

October 16, 2002

**ASSOCIATED HEALTH INTERNS, RESIDENTS, AND FELLOWS APPOINTMENTS
REGARDING INSURANCE BENEFITS**

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive defines policy regarding the appointment of full-time associated health trainees who are funded by the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA).

2. BACKGROUND

a. Each year over 90,000 medical and associated health trainees receive training at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities. Of the approximately 50,000 associated health trainees funded each year, 875 are interns, residents, and fellows appointed to VA facilities to complete paid, full-time, year-long or longer advanced training in such programs as audiology, chaplaincy, health services research and development, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, podiatry, psychology, rehabilitation research, social work, or speech-language pathology.

b. Associated health trainees are defined as all health care professionals, other than those in medicine and dentistry. These trainees are appointed in VA facilities under authority of Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.) 7405(a)(1)(D).

c. Prior to 2001, appointments of full-time associated health trainees were limited to 1 year in statute. That was the maximum duration of appointments authorized in 38 U.S.C. 7405(c)(3). Due to this 1-year restriction, associated health trainees were not eligible to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (Title 5 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 890.102) and the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program (5 CFR 870.302). Students in programs of more than 1-year duration or extended or renewed beyond 1 year were restricted to a 30-hour per week appointment limitation.

d. Section 204 of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-419) amended section 7405(c) to permit the appointment of full-time medical support personnel (including associated health trainees) on a temporary basis, not to exceed (NTE) 3 years, with renewals permitted for like periods. With the change in the law, trainees requiring 1 or more years of training may be appointed for a period NTE 3 years, thereby qualifying them to participate in Federal health benefits and insurance programs. These changes should enhance VHA's ability to recruit the best and the brightest trainees to participate in the care of veterans. Many trainees are recruited to VA employment upon completion of their training so this change will also impact on the future VA workforce.

e. Trainees appointed for more than 1 year are eligible to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program and the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program. Funds for trainees' participation in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program and the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program will be provided by OAA.

THIS VHA DIRECTIVE EXPIRES OCTOBER 31, 2007

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3. POLICY: It is VHA policy that associated health trainees who are participating in VA-sponsored training, requiring 1-year (2080 hours or more) of training, can be appointed for a period NTE 3 years; thereby qualifying them to participate in Federal health benefits and insurance programs. ***NOTE:** The actual length of training programs depends upon the requirements of the appropriate accrediting agency for the training program and the program curriculum. Only accrediting agencies that have been recognized by the United States Secretary of Education are acceptable.*

4. ACTION: Medical facility Directors are responsible for appointing associated health trainees with required training of 1 year or more, on a full-time temporary basis for a period NTE 3 years.

5. REFERENCES

- a. VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 3, Section G, paragraph 6.
- b. VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 3, Section G, paragraph 6a(1), 6b(1), and 6c(1)(a).
- c. Title 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1).
- d. Title 5 CFR 890.102 (c)(1).
- e. Title 5 CFR 870.302.
- f. Title 38 U.S.C. 7406.
- g. Public Law 106-419, dated November 1, 2000.

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Office of Academic Affiliations (14) is responsible for the content of this Directive. Questions may be referred to (202) 273-8373.

7. RESCISSIONS: VHA Directive 2001-067 is rescinded. This VHA Directive expires on October 31, 2007.

Robert H. Roswell, M.D.
Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION: CO: E-mailed 10/21/2002
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 – E-mailed 10/21/2002