



August 4, 2021

Dr. Jennifer Zacher-Martin
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Pharmacy Benefits Management
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

Subject: Temporary Suspension of Visits by Drug Representatives Policy

Dr. Jennifer Zacher-Martin:

The Coalition for Government Procurement (“the Coalition”) sincerely appreciates the continued communications with industry about the Temporary Suspension of Non-Patient, Non-VA-Staff, Drug-Representative, Visits during the COVID-19 national emergency. We are writing to inquire about the status of the policy, given that in the last published version, multiple VISNs had indicated that their policies would be revisited on June 30, 2021.

As you know, the Coalition is a non-profit association of firms selling commercial services and products to the Federal Government. The Coalition’s Healthcare Committee members provide more than \$10 billion worth of healthcare products/services and pharmaceuticals to support the healthcare needs of our nation’s veterans. Our members include small, medium, and large businesses. We are proud to have worked with Government officials for more than 40 years towards the mutual goal of common-sense acquisition.

The Coalition respects the necessary restrictions in the Temporary Suspension policy on in-person visits that have been critical to protecting the health and safety of veterans, healthcare workers, and VA staff at VA healthcare facilities during the COVID-19 national emergency. Given that the latest version of the Temporary Suspension of Visits policy states that it would be reevaluated on June 30 at the VISN level, industry respectfully requests an update on the current visitation policies of the respective VISNs, and that VA continue to permit virtual visits where in-person facility visits cannot be accommodated.

Pharmaceutical member companies report that, over the past year, private sector hospitals have had similar restrictions in place on in-person visits, and that as a result, they have prioritized virtual meetings with the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that education and training on the latest treatments available continue. Virtual meetings, via Zoom, WebEx, and conference calls have been standard practice for pharmaceutical representatives and private sector physicians and staff when COVID restrictions have prohibited meetings in person. Academic institutions have also been open to virtual meetings and other remote options during the pandemic.

Continued communications and education about the latest advancements in pharmaceutical treatments are critical to maintaining a “world-class” level of healthcare for our nation’s veterans. Regular engagement, whether in person or virtual, supports continuing education about pharmaceutical products and informs the VA of new data that is published and when certain guidelines change. It also helps to inform VA healthcare professionals when new drug therapies are available to treat veterans that improve outcomes or are more cost effective for veteran patients and the VA.

Therefore, the Coalition respectfully requests the opportunity to talk to you at your convenience to 1) confirm whether in person meetings are permissible at the discretion of the local facility Chief of Pharmacy and 2) to discuss strategies to permit virtual meetings, training and education with the pharmaceutical industry when in person visits are not possible. Our members recognize that time and resources at the VA have been more limited as they have shifted to the COVID-19 response. However, from a staffing perspective, we believe that another benefit of resuming virtual private sector provided education and research is that it can help to supplement some of the ongoing work at the VA.

The Coalition sincerely appreciates your consideration. We also thank you and your team for your commitment to protecting the health and safety of our nation’s veterans during these unprecedented times. If you have any questions, I may be reached at rwaldron@thecgp.org or (202) 331-0975.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger Waldron", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Roger Waldron
President