



Spinal Cord Injury Center Veteran Orientation Handbook

“Working Together For the Successful Return to the Community”



Changing lives. One Veteran at a time.

**Veterans Affairs North Texas Health Care System
4500 S. Lancaster Rd. (SCI/128), Dallas, TX 75216
www.northtexas.va.gov/services/sci.asp**

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About Our Center

The Spinal Cord Injury Center (SCIC) at VA North Texas Health Care System, Dallas, is a specialized care facility dedicated to the treatment and rehabilitation of you and other Veterans with spinal cord injury or dysfunction.

Health care at our SCIC utilizes a person-centered philosophy and emphasizes active Veteran and family participation. Our goal is to enable you to resume an active place in the community and achieve maximum potential physically, emotionally and socially based on individual strengths, needs, abilities and preferences.

We offer you and all Veterans a comprehensive health care plan. Our services include, but are not limited to physical, occupational, psychological and recreational therapies, as well as social services to assist you in life care and discharge planning.

Spinal Cord Injury Center Mission

The SCIC Program is committed to providing excellence in:

Person-Centered Philosophy

Person-centered philosophy is incorporated into program planning; recognition of your unique strengths, needs, abilities and preferences.

Clinical Care

Clinical care to enhance the health, functional abilities and quality of life for you and other Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury or Dysfunction (SCI/D).

Education

Education concerning SCI/D is provided for all Veterans, their families and all professional disciplines involved in the ongoing care provided by the SCIC.

Research

Research is used to expand and extend our knowledge of diseases, impairments, disabilities and handicaps as they relate to SCI/D and to utilize that knowledge to continuously evaluate and improve clinical care.

VA Core Values & Characteristics

Core Values and Characteristics that apply universally across all of VA have been approved and were announced by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on June 20, 2011. These core values are the basic elements of how we go about our work – they define “who we are” – and form the underlying principles we will use every day in our service to Veterans. The Core Characteristics define “what we stand for” and what we strive to be as an organization. The I CARE model represents VA’s



value of Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence and core characteristics of providing Trustworthy, Accessible, Quality, Innovative, Agile and Integrated care.

Our Ethical Code of Conduct

VA North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS) is committed to “Changing lives. One Veteran at a time.” by providing quality medical services to Veterans and to act as responsible health care providers in the community. We demonstrate this responsibility through ethical business and Veteran care operations as defined by our mission, values, strategic business plans and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) regulations.

Patients’ Rights & Responsibilities

You have the right to:

- Receive a written statement of your rights communicated in a way that is understandable, prior to beginning treatment or initiation of service and is available to you at all times for review and clarification.
- Receive information regarding confidentiality of information and privacy.
- Receive considerate and dignified care that respects your personal value and belief systems regardless of culture, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, spiritual beliefs, socioeconomic status or language.
- Receive prompt and appropriate care in the least restrictive environment for that treatment.
- Receive care in a safe and non-threatening environment.
- Participate in decisions regarding your care.
- Participate in consideration of ethical issues that arise in provision of your care.
- Receive information necessary to give informed consent in terms you can understand prior to the start of any treatment, including significant alternatives and the identity of persons responsible for treatment.
- Receive maximum privacy.
- Receive confidential medical care. Your personal information will be treated as confidential unless you consent to its release; disclosure is required, or permitted by law and VANTHCS policy on release of information.
- Make decisions regarding resuscitation and life-sustaining treatment.
- Formulate advance directives and have advance directives honored.
- Designate a representative to make medical decisions on your behalf in the event you are incapable of understanding a proposed treatment or procedure or are unable to communicate your wishes regarding care.
- Have access to pertinent information in sufficient time to facilitate your decision making.
- Obtain complete and current information in understandable terms concerning your diagnosis, treatment and prognosis.
- Have access to informed consent or refusal or expression of choice regarding service delivery; release of information; concurrent services; composition of your treatment team, and involvement in research projects, if applicable.

- You have a right for staff to ensure adherence to research guidelines and ethics if you are involved in research projects.
- Have access to investigation and resolution of alleged infringement of rights and other legal rights.
- Refuse treatment and understand the medical consequences of such refusal without interference with service or fear of reprisal.
- Expect reasonable continuity of care, to know in advance what appointment times and providers are available and to know what is necessary for continuing care after your discharge.
- Communicate freely and privately with persons outside the facility and to have or refuse visitors.
- Wear your own clothes and keep personal possessions, barring any medical or safety related factor.
- Express a complaint and receive prompt attention to matters of concern.
- Receive pastoral care and other spiritual services.
- Be free from neglect, financial or other exploitation, physical or emotional punishment, retaliation, humiliation, and mental, physical, sexual, verbal and financial abuse.
- Have protective services; legal entities for appropriate representation; self-help support services; and advocacy support services.
- Receive an explanation of benefits, possible discomforts and risks alternatives, and procedures to be followed before consenting to research.
- Refuse to participate in research without compromising access to care.
- Receive a personal advocate when appropriate.
- Receive unopened mail. If there is reason to believe the mail may contain contraband, you will have to open the mail in the presence of an appropriate staff member.
- Know what hospital rules and regulations apply to you.
- Receive assistance with special communication needs.

You are responsible to:

- Wear your identification wristband at all times as treatment cannot be given to you without proper identification. If this band becomes damaged, please tell your unit clerk or your nurse. In an emergency, this could save your life.
- Observe all of the medical center's safety rules and posted signs.
- Be considerate and respectful of medical center personnel, other Veterans, families and visitors.
- Collaborate with your treatment staff. If you have questions or disagree with your treatment plan, you are responsible for discussing concerns with your treatment staff.
- Prevent any injury to yourself, other Veterans, visitors, families or staff members by your own actions.
- Be responsible for the safekeeping of clothing, money and personal possessions you choose to keep with you while you are in this facility.
- Keep all of your scheduled diagnostic or treatment appointments on time.

- Avoid interference with the treatment of other Veterans, particularly in emergency situations.
- Encourage your visitors to be considerate of other Veterans and medical center personnel and also observe the visiting hours. Make sure your visitors understand they will not participate in therapy sessions until the appropriate time when family/caregiver education is scheduled.
- Make sure you understand what medications you must take following discharge from the medical center and whether you are scheduled for outpatient follow-up. If you have any questions about your medications, please discuss with staff.
- Ask designated staff to review your Advance Directives annually and inform medical center staff of any desired changes.

Concerns or Complaints

The Dallas VA Spinal Cord Injury Center strives to provide the best care possible in the most courteous and efficient manner to our Veterans. Our goal is to be responsive and sensitive to the needs of our patients and resolve any concern in a positive and timely manner. Bringing concerns to our attention will not result in retaliation or barriers to services.

If a problem develops with respect to your care in the SCI Center, we encourage you to share your concerns with the Nurse Manager or Charge RN. The Nurse Manager has the responsibility of either resolving your concerns or bringing the matter to the attention of your attending physician or service administrative officer.

You have the right to put your grievance in writing by requesting and completing a Report of Contact and giving it to the Nurse Manager. You may also request your attending physician (for a medical matter) or your service Administrative Officer (for administrative issues) address the issue. They have **3 working days** to address your concerns and complaint(s) and will notify you of the outcome. If they do not, you may ask for the Service Chief, Chief of Staff and Medical Center Director, in that order, to address the issue.

You also have the right to submit a written complaint or discuss your concern(s) with the Patient Advocate program by calling 214-857-0482 or stopping by Room 1B-207 in the Clinical Addition. You can also notify your nurse or complete a Speak to Director form. These forms are located near the SCI Parking lot entrance and other areas in the medical center.

If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, you have the right to appeal through your Veterans' Organization (PVA) Service Officer or other external entities such as The Joint Commission, Office of Inspector General and Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.

To contact the Joint Commission:

Office of Quality Monitoring
One Renaissance Blvd.
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181
Email: complaint@jointcommission.org

To contact the OIG:

VA OIG Hotline
P. O. Box 50410
Washington, DC 20091
Toll-Free: 1-800-488-8244
Email: vaoighotline@va.gov

To contact CARF:

CARF
6951 East Southpoint Road
Tucson, AZ 85756-9407
Toll-Free: 1-866-510-2273
Email: feedback@carf.org

If you feel ethical issues are a concern or problem, you may request an ethics team consultation. See your nurse for more information or consult with the Patient Advocate as above.

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program

The SCIC offers rehabilitation services to you and other Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders.

To qualify for rehabilitation services, you must:

- Be medically stable to participate in the rehabilitation process
- Be able to participate emotionally, cognitively and physically in the rehabilitation process
- Have functional deficits, and treatment needs in two or more of the following areas:
 - ✓ Mobility and/or transfers
 - ✓ Basic or advanced activities of daily living
 - ✓ Communication/language; Behavioral/cognitive
 - ✓ Bowel and/or bladder management
- Demonstrate a willingness to participate in the rehabilitation process
- Have the capability for functional improvement
- Have a feasible disposition/discharge plan

For those Veterans who do not meet the above criteria, the SCI Center will work with you on an individualized plan.

The Teamwork Approach

During your stay, you and your family will become important members of the SCI Treatment Team. The people who make up your team will depend on your needs and your goals.

Along with your medical provider, other people on your team are:

- You
- Family/caregiver
- Coordinator of Care
- Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Physician
- Registered Nurse
- Physical Therapist
- Occupational Therapist
- Kinesiotherapy
- Recreational Therapist
- Psychologist
- Dietician
- Chaplain
- Social Worker

Your treatment team will schedule times to provide services and therapy while you are here. As a participant in SCIC's Inpatient Rehabilitation program, you can expect to participate in treatments and therapies for 3-4 hours a day (including education, adjustment counseling, etc.). The average number of visits for Veterans in the in-patient program depends on the goals and will be discussed during your initial visit with your treatment team.

In addition, the treatment team will assess your educational needs based on your strengths, needs, abilities and preference. They will work with you to develop a teaching plan for you, your family and chosen support individuals using methods based on your individual learning needs. The educational/teaching plan will help you manage and adapt to the environment in order to prevent further injury, enhance your strengths and abilities to improve your quality of life.

There will be community outings based on your strengths, needs, abilities and preferences to assist you in transitioning/integrating into the community, at time of discharge, outpatient therapy or home care services will be scheduled for follow-up as needed.

Interdisciplinary Team Conference (IDT) & Rehab Rounds

Your treatment team will meet on Wednesday afternoons to discuss your progress. This meeting is called the Interdisciplinary Team Conference or IDT. Prior to IDT your Coordinator of Care will meet with you to gather any questions and/or concerns you may have and discuss them in IDT. Following IDT Conferences, your team will meet with you to discuss your individual treatment goals based on your input, strengths, needs, abilities and preferences. This meeting is called Rehab Rounds. Your input is extremely important during these rounds and you are encouraged to discuss your progress and any concerns.

Patient Healthcare Profile

You and other Veterans who participate in Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation will receive a notebook for their **Patient Healthcare Profile**. Your binder will contain important medical information specific to you including your diagnosis, medications, Advance Directives, allergies and your primary care providers. It also contains information about the Dallas Spinal Cord Injury Center along with safety and risk factors for you and other Veterans. In order for your healthcare profile to stay current, we encourage you to keep your binder at bedside.

Your Schedule

During your stay, you will likely have scheduled times to meet with members of your treatment team and receive services. We want you to attend all scheduled therapies, education classes, group activities and appointments so you can make steady progress.

On weekdays, all rehabilitation patients get out of bed by 7 a.m. so they can get to their appointments on time. You will also have therapy appointments on the weekend that will also require you to be out of bed by 7 a.m.

As a participant in the rehabilitation program, you will be required to stay up for breakfast, lunch and dinner unless your medical condition warrants otherwise. Please remember to do pressure releases and other pressure relieving interventions to avoid pressure ulcers. During your stay, your team members will teach you ways to prevent pressure ulcers.

Patient & Family Conferences

You, family members, support systems and /or other relevant stake holders will be invited to join the team in a patient/family conference. Medical patient/family conferences will be scheduled within the first two weeks of your admission to the SCIC comprehensive rehab program. Veteran/family conferences provide an opportunity to meet your treatment team, discuss individual goals and ask questions about your treatment. At these conferences, the team will discuss your goals based on your input, as well as input from other team members, noting how long it will take to attain the goals, and recommendations for outpatient services you may require after discharge.

Home Evaluations

Home Evaluations will be completed by your Physical Therapist (PT) and Occupational Therapist (OT) to make recommendations about how to make your home more accessible. Your PT/OT will schedule your home evaluation. Home evaluations will be completed for those veterans within a 75 mile radius from the Dallas VA SCI Center. At times, PT/OT will recommend the veteran travel with them to complete home evaluation. This is completed in order to observe the patient within their home environment and make appropriate changes for the ordering of equipment.

Practicing Your New Skills

Your rehab team will make recommendations for you to practice your new skills based on your strengths, needs, and abilities. Your inpatient rehabilitation and recovery plan require daily and nightly practicing of newly-acquired skills. Staff will assist as needed to facilitate your rehabilitation. Once you have developed skills to transfer, dress, groom and feed yourself, you will be expected to perform these activities. The therapist will provide you with a communication board that will show your ability to perform all the activities. This communication board serves as a means for you and all staff to continue performing your newly-acquired skills.

The rehabilitation process requires these daily activities to maximize and help you gain strength, knowledge and an individualized level of independence by:

1. Being involved in your care.
2. Meeting your therapy schedules.
3. Participating in educational activities.

As you progress in your rehab treatment plan, you are expected to assume more responsibility toward your own care (i.e. self-catheterization, bowel training, hygiene care, etc.). This will assist you in making a smoother transition from the hospital environment to your home environment.

Other ways to assist you with this transition include:

Community Outings - A scheduled activity in the community such as going out to eat, bowling, movies, shopping etc.

Transitional Living Apartment (TLA) - The TLA is a fully functioning three-room apartment in the SCIC that is used to prepare patients to adjust to living at home. Another option depending upon therapist/physician recommendation will be a weekend home pass.

Discharge from Inpatient Rehab

You will be discharged from inpatient rehab when:

- 1) You have met your goals that were established for inpatient rehabilitation.
- 2) You have reached a plateau in functional status.
- 3) You are unable to participate in the rehabilitation process due to medical, psychological, social or behavioral reasons.
- 4) You request discharge.

Irregular discharges (Against Medical Advice) are given to the following classes of patients:

- Patients who refuse, neglect, or obstruct examination or reasonable treatment.
- Patients who fail to return from authorized absence.
- Patients who leave the hospital without the approval of their physician.

- Patients who are found guilty of disorderly conduct, including failure to comply with treatment, as defined in VANTHCS policies when discharge is determined to be the appropriate disciplinary action.

Approximately two weeks after discharge from the inpatient rehabilitation program, an SCI Home Care Nurse will contact you to see how you are doing. The SCI Home Care team will follow you for up to one year, depending on your level of need.

90-day Post Rehab appointments will be scheduled by all team members upon discharge from Rehab. This is to assess current physical and cognitive adjustments to Spinal Cord Injury and determine care for continued follow-up/resources as needed.

Please Note: Your schedule may change if you are discharged from the inpatient rehab program, but your medical condition warrants continued hospitalization.

General Hospital Information

Cafeteria: The cafeteria is located in the basement of the main hospital building. Starbucks and a sandwich shop are located on the first floor across from the canteen in the main building. Vending areas are located near the cafeteria in the basement, on the first floor of main building by the canteen/retail store and by the SCI Recreation Room.

Library: The Medical Center Library offers large print books, “talking books,” players, magnifying lenses and “bed specs” for you to borrow. The nurse or unit secretary may request these items for you. Paperbacks are available from Voluntary Services.

Lost & Found: The lost and found is located in the main hospital in the Clinical Addition near admissions. It is open Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.

Newspapers: Daily newspapers are available in the retail store located on the first floor of the main hospital.

Notary Services: Notary services are available for inpatients, free of charge. Please check with the clerk at the nursing station on your unit.

Mail: Your mail is delivered to you on your unit. All mail received after you have been discharged will be forwarded to your home address. It is important to ensure we have your current address. Mail sent to you while an inpatient should be addressed as such:

**Your full name
Spinal Cord Injury Center (Mail Code 128)
Dallas VA Medical Center
4500 S. Lancaster Rd.
Dallas, TX 75216**

If you wish to mail letters, there is a mailbox located on the first floor of the main hospital near the retail store. Postage stamps are available for purchase in the retail store.

Automatic Teller Machine (ATM): To obtain cash, an ATM is located in the basement of the main hospital building between the main elevators and cafeteria. There is also an ATM machine located by the vending machines outside the retail store on the first floor of the main hospital.

Absentee Voting: Hospitalized Veterans who wish to vote in a general election may do so by completing an application for an absentee ballot during the prescribed time frame. Patients needing an application or additional information may contact the Chief of Medical Administration Service at extension 71317.

Release of Medical Information: Medical information will be released upon receipt of your written request and consent. If you wish to request your medical information, please contact the release of information clerk at hospital extension 71364. Please allow 10-14 business days. Medical information refers to patient medical information stored electronically, on paper, and film.

Chaplain Services

Your spiritual welfare is of primary concern to our SCIC and Chaplain Service staff. Our chaplains are on duty seven days a week for urgent needs and Monday through Friday for spiritual visits. If you should desire a special visit, please ask your nurse to call Chaplain Service. The Chapel is on the first floor of the main hospital and is open 24 hours a day for prayer and meditation.

Protestant Worship Services:

Singspiration, Sunday, 10 a.m., Chapel
Worship Service, Sunday, 10:30 a.m., Chapel
The Lord's Supper, 1st Sunday

Catholic Worship Services:

Mass, Friday, 10:30 a.m., Chapel

Muslim Prayers:

Prayers, Friday, 1:15 p.m., Chapel

Visitor Information

Daily visiting hours on the SCI/D inpatient unit are 9 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Exceptions to visiting hours may be made for admission, discharge, family conferences, caregiver teaching, critically ill patients and unusual circumstances. The Nurse Manager or Charge Nurse will make consideration for exceptions.

Children under the age of 13 must be under adult supervision at all times and must abide by the rules and regulations of the hospital including infection control regulations.

Federal law prohibits pets on the premises. Exceptions are made for working dogs and animals used for pet therapy.

Keep in mind you will need to keep your scheduled therapy appointments, even if you have visitors. Make sure your visitors know they will not be able to participate in your therapy sessions until the scheduled time for family/caregiver training.

Encourage your visitors to be considerate of other Veterans and medical center personnel and also observe the visiting hours.

Please note, guests are not allowed to stay in your room overnight.

Lodging options for your guests:

VA North Texas Fisher House: Safe comfortable housing is now open for families of Veterans who receive health care at VA North Texas Health Care System, Dallas. A Fisher House, similar to a Ronald McDonald House, provides free short-term lodging. The Fisher House is “a home away from home” for families of certain VA patients receiving treatment and who live 50 miles from the Dallas VAMC.



The Fisher House includes a 21-suite two-story house. There is a common kitchen area, laundry area, a spacious dining room, living room, library, picnic area and toys for children. For patients requesting to visit family/friends at the Fisher House, they are to receive a pass from physician prior to transfer.

To learn more, please contact VA North Texas Fisher House Program Manager Lydia Gray-Henderson at 214-857-2574. You may also visit the Fisher House Foundation website at: www.fisherhouse.org.

Hotels and Lodging: If you need information about local accommodations while your family member is staying at the SCIC please contact your Social Worker.

Voluntary Service

VA provides an orientation for volunteers and exposes volunteers to the services that are available at the medical center where they choose to serve. Furthermore, training is provided through the Voluntary Service Office under the supervision of the department to which the volunteers are assigned.



For more information, contact:

Fort Worth: 817-730-0078
Dallas & Tyler: 214-857-0428
Bonham: 903-583-6283

Identification Wrist Band

Upon admission to the medical center, an identification band will be fastened to your wrist. This wristband must be worn at all times as treatment cannot be given to you without proper identification. If this band becomes damaged, please tell your unit clerk or your nurse. In an emergency, this could save your life.

Medications

Your nurse will give you detailed instructions about your medications, including names, reasons for taking, side effects, dosage and reactions to report to the nurse and other staff. Knowing the names and purposes of these medications is important. At the time of discharge, you will be provided with a written list of medications that will be reviewed with you. Please let the nurse know at any time if you have questions about your medications.

Please do not bring any medications from home with you to the hospital. Any medicine brought with you will be returned to a family member or will be locked in the pharmacy until you are discharged. Your physician will order appropriate medications for you and, if necessary, medications will be furnished to you at the time of discharge.

Telephones, TVs, Radios & Other Devices

Each Veteran has a phone at bedside for personal use. Upon admission, you may ask your nurse for the telephone number designated for your room. You will need a calling card to make long distance phone calls. Calling cards can be purchased in the retail store.

To protect your privacy, we will not give out information about you, unless you have given us permission to speak to the person calling.

A television set is available at each bedside, in the visitors' lounge and in the dining room. All televisions should be turned off by 11 p.m. Any other audio equipment (MP3 players, radios, etc.) should be used with headphones to avoid disturbing others. The VA is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged personal electrical equipment.

Meals & Food

Good nutrition is important to good health and is an important part of your treatment. Your physician may order either a regular diet or a special diet suited to your needs. A registered dietitian will visit you to discuss your eating habits, food allergies you may have and may suggest changes in your diet. Depending on your nutritional needs, you and your family will be shown how to continue your special diet plan at home. It is the policy of VA North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS) that all food provided for Veterans is safe, wholesome and sanitary. You and other Veterans on the SCIC unit are considered to be highly susceptible for food borne illness and therefore, food safety is a primary concern.

Families are discouraged from bringing food for individual Veterans unless the physician or nursing staff give prior approval. Before distributing any food to a patient on the SCIC unit, a nurse or a clinical dietitian familiar with the patient's diet restrictions and ability to chew and swallow should be consulted. The nurse and/or dietitian will determine if the foods are appropriate for your diet.

If your family brings you food, it should be in an airtight container that is clearly labeled with your name and dated. **All perishable, outdated or unlabeled food is discarded daily.** Any food not consumed after partial consumption, opening or reheating will be discarded. **If you are on isolation precautions, once an item has been opened or entered your room, it should not be placed in the Veterans' refrigerator in the hallway due to infection control reasons.**

Please do not keep food at your bedside as it attracts ants and other insects. Veterans are asked not to eat foods brought by visitors or from the cafeteria without checking with the nursing staff. Should you have a problem with your diet, notify the nursing staff on your unit who will alert Dietary Services.

Check with your nurse for the specific time frame your meal tray will arrive so you can be at your bedside and ready to eat, especially if you need assistance with your meals. All trays are picked up approximately 60 minutes after delivery.

Taking Passes & Leaving the Unit

You are encouraged to be as independent and mobile as possible. However, during your stay in the SCIC, we are responsible for your health, well-being and safety. Adherence to SCIC rules regarding leaving the unit is necessary. Before you leave the unit, please tell your nurse where you are going and check in with the nurse upon return.

We request you remain on the unit between the hours of 8:30 p.m. and 10 a.m. unless you have a scheduled appointment. Please do not leave the unit at any time without first consulting with your nurse. You should not leave the unit when you are scheduled for medication, treatment, therapies, etc.

All Veterans must return to the SCI Unit by 8:30 p.m. **Veterans who require any assistance with bedtime care should transfer to bed no later than 9 p.m.** If you are scheduled for bowel care and shower and you require assistance, you must transfer to bed by 8 p.m. Veterans who do not require assistance with bedtime care or who can transfer independently are encouraged to be in bed by 10:30 p.m. to ensure adequate sleep and rest.

If you do not require constant hospitalization for medical reasons and wish to leave the hospital on evenings or weekends (to visit family, attend to personal business, etc.) you may be allowed to do so. However, a pass is required to leave the hospital grounds. Failure to obtain a pass may affect your treatment plan.

All passes should be requested through your physician at least 5 days in advance. Early requests for passes allow time to get necessary supplies, medications and medical equipment prepared.

Before leaving on pass, a member of your family or care provider should meet with your nurse and/or therapist to receive pertinent instructions and have training for those things you cannot do for yourself.

Parking

The SCIC has a designated parking lot for SCI patients. A permit to enter the lot may be issued to eligible Veterans. An application for this permit can be obtained in the SCI Administrative Office. Only vehicles with the proper identification may park in the handicapped spaces.

Clothing & Laundry

During your hospitalization, you are welcome to wear your own pajamas. If you are here for rehabilitation, we want you to wear your personal clothing (i.e., street clothes), rather than hospital pajamas during the day. For comfort and safety, we recommend wash and wear slacks instead of blue jeans. Double knit materials are less likely to cause injury to the skin. Jogging/sweat suits are ideal. You will need a pair of shoes to protect your feet. Please note you may require a larger shoe size than before your injury.

A washer and dryer are available on the unit for Veterans' use. You are expected to take responsibility for your own laundry and to provide your own soap, bleach, etc. If you are unable to do your laundry, a family member or friend should assume that responsibility as nursing staff are not permitted to assist with this. We suggest you keep one week's supply of clothing and personal possessions with you since storage space is limited. Please keep necessary toilet articles (e.g., combs, brushes, and razors) in your bedside stand.

Gifts

SCI Unit staff, students, and volunteers are not permitted to accept gifts from you. This includes buying lunch for them, gift cards, or gifts of any value. If you want to show your appreciation, a letter to their supervisor or a thank you card is always welcome.

Money

Carrying large sums of money is not recommended. We strongly urge you to deposit your money with the agent cashier located on the 1st floor near the Pharmacy in the main hospital. If you are admitted after 4:30 p.m., on weekends, or holidays, the administrative officer on duty (AOD) will assist you by accepting your funds for safekeeping and depositing them with the Agent Cashier the next working day. You may withdraw from your account through the Veteran Funds Clerk and Agent Cashier, Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

The medical center is not responsible for the money you keep in your possession. Canteen books are available for your convenience. These books may be purchased in the Canteen in \$0.50 or \$1 increments.

Personal Belongings

There is a limited amount of space at each bedside for each Veteran. You and other Veterans are only be allowed 1 set of bedside drawers, 1 bedside closet and 1 bedside table; all of your personal items must be stored in these locations only. For infection control and safety reasons, items are not allowed to be stored on the floor, on window sills or in furniture that belongs to another patient, another bed, or another room. Please only bring items that fit in the space assigned to you. Excess items will be stored in the Veterans Effects Department until discharge.

Note: The VA is not responsible for lost or stolen property.

Lockers, bedside tables, drawers, etc. are not considered private or for the exclusive use by Veterans. These areas may be inspected for purposes of inventory, sanitation, or security (in case of suspicion or prohibited items).

Kitchen appliances such as coffee makers, electric kettles, microwaves, toasters, or blenders and other electronic items such as extension cords, fans, televisions, etc. are not allowed at the bedside for safety and sanitary reasons.

You may use the corkboard attached to your large cabinet for photos or cards. **Materials may be taped to other surfaces of the cabinet but not to the wall, door, light fixtures or medical waste boxes.**

Your cooperation in keeping the shower and toilet areas clean and free of soiled washcloths and towels will be appreciated by your fellow Veterans and staff.

Personal care items must be stored at your bedside when not in use. Place soiled linen in the laundry bag and throw food or other items into the trashcans. Disinfectant wipes are provided in each bathroom for cleanup of spills and to clean toilets, sinks and commode after use. Please ask your nurse to show you how to use these wipes.

Medical Expenses

Depending on your financial situation and your eligibility status, there is a possibility there may be some medical expenses associated with your treatment. If you have any concerns about finances or benefits, you can speak with your Social Worker.

Insurance: In 1985, the U.S. Congress passed the Medical Care Cost Recovery Act providing for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to bill third party health insurance carriers for medical care provided to Veterans for treatment of their non-service connected disabilities.

Income Verification Matching: Public Law 101-508 provides for VA to compare means test income data with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Social Security Administration (SSA) on non-service connected Veterans whose eligibility for medical care is based on income. The purpose of income verification matching is to be sure each Veteran is receiving VA medical care according to the correct eligibility assignment. If your eligibility for VA medical care is based on income, you will be asked to provide health insurance,

employment, and income information for yourself, your spouse and dependents. Your VA means test is based on your prior year income and you will need to update it annually. Failure to complete your means test may result in being billed for services.

You may also meet with a National Service Officer from the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) to discuss benefits that you may be entitled to receive.

Smoking

The VA Medical Center is a non-smoking facility and smoking is not allowed in the building. Smoking is permitted in designated areas outside the hospital building.

A smoking shelter is located outside of the SCI Recreation room. Access to this is through the recreation room. A violation of smoking regulations may subject you to federal citation and fines.

You must be cleared with therapy if hand function or other function suggests you may be unsafe to smoke independently. If not cleared, you must be escorted by a responsible family member.

Important Notes:

- E-cigarettes are not allowed inside the building. They may be used in designated smoking areas only.
- **SCI Nursing Staff are not permitted to light or hold your smoking materials for you, push gurneys/wheelchairs/beds to smoking areas, or smoke with you on their breaks.**

Smoking and Spinal Cord Injury: Smoking is a fire hazard. It has also been associated with a variety of health problems including lung, mouth, esophagus, stomach, pancreas, cervix, kidney, and urethra cancer, bronchitis, emphysema, impotence, infertility, cataracts, skin wrinkling, skin discoloration, stroke and heart problems. It can also cause skin wrinkling and skin discoloration. Many Veterans who have a diagnosis of Spinal Cord Injury have impaired breathing function because of their injuries, and smoking (or being exposed to second hand smoke) may seriously aggravate that problem. In addition, smoking also delays the healing of pressure sores among Veterans of this population.

Quitting Smoking: The Spinal Cord Injury Center has a program to help you quit smoking using the latest techniques. The program is called Quitwell. The Quitwell program uses a positive approach to behavior change by teaching and coaching you to change not only your tobacco use behavior, but other behaviors and situations associated with using tobacco. In addition, medications may be prescribed to help control withdrawal symptoms and to help with urges and cravings.

Please discuss your interest in quitting with your physician. We look forward in helping you become a non-smoker.

Vocational Services

If you are interested in returning to work, there are several programs that can assist you with this goal.

VA Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program (Chapter 31 Benefits): If you are at least 10% service connected, you may be eligible to apply for the VA Vocational Rehabilitation and employment program. The primary purpose of this program is to assist Veterans with service-connected disabilities in obtaining and maintaining suitable employment.

If you are interested, your social worker will arrange for a VA vocational counselor to meet with you or provide you with an application for services. You can also obtain additional information by going to the Veterans Benefits Office located in building 2, room 1E-307 or on the internet at www.va.gov and click on Vocational Rehabilitation.

Department of Assistive and Rehabilitation Services (DARS): DARS is a state-funded agency specializing in retraining individuals with disabilities so they may resume employment. If you choose, your social worker can arrange for you to meet with a DARS counselor prior to your discharge. You can also access information by calling 1-800-628-5115 or online at www.dars.state.tx.us/drs/index.shtml.

PVA National Service Officer

Veterans Benefits Officer(s) are assigned to the medical center to assist you in matters concerning VA benefits such as compensation, pension, government insurance education, GI loans, and vocational rehabilitation. In addition, the PVA National Service Officer can assist with issues that may arise in receipt of medical care at VA Medical facilities and ancillary medical benefits you may be eligible for based on your diagnosis and eligibility. If you need information or assistance, ask your unit staff to contact the Veterans Benefits officer(s) for you. A Service Officer representing Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is available for consultation located in the Spinal Cord Injury Center waiting room area.

Contact the PVA National Service Officer:

Room 1A102

Telephone: 214-857-0105/0106

Toll-free: 1-800-795-3570.

The Peer Partner Program (SCI Peer Mentoring for Veterans)

When going down a new or difficult path, sometimes it helps to talk to someone who has already been there. That's why the SCI Peer Partner program (Peer Partners) was created. Peer Partners will match Veterans who have been living successfully with a Spinal Cord Injury or Dysfunction (like MS) for many years with Veterans in the Spinal Cord Injury Center Rehabilitation Program. Peer Partners can act as a coach or a guide as you go through rehabilitation and prepare for life outside of the hospital. They are available to listen and share their point of view. They do not give advice about your medical diagnosis

or treatment, but they can serve as a valuable source of information and answer questions you may have about what life is like with a spinal cord injury.

Peer Partners meet together with selected SCI staff members on the first Friday of every month to discuss topics of interest and answer questions about successful living with a disability. Patients in rehabilitation are required to attend as part of their rehabilitation program but all patients are welcome.

Discussion topics include:

- Hiring and keeping a good caregiver
- How to ask for help when you need it and say “no” when you don’t
- Traveling with a disability
- Sports and having fun in community
- What to do with your time now: volunteering or working again
- Parenting after spinal cord injury
- Dating and marriage after spinal cord injury
- Living life after rehabilitation

SCI/D Reach VA

REACH VA is a behavioral intervention program designed to assist caregivers of Veterans with SCI/D and is delivered over a two to three period of time consisting of four sessions with the caregiver either face to face (home or facility) or by telephone. The first component of the program is to assess risk in the caregiving situation and then address risks by engaging the caregiver in problem-solving and skills-building techniques. The program emphasizes safety, health, social support, caregiver physical and emotional well-being and stress management and problem solving for target behaviors/issues. During the ongoing Maintenance Phase, additional problems or concerns can be addressed.

Depression and Spinal Cord Injury

Facts about Depression: Depression is a common condition. People with medical problems including SCI are at high risk for depression. Depression is a serious condition. It contributes to pressure ulcers, urinary tract infection, frequent illness, chronic pain, longer or more frequent hospital stays, relationship problems, caregiver problems, substance abuse, and higher medical expenses. Medication and talk therapy (psychotherapy) help many people.

Signs of Depression:

- Feeling sad, down or empty
- Lack of pleasure or interest in your usual activities
- Trouble sleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Hard time concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling fatigued or lack of energy
- Feeling either slowed down or restless

- Thinking about killing yourself or have tried to commit suicide
(Please see following section, “Suicide Prevention.”)

Causes of Depression

- Effects of SCI, such as fatigue, loss of appetite, loss of energy, sleep problems, pain, and pressure ulcers.
- Life events, such as divorce, loss of loved one, job, or home.
- Personal circumstances, such as finances, job problems, loneliness, lack of support from family or friends, and personal or family history of depression.
- Other medical conditions, such as heart problems, stroke, brain injury, and chronic pain.
- Medications, such as drugs used for other conditions such as spasticity, pain, heart disease, and Multiple Sclerosis.

Help for Depression: Tell your SCI physician and get a referral to a mental health professional. The SCI Center has psychologists and social workers who are specialist in helping people with SCI and depression. Help is available and you are not alone!

Suicide Prevention

Did you know?

- Veterans returning from active duty have a higher risk of suicide?
- Veterans with SCI have a higher risk of suicide?

Recognize the suicide warning signs:

- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself
- Looking for ways to kill yourself
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Self-destructive behavior such as drug abuse, weapons, etc.

Any of these signs requires immediate attention:

- Alert your healthcare provider.
- Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Get useful information at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Advance Directives

What kind of medical care would you want if you were too ill or hurt to express your wishes? Advance directives are legal documents allowing you to express our decisions about end-of-life care ahead of time. They provide a way for you to communicate your wishes to family, friends and health care professionals, to avoid confusion later on. There are two kinds of Advance Directives: Living Will and Durable Power of Attorney.

A patient must always give his/her consent for any for any treatment. As long as you are able to make your own decisions, nothing will be done you have not agreed to. Sometimes a patient's condition becomes such that he/she cannot make informed decisions

regarding their health care. While you are able to make your own decisions, it is best to write down what you want, or do not want, to sustain your life.

Living Will

A Living Will tells how you feel about care intended to sustain life. You can accept or refuse medical care.

For example, you might consider whether you would want:

- The use of breathing machines
- If you want to be resuscitated if breathing or heartbeat stops
- Tube feeding- tubes placed on your nose or stomach to give you food and/or fluids
- Organ or tissue donation
- Dialysis

In some cases, these and other treatments are considered to be “life sustaining.” This means under the circumstances, these treatments are not expected to improve your medical condition, but are expected to maintain you for a period of time in your current condition.

Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care

A Durable Power of Attorney is a document naming someone you trust to make health decisions if you unable to do so.

But, remember:

- These decisions are yours to make.
- Our staff wants to follow your wishes.
- You can change or revoke an Advance Directive at any time.
- There are people who can help you.

We suggest you talk to your loved ones about these choices. Let them know how you feel about such treatments. If you have questions about your medical condition and what types of questions about your medical condition and what types of treatments might become needed, discuss your options with your physician.

If you do not already have an Advance Directive, but think you might want to complete one, we suggest you ask for a chaplain to help you complete the forms, obtain appropriate witness and place the information in your medical record. They are prepared to hear your concerns offer counsel and assist you in making your wishes known.

Infection Control & Communicable Disease Precautions

Hand Washing: Hand washing is an essential part of preventing the spread of germs. Hand washing (with soap and water for at least 15 seconds) has proved to be a good way to prevent the spread of disease. We ask you practice good personal hygiene and wash your hands often when leaving and returning to your personal living space and before all meals.

Staff should wash their hands before touching you, before procedures, after exposure to body fluids, after touching you, and prior to leaving your room. You have the right to ask staff to wash their hands before and after providing care to you. The use of VA approved hand sanitizer is also acceptable if your hands are not visibly soiled.

Flu: Anyone can get influenza, but rates of infection can be higher among Veterans with SCI. For most people, symptoms last only a few days. They include fever/chills, sore throat, cough, headache, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, and fatigue. Influenza (flu) and other serious respiratory illnesses like respiratory whooping cough and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) are spread by cough, sneezing, or unclean hands.



To help stop the spread of germs, we ask you to **Cover Your Cough and:**

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put your used tissue in the waste basket.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands.
- You may be asked to put on a facemask to protect others.

Discharge from the Hospital

The doctors, nurses and social workers on your unit will be planning your discharge with you. If you have any special concerns about leaving the medical center, please let them know. If you need a “return to work statement”, please discuss this with your physician before leaving the hospital. When you are told you are going to be discharged, there may be certain information you need to know.

Your physician or nurse will provide this information including:

- What illnesses you were treated for.
- What things might improve or worsen your condition.
- What symptoms to report to a physician, and how to contact him or her, if necessary, after discharge.
- What activities you should and should not do.
- What care is needed for any tubes or dressings?
- What treatments you should continue at home, for how long, and how often.
- What diet to follow and what foods you can and can't eat?
- What medication to take and how to take it.

- Any special instructions for taking your medication as well as possible side effects.

Also, be sure you have:

- A friend or family member who knows how to help in your care at home.
- Transportation arranged to get home and to return for appointments.
- Supplies/equipment you will need at home.
- Medications you are to take home and how to get your medications refilled.
- A clinic appointment for follow-up.
- Please withdraw any funds you have placed on deposit with the Agent Cashier on the first floor of the main hospital building during regular operating hours, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Check with your nurse before you leave for any other discharge instructions.

Irregular Discharges (Against Medical Advice) are given to the following classes of patients:

- Patients who refuse, neglect, or obstruct examination or reasonable treatment.
- Patients who fail to return from authorized absence.
- Patients who leave the hospital without the approval of their physician.
- Patients who are found guilty of disorderly conduct, including failure to comply with treatment, as defined in VANTHCS policies when discharge is determined to be the appropriate disciplinary action.

90-Day Post Rehab Assessment: 90-Day Post Rehab Assessment will be scheduled 90 day post discharge from the SCI Rehab Program. During this assessment, you will be evaluated by physician, PT/OT, Psychology and Social Work.

Annual Evaluations: Annual Evaluations are due every year on (or around) your birthday. Please call the Spinal Cord Injury Outpatient Clinic 4-6 weeks prior to your birthday to schedule an appointment. During this assessment, you will be evaluated by physician, PT/OT, Psychology, Social Work and you will receive a Renal Ultrasound. You are expected to arrive at 8 a.m. for labs and your day will end around 3 p.m.

SCI Outpatient Clinic

At discharge, you will be given an outpatient clinic appointment for follow up. The clinic also offers the vaccines for Influenza, Pneumonia, and Tetanus Toxoid.

If you have questions about your care, please call the Dallas SCI Outpatient Clinic at 214-857-1782. Should you have an immediate need to be seen by a physician prior to your scheduled appointment, contact the SCI Outpatient clinic for an appointment.

Dallas SCI/D Clinic:

- The clinic is open Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- To decrease waiting time and to ensure the best service, patients should notify the clinic and speak to one of the clinic nurses prior to coming in.

SCI Telehealth

The SCI/D Center has established a Clinical Video Telehealth (CVT) into the Home Clinic that uses advanced video technology allowing SCI providers to offer certain medical care without needing you to be physically present in clinic. CVT to Home is a lot like a face-to-face appointment. Using your own computer and web camera, we can provide care while you are at home. Telehealth nurses will help you download special software to your personal computer that will allow you to connect with any of our SCI providers. These video technologies make it possible for SCI providers to make diagnoses, manage care, perform check-ups, present patient education, and provide care.

The SCI CVT clinic availability is Monday through Friday upon provider and/or patient request. Appointments can even be arranged through the SCI Telehealth Coordinator and/or SCI Nurse Telepresenter. CVT to Home is secure, private, effective, convenient, and simple!

SCI Spoke Clinics

In order to serve you better, we also have SCI Clinics located in Bonham, Fort Worth and Temple. If you live close to one of these clinics, you can receive your primary SCI care there and be referred to the Dallas clinic for your annual evaluation and for issues that cannot be addressed at a primary care clinic.

To schedule an appointment:

Bonham

1-800-924-8387

Clinic Clerk: Ext. 6609

Social Worker & SCI Coordinator: 903-583-1330

Fort Worth

1-800-443-9672

Social Worker: 817-730-0144

Temple

1-800-423-2111, Ext. 42178 or 42180

Social Worker & SCI Coordinator: 254-743-1769

SCI Pharmacy Services

New Prescriptions: Ask the physician to give you the prescription form to take to the SCI Pharmacy in the main reception room and press the call button. If no one answers, they are taking care of another Veteran. If you are unable to wait, take your prescription to the Main Pharmacy in the Clinical Addition part of the main hospital. You can also have your

new prescription mailed to you by dropping the prescription in the box at the Pharmacy window.

Ordering Refills: Whether ordering by mail, telephone, or the internet, request each refill at least 2 weeks before you run out. We suggest you order your next refill as soon as you receive your order in the mail. **Note:** All refills must be sent to you by mail.

Refill Ordering Options:

- ✓ **Telephone Ordering System:** 1-800-849-3597, press (1) for the Pharmacy menu.
Call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to find out if you have remaining refills, and to order refills through the mail. You will need your full (9-digit) social security number, your current prescription (RX) number, and a touch-tone telephone.
- ✓ **Mail Your Refill Slips:**
Pharmacy Service (119)
VA North Texas Health Care System
Lancaster Rd.
Dallas, Texas, 75216
- ✓ **Refill Drop Box:** Place your refill slips in the brown mailbox located outside of the Main Pharmacy Prescription Pick-Up Area
- ✓ **Internet:** Refilling prescriptions on the Internet is the easiest and fastest way. Register with MyHealthVet at www.myhealth.va.gov. Refills are located under the "My Care" tab.

Narcotic Prescriptions: To call in requests for narcotic renewals, there is a special line, 1-800-849-3597, Ext. 71774 or (214) 857-1774 to leave your message. SCID Veterans should call in narcotic renewal requests 7 days prior to running out of the medication. This will give the Pharmacy enough time to fill the prescription and get it to you. Prescriptions will be forwarded to the pharmacy within 24 hours during the week or by Monday, when submitted on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday.

SCI Pharmacy:

1-800-849-3597

Hours of Operation: Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

My Healthvet Website

This website, www.myhealth.va.gov, provides access to many Veteran health benefits and services:

- Trusted health information
- Links to Federal and VA benefits and resources
- The Personal Health Journal
- Online VA prescription refill

TeleCare

For questions regarding eligibility, appointment scheduling, claims, medications, medical problems, available treatment programs or women Veteran issues, a telephone triage team provides information to possibly avoid a clinic or hospital visit. Tele-Care staff includes a social worker, Veteran service officer, patient advocate, patient service assistant, pharmacists, registered nurses and staff physicians.

Dallas: 1-800-677-8289

Ft. Worth: 1-800-443-9672

Bonham: 1-800-924-8387

Important Numbers

VA North Texas Health Care System Main Number1-800-849-3597
(If you are inside VA, dial 7 + last four of telephone number)

SCI Rehabilitation Coordinator of Care.....	214-857-0617
SCI Outpatient Clinic.....	214-857-1782
SCI Home Care.....	214-857-1767
SCI Outpatient Social Worker.....	214-857-1427
SCI Psychologist.....	214-857-1782
SCI Occupational Therapists.....	214-857-3620
SCI Physical Therapists.....	214-857-3620
Prosthetics.....	214-857-0548
SCI RN Case Manager.....	214-857-0333
SCI Nurse Manager.....	214-857-1616
SCI Assistant Nurse Manager.....	214-857-3232
Billing Office.....	866-393-9132
PVA National Service Office.....	214-857-0105
Dallas Travel.....	214-857-1350
Bonham Travel.....	903-583-6317
Wheelchair Repair.....	214-857-0550
VBA Benefits.....	800-827-1000
Veterans Crisis Line.....	800-273-TALK (8255)
Women Veterans Hotline.....	855-VA-WOMEN (829-6636)
Combat Call Center.....	877-WAR-VETS (927-8387)