

Appendix B. Patient Interview Guide

Introduction

- [Your name]_____ from the VA
- Quality Improvement Team

Purpose

- Understand your experience with the Veterans Choice Act (VCA) so we can evaluate and improve it; and
- VCA: new program designed to provide better access to care; allows eligible veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than wait for a US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appointment or travel to a VA facility.

Participation

- Completely voluntary;
- Do not have to answer; can stop participation and continue or stop altogether;
- Participation will not affect the care you receive at the VA;
- 30 to 45 minutes; is now still a good time?; and
- Record so that we do not miss anything that you have to say.

Confidentiality

- We will take steps to ensure the information you provide remains confidential;
- Take notes; your name and the names of anyone you talk about will not be reported; and
- Only staff on the quality improvement team will have access to the audio and notes.

Compensation

- To show our appreciation for your time, we will be mailing you a \$25 gift card; and
- **Confirm address**

Do you have any questions before we start?

Background

1. First, I'd like to ask you a couple of basic questions about your experience with the Veterans Choice Act. *If patient discusses non-VCA episode of care, redirect to VCA episode. Thank you for that information; it's very helpful. It looks like you may have received [VCA episode of care], can you tell me more about that?*
 - a. What kind of care are you eligible for through the VCA? For what medical condition?
 - b. Did you choose to get your care outside the VA through the VCA?
 - i. If yes: Have you had your appointment yet with the outside provider? When was/is it?
 - ii. If no: go to question 2
2. How long have you been a VA patient? How long have you been at [facility where veteran gets primary care]?
3. Generally, how do you feel about the care you get at the VA?
4. *[For Veterans who've had their VCA appointment: Besides the care you just got through the Veterans Choice Act],* have you gotten any of your health care outside of the VA?
 - a. Please describe.
 - b. Do you have any non-VA doctors that you see regularly? Now? In the past few years? Please describe.
5. Generally, what are your views about VA care vs care outside the VA?

Choices and Rationale

If veteran has chosen to receive care through VCA: You recently chose to receive care for [VCA episode of care] through the VCA in the community.

If veteran has chosen not to receive care through VCA: You recently chose to get your care for [care described by veteran] at the VA, even though you were eligible to go to a provider outside the VA.

6. What did your VA doctor tell you about the care that you needed?
 - a. How soon did your doctor think you should be seen?
 - b. How soon did you want to be seen?

7. What did you consider in deciding whether to get this care at the VA vs outside the VA?—see attachments

Potential Factors

See notecards; follow up on these if interviewee mentions them.

Tensions and Trade-offs (eg, why was x more important than y?)

Be sure to ask about trade-offs with longitudinal continuity, even though patient doesn't mention that.

8. You mentioned _____ in making this decision; what was most important in making your decision?

- a. Were there any downsides to *staying in the VA/getting care in the community*?

9. *If veteran has chosen to receive care through VCA and attended their appointment.* If it hadn't been for VCA, and you couldn't have seen an outside doctor for [VCA episode of care], what do you think would have happened?

- a. What would you have done?

- b. What would the consequences have been for your health?

10. Looking back, would you make the same decision to get this care in the VA vs outside the VA? Why or why not?

11. Are there specific types of care that you would want receive outside the VA?

- a. Are there specific types of care you would not want to receive outside the VA?

12. What if you needed follow-up care for [VCA episode of care]? Where would you want to get it? [*If outside the VA: Do you think you could?*]

Process: Experience, Barriers, Assessment

13. How did you find out that you were eligible for the VCA?
- Were you told why you were eligible? Could you describe what you were told?

If the veteran has chosen to receive care through VCA, ask questions 14 to 20. If not, skip to the next section.

14. Can you describe the process you went through to get an appointment for health care outside the VA?
- What steps did you have to go through?
 - How long did it take?
 - Can you describe your interactions with the third party administrator (TPA) also known as Health Net?
 - Can you describe your interactions with the VA TPA coordinator?
15. How difficult was it to make the appointment with the doctor outside the VA?
- 16. How did you feel about the timeliness of the appointment you got outside the VA?**
- How did this compare to when your doctor said you should be seen?**
17. Have you seen your VA doctor since your appointment with the outside provider? How did that go? Was your VA doctor informed about the care you got outside the VA?
18. Was the non-VA doctor approved to provide care to VA patients? or Do you know whether the non-VA doctor had to be added to the Health Net (or Choice) network?
- If not, did that cause a delay in your getting care?
19. Can you describe how payment to your non-VA health care was handled.
- Deductibles, co-pays, billing, etc.
20. Have you had any experiences with the Health Benefits Center?
- If yes, please describe.

Knowledge and Understanding of Veterans Choice Act

21. Where have you gotten information about the Veterans Choice Act?
- Where have you looked for information about the Veterans Choice Act?

Suggestions for Improvement

22. Do you have any suggestions for improving the process for getting care outside of the VA through the Veterans Choice Act?

- a. What change(s) would be most helpful for veterans?
- b. What's the most important information about the Veterans Choice Act and the process of getting care through the Choice Act that should be given to veterans?
- c. Is there any information you didn't get that you wished you'd had?

Closing

23. Is there anything else you'd like to say about getting health care through the Veterans Choice Act?

24. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for participating in this interview.