**VHA PROSTHETIC CLINICAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (PCMP)
CLINICAL PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PRESCRIPTION OF
COMPUTERS AND PERIPHERAL DEVICES TO BLIND AND VISUALLY
IMPAIRED VETERANS**

I.   **Purpose**

The purpose of these clinical practice recommendations is to assist practitioners in clinical decision-making, to standardize and improve the quality of patient care, and to promote cost-effective prescribing.

II.   **Background**

VHA's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service Strategic Healthcare Group was directed by the Under Secretary for Health to establish a Prosthetic Clinical Management Program (PCMP). The objectives are to develop clinical practice recommendations to be used by clinicians to write appropriate prescriptions; to standardize issuance criteria, evaluation and training; to assure technology uniformity; to provide patient care that will lead to valid outcome measures and analysis for research purposes.

A work group with input from selected clinicians, blind rehabilitation specialists, prosthetic representatives and a consumer representative from the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) convened to recommend clinical practice recommendations regarding issuance criteria for Computers and Computer related Devices and Access Software.

III.   **Issuance Criteria**

The following criteria must be met for veterans to be evaluated and trained on a computer device with access technology.

 A. Determined by an eye care professional (optometrist or ophthalmologist) to be legally blind or to have a visual impairment so significant that the veteran may benefit from adaptive computer access devices or software.

B. Veterans with residual vision should complete a comprehensive low vision examination by an eye care professional. The low vision examination should evaluate the veteran's ability to benefit from corrective lenses, reading glasses, and low vision devices, to maximize access to computer information. It is the responsibility of the eye care professional to determine the level of visual impairment and the best set of optics available for the veteran to properly access the computer system.

C. The veteran has a stated goal(s) that require the use of a computer, peripherals and access software.

D. A comprehensive audiology evaluation should be completed for veterans requiring speech output computer access technology. This will ensure that veteran has maximized his or her ability to hear the speech output.

E. The veteran demonstrates the ability to independently use the prescribed devices and software to effectively meet the stated goal(s).

F. Prior to prescribing a computer, peripherals and software, the veteran should evaluate all approved options to accomplish the stated goal(s) including, but not limited to, different size LCD monitors, types of printers (inkjet or laser), input devices (mouse or trackball), scanners and access software options.

G. The computer, peripherals and access software that are prescribed must prove to be the most efficient and effective means to meet the veteran's needs and accomplish the stated goal(s).

H. Veterans determined by medical providers or instructional staff to have difficulty using a keyboard for inputting information may be considered for voice or other input options.

IV. **Clinical Practice Recommendations for Evaluation/Training**

A. The Computer hardware and software may be prescribed through an outpatient or inpatient program, i.e., VIST, BROS, VA low vision clinic, BRC, VISOR, or approved non-VA agency or provider serving the blind and visually impaired.

B. Blinded veterans, who are deemed appropriate for local training by the VIST Coordinator may be considered for local Fee Basis

services, if eligible. If Fee Basis service will not cover cost, the local Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service is permitted to procure computer equipment, evaluation, and training according to VHA Handbook 1173.5 (dated September 9, 2002), Section 4d(3)(b) and 1173.5, section 10. The veteran needs to be enrolled and vested.

C. <u>Evaluation and Training Procedures:</u> The prescribing program must have a VA approved evaluation and training program that is outlined in a policy and procedure manual that addresses evaluation, training and issuance procedures on computers, peripherals and adaptive access software and devices.

D. The evaluation process should include consideration of ergonomics, comfort, health status, hearing impairment, physical limitations, special learning needs, patient preferences as well as performance level when determining efficiency and effectiveness. The evaluation process should include documentation of training needs, the appropriate learning environment, and/or any training modifications necessary for the veteran to successfully achieve his/her stated goals.

E. Training should be designed and paced to meet the specific goals, objectives and capabilities of each veteran. Blinded veterans will be given a reasonable opportunity to successfully complete any necessary training.

F. Training is required if a veteran is unable to demonstrate the ability to functionally use a computer, peripherals and access software in an effective manner to meet stated goals. There is no requirement for training if the veteran can demonstrate the ability to successfully meet the standard outcome measures outlined in this document during the evaluation process.

G. <u>Portable Computer Systems:</u> When the veteran presents with vocational, educational, and/or avocational goals requiring portability that cannot be adequately accomplished with a conventional computer, then the appropriate portable alternative may be evaluated. These alternatives include, but are not limited to, portable laptop computers suitable for use by a blind and/or visually impaired individual.

H. A portable computer system can be issued in addition to a standard desktop model when the veteran's needs necessitate the use of both devices.

I. Scanners: The provision of a scanner is authorized when the goals of any eligible veteran involve the need to use a scanner to input documents and/or use OCR software to scan and read.

J. Replacement Printer Cartridges: Local Prosthetics will provide replacement printer ink and toner cartridges to veterans who have been issued a VA computer system.

K. Request for Upgraded Equipment: Veterans requesting upgraded computer systems or components must have a functional need or reason for an upgraded system. Veterans requesting additional training for an upgraded system may return to a BRC program for training, however, this is not required if training is not necessary or there are local options available to provide the training. The decision to upgrade a computer component or system is the responsibility of the local VIST program and Prosthetics Manager when a veteran does not return to a BRC program for additional training.

L. Service, Repairs and Replacements: The local Prosthetics Activity will be responsible for servicing or replacing computer equipment not covered by the warranty section of the national contract. This includes arranging a service call or shipping the computer equipment to a vendor when necessary.

When issuing new equipment, upgrades, or replacement components, the local Prosthetics Activity will be responsible for set-up and delivery as needed. This may include configuring the equipment, setting up e-mail, and providing instruction to ensure proper use of the new equipment.

Additional information regarding the provision of local services to veterans with computers, peripherals and software issued by the VA is contained in the "Local Service Guidelines" which are a supplement to this document.

M. Appeals: Each program prescribing computer related equipment must have an appeal process in place.

V.   Documentation

Appropriate documentation will be maintained in the medical record that clearly identifies the veteran's stated goals; the evaluation and training provided; and the veteran's functional ability to use the

prescribed equipment and software effectively to meet the stated goals.

VI.   Quality Management

Prescribing programs will maintain documentation of an active quality management program that regularly identifies issues, concerns and problems and strives to provide the highest quality of care.

VII.   Outcomes

Veterans must demonstrate the ability to independently operate the computer hardware and software to achieve their stated goal(s).

Outcomes may include the following:

1. Ability to identify components and effectively use the computer hardware, software and peripherals.

2. Ability to appropriately use the devices to meet stated goals.

3. Ability to functionally use the access software.

4. Ability to load software programs as needed.

5. Ability to clean, care for, maintain and trouble shoot the device.

6. Ability to print documents.

7. Ability to use the major operating commands designed for the particular software/hardware package.

8. Ability to touch type or demonstrate ability to enter commands.

9. Ability to perform basic word-processing tasks (as appropriate).

10. Ability to use a scanner to meet stated goals.

11. Ability to read, send and receive E-mail in a functional manner.

12. Ability to independently navigate the Internet.

VIII.   <u>References</u>

      A. BRS CAT Policy and Procedures Manual (When published)
      B. VHA Handbookj 1173.5, Aids for the Blind, dated 9/23/02.
      C. Supplemental guidelines for the Provision of Local Services for Computers, Peripherals and Software (attached)

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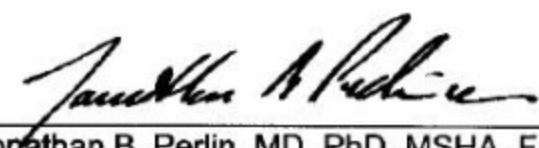
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