

**ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION
BY THE VA OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
IN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS
REGARDING PATIENT WAIT TIMES**



**VA Outpatient Clinic in Tulsa, Oklahoma
April 26, 2016**

1. Summary of Why the Investigation Was Initiated

The investigation was initiated pursuant to information received through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline that alleged employees at the Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic (OPC) in Tulsa, OK, were manipulating appointment data and maintaining separate waiting lists in order create the appearance that patient access to medical care was better than the actual conditions at the facility.

2. Description of the Conduct of the Investigation

- **Interviews Conducted:** VA OIG interviewed 27 Medical Support Assistants (MSAs), the complainant, and 4 supervisors, as well as the current and former VA Medical Center (VAMC) Directors for Muskogee, OK, which is the parent facility for OPC Tulsa.
- **Records Reviewed:** VA OIG reviewed VA emails, data related to appointment scheduling, and Annual Performance Appraisals for 28 employees.

3. Summary of the Evidence Obtained From the Investigation

Interviews Conducted

- The complainant stated that the requirement (at the time of the interview) was to schedule appointments within 14 days of the “desired date.” However, the complainant believed that some coworkers entered the desired date as the appointment date, which would make it appear as if there was no wait time for medical appointments. The complainant stated the proper way to schedule an appointment was for the MSA to ask the patient for the date that he/she desired to be seen. Often, the desired date was not available; in this case, the MSA should advise the patient of the next available appointment date. Once the appointment date was scheduled, the MSA should enter the patient’s desired date and the actual date of the appointment, which may be two different dates.

Referring to her fellow MSAs’ concept of the desired date versus the appointment date, the complainant stated, “I don’t think they’re getting the concept of how this is supposed to work.” The complainant explained that, until recently, MSAs were verbally instructed to schedule appointments in a different way from the official training and the official VA scheduling directive. She stated that MSAs were verbally instructed that if they could not schedule an appointment within 14 days of the desired date, to use the appointment date as the desired date. She stated that she knew this because when she observed an MSA enter the desired date as the appointment date and attempted to correct the MSA, the MSA responded, “That’s how I was trained.”

The complainant's supervisor told the complainant, in the past, to enter the appointment date as the desired date and explained that it was because OPC Tulsa was expected to schedule patient appointments with 14 days of the desired date.

The complainant stated that the message from management was that OPC Tulsa had to meet the 14-day performance measurement and the complainant believed that the instruction to enter the appointment date as the desired date was the means to meet the performance measurement; however, it was never directly stated. The complainant stated that the practice of entering the appointment date as the desired date continued until an April 2014 staff meeting. When asked if it was possible to schedule appointments within 14 days of the patient's desired date, the complainant said that, in most cases, it was. The complainant blamed the inability to schedule appointments within 14 days of the patient's desired date on a lack of efficiency due to poor supervisory oversight, a lack of accountability, and poor training.

The complainant stated that due to the VA performance measure to schedule patient appointments within 14 days of the desired date, the complainant's supervisor produced lists of appointments that were not scheduled within 14 days of the desired date and instructed the MSAs to change the desired date to match the appointment date. The complainant stated that the only time the complainant's supervisor brought the complainant a list, the complainant told the supervisor, "I'm doing this under protest" and the supervisor responded, "Well, that's what they want us to do." The complainant estimated that it had been approximately 3 years since the complainant's supervisor had brought the complainant a list and instructed the complainant to change the desired dates.

The complainant expressed a belief that facility kept "secret" lists. When asked if the complainant had seen any lists or had some form of proof to corroborate this belief, the complainant denied ever seeing any secret list and had nothing to corroborate the belief that secret lists were maintained by facility staff.

- Fifteen MSAs stated that they were never trained or instructed to enter the "next available date" as the desired date, did not enter the next available date as the desired date, and had never been given a list of veterans' names and ordered to change the desired date to make it appear that the wait time was shorter than it actually was. The MSAs also stated that they followed the Recall List Procedure, that they never destroyed or had been ordered to destroy any patient scheduling information, and did not keep any secret lists, nor were they aware of anyone keeping secret lists.
- MSA16 advised that most recently during the past "three or four" months prior to the VA OIG interview, she had been entering the actual desired date when scheduling appointments. Prior to this change to the proper scheduling technique, MSA16 stated that it "came down" that the MSAs were supposed to schedule appointments within 14 days of the desired date. Since this was not possible, she and other MSAs would schedule patients for the next available appointment, but would enter the desired date as a date that fell within 14 days of the actual appointment date. She stated that she would "make up a date" within 14 days of the actual appointment date to avoid being admonished by her supervisor. MSA16 stated that she and the other MSAs were not

specifically instructed to change desired dates or enter false desired dates. Instead, MSA16 stated that she and other MSAs entered incorrect desired dates to avoid being on management reports, which resulted in being admonished, but explained that she had not experienced repercussions for not scheduling appointments within 14 days of the desired dates. She described her supervisor as the “greatest supervisor” and stated that the only reason her supervisor would have admonished MSAs who did not to schedule appointments within 14 days of the desired dates was because someone above her told her to do so based on the reports not looking “pretty.” She stated that she was never given a list of veterans and instructed to change the desired dates to make it appear that the wait times were shorter than they actually were.

MSA16 described a meeting that occurred 2 to 3 months prior to the interview, during which her supervisor and other management staff explained to the MSAs how to properly enter desired dates and appointment dates regardless of whether or not the appointment dates were within 14 days of the desired dates. Several attendees argued, stating that the MSAs had always been pressured by management to schedule appointments within 14 days of the desired dates. She said that her supervisor responded by explaining that MSAs had always been expected to enter the correct desired dates and appointment dates. She did not believe that entering incorrect desired dates caused any harm because the veteran was still receiving the earliest possible appointment regardless of his/her desired date.

- MSA17 stated that prior to the media scrutiny of VAMC Phoenix¹ and the subsequent VA OIG investigation, she was trained by her supervisor and her on-the-job trainers to enter the desired date as the next available date. She said that she and other MSAs questioned management about the practice, but “it was about numbers at that point.” She stated that because she was trained to enter the desired date as the next available date, and because that was how she had always done it, she interpreted it as an order originating from management. Furthermore, MSA17 stated that her supervisor also instructed her to enter the desired date as the next available date.

She said that “a few years back,” some of her coworkers were “doing it the correct way.” As a result, her supervisor produced a list of patients (because the “numbers would not be good”) and had the MSAs change the desired dates to match the next available dates. She felt that the reasoning behind manipulating the scheduling data was to make it appear that the director at the time was running an efficient clinic. It was believed that the former director was interested in promotion to a position in Washington, D.C., and needed to make it appear that his facilities were operating efficiently. She said that the last time her supervisor produced any such lists was about 3 years ago. Under the current director, MSAs were instructed to properly enter the patient desired dates as they were scheduling the appointment. MSA17 recalled a recent meeting during which her supervisor told them how to correctly schedule patient appointments, but some of the MSAs spoke up and told her that it was not how she had told them to do it in the past. She said the supervisor denied ever telling the MSAs to enter the desired date as the next

¹ Any reference to Phoenix in this summary refers to wait time allegations that surfaced at VAMC Phoenix in early 2014.

available date. After the meeting, her supervisor started conducting more training to be sure that the MSAs were scheduling correctly.

- MSA18 stated that when he was first trained, he was taught that if he could not find an appointment within 7 days of the desired date, to find the next available appointment and make that date the desired date. He stated that he learned this method during on-the-job training with various senior schedulers and not from his supervisor. He stated, “That’s how the system was . . . that’s how she [the supervisor] told them to train us.” He said that when he would enter the correct desired date, he would be “confronted” by the supervisor. He said that the supervisor told him that he was “messing with their numbers.” He believed that his supervisor was ordering him to enter an incorrect desired date when she instructed that appointments must be scheduled within 7 days of the desired date. He stated that when he was confronted by his supervisor, she never instructed him to go back and change desired dates. He stated that he stopped using this method after his supervisors held a meeting, which occurred at about the time of the media scrutiny of VA, and instructed the MSAs to enter the correct desired date.

MSA18 stated he was never given a list of veterans and ordered to change the desired dates to make it appear that the wait times were shorter than they actually were; however, MSAs on his team had been given a list of veterans and ordered to change the desired dates. He stated that he helped his fellow MSAs change the desired dates by canceling the appointment and then rescheduling the appointment for the same day/time, but with a different desired date that was closer to the appointment date. He believed that the instruction to do this was based on reports that his supervisor received from VAMC Muskogee, which showed appointments that were scheduled outside of the time period from the desired dates. He stated that, at the meeting during which the supervisors instructed the MSAs to enter the correct desired date, several MSAs argued that it was not how they had previously been instructed. He stated that both supervisors denied that they had ever instructed the MSAs to enter incorrect desired dates.

- MSA19 stated that, currently (at the time of the interview), he entered the desired date and the next available date correctly. However, in the past, he had been instructed to enter the desired date as a date within 14 days of the available date. He stated that the patient still received the earliest possible appointment, but the desired date was entered as a date within 14 days of that appointment date to “fudge the numbers.” He said, “We worked the numbers.”

He recalled a meeting during which his supervisor explained how to correctly enter the desired date. He stated he objected and explained to her how he entered the desired date and told her that she had instructed him to do it that way. He stated the supervisor denied instructing him that way. He said that he told her, “You pretty much did tell me to do that because you brought me lists and you wanted me to change the dates because they didn’t match.” He said the supervisor acknowledged giving him the list, but denied that it was because she wanted him to change that date to within 14 days of the available date. He said she offered another explanation for why she gave him the list, but he could not recall what it was. He stated that, at first, he fought entering the desired date as a date within 14 days of the available date, but when his supervisor gave him a list of

60-70 patients and told him to change the desired dates, he ended up spending too much time working on the list and decided to start entering the desired date as a date within 14 days of the available date. He stated that the list contained patients' appointment dates and desired dates and if the desired date was outside of the 14-day window, he was instructed to change that date to within 14 days of the available date. He recalled only being given one list and that it occurred approximately 3 years ago.

MSA19 stated that he was not instructed to enter false desired dates, but was instead repeatedly instructed to schedule appointments within 14 days of the desired date. He explained that since he knew he was not able to schedule appointments within 14 days of the desired date and the instruction to schedule appointments within 14 days of the desired date was constantly repeated, he interpreted it as being "heavily implied" to enter incorrect desired dates. He stated that when OPC Tulsa got a new director, "everything kinda changed [for the better]." He stated that under the former director, there was pressure to enter the desired date as a date within 14 days of the available date.

- MSA20 stated that when he first began employment as an MSA at OPC Tulsa, he was trained to search for the next available appointment date and offer it to the veteran. When a veteran agreed to the next available appointment date, that date became the desired date and was entered as such. He described it as "a little gray area" because the veteran may or may not have requested a specific desired date. MSA20 recalled a staff meeting that took place at about the time of the media scrutiny of VA during which his supervisor recapped the proper way to enter the desired date. He and seven or eight of his colleagues objected and said, "This isn't how we've been told . . . this is not how you trained me and it's not how you advised me to train others." He stated his supervisor responded, "That's not true, that's not true."

He stated that OPC Tulsa needed more staff, but the access reports showed 100 percent; if they had been scheduling correctly, the access reports would have supported that OPC Tulsa needed more staff. He stated, "obviously availability is an issue and it should have been showing and reflecting it all this time and it would have been reflecting it had it not been for the way that we were taught to schedule." He stated that during the aforementioned meeting, he and others pointed out to the supervisor that she had brought them a list of patients and instructed them to change the desired dates to make it appear that the wait time was shorter than it actually was. He stated the supervisor responded by saying, "well I haven't done that in a long time."

- MSA21 stated there was a "point in time, when we were under a different director," when MSAs were expected to enter a desired date that was within the expected date range from the appointment date. He said that this practice occurred under the previous director and also his predecessor. He stated that it was "really rare" that a veteran actually specified a desired date "even if you ask them"; however, when a veteran did specify a date, the MSA would still enter the available date as the desired date, or the desired date was entered as a date within the expected date range from the available date. MSA21 believed that this practice stopped approximately 1½ years prior to the interview. He described how, during a recent staff meeting, the desired date was being discussed, and he reminded his supervisors how the MSAs had previously been instructed to enter the

desired date. He said that he was “shocked” when the MSA supervisors denied that they had ever instructed the MSAs to enter the desired date incorrectly. He stated that he did not have any documentation to support that he was instructed to enter the desired date incorrectly. MSA21 recalled that approximately 2½ years ago, his supervisor had a list of patients whom she wanted rescheduled so that their appointment dates were within the correct date range from their desired dates. He could not recall if they were calling veterans and rescheduling appointments or just changing the desired dates. Eventually, he said, “we probably were changing the desired date.” He believed that his supervisor had been ordered by her supervisors to produce the list and give it to the MSAs.

- MSA22 stated, “There was a time . . . we were not letting it be known that we can’t get them in in that timely manner.” She went on to say, “It’s kinda hard to explain . . . put it like this, if you did it the right way, then it was brought back to you to make like [it was timely].” She stated that her supervisor would give her a list of veterans and instructed her to change the desired date to make it appear that the wait time was shorter than it actually was. She stated that this occurred “a couple of years” ago. She stated that her supervisor instructed her to change the desired date to one that was within a certain time period of the appointment date. She noted that there were times when she was too busy and did not change the desired dates as instructed. She stated that she did not experience any repercussions for not changing the desired dates and her performance evaluations were “always” outstanding. She did not know if her supervisor was acting on her own or if she was under orders from her supervisors. When asked if she had ever been trained or instructed to enter the next available date as the desired date, she replied, “No.”
- MSA23 stated that he only recalled one situation (several years earlier) when his supervisor gave him a list of 10–15 names and instructed him to adjust the desired date to match the actual appointment date. He recalled being told by his supervisor that the patients were “too far out.” He stated his supervisor wanted the desired dates changed so that it would appear that the veterans were seen sooner than they actually were. He did not believe that he would have faced any repercussions, if he had not done as she instructed. He said that he was never directly ordered to manipulate the information; it was just implied by his supervisor. He said that this practice has not been followed for over a year and that now the desired date and appointment dates are entered accurately.
- MSA 24 was asked to describe how he scheduled appointments. His description sounded like he used the next available date as the desired date. When asked if he knew whether or not the desired date was being stored along with a separate appointment date, he said that he did not know that. He stated that he was never trained or instructed to enter the next available date as the desired date. He stated he was never given a list of veterans and ordered to change the desired date to make it appear that the wait time was shorter than it actually was.
- MSA25, when asked about the desired date, stated, “Until last month, I didn’t have no clue about a desired date.” He explained that he now understood that the desired date is based on what date the patient wants. However, when he first started, he did not understand and asked his supervisor for clarification, but he found her instructions to be confusing. Later, he learned that he was still entering the desired date incorrectly and

was further instructed by his supervisor, but he still did not understand. He stated that he was not sure, but he believed that, prior to last month, he had been trained to enter the desired date as a date 7 days after the appointment date. He noted that he did not understand what effect that would have. He stated he was never given a list of veterans and ordered to change the desired date to make it appear that the wait time was shorter than it actually was.

- MSA26 stated that until approximately 3 or 4 months ago, his supervisor's instructions regarding scheduling patients for appointments differed from VA policy. He stated that MSAs were previously instructed to enter the desired date as the appointment date. He further stated that this was done because the appointment dates were very far out and this method would make it appear as though there was no wait time. He added that the instruction to manipulate the desired date came from his supervisor, her supervisor, and another VA employee. He stated that the instructions were disseminated via verbal instruction or through emails and he provided three emails, which he believed proved that OPC Tulsa management consistently ordered him to violate scheduling directives. [The emails do not appear to support his position.]
- He stated that, in the past, under the prior director, his supervisor would provide a list of patients whose desired dates were more than 14 days from their appointment dates and then require the MSAs to change the desired date to match the appointment date. He stated this was done to manipulate the statistics to make it appear that OPC Tulsa was complying with VA performance measures. He stated that, in the past 3 to 4 months (prior to the interview), his supervisors "completely and totally changed their tune." MSA26 stated that at a recent meeting his supervisors instructed all MSAs to correctly enter the desired date when making appointments. During the meeting, MSA19 confronted the supervisors about how MSAs had previously been instructed. He stated both supervisors denied that they ever told MSAs to manipulate the desired date.
- MSA27 stated that, as a new employee, he received on-the-job training from a senior MSA. He described the on-the-job training as inconsistent and "chaotic" because each MSA did things differently. He stated that he had never been trained or instructed to enter the next available date as the desired date. He further stated that he did not enter the next available date as the desired date. He added that when he first started working on the Recall List, if the doctor was not available until several weeks after the Recall List date, his supervisor taught him to change the recall date to match when the doctor was available. The Recall List date was not an appointment date, but rather the desired date of the physician for follow-up. He stated that when his supervisor later asked him why he did it that way, he told her because that was the way she had taught him to do it. He stated she denied that and showed him the correct way. He had worked the Recall List correctly ever since. This occurred approximately 1½ years ago. He stated he was never given a list of veterans and ordered to change the desired date to make it appear that the wait time was shorter than it actually was.
- The MSA supervisor stated that she instructed all of her employees on how to properly schedule patient appointments, particularly concerning the desired date versus the actual date of the appointment. This practice was followed regardless of the performance

measure of 14 days. She stated that her employees were trained to ask the patient for his/her desired date and then enter that date. She explained that this procedure was outlined in the national and local VA policy regarding scheduling patient appointments. She stated that she had not instructed her employees to document the scheduling of patient appointments in any way that violates this policy.

She stated that approximately 3 years prior to the interview, as she reviewed the scheduling reports, she occasionally noticed that an MSA was using the same desired date for numerous patients. She stated that this was obviously incorrect and concluded that the MSAs were simply using a desired date that was within 14 days of the next available date, regardless of the patient's actual desired date. She explained that the practice was obvious because it was not possible that so many veterans wanted an appointment on the exact same day. In order to correct their mistake and teach them the proper scheduling procedure, her supervisor instructed her to have the MSAs change the desired date to the date of the appointment. She explained that it had no real effect on the performance measurement because the desired date was already within 14 days and there was no way of knowing what the true desired date was. She stated that this assignment was not to punish the MSAs, but to have them correct their mistake and use it as a learning tool. The MSA supervisor stated this was done not to hide scheduling problems, but to administratively correct mistakes made by the MSAs. She stated that this practice has not been followed in approximately 3 years.

The MSA supervisor stated that during a recent staff meeting, she reminded her staff about the difference between the desired date and the next available date and how to properly determine the patient desired date. She stated that one of her employees, MSA19, became very upset and asked her, "Why do they keep changing" the rules regarding scheduling. She believed that MSA19 misunderstood the desired date concept. She stated that she never ordered her staff to change a desired date in order to make the clinic look better or show performance measure compliance. She stated that manipulating the 14-day performance measure was not in the best interest of the facility. She explained that they are short on manpower and they "will never get help" if her staff manipulate the data to make it appear that they are in compliance.

The MSA supervisor explained that the previous VAMC director put a lot of pressure on his service chiefs to make sure "the numbers looked good," but did not instruct them to manipulate the data to make it look better. She explained that the pressure was to improve efficiency, not to manipulate the data, but conceded that the pressure could have been misinterpreted by the MSAs as an instruction to manipulate the data. She stated that this was not her intention. She explained that any order she gave to her employees was to make their clinic run efficiently and quickly, not to manipulate the data to make her look better. She stated her performance rating was not based on whether she or her staff fall within the 14-day performance measure. In addition, she did not rate her employees on the 14-day performance measure.

- A Health Systems Specialist (HSS)/site manager stated that she never ordered an MSA to enter the next available date as the desired date. She stated that she was not aware of any MSA being given a list of veterans and ordered to change the desired date to make it

appear that the wait time was shorter than it actually was. She said she never destroyed, or was ordered to destroy, any patient scheduling information. She said she did not keep any secret lists, nor was she aware of anyone keeping secret lists.

She stated that several months earlier, prior to media scrutiny of VAMC Phoenix and other sites, the MSA supervisor held a staff meeting during which she recapped the appointment scheduling procedures with all the MSAs. During the meeting, several MSAs became upset and seemed confused regarding the concept of the desired date. Several of the MSAs in the meeting said that, in the past, they had been instructed differently regarding the desired date, but the MSA supervisor told them that they had always been instructed this way. The HHS/site manager stated that the MSAs were never instructed to enter the desired date incorrectly. She stated, "I just think there's confusion."

- A supervisory staff assistant stated he was familiar with Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive 2010-027, but did not schedule appointments as part of his duties. He stated that the MSA supervisor held regular staff meetings to discuss work-related issues, to include scheduling policy and procedures. He stated that he and the HHS/site manager also attended the staff meetings. In approximately June 2014, the MSA supervisor held a staff meeting and reviewed VHA Directive 2010-027. He said that, based on the MSAs' reaction, "it seemed like there was some confusion on what was the right way, and what was not the right way of doing it."

He said that some of the MSAs who started at VAMC Muskogee claimed that they were trained differently and other OPC Tulsa MSAs said that they were trained to do it differently. He stated the MSA supervisor responded by telling them that she was not going to "worry" about how the MSAs had been doing it and was only going to focus on doing it "right from now on." He recalled that MSA19 "banged his head on the table four times . . . because he was confused." He stated that three of the MSAs present claimed that they had not been trained that way; they claimed that they were trained to enter the desired date as the next available date. He stated the MSA supervisor responded that they were not correct and instructed them to enter the desired date correctly from then on.

The supervisory staff assistant described the MSA supervisor and the HSS/site manager as "by the book type people" and said that he had never heard either of them instruct an MSA to enter the desired date incorrectly. He stated that he was not aware of any MSA being given a list of veterans and ordered to change the desired dates to make it appear that the wait times were shorter than they actually were. He said he never destroyed, or had been ordered to destroy, any patient scheduling information. He said he did not keep any secret lists, nor was he aware of anyone keeping secret lists.

- An administrative manager stated that she had previously supervised the MSAs at OPC Tulsa. She said that, during that time, she did not feel that the former director was pressuring her or his staff to manipulate wait time information in any way to show his facilities in a favorable light. She said that during the time she supervised the MSAs at OPC Tulsa, patient wait times were a performance measure for all facilities throughout VA. She said that they did recognize that there was a problem with patient access at OPC

Tulsa because it was not able to meet the 14-day or 30-day scheduling time frame; there were a lot of patients in OPC Tulsa and the facility did not have the capacity to meet the 14-day scheduling standard.

The administrative manager stated that she was never instructed by the former director to use the next available date as the desired date. She further stated she never gave employees instructions to use the next available date as the desired date. She added she was never instructed or provided instruction to enter the desired date within 7 or 14 days of the next available appointment date. She stated that she never discussed manipulating patient wait time data or desired dates with any employees at OPC Tulsa. She stated she never gave a list of veterans to any MSA employee at OPC Tulsa with instructions to change the desired date so that it would appear that OPC Tulsa was in compliance with the wait time performance measure and never ordered any other employee to do so. She stated that continual scheduling mistakes were attributed to several things, including improper training.

- The current director stated he had never instructed his management staff or the employees at VAMC Muskogee or OPC Tulsa to manipulate wait time statistics to give an appearance of a shorter patient appointment wait time. He said that in April or June 2014, he personally visited each of his facilities and observed every employee responsible for scheduling appointments. He said that he did not observe anyone violating the scheduling directive. He said that he wanted the schedulers to obtain a desired date from the patient and then negotiate the appointment date. He stated that he had not given any instruction to any employee to manipulate any appointment data.
- The former director stated that wait times were a component of his performance plan. He added that success was defined by how many performance measures, to include wait times, were exceeded and that bonuses were also tied to performance components. However, among all of the performance components, wait time was not “heavily weighted.” He further stated that the overall performance of the facilities he directed, not just wait times, factored into his transfer to another facility. He stated that VAMC Muskogee, and in particular OPC Tulsa, “did very well” in wait time performance during his last 2 years at the facility. He stated that he never discussed, with any VA employee at OPC Tulsa, changing appointment data—which included “zeroing out” a patient’s desired date with the next available date so they were both the same or having schedulers enter a desired date that fell within 7 to 14 days of the next available date—in order to meet the waiting time metric. In addition, he was not made aware of any schedulers at his facilities using such scheduling practices or hearing any allegations that it was occurring. He stated he never instructed any VA employee to do anything to manipulate wait times in any way.

Records Reviewed

The MSA supervisor provided copies of emails documenting her attempts to ensure everyone on her staff was following proper scheduling guidelines. A review of the emails showed support for her position.

VA OIG's review of the fiscal year (FY) 2013 annual performance appraisals for the 27 MSAs interviewed, as well as for the MSA supervisor, revealed that only 5 of the 28 appraisals specifically mentioned the scheduling of appointments within a specified time period from the desired date.

VA OIG reviewed data related to appointment scheduling, specifically the period of time between the desired date and the appointment date, for appointments occurring in the second and third quarter of FY 2014 for OPC Tulsa. The data were analyzed by the VA OIG Data Systems and Analysis Division and divided into individual reports reflecting: percentage of scheduled appointments for which the desired date was equal to the appointment date, percentage of scheduled appointments for which the scheduled date was within 7 days of the desired date, and percentage of scheduled appointments for which the scheduled date was within 14 days of the desired date. An average 97.5 percent of all scheduled appointments during the time frame reviewed was reported as being scheduled within 14 days of the veteran's desired date.

4. Conclusion

Twelve MSAs provided information indicating that as many as 2 to 3 years ago, schedulers used the first available appointment date as the desired date and entered incorrect desired dates. This appears to have been the result of poor communication and poor training. There was no evidence to support the allegation that OPC Tulsa management directed facility staff to maintain separate "secret" waiting lists.

Several MSAs, along with the MSA supervisor, described lists of patients that were used to correct desired dates. These corrections occurred at least 2 years prior to the initiation of this investigation and were no longer used at the facility. In addition, the conflicting testimony provided by several MSAs regarding the purpose of lists and the credible explanation provided by the MSA supervisor could not be resolved. Therefore, no conclusion will be provided regarding this specific part of the investigation.

The OIG referred the Report of Investigation to VA's Office of Accountability Review on February 27, 2016.



QUENTIN G. AUCOIN
Assistant Inspector General
for Investigations

For more information about this summary, please contact the
Office of Inspector General at (202) 461-4720.
