

EMPLOYEE COURTESY AND CONDUCT

1. **Policy:** Each medical center employee is expected to serve diligently, loyally and cooperatively; to avoid misconduct and other activities that conflict with his/her employment; to conduct himself/herself both on and off duty in a manner that is creditable to the employee, the Federal Government, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the medical center. It is the policy of this facility that each employee will exhibit sensitivity, compassion and concern in dealing with VA employees, the public and veterans we serve. VA Employees will provide dignified and caring service that exemplifies the highest standards of customer service. Behavior that is hostile or of a volatile nature (e.g., verbal or physical aggression) will not be tolerated. Failure to comply with conduct expectations/requirements may result in appropriate corrective/ disciplinary action.

2. **Responsibility:**

- a. Medical Center Director is responsible for ensuring compliance with the standards of conduct and the medical center's policies/statements regarding an employee's conduct.
- b. Service Chiefs and Supervisors are responsible for informing employees, at least annually, of the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, customer service policies and the contents of this policy and VA Employee Handbook. This should be documented in the employee's competency assessment and/or in service minutes. Service Chiefs and Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that all communications, whether verbal or written (including messages sent via electronic mail) are conducted in a professional and courteous manner and to investigate and take appropriate action on any report of unprofessional, discourteous behavior demonstrated by an employee.
- c. Human Resources Management Service (HRMS) provides assistance and advisories in the interpretation and application of the Standards of Conduct to employees, Supervisors and management officials. The HRMS will ensure distribution of the VA Employee Handbook and this policy to all employees during new employee orientation and thereafter upon request.
- d. Employees are to adhere to their responsibilities as VA employees as outlined in this policy, VA Employee Handbook, medical center policies, position description/functional statements, Principles of Ethical Conduct, (Attachment A) and regulations. Employees are responsible for ensuring that any individual seeking advice or assistance will be helped in a prompt, courteous, and cooperative manner.

3. **Procedure:**

- a. Employees shall not engage in criminal, infamous, dishonest, immoral, or notoriously disgraceful conduct, or other conduct prejudicial to the government. Employee conduct, on or off the job, which reflects adversely on the Federal Government, as the employer, may be grounds for disciplinary action in addition to whatever penalty is prescribed by law.

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- (1) Employees must refrain and avoid any action and/or conduct that result in or creates the appearance of using public office for private gain; giving preferential treatment to individuals, groups or organizations; impeding government efficiency or economy; losing impartiality; making a government decision outside official channels and adversely affecting the confidence of the public in the integrity of the government. Employees are to adhere to the Ethical Standards of Conduct.
 - (2) Staff are expected to adhere to supervisory instructions.
 - (3) Employees are to avoid misconduct and any other activities in conflict with their employment; to exercise courtesy and dignity and otherwise conduct themselves both on and off duty in a manner reflecting credit upon themselves and the VA.
- b. Indebtedness: VA employees are expected to manage their just financial obligations in a proper and timely manner. Upon receipt of letters of indebtedness (including judgments), HRMS will review for compliance with legal and regulatory guidance, and prepare letters to the creditor and Supervisor as necessary. Complaints that are incomplete will be returned to the creditor for additional information. Judgments will be forwarded to Payroll for garnishment action.
 - c. Intoxicants/Drugs: An employee may not use intoxicants and/or illegal drugs in such a manner that his/her work performance and/or conduct is adversely affected; an employee may not report for duty under the influence of intoxicants/drugs or use said items while on duty, nor may an employee sell or attempt to sell items on VA property. Certain positions are subject to random urine analysis drug testing requiring staff to submit upon being notified. Identification of illegal drug use could result in disciplinary action up to and including removal.
 - d. Financial Interests: VA employees are to refrain from entering into any type of financial interests and/or obligations with employees, VA beneficiaries or patients. Employees are to refer to the Standards of Ethical Conduct for information or contact HRMS or Regional Counsel.
 - e. Hostile and/or Volatile Behavior: Employees are to refrain from inappropriate behavior that demonstrates and/or suggests disruptive, threatening or volatile actions or communication toward staff, beneficiaries and/or patients. The medical center has a "zero tolerance" policy regarding this type of behavior. Employees are also to refrain from statements and/or remarks that are unsubstantiated resulting in defamatory, slanderous, or disrespectful in nature or behavior that is disruptive to the work environment. Failure to adhere to these requirements will result in immediate corrective action, up to removal from Federal employment.
 - f. Leave Administration: Employees are responsible for reporting for duty as scheduled and being at their post of duty during official duty hours. Employees are responsible for properly requesting leave and acquiring approval for said leave prior to its use. Failure to adhere to proper leave requesting procedures could result in corrective actions.

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- g. **Whistleblower Protection:** It is a prohibited personnel practice for an agency to subject an employee to a personnel action if the action is threatened, proposed, taken or not taken because of Whistleblower activities. Whistleblower means disclosing information that one reasonably believes is evidence of a violation of any law, rule, or regulation, or gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety. Employees are protected if they make such a disclosure to the Office of Special Counsel or the Inspector General. Employees are also protected if they make such a disclosure to any other individual or organization (e.g., a Congressional committee or the media), provided that Law does not specifically prohibit the disclosure. Information about appeal rights, grievance procedures and where to file is available in HRMS.
- h. **Gambling/Selling/Betting:** VA employees shall not participate, while on government property or on official government duty, in any form of gambling activity or device, including lotteries, pools and numbers slips or on behalf of some gambling agent. Employees are not permitted to sell items (e.g., Avon, Tupperware, etc) to other employees during duty hours or on the premises.
- i. **Loans:** VA employees may not engage in business-type activity involving the borrowing or lending of money on Federal premises except as part of a recognized credit union.
- j. **Staff-Patient Relationships:**
 - (1) Staff members will maintain optimal ethical conduct and practices and are expected to limit their contact with patients and patients' families, both on and off duty, to those activities deemed therapeutically beneficial to the patient. An exception from accepted practice may signal the beginning of an unhealthy staff-patient relationship. Such a departure from accepted practice may include the giving or receiving of gifts, visiting a patient at home when off-duty, or any similar interaction. Social, economic, and/or sexual relationships with patients or member of patients' families may be basis for disciplinary/adverse action.
 - (2) Employees are expected to demonstrate interpersonal and communication skills that enable them to establish and maintain professional relationships with patients, families, and other members of health care teams. Employees are expected to demonstrate behaviors that reflect a commitment to continuous professional development, ethical practice, an understanding and sensitivity to diversity and a responsible attitude toward their patients, their profession, and society.
- k. **Patient Abuse:** It is a fundamental policy that no one may physically or verbally abuse a veteran patient and/or beneficiary. An employee may not abuse a patient by speaking harshly or rudely to the patient, teasing or ridiculing the patient, scolding the patient, or treating the patient in an indifferent manner. Any form of patient abuse, either intentional or unintentional, by an employee is cause for disciplinary action, up to removal. Also, an employee who witnesses the abuse of a patient without promptly reporting it to a proper authority is subject to disciplinary action.

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1. Customer Service Standards: The fundamental principle of customer service is to put forth a courteous manner, with a presence that indicates a calm and helpful attitude. Employees will wear an identification badge in a visible manner during duty hours. All individuals will be accorded dignity and treated with compassion and respect in a prompt manner. Employees are responsible for interacting with each other in a courteous, respectful and professional manner to facilitate the accomplishment of the work of the organization.
- m. Misuse of government property: All employees have the responsibility to protect and conserve government property. They may not use it or allow it to be used for purposes other than those that are job-related. Applicable property includes but is not limited to computers, motor vehicles, office supplies, telephones, fax machines, and laboratory equipment. VA employees are permitted limited use of government equipment for personal needs if the use does not interfere with official business and involves minimal additional expense to the Government. This limited personal use of government office equipment should take place during the employee's non-work time.

4. **References:** VHA Directive 2006-41, Veterans Health Care Service Standard and VA Handbook 5025, Part IV, Appendix A.

5. **Rescission:** Medical Center Memorandum 05-48, Employee Courtesy and Conduct dated June 10, 2009.

6. **Expiration Date:** January 22, 2016.

Signed MCM in D/FMO File

George Marnell

Director

Principles of Ethical Conduct

These 14 principles of ethical conduct identify, in a nutshell, what is expected of every federal employee. Failure to adhere to them can result in disciplinary or criminal penalties.

1. Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws and ethical principles above private gain.
2. Employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
3. Employees shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic government information, or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
4. An employee shall not, except as permitted by the Standards of Ethical Conduct, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by the employee's agency, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the employee's duties.
5. Employees shall put forth honest effort in the performance of their duties.
6. Employees shall not knowingly make unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the government.
7. Employees shall not use public office for private gain.
8. Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
9. Employees shall protect and conserve federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
10. Employees shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment that conflicts with official government duties and responsibilities.
11. Employees shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse and corruption to appropriate authorities.
12. Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all financial obligations, especially those -- such as federal, state or local taxes -- that are imposed by law.
13. Employees shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability.
14. Employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards set forth in the Standards of Ethical Conduct. Whether particular circumstances create an appearance that the law or these standards have been violated shall be determined from the perspective of a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts.