

Department of Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: March 31, 2020

From: Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N)

Subj: Guidance to Avoid All Routine or Non-urgent Face to Face Visits

To: Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Directors

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance for all outpatient appointments, including Primary Care, Mental Health, and Specialty Care, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This guidance is intended to reduce the risk of infection and exposure for our Veterans and aligns with Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations.
 - a. Sites should be working to eliminate all but urgent face-to-face (F2F) visits across all clinical services.
 - b. In house Specialty consults should be completed using virtual modalities to the extent possible.
 - c. All specialty services are expected to implement E-consults and use them to answer new consult requests in place of F2F visits whenever clinically appropriate.
 - d. Medication refills should be mailed whenever clinically appropriate.

2. To the extent possible, all providers and scheduling staff need to review and convert as many future appointments to telephone or video in place of F2F as possible. To deliver virtual care, clinical teams should use the modality that has the lowest technology requirement, such as Secure Messaging (SM) or telephone visits unless a video visit is deemed clinically necessary or if a Veteran prefers a video visit.
 - a. Group F2F appointments should be converted to virtual modalities. See [VANTS Use for Group Patient Care Related to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) memo](#).
 - b. More specific guidance for Primary Care and Mental Health can be found in the following documents:
 - i. [Primary Care Memo: Primary Care Guidance for COVID-19 Pandemic Response](#)
 - ii. Mental Health Memo: Converting MH In-person Appointments to Virtual Care

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3. Due to the increased demand of virtual care, medical centers may require additional clinic grids. For assistance with setting up virtual clinic grids, please contact the Referral Coordination Initiative Team (VHARCI@va.gov).
 - a. Memorandum can be found at the following SharePoint site:
<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/sites/VACOVHAPublicHealth/HCI/Administration/DUSHOM%20Guidance/032220%20Outpatient%20Clinic%20Appointment%20Scheduling%20Management%20in%20Response%20to%20COVID-19%20Pandemic%20Updated.pdf?csf=1&e=y7DcTc>
 - b. All relevant and updated supporting materials for the Telehealth COVID-19 response are available on the VHA High Consequence Infection SharePoint site's Virtual Care folder at the following SharePoint site k:
<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VACOVHAPublicHealth/HCI/Virtual%20Care/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.
4. Your commitment to this effort is critical during this unprecedented public health pandemic. Veterans Health Administration sincerely appreciates all your work in providing the highest level of care to our Veterans. Should you have any questions regarding this memorandum, please contact the Office of Veterans Access to Care by sending an email to VHA10NGAction@va.gov.



for
Renee Oshinski