AMENDMENT TO VHA HANDBOOK 1170.04 REHABILITATION CONTINUUM OF CARE, ESTABLISHING CONSISTENT IMPLEMENTATION OF DIRECT ACCESS TO PHYSICAL THERAPY SERVICES

1. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) notice is to notify Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) and VA medical facilities of the allowance to implement the practice of Direct Access/Self Scheduling to Physical Therapy (PT) services.

2. Due to changes in community standards, the high demand for PT services and change in state licensing laws, VA medical facilities should implement Direct Access principles for PT. As of January 1, 2015, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the US Virgin Islands allow patients to seek treatment from a licensed PT without a prescription or referral from a physician or other qualifying health care provider. This is consistent with PT practice in the Department of Defense.

3. The procedure of patients to seek treatment from a licensed PT without a prescription or referral does vary among states. Most states have no provisions; however, some have provisions that require notification of the provider of record.

4. This amendment provides guidance that the notification of the provider of record is fulfilled by the documentation provided by the Physical Therapist in the medical record of the evaluation and the plan of care.

5. VHA Offices of Primary Care, Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services, Office of Regulatory Affairs, Health Information Management, and Chief Business Office, with consultation from the Office of General Counsel, reached this consensus after reviewing current VA policies and procedures, as well as community standards, for the provision of PT services. This decision will not impact VA’s ability to bill third party payers.

6. This guidance is an update to assist facilities in the implementation of VHA Notice 2017-49, Amendment to VHA Handbook 1170.04, Removing Requirements of a Physical Therapy Plan of Care Co-Signature, dated June 14, 2017, which was an update of the current guidance provided in VHA Handbook 1170.04, Rehabilitation Continuum of Care, dated December 30, 2014 and will be added during the next revision.

7. Training and guidance on implementation of this change will be provided in collaboration from the aforementioned VHA Offices throughout fiscal year 2018. Questions on this guidance should be directed to VHA Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services (10P4R) at 202-461-7444.
8. This VHA notice will be archived as of June 30, 2019. However, the amendment information will remain in effect.

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Executive in Charge

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