

November 28, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20420



Subject: Concerns Regarding Proposed Rule AP46 – Prosthetic and Rehabilitative Items and Services

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

On behalf of the Orthotic Prosthetic Group of America (OPGA) and our 1,300 member locations for orthotic and prosthetic (O&P) practitioners across the United States, we would like to express our concerns regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) current Proposed Rule AP-46, "Prosthetic and Rehabilitative Items and Services." Our practitioner members have serious concerns as they directly provide care and services to countless veterans that come into their facilities. It is the position of OPGA that veterans must have ample choice in the care that they receive, and we believe that the proposed rule, as currently written, threatens both accessibility and veteran choice to O&P services.

Veterans who have faced the challenge of adapting to their prosthetics develop a strong bond with the practitioners who provide them with the necessary opportunities to remain a productive and independent citizen. This bond has a powerful impact that a prosthetist or orthotist can have on a veteran's life as they navigate through the challenges that come after an injury during or after their service. For this reason, we oppose the proposed rule which would give the VA exclusive authority in decision making for where veterans may receive these services. It is our belief, and the belief of practitioners who OPGA represents, that the clinical needs of the veteran should come before the administrative functions of the Department.

It has been long-standing precedent and the strong position of current and past administrations that veterans must maintain a wide range of choice of where they receive their care. As this administration works to reduce gaps in access, wait times at VA facilities, and improvement in the overall care of the veteran, this proposed rule seeks to achieve the opposite effect. Many veterans do not reside near a VA facility to receive care, especially for the amount of hands-on care necessary for O&P services. This is likely to be a severe consequence to patient accessibility, which could negatively impact patient outcomes as they work towards a life of independence. Clearing regulatory overreach for veterans to access the care they need will result in improved patient outcomes and overall quality of care that VA benefits can deliver.

OPGA is in favor of reasonable measures to protect the government from fraudulent activity, which affirm the importance of quality O&P practitioners. We also believe that our nation's veterans should have choice in where they receive care, not to be at the mercy of the VA. We hope that the Department withdraws this proposal to ensure that veteran's choice and accessibility is preserved for our nation's bravest.

Sincerely,



Todd Eagen  
President  
Orthotic and Prosthetic Group of America