

PATIENT ADVOCACY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE PROGRAM

1. **PURPOSE:** To establish policy and procedures for a Centralized Patient Advocacy Program.

2. **POLICY:** It is the policy of this facility to provide a customer service program that ensures timely resolution of stakeholder issues, and contributes to identification and resolution of problems in our system. The program operates under the philosophy of service recovery whereby patient concerns are identified, resolved, classified and utilized to improve overall service to all patients and their families. The Patient Advocacy Program/ Customer Service Program is an important component of patient satisfaction and contributes proactively to customer service initiatives to provide excellent patient-centered care. The program will aid all staff in providing care and service that is patient centered and the highest standard of excellence.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- a. Facility Director: Has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring there is a functional and efficient program in place for service recovery and responding to patient concerns/complaints.
- b. Service Chiefs/Department Directors: Ensure their staff is following customer service principles and promptly report patient concerns and resolution through the patient advocate system. Allow staffs who are members of the supporting committee's time to participate in the committees devoted to customer service.
- c. Patient Advocate Manager: is designated in this facility to manage the complaint process including complaint resolution, data capture and analysis and assist with identifying areas requiring system improvements. The advocate will address complaints directly with supervisors, department leaders and executive leadership to facilitate resolution to problems. She/he serves as chair of the customer service committee, customer service champion team and patient advocate committee. She/he works closely with customer service champions at the service level. Identifies and communicates any quality of care issues that arise to the appropriate individuals for further resolution.
- d. Customer Service Champions: Are provided additional guidance on customer service and service recovery. CSC will provide guidance in their service area on management of patient concerns, communicate activities of the customer service program, and provide education as appropriate to their service areas.
- e. All employees: provide service based on customer service principles and report patient concerns timely for prompt resolution. All employees will provide the highest level of customer service to internal and external stakeholders. Examples include:

- (1) Answer all telephone calls by the 3rd ring.
- (2) Respond to voice mail messages promptly.
- (3) Warm Handoff – when escorting a stakeholder or transferring a call to another employee, introduce self and patient to that employee.
- (4) Introduce self to stakeholders when providing service.

Ask the individual if they need additional assistance before ending discussion

Every VA employee is responsible for customer satisfaction. It is essential for employees to display compassion and understanding when dealing with customers; resolving problems at the point of entry whenever possible. Each customer contact should be viewed as an opportunity for improvement. Any customer dissatisfaction that cannot be expeditiously resolved should be reported to the Patient Advocate Manager

f. Customer Service Committees:

Customer Service Committee: Meets monthly and identifies projects and activities to improve customer service utilizing information from customer surveys and the patient advocate program.

Customer Service Champions: Meets quarterly and provides education, discussion, and information sharing with the unit champions.

Quality Performance Council: Activities of the above committee's and the data analysis of customer surveys and PATS program data is reported to this committee and shared from this council with the Executive Committee.

3. **PROCEDURES:**

- a. Patient concerns presented at the service level if unable to be quickly resolved will be reported to the Patient Advocate Manager (PAM) with as much detail as possible.
- b. PAM will contact the patient for more information as appropriate and enter the information into the PATS system. All concerns regardless of source will be entered into the PATS system.
- c. The PAM will forward the concern to the appropriate supervisor/manager/director for prompt resolution.
- d. The expected response rate from the departments is within 2 days with a maximum of 7 days and communication to the patient should occur regarding the resolution and during the process of resolution feedback should be provided to the Veteran. The PAM will audit for timely responses back to our Veterans/families and follow up as indicated. Examples of feedback that may be effective with the Veteran include:
 - A sincere apology- most patients would like to hear acknowledgement of error or their perception/feelings personally when there is a real or perceived system/service failure.
 - Urgency- demonstrating action to resolve the problem immediately sends a message to the patient that their care is a priority to the organization

- Empathy- letting the patient know that the organization cares and feelings are understood.
 - Offer meeting with the individual for further discussion
 - Offer referral to the appropriate service as indicated by concern within VA guidelines.
- e. The PAM will make periodic rounds to assess for inpatient customer satisfaction with services.
- f. Posters are placed throughout the facility and updated when needed identifying the patient advocate manager and how to issue a concern/complaint.

6. **REFERENCES:**

- a. Patient Advocate Guidebook, located at <http://nvsap.vssc.med.va.gov/Document%20Library/ptadvguidebook.pdf>
- b. VHA Directive 1003, dated August 6, 2003
- c. Joint Commission Standards, current edition

7. **RESCISSION:** Center Circular QPC-09-07, dated March 1, 2009.

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