



New NO SHOW Policy signed to improve patient access to care

By Roger G. Meyer, Fort Carson Medical Department Activity Public Affairs
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Fort Carson's Medical Department Activity has initiated a new Commander's Appointment Policy that affects all TRICARE beneficiaries who receive healthcare services here.

Also known as the "No-Show Policy", it clearly establishes standards and guidelines for Evans Army Community Hospital's clinics and patients for making, keeping, and documenting appointments.

Colonel Jimmie O. Keenan, MEDDAC's commander, recently announced the new policy to MEDDAC staff and said, "When patients miss their appointments it causes several second and third order effects; not the least are the cost in frustration, prolonged suffering and the financial impact to our overall operations. We have to work together with our patients to overcome no shows!"

The new policy addresses patient arrival/check-in, late arrivals, cancellations, no shows, and no show follow up. It also includes specific actions staff members have to take to standardize reporting procedures.

Keenan said, "Patients, of course, play THE key role in making sure they show up on time, but we [MEDDAC staff] all have to do the right things too."

Key points in the policy include: Patients are not required to report to any appointment earlier than the scheduled appointment time; Soldiers and all other patients are required to arrive at appointments regardless of duty status; EACH's policy is to accommodate patients who report late to their appointments without causing undue delay to patients reporting on time; A patient arriving more than 10 minutes late will have their choice of either waiting to be seen or rescheduling for another day; Patients are able to cancel their appointments by directly calling the clinics or by calling Patient Appointing Services, 457-CARE (2273); Warrior Transition Battalion Soldiers are not authorized to cancel their own appointments -- their appointments must be cancelled by WTB cadre or their nurse case managers; A patient is considered a No Show if he/she fails to show for his/her appointment, fails to cancel the appointment, or reports late and does not choose to wait to be seen that day; and per each clinic's SOP, follow up contact is made whenever a high risk patient misses an appointment.

Major Philip Ginder, chief of MEDDAC's Clinical Operations Department recently reported that Soldiers, Family Members and other beneficiaries who miss appointments cost our medical facilities time, resources, and money.

"According to the Western Regional Medical Command's Clinical Operations Department, each missed appointment costs an average of \$70 in prospective earnings. With over 40,000 missed appointments in fiscal year 2010, no shows have cost Fort Carson's Medical Department Activity more than \$2.8 million," said Ginder.

Under the new policy, clinics will follow several missed appointment enforcement measures depending on the individual circumstances. Patients with multiple no-shows could have their services halted and Soldiers may require a unit escort to future appointments. Patients may be required to sign a contract acknowledging they understand the ramifications of multiple no shows. And, a letter may be sent to the Soldier's unit notifying the chain of command when he/she or his/her Family member has multiple no shows or cancellations. Retirees with multiple missed appointments, "left without being seen", or cancellations may receive letters notifying them of changes to their locations of care.

"Although appointments can be cancelled any time prior to the appointment, at least 24 hours notice is typically needed to reutilize a primary care appointment, and a week is needed to reutilize a specialty appointment," said Ginder. "So, beneficiaries who are not able to make it to their next appointment should cancel the appointment as soon as possible."

To cancel appointments during weekdays, beneficiaries should call the same TRICARE appointment line phone numbers (719) 457-2273 or (866) 422-7391 weekdays from 6 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. They can also cancel the appointments through TRICARE Online (www.tricareonline.com) if they booked the appointments online. Additionally, beneficiaries have an option to confirm or cancel their appointments when they receive their reminder phone calls.

"Our whole goal with this policy is to improve access to our patients," said Keenan. "Together we can make this work and reduce no shows on Fort Carson; I appreciate your help in making this a reality."