

**VHA Prosthetic Clinical
Management Program (PCMP)**

**Clinical Practice Recommendations For Prescription
of Voice Carry Over Phone (VCO), Teletype (TTY),
and Teletext Device for the Deaf (TDD), Devices for
Hearing Impaired Veterans**

**VHA PROSTHETIC CLINICAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
CLINICAL PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRESCRIPTION
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TELETEXT DEVICE FOR THE DEAF (TDD), DEVICES FOR
HEARING IMPAIRED VETERANS**

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of these clinical practice recommendations is to assist practitioners in clinical decision-making and delivery of services, to standardize and improve the quality of patient care, and to promote cost-effective prescribing. This clinical practice recommendation provides recommendations for Voice Carry Over Phones (VCO), Teletype Device (TTY) and Teletext Device for the Deaf (TDD). These are special devices that allow people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired to use the telephone to communicate by allowing them to type messages back and forth to one another or through a relay system instead of talking and listening.

1. TTY/TDD: These acronyms represent interchangeable terms for Text Telephone or Telecommunication Device for the Deaf. The device consists of a keyboard, which contains character keys, a display screen, and a modem. The letters that are typed into the machine are changed into electrical signals that can travel over regular telephone lines. When the signals reach their destination (i.e., another TTY), they are converted back into letters which appear on a display screen, are printed out on paper, or both. Some models of these devices are even equipped with answering machines. TTY/TDDs allow people who cannot use a commercial or amplified telephone to be able to independently communicate with family, friends, and business associates. They also provide an easier way to connect to police and fire stations in case of emergency. When both parties do not have a TTY/TDD a Telecommunication Relay Service (TRS) must be utilized (see section 3 below).
2. VOICE CARRY OVER TELEPHONE (VCO): This is a device for people who can speak clearly but have trouble hearing conversations over a standard telephone. The device looks and feels much like a standard telephone with the addition of a text screen. The VCO allows users to speak directly to the other person and read the other person's response on the text screen via the TRS. The person who calls the VCO user is required to call the relay service first. Then, a TRS operator will call the

VCO user and type what the original caller says. There are privacy and confidentiality agreements the operator must uphold. The VCO user reads the text and speaks the reply into the telephone, therefore no typing is required.

3. TELECOMMUNICATION RELAY SERVICES (TRS): TRS enable standard voice telephone users to talk to people who have difficulty hearing or speaking on the telephone. Under Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act, all telephone companies must provide free relay services either directly or through state programs throughout the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and all of the U.S. territories. TRS uses operators, called "communications assistants" (CAs), to facilitate telephone calls for people who have difficulty hearing or speaking, and other individuals who may require this service. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules require telephone companies to provide TRS nationwide on a 24 hour-a-day, 7 day a week basis, at no extra cost to callers. Conversations are relayed in real-time and CAs are not permitted to disclose the content of any conversation. Relay callers are not limited in the type, length, or nature of their calls.

II. ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for Communication and Assistive Listening Devices and Assistive Devices is determined by Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service in accordance to VHA Handbook 1173.7 – 7.b. (1) and (2) that states:

1. Prescriptions and requests for special function and/or communication electronic devices will be developed by the audiologist or speech pathologist. The special needs of each patient will be documented to clearly establish that the special function device provides superior performance over any of the more common and conventional appliances.
2. Telecaption television decoders and other assistive listening devices to overcome the handicap of deafness may be provided to veterans who are profoundly deaf and entitled to compensation on account of a hearing impairment. *NOTE*: This should not be confused with all assistive devices, which are commonly used in auditory rehabilitation which take the place of, or are used in conjunction with, a hearing aid, e.g., telephone amplifiers, amplified headsets, etc., which may be provided to eligible veterans.

III. BACKGROUND

The Under Secretary for Health directed VHA's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service Strategic Healthcare Group to establish a Prosthetic Clinical Management Program (PCMP). The objectives are to coordinate the development of clinical practice recommendations for prosthetic prescription practices and contracting opportunities to assure technology uniformity and ease of access to prosthetic prescriptions and patient care that will lead to valid outcome measures and analysis for research purposes.

A work group with input from selected audiologists and prosthetic personnel convened to develop clinical practice recommendations for the prescription, use, training and issuance of VCOs, TTYs, and TDDs to assist veterans who are hearing or speech impaired.

Currently, 135 Audiology clinics exist within the VA wherein audiologists are responsible for identifying, assessing, and managing disorders of audition, balance, and other neural systems. Many veterans with hearing impairment who are served within the VA system are currently eligible to receive hearing aids, which primarily serve to make much if not all of speech audible in ideal listening situations. In addition, veterans with severe to profound hearing losses are frequently helped with the provision of VCOs, TTYs and TDDs. There must be documentation about the justification for and evidence of appropriate patient training in use of these devices to meet VHA outcome measures.

IV. CANDIDACY FOR VCOs, TTYs, and TDDs

The following criteria must be met for veterans to receive VCOs, TTYs or TDDs:

- A. Determined by a licensed audiologist to have all of the following:
 1. Documented hearing impairment and/or severe speech impairment.
 2. Ability to use and maintain the device.
 3. Support available from significant others to appropriately use the device.
 4. Completed audiological assessment, which includes but is not limited to comprehensive hearing evaluation, observations of auditory performance, consultations with the veteran or others knowledgeable of the user's performance, questionnaires and scales, hands on demonstration, and a trial period.

- B. The veteran must be able to type on a keyboard if using a TTY/TDD.
- C. The veteran had a stated goal(s) that required the use of TTY/TDD, or VCO.
- D. The veteran expressed an interest in using the VCO, TTY, or TDD to accomplish the goal(s).
- E. The veteran demonstrated the ability to independently and safely use the VCO, TTY, or TDD to effectively meet the stated goal(s).
- F. The VCO, TTY or TDD must prove to be the most efficient and effective means to accomplish the stated goal(s).

IV. CLINICAL PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVALUATION AND TRAINING OF VCO PHONES, TTYs AND TDDs

- A. The VCOs, TTYs or TDDs may be prescribed through an outpatient or inpatient program, contracted non-VHA agency, or affiliated community service providing the devices at no charge to the veteran. Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service will be responsible for batteries (initial dispersment of spares, cadmium/lithium, or rechargeable), whether they stock the batteries or procure them on an as needed basis. The only exception is batteries for hearing aids or other rare cases that are currently maintained by the Denver Distribution Center (DDC). In each setting, the following criteria must be in place to provide VHA issuance of VCOs, TTYs, and TDDs. The outpatient or inpatient program must have:
 - 1. A clearly defined hearing evaluation program, including a policy and procedure manual that outlines procedures for evaluation and training on VCOs, TTYs and TDDs and training performance goals.
 - 2. Provided audiological evaluations that meet nationally published standards of care.
 - 3. Documented evidence of an ongoing program of quality assurance in order to maintain the highest level of care.
 - 4. Appropriate documentation in the medical record that clearly identifies the training provided and the veteran's ability to achieve the stated goal(s).
- B. The audiologist should include consideration of ergonomics,

comfort, health status, and patient preferences in addition to performance level in determination of efficiency and effectiveness.

- C. When the veteran presents with vocational, educational, and/or activities of daily living goals requiring communicative skills that cannot be adequately accomplished with a standard amplified telephone, then the appropriate alternative system may be evaluated (i.e., VCO, TTY, or TDD).
- D. Veterans with a demonstrated need may be issued these devices.

V. REFERENCES

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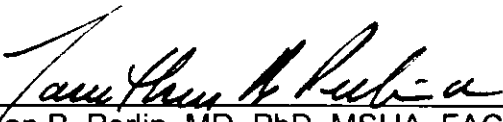
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