**How To Plan an Adaptive Golf Clinic**

The Veterans Adaptive Golf Program consists of two separate clinics. These clinics are successful individually, though the maximum benefit is shown when they are used together as pieces of one cohesive program.

The first clinic is the **First Swing Clinic**. It provides the Veterans with the opportunity to learn the basic swing techniques from local golf professionals. This clinic is held at a driving range and is a one day clinic for all local amputee veterans. Veterans are broken down into small groups of 2-4 per driving range stall and the Golf Professionals provide 1:1 instruction throughout the day teaching them the basic swing techniques, or assisting them to perfect their current swing.

The second clinic is the **Next Step Clinic** which is exactly as it sounds. It is simply the Next Step in their Rehabilitation and their golf game (held several months after the First Swing to encourage skill practice). This clinic is held on a Golf Course and is a 9-hole scramble formatted clinic / tournament. The teams are broken down into 9 teams of 4. Each team is comprised of 2 amputee Veterans (who have completed a First Swing Clinic), a Golf Professional and a VIP guest (or you can have 2 Golf Professionals in lieu of the VIP if you choose). These teams hit the course to play a full round of golf, all the while being coached and taught by their Golf Professional.

**Getting Started**

**Pitch the idea:** The first step is to get support and buy-in from your department and your VA facility's senior leadership (and VISN for additional support). Meeting with your key stakeholders and educating VA staff about the benefits of the game of golf and its use in rehabilitation is helpful in sharing your vision. If funding is needed, a typical clinic will run approximately $5,000, depending on how much you can get donated.

**Assemble clinic staff:** Golf clinics require approximately 10-12 VA staff members on the day of the event for success (to assist with the golf pros, setup, clean up, registration, troubleshooting, etc.). Try to include your physical, occupational, and recreational therapists as well as prosthetics staff on the team. These professionals make a good comprehensive team. Also, having a medical professional (RN, NP, MD) available on the day of the event is a great safety precaution.

**Choose the Who, When and Where:**

* Identify who you would like to provide the event for (amputees, SCI, Visually impaired, Veterans who use wheelchairs, etc.). Obtain a listing of the Veterans you choose to reach out to. Keeping it to a specific population will give you a manageable number of Veterans to work with for a one day clinic.
* Locate a driving range and golf course that is in the general proximity of your VA hospital.
* Make sure the driving range is accessible (look for close parking, paved sidewalks- not too much gravel, grass, or rough terrain, handicap accessible bathrooms, no steps up to the range/stalls).
* A covered driving range is ideal, so rain dates aren’t necessary.
* The golf course for the 9-hole scramble should be an “easier" course for beginners.
* Encourage the golf course to get involved in the clinic-allowing you to use their carts and equipment, having some of their golf professionals help out, etc.
* Choose a suitable date. Remember to plan it around other major tournaments in your area. Find a date when the golf course will give the full driving range for use or is able to shut down the front 9 holes for your scramble. You want the focus to be on the Veterans.

**Create your brand!** Work with your Medical Media department to create your clinic name, logo and a promotional poster. Start spreading the word about the clinic throughout your hospital. Visiting various VA clinics and educating providers about the event is helpful. Medical Media/Public Affairs can also send out emails to staff and update the VA Facebook/Twitter pages to include the information. Create a buzz about your adaptive sports clinic. Get your logo anywhere and everywhere so staff and Veterans are all aware of it.

**Reach out to the Veterans:** If you have a significant amount of time, starting out with mailing out a Save the Date card is helpful. If time is limited, mail out a packet to include a cover letter to explain the event (what is provided, the benefits of the game, the agenda) and a registration form so you can keep accurate track of the participants. SELL YOUR EVENT! Don't be afraid to use the positive aspects to pique interest. Keep the Veterans interested and informed. Maintain communication up until the event date- emails, mailings, phone calls, etc.

**Gather resources:** If you do not know of any golf resources, start researching. The golf course you choose to hold your clinic at will have plenty of basic golf resources. PGA has excellent adaptive golf literature and contacts in your area. Touch base with any local companies or organizations. If you are doing an Amputee Golf Clinic, the National Amputee Golf Association (NAGA) has excellent resources and is always willing to assist.

**Find Golf Professionals:** The more the merrier but, it's advised to start with at least 4-5 Golf Pros. More Golf Pros = more 1:1 instruction. You can contact your local PGA Chapter to solicit help. The individual PGA chapters hold meetings which you can attend to promote your event / opportunity. Require interested Pros to register and keep them aware of the clinic agenda and goals so they are prepared.

**Tap into Sponsors:** Many prosthetic and golf companies as well as Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) are willing to be clinic sponsors. Companies may be willing to donate products or financially support your clinic so in return, you can offer to hang their banner or let their company set up an expo tent or put their logo on a t-shirt on the day of your clinic.

**Alert the Media!** Your Public Affairs Officer can send out a media release to the local newspapers, television and radio stations. It’s a great opportunity to educate the local community about the excellent programs available to Veterans. Additionally, your VA faculty will appreciate the positive news coverage.

**The beauty is in the details:** On the day of the event, don’t be afraid to roll out the red carpet. Some helpful hints of how to make your clinic extra special:

* Always greet each Veteran as they arrive. Helping them out of their vehicles or carrying their golf bag is always appreciated. Escort them to where to go and help answer any questions.
* VA staff should all wear matching staff shirts so the Veterans know who to contact if they need anything.
* Little extras like making coffee and donut available in the morning during registration goes a long way.
* Provide a free lunch (some organizations are willing to donate) if your clinic takes place over lunchtime.
* Providing give-a-ways are always a hit (hats, shirts etc., with your clinic logo= great promotion!).
* Award fun trophies for the Golf Scramble- it gives the Veterans something to work towards and promotes healthy competition.
* PLENTY of signage (along the route to the course), at the driving range, each hole on the course, the bathrooms, etc.
* If you are able to work with your facility's transportation department, offering transportation to those who may require it, allows for greater attendance.
* Have adaptive equipment available to use or test such as adaptive clubs, golf grips /grip aids, teeing devices, adaptive carts, etc. Companies will often loan these items since it can be good promotion for their business.

**Encourage Practice!** At the end of your clinic, be sure to encourage the Veterans to continue going to the driving range / golf course to practice their skills. If you are able to receive donations of used sets of golf clubs, you can give these out to interested Veterans at the end of the clinic. This will provide them with the tools necessary to continue on the path of rehabilitation.

**Follow up!** Have your staff follow up with the Veterans. Send out a survey to get feedback about the clinic, mail a thank you letter to the Veterans and have the staff call the Veterans to ask how their golf practice and therapy are going. Keep them engaged and involved. Offer support as needed.

**Good Luck!**