

§ 1.460 Definitions.

For purposes of §§ 1.460 through 1.499 of this part, the following definitions apply:

Agreement. The term “agreement” means a document that a VA health care facility develops in collaboration with an Organ Procurement Organization, eye bank or tissue bank with written, detailed responsibilities and obligations of the parties with regard to identifying potential donors and facilitating the donation process.

Alcohol abuse. The term “alcohol abuse” means the use of an alcoholic beverage which impairs the physical, mental, emotional, or social well-being of the user.

Contractor. The term “contractor” means a person who provides services to VA such as data processing, dosage preparation, laboratory analyses or medical or other professional services. Each contractor shall be required to enter into a written agreement subjecting such contractor to the provisions of §§ 1.460 through 1.499 of this part; 38 U.S.C. 5701 and 7332; and 5 U.S.C. 552a and 38 CFR 1.576(g).

Deceased. The term “deceased” means death established by either neurological criteria (brain death) or cardiopulmonary criteria (cardiac death). Brain death is the irreversible cessation of all brain function. Cardiac death is the irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory function. In both cases, “irreversible” means that function will not resume spontaneously and will not be restarted artificially.

Decision-making capacity. The term “decision-making capacity” has the same meaning set forth in 38 CFR 17.32(a).

Diagnosis. The term “diagnosis” means any reference to an individual’s alcohol or drug abuse or to a condition which is identified as having been caused by that abuse or any reference to sickle cell anemia or infection with the human immunodeficiency virus which is made for the purpose of treatment or referral for treatment. A diagnosis prepared for the purpose of treatment or referral for treatment but which is not so used is covered by §§ 1.460 through 1.499 of this part. These regulations do not apply to a diagnosis

of drug overdose or alcohol intoxication which clearly shows that the individual involved is not an alcohol or drug abuser (e.g., involuntary ingestion of alcohol or drugs or reaction to a prescribed dosage of one or more drugs).

Disclose or disclosure. The term “disclose” or “disclosure” means a communication of patient identifying information, the affirmative verification of another person’s communication of patient identifying information, or the communication of any information from the record of a patient who has been identified.

Drug abuse. The term “drug abuse” means the use of a psychoactive substance for other than medicinal purposes which impairs the physical, mental, emotional, or social well-being of the user.

Eye bank and tissue bank. The term “eye bank and tissue bank” means an “establishment” as defined in 21 CFR 1271.3, pursuant to section 361 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 264) that has a valid, current registration with the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as required under 21 CFR part 1271.

Health care. The term “health care” has the same meaning as provided in 45 CFR 160.103.

Health care-related activities or functions. The term “health care-related activities or functions” means the actions required for the delivery of health care, including hospital care, medical services, and extended care services. Health care-related activities or functions includes: Treatment as defined by 45 CFR 164.501; activities related to reimbursement for care and treatment by a health care provider; activities related to participation in health information exchanges for the delivery of health care; health care operations as defined by 45 CFR 164.501; and activities related to a patient’s exercise of privacy rights regarding health information.

Individual. The term “individual” means a veteran, as defined in 38 U.S.C. 101(2), or a dependent of a veteran, as defined in 38 U.S.C. 101(3) and (4)(A).

Infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The term “infection with the human immunodeficiency

virus (HIV)” means the presence of laboratory evidence for human immunodeficiency virus infection. The term does not include negative results from the testing of an individual for the presence of the virus or antibodies to the virus, or such testing of an individual where the results are negative.

Informant. The term “informant” means an individual who is a patient or employee or who becomes a patient or employee at the request of a law enforcement agency or official and who at the request of a law enforcement agency or official observes one or more patients or employees for the purpose of reporting the information obtained to the law enforcement agency or official.

Near death. The term “near death” means that in the clinical judgment of the patient’s health care provider based on defined clinical triggers, the patient’s death is imminent.

Organ Procurement Organization. The term “Organ Procurement Organization” (OPO) means an organization that performs or coordinates the procurement, preservation, and transportation of organs and maintains a system of locating prospective recipients for available organs.

Patient. The term “patient” means any individual or subject who has been given a diagnosis or treatment for drug abuse, alcoholism or alcohol abuse, infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, or sickle cell anemia and includes any individual who, after arrest on a criminal charge, is interviewed and/or tested in connection with drug abuse, alcoholism or alcohol abuse, infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, or sickle cell anemia in order to determine that individual’s eligibility to participate in a treatment or rehabilitation program if the result of such testing is positive. The term “patient” includes an individual who has been diagnosed or treated for alcoholism, drug abuse, HIV infection, or sickle cell anemia for purposes of participation in a VA program or activity relating to those four conditions, including a program or activity consisting of treatment, rehabilitation, education, training, evaluation, or research. For the purpose of infection with the human immunodeficiency

virus or sickle cell anemia, the term “patient” includes one tested positive for the disease even if no treatment is provided, offered, or requested. The term does not include a patient who has tested negative for the disease.

Patient identifying information. The term “patient identifying information” means the name, address, social security number, fingerprints, photograph, or similar information by which the identity of a patient can be determined with reasonable accuracy and speed either directly or by reference to other publicly available information. The term does not include a number assigned to a patient by a treatment program, if that number does not consist of, or contain numbers (such as social security, or driver’s license number) which could be used to identify a patient with reasonable accuracy and speed from sources external to the treatment program.

Person. The term “person” means an individual, partnership, corporation, Federal, State or local government agency, or any other legal entity.

Practitioner. The term “practitioner” has the same meaning set forth in 38 CFR 17.32(a).

Procurement organization. The term “procurement organization” means an organ procurement organization, eye bank, and/or tissue bank as defined in this section.

Records. The term “records” means any information received, obtained or maintained, whether recorded or not, by an employee or contractor of VA, for the purpose of seeking or performing VA program or activity functions relating to drug abuse, alcoholism, tests for or infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, or sickle cell anemia regarding an identifiable patient. A program or activity function relating to drug abuse, alcoholism, infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, or sickle cell anemia includes evaluation, treatment, education, training, rehabilitation, research, or referral for one of these conditions. Sections 1.460 through 1.499 of this part apply to a primary or other diagnosis, or other information which identifies, or could reasonably be expected to identify, a patient as having

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a drug or alcohol abuse condition, infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, or sickle cell anemia (e.g., alcoholic psychosis, drug dependence), but only if such diagnosis or information is received, obtained or maintained for the purpose of seeking or performing one of the above program or activity functions. Sections 1.460 through 1.499 of this part do not apply if such diagnosis or other information is not received, obtained or maintained for the purpose of seeking or performing a function or activity relating to drug abuse, alcoholism, infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, or sickle cell anemia for the patient in question. Whenever such diagnosis or other information, not originally received or obtained for the purpose of obtaining or providing one of the above program or activity functions, is subsequently used in connection with such program or activity functions, those original entries become a “record” and §§1.460 through 1.499 of this part thereafter apply to those entries. Segregability: these regulations do not apply to records or information contained therein, the disclosure of which (the circumstances surrounding the disclosure having been considered) could not reasonably be expected to disclose the fact that a patient has been connected with a VA program or activity function relating to drug abuse, alcoholism, infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, or sickle cell anemia.

(1) The following are examples of instances whereby records or information related to alcoholism or drug abuse are covered by the provisions of §§1.460 through 1.499 of this part:

(i) A patient with alcoholic delirium tremens is admitted for detoxification. The patient is offered treatment in a VA alcohol rehabilitation program which he declines.

(ii) A patient who is diagnosed as a drug abuser applies for and is provided VA drug rehabilitation treatment.

(iii) While undergoing treatment for an unrelated medical condition, a patient discusses with the physician his use and abuse of alcohol. The physician offers VA alcohol rehabilitation treatment which is declined by the patient.

(2) The following are examples of instances whereby records or information related to alcoholism or drug abuse are not covered by the provisions of §§1.460 through 1.499 of this part:

(i) A patient with alcoholic delirium tremens is admitted for detoxification, treated and released with no counseling or treatment for the underlying condition of alcoholism.

(ii) While undergoing treatment for an unrelated medical condition, a patient informs the physician of a history of drug abuse fifteen years earlier with no ingestion of drugs since. The history and diagnosis of drug abuse is documented in the hospital summary and no treatment is sought by the patient or offered or provided by VA during the current period of treatment.

(iii) While undergoing treatment for injuries sustained in an accident, a patient's medical record is documented to support the judgment of the physician to prescribe certain alternate medications in order to avoid possible drug interactions in view of the patient's enrollment and treatment in a non-VA methadone maintenance program. The patient states that continued treatment and follow-up will be obtained from private physicians and VA treatment for the drug abuse is not sought by the patient nor provided or offered by the staff.

(iv) A patient is admitted to the emergency room suffering from a possible drug overdose. The patient is treated and released; a history and diagnosis of drug abuse may be documented in the hospital summary. The patient is not offered treatment for the underlying conditions of drug abuse, nor is treatment sought by the patient for that condition.

Surrogate. The term “surrogate” has the same meaning set forth in 38 CFR 17.32(a).

Third party payer. The term “third party payer” means a person who pays, or agrees to pay, for diagnosis or treatment furnished to a patient on the basis of a contractual relationship with the patient or a member of his or her family or on the basis of the patient's eligibility for Federal, State, or local governmental benefits.

Treatment. The term “treatment” means the management and care of a

patient for drug abuse, alcoholism or alcohol abuse, or the diagnosis, management and care of a patient for infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, or sickle cell anemia, or a condition which is identified as having been caused by one or more of these conditions, in order to reduce or eliminate the adverse effects upon the patient. The term does not include negative test results for the human immunodeficiency virus, antibodies to the virus, or sickle cell anemia, or such testing of an individual where the results are negative.

Undercover agent. The term “undercover agent” means an officer of any Federal, State, or local law enforcement agency who becomes a patient or employee for the purpose of investigating a suspected violation of law or who pursues that purpose after becoming a patient or becoming employed for other purposes.

VHA health care facility. The term “VHA health care facility” means a VA medical center, VA emergency room, VA nursing home or other facility as defined in 38 U.S.C. 1701(3).

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§ 1.461 Applicability.

(a) *General*—(1) *Restrictions on disclosure.* The restrictions on disclosure in these regulations apply to any information whether or not recorded, which:

(i) Would identify a patient as an alcohol or drug abuser, an individual who tested positive for or is infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hereafter referred to as HIV, or an individual who tested positive for or has sickle cell anemia, either directly, by reference to other publicly available information, or through verification of such an identification by another person; and

(ii) Is provided or obtained for the purpose of treating alcohol or drug abuse, infection with the HIV, or sickle cell anemia, making a diagnosis for that treatment, or making a referral for that treatment as well as for education, training, evaluation, rehabilitation and research program or activity purposes.

(2) *Restriction on use.* The restriction on use of information to initiate or substantiate any criminal charges against a patient or to conduct any criminal investigation of a patient applies to any information, whether or not recorded, which is maintained for the purpose of treating drug abuse, alcoholism or alcohol abuse, infection with the HIV, or sickle cell anemia, making a diagnosis for that treatment, or making a referral for that treatment as well as for education, training, evaluation, rehabilitation, and research program or activity purposes.

(b) *Period covered as affecting applicability.* The provisions of §§ 1.460 through 1.499 of this part apply to records of identity, diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment pertaining to any given individual maintained over any period of time which, irrespective of when it begins, does not end before March 21, 1972, in the case of diagnosis or treatment for drug abuse; or before May 14, 1974, in the case of diagnosis or treatment for alcoholism or alcohol abuse; or before September 1, 1973, in the case of testing, diagnosis or treatment of sickle cell anemia; or before May 20, 1988, in the case of testing, diagnosis or treatment for an infection with the HIV.

(c) *Exceptions*—(1) *Department of Veterans Affairs and Armed Forces.* The restrictions on disclosure in §§ 1.460 through 1.499 of this part do not apply to communications of information between or among those components of VA who have a need for the information in connection with their duties in the provision of health care, adjudication of benefits, or in carrying out administrative responsibilities related to those functions, including personnel of the Office of the Inspector General who are conducting audits, evaluations, healthcare inspections, or non-patient investigations, or between such components and the Armed Forces. Information obtained by VA components under these circumstances may be disclosed outside of VA to prosecute or investigate a non-patient only in accordance with § 1.495 of this part. Similarly, the restrictions on disclosure in §§ 1.460 through 1.499 of this part do not apply to communications of information to