
- Letters/packages with restricted markings such as **Confidential** or **Personal.**
- Letters or packages that are lopsided or have a lumpy appearance
- The feel of a powdery substance
-

What should you DO if you receive a suspicious package?

- Relax and remain calm
- If it is a letter you have opened set it down gently. Do not move it around as you may expose others.
- Advise a co-worker to phone the VA Police
- Turn off fans and if possible ventilation systems in the area
- Keep others out of the area

What should you NOT do?

- Do not pass the letter or package around for others to examine.
- Do not disturb any contents in the letter or note.
- Do not ignore the threat, treat it as real.
- Do not remove the package or letter out of the area (this minimizes cross contamination).

GENERAL DO'S AND DON'TS:

Do:

- Arrange your office furniture so that you can quickly and safely exit through your office door. The person you are interviewing or examining should be located at the innermost area of your office; if they become hostile, you are not trapped and can exit your office quickly.
- Secure government property when it is unattended.
- Lock your car, even when you are in it.
- Walk only in well-lit areas.
- Walk with someone or request a VA Police Escort when walking to or from the parking lot.
- Wear your photo ID badge at all times in the workplace and challenge anyone unfamiliar to you who is in an area without an ID badge who acts suspiciously and/or notify the VA Police or local police if no VA Police are assigned to your facility.
- Resist, scream, and attract attention if you are attacked.

- Report suspicious persons or activity to the VA Police.

Don't:

- Do not leave personal property unsecured and unattended at the worksite.
- Do not leave valuables in plain view inside your vehicle.
- Do not walk between parked cars, especially at night.
- Do not carry large sums of money on your person.
- Do not leave keys, personal or government property unsecured.

CONCLUSION:

Knowing what to do and to whom to report it is vital in making your work environment safe and secure for the patients, employees, volunteers and visitors who frequent the facilities within the VATVCBHCS. The VA Police play an instrumental role in this reporting process. Be a responsible volunteer by following the policies and procedures that you have read here. In doing so, you can help the VA Police to help you when you need it!

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defined **Sexual Harassment** in 29 CFR 16.04.11.
Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- ✓ Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment.
- ✓ Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting that individual.
- ✓ Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.
- ✓ Sexual jokes, remarks, teasing, rude or obnoxious behavior, pranks, or questions that contain sexual overtures can also be a form of sexual harassment and are not acceptable in VA's professional work environment and will not be condoned.

In more common terms, sexual harassment includes such unwelcome behavior as verbal abuse, insults, whistles, jokes, notes, suggestive comments or picture displays, touching and physical aggressiveness, pressure for dates, or threats and sexual assaults.

Sexual harassment does not have to happen only on the job or at the work site to be prohibited behavior. The rules and guidelines concerning sexual harassment also apply to business trips, meetings, and conferences away from the regular work place or any work-related social activity.

If such behavior results in the loss of productivity, affects personnel actions, or creates a psychologically harmful or unsafe condition, it is prohibited. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended 2000e-16, guarantees all Federal employees and volunteers a working environment free of gender-based intimidation.

Sexual harassment is an issue affecting both men and women. It is also a legal issue. Managers and supervisors are responsible for preventing and eliminating such harassment. An employer may be liable for the acts of its managers, supervisors, and non-employees such as contractors and vendors where the employer knew, or should have known, of the conduct and failed to take immediate corrective action.

Employees and volunteers, as well supervisors and managers, are responsible for preventing sexual harassment in the workplace. Each person is responsible for assuring that their behaviors exhibited are not offensive to others. Suggestive comments, jokes of a sexual nature, offensive displays, or touching coworkers in any way that could be interpreted as intimate or offensive to them or to an observer must be avoided. Each person must respect the personal beliefs, interpretations and space of others. **Incidents of sexual harassment must be reported immediately!**

Supervisors and managers must investigate all alleged occurrences of sexual harassment and take corrective action. A strong, enforced policy against sexual harassment is the best preventive measure. Education and training programs assist in reinforcing the organization's policy.

If you believe that you are being sexually harassed, do the following:

- ✓ Recognize and confront it.
- ✓ Tell the person that their conduct is offensive, unwanted, and unwelcome and to STOP.
- ✓ Record dates, times, acts and names of persons involved in the incidents of harassment, your actions, and results of the action.
- ✓ If your efforts have not stopped the harassment, report the conduct to the offender's supervisor.
- ✓ Seek advice from your supervisor or other personnel who have expertise in the area such as the **Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Manager.**
- ✓ File a complaint through the EEO complaint system. The EEO Manager will provide guidance.
- ✓ Talk to friends, co-workers and relatives. A strong support system is helpful.

DIVERSITY AWARENESS

The adult Veteran population consists of persons of varying age groups. Among this population are Veterans who represent many cultures, exhibit various sexual preferences and orientation, have various religious and spiritual beliefs, and hold varying beliefs about their lives and of those around them. Persons caring for the Veteran population must refrain from making judgments about the Veteran because of his/her position on any of the above. Please consider the following:

Age Group

- ✓ Accept that because of age, persons may require adaptations to a standard method of treatment and care.

- ✓ Accept that various approaches may be necessary to be effective.
- ✓ Recognize that because of age, the person may approach their treatment, care, and caregivers in a different way.

Culture

- ✓ Acknowledge that cultural differences may be the reason that a person is behaving in a way unfamiliar to you.
- ✓ Be sensitive to cultural differences; do not offend.
- ✓ Facilitate cultural observances as much as possible.

Sexual Preferences and Orientation

- ✓ Accept that the patient's sexual preference and orientation may be different than yours.
- ✓ Refrain from making judgments about the patient's choices.

Religious and Spiritual Beliefs

- ✓ Accept that the patient's religious and spiritual beliefs may be different from yours.
- ✓ Refrain from making judgments about the patient's choices.

Life Choices

- ✓ Accept that the patient's life choices may be different than what you would choose.
- ✓ Refrain from making judgments about the patient's choices.

Volunteers are expected to respect all Veterans, staff, visitors, and other volunteers regardless of their age, culture, sexual preference or orientation, religious beliefs, life choices, and abilities. If you witness discrimination towards Veterans, staff, volunteers or visitors contact Voluntary Service or the **EEO Manager** if you have concerns regarding Diversity.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Employees and volunteers deserve a work environment which is free of physical attack, threats, and menacing or harassing behaviors. Violent behavior will not be tolerated in any of the VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System's facilities or community-based programs.

Persons (patients, beneficiaries, volunteers, employees, visitors or vendors) committing acts of violence will be reported to the appropriate authorities and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against volunteers and employees who are verbally or physically aggressive.

Patient abuse in any form (verbal, physical, or neglect) **will not be tolerated**. You must report abusive behavior to your immediate supervisor. **Volunteers who abuse a patient(s) will be immediately terminated from the volunteer roles without reinstatement possibilities.** Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against employees.

Report any violence immediately to VA Police (ext. 69911) to initiate a Code Green.

VHA PRIVACY POLICY

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) carefully guards the privacy of Veterans and the privacy of their records. As a Health Care System volunteer, it is mandatory that you read and understand the privacy laws that apply to VHA, even if you do not have direct patient contact in your volunteer assignment. It is your responsibility to be diligent in your efforts to safeguard and protect patient health information (PHI), patient identifiers, and employee identifiers just as you would want your own privacy protected.

There are six (6) privacy and confidentiality statutes and regulations that govern the collection, maintenance and release of information from VHA records. VHA employees and volunteers must access or use record information only as provided by these statutes. VHA employees and volunteers can use the health information in VHA records in the official performance of their duties for treatment, payment, and health care operations purposes. VHA employees and volunteers must use the minimum amount of information from these records necessary to fulfill or complete their official duties.

Information from VHA records that identifies the Veteran/patient by name and social security number can be released to the patient or another individual only when a prior written authorization is obtained from the individual whose information is to be released and can only be released by Medical Administration Service staff.

Additionally, VHA must assure that records are protected from loss and tampering, as well as assure that physical safeguards, such as a sprinkler system and controlled temperature, are in place to safeguard hardcopy records.

Veteran patients have the right to:

- ✓ Receive a Notice of Privacy Practices.
- ✓ A copy of their own medical records (request must be submitted in writing).
- ✓ Request amendment of information that is thought to be inaccurate or incomplete.
- ✓ A list of anyone who has received information from his/her record.

What is Protected Patient Health Information (PHI)?

Protected patient health information consists of the following:

- Individually-identifiable information, e.g., name, social security number.
- Demographic information, e.g., room number, address, phone number, age, gender.

Note: Protected patient health information can be violated whether being discussed verbally, in writing or electronically.

What is my responsibility as a volunteer?

As a volunteer you are responsible for keeping all protected patient health information encountered in the course of your assignment confidential. Some of the following are examples of prohibited actions:

- ✓ Discussing patient health information in public areas (Canteen, Recreation Center, hallways, stairwells, on hospital grounds).
    - Information disclosed by the patients themselves is not to be discussed with anyone inside or outside of the hospital.
    - Remember that volunteers' and employees' health information should also be safeguarded in the same manner.

- ✓ Assuming the patient wants his/her medical information disclosed to their family members. **ALWAYS** redirect any questions regarding patient health information to an appropriate staff member.

- ✓ Invading patient space. ALWAYS give patients control over their environment. A patient's room should be treated just as you would treat their home. Please knock and ask permission before entering any patient's room.

Remember:

- ✓ Patient information received or found should ALWAYS be turned in to a staff member or disposed of in the SHRED-IT receptacles.

- ✓ NEVER leave patient information visible. ALWAYS ensure protected patient health information is appropriately secured before leaving the area.

What are POSSIBLE penalties for non-compliance?

- Volunteer termination.

- Organizational-specific sanctions.

- Fines up to $50,000 and one year in prison for improperly obtaining or disclosing protected health information.

- Fines up to $100,000 and five years in prison for obtaining protected health information under "false pretenses."

- Fines up to $250,000 and ten years in prison for obtaining or disclosing protected health information with the intent to sell, transfer, or use it for commercial advantage, personal gain, or malicious harm.

How can Volunteers protect PHI while volunteering?

- Follow all privacy policies and procedures.
- Properly dispose of any private data you no longer need.
- Disclose only the required data and only through the proper VA channels.
- Report suspected or potential breaches of privacy to your privacy officer.
- Ask your immediate supervisor if you are in doubt.
- Contact the appropriate person for help if necessary.
- Work as a team to ensure privacy.

Remember that the relationship between the patient and the health care provider is based on trust and the only way to maintain that relationship is to safeguard each patient's health information

and respect our veterans' privacy. VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System prides itself in being one of the nation's top healthcare providers, and with your assistance we can maintain and improve the care given to our veterans.

If you see anyone violating the security of protected patient health information, you are required to notify the Privacy Officer.

INFORMATION SECURITY

Information security measures and controls are put into place to protect technology systems and data against denial of service and unauthorized disclosure, modification, or destruction. All volunteers who are given computer access are required to have a complete background check performed (NACI), including fingerprinting. Identification badges will not be issued until reports have been received. Computer access will not be granted until the background check has been received and the volunteer has completed information security awareness training.

The VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System has a security policy entitled Automated Information Systems (AIS) Security Systems. It can be found on the VATVCBHCS website or obtained from your immediate supervisor. Computer security training, including the Rules of Behavior, is mandatory for anyone having access to the computer. A copy of the training document may be obtained from your supervisor.

Your responsibility is to:

- ✓ Safeguard sensitive information left on fax machines/printers in unsecured areas.
- ✓ You should not view information about anyone unless it is job-related.
- ✓ Take computer security training annually, if you have access to the computer.
- ✓ Safeguard the computer screen to assure that sensitive data is not viewable by non-authorized personnel.
- ✓ Safeguard your personal access and verify codes.
- ✓ Log off your workstation **every time** you leave your work area.

Report any information security concerns to your supervisor and the Information Security officer.

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Main VA Texas Valley Coastal Bend Health Care System number: (956) 291-9000

VATVCBHCS Acting Director: Mr. Charles Harpel
Voluntary Service Office (Donations/Volunteers): Mitchell Hanks

Phone: (956) 291-9271
VA Cell: (956) 410-4436
E-mail: Mitchell.Hanks@va.gov
www.texasvalley.va.gov/giving

Mail: VATVCBHCS
Voluntary Service (135)
2601Veterans Drive
Harlingen, TX 78550

The Joint Commission: 800-994-6610 to report a complaint about patient rights, care of patients, safety, infection control, medication use and security. ***First,*** please notify your supervisor or hospital leadership so immediate attention can be given to the matter.

Office of Inspector General: 1-800-488-8284 or ***VAOIGHOTLINE@VA.GOV*** to report suspected fraud, waste or abuse in VA programs or operations.

Occupational Health Nurse: _____

Patient Advocate: Roger Smith, 956-366-4510, ext 67810

VA Police Service Emergencies: Ext. _69100_____

Public Affairs Office (Media): 956-291-9340

Fire Safety: R.A.C.E. (**R**escue, pull **A**larm, **C**onfine fire, **E**vacuate)
P.A.S.S. (**P**ull pin, **A**im low, **S**queeze, **S**weep)

Please keep this page with you and refer to it as needed. This area is left blank for you to write information that is specific to your volunteer assignment and/or location.

YOUR SUPERVISOR'S NAME _____ **PHONE**_____