

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Standard Operating Procedure

Mental Health 116A-U

August 3, 2016

Same Day Access

Purpose: To clarify the walk-in process and procedures to ensure same day access to care. Where relevant this SOP will delineate procedure variations between new patients (patients without a mental Health encounter in the past two years) and established patients.

Scope: Same day access for clinics in the BHSL at University Drive, Heinz site, and Community Based Care Centers (CBOC). Patients' inquiring into same day access mental health services can come from any of our outpatient clinics or they can simply walk into any behavior health clinic and obtain services.

Definitions:

New Patient: Eligible Veteran that has not been seen in behavioral health in the past 24 months.

Walk-in Clinics: Clinics available for same day access patients to obtain an initial mental health evaluation.

University Drive-Building 29, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Heinz Site- Primary Care, 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

CBOC- Patient referred to on-site psychologist or social worker.

Established Patient: Patient has been seen in behavioral health in the past 24 months. Verify encounter in CPRS by searching for an initial mental health evaluation, recent individual therapy, psychology or psychiatry appointment, inpatient stay on the behavioral health units (3CB, 4CB, or 5CB) or new or pending consults.

Procedures:

1. Access for Veterans in Crisis – Varies by the manner in which the request occurred:
 - a. In Person – If a Veteran presents with suicidal or homicidal ideation, or a medical center employee identifies a veteran “at-risk” they will notify a medical or mental provider to escort the Veteran to the emergency department.
 - b. By Telephone – Veterans who contact medical center staff by telephone that are in crisis, will keep the Veteran on the phone while pushing a panic button or alerting someone in the vicinity to contact the VA Police. The VA Police will contact local authorities to perform a home health and safety welfare check. If the Veteran contacts the main medical center phone number in crisis they can push option seven and they will be connected directly to the Suicide Crisis Line. In accordance with National policy, all providers who have voicemail established have the appropriate emergency contact information if the Veteran is attempting to contact a provider in crisis.
 - c. After Hour Calls – All Veterans attempting to contact the MH Call Center or any Pittsburgh VA site to request services after hours are routed to the Bronx VA Call Center for triage by an RN. The triaging RN assesses

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safety concerns, reviews the Veteran's presenting problem and request, determines the immediate treatment plan, and then documents and alerts the appropriate MHTC to follow-up with the Veteran to establish care no later than the next calendar day. Calls with urgent needs are triaged appropriately to an LIP. For non-urgent calls, the delegated LIP/MHTC will initiate contact no later than the next calendar day.

2. **University Drive:** Patients referred to behavioral health for same day access will be escorted or directed to our clinic for care. This same procedure applies to patients that walk-in to our clinics without a referral.

New Patient:

- a. Scheduling staff will enter an unscheduled appointment into the scheduling package under clinic (PIT-UB-O-IE), then contact the psychologist assigned to the walk-in clinic.
- b. After initial evaluation provider will escort the patient to scheduling staff to negotiate a follow-up appointment.
- c. If the psychologist determines the patient needs to see a prescribing provider, they will inform patient of the process and plan and take them back out to the scheduling staff to enter another same day appointment. Scheduling staff will enter same day appointment for the prescribing provider in clinics PIT-UB-I-WALK-IN-MD-X (for physicians) or PIT-UB-I-WALK IN CRNP-X (for CRNP).
- d. The psychologist will contact the prescribing provider to inform them of their findings and the patient presence in the waiting area.

Established Patient:

- a. The scheduling staff will contact their prescribing provider or psychologist.
An unscheduled appointment with their prescribing provider must be entered into the scheduling package or if their provider is not available the patient will be directed to the walk-in clinic provider and an appointment will be made in clinic PIT-UB-I-WALK-IN-MD-X (for physicians) or PIT-UB-I-WALK IN CRNP-X (for CRNP).
- b. If the patient wants to speak to the psychologist the scheduling staff will enter an appointment in their clinic or if the provider is not available, refer the patient to the psychologist assigned to the walk-in clinic (PIT-UB-O-IE).

Substance Abuse:

- a. New or established Veterans presenting to the behavioral health walk-in clinic for immediate substance abuse treatment will be escorted to the Emergency department for ambulatory detoxification.
- b. After hours, Veterans seeking substance abuse treatment are directed to the emergency department.

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c. Veterans phoning in seeking same day substance abuse treatment are provided with the ambulatory detoxification program information and directed to report to the emergency department, available 24 hours a day.

Note: If two Veterans have checked-in for walk-in clinic, an e-mail is sent via outlook to “VHAPTH IE Clinic Psychologist” requesting assistance.

3. Telephone Contacts:

- a. New patients to behavioral health must speak with a mental health LIP by phone that day or by the next calendar day. The clerical staff that receives the call will then warm transfer the Veteran to the Initial Evaluation (IE) psychologist assigned to the walk-in clinic with the exception of CTAD calls which will be directed to the team leader for that specialty. Any off-tour needs will be referred to the on-psychiatrist.
- b. Established patients requesting services that do not include urgent mental health concerns will be asked if they need to speak with a provider. The clerical staff that receives the call will warm transfer the Veteran to the provider they normally see. If the LIP is not available the clerk will leave a message for the LIP and the LIP will initiate contact no later than the next business day to review specific mental health needs.

4. Heinz Site: Referring provider pages walk-in-clinic provider, usually a psychologist, for an initial evaluation. If medication is warranted, the psychologist will complete a warm hand-off to a provider. Entering appointments in the scheduling package are consistent with above noted clinic delineations.

5. **Community Based Outpatient Care Centers:** Referring provider will complete a warm hand-off to the on-site Psychologist, social worker or Behavioral Health Lab (412-651-1590). If there is a need to see a prescribing provider, the patient is referred to the walk-in clinic at University Drive or the emergency department.

References: VHA HANDBOOK 1160.01, *Uniform Mental Health Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics*, September 11, 2008.

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