



# Volunteer Handbook

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
PROVIDENCE VA MEDICAL CENTER**



**Providence VA Medical Center  
830 Chalkstone Avenue  
Providence, Rhode Island 02908  
Phone: 401-273-7100**

# Welcome

Welcome to the Providence VA Medical Center. Volunteers are an important part of the VA Voluntary Service Program (VAVS) and the medical center team. Each one of you is unique and has a contribution to make. Your services are needed and most welcome. We hope that your experience as a volunteer is rewarding, meaningful and educational.

The VA Medical Center serves Veterans in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. We are resolved to providing timely, compassionate and quality Service to Veterans and their families. Voluntary Service is committed to the VA Mission and we hope that you will join the staff in a spirit of enthusiasm and dedication to help us achieve this mission.

This handbook should answer many questions that relate to your service as a volunteer. We have outlined information for you in the following pages as a guide for your duties as a volunteer.

Thank you for your service to our Veterans.

Donna Russillo  
Chief, Voluntary Service

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### VISN 1

Recently, VA New England Healthcare System leadership re-evaluated and revised the Network's mission, vision and values statement in order to better reflect our purpose in serving the Veterans of New England. With input from Veterans, employees and other stakeholders, we developed a new statement that describes our organization, its direction and purpose, and the scope of our activities. We take pride in sharing with you our new mission, vision, and values statement.

#### Our Mission:

To improve the health of Veterans through Clinical Care, Education and Research.

#### Our Vision:

- **Strive** to exceed Veterans' expectations by providing the right care at the right place at the right time.
- **Support** employee development to ensure a work force that will meet the challenges ahead.
- **Seek** to be recognized as a leader in the healthcare community.
- **Create** innovative ways to deliver healthcare.
- **Not to yield** until we are recognized as the healthcare provider of choice by Veterans who then recommend us to other Veterans for Health Care.

#### Our Values are:

**Trust**

**Respect**

**Commitment**

**Compassion**

**Excellence**

**Accountability**

**Integrity**

**Teamwork**

## **MISSION:**

- Voluntary Service has a commitment to provide a comprehensive volunteer program through professional leadership, which will contribute to the benefit and welfare of the patients.

## **VISION:**

- Our vision is to become a leader in the Medical Center and the community through development of volunteer programs and coordination of community activities at the Medical Center, which support healthcare delivery to our Veterans.

## **GOALS:**

- We will strive to develop and provide resources consistent with identified needs which will assist staff in providing quality, timely and compassionate healthcare to our Veterans.
- We will strive to maintain effective community relations which will project a positive image of Voluntary Service and the Medical Center.
- We will strive for service excellence in development of the volunteer program; in recruitment of volunteers; and in utilization of community resources.

## **VOLUNTARY SERVICE STAFF**

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## **You as a Volunteer:**

The following section is designed to provide you with the basic information you will need to begin your volunteer assignment. Please take time to read each item. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact either the Voluntary Service Office or your immediate supervisor. We are here to assist you in your assignment so that you may achieve the best results in helping the Veteran patients.

## **Role:**

As a Regularly Scheduled (RS) Volunteer, you are a member of the VA Medical Center team and have an invaluable role in its mission. Individuals who volunteer their time and efforts through the VAVS Program are complementary to the essential VA personnel at the Medical Center. Specifically, VA policy states that volunteers in the VA Medical Center programs are assigned for the purpose of supplementing, not replacing the VA staff, and for augmenting program activities in accordance with the needs identified at each Medical Center.

## **Orientation:**

The brief orientation presentation is designed to familiarize you generally with the VA medical Center, Voluntary Service and your role as a volunteer. This orientation includes general information about several volunteer responsibilities and benefits. Specific assignment orientation varies in length and is under the direction of the respective Medical Center supervisor who will inform you of matters pertaining to your assignment area. Specific instructions about the various safety issues like fire safety and infection control procedures will be discussed at this time.

## **Assignments:**

The Voluntary Service Program Manager is responsible for making all volunteer assignments commensurate with the current Medical Center needs and the qualifications of the individual volunteer. Volunteer abilities, skills, interests and career goals are taken into consideration when volunteer assignments are determined. If after a fair trial period and adequate on-the-job training you find you are unhappy with the assignment, please discuss the matter with the staff in the Voluntary Service Office. If possible, an appropriate assignment will be found for you in another area.

**The subjects that follow may well be the most important items in this handbook. Please read them carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have.**

### **TIME AND ATTENDANCE:**

All persons performing volunteer work must be accounted for on a daily basis. The information is used to respond to family inquiries, disaster, etc. Volunteers who are injured on the job are entitled to benefits provided under the provisions of Workers' Compensation. Only authorized volunteers who have signed in for duties are eligible to apply for benefits. Only those hours that have been officially recorded are applied toward awards or verification of service for school .

It is your responsibility to assure the hours that you volunteer each day are recorded. All volunteers should sign in prior to reporting to their assignment.

**DIRECTIONS FOR VOLUNTEER SIGN-IN:** On the computer located in the Voluntary Service Office—press any key or move the mouse to begin.

- (1) Enter your volunteer code (First initial of your last name and four numbers) Press return key or left click mouse.
- (2) If you volunteer in more than one service, a list of assignments will show on the screen. Select the correct assignment from those that appear on the screen and left arrow click the mouse.
- (3) How many hours will you be working? Type or select a whole number in this section. For example, if you are working 4 ½ hours, type “5”; then left click the mouse.  
**Note:** If you are uncertain about your time, enter the number of hours you expect to work. Changes may be made later in the day.
- (4) Will you need a meal ticket? Any volunteer working for at least four hours on a schedule that extends over the noon meal period and begins no later than 1:00PM is entitled to a meal allowance not to exceed \$6.00 from the Canteen Service. Select “Yes” or “No” and click the “Print” button.

**Note:** This question will come on the screen only if you sign in **before** 1:00 PM. Meal tickets can only be used on the day they are issued and cannot be given to anyone else.

### **RULES AND ETHICS:**

Be properly groomed, neat in attire and makeup and **wear your official VA volunteer ID badge each time you come to the hospital to volunteer.** Personal appearance is an important element in gaining the trust and confidence of patients, visitors, staff and co-volunteers.

Volunteers are not permitted to wear shorts, leggings, torn jeans, mini-skirts, tight skirts, see-through blouses, halter tops, muscle shirts, or shirts with offensive language printed on them.

Be courteous at all times and conduct yourself in a positive, friendly manner. Courtesy must be shown in all contacts with Veterans and their families, the general public, supervisors, and with fellow volunteers and employees.

- Any criticism of your position, your supervisor, or the Medical Center should be discussed in private with your supervisor or with the Voluntary Service Program Manager.
- Accept assignments and/or suggestions graciously and cooperatively.
- Remain in the area to which you are assigned unless your VA supervisor sends you on an errand.
- When in a patient care area, observe posted unit regulations.
- Do not eat or drink in the corridors or patient units.
- Never sit or lean on a patient's bed. Likewise, do not give food, beverages, or smoking materials to a patient unless directed to do so by a VA supervisor.
- All information concerning patients is **STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**
- Lending money or other items to patients, staff, or other volunteers is prohibited.
- Do not give information about yourself, such as your home address, telephone number, etc., or accept gifts or tips from patients.
- Avoid discussing subjects of a controversial nature involving the patient's family matters, religion or politics. If these subjects are raised, politely decline to enter into the discussion.
- Advise patients to refer their pension and benefit questions or problems to the Veteran Benefits Counselor or a qualified Veterans Service Officer.
- Avoid showing favoritism. As a rule, you should avoid showing favoritism or concentrating all your attention on a single patient, or on any small group to the exclusion of others in your assignment area.

## **REPORTING SPECIAL INCIDENTS INVOLVING PATIENT(S):**

Volunteers witnessing any special or unusual incidents involving patients should report such incidents immediately to their VA supervisor or the person in charge of the activity site. Examples of special incidents include:

1. Patients missing from their assigned activity;
2. Any injuries to the patients;
3. Patient abuse;
4. Attempted suicide;
5. Patients damaging personal or government property.

## **WORKPLACE VIOLENCE/ PATIENT ABUSE:**

The Providence VA Medical Center hereby affirms its policy that employees and volunteers should work in environments that are free from physical attack, threats, menacing and harassing behaviors. Violent behavior will not be tolerated at this facility. Persons, (patients, beneficiaries, volunteers, visitors, employees) committing acts of violence will be reported to the appropriate authorities and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against volunteers who are verbally or physically aggressive. No patient is to be mistreated or abused in any way, physically or verbally, by any employee or volunteer. Volunteers witnessing abuse must report it immediately to their VA supervisor or the person in charge of the activity. **Volunteers who abuse any patient will be immediately terminated from the volunteer rolls.**

## **PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT:**

The Supreme Court of the United States defines sexual harassment as “such conduct (that) has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment”. Sexual harassment is a flagrant form of illegal discrimination that generates a harmful and threatening atmosphere and undermines the integrity of the employment relationship. Sexual harassment also debilitates morale and interferes in the work productivity of its victims and co-workers. Employees and volunteers who feel that they are the victims of sexual harassment are encouraged to report such activities to their supervisor. **Volunteers who sexually harass other volunteers, employees, patients or visitors will be immediately terminated from the volunteer rolls.**

## **PATIENT PRIVACY:**

- MUST BE PROTETED!

Who must comply?

- All VA employees and volunteers
- All VA contractors and affiliates
- All VA business associates, other people and organizations who have access to personally identifiable information

What if I don't handle medical information? Do I still have to comply?

Even if you do not handle patient medical records or work in a VA hospital, you may have direct or casual access to employee, Veteran, dependent or beneficiary personal information. As a result, you must protect this information.

**REMEMBER: PATIENT INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL – WHAT YOU SEE HERE, WHAT IS SAID HERE, WILL STAY HERE.**

Volunteers will not discuss the name, medical condition, or other data about a patient with anyone. According to the Privacy Act, the penalty for violation of the Privacy Act in relation to the patient's right to privacy is a fine of \$5,000.

**Additionally, misuse or disclosure of patient medical information can lead to termination of the volunteer.**

## **PATIENT RIGHTS:**

(Reference: CFR 38 Part 17, Paragraph 17.34a, September 1, 1989) – Each patient at the VA Medical Center has certain rights and privileges. It is imperative that each VA staff member and volunteer honor those patient rights. These specific patient rights are posted throughout the Medical Center. Please familiarize yourself with them.

## **INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES:**

While no environment is germ-free, we can take several simple steps to prevent the spread of infection. The single most effective means of preventing the spread of infection is hand washing. This is especially true if you follow these simple steps:

How to wash your hands:

- Moisten hands with water; add soap.
- Scrub hands and wrists vigorously for 20 seconds, paying special attention to nails.
- Dry hands well, then turn off faucet with a dry paper towel.

When to wash:

- Before and after your work session.
- Before and after physical contact with patients.
- After using the toilet, blowing your nose, covering a sneeze.
- Whenever hands become obviously soiled.
- Before and after eating, drinking, or handling food.

## **EQUIPMENT SAFETY:**

Electrical shock accidents can be prevented. Regulations require that staff utilizing electrical equipment learn about safety in operations. Only use equipment as it was intended to be used, and keep clothing, hair and hands away from moving parts. Make a quick examination of the equipment before every use to spot potential problems. Any potential equipment problems should be reported to Engineering Service immediately.

## Hepatitis B, HIV and the AIDS Virus:

- Volunteers working directly with patients and in areas such as Laboratory, Radiology, Emergency Room and Patient Transport should be aware of Universal Precautions (UP) and Disease Specific Isolation (DSI), or isolation ordered for a specific disease. It is the policy of this Medical Center to follow UP and DSI in the treatment of all patients. All tasks performed by healthcare workers will be categorized by potential exposure to blood and bodily fluids.
- Blood-borne pathogens are those infections that are spread through blood and blood products. Included in this type of infection are Hepatitis B and the HIV/Aids virus. Hepatitis B is easier to catch than HIV.
- Hepatitis B is spread through blood and blood products. Volunteers who work in direct patient care positions or who handle lab specimens can minimize any potential exposure by following the infection control procedures described above. Hepatitis B vaccine is available and recommended for all direct care staff. Those volunteers in this category may view a film that outlines the risks and precautions prior to deciding to elect or decline the vaccine.
- The HIV infection is spread through blood, blood products and body fluids. One in 300 exposures results in HIV transmission.

**Standard precautions are effective in avoiding contagion. Volunteers will, without exception, wear gloves to handle lab specimens and will only accept those specimens that are already sealed in a plastic bag.** Volunteers in direct patient care assignments will wear the appropriate protective garments as defined in the formal training session.

## **Tuberculosis and TB Skin Testing:**

Tuberculosis (TB) infection is spread through the inhalation of airborne droplets. The incidence of TB infection has risen in our society. Newer strains of the disease are more resistant to treatment.

To reduce the spread of the disease, proper precautions must be observed. Patients identified with TB must be kept in a negative-pressure isolation environment until no longer contagious. Anyone coming into contact with the patient must wear a mask (respirator) when in the patient's room. Any room in which a TB patient is isolated is clearly marked with a sign outside the door.

## **Volunteers will not enter an isolation room.**

Annual testing is a state law and a federal requirement for anyone working in a healthcare facility. TB tests are provided free of charge to all RS volunteers prior to acceptance as a volunteer and annually thereafter during their birth month. If you have tested positive in the past, you may need to have a chest x-ray or complete a questionnaire at the discretion of the Employee Health Nurse Practitioner.

## **Fire and Safety Procedures:**

Knowledge of the appropriate response to a fire in a medical center environment is a critical element in quality healthcare. This medical center practices the “R A C E” system for response to a fire.

### **This means:**

- **Rescue**-evacuate the immediate area of danger
- **Alarm**-pull the nearest fire alarm box. Then dial **4999** and give the location and a brief description of the fire. The telephone operator will announce “Code Red” over the loud speakers.
- **Confine**-contain the fire by closing doors to the fire area.
- **Evacuate**-as directed by your area fire plan, supervisor, VA Police, or Providence Fire Department.

These rules are universal and may be used in any fire (or fire drill) situation. The supervisors in the work area where you are assigned provide additional service - specific instructions. Make sure your supervisor explains the instructions to you.

## **Emergency Preparedness:**

All employees and volunteers should know to protect themselves in case of an emergency. In the event of an emergency, an overhead announcement will be made to alert staff as to the nature of the emergency. The announcements will be made as follows:

- **“Code Triage Standby”** used for emergency/unusual event that may impact the Medical Center.
- **“Code Triage”** used to activate the HEICS emergency disaster plan.
- **“Code Red”** used for fire alarm emergency.

**Volunteers should report to their work site supervisor for specific instructions on their responsibilities during an emergency situation.**

### **Distribution:**

No item, handout, or gift should be brought into the Medical Center or distributed without specific permission of the Voluntary Service Program Manager. Some items are *totally* unacceptable. These include drugs, over-the-counter medications, firearms, ammunition, other weapons and any alcoholic beverages. Violation of these prohibitions may result in arrest and/or a fine. If a volunteer is taking medications (including prescription medicines), these medications may be brought into the Medical Center for the volunteer's use only.

### **Taking Pictures of Patients:**

Taking pictures of patients, or even bringing a camera into the facility without prior approval is prohibited. If you plan to host a gift distribution or recreational activity and would like to take pictures for your organization's scrapbook, or to publicize your activity, please discuss this in advance with the Voluntary Service Program Manager. Photography must be approved by Public Affairs and cleared through VA Police.

### **Changes in Address, Phone or Resignation:**

- Any change of address or telephone number must be reported to Voluntary Service in a timely manner. Timely sharing of important information is dependent upon accurate records.
- Please notify Voluntary Service if, for any reason, you decide to discontinue your volunteer service. Your comments are important to us.

## **Hours, Awards and Recognition:**

Volunteers are recognized for their service on a yearly basis via an Annual Recognition Ceremony.

## **Canteen:**

The Veterans Canteen Service located in the basement of the medical center, includes a cafeteria and a retail store. A Starbucks coffee shop is located on the 1st floor of the hospital. The cafeteria has a full breakfast and lunch menu and the store displays gifts, snacks and a wide variety of dry good items. The canteen is open Monday through Friday, except on Federal holidays.

### **Hours:**

**Retail store – 7:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.**

**Cafeteria** – Breakfast is served from 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m.

Lunch is served from 10:30 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

**Starbucks**-7:00a.m. until 3:00p.m.

## **Volunteer Meals:**

A volunteer working for a minimum of four hours on a schedule that extends over the noon meal period and begins no later than 12:00 p.m. is entitled to a meal allowance not to exceed \$6.00 from the Canteen Service. The Voluntary Service Program Manager or a designated staff member will certify names of volunteers eligible for meals.

## **Free Parking:**

All parking at the Medical Center is free of charge. You must register your car with and obtain a parking sticker from the VA Police to be authorized to park on Medical Center grounds.

## **Medical Treatment:**

Volunteers who are injured in the course of their assigned duties are authorized medical services. If you have an accident or illness while serving in your assignment, report to your immediate supervisor to determine the course of action to be taken.

## **Immunization Program:**

Flu shots are offered annually to all employees and volunteers free of charge. Watch for the immunization schedule that will be posted annually in October. Hepatitis B vaccinations are offered only to those volunteers involved in direct patient care or exposed to body fluids in the laboratory.

## **In-Service Training Opportunities:**

In addition to initial orientation and on-the-job training to their assignment areas, volunteers may be eligible for educational opportunities through in-service training sessions on topics related to their job assignments. Information will be posted on the electronic bulletin boards located in the elevator lobbies of the main building.

## **Employment References and Recommendations:**

Voluntary Service will provide references and recommendations for employment, scholarships, schools, and a variety of other individual needs. Volunteers should allow staff sufficient time.

## **Liability, Injury and Damage Protection for VA Volunteers:**

VA volunteers have the same protection from personal liability as paid Federal employees. Federal law provides immunity to all Federal employees, (including VA volunteers) from suits for personal injuries or death, or for property damage, so long as the volunteer's actions are part of his or her official duties.

### **Gifts and Donations:**

The Voluntary Service Program Manager is responsible for coordinating the acceptance and acknowledgement of all gifts and donations offered to the medical center. These gifts and donations will be used for the sole purpose of meeting particular needs and requirements for the welfare and comfort of the patients.

Individuals or organizations wishing to make monetary donations to the Medical Center for the benefit of the patients should make checks payable to:

#### **VA Medical Center**

and mail them to:

Voluntary Service (135)  
VA Medical Center  
830 Chalkstone Avenue  
Providence, RI 02908

If uncertain as to what purpose or what account you wish the donation to be applied, prior contact with the Voluntary Service Program Manager will ensure prompt and accurate application of the monetary donation. Contact Voluntary Service at (401) 273-7100, ext. 3002 or 2023 for further information.

A complete list of routine material donation needs and monetary donation accounts is available online at [www.providence.va.gov](http://www.providence.va.gov) and also upon request from the Voluntary Service Office at the telephone numbers listed above.