



February 12, 2014

Honorable Robert A. Petzel, MD
Under Secretary for Health
Veterans Health Administration
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Room 800
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Dr. Petzel:

On behalf of the more than 95,000 physician assistants (PAs) represented by the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), I wish to communicate the Academy's whole-hearted support for the Veteran Health Administration's (VHA's) recently transmitted Directive 1063, updating the utilization guidelines for PAs employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In fact, AAPA has been commending the VA for this forward thinking VHA directive in public forums and publications since its transmittal in 2013. AAPA strongly encourages the VHA to continue to implement this critically important directive without delay.

AAPA applauds your leadership, as well as the leadership of Denni Woodmansee, VA Director of PA Services, in crafting a policy that recognizes the versatility of the PA workforce and enhances PAs' ability to deliver high-quality medical care to our nation's veterans, while continuing to embrace patient-centered, team-based medical care. We are very pleased that the VA, through VHA Directive 1063, distinguishes between the level of medical practice autonomy exercised by experienced PAs and newly educated PAs, as do other major healthcare systems that rely on a large PA workforce.

AAPA also applauds the directive's newly required integration of knowledge regarding PA utilization throughout the VHA. The directive's reliance upon designated VA leaders to ensure that all VA medical facilities are compliant with PA credentialing and utilization of PAs is a major step forward for the VA. Not too many years ago there was no institutional knowledge of PAs at the VA and no source of expertise regarding PA education, qualifications, clinical privileges, or scope of practice. Unfortunately as a result, VA medical facilities, and more importantly, veterans, paid the price – with inconsistent and under utilization of the VA's PA workforce. VHA Directive 1063 creates an infrastructure of knowledge of the PA profession at the federal, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), and medical facility levels, ensuring consistently optimal utilization of the VA's PA workforce.

AAPA looks forward to working with the VHA in the ongoing implementation of VHA Directive 1063. We applaud the VHA's efforts to date in moving forward with new scopes of practices, amended medical staff bylaws, and newly written local PA practice models to implement the new PA utilization guidelines, and we encourage the VHA to remain steadfast in implementing this important policy. To create any delay in implementing the directive at this point would cause disruption and negatively impact patient care.

Again, thank you for your leadership in updating the utilization guidelines for the VA's PA workforce. Please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Sandy Harding, AAPA senior director of federal advocacy at sharding@aapa.org or 571-319-4338 with questions regarding the Academy's comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lawrence Herman, PA-C, MPA". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Lawrence Herman, PA-C, MPA
AAPA President