

HUD-VASH Case Management Walks During COVID-19

A Strong COVID-19 Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations

INTRODUCTION

The VHA Homeless Programs Office identifies and disseminates strong, emerging practices in homeless program operations during the COVID-19 National Emergency. Homeless program staff at the Cheyenne VA Medical Center (VAMC) developed face-to-face case management requirement criteria to facilitate walking encounters with Veterans in Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) encourage exercise and other physical activity to mitigate problems stemming from lack of physical activity due to COVID-19 social isolation protocols.

PRACTICE OVERVIEW

In late April 2020, nearly two months after the State of Wyoming declared a State of Emergency and began implementing state-wide social distancing guidelines, HUD-VASH staff at the Cheyenne VAMC grew concerned about the lack of physical activity for certain participating Veterans. In particular, HUD-VASH nursing evaluations of some Veterans showed signs of muscle atrophy due to extended periods of physical inactivity, most likely caused by prolonged time in bed. These periods may have been exacerbated due to depressive symptoms related to social isolation.

For these targeted Veterans, HUD-VASH staff planned to provide in-person case management sessions that incorporate walks or other light physical activity. To ensure that both staff, Veterans, and any household members living with the Veterans, minimized their risk of transmitting COVID-19, the HUD-VASH leads developed local guidance to help inform when and how face-to-face encounters may take place in light national VHA Homeless Programs Office limiting face-to-face contact. The Cheyenne Face-To-Face guidance covers issues such as pre-visit screening procedures, personal protective equipment (PPE) required for use, sanitation protocols when using fleet vehicles, and physical distancing guidelines during the encounter.

Staff at the Cheyenne VAMC note that the walks have been well received by Veterans and that their therapeutic benefits may have prevented several crisis line and/or 911 emergency calls. One HUD-VASH Veteran reported that getting outside and walking with his case manager has helped him manage his depression. He enjoyed being out in the sun and looked forward to their next walking session.

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