

# St. Cloud VA Health Care System

Brainerd | Montevideo | Alexandria



## Social Work Student Handbook 2021

**Josh Seezs, MSW, CSW-PIP**  
**Social Work Executive**



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**This Handbook is designed to provide information, resources, and guidance for St. Cloud VA HCS Social Work Students throughout the field placement experience.**

VA Social Workers are committed to training graduate level Masters of Social Work students. The passion and commitment we share with students in the field is generative, building a cadre of highly trained clinical social workers. Those who complete their VA field placement are often VA social workers of the future.

## Introduction to the VA

As of 2010, there are 22.7 million living U.S. Veterans, 8 percent of whom are women. Nearly 17 million, or 74 percent, of Veterans served during at least one wartime period. The median age of all living Veterans is 62 years – median age for men is 62, for women it is 48. Vietnam Veterans account for the largest segment of the Veteran population. Veterans, dependents, and survivors make up about 19 percent of America's population. (Department of Veterans Affairs Fact Sheet)

### VA History

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The United States has the most comprehensive Veteran's health care system of any nation. The roots of the Department of Veterans Affairs date back to the pilgrims.

*“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.” – Abraham Lincoln*

1636

- The first law for the support of disabled soldiers was passed by the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony when they were at war with the Pequot Indians.

1776

- Continental Congress began providing pensions to soldiers who were disabled to encourage enlistment during the Revolutionary War.
- States and communities also provided direct medical and hospital care to veterans on an individual basis.

1811

- Federal authorization for domiciliary and medical facilities first occurred

1865

- During the Civil War the motto for the VA was born out of President Lincoln's second inaugural address when he called for "care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."

1917

- The United States entered World War I and established a new system of Veteran's benefits, which included disability compensation, insurance and vocational rehabilitation.

1930

- The Veterans Administration was formed to consolidate and coordinate all veteran activities after the benefits were being administered by three different federal agencies.

1944

- During World War II, the "G.I. Bill" was passed, granting educational benefits to veterans. It is believed that this act had more impact on the American way of life than any bill since passage of the Homestead Act almost 100 years earlier.

1989

- On March 15, 1989, the Veterans Administration became the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA was now a cabinet-level agency with a Secretary who reports directly to the President of the United States.

## VA Branches and Information

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs is currently Denis McDonough [Reference:](#)

VA Central Office in Washington DC gives local regions, or Veteran's Integrated Service Network (VISN), and Health Care System directives that are implemented at the local centers according to needs and processes. [Reference](#)

## Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

[Reference:](#) Healthcare Benefits 2012

## Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA)

[Reference:](#) Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents Book, Department of Veterans Affairs

## For Assistance To Apply For Benefits:

[Reference:](#) VA Regional Office, St. Paul, Minnesota

[Reference:](#) County Veterans Service Office (CVSO)

## National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

[Reference](#)

## VA and Military Culture

The military has a unique culture and many aspects transfer to the VA facilities, such as certain language uses and authority. Familiarize yourself with this culture and consider how it influences relationships.

[Reference:](#) Guide to Understanding the National Guard and Reserve Forces

[Reference](#) Military Facts for Nonmilitary Social Workers

[Reference](#) Understanding the Experience of Military Families and Their Returning War Fighters:  
Military Literature and Resource Review



*Core Values describe an organization's culture and character, and serve as the foundation for the way individuals interact with each other, as well as with people outside the organization.*

## VA Core Values "I CARE"

**Integrity** – Act with high moral principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.

**Commitment** – Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.

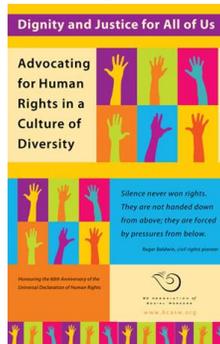
**Advocacy** – Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.

**Respect** – Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.

**Excellence** – Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.

### **Cultural Competency**

Cultural competency, identification, diversity, and inclusion are all current terms to describe and identify ways to address and work within the context of difference. These issues will arise in supervision and with client relationships. You will need to consider when you raise the issues in your work and your own multicultural knowledge and awareness.



### **St. Cloud VA HCS Vision and Mission**

**Mission:** St. Cloud VA Health Care System exists to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.

**Vision:** St. Cloud VA Health Care System will be a patient-centered, integrated health care system for Veterans, providing excellent health care research and education, an organization where people choose to work; an active community partner and a backup for national emergencies.

## Overview of the St. Cloud VA HCS Facility

St. Cloud VA HCS St. Cloud Website <http://www.stcloud.va.gov>

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System began serving Veterans in 1924 and now delivers care to more than 37,000 Veterans in the upper Midwest region.

Areas of care include primary and specialty care, mental health care, surgical and specialty care, urgent care, acute psychiatric care, telemedicine, extended care and rehabilitation, imaging, laboratory and pharmacy services. [Reference](#)

The leadership of the St. Cloud VA Health Care Center is the Health Care System Director, Associate Director, Chief of Staff, and Nurse Executive.

### Important Information

**VISN:** 23

**Station:** 656

**Address:** 4801 Veterans Drive St. Cloud, MN 56303

**Main Phone:** 320 252-1670

**Email:** your [firstname.lastname@va.gov](mailto:firstname.lastname@va.gov) (such as [connie.selden@va.gov](mailto:connie.selden@va.gov)) \*You may have a number after your name if there is an identical name in the VHA system

**Log In:** PIV card OR VHASTC + first 5 letters last name and first initial (such as VHASTCSELDEC) or email

## Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs)

### Max J. Beilke Community Based Outpatient Clinic



515 22nd Avenue East  
Alexandria, MN 56308

**Phone:** 320-759-2640

### Brainerd Community Based Outpatient Clinic



722 NW 7th Street  
Brainerd, MN 56401

**Phone:** 218-855-1115

## Montevideo Community Based Outpatient Clinic



1025 North 13th Street  
Montevideo, MN 56265

**Phone:** 320-269-2222

### **Social Work in the VA**

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Veterans Bureau General Order dated June 16, 1926, established the Social Work program in the Veterans Bureau, outlining its organization and functions. The first year staffing consisted of 36 social workers. Today the Veterans Health Administration employs over 11,000 Masters prepared social workers. ("VA Clinical Social Work" 2010) In addition to being the largest health care system in the country, VHA is also the nation's largest employer of master's prepared social workers. A master's degree in social work (MSW) is required for clinical social work positions in the VA. An advanced degree has become the standard. Supervisory and administrative positions require advanced experience. All States and the District of Columbia have some licensure, certification, or registration requirement, but the regulations vary.

**Mission:** The mission of VA Social Work is to maximize health and well-being, through the use of psychosocial interventions for Veterans, Families and Caregivers.

**Vision:** VA Social work will be the preeminent leader, setting standards for innovative psychosocial care and treatment.

This will be accomplished by developing and maintaining integrated quality programs in patient centered care, informed and evidence based practices, community partnerships, research, education, health promotion and disease prevention.

**Values:** VA Social Workers are advocates for the optimal health and well-being of Veterans, Families and Caregivers. Our Core Values are to:

- Respect the dignity and worth of the individual.
- Appreciate the Veteran within his or her family and socio-cultural environment.
- Empower the Veteran as the primary member of their health care team.
- Respect the distinctive role and expertise of each member of the health care team with the Veteran at the center.
- Advocate for systems changes that are responsive to Veterans' evolving needs with a focus on at-risk populations.
- Promote a learning environment that fosters knowledge, enhances clinical social work practice, and advances leadership and administrative excellence.
- Exemplify and model the highest professional and ethical standards.
- Promote conscientious stewardship of organizational and community resources.

The National Social Work in the VA is coordinated by the Chief Consultant of Care Management and Social Work Services and the National Director of Social Work, part of the Office of Patient Care Services. This office provides direction for new programs and requirements for all social workers in the VA.

VA Clinical Social Work brochure



**Social Work brochure  
2010 -9-10-10 revise**

## St. Cloud VA HCS Social Work

At the St. Cloud VA HCS, social workers are assigned to or assist in the following programs in the patient care service lines:

The **Mental Health Service Line** includes the Mental Health Clinic (MHC), the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit, Outpatient Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Program, Primary Care-Mental Health Integration (PC-MHI) Program, Mental Health Intensive Case Management (MHICM) Program, Psychosocial Rehabilitation Recovery (PRRC) Program, Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) Program, Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Program, Suicide Prevention Program, and Local Recovery Program. The Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (RRTP) includes the Mental Health/Continuum of Care track (mental health and/or substance use), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Program track (PTSD track), and Independent Living Skills (ILS). The Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Program (HCHV) includes the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) Program, Transitional Housing, Contract Residential, Homeless Outreach, and Veterans Justice Outreach/Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (VJO/HCRV) Programs, and other programs and services.

The **Extended Care and Rehabilitation Service Line** includes the Community Living Center, Home Based Primary Care, Polytrauma-Traumatic Brain Injury Program, Spinal Cord Injury & Disorders Program, Visual Impairment Services Team, Caregiver Support Program, GEM Clinic, Adult Day Health Care, Hospice and Palliative Care Program, and Contract Nursing Homes, Rehabilitation Services, and other programs and services.

The **Primary & Specialty Medicine Service Line** includes general preventive health care, management of chronic diseases, consultations for specialty medicine services, urgent care services, home care telehealth, the women's health clinic, the chronic pain management clinic, and other programs and services.

The **Surgical and Specialty Care Service Line** includes ambulatory surgery services, audiology, cardiology, dentistry, optometry, podiatry, urology, wound care, and other programs and services.

Social Workers fill many vital and interesting positions and roles. In your internship, you will begin to learn the multiple types and levels of social work positions at the St. Cloud VA HCS, particularly through shadowing assignments. Be curious; ask a VA Social Worker about her/his work.

# The Social Work Student Program

## Associated Health Professions in the VA and Stipends

Many universities and colleges with social work programs have affiliation agreements for students to complete field placements at VA facilities. Contact your local university or college Field Placement Coordinator to inquire if your school has an affiliation agreement with a VA facility in your geographic area.

Some VA facilities have stipends available for students completing field placements.

## The Role of the Field Instructor (FI)

The field instructor is the teacher, guide, facilitator and advocate for the student. "It is the FI who is expected to teach the student how to understand and to practice the art and science of professional social work. This means helping the student develop a high level of knowledge and of skill that is consciously based on theory and principles- a critical mind and a vocational identity." (Siporin "The Process of Field Instruction" in Quality Field Instruction in Social Work Education, 1982)

Your assigned FI will be your primary contact and source of supervision, though you may have other preceptors assigned for additional programs or projects.

## The Role of the Task Supervisor (TS)

A Task Supervisor may be designated by the Field Instructor or the St. Cloud VA Social Work Student Education Committee to assume specific responsibilities for a student's learning on a particular assigned task, project, or experience. The Task Supervisor does not replace the Field Instructor, and will work in collaboration with the Field Instructor to ensure that your learning goals are being met and regular feedback is provided.

## The Role of the Social Work Executive

The Social Work Executive serves as the liaison with Schools of Social Work, coordinates interviewing and selection of students, coordinates selection and education of and collaboration with FIs, and MAY lead at least monthly group supervision. He/she is your resource for consultation. Please discuss any concerns or potential problems right away with the FI and/or Social Work Executive before it becomes a bigger issue. Additionally, all inquiries from schools and requests for internships should come through the Social Work Executive to make sure we have the paperwork and processes in place.

Your FI will provide program/site specific orientation in the beginning of your internship:

- Introductions to key multidisciplinary staff
- Program structure, objectives, and processes.
- Logistics: Schedule of meetings, groups, and supervision; work/office space; keys.

## Orientation

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You will be contacted to arrange a schedule for your first few days, to gain computer access, complete CPRS Training, complete TMS Training, get keys (St. Cloud only), meet with the Social Work Executive, and pick up your PIV Card (ID Badge).

## Badges

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Photo Identification Badges are provided to all St. Cloud VA Health Care System employees, students, volunteers, without compensation (WOC) personnel, and contractors. Badges serve to identify Health Care System staff to patients and visitors and are a necessary means of maintaining security within the facility and CBOC clinics.

You are responsible to:

1. Report the loss of the photo identification badge.
2. Get a temporary badge from Police Service if you forget your ID badge.
3. Turn in your badge to Police Service upon termination of your field placement.
4. Complete a clearance form at the end of placement.

**Badges MUST be worn while on the premises of this Health Care System (or any other Health Care System within VISN 23). Badges must be worn above the waist and visible.**

## Learning Agreement / Plan / Contracts

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The Learning Agreement is usually required by your School of Social Work. It details learning goals and objectives as well as specific case requirements and learning needs. Make it a meaningful tool by putting time, attention, and most importantly, discussion with your FI, into it at the beginning of the social work student process and throughout placement.

## Student's Responsibilities

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1. Maintain the ethical standards and values of the Social Work profession.
2. Participate in the Student Orientation program; review orientation materials provided.
3. Proactively participate in the weekly supervision with field instructor; these are designed for group interaction and learning.
4. Function in a manner consistent with VHA, HCS, and Social Work policies and procedures, and NASW Social Work Code of Ethics.

Reference: The NASW Code of Ethics is an excellent guide to review and discuss with your FI.

5. Maintain communication with your FI regarding all clinical practice, administrative, and ethical issues encountered in the field placement. Discuss any difficulties that arise within the field placement with your FIs proactively.
6. Actively participate in the learning process by identifying learning needs and goals, providing agenda and case material prior to supervision, completing assigned tasks and attending required meetings.
7. Notify the FI of all medical record entries so that they can be reviewed and co-signed.
8. Be proactive and communicative about your educational needs/desires with the FI and/or Social Work Executive.
9. Complete direct patient care charting within required time lines.
10. Do NOT download or copy any patient records.
11. Request any changes in your schedule necessitated by illness, personal emergency, educational conferences or any other planned or unexpected leave. Coordinate any hours that needs to be made-up if missed and assures that the required field hours are met.

## **St. Cloud VA HCS Student Competencies**

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There will be a number of competencies you will achieve while at the VA, some that are required by the VA and some related directly to your Learning Agreement/Plan/Contract. Your FI will work with you on orienting you to and measuring these competencies. These competencies will be reviewed at the beginning, middle and at the end of your field placement.

## **Individual Supervision**

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One hour of weekly supervision is required. You should come prepared to supervision with your agenda, questions, and issues each week. Take responsibility for your own learning and address concerns and barriers directly with your FI.

## **Level of Supervision**

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The VHA Handbook 1400.04 "Supervision of Associated Health Trainees" provides all the requirements for supervision for students.

[http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1754](http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1754)

## GRADUATED LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY

1. As part of a field placement, students earn progressive responsibility for the care of Veterans. The determination of a student's ability to provide direct care to Veterans without a supervising practitioner physically present, or to act in a teaching capacity, is based on documented evaluation of the student's clinical experience, judgment, knowledge, and technical skill. The Field Instructor or Social Work Executive assigns levels of responsibilities for each student by describing in detail the clinical activities that the student may perform and makes the description available to the student, Field Instructor, and, as needed, other staff who interact with the student. Supervising practitioners must provide the type of supervision commensurate with the trainee's assigned Graduated Level of Responsibility.
2. Ultimately, the Field Instructor determines which activities the student will be allowed to perform within the context of assigned levels of responsibility. The overriding consideration in determining assigned levels of responsibility must be safe and effective care of the Veteran.
3. The type of supervision provided must be congruent with:
  - a. The assigned level of responsibility,
  - b. A documented decision by the Field Instructor that the student is sufficiently experienced and skilled for the level of supervision provided.
4. There are three general types of supervision:
  - a. Room. The Field Instructor or supervising practitioner is physically present in the same room while the trainee is engaged in direct health care activities.
  - b. Area. The Field Instructor is in the same clinic or treatment area and is immediately accessible to the student. The Field Instructor meets and interacts with Veterans as needed. The student and Field Instructor discuss, plan, or review evaluation and treatment. Area supervision is available only when the trainee has formally been assigned a Graduated Level of Responsibility commensurate with this type of supervision.
  - c. Available. Services are furnished by the student under the Field Instructor's guidance. The Field Instructor's presence is not required during services, but the Field Instructor must be in the facility, available immediately by phone or pager, and able to be physically present as needed.
5. In addition, Field Instructors will review and co-sign all CPRS documentation by the social work student.
6. Home and community visits occur as a part of VA special programs such as Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC), Mental Health Intensive Case Management (MHICM), and others. Trainees participating in community or home visits must have received orientation and training pertaining to the handling of emergency situations and related VA program policies and procedures. Additionally, as outlined in VHA Handbook 1141.01, Home-Based Primary Care Program, supervising practitioners are expected to educate students from multiple

associated health disciplines about the challenges of delivering health care to Veterans in their homes and communities.

- a. Trainees with less experience may participate in home visits only when accompanied by a supervising practitioner. The trainee may participate in a home visit without a supervisor present only when the trainee has demonstrated the requisite skills and expertise to function without a supervisor immediately present and after being granted the appropriate graduated level of responsibility.
- b. Although the supervising practitioner is not required to accompany trainees with more advanced knowledge, skills, and abilities on the home visit (assuming an acceptable, documented level of graduated responsibility), the supervising practitioner must be readily available at an agreed upon, identifiable phone number for the duration of the time the trainee is making home visits. Following a home visit, the supervising practitioner must discuss each case with the trainee. If at any time a trainee feels his or her personal safety is compromised, the supervising practitioner must be notified and local procedures must be followed. NOTE: Any of the three forms of documentation referenced in paragraph 6.a.(1) may be used to record this supervisory interaction.
- c. A trainee may also participate in a home or community visit without the identified supervisor's presence if accompanied by a provider from the same or another discipline that is credentialed or privileged to provide care in the case of an urgent or emergent event.

### **Group Supervision**

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The Social Work Students will be offered group supervision with a licensed social worker, a member of the Social Work Student Education Committee. Group supervision will be held every Thursday from 1 pm- 2 pm. Location of group supervision will be determined by facilitator.

### **Group Didactics**

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Social Work students will have the opportunity to participate in group didactics. Didactics will meet Thursdays from 2 pm – 3 pm; with the exception of the first Thursday of the month, in which the didactic will be from 1 pm -3 pm. Location of group didactics will be determined by facilitator. For more information speak with your Field Instructor and refer to the didactic schedule.

Students are also able to register for any scheduled trainings sponsored by the St. Cloud VA HCS Social Work Education Committee.

## **Research Projects**

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St. Cloud VA HCS has offered students a variety of opportunities to conduct research projects at our local facility. The Research Program at the St. Cloud VA HCS requires that a full-time VA employee serve as Principal Investigator (PI) and mentor for the student. All research projects must go through an application process, approval by the local Research and Development (R&D) Committee, and approval by the Minneapolis Institutional Review Board (IRB). The student's university of study likely also requires separate approval by the University IRB. The approval process can be a lengthy (and often daunting) process. If you wish to do research here, don't be discouraged: Just begin the process immediately and contact the Research Program Coordinator for more information. Students in areas of social work, nursing, and psychology have recently completed projects through St. Cloud VA HCS.

## **Evaluations**

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You and your FI will follow your school's requirements for the timing and format of evaluations. Typically, this is at one month, midyear, and end of year. Your Faculty Field Advisor may meet individually and/or conjointly with you and your FI one to two times a year.

Additionally, you will be asked for feedback about the Student program one to two times a year in different formats – changes are made every year, so please provide your candid feedback!

**IMPORTANT:** Evaluation and learning is an ongoing process. Please address concerns or needs directly and immediately so they can be resolved.

## **Learners' Perception Survey**

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At the conclusion of the practicum year, each student will be asked to complete an online survey regarding his or her learning experience at the VA. Please take the time and complete the survey as thoroughly as possible. You will also be asked to complete a local program evaluation. The data compiled from the results are very important for shaping our program to meet the needs of future student learners within our facility. The Learners' Perception Survey is voluntary and anonymous, and the data is analyzed in order to improve training at the local and national levels. The link to take LPS is <https://www.va.gov/oaa/surveys/default.asp>.

# Clinical Requirements

## Documentation

Clinical documentation is a major part of your learning during your field placement. There is an art to writing good clinical notes. Seek feedback and review lots of different kinds of medical notes to understand the tone and information required. Social workers use a SOAP note format: Subjective, Objective, Assessment and Plan. Or you may use the format or template provided by your Field Instructor.

### SW Documentation



SW  
DOCUMENTATION EC



Social Work  
Documentation CM:

Purpose of Documentation is to:

- Share information with and communicate to other medical staff in order to promote interdisciplinary communication, collaboration and coordination of care.
- Document professional work and show value of social work interventions and goals.
- Serve as the basis for continuity of care as part of the treatment plan for the Veteran.
- Facilitate quality assurance as a permanent part of the medical record.
- Serve as risk management and malpractice protection by protecting the legal interest of the patient, the Health Care System and the responsible social worker by providing for the recall of important information about a Veteran at a future time.
- Provide documentary evidence of the Social Work assessment, treatment planning, therapeutic interventions and outcomes.
- Provide a basis for planning social work interventions and for ensuring continuity in the provision of care and evaluation of Veteran's condition.
- Measure and evaluate our performance and assure quality care through performance improvement activities and utilization review.
- Assist in continuing education and research.

**If it is not documented, it did not happen!**

Tips for Medical Record Documentation:

- Documentation is an important professional representation of you as a clinician to other members of the interdisciplinary team.
- Organize what you want to say before you begin writing.

- Documentation should be grammatically correct and contain no spelling errors (use spell check).
- Provide relevant information in appropriate detail. Be concise, but ensure the documentation provides sufficient detail to show your application of professional knowledge, interventions and judgment is consistent with the clinical practice standards of the Social Work profession.
- Do not use personal pronouns or first names. Refer to the Veteran as “Mr. Smith”, “Veteran”, or “patient”. Refer to yourself in the third person as “social worker” (Ask Supervisor preference)
- When referring to contacts with community agencies, provide the name of the person with whom you spoke, his/her title and phone number.
- Use relevant direct quotes from the Veteran and/or family.
- Documenting profanity requires making a clinical judgment whether the profanity is relevant to the Veteran’s assessment and treatment. If may be clinically necessary to document the profanity in quotations, especially when it involves threats of harm to self or other or evidences the extreme nature of the Veteran’s feelings. Other times, it may be sufficient to reference that a Veteran expressed a statement using profanity or vulgarity.
- Make a distinction between facts, observations, and assessment.
- Document as if the Veteran, family, or legal representative will one day read the medical record.
- Your CPRS Signature Block should identify you as "Social Work Student"
- The note must include a statement about clinical supervision. Check with your FI for the terminology to be used.

#### A Good Note:

- Provides relevant information with appropriate details. Is organized with appropriate headings and logical progression.
- Distinguishes between facts, observations, hard data, and opinions.
- Is thoughtful, reflects application of professional knowledge, skills, and judgment.
- Is appropriately concise.

### Rules for CPRS:

- Do not copy and paste other notes as if it is your note. If you need to copy information, attribute to the source. NEVER copy a signature block.
- Do not print out notes and give to the Veteran or send out. Patients and their designees must go through Release of Information, see below.
- Verify information to make sure it is correct.
- Only use approved abbreviations and acronyms: [Reference](#)
- Meet time requirements for your service line.

### What Does Not Belong in CPRS:

- Criticism or judgment, either stated or implied, of other health care providers, the VA health care system, or Veterans. Veteran's criticism of his/her treatment or the VA health care system may be referenced in general terms when it is relevant.
- Documentation that reads like, or is, a process recording, such as "He said..., I said..."
- Personal opinions of the clinician and conclusions that are unsupported by the stated facts.
- Reference to any other written information, such as email or Incident Report
- Performance improvement information
- Regional Counsel decisions/opinions and legal advisement regarding a Veteran.

## PRIVACY

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HIPPA is a law which protects patient sensitive information in medical records.

The Privacy Act is a law that governs how government agencies must maintain and can disclose records which contain individual identifying information.

Things to Remember:

**Protect Confidentiality:  
What you hear, you cannot talk about**

- If you are ever in doubt, do not give it out! Seek supervision.
- Do not discuss anything about a patient with ANYBODY unless you are sure it is permissible by law.
- DO NOT leave Veteran identifiers (name, DOB, SSN) unattended. Logs, loose papers, notes must be safeguarded and/or put in locked shred bins. Do not use identifying information in process recordings, case studies/presentations, or coursework.

- Every employee/student is bound by the Privacy Act and HIPPA, which carry fines if not adhered to.

### **Keeping Government Records**

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Federal Records are much more than Patient Records. Believe it or not, MOST of what you do for work is an official record:

**Keeping records for the amount of time required is just as important as getting rid of records when they are past due, for space and legal reasons.**

It's law. All Federal agencies are required to have schedules of records, regardless of formats. Destroying or removing records without authorization can result in criminal penalties.

### **Information Security**

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The VA is a potential target for cyber threats by criminals who seek to exploit Veteran information. At VA, the mishandling of health-related personally identifiable information (PII) can lead to inappropriate exposure or loss of Veteran data. It is important in caring for Veterans that we protect their sensitive information as if it were our own. Check the links below for the Information Security Officers (ISO) and more information.

[Reference:](#) Information Security

### **Release of Information**

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If a Veteran needs a statement or progress note, he/she needs to sign a “Request for and Consent to Release”. This form must specifically state what information he/she is requesting. Only the Release of Information office can give Veterans a copy of their medical record. At the St. Cloud VA HCS, Release of Information is located at Building 29.

## Email Confidentiality

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There are two types of VA email. Please know the privacy limitations of each:

1. Outlook is not secure unless you are sending an encrypted email. Email correspondence is not allowed with Veterans, caregivers, or families, as it is not secure. If a Veteran emails you, please contact him/her by phone and explain you cannot correspond by email. Do not copy quotes from any email in the medical record.
2. VistA – Is secure, though harder to use, and is only internal to VA employees. Do not put identifying information in the subject line, but you may use private information in the text of the message. VISTA GUI provides an interface to make VISTA look more like Outlook, but please do not use the Global Address function to send messages.

Consider adding a confidentiality statement to your email such as:

Confidentiality Note: This e-mail is intended only for the person or entity to which it is addressed, and may contain information that is privileged, confidential, or otherwise protected from disclosure.

Dissemination, distribution, or copying of this e-mail or the information herein by anyone other than the intended recipient is prohibited. If you have received this e-mail in error, please notify the sender by reply e-mail and destroy the original message and all copies.

Fax: Use only approved VA Fax forms with a confidentiality statement when faxing for official business.

## Mandatory Reporting

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As a VA student, you are a mandatory reporter! Review the policies-you must get consultation/supervision, and know when and how to report suspected abuse or neglect. Definitions can be located in the HCSM CD11-55.

# Logistics

## Time and Leave

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Students work in their practice setting each day of their planned schedule. Schedules, or "tour of duty," will be worked out with your Field Instructor (FI) based on your 15-20 weekly hours. As with all field placements, especially paid ones, you are responsible for completing the required hours based on both your school's requirements and the VA work schedule.

When you are unable to report to the field placement due to illness or an emergency reason, notify your FI (or designee) as soon as possible. Generally, time lost due to illness or other than scheduled semester breaks will need to be made-up.

Social Work students who receive a stipend are considered a Temporary Part-Time Appointment and will accrue annual and sick leave. Students will receive 1 hour AL/SL for each 20 hours they work.

Students who do not receive a stipend are considered Without Compensation (WOC) and follow guidelines provided by the St. Cloud VA HCS Education Department.

Students will receive time off for federal holidays. It is important that you account for these days off with your School of Social Work to ensure you complete your required hours by the end date of the semester.

Students may be asked by their School of Social Work to attend various education and training opportunities throughout the school year. Should these events take place during clinical hours that the student would normally be at the VAHCS, Students may attend these events and trainings, however will be asked to utilize Annual Leave on those days. The St. Cloud VA HCS will not count these hours towards clinical hours for their internship.

The following are yearly federal holidays, days off may vary depending on day of week:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Holiday</b>
<b>Friday, December 31, 2021 *</b>	<b>New Year's Day</b>
<b>Monday, January 17</b>	<b>Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.</b>
<b>Monday, February 21 **</b>	<b>Washington's Birthday</b>
<b>Monday, May 30</b>	<b>Memorial Day</b>
<b>Monday, July 4</b>	<b>Independence Day</b>
<b>Monday, September 5</b>	<b>Labor Day</b>
<b>Monday, October 10</b>	<b>Columbus Day</b>
<b>Friday, November 11</b>	<b>Veterans Day</b>
<b>Thursday, November 24</b>	<b>Thanksgiving Day</b>
<b>Monday, December 26 ***</b>	<b>Christmas Day</b>

## Computer

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There are two systems which you will need to access for documentation. Your workload in Event Capture and/or the clinical encounter are documented in the patient's medical record or **Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS)**. Please see related computer instructions and training for step-by-step instructions for computer use and documentation. **VISTA** is also used for clinical information. You will receive training in the use of these systems, and your field instructor will assist you as needed.

Please be aware of the privacy guidance for computer use. Lock your computer (windows flag + L) or log off (Ctrl +Alt+ Delete) *every time* you leave your computer unattended.

**Thumb drives, or any external devices, are not allowed in VA computers.**

**Safeguard your passwords at all times.** NEVER give out your password, leave it in an obvious place, or use someone else's password or code.

## Office Space

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Office space is limited in the St. Cloud VA HCS and Community-based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC). If you do have space, be prepared to share it or hand it over when you are not there. Be respectful of your officemates and neighbors. Be sure to keep your valuables, including cell phones and electronics, locked in a drawer or cabinet. Remember to keep patient information out of sight and locked away, even if your office door is locked.

## Parking and Public Transportation

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Please remember that areas designated for visitors or patients are reserved parking areas. Parking in these spaces could result in a **federal citation**. Please park in areas designated for employees only and be sure you have a VHA parking decal.

## Government Cars

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Social work students in community based programs can be authorized to drive government vehicles after completing all requirements. Students will need to view various policies, complete trainings and a physical examination if going to transport Veterans, as well as have a valid driver's license. The FI will determine when the student is able to make community visits without the supervisor present. For a more detailed list and assistance completing these requirements, please speak with your Field Instructor.

## **Dress Code**

The VA dress code is business casual, somewhat depending on your area of placement. Use your clinical judgment in deciding what is appropriate, it can be subjective, but your goal is to professionalize your appearance. Open toed shoes should not be worn in medical care areas to reduce risk of spills or contact with toxic substances.

## **VA Employment (After MSW Program)**

Before you complete your placement, you will attend a meeting to understand how your internship may interact with your eligibility if you seek employment in the VA. In addition, please let your Field Instructor know if you are interested in potential future openings here at the St. Cloud VA Health Care System. Students may not apply directly to internal openings.

Most hiring officials use Performance Based Interviewing (PBI) which asks for examples of direct experience for topics and issues. Familiarize yourself with this style of interviewing and practice your answers.

[Reference:](#) PBI website. Use your hard-earned VA experience to show your success in the future. Good luck!

# Resources

## **St. Cloud VA HCS Social Work Service SharePoint**

Find documents, information, and resources you will need at Social Work Resources. Access required-check with the Social Work Executive.

[https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/stc/social\\_work\\_resources/default.aspx](https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/stc/social_work_resources/default.aspx)

## **VHA National Social Work SharePoint**

The National Social Work SharePoint is an excellent source for reference information about the Student Program (list on left side of page) and our VA social work community at

<http://vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/cmsws/SocialWork>

## **Social Work Reference Center**

This is a reference tool designed for clinical professionals dedicated to improving patient quality of life. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype+ip.uid&profile+swrc>

## **Consultation**

Please use your nearest and dearest resource – the Field Instructor or Task Supervisor. Please consult the Field Instructor or Task Supervisor BEFORE the issue becomes one!

## **VA Terminology, Abbreviations, and Acronyms**

The VA has its own language of acronyms. When you're stuck use the references below.

Reference: [VA Acronym Lookup](#)



**Welcome to the VA! We are glad you are here.  
Have a successful academic year!**