Healthcare Inspection

Credentialing, Privileging, and Pay Irregularities

VA Medical Center
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
To Report Suspected Wrongdoing in VA Programs and Operations
Call the OIG Hotline – (800) 488-8244
Executive Summary

The purpose of the inspection was to determine the validity of allegations regarding pay for two social workers at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. The complainant alleged the Administrative Director of the Substance Abuse Unit has shown preferential treatment and violated VA policies on social worker licensure, credentialing, and privileging by allowing two unlicensed social workers to be paid as licensed clinical social workers.

We did not substantiate the allegation. Documentation showed the social workers had completed all requirements for the master’s degree in social work in a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. In addition, the social workers had met the supervision, experience, and examination requirements prior to receiving their licensure. Documentation in the personnel files revealed the social workers were appointed and paid according to the GS 185 Social Worker Series qualification standards. We did not make any recommendations.
TO: Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network (10N16)

SUBJECT: Healthcare Inspection – Credentialing, Privileging, and Pay Irregularities, VA Medical Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Purpose

The Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General (OIG), Office of Healthcare Inspections (OHI) reviewed allegations of credentialing, privileging, and pay irregularities at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center (medical center), Oklahoma City, OK. The purpose of the inspection was to determine the validity of the allegations.

Background

An anonymous complainant contacted the Office of Inspector General with allegations regarding that two social workers were being paid as licensed clinical social workers without having obtained their licenses.

Specifically, the complainant alleged that the Administrative Director of the Substance Abuse Unit has shown preferential treatment and violated VA credentialing and privileging policies by allowing the social workers to be paid as licensed clinical social workers. According to the complainant, a clinical social worker is required to receive a year and a half of supervision to qualify for the licensure exam,¹ yet both social workers have been working at the medical center 4–6 years without a license.

Scope and Methodology

We visited the medical center May 8–12, 2006, and interviewed the quality manager, an administrative director, and two social workers. We reviewed pertinent Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directives, the scope of practice for social workers, qualifications standards for general schedule positions, medical staff bylaws, professional standards board policy, credentialing and privileging files, social worker licensure requirements for Texas and Oklahoma, and other pertinent documentation. We conducted the review in

¹ Texas and Oklahoma state licensure boards require 2 years of supervision to qualify for state licensure exams.
accordance with the *Quality Standards for Inspections* published by the President’s Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

**Inspection Results**

**Credentialing/Privileging and Pay Irregularities**

We did not substantiate the allegation that the Administrative Director for the Substance Abuse Unit had shown preferential treatment with credentialing/privileging and pay irregularities.

VHA Handbook 1100.19, *Credentialing and Privileging*, states credentialing is required to ensure an applicant has the required education, training, experience, physical and mental health, and skill to fulfill the requirements of the position and to support the requested clinical privileges.

According to VHA Handbook 5338.4, *Social Worker Qualification Standard Including Licensure and/or Certification Requirement*, VA social workers who are not licensed at the time of the appointment must be licensed or certified at the master’s level, within 3 years of their appointment as a social worker or 1 year from the day they meet the full requirements of the state licensure or certification, whichever is longer.

Documentation showed that the social workers had completed all requirements for a master’s degree in social work in a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. One of the social worker’s entry on duty date to the medical center was November 11, 2004, and she obtained her Oklahoma license on September 16, 2005. The other social worker’s entry on duty date to the medical center was June 16, 1997. On September 24, 2000, she was reappointed as an Addiction Therapist because she had not met the 3-year licensure requirement. On April 8, 2001, she was reappointed as a clinical social worker and was issued her Texas license on April 17, 2001.2 Documentation also showed that both social workers met the supervision, experience, and examination requirements prior to receiving their licensure as social workers for the states of Texas and Oklahoma.

Personnel file documentation showed that both social workers were appointed and paid according to the GS 185 Social Worker Series qualification standards.

**Conclusion**

We did not substantiate the allegations regarding the two social workers. Therefore, we did not make any recommendations.

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2 Documentation shows a verbal confirmation in lieu of a written verification.
Comments

The Veterans Integrated Service Network Director and Medical Center Director concurred with the results of this inspection. The Office of Healthcare Inspections considers this matter closed.

(original signed by:)

JOHN D. DAIGH JR., M.D.
Assistant Inspector General for Healthcare Inspections
VISN Director Comments

Department of Veterans Affairs Memorandum

Date: July 12, 2006
From: VISN Director
Subject: Healthcare Inspection – Alleged Credentialing, Privileging, and Pay Irregularities, VA Medical Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
To: Director, Dallas Healthcare Inspections Division, Office of Inspector General (52DA)

1. Attached is the Facility Director’s response to the OIG Healthcare Inspection of the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center.

2. I concur with the Facility Director’s comments.

3. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the Staff Assistant to the Network Director at (602) 364-7900.

(original signed by:)

Robert Lynch, MD

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Medical Center Director Comments

Department of Veterans Affairs
Memorandum

Date: July 12, 2006

From: Medical Center Director

Subject: Healthcare Inspection – Alleged Credentialing, Privileging, and Pay Irregularities, VA Medical Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

To: Director, Dallas Healthcare Inspections Division, Office of Inspector General (52DA)

1. We appreciate the opportunity to work with the Office of the Inspector General as we continuously strive to improve the quality of healthcare for America’s Veterans.

2. I concur with the findings of the OIG Healthcare Inspection team.

3. If you have any questions, please contact Donna Delise, Chief, Office of Performance and Quality at (405) 270-5194.

(Original signed by:)

KATHLEEN FOGARTY
Acting Director
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