

## **Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center Offers Free Credit Monitoring to Veterans Whose Personal Information May Have Been Improperly Discarded**

Augusta, Ga. – The Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center (CNVAMC) is notifying and offering one year of free credit monitoring to more than 2,600 Veterans whose personal information may have been improperly discarded at its outpatient clinic in Aiken, South Carolina.

An internal investigation revealed that a stack of appointment lists, which included Veterans' social security numbers and dates of birth, was improperly discarded in a regular trash bin instead of a bin designated for shredding. There is no indication that the information has been misused or stolen, and the waste collection process of CNVAMC, as explained by the company that handles trash collection for the medical center, suggests that the information is not accessible to anyone.

“While this was an isolated incident, any time a Veteran’s personal information may be compromised, we take the matter very seriously,” said Acting Medical Center Director Patricia Pittman. “We are reaching out to each Veteran who may have been impacted, and we’re taking the necessary steps to prevent this from happening in the future.”

Although CNVAMC administrators believe the discarded documents only pertain to appointments held in January 2011, the actual number of Veterans could not be verified. Therefore, the medical center is sending letters to every Veteran who received care at the Aiken clinic from January 2010 through January 2011 to explain what occurred and to offer free credit monitoring services.

In addition, all CNVAMC employees have been required to review VA’s privacy procedures again, which include the proper disposal of documents containing Veterans’ personally identifiable information.

Veterans who have questions or concerns about whether their personal information may have been improperly discarded are encouraged to call a special hotline established by the CNVAMC at (706) 729-5893.

### **Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center – Aiken Outpatient Clinic Improper Disposal of Veterans’ Personal Information Q&A**

#### **What happened?**

A clerk at the VA outpatient clinic in Aiken, S.C., discarded a stack of appointment lists in a regular trash receptacle instead of placing them in the bin designated for shredding.

#### **What type of information was included on the appointment lists?**

The appointment lists contained Veterans’ names, physicians’ names, appointment times, social security numbers, telephone numbers, income verification and co-pay information.

#### **How many Veterans were impacted?**

Although CNVAMC administrators believe the discarded documents only pertain to appointments held in January 2011, the actual number of Veterans could not be verified. Therefore, the medical center is sending 2,667 letters to Veterans who received care at the Aiken clinic from January 1, 2010 thru January 31, 2011. The letters explain what occurred and offer free credit monitoring services.

**What is the CNVAMC doing to addressing this?**

In addition to offering one year of free credit monitoring to impacted Veterans, all CNVAMC employees have been required to review VA's privacy procedures, which include the proper disposal of documents containing Veterans' personally identifiable information.

**Why weren't the appointment lists retrieved?**

When it was discovered that appointment information was disposed of in the regular trash, CNVAMC called Three Rivers Solid Waste Authority, which handles trash collection for the clinic. The company indicated that it would be impossible to retrieve the appointment lists, and sent a letter to the CNVAMC explaining their waste disposal process. According to Three Rivers Solid Waste Authority, trash is picked up from the clinic dumpster and taken to a landfill where the waste is tipped from the truck and pushed into place by a bulldozer. The trash is then compressed by a 120,000-pound compacting machine, which is equipped with a metal wheel that crushes and shreds the material. Each day, the landfill accepts more than 800 tons of waste, which is then covered by soil.

**Why didn't the CNVAMC inform Veterans about this sooner?**

This isolated incident occurred on February 16, 2011, and CNVAMC administrators immediately launched an internal investigation to determine what happened. To ensure a thorough investigation, the CNVAMC wanted to gather all the facts before making Veteran notifications.

**What happened to the employee who made this error?**

The employee's supervisor and clinic coordinator are following appropriate administrative procedures to ensure this does not happen again.

**Who can Veterans call if they have questions or concerns?**

The CNVAMC has established a special hotline that Veterans can call if they have questions or concerns about whether their personal information may have been improperly discarded. The number is (706) 729-5893.