VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK 2015

VOLUNTARY SERVICES PROGRAM

Organization

Voluntary Services at the Dayton VA Medical Center is aligned under the Office Community and Public Relations. The Chief, Voluntary Services has the responsibility for developing and maintaining, within the Center, a proper climate for a volunteer program that is purposeful and worthwhile for the patients, staff, organizations, and volunteers. The Veterans Administrative Voluntary Services (VAVS) Executive Committee provides advice and assistance in making the volunteer program meaningful. The Medical Center's VAVS Committee, which provides the opportunity for an exchange of ideas and advice, is comprised of a group of Medical Center management personnel and representatives and deputies officially appointed and certified by their National VAVS Organization.

Leadership

Each medical center has a Voluntary Services program that is an officially authorized element within the VA Medical System.

The Chief, Voluntary Services is administratively and operationally responsible for all phases of the Voluntary Services program including:

- Recruitment, orientation and placement of volunteers;
- Planning and coordinating special VAVS projects and activities;
- Accepting and acknowledging gifts and donations through VAVS channels that are for the sole purpose of meeting needs, comfort and welfare of our veteran patients;
- The organization, administration, supervision, and professional functioning of the staff and programs for patient participation in recreational activities programs.

YOU AS A VA VOLUNTEER

The following section is designed to provide you with the basic information you will need to begin your volunteer assignment. Please take time to read each item. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact either the Voluntary Services office or your

immediate supervisor. We are here to assist you in your assignment so that you may achieve the best results in helping Veterans.

Role

As a Regularly Scheduled (RS) Volunteer, you are a member of the Dayton VA Medical Center team and have an invaluable role in its mission. Individuals who volunteer their time and efforts through the VAVS Program are **supplemental** to the essential VA personnel at the Medical Center. Specifically, VA policy states that volunteers in the VA Medical Center programs are assigned for the purpose of supplementing, not replacing the VA staff for augmenting program activities in accordance with the needs identified at each Medical Center.

Authorization

Volunteers who agree to serve on an approved RS assignment will be officially authorized to serve on a “without compensation” basis. To be an RS volunteer, the official VAVS representative of your organization and/or by the Chief, Voluntary Services must certify you.

Orientation

The brief orientation presentation is designed to familiarize you generally with the VA Medical Center, Voluntary Services, and your role as a volunteer. This orientation includes general information about several volunteer responsibilities and benefits. Specific assignment orientation varies in length and is under the direction of the respective Medical Center supervisor who will inform you of matters pertaining to your assignment area. Specific instructions about the various safety issues, like fire/safety and infection control procedures, will be discussed at this time.

Assignments

The Chief of Voluntary Services is responsible for making all volunteer assignments commensurate with the current Medical Center needs and the qualifications of the individual volunteer. Volunteer abilities, skill, interest, and career goals are taken into consideration when volunteer assignments are made. If, after a fair trial period (usually a 6 weeks probationary period) and adequate on-the-job-training, you find you are unhappy with the assignment, please discuss the matter with the Chief, Voluntary

Services. If possible, an appropriate assignment will be found for you in another area. Changes of assignment must be cleared through the Chief, Voluntary Services.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The subjects that follow may well be the most important items in this handbook. Please read them carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have.

Time and Attendance

All persons performing volunteer work must be accounted for on a daily basis. The information is used to respond to family inquiries, disaster, etc. Volunteers who are injured on the job are entitled to benefits provided under the provisions of Workers Compensation. Only authorized volunteers who have signed in for duty are eligible to apply for benefits. Only those hours that have been officially recorded are applied toward awards or verification of service for school/court referral purposes.

It is your responsibility to assure the hours that you volunteer each day are recorded. Please note that driving time, to and from your volunteering tour does not count towards “volunteer hours”. All volunteers should sign in prior to reporting to their assignment. Two computers have been set up for signing in and are strictly for that purpose:(1) Information Desk (Main Lobby); and Voluntary Services Office, Building 305. If the system is not working, sign-in sheets will be provided in these areas. You will also use sign-in sheets during non-administrative hours to record your time. A member of Voluntary Services staff will enter the information for you.

Directions for volunteer sign-in:

1. Press any key to begin.

2. **Enter your volunteer code** (First initial of your last name and an assigned random four digit code). Press return key.

3. Your assignments are: If you have only one assignment, the computer will automatically select that assignment. However, if you volunteer in more than one service, a list of possible answers will show on the screen. Select the correct assignment from those that appear on the screen. Press the return key.

4. How many hours will you be working? Type in a whole number in this section. If you are working 4 1/2 hours, for example, type "5." Press the return key. NOTE: If you are

uncertain about your time, enter the number of hours you expect to work. Changes may be made later in the day.

5. Will you need a meal ticket? Any volunteer working for at least four hours is entitled to a meal allowance not to exceed the set amount in our Canteen Service. Make your selection by typing "Y" for yes or "N" for No. Press the return key**. NOTE: This question will come on the screen only if you sign in before 11:00 AM.**

6. Thank you. Log in has been completed. If you have any questions, please see the secretary.

Wheelchair Safety Tips

Volunteers assigned to certain inpatient units may be periodically requested to assist with limited transport of wheelchair patients. Staff on inpatient units will provide any further training as needed.

Please observe the following procedures:

Make sure the wheelchair is in a locked position before a patient gets in or out. Staff members who are requesting assistance with transport of patients to and from appointments should already have patients ready for transport. **Volunteers are not to lift a patient in any way.**

The calf rest and footrest should be in an up position when the patient enters the chair.

After the patient is seated, put the calf rest and footrest down for added support and comfort.

Remove brakes.

Wheelchair should be wheeled down the center of the corridor.

At elevators, wheelchairs should be pulled through (or backed in) through the doors – not pushed.

Volunteers will not be involved in transporting patients on stretchers unless accompanied by medical center staff or personnel who are designated/qualified transporters.

Do not transport patients with IV attachments.

Rules and Ethics

- Be properly groomed, neat in attire, and **wear the official VA volunteer name badge** that will be provided.
- Hats cannot be worn while you are volunteering in an official capacity unless it has been approved by your supervisor and documented as part of your volunteer uniform.
- Personal appearance is an important element in gaining the trust and confidence of patients, visitors, staff and volunteers. Volunteers are not permitted to wear shorts, torn jeans, miniskirts, tight skirts, see-through blouses, halter tops, muscle shirts, or shirts with offensive language printed on them.
- Be courteous at all times and conduct yourself in a positive, friendly manner. Courtesy must be shown in contacts with veterans and their families, the general public, supervisors, and with fellow volunteers and employees.
- Avoid open criticism of the Medical Center, any program or staff member while on duty. Criticism should be discussed in private with your supervisor or to the Chief, Voluntary Services.
- Accept assignments/suggestions graciously and cooperatively.
- Remain in the area to which you are assigned, unless your VA supervisor sends you on an errand.
- When in a patient care area, observe posted ward regulations.
- Do not eat or drink in the corridors or patient units.
- Never sit or lean on a patient's bed. Likewise, do not give food, beverages, or smoking materials to a patient unless directed to do so by a VA supervisor.
- All information concerning patients is **STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**.
- **Lending money or other items to patients, staff, or other volunteers is prohibited.**
- Do not give information about yourself, such as your home address, telephone number, etc., or accept gifts from patients.
- Avoid discussing subjects of a controversial nature involving the patient's family matters or religion. If these subjects are raised, inform your VA supervisor so that the Social Work Service or Chaplain Service staff can professionally assist the patient.
- Advise patients to refer their pension and benefits questions or problems to the Health Benefits Staff or a qualified Veterans Service Officer.

Avoid showing favoritism. As a rule, you should not concentrate all your attention on a single patient or small group to the exclusion of others in your assignment area.

Reporting Special Incidents Involving Patient(s)

Volunteers witnessing any special or unusual incidents involving patients should report such incidents immediately to their VA supervisor, Police Service (Ext. 3333), or the person in charge of the activity site. Examples of special incidents include:

1. Patients missing from their assigned activity
2. Any injuries to the patients
3. Patient abuse
4. Attempted suicide
5. Patients damaging personal or government property

Workplace Violence/ Patient Abuse

Whether the personnel in question are paid or volunteer, it is important to have policies and practices which promote accountability and the highest levels of performance possible without ignoring the reality that all individuals have idiosyncrasies and limitations as well as strengths. A double standard which does not give respect and dignity to both volunteers and paid staff is not only unnecessary but is also unhealthy for individuals and organizations.

The Dayton VA Medical Center hereby affirms its policy that employees and volunteers should work in environments that are free from physical attack, threats, menacing and harassing behaviors. Violent behavior will not be tolerated at this facility. Persons (patients, beneficiaries, volunteers, visitors, employees) 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 that are verbally or physically aggressive.

No patient is to be mistreated or abused in any way, physically or verbally, by any employee or volunteer. Volunteers witnessing abuse must report it immediately to their VA supervisor, Police Service (Ext. 3333), or the person in charge of the activity. Volunteers who abuse any patient will be immediately terminated from the volunteer roles.

Prevention of Sexual Harassment

The Supreme Court of the United States defines sexual harassment as “such conduct (that) has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. Sexual

harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment is a flagrant form of illegal discrimination that generates a harmful and threatening atmosphere and undermines the integrity of the employment relationship. Sexual harassment also debilitates morale and interferes in the work productivity of its victims and co-workers.

Employees and volunteers who feel that they are the victims of sexual harassment are encouraged to report such activities to their supervisor. Volunteers who sexually harass other volunteers, employees, patients, or visitors will be immediately terminated from the volunteer roles.

VHA Privacy Policy and HIPAA Training for Volunteers

Required Training For Who? All Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employees, including volunteers, medical residents, students, and contractors are required to complete this training, even if you may not have direct patient contact responsibilities.

Purpose and Background: In 1996, Congress passed the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). On December 28, 2000, Health & Human Services Department (HHS) published the final rule for Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information, known as the HIPAA Privacy Rule. Revisions have been published, and VHA had to be compliant by April 14, 2003.

What does HIPAA mean? HIPAA protects your individual health information when it is maintained or transmitted electronically, in written format, or communicated verbally. Volunteers need to know that all patient information and related health information is confidential. It is important for all volunteers to safeguard any patient health information you may come across in the course of your duties. The safeguards and extensive legislation that have now been put in place by HIPAA are designed to safeguard confidential health information, as the healthcare industry increasingly relies on computers for processing health care transactions.

The VA must establish procedures to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of protected patient health information. All volunteers and employees need to be familiar with the VA Privacy Policies and HIPAA safeguards designed to protect patient health information.

Volunteers, as “without compensation employees”, are subject to the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974, Public Law 93-579, and the VA regulations that implement this law. Accordingly, volunteers must assist VA staff in safeguarding the privacy of patient information discovered during the course of their duties in their volunteer assignment.

Unlawful release of such information could result in prosecution in a court of law and the imposition of a substantial fine.

As a Volunteer, What Do I Need to Know About HIPAA?

Protected Health Information (PHI) must be kept confidential. PHI consists of the following:

- Individually Identifiable Information (i.e. Social Security number, health information, etc.)
- Demographic Information (i.e. address, phone, age, gender, etc.)
- This information can be in any form (verbal, written, electronic)

As a volunteer, you are required to keep all PHI strictly confidential that you may discover in the course of your assigned volunteer duties. Here are some requirements:

- No talking in public areas about Protected Health Information as listed above
- Keep PHI out of public areas. (i.e. elevators, stairways, open areas, etc.)
- Secure any records you may be working with before walking away
- No discussing with anyone, inside or outside the hospital, any PHI you may learn while carrying out your assigned duties as a volunteer.

Possible Outcomes For Not Complying With HIPAA Privacy Policy:

- Organization specific sanctions (i.e. lawsuits, not receiving accreditation)
- Right of Privacy Policy violation victim to file a complaint will be exercised
- Civil and criminal penalties for HIPAA Privacy Policy violators
- Fines up to $50,000 and or imprisonment

Summary:

All volunteers are responsible for safeguarding Protected Health Information (PHI). As a volunteer in our hospital, you have a responsibility to keep all patient information, learned in the course of your duties, confidential and secure. Do not discuss any PHI discovered in the course of your assignment with anyone. Remember that you would want your personal information and health records treated in the same confidential, professional manner.

As a volunteer, take pride and ownership in the fact that your organization is concerned about privacy and recognizes its importance in providing quality healthcare.

Patient Rights

Each patient at the VA Medical Center has certain rights and privileges. It is incumbent that each VA staff member and volunteer honors these patient rights. These specific patient rights are posted in each unit. Please familiarize yourself with them.

Infection Control Measures

While no environment is germ-free, we can take several simple steps to prevent the spread of infection. The single most effective means of preventing the spread of infection is **handwashing**. This is especially true if you follow these simple steps:

How to wash your hands:

1. Moisten hands with water and add soap.
2. Scrub hands and wrists vigorously for 10 seconds, paying special attention to nails.
3. Dry hands well, and then turn off faucet with a dry paper towel.

When to wash:

1. Before and after your work session
2. Before and after physical contact with patients
3. After using the toilet, blowing your nose, covering a sneeze
4. Whenever hands become obviously soiled
5. Before and after eating, drinking, or handling food.

To further halt the spread of infection, volunteers will **wear gloves** when handling or serving food. In addition, anyone serving food will refrain from eating while serving the food. When removing gloves, pull them back so that they are turned wrong side out. The gloves should then be thrown immediately in the trash.

Hazardous Spills

All staff should know how to protect themselves from hazardous spills. Such spills may be classified as either a biohazard spill or a chemical hazard spill. A biohazard spill contains blood in the spilled liquid. A chemical hazard spill contains a caustic, flammable, reactive, and/or toxic element in the spill. Spills of this nature must be isolated to prevent tracking or the spread of the hazard. Notify the immediate Supervisor in the area to report the spill so that appropriate cleaning procedures may be followed.

Bloodborne Pathogens: Hepatitis B and HIV/Aids Virus

Volunteers working directly with patients and in areas such as Laboratory, Radiology, Emergency Room, and Patient Transport should be aware of Universal Precautions (UP) and Disease Specific Isolation (DSI), or isolation ordered for a specific disease. It is the policy of this Medical Center to follow UP and DSI in the treatment of all patients. All tasks performed by health care workers will be categorized by potential exposure to blood and body fluids. Body fluids include blood, oral or genital secretions, urine, feces, wound drainage, and breast milk.

Bloodborne pathogens are those infections that are spread through blood and blood products. Included in this type of infection are Hepatitis B and the HIV/Aids virus. Hepatitis B is easier to catch than HIV.

Hepatitis B is spread through blood and blood products. Volunteers who work in direct patient care positions or who handle lab specimen can minimize any potential exposure by following the infection control procedures described above. Hepatitis B vaccine is available and recommended for all direct patient care staff.

The HIV infection is spread through blood, blood products and body fluids. Only 1 in 300 exposures result in HIV transmission.

Standard precautions are effective in avoiding the contagion. Volunteers will, without exception, wear gloves to handle lab specimen and will only accept those specimen that are already sealed in a plastic bag.

Tuberculosis and TB Skin Testing

Tuberculosis (TB) infection is spread through the inhalation of airborne droplets. The incidence of TB infection has risen in our society. Newer strains of the disease are more resistant to treatment.

To reduce the spread of the disease, proper precautions must be observed. Patients identified with TB must be kept in a negative-pressure isolation environment until no longer contagious. Anyone coming into contact with the patient must wear a mask (respirator) when in the patient's room. Any room in which a TB patient is isolated is clearly marked with a sign outside the door. **Unless specifically trained to do so, volunteers will not enter an isolation room**.

Annual testing is a state law and a federal requirement for anyone working in a health care facility. TB tests are provided free of charge to all RS volunteers prior to acceptance as a volunteer, and annually thereafter during their birth month. Anyone who has not had a TB test within the past year must initially have two tests within a two-week period. If you have tested positively in the past, you may need to have a chest x-ray or complete a questionnaire at the discretion of the Occupational Health Nurse.

Fire and Safety Procedures

Knowledge of the appropriate response to a fire in a medical center environment is a critical element in quality health care. This medical center practices the "R.A.C.E." system for response to a fire. This means:

> **R**escue – evacuate the immediate area of danger.
>
> **A**larm - Pull the nearest fire alarm box. The telephone operator will announce "**Code Red**" over the loud speakers.
>
> **C**onfine – contain the fire by closing doors and windows.
>
> **E**xtinguish – attempt to extinguish the fire only if it is small enough and you are skilled with an extinguisher.

These rules are universal and may be used in any fire (or fire drill) situation. **Additional service specific instructions are provided by the supervisors in the work area where you are assigned**. Make sure your supervisor explains the instructions to you.

Equipment Safety

Electrical shock accidents can be prevented. Regulations require that staff utilizing electrical equipment learn about safety in operations. Only use equipment as it was intended to be used, and keep clothing, hair, and hands away from moving parts. Make a quick examination of the equipment before every use to spot potential problems. Any potential equipment problems should be reported to the immediate supervisor of the area immediately.

Emergency Preparedness

All employees and volunteers should know how to protect themselves in case of an emergency. In the event of an emergency, an overhead announcement will be made to alert staff as to the nature of the emergency. The announcements will be made as follows:

Code Red - Fire Alarm
Code 99 (Blue) - Medical Emergency
Code White - Terrorism-Chemical, Biological and Radiological
Code Violet - Violent Patient/Combative

Code Black - Bomb Threat/Explosion
Code Orange - Hazardous Material Release
Code Silver - Person with /Weapon/Hostage Situation
Code Brown – Missing Patient
Code Green – Evacuation
Code Yellow – Disaster Plan (Internal & External)
Code Gray – Tornado Watch/Warning

Volunteers should remain at their work site. Supervisors will provide specific instructions on their responsibilities during an emergency situation.

Accident Reporting

Any accident involving you or a patient must be reported to your VA supervisor immediately. Even when it does not appear an injury has resulted, a report to your supervisor is important. You will receive, without cost, emergency treatment for any injury sustained while working as a volunteer. You are a member of our VA team and will be treated like an employee who may be injured while performing assigned duties.

Smoking Policy

Cigarette smoking is **STRICTLY PROHIBITED** in all of the buildings of the VA Medical Center. This regulation applies to employees, volunteers, patients and visitors. Individuals may smoke **ONLY** in the designated outside smoking areas and 100 feet from any building entrance. Electronic cigarettes must follow the same rules as regular cigarettes.

Distributions

No item, handout, or gifts should be brought into the Medical Center or distributed without specific permission of the Chief, Voluntary Services. Some items are totally unacceptable. These include drugs, including over the counter medications, firearms, ammunition, other weapons, and any alcoholic beverages. Violation of these prohibitions may result in arrest and/or fine. If a volunteer is taking medications (including prescription medicines), these medications may be brought into the Medical Center for their use only.

Selling of promotional goods or ticket selling is not allowed.

Change of Address/ Telephone

Any change of address or telephone number must be reported to Voluntary Services in a timely manner. Timely sharing of important information is dependent upon accurate records.

Taking Pictures of Patients

Taking pictures of patients or even bringing a camera into the facility without prior approval is **prohibited**. If you plan to host a gift distribution or recreational activity and would like to take pictures for your organization's scrap book or to publicize your activity, please discuss this in advance with the Chief, Voluntary Services. Photography must be approved by Public Affairs.

Resignation

It is your responsibility to notify Voluntary Services if, for any reason, you decide to discontinue your volunteer service at the Dayton VA Medical Center. We will request that you return your ID badge at that time as well.

Benefits

We are happy to have you on our team. There are services that are available to you, some even beyond those given employees.

Hours Accrual, Awards and Recognition

It is our pleasure to recognize the contributions of the VAVS volunteers and their organizations to the VAVS Program. Volunteers have a significant impact on VA and should be applauded for their contributions. Volunteers will accrue hours when services are rendered within a VA facility, clinic, or off-station site approved by VA as an appropriate location for an RS assignment under VA supervision. Credit will be given for hours actually worked, rounded to the nearest hour.

Each year Voluntary Services hosts an Adult Volunteer Recognition Ceremony, generally during the month of April.

NOTE: <u>The Medical Center presents awards to volunteers based on the number of cumulative hours of service contributed through September of the prior year</u>. This can be very confusing given the fact that there is a six-month delay between the end of the accrual year and the date of the ceremony. The award you receive in April will not include

credit for those hours worked from October through the date of the program. You may rest assured that these hours are on file and will be recognized in subsequent years.

Appointment to VAVS Committees

Established in 1946, the VAVS National Advisory Committee operates under Public Law 92-463, “The Federal Advisory Committee Act.” This committee advises VA staff on how to coordinate and promote volunteer activities within VA healthcare facilities and on matters relating to volunteerism. The committee is comprised of VA staff and the national representatives from many service and community organizations. Each VA medical center and independent outpatient clinic has a corresponding local committee. This committee is comprised of local VA staff and representatives who are appointed by their corresponding National Representatives. If you are unsure who your representative is, we will be happy to introduce you.

Volunteer Meals

A volunteer working for a minimum of four hours is entitled to a meal allowance - not to exceed the amount noted on your meal ticket. Meal tickets are printed at either of the two computers designated for volunteer sign-in located at the Information Desk in the main patient tower or in Voluntary Services, Building 305.

The meal list is automatically generated when you sign-in for the day. Canteen Service will not honor the meal allowance unless your meal ticket is signed and you are wearing your official Volunteer ID Badge.

Meal tickets are valid only for the day they are printed.

Falsifying hours in order to receive a meal ticket when hours are not actually worked will result in termination of volunteer.

Canteen

The Veterans Canteen Service, located in Building 330, includes a cafeteria and a store. The cafeteria has a full breakfast and lunch menu and the store displays gifts, snacks, and a wide variety of dry good items. The canteen is open Monday through Friday, except on federal holidays.

A 24-hour vending area is located in the Main Lobby, Building 330 and has drinks and light snacks available for purchase.

Medical Treatment

Volunteers who are injured in the **course of their assigned duties** are authorized medical services. If you have an accident or illness while serving in your assignment, report to your immediate supervisor to determine the course of action to be taken.

Immunization Program

Flu shots are offered annually to all employees and volunteers free of charge. Availability dates will be posted for volunteers usually in the month of October.

Library and Reading Materials

The VAMC Library is primarily dedicated to the provision of current medical information. RS volunteers, as "without compensation" employees, may have access to this material.

For the reading enjoyment of the patients and visitors in our outpatient clinic areas, books and magazines are located in waiting areas throughout the medical center. These areas are stocked with donated materials. Accordingly, the assortment and stock will vary from week to week. Voluntary Services accepts donations of paperback books to support this program.

Telephones & Computers

With few exceptions, telephones in the medical center are to be used for official VA business. Courtesy phones are located in areas of the medical center for brief local calls.

All computers in the Medical Center are Federal Government Property and are for official VA business use **only**.

YOU MAY NOT PLUG ANY DEVICE INTO ANY USB PORT ON ANY VA COMPUTER!

This includes, but is not limited to, cell phones, iPods or MP3 Players, Digital Cameras, flash/jump drives, digital book readers (Kindle/Nook), personal laptops, etc.

While on official duty as a VA volunteer your attention should be devoted to the patients and/or your assignment. As such, the use of cell phones (to call or text) and iPods/MP3 players is **prohibited** while on duty. It is recommended that you leave these items at home or in your vehicle during your shift to also prevent theft of such items.

Employment References and Recommendations

Voluntary Services will provide references and recommendations for employment, scholarships, school, and a variety of other individual needs. Volunteers should notify staff in sufficient time for a written response to be prepared.

The MOVE Program

If you are interested in assisting with our MOVE program at the facility, please let us know. We have many hospitalized Veterans who would enjoy the opportunity to have an escort walk with them around the facility. Walking or pushing a wheelchair is a great way to show a Veteran you care, give them a breath of fresh air, adopt a friend for life, and get fit all in one opportunity!

Free Parking

Limited parking is provided for volunteers in a restricted access lot at the Medical Center. General parking is located in several areas on the grounds. Valet parking is a service provided to our Veterans and Volunteers.

You must display a VA Volunteer Parking Decal to parking decal to park in the designated Volunteer spots. These are obtained through the Police Service. Please see Voluntary Service Staff for a form.

Credit Union

Day Air Credit Union is located on the Dayton VAMC Campus outside of building 305.

Liability, Injury and Damage Protection for VA Volunteers

VA volunteers have the same protections from personal liability as paid Federal employees. Federal law provides immunity to all Federal employees (including VA volunteers) from suits for personal injuries or death, or for property damage, as long as the employee's actions are part of his or her federal duties.

If a volunteer or other VA employee is sued, VA does a quick investigation to determine if the employee's actions were part of his or her official Federal duties and not, for example, the personal business of the employee. VA then recommends to the Department of

Justice that the suit, if filed in a State court, be removed to a Federal court and the Federal Government take the place of the employee in the suit. If the Department of Justice agrees, that is exactly what happens, and the employee is no longer a party to the suit.

Income Tax Deduction

In preparing tax returns, volunteers may deduct unreimbursed out-of-pocket expenses directly related to their volunteer service if they itemize deductions.

Volunteer service or other charitable donations must have been contributed to what the IRS terms a "qualifying organization."

Examples of types of expenditures that volunteers may deduct on their tax returns include:

- bus and cab transportation expenses
- parking costs and toll fees
- the cost and expenses of upkeep of special uniforms
- telephone bills
- supplies purchased to perform volunteer duties
- automobile mileage and expenses for gas and oil
- dues, fees or assessments made to a qualified organization
- non-cash contributions or property (i.e. clothing, books, household items, equipment)

More detailed information can be obtained from the IRS Publication #526 - "Charitable Contributions" which can be obtained from the IRS Forms Office - 1-800-424-FORM.

Termination of Volunteer

In accordance with VHA Handbook 1620.01:

“The Voluntary Services Program Manager may remove a VAVS volunteer for unsatisfactory performance, inability to perform the assignment, or a violation of established policy or procedures. “

Gifts and Donations

The Chief, Voluntary Services is responsible for coordinating the acceptance and acknowledgment of all gifts and donations offered to the medical center. These gifts and

donations will be used for the sole purpose of meeting particular needs and requirements for the welfare and comfort of the patients. Some of the more popular donated items include magazine subscriptions, and personal hygiene items such as shaving items, deodorant, dental care items, and shampoo. The Voluntary Services office maintains a "needs list" which is updated frequently and always available.

Individuals or organizations wishing to make monetary donations to the Medical Center for the benefit of the patients should make checks payable to Dayton VA Medical Center and mail them to the following address.

Dayton VA Medical Center (135)
Attention: Voluntary Services
4100 West Third Street
Dayton, Ohio 45428

If uncertain as to what purpose or what account you wish the donation to be applied, prior contact with the Chief, Voluntary Services will ensure prompt and accurate application of the monetary donation. Contact Voluntary Services at 937-262-2162 for further information.

All equipment items donated to the Medical Center become the property of the United States Government.

Officials and employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs will **not** solicit gifts or donations or authorize the name of the VA by individual or organization or the name of anyone in the VA for this purpose. This does not preclude discussion of appropriateness with an individual offering a gift.

Government Owned Vans

The Dayton VAMC has a fleet of donated/government owned vans in service to support the Veterans Transportation Network (VTN). They are easily recognized by their distinctive markings that both advertise the program and recognize the veteran service organizations that donated them. The vans are stationed at the medical center and at key locations throughout our service area.

Use of Government Owned Vehicles

Only certified volunteer drivers operating under the direction of the transportation coordinator will operate the vehicles. A certified driver holds a valid state driver's

license and vehicle insurance, and who has passed a physical examination by this medical center.

Off-Station vans will be stored in agreed upon, secure locations, (preferably a local government facility such as a police, fire station, etc.). They will be used exclusively to transport patients for scheduled medical center appointments and treatments.

When transporting veterans, the volunteer driver is only permitted to stop the van for rest stops and/or emergencies, or to pick up and discharge passengers at designated pick-up points. **UNAUTHORIZED TRIPS OR PERSONAL ERRANDS ARE NOT PERMITTED.**

The van is not an emergency vehicle. Should the veteran require immediate emergency transportation, it is recommended that he or she contact the medical center.

NOTE: Transportation in the Network vans is offered free of charge to eligible veterans. The volunteer driver is NOT to accept payment from any passenger for transportation in the van. Should a rider wish to make a donation to support the network, he/she will be referred to the local HSC. Any donations to this program go towards the purchase of new replacement vans.

Passenger Identification and Authorization

Each veteran who wishes to utilize the VTN must agree to follow the established rules for that program prior to his/her acceptance as a passenger. The coordinator will gather needed information for the driver and record this information on the Passenger Identification Form.

Each time a driver transports veterans to the medical center, he/she will complete a “Daily Driver Trip Report” form (Appendix B). This form will be used to identify and locate patients, help expedite their treatment, and record travel activities. A copy of the list of patients transported will be provided to the Travel Office upon arrival at the medical center.

Van Emergency Items Checklist

Each of the government owned vans is equipped with supplies that may be needed in case of an emergency. Vans are equipped with a folder providing drivers with information, sample forms, and important telephone numbers.

Emergency items in each van include:

- Blank Accident Report Forms

- Fire Extinguisher
- First Aid Kit (minor first aid injury only)
- Modular Telephone in working order (NOTE: This telephone may be used for emergency calls only)
- Government Credit Card for fuel purchases
- Inflated/inflatable spare tire and working jack

Vehicle Maintenance and Credit Card Purchases

Maintenance of government-owned vehicles will be the responsibility of the VA and will be directed by the Chief, Engineering. Maintenance will be under his/her direction and may warrant temporary removal of the vehicle from service.

Credit cards may be used to pay for fuel. Drivers will report mechanical problems/service needs to the HSC. The HSC will contact appropriate VAMC staff for any vehicle repairs or servicing needs. Credit purchase receipts must be submitted promptly (daily) to prevent extra charges and to facilitate timely recording.

Motor Vehicle Trip Log and Monthly Coordinator's Report

Volunteer drivers and VTN Coordinators will be responsible for maintaining complete and detailed logs of vehicle use. This log enables the HSC to keep accurate records of DAV transportation activities.

Reporting a Motor Vehicle Accident

1. Stop immediately and take steps to prevent another accident at the scene.
2. Call 911 and give the operator your location and request medical assistance in the event of injuries.
3. DO NOT <u>sign any paper</u> or <u>make any statement</u> as to who was at fault *(except to your supervisor or to a Federal Government investigator.)*
4. Get name of address of each witness.
5. State your name, address, place of employment, name of your supervisor and upon request, and show your operator's permit and vehicle registration card. (NOTE: *Only Government-owned vehicles registered in the District of Columbia or displaying state tags have registration cards.*)

6. Complete Standard Form 91, Motor Vehicle Accident Report at the scene. A sample of this form is included in each van. If conditions prevent this, make notes of the following:

a. Registration information for other vehicle(s) (owner's name, tag number, state, serial number, and vehicle description);

b. Information on other driver (name, address, operator's permit number, and expiration date);

c. Name and address of each person involved and extent of injury, if any;

d. Name and address of company insuring other vehicle(s); and

e. General information such as location, time, weather, damage, measurements, etc.

7. As soon as possible, notify the HSC. Instructions will be provided to you if the vehicle is unsafe to operate. Phone numbers are posted in the folder located in each van.
8. If you are injured, have your supervisor submit Form CA-1, Employee's Notice of Injury or Occupational Disease.
9. Inform all passengers riding the van to notify their doctor(s) that they were in an accident when they go for their appointment.
10. All reports and data must be submitted to your supervisor within one working day.

NOTE: If you are injured, have the police officer notify your supervisor, who will assume your obligation for reporting the accident.